

“Building a Twenty-first Century Christian Community”

Psalm 133:1 and I John 5:9-13

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+133:1

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“Whoever has the Son has life” I John 5:12

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Within 30 miles of Chilson Hills two church tragedies have happened. In both circumstances bright and energetic pastors were called by the congregations with mandates to lead their churches into a period of renewal and growth. In both circumstances after a few months the pastors encountered resistance to any change that would be different from the 1950 successful church style. In both circumstances the churches have faltered and the pastors have had significant personal difficulties. In one case the pastor is under physicians care and unable to work. In the other case the pastor is waiting to find another job and leave the state. The tragedy of these two stories is greater than the personal suffering of these churches. The tragedy is that these scenarios are being replayed in congregations across the country.

According to organizational theory one of the most detrimental things to the growth of an organization is its prior success. The church was wonderfully successful in the 1950's. Most dedicated and faithful church leaders still dream of a church in the 1950's style. Many of these key lay people are the attendees and givers of record in churches that want a repeat of the 1950's style of church.

Most seminarians are taught to help a church to grow using very different methods than those used in the 1950's. Most books written about church growth recommend doing things very different than the 1950's. We live in a new age, with new expectations, with a different pace of life, and new generation of working, educated women and men. When the powerful groups of faithful people want one kind of growth and the leaders are seeking another kind of growth, the prescription for disaster is clearly written. The conflict might be over styles of music, loss of the women's group, changing of the lampshades, or any number of other things. But, the real conflict is over a vision for the church.

I am so thankful that Chilson Hills began intentionally seeking God's vision fifteen years ago. I am thankful for people who were willing to honestly evaluate what we are doing and not doing. I am thankful for Chilson Hills people:

- ❖ who are willing to read new books;
- ❖ go to conferences about new ways of being church;
- ❖ travel to different churches that were doing things radically new; and,
- ❖ who pray fervently for God to bless us with a clear vision of who God wants us to be in this new millennium.

God continues to answer our prayers. We heard God's call to build a community ministry center. We heard God's call to empower people to grow in their spiritual gifts through actively participating in empowered ministry teams. We heard God's call to grow ourselves as ministers to each other and to new friends through Lifegroups. We heard God's call to identify the spiritual values that we will continually learn and teach to our children and youth. We know that God wants us to actually live out our values:

- ❖ Loving unconditionally,
- ❖ Learning continually,
- ❖ Living meaningfully,
- ❖ And leaving a legacy of hope.

God's Vision for Chilson Hills

God continues to bless us with a vision for being an active, living, vital, committed community of God's Grace filled people who are participating with God in growing God's 'Beloved Community' for the Twenty-first Century. God's revealed vision for Chilson Hills Church is to be a people "Connecting together in Christ to serve all God's people and renewing ourselves through Jesus' teaching of love, healing, and forgiveness"

Connecting Together in Christ: A Community Worshiping God

The Worship of God is central to all we do at Chilson Hills. Our worship life is the most important aspect of our life together. Everything we do grows out of our worship life. Our new community ministry center is a visible symbol of how worship relates to everything. Recreation grows out of worship. Teaching and learning grows out of worship. Dinners, banquets, and parties are best centered in the worship of God. Worship is not separated off from life. Worship is not something we just do on Sunday morning. Worship is life through Christ Jesus. And, life with the Son is worship. Let me share two guiding principles that are central to our worship planning.

1. Our worship life as a community must be a reflection of a worshiping life throughout the week. When Jesus was confronted by evil in the Judean Wilderness, he responded by saying, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only God." (**Matthew 4:10**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+4:10) Our challenge in the 21st Century is to see God in all of life. The Christ within you will greet the Christ within another. The Christ within you will link you with the Holy Spirit revealed in the song of a bird, the movement of the wind, the thunder of the storm, or the love of a pet. Chilson Hills must be a people who are daily, weekly, monthly, yearly growing in the worship of God.
2. Our worship life must be guided by the Spirit of God who speaks to us from many traditions through many voices. Ten years ago our Worship Team declared the reformation fight between Protestants and Catholics to be over. Last month seventeen people from Chilson Hills discovered the rich tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The worship tradition of the worldwide Christian church is rich with symbols, actions, processions, and rituals. We can better worship God:
 - ❖ if we allow the Korean Christians to teach us to pray aloud together;
 - ❖ if we allow the African American Christians to teach us how to worship with joy;
 - ❖ if we allow the Eastern Orthodox Christians to teach us how to appreciate the saints of God who have gone before us;
 - ❖ if we allow Charismatic Christians to teach us how to lift our hands in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord;
 - ❖ if we allow Seeker Sensitive Christians to teach us how to sing without burying our heads in a book and how to worship in a visual medium;
 - ❖ if we allow the European Christians to teach us how to appreciate a well planned and delivered sermon; and
 - ❖ if we allow the Roman Catholic Christians to teach us how to appreciate the Christian year and receiving the Lord's Supper weekly.

At Chilson Hills we want to connect with Christ so we have declared peace within God's family and we deeply desire that the Holy Spirit teach us how to worship God with all our hearts, minds, and bodies!

Renewing ourselves through Jesus' teaching of love, healing, and forgiveness.

As Worshiping God is central to our community, following Jesus in real life is our mission. Living life with the Son is actually living life as God intended it to be. Living life in relationship to Christ Jesus is living the abundant life of God. There are two key aspects of this portion of the vision: actual living and global living.

1. Actual discipleship in contrast to virtual discipleship is our challenge. We are called to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us to live life in relationship to the Son. I am talking about real life. Ken Medama wrote a song where he challenges us to "come build a church of flesh and bones." Real life issues, concerns, and conflicts need to be dealt with in the light of Jesus' teachings. If we are to be real disciples and not just play at it in the virtual reality of Sunday morning, then we must show how Christ daily teaches us:
 - ❖ about healthy sexuality,
 - ❖ about marriage conflict and reconciliation,
 - ❖ about healthy parenting and growing strong and faithful children,
 - ❖ about death and resurrection, and
 - ❖ about loneliness and community.

The Holy Spirit wants us to actually, in real life follow Jesus! Where the Son is, there is life! God wants us to be an alive community of followers of Jesus.

2. Actual discipleship will move us quickly beyond ourselves into the world of the dispossessed, the marginalized, the outcasts, and the unclean people of our planet. After all, Jesus was attacked for eating and drinking with sinners. Jesus taught that the outcast Samaritan was the good neighbor. Jesus actually touched lepers. Jesus saved a condemned thief on the cross. Jesus' eyes were always on the persons who needed a friend to come alongside them and give them the help they needed when they needed it. Jesus is calling us to walk beside those marginalized persons in our world who need a word of hope and the assurance of God's love. God's vision for us is to look beyond the confines of our friendships and to find ways to respond to the needs of the world!

To serve all God's people

Actually following Jesus means that we must take Jesus' words seriously. Welcoming and serving all who come is our joy and our challenge! When Jesus says love one another he does not give us any exceptions.

- ❖ The word is not, love them when they...!
- ❖ The word is not, love them if they...!
- ❖ The word is not, love them because they...!

Rather, Jesus commands us to love every person that God brings into our awareness.

- Are they unclean? The Roman Centurion was ritually unclean and the Holy Spirit commanded Peter to visit him, share Christ's love with his family, and accept them all!
- Are they racially or sexually stigmatized? Phillip was commanded by the Holy Spirit to share Christ with the Ethiopian eunuch, to accept him and to baptize him.
- Are they public sinners known in the community for their actions? The woman taken out of the bed of adultery and brought before Jesus in the Temple courtyard was loved, protected, and accepted by Jesus all before Jesus challenged her to get another lifestyle.
- Are they economically or politically outcasts or upcasts? Jesus invited the wealthy Matthew, tax collector and Roman collaborator, into the inner circle of the disciples. Jesus loved him, accepted him, and then challenged him to grow in God's grace.

"Whoever has the Son has life!" If we are to be alive with God's Spirit we will live like God's Son. We will welcome all that come into our circle of awareness regardless of who they are or what they have done. Sure there will be difficulties. Sure there will be trials, troubles, misunderstandings, conflict, and struggle. We can expect that we will not be able to control everything. People will not look like us, have as much or as little as us, dress like us, or drive a car like us. Homogeneity is not God's way of growing a community of grace-filled people. Spiritual hospitality is God's way of growing us into the very likeness of Jesus Christ. The more we become like Christ, the more alive we will become.

God's vision for Chilson Hills:

Brothers and Sisters, God is calling us to do a new thing. God is calling us to sing a new song. The 21st Century is not yet 10 years old. Nine years ago we watched on television as people around the globe celebrated the coming of the new century. God is calling us to continue to celebrate not the change of a calendar, but the transformation of persons and communities through the power of Jesus Christ. God is challenging us to be in the forefront of a spiritual change. God is calling us to be a 21st Century church.

I hold before you again---God's vision for us! God's vision for Chilson Hills Church is to be a community, God's vision for Chilson Hills Church is to be a people "Connecting together in Christ to serve all God's people and renewing ourselves through Jesus' teaching of love, healing, and forgiveness." Let us pray, work, and joyously live in relationship with the Son who will then bless us with abundant life!