

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on January 13, 2019:**

**"A Vision for 2019: Part 1
(Mark 9:22-24)"**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman shows the importance of commitment and working together as a church family to fulfill God's vision for us in this coming year.]

Notes

Introduction:

- We're going to talk about vision today as it's the start of a new year.
- Now when we talk about vision for the church and more specifically when we talk about vision for Grace Monrovia, what thoughts come to mind?
- Audience answers:
 - What we hope things will look like in the future.
 - Planning, direction.
 - Focus
 - Hope
- Pastor Craig commented that those were good answers.
- Now you can have two approaches to life.
- The first one is that the future is going to be what it is – that's a fatalistic or deterministic approach. We have no control over the future because it's set in stone.
- The other approach is that we can create our future – that we can have the hope, the imagination, the planning to make a different future.
- Now that's exciting.
- To do this says we have some say in what this life is all about.

Commitment:

- Pastor Craig didn't hear the word "commitment."
- So, is commitment a good thing or a bad thing?
- Some of us may think that commitment as defined in today's age can be a bad thing.
- But when we think of commitment in terms of relationships and in terms of family, it's a good thing.
- Commitment, to pastor Craig, is a way in which we build trust.
- Now to build trust is to make promises and keep them.
- If we continue to do that over time, then people will begin to trust us.
- Our vision for our new future has to apply commitment because to make change, requires us to commit.
- So, commitment isn't necessarily a bad thing, when we talk about it in terms of vision.
- Here is an interesting example of commitment.

Computer gender:

- A computer instructor asked the adults who were taking his evening computer class at a community college, to divide themselves into 2 groups – men in one group and women in another and determine what gender a computer would be.
- The men wholeheartedly concluded that computers has to be referred to in the feminine gender because:
 1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic.
 2. When computers speak to each other, they use a code language only the experts can understand.
 3. Every mistake you make is stored on their hard drive for later retrieval.
 4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you spend half your paycheck on accessories for it.
- Women claim that computers should be referred to in the masculine gender because:
 1. In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
 2. They have a lot of data, but still can't think for themselves.
 3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they are the problem.
 4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that, if you had just waited a little longer you could have had a better model.

Antithesis (exact opposite) of vision:

- “If we always do what we always did, we’ll always get what we always got”
- This is like kicking the can down the road – nothing will change.
- Even though things are pretty good right now, but if we want to have a better future, we’ve got to commit to a certain outlook, a certain vision.
- The passage here is in terms of belief and unbelief.
- The context of these verses here in Mark 9 is about a father who had a son possessed by a demon since birth.
- The father was very distraught because he had taken his son to the religious leaders, who couldn’t cast out the demon.
- So the father came to Jesus and asked Him this question in verse 22.

Mark 9:22 (NASB), It (the demon) has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!”

- So, here’s the father asking Jesus to do something, if He could.

23) And Jesus said to him, “If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.”

- So, Jesus is telling the father that if he believes, then all things are possible.
- Here we are talking about two concepts “belief” and “believes.”
- *Pisteuo* (belief) is the Greek word where we get the word “faith” from.
- But “believes” here in this case is a “present participle” of the Greek verb *pisteuo* meaning that “believes” is a continuous and an ongoing repeated action.
- This ties in with how we move forward with our vision of the future.

- The word belief is not just a notion, but, as Jesus tells us, it's a continuous repeated action.
- Now the father had a certain amount of belief or he would never have approached Jesus to gain relief for his son.
- Yet, there was an element of unbelief that Jesus sensed and challenged him on it.

24) Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

- Now, at first, this sounds like an oxymoron.
- But, in reality, it affects every one of us here.
- The word "unbelief" is *apisteuo* in the Greek meaning "without belief" or "a state of disbelief."
- Whether we realize it or not, all of us live with this.
- While we believe certain things, yet we also have an element of unbelief.
- Now parental love is a strong force and this father wanted to get relief for his son because of his love for him.
- Did the father pull back from Jesus or did he lean in?
- When we face problems, emotional despair, it's humanly natural to want to pull back and avoid people at times.
- When we're involved in helping out a family member, a child or spouse or parent, we shouldn't go alone but we should lean in to Jesus and keep our relationship with Him close to us.
- When we are going through something very emotional, it's not the time to pull back and hunker down and go into a cocoon of ours.
- When this happens, that's the time to lean into Jesus, that's the time to lean into your church family, that's the time to lean into prayer, study and meditation, that's the time to lean into your flourishing care group.
- Now we all live with our beliefs and un-beliefs.
- Our un-beliefs will keep us from moving forward with our beliefs.
- That's part of our human nature, but we also have a divine nature that we can lean into to overcome that.
- But if we don't lean into our divine nature of the Holy Spirit, then we're going to be left with just our human nature that will lead us, at times, into unbelief.

New 2019 Grace Monrovia theme:

- "If we want to go fast in renewal, we go alone. But, if we want to go far in renewal, we go together."
- This comes from an African proverb.
- Now, as a family, in this transformational process we're going through, and the vision we have for 2019, we don't want to go alone.
- Even though going alone might be our first instinct for some, God doesn't want us to go alone, that's not what He wants for us.
- Pastor Craig and the members read out 2019 theme together out loud: "If we want to go fast in renewal, we go alone. But, if we want to go far in renewal, we go together."

- Now, interestingly, going together means that we operate at different paces.
- Not everybody can run a sprint; not everybody can run a mile, but all of us can go together at the pace that we move together.
- That will frustrate some who want to move at a faster pace and frustrate others who want us to slow down.
- But the important thing is – is that we're NOT lone rangers, but rather, in a spirit of community, which the church is, we go together.
- This kind of implies that we make a commitment to each other to go together.
- And if you are thinking that is difficult for you to do, then pastor Craig submits that you are thinking out of your unbelief.
- But, if we are thinking out of our belief, we will realize that together we will go far and that no one will be left behind.

2019 Theme Scripture:

- Last year, our theme Scripture was “abiding in the vine”.
- Even though, we've changed the theme this year, it doesn't mean that “abiding in the vine” is not first and foremost of importance.
- It's because “abiding in the vine” makes all of this possible.
- “Abiding out of the vine” causes us to act out of our belief and not our unbelief.
- So this year, we going to focus on 2 Peter 1:1-11 (Knowing and Growing in Jesus).
- Pastor Craig has put together for our Flourishing Care Groups and our Forerunners Luncheon Group a 20 page study which unpacks these verses.
- These verses will show us the growth process we go through as we are being transformed and conformed to the heart of Jesus.

Mission:

- How many of us know and can recite our mission at Grace Monrovia?
- It is: “Glorifying God by developing or transforming fruit-bearing disciples that have a flourishing relationship with Jesus without fear, shame, guilt, or doubt.”
- Vision will change over time, but our mission won't.
- Notice the mission statement has three elements to it.
- The first one – “glorify God.” Don't we all want to glorify God?
- Now the challenge to each one of us is, including pastor Craig, are we living an on-going life that glorifies God?
- We cannot glorify God on our own – it won't happen out of our humanity.
- It will only happen when we are in a close relationship to the Father, Son and Spirit through the various spiritual practices and disciplines of prayer, study, meditation, worship and giving, etc.
- One of the main reasons people don't go to church anymore is because Christians act as hypocrites.
- Now there is a reason for this saying – as believers, too often we live our lives, on a day to day basis, out of our unbelief because we haven't done the prep work to allow the Spirit to flow out of us.

- It takes the Holy Spirit to change us, but we need to stay in relationship with Him through prayer and study and meditation, worship and giving.
- When we draw close to God, we live out of our divinity, not our humanity.
- Now, it's when believers are seen doing things that are not Christian, people say that they are just putting on a show in going to church.
- It's not that we just put on a show, it's when we are under stress and not in closeness to the Father, Son and Spirit, we will respond out of our humanity.
- We need to realize that if we are not in that daily renewal process, that daily relationship with God we are going to live out our lives through our unbelief.
- Now we need to realize even in our moments of unbelief, Jesus will always consider us, day in and day out, an absolute beloved child of His, which will not change.
- We must never forget that our change in becoming spiritual is a supernatural occurrence.

What is our motto?

- Loving God and loving others without fear, shame, guilt, or doubt.
- That won't change.
- If we're not first in relationship with God and loving Him, then we won't be able to love others without fear, shame, guilt, or doubt.
- Pastor Craig committed to us that he will never ever guilt us into doing something.
- But what he will do is to challenge us to maintain that loving God relationship so that God's love and purpose will flow out of us.
- That's the only way we will be able to change and to go far in renewal.
- Guilt or any other external stimulus will not work long term in producing lasting spiritual transformation.
- Once its impact is over, we will go back to where we were before.
- Long term spiritual change is only through the Holy Spirit.
- Being involved in a flourishing relationship with Jesus is what changes behavior.
- When we live out our lives through the love of God, we become a light to this darkened world.

What Scripture supports our motto?

- Mark 12:30-31 (All-In God-love: heart, soul, mind, strength; neighbors as self)

Mark 12:30, "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." 31) The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

- That's what Scripture tells us what to do.

Vision statements:

1. Our family (church family) expresses this love, loving God and loving others, with a commitment to transformation by growing deeper in a flourishing relationship with Jesus.
2. Our family knows this commitment and grows by continually engaging relational spiritual practices by abiding in prayer, study, worship, fellowship, giving, etc.
 - When we go out into the community and we are in a situation where we are pressured and interact with someone, we can act out of our belief or we can act out of our unbelief.
 - And that will be dictated by what we've done before we got into this situation.
 - As Christians, when we get out into the game, we shouldn't act out of ourselves, but rather we should act out of the relationship we've already established with God through prayer, study, meditation day in and day out to allow the Holy Spirit to just flow out of us.
3. Our family, those who are able (not everyone is), engage in these practices in community through whole-life discipleship committed to Groups, Teams, Classes.
4. Our family expresses and shares this love by living mission-minded to the Y staff and Y members, the surrounding parish and neighborhood around us, which is the church gathered. And then the church scattered would be interacting in our own neighborhoods with our neighbors, friends, family, and other circles of influence.

How can each of us, individually yet collectively as a church family, create a better vision for the future?

- Here are some diagnostic questions we can ask ourselves.
 1. Am I committed to growing my flourishing relationship with Jesus?
 2. Am I regularly abiding in the vine through communication (prayer), curiosity (study) contemplation (meditation), community (worship, fellowship, witness)?
 3. Am I a faithful giver of financial resources God has given me? That's first-time giving, then consistent giving, becoming a percentage giver, and then increasing the percentage as God provides.
 4. What is keeping me from being a flourishing group member through groups?
 5. What area of service am I gifted for and where is God calling me to serve through teams?
 6. What is keeping me from engaging my mind, growing, and interaction with others through classes?
 7. What is keeping me from sharing and serving in the harvest/mission field?

Concluding comments:

- Now are we answering these questions and living our lives out of our belief or out of our unbelief?
- We need to do these things out of our belief and do it together as a family, not individualistically.
- God designed us to work together to be transformed and then to enlighten the world.

- Now all of these vision statements were not Craig Kuhlman's but rather they came out of Scripture, they came out of what the Father, Son and Spirit want for each one of us.
- Obviously, we're not all there yet. We are all at different points along the path and that's the whole point of a vision.

- God wants so much for us and He has given so much for us.
- And God provides His love and joy and peace to us when we interact and talk with others.
- The purpose for church is to come together to be instructed and also to be challenged to step it up and meet God's vision for us.

Closing prayer