

1000 Days of Witness Project Overview
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We're a church that...we don't have a lot of congregational projects, things that we rally the whole congregation around, young and old, and say, 'Let's all do this together.' We're very careful about that. We don't have many projects like that. In fact, we deliberately keep it that way. For one, if there's a lot of projects on the congregational calendar, if there's a lot of things that all of us are being called to do, to participate in, and 'everybody show up for this,' and 'everybody show up for that,' there's some things that are kind of byproducts of that. For one, there begins to be confusion. You know, it's kind of like you go to pick up the remote control and you don't know how to turn on your TV because there's so many buttons. In church we just need a couple buttons—on, off, change the channel, adjust the volume. We don't need a whole lot of other buttons in terms of our congregational life, the projects we're trying to accomplish; otherwise it gets confusing.

The other thing it does is it begins to diffuse our congregational energy and focus, and pretty soon we're doin' a lot of things, but none of them well. We're starting a lot of things but never completing them. And so not only is there confusion, there is a diffusion of focus and energy, and things just don't get done, and don't get done well. And even more than that, and related to that is if you keep piling on the things for the congregation to do, and you have them running from here to there, and 'get involved in this,' and 'do that,' pretty soon if you're not careful they begin to slip in their responsibilities to their families. And they begin to slip in the role that God has given them in the community, the unique placement He has given each one of us in the community. And so the challenge is to make sure that if we put a project in front of the congregation, it's not just another add-on, another confusing thing to do that's stretching us further and further. So we're very deliberate—as elders and as staff—in terms of congregational projects that we put in front of our people.

And that's why it's kind of significant and it's very unusual that we're using these two Sundays prior to Easter to introduce and to launch a congregational project. We're breaking from our normal sermon pattern and we're taking two Sundays to introduce a project that we first put on the horizon way back in December, and we said this is gonna come. And now we're ready to launch it. We put it together; we're ready to go with it. We're calling it '1000 Days of Witness,' and it begins April 6, the Sunday after Palm Sunday, and it'll run for a thousand days, right up to December 31st, 2011—1000 Days of Witness.

That's the title we've given the project. And as we introduce it this Sunday and next we're gonna do a couple of things. The first thing we're gonna do today is give you a project description. Whenever we launch something, and as a leadership board we decide, 'Ok, where are we gonna go?' we wanna make sure we're specific about it, that we understand what it is we're trying to do. And so our project statement for this particular project that we're calling '1000 Days of Witness' is that we would launch an extended exercise...a thousand days is an extended one, it's pushin' three years...that will establish prayer-based, Spirit-led witness. We're not talking about a program where you're all going out with booklets, and you're all being trained in a particular direction, and you're all making rounds through the community and stuff. We are talking about something that will have at its base prayer, and it will be something that in individual circumstances and conditions we are relying on the Spirit of God to open the doors and to give the opportunity, and to establish that pattern of prayer-based, Spirit-led witness as a life practice across our congregation. That's why we're doin' it on such an extended effort.

You see, this is one of those things we don't wanna do for two days and then forget it. This is a project where we wanna see something built into our lives, so that by the time we're done we're actually living this way day-in, day-out, without even having to think about it—the practice of prayer-based, Spirit-led witness in all our different circumstances, in all our various condition, being people who speak of Jesus, who tell His story, speak His name, and give witness to the reality and the wonder of all that He is. That's our project statement.

Now we put a plan together for that, and we say 'How are we gonna go after it?' One of the things I do before we put together a plan is I start makin' in my mind a criteria of what that plan needs to be like. If we're gonna try to do this, what does that project need to line out like? What are the things that will have to mark it if it's gonna be successful? And so I put together a project criteria, and I wanna run you through the criteria for this project as we put it together.

Number one—it had to be marked by sustainable simplicity. This is a long project; a thousand days is a long project. In order for us to do that we need to keep things very simple. The moving parts—there can't be very many of them, and they have to be durable. See, we don't have any idea what's gonna happen in the next thousand days. And if anything in the past year that I've learned, is I cannot guess what's gonna happen the next thousand days. So we need a plan that is simple enough, the moving parts are so few and so durable that they can carry on no matter what happens for an extended period of time, that everybody can remember 'em and do 'em no matter where they are, no matter what happens. So we need that sustainable simplicity.

We also need, and I'll put this phrase to it, a deliberate diligence. This is something, because it's extended it is not something we can rely on emotional intensity to carry it. It's not something that I can pump you up today and expect it to carry for a thousand days. That's why we're introducing it in this way. This is *not* a pep rally. It's gonna take deliberate, intentional action, day after day for a thousand days.

You know, if you decide you're gonna go up on the mountain for back country skiing you don't go to the Donut King and just look at that array of donuts. That place is so good! Ok? That's how I know we're in a good community, ok, that Donut King. ☺ Alright? No, you don't go there if you're headed into the back country for a day of skiing. That's not breakfast. You go to Merry Doner's. You get one of her sourdough whole wheat pancakes. And when it hits the plate it goes "Thunk!" Ok? Right. We need a plan that will go "Thunk!", that will last. So it not only has to be sustainable simplicity; it has to call us to action; it has to be something that we can be doing no matter how we feel, no matter what the conditions are...we know the next step to take, the next step to take. And it won't be built on how we feel at that moment.

Third thing is it has to have an expandable effectiveness. We had a terrific experience as a congregation when we decided to build this building. We needed to raise funds that we didn't have. And one of the things was we committed to a three-year project. We called it "Extending His Grace," and we decided...we committed, we prayed about it, we thought about it, and we launched a congregational project. And for three years we gave beyond our normal giving and we set aside two point two million dollars (\$2,200,000.00) to help build this building after we sold our other building. That was a challenge, but it was a rich experience. And we started into it, and then three years later we're in here. It was just amazing! And those who were a part of it...that was a rich experience for me, personally, and I know others, of walking with God through that time. That really stretched us financially. But one of the things that happened is the way that project was designed, we introduced it over six weeks, we explained it, made it understandable; people jumped into it, said 'we're on board.' But there wasn't good ways to engage other people once the project started. And so what happened is the same group of people that started the project were pretty much the same group that carried it on to the end. And along the way we were not able to add other people into the project. Our desire with this particular project, which is very different but still an extended one, is that people can be added into the project, they can engage in this and they can become a part of it at any time, right up to the day 999. So we want something that's expandable, that easily people can join in and become a part of.

The other thing is that it needs to have a "Practical Phit (fit)"...we're trying to stay with alliteration here, so we're spelling 'fit' a particular way. Alright...it has to have a "Practical Phit"; in other words, by that I mean it needs to be us, it needs to fit us. There's thousands of ideas out there and they're good ideas, they're excellent ideas, but they may not fit us—who we are, where we've been, what we've been through, and what God's done in us and among us both individually and congregationally, and what unique place it is for us in this particular community. And we have to be sensitive and responsive to that. This project that we're having, since it's one that we're asking everybody to be a part of; I need to be sure that it fits everybody. This needs to be a project that a twelve-year-old girl in junior high that is nervous and feeling awkward and everything else can get engaged in and become a part of. It needs to be a project that that businessman who's very busy tryin' to keep his business going, and wheelin' and dealin' and everything else in the community...he needs to be able to engage in this project and to be able to do it. That man that's goin' out to the Slope two weeks out, two weeks in...we wanna make sure the project's designed so that he can stay engaged in it no matter if he's here or gone or whatever. That widow that is at the Pioneer Home and can't get out except for maybe on an occasional Sunday...we want her to be a part of this. We want that school teacher that's busy all winter long trying to keep up with a class full of kindergarteners. We want them to be able to be a part of this. We want that mother that's got preschoolers that are just wandering all over the house and she feels like she never gets out except for come up for air on Sunday and "Ah-whoosh" [made whooshing noise], ok...we want her to be a part of this.

So it's got to be a project that has a practical fit. The way I do this a lot of times...I sit there and I ask, 'Would my brother do this?' See, I'm convinced that every pastor...every pastor should have a twin brother like I have, who's in your congregation, looks just like you, but is very different from you. And we're talkin' about a guy that...he never went to seminary. He rarely found a Sunday school class he ever liked. And he sits back in the sermons, and if it starts goin' long he's going [makes yawning noise]. But he loves the Lord. And so one of the things I do when we design a project, I sit there and ask myself, "Is this something Loren would do? That commercial fisherman...would he do that?"

And then lastly the project, when we look at it, and we design it...we wanna make sure it's a project that has a biblical base; that everything we do, everything about it goes back to a foundation in scripture. We're doin' what God tells us to do in His word. And that's the project criteria. And we put together a project plan, a ministry plan that we believe fits that criteria. And we're gonna introduce it to ya next week. We're gonna tell you exactly what it is and how we're gonna go after that goal. And it's something that I believe each and every one of you can get engaged in.

But before we do that, before I lay out the 'what' of it and how we're gonna approach it, I need to make sure that I answer to the 'why.' Why would we choose to do that? Of all the things we could be doin' as a congregation, of all the things we could be planning, why do we choose to do this? And so I'm gonna answer that question very quickly. I'm gonna put it first of all in a phrase. When we answer the question why our response is very simply this. Number one, it's in order to better answer God's call upon us. And a follow up phrase to that is not only to answer God's call upon us, but to give voice to His Spirit within us. That's why we're doing this...we want to get better and better and better at answering God's call upon us, and give voice to His Spirit within us. This goes back to a statement we made way back in December when we first ever talked about maybe possibly doing this. And this was a phrase we used, and we wanna go back and make sure that we explain it and you understand it biblically, because this is a foundation...this is why we're doin' it.

Number one—we are a people who have a call upon us. We are a people of whom God has said, "This is what you are to do." And we need to be sure of our calling, why it is God has placed us here, and what it is we're about. And the passage I'm gonna take you to this morning is found in Matthew chapter 5, verses 1 through 16. It's an introduction section of the longest section of Jesus' teaching that we have. It's called the Sermon on the Mount, because it took place on a mount. But it's a sampler, as it were, of all Christ's teaching. It's something that I believe He said these things many different places, many different venues. But this passage is the one we're gonna key on. And as we read through it...and we're not gonna do much more today than read through it...and as we read through it you're gonna begin to see what our calling is as followers, as disciples, of Jesus Christ. And you will see that we are called to be witnesses.

It says, at the very beginning of the chapter when you go there, it says at the very beginning that when He saw the crowds... It's early in His ministry; the crowds are beginning to gather around Him hundreds and thousands at a time. It says that

When He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountain; and after He had sat down, His disciples came to Him.

And you can picture this teacher, very much the way that teachers did at that day. They would sit down in order to teach. And He sat down and His followers, His disciples...not just the crowds in general, but the people that said, 'Jesus, we believe you're the Teacher, and we're here to learn from You.' Those disciples gathered around. And as they looked at Him, and we're told that

He opened His mouth and He began to teach, saying...

That's kind of a formal phrase—"And He opened His mouth and began to teach." We would assume that He opened His mouth when He began to teach. But that was...in ancient literature that was a way to say this was a formal teaching moment. And we have here the teaching He gave. He said, first of all,

"Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Blessed are those who have no claim on God's goodness. Blessed are those who are morally, spiritually, bankrupt. Blessed are those who cannot look at God and say 'You owe me anything.' Blessed are those who can bring nothing of value and worth to God. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.

And then He goes on and says *“Blessed are those who mourn...”* In a culture that fears sadness and pursues happiness with a desperation, Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who mourn,”* who care enough to feel sadness at loss.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

And then He goes on and says *“Blessed are the gentle,”* those who with patience pursue what is best for others with a soft touch, confident...confident that God will work His purposes to a good end. They don't have to desperately force it.

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”

And He goes on and says *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”* Blessed are those who desperately want to do what is right, and who see what is right be done. He says *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...”* It's like their body's screaming out, only it's their soul saying, 'I must have this!'

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

And then He says *“Blessed are the merciful,”* those who look at those who are hurting and are suffering, and feel for 'em and care about 'em, even though their suffering and their pain may be due to their own failure.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” those who love God, who are completely devoted to Him and there's not a mixture of motive and desire within 'em.

“Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” those who are able to bring the angry and the alienated into agreement and even into affection, those who don't drive wedges between people but build bridges.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”

And then He gets to this. He says, *“Blessed...”* and this kinda catches us. He says, *“Blessed are those...”* privileged are those who suffer, who are persecuted, *“...have been persecuted because of righteousness,”* who have been so committed to what is right that they have suffered for it, *“...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

And then He even makes the suffering more specific, the persecution more specific. He says, *“Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute you, and when they speak falsely all sorts of things against you because of Me,”* because of Jesus, not just because of righteousness but because of the One who is righteous, Jesus. He says 'Blessed when you're persecuted because of Me.' *“Rejoice, be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, and this is the way they treated the prophets before you.”*

It's a quick succession of opening declarations, and they all have one major impact, and they're spoken for this reason—they're told and they are spoken to make us rethink everything about what we consider important, what we consider valuable, what we consider to be blessed, what we consider to be privileged. And then, having said that, He goes and makes two more statements. He speaks about that group of followers who just heard His radical statement, as it were, of values. He speaks to them and He says, number one, He says

“You are the salt of the earth.”

These are people just like us, just like us, who simply believe that Jesus is the Teacher, the one right Teacher; and they've gathered around to learn life from Him; and He looks at them and He says, *“You are the salt of the earth.”* Now, He's concerned. He says if you lose your saltiness you're not worth anything. You can't be...you've gotta be thrown out and trampled under the feet of men. Salt has to be salty. It has to be able to preserve, because salt preserves a rotting world. And what's the saltiness we might lose? It's the thing we talked about, those virtues that He calls us to—a poverty of spirit, that sadness of soul over the grief of others and ourselves and the challenges that happen, the gentleness of spirit, that whole list of things. He says if you lose those, you're no longer salty.

Then He goes on, and He says not only are you the salt of the earth, He goes on and makes the same statement, a different statement to the same group of people. He says

“You are the light of the world.”

‘You reveal reality. You’re the beacon in the darkness. You are what gives hope.’ He says

“A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”

‘You can’t be hidden; you’re a light, you can’t be hidden. In fact, nobody would wanna hide you, because you don’t have lights, you don’t set lights up to be hidden.’ And so He challenges them, and I’ll read that challenge exactly. He says to them, *“So let your light shine...”*

“So let your light shine before men...” so that before them *“... in such a way they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*

In other words, He says you’re the light of the world. Do what you do, the good that you do, do it in such a way that when people see it they don’t praise you and they don’t praise the organization you belong to...they praise God.

How do you do good in such a way that men see it and praise God? Answer—you do it with a poverty of spirit. You do it with a soul that knows sadness. You do it with gentleness. You do it with mercy, a hunger for what is right. You do it, willing to suffer whatever the cost, for Jesus. You live out those beatitudes that Jesus spoke. You’re the light of the world, He says. You’re the salt of the earth.

And then, much later in the New Testament, when Jesus has completed His ministry and He gathers His disciples around Him—He’s been crucified and He’s been buried, He’s been raised from the dead, and now He’s gonna ascend to heaven—He comes back to that very same theme. And He says to them, *“You shall be My witnesses.”* ‘You are the ones who are gonna tell people about Me. You’re gonna testify to My reality.’

That’s a calling, God’s calling on Christ’s people. We’re the salt, we’re the light, we’re the witness to the reality of Jesus. We do that not just as a calling, but it’s something that moves within us. It’s not just something that God says, ‘You need to do this.’ It is actually something that God stirs within us, and we give voice to His Spirit as it moves within us. That same verse we just cited in the book of Acts, Paul says...or excuse me, Jesus says

“You’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

‘You’re gonna be witnesses, but you know what? Before you’re witnesses, the Spirit of God is gonna come upon you. And *then* you shall be My witnesses.’ And we see how this works out a number of times in the book of Acts; it’s repeated over and over again how the Spirit moves and God’s people give witness to the reality of Jesus. I’m gonna cite just one example; it’s found later in Acts chapter 4, ‘cause I love this incident. The church had been giving witness to Jesus and the people in Jerusalem, the authorities, said ‘Stop! We don’t wanna ever hear that name in this city again. Stop.’ And then they beat and they flogged the people who had been speaking about Jesus. And so the church gathered. And they’re wondering ‘What do we do? We’ve been told that we’re witnesses, that we’re supposed to speak of Jesus. But now we’re bein’ told not to.’ And so they pray. They pray out to God, and they say ‘God, give us courage. Allow us to keep going. Let us answer our calling.’ And we’re told that something happens, and they were all filled with the Spirit. The Spirit of God came upon them, began to move within ‘em, and they began to speak the word of God with boldness.

The Spirit of God comes in our life. Jesus promised it as one of the greatest, most wondrous promises ever. And when that Spirit comes in it’s God presence entering into our life to renew us, to quicken us, to make us alive to His word, to His Son, to His people. The Spirit of God comes in not just to renew us; the Spirit of God comes in to encourage us, to be that Paraclete that comes alongside us and keeps us moving. The Spirit comes alongside us to make sure we understand, and we know, and we recognize, and we hear God saying “I love you” when He speaks to us, and we feel conviction when we’ve gone wrong, and there’s illumination that helps us see things we couldn’t see on our own. And there’s direction when we need to know do we go fast or do we slow down, do we turn right or turn left, or do we just wait... The Spirit of God comes alongside us and is the encourager.

But He's not just the renewer; he's not just an encourager; He's an enabler. And we have been given the Spirit so that, our time and our place, we can tell the story of Jesus and we can speak His name...in all our circumstances and all our conditions we can give witness to His reality. That's our calling, and that's our gifting—the Spirit of God has been given to us. That lies behind this project. You understand that, you need to grasp it.

See, there's many people that have ideas about what the church should do, and what the church should be saying, what its mission is, and what its message is. That's one thing, after thirty years of pasturing I look back, that's one thing I was never prepared for when I went through seminary. They didn't warn me, they didn't tell me, they didn't prepare for me how to handle the numbers of people that would come to you in the course of your career, telling you what the church really should be doing, and what the church should really be saying. It happens all the time. There's hardly a day doesn't go by when I don't hear from somebody somewhere about what the church should be doing and what the church should be saying.

There's some who see the church as a relief agency, and our challenge is to make sure that the downtrodden are taken care of, and the hurting are provided for, and the sick are taken care of, and our message needs to be, as we go out into the world, is simply "How can I help?" And then there's others that say "No, the church isn't so much a relief agency; it's like a community center. It's a place we're able to connect with people of shared values, and we're able to find friends, and we're able to engage in life together, and we're able to find husbands and wives for our kids. And our message is 'Welcome.'" And there's others that say, "No, the church is really a political action committee. It's a power block in the public arena. And it should be entering into that fray, and it's message should be the party platform." And you don't know how many parties try to make that our message.

I say no to each one of those, and I'll continue to say no, because God has given us one calling and He's given us one message. The calling is to be a witness for Jesus, to testify to His reality, to tell His story, to speak His name—in all our various circumstances, in all our various conditions. And we have been given one message—Jesus is Lord.

That's what this project is about. I thought of how do you make the ending dramatic; how do you make it powerfully motivational at this moment? I thought of different model of public speakers that I've seen really clinch it at the end with motivation. And then I go back to the one model I have of on this message. It's a man sitting on a mountain with a group of students gathered around Him, simply saying "*You are the light of the world...you are the salt of the earth.*" You are His witnesses.

Let's stand.

Our Father in heaven,

We go from here today as a people who do know our calling. And wonder of wonders, we have Your Spirit within, stirring us to speak of the reality of Jesus. Father, we pray and we ask that You would be with us as we go through this week; clear our agendas, clear our focus. And as we come back next week bring us back as a people ready to move forward, to enter into this project, and give witness for Jesus.

In His name we pray, amen.

Grace on ya.