

Sermon for 02/12/06

How to Change the World – TAKING STOCK OF WHAT YOU GOT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
AMEN

Main Theme: Changing the world, transforming hearts, and renewing minds is the will of God! Last week we asked: Who am I to think I can change the world? And God said we were His beloved children and partners in mission. Only after deciding we WANT to change the world according to His will, should we move on to today's topic: Change it with what? What resources do I have that can be used to change the world? When we take stock of what God has given us, we discover we have more than we first thought! We have 1) God Himself (His power, love, and Spirit living within us), 2) a clearly defined mission and vision for our life, 3) human partners (called the church), 4) a Spiritual gift (for specifically building up the kingdom), 5) natural gifts (talents, personality, education, life experiences, resources , etc

1) TAKING STOCK! Anyone who saw the movie “**Apollo 13**” remembers that the crew was on their way to the moon when a spark caused a *tank explosion* that damaged the space ship. This unexpected disaster left the astronauts with no way to filter out the dangerous carbon dioxide increasing in the cabin. Back on earth, the best engineers were sent to a room with all the materials the astronauts had available to them in their capsule, and told *not to come out* until they figured out a way to turn ordinary items into a device that would save the men on board. Only after all the items were thrown onto a table and analyzed, did those in the “think tank” realize that they **did indeed** have what they needed to get the job done. **Taking stock** of what they had, *saved* the crew's lives. But more often, people get *discouraged* when faced with a big or daunting task, and **quit** before they start, because they have never **taken stock** of the resources available to them. And that lesson needs to be applied to those of us who are called to “**Change the world!**”

2) WANT! Last week we talked about how God's **one desire** is to **change the world** – that is, *transform hearts* and *renew lives*, that His lost children would find their way home! And He designed the **church** and **everyone of us** in it to be His hands, feet, and voice – to **join Him** in His mission! Before we talk about **HOW** to change the world, we asked ourselves last week, “Do we **WANT** to change the world?” The remaining sermons in this series are *meaningless* if you do not **WANT** to make Jesus' **purpose** and **mission YOUR purpose** and **mission**. But if you said “**Yes, I want to be used by Jesus to change the world**”, then it's important, (in facing this enormous task) to **take stock** of what God has made available to you.

3) IMPACT! George Barna, (Christian author of 30 books and President of the Barna Research Group), has studied thousands of American churches and concluded, “**A typical church is a fairly small group of people that convenes weekly and has limited impact on the culture.**” How sad. And yet, when I first interviewed here, I asked this congregation, “What is ASLC **known for** in the community? In other words, if ASLC were to *disappear* tomorrow, how would that **impact** the community? Who would miss us?” And all I got was *shoulder shrugs*. Were **we** just another “small group of people that convenes weekly and has limited **impact**” on the culture? *We decided to change that!* Though we got *distracted* for a number of years as the desire to **change** the church’s “culture” caused internal unrest - we’re **back on track** and **refocused** on “changing the world.” **If** we are to make a positive community **impact**, **WE** need to take stock of what God’s given us!

4) GOD! First, 1) **God** has given us **Himself!** Whether that is good news to you depends on whether your **God** is a **big** or **small God!** *My God* is the **Creator of the Universe!** My **God** is the **source** of all the *power, wisdom, and love* that exists! My **God** is **bigger than big!** And my **God** can do **anything!** You either **believe** that or you don’t! If your **God** is **small** and incapable of modern day miracles – then I can see why “changing the world” would be deemed a “**Mission Impossible!**” But if your **God** **gave birth** to the universe, this planet, and you – *with just a Word* - then your divine partner can help you make an impact on the town you live in! If the **first resource** given to you to “change the world” is **THAT** awesome partner - **God** Himself, then don’t you think He is capable of **making it happen!?** **Through you!**

5) RELATIONSHIP! Remember, Christianity is **NOT** a religion or a philosophy, it is a **RELATIONSHIP!** A **relationship** with Jesus Christ! The human and the divine – **together!** The finite and the infinite – **in love** and **working as one!** When the two are embraced in **relationship**, connected through constant prayer, and united in will – the “impossible” is a **daily result** of that faithful “**oneness.**” The **love** and **power** that surrounds God’s throne – is available **to you** every day! *Do you believe that?* Or is your God some toothless teddy bear; cute and comforting, but **small** and **weak** and **without** the power to **impact the world** around you? Is your God a **big God** - capable of **countless daily miracles?** The ability to take “theory” and move it into an **active pursuit of the impossible**, will depend on whether you have a **relationship** with a big God! Only then should you attempt to change the world!

6) YOU? Many of you may be **confused** because in the past **you** **tried** to “help God”, **you** **worked hard** to bring down the mountain of human pain, **you** **struggled** to build a faith that would warm a cold world – but **you** **got nowhere!** But that may have been the whole problem, **YOU** tried. **YOU** worked, **YOU** built, **YOU** struggled. **Your** attempt to prove to God that **you** are faithful and worthy was conceived in **your** own mind, and you used **your** human wisdom, **your** human power, and **your** human limited resources to do what **ONLY GOD CAN DO!** See, **you** are not Him!

7) LIVING IN YOU! Last week, we discovered that Jesus didn’t come **just** to present a **model** of true humanity – then leave it to **YOU** to “**IMITATE**” Him; He came to **live IN you!** ...to **INHABIT** your heart! You don’t have to **create a plan** to “change the world” – **God’s already got one!** Your Lord is **ALREADY** about the work of **transforming hearts** and **changing lives!** Ask Him, and He will **reveal** how you can “**get in**” on what He is

already doing! Don't **TELL** God what you are willing to do for Him, **ASK** Him how to *best serve* Him according to the designs *already* on His table! If you have *surrendered* the "desire to lead", the One **living in you**, will **show you the way**, **inspire**, **empower**, and **USE you** in powerful ways! Your greatest **resource** for "changing the world", is **God Himself – living in you!**

8) MISSION! So, with God comes your second resource; 2) **A MISSION!** Basically it begins with a calling to be **more like Christ** each and every day! As we *study*, *embrace*, and *invite Jesus in* – **He** becomes more and more our *reason* for living! As we "**decrease**", and Christ "**increases**" within us – we *begin to see* what Jesus is up to each and every day! We see **miracles** happening all around us that we would have *missed*, left to ourselves. We are *filled* with a greater capacity to **love**, and **forgive**, and **heal**, and a burning desire to **pour ourselves out** for others! Having read or heard our **mission statement** here at ASLC for years, more and more of you are beginning to *understand it*, and *own it!* As you let Jesus unpack the **Great Commandment**, it is *inspiring* you to want to 1) **WORSHIP** God, and 2) **SERVE** our neighbor. As Christ writes the **Great Commission** into your heart, you are *compelled* to 3) **SHARE YOUR FAITH**, 4) BRING THE LOST INTO THE **FELLOWSHIP** of the church, and 5) continue to GROW in your **DISCIPLESHIP!** This plan for your life is guaranteed to bring you the *greatest inner peace*, *purpose*, and *joy*. This **Mission** is an *incredible resource* to you, from God. As is your **vision!**

9) VISION? Many people mix up the two terms: **MISSION** and **VISION**. Our *mission* is shared by **all** Christians. For example: on the front of your bulletin is our Mission Statement "**To grow in God's Grace through the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).**" Basically *every* church in the world could adopt this *broad generalized* mission statement. Our **VISION** statement is *specific to us*, and is found on the 2nd page: **To create an expanding community that seeks and receives Jesus' gracious gifts of healing, wholeness, and spiritual growth.**

10) CHANGE! Several years ago, the leadership of this church began to see that our community was **changing**. The **growth boom** of the 80's and 90's came to a halt. Almost every *empty lot* has now been *filled* with homes, apartments, or businesses. **AND** the people moving in are no longer composed on *middle class families raised* in the American culture. We have had a flood of **1st wave immigrants** from around the world pouring in, and the Christians among them do not want to **JOIN** our church, they want to **rent it!** They want to worship in their *first language*, using their *traditional songs*, and worshipping in ways that are *comfortable* for them. Because our community has **changed**, so is God **changing** our **vision**.

11) A HEALING CHURCH! Now, I'm excited about how many **mission churches** God is starting in our neighborhoods, but we also have to understand the **impact** on **our** ministry. The number of *visitors* walking in our front door has **decreased** dramatically. Recognizing this, the *leadership* fought away the urge to **panic** – (for you will remember 10 years ago our *specific vision* was to reach out to youth and their families – since our neighborhood was filled with them). Instead, the leadership **prayerfully** asked God to show us what He is **already** doing around us and how we might be a part of **that**. He opened our eyes to all the **12 step programs** and **community groups** **already** using

our building, and revealed a bigger community *filled* with *hurting people*; lives and relationships *destroyed* by *addictions*, people *seeking answers* to the *loneliness*, *depression*, and *health issues*. What this community needs is a place where *healing*, *wholeness*, and *spiritual growth* can occur. (Sure, maybe other churches down the road are being called to reach out specifically to *senior citizens*, or develop a *single's ministry*, or focus on supporting *global missions* – but *we're* feeling called to be a *healing* church. The fact is, *no single church can do it all!* And God always has a *specific calling* to *each church* for that *particular time* and *place*. God's **MISSION** may never change, but our *specific VISION* will constantly evolve as the needs of God's people changes.

12) YOUR SPECIFIC VISION? Just as *churches* have a "*specific Vision*" – *so do you!* **Every Christian** has a *specialized calling!* Have you discovered yours? George Barna recently wrote: "...**most people don't have a clue why God gave them life, why they find themselves in their current circumstances, or how they can add value to the world through their efforts to serve Him.**" He then states, "**In fact, most people – even most born-again Christians in America – do not see themselves as God's servants.**" Without a *specific Vision* – it is easy to see why *so little* gets done by Christians to change the world! *Your specific vision* does not need to be *created* – but *revealed*. Invest in *prayer* - ask your partner for *your "specific Vision"*. I guarantee it – in God's time the answer *will* come!

13) PARTNERS! So, in taking stock of what we've got, there's *God Himself*, a divine *Mission and Vision*, and the next resource is **3) PARTNERS!** That's right – the *church!* *God's people!* Your *spiritual family!* See, God's Mission and Vision *transcends* the capacity of a single person! You were *never designed* to change the world *alone!* This is not a *competition* – changing the world is built upon *cooperation!* When people are *empowered* by God, given *purpose* by God, and then knit together as *partners* in a common purpose – *miracles happen!*

14) ONE BODY! In **Romans 12:4** Paul tells us, "**Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belonging to the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.**" As much as some of us prefer to *go it alone*, that's *NOT* according to God's plan. All the gifts necessary to accomplish God's will have been intentionally *dispersed* among us. None of us have them all, and hence God wants us to *work together* as all the parts of the *body* have to *work together* to function properly. According to Paul, you not only belong to God, you *belong* to each and every member of His family! An "eyeball" that decides to *separate itself* from the rest of the *body* cannot *walk*, or *talk*, or *hear* by itself. And **Christians**, called to serve God, must *offer themselves* to one another and be *one body* if we are to "change the world" according to *God's plan*.

15) TEAMWORK! Notice, Jesus did not send His disciples out as *individuals*. **Mark 6:7** tells us, "**Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out ...**" *What? One by one?* No! "...**two by two.**" It provided *support*, *encouragement*, as well as demonstrated that the *testimony of two witnesses* is *more powerful* than just one! The early church grew because of *teamwork!* *Teamwork* makes the job more *enjoyable!* And two or more heads are *always better* than just one! Have we not learned that *two or more working*

together can accomplish **far more** than the individuals can separately?! Our culture may exalt “**individualism**”, but **God’s will** is based instead around **teamwork**! If you think that *your vision* comes from God, yet requires no one’s help, **check again** its source! God’s blessed you with an entire church of diverse and talented people **for a reason**. **You need them!** Success in accomplishing God’s will comes from *sharing our gifts, working towards a shared goal, empowered by a common source!* **Teamwork** can **transform hearts**, and **renew lives!** **TEAMWORK** can change the world!

16) SPIRITUAL GIFT! Let’s not also forget about the fact that **4)** each of us has been given a specific **Spiritual Gift!** I’ve *preached* on this often – and *teach it* in our new member’s class. Of the **20+ spiritual gifts** mentioned in the Bible – we each have been **given one**, (or a unique combination of several), **for one purpose: to build up the Kingdom of God!** They are **NOT** given for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. We are going to spend a lot of time discussing this in more detail **next week**, but for now – grasp this: **Everyone has one!** (*No exceptions*) And when you discover it, nurture it, and use it – three things happen: You are **energized, fulfilled, and successful!** If you don’t find serving God as exciting as it should be, it’s because you are **not** using your **spiritual gift**. You are a square peg in a round hole. If you **don’t know** what your **spiritual gift** is, there is a **spiritual gift inventory** on the table in the narthex that you can take home and fill out. Then bring it back to me and I will share with you what the results mean! The *inventory* is limited - but it will quickly help you **eliminate** the majority of **spiritual gifts** leaving you with **3-4 gifts to go explore**. Believe me, if you want to change the world – your **Spiritual Gift** is one of the major keys to making a difference in the world!

17) God’s Glory! And **5)** don’t forget your **natural gifts**, (gifts you were born with or learned), your **unique personality**, your **life experiences**, **education**, and **material blessings**. Some us come out of the womb talking, some are natural athletes, other good at mathematics, music, or mechanics. One of the greatest excuses people give for not serving is “**I just don’t have any abilities to offer.**” That’s ludicrous! Studies say the average person possesses from **500-700 skills!** And **every ability** can be **used to God’s glory**. Remember what Paul told the Corinthians and us, (**1st Cor. 10:31**) “**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**” Believe this: **God has a place in His church where specialties can shine and be used to God’s glory.**

18) BLESSINGS! Several weeks ago, Cheri S. and several others here, embraced the responsibility of cooking and serving a meal once a month for the homeless and needy at the Presbyterian Church in Federal Way. Now while cooking is not Cheri’s “Spiritual” gift, it is a **natural ability** or **learned skill** that **CAN** and **IS** being used to serve God. Likewise, your unique personality, your education, your life experiences – **these are blessings**. So you struggled as a kid with **drugs**, or **low self-esteem**, or a **dysfunctional family** – **so what!** God can use what Satan meant for harm and turn it around into an opportunity **to serve and heal others!** Others in bondage to drugs will be touched *more effectively* by someone who has “**been there**” than someone who hasn’t. Don’t be **ashamed** of a rough life, **let God use it, turn it around** to reach others in the same boat! As to **material blessings** – everything came from God, and belongs to God, so though you may not have as much as some – you have **more than enough** to be a **blessing** to someone!

19) EVERYTHING! Satan wants you to be overwhelmed by the requirements necessary to change the world! But before you give up in despair: **Take stock of what you've got!** Which is? **EVERYTHING!** Jesus is here to remind you – above all else, **you have God on your side!** His power, His wisdom, His love... they are *at your disposal!* Christ is **living inside your heart** and can do for you what you cannot do by yourself! Secondly, you have a **detailed** mission and specific vision **ALREADY** on the drawing table! **ASK** and it will be revealed to you! Next, Christ is pointing out your other **partners** – those in this room, and around the world; the church! No lone rangers need apply – only **team work** is *supported* and *empowered* here! As united parts of one body - we make a greater impact on the world. Forget not your special **spiritual gift** – given to you by Christ to **build others up!** And Jesus reminds us of our natural skills and learned abilities, distinctive personality, unique life experiences, education, and material blessings. So – tell me: what is missing? What more **do we need** to change the world? **Nothing!** After taking stock of what we got: we realize Christ has given us **EVERYTHING!**

Praise God!

AMEN

Sermon/Confessional Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we confess we forget that all power, all wisdom, and all love comes from you. And because we don't always surrender our heart to you, we find ourselves focused only on what we can do with our limited resources and abilities. Forgive us, and help to believe that nothing is impossible if you are living within us and we are following your will. Help us to believe in and expect miracles to happen through us and this church. Empower us to do what we cannot do by ourselves – change the world with your love!

Lord, forgive us for trying to go it alone! Forgive us for making our plans instead of seeking your divine mission and vision for our lives. Teach us how to get closer to you, discover our spiritual gifts, and offer them to you. Thank you for the gift of partners – especially those in this church. Help us inspire, encourage, and care for one another, that united around your will, we may make a positive and life-giving impact upon the world around us! Use us Lord!

And now Lord, although you know us better than we know ourselves, listen as we share in a moment of silence, those other parts of our lives that need to be forgiven, washed clean, healed, and recommitted to you! (made anew.)

(Silence)

Lord, you have reminded us that everything that is yours is now available to us should we surrender ourselves to your purpose! Transform our hearts, renew our minds, and help us to see and believe that everything we need to touch and change the world has

been given to us. Move us to action, let your will be done in and through us! In Jesus Name We Pray. AMEN

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Friends, listen to the good news: The Lord, the provider of everything we need to change the world, ...that Lord has mercifully heard your confession and eagerly forgives you all your sins. Go now, hearts open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, looking for opportunities to use His countless blessings to change the world – one heart at a time! Dream big – for you have a big God! Praise God! AMEN

Opening prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, the brokenness of the world seems so permanent, so vast, so unchangeable that many of us have not even attempted to try. Others of us who tried this week met with resistance and quickly backed off. Our good intentions and wishful desires to perfectly serve you, *tripped* over our own selfish desires and the road blocks that a godless world threw in front of us. A few of us did manage to experience the joy in living according to your will as we risked reaching out to those in need. But regardless of our success or failure, all of us Lord, know we have a long way to go in our faith walk. We thank you for your patience and glorify your name for loving us despite our weaknesses and failures. So again we come to receive your merciful forgiveness that we may forgive others with more grace than ever before. We come to get healed, that we may offer the same miracles to others by bringing them to you! We bring our broken relationships to you, that you may guide us and strengthen us, so that they may display your glory to others who also struggle with fractured relationships.

Lord, we can not imitate you unless you come in and live within us. Please do so, and help us surrender every part of lives to you – increasingly make us more Christ-like, and use us to change the world according to your will! In Jesus Name We Pray! AMEN