

Reaching People God's Way, February 17, 2008
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This morning I want to talk with you about why Gretna Baptist Church exists. We want it to be a place of safety, a good place to raise your family, make good friends, and be taught the Word of God. But, as good as these things are, Gretna Baptist Church exists for more.

Our vision statement says we exist to communicate the Word of God without compromise but with compassion, *ready and willing to reproduce ourselves*. Ultimately, we desire to reproduce ourselves by sharing the gospel and starting new churches.

I am convinced God's desire is to reach people and to use you and me in doing so. That's why our church exists.

The question we grapple with however, is, "*How do we make this happen?*"

The answer lies in what we believe and do.

I. What We Believe About God

It begins with what we believe about God, based on His Word. Obviously, that is an inexhaustible subject.

Charles Swindol tells about being asked to speak at a large civic gathering. He asked the person what she wanted him to speak on and she replied, "*Oh, I don't know, something about God.*" He replied, "*Well thanks for narrowing it down!*"

For our purpose this morning though, I am concerned with just one specific aspect of what we believe about God. It is provided for us in the familiar reference of John 3:16. Look at it with me as I read it...

This verse tells us a great deal about God.

First, it tells us God loves people.

I remember the first time I heard God loved me. I was in high-school, walking down the street with a friend one night, we had just past a church building when we heard someone behind us shouting, “*Wait, Wait!*” His first words were, “*I just wanted you to know God loves you, and has a plan for your life.*” The church service was just getting started and he asked us to attend with him. There I was with long hair, a t-shirt, jeans with the knees worn out, sandals, and he was asking me to attend church. I did! I didn’t feel like anyone loved me, so what an impact it had to learn that God loved me, just the way I was.

Did you know **most** of the people you and I come into contact with everyday do not feel loved? How important it is someone lets them know ***God loves them!***

This verse also tells us God wants to reach people. Can you think of any other verse in the Bible that makes this truth about God any clearer? God **so loved** the world **that**. His love for people moved Him to reach out to us. What a tremendous truth for you and me to hold on to!

And then it tells us He has a plan for reaching people. His plan included the sending and sacrifice of His Son; the Lord Jesus Christ. God **so loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that ***whosoever***. **None of us** would be here had God not taken that initiative. Romans 3 teaches there is not even one good enough, and not even one who would have sought after God on their own.

Hopefully everyone here has a story to tell about how God reached you. God has made it easy for people to be reached.

Admit that we are sinners. (Romans 3:23)

Believe that Jesus came and died for sin. (Romans 5:8) It was when we least deserved it that He did what we most needed!

Call upon Jesus to save us from our sin and give us everlasting life. (Romans 6:23; 10:13)

Everyone who does this causes **rejoicing in heaven** (Luke 15:7) because it fulfills the love and desire of God in reaching people.

This, to me, is the starting point of what we **must** believe about God. We **must** believe He loves people, wants to reach people, and has a plan to reach people. If we don't believe that, *why would we ever even try to reach people ourselves?*

Are you **convinced** God loves people and wants to reach people? Do you *really* believe that?

II. What We Believe About Ourselves

Having been recipients of God's love and salvation by faith in His Son, we also **must** believe something about ourselves: God wants to use **us** in His plan to reach people.

That's what the Great Commission is all about.

In John 20:21 Jesus said, "*As the Father has sent me, even so send I you.*"

Mark 15:16 says, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*"

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, "*All power... Go ye therefore and teach all nations...*"

And in Acts 1:8 it says, "*But you shall receive power, after...*"

These passages **all** teach us that God loves people, wants to reach people, has a plan to do so, **and** wants to use *each of us* in His plan.

No where in the Scriptures do I get the impression that was limited to the disciples or even a select few today. I understand that to be His commission, His will for *each* believer and *each* local church.

We often think this to be the task of missionaries, but a missionary is simply *one sent by God*. **So, I am** a missionary, **you** are a missionary, and **our church is** to act as a missionary, because we are an organized gathering of people sent by God to reach and teach other people.

I have never met a Christian that God did not use **someone** to reach. As a young man, on a clear starry night, I drove down to the Illinois River; I was

grieving over the death of a friend. Looking up at the night sky through my windshield, I prayed and said, “*God somehow my life has to change but I don’t know how, show me what to do.*” Noticing a piece of paper tucked under my windshield wiper, I reached out, took it, and began to read it. **It was a gospel tract**, telling me of God’s love and plan for my life. That night I prayed to receive Christ as my Savior. God’s answer to my prayer to show me what to do *didn’t just happen*. **He used someone** to place that tract under my windshield wiper. **God always uses people to reach people!**

If we are ever going to reach others, then we **must** believe this! We **must** believe first that God wants to reach people, and we **must** believe second that He wants to use **us**.

Are you **convinced** God wants to use **you** in reaching people? Do you *really* believe that to be true?

III. What We Talk With God About

Third, we must talk with God about who He wants us to reach.

In our society people talk with God about all kinds of things. They talk about what they want, they talk about their health, and they talk about what they don’t want. But if we are going to reach people, we must talk with Him about the people He wants to use us to reach.

James 1:5 says, “*If any of you lack wisdom, **let him ask** of God that giveth to all men liberally.*” If you want to reach people but don’t know what to do then pray and ask God for wisdom.

James 4:2 tells us, “*Ye have not, **because** ye ask not.*”

James 5:16 says, “*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man **availeth much**.*” If we are going to reach people we must, we must, we must pray.

When I moved to Gretna I did two things:

(1) I found the highest point outside of town that would give a view of the whole community so I could pray for it in a visual way...

(2) At night I walked my neighborhood and prayed for every house asking God for an opportunity to minister to the people who lived there...

Before building this building, every summer Sheryl and I had Vacation Bible School at our home. The last year we had it there, including the staff, we had 98 in attendance! As I would stand on the corner in the morning greeting the families upon their arrival, I saw something that left a deep impression on me, from every direction in our neighborhood I saw mothers walking their children to our house. And it seemed to me the Spirit said to my spirit, "*Roger, here is the answer to your prayer.*"

1 John 5:14-15 says that's the confidence we can have...

If God's will is for us to reach people (And it is!), and we ask Him for the people to reach, God is going to answer!

So here is what we must *believe and do* if we are going to reach people:

- (1) We must believe God wants to reach people.
- (2) We must believe God wants to use us in reaching people.
- (3) We must talk with Him about the people He wants us to reach.

Any Christian, or local church, who believes these things about God, themselves, and prayer will start reaching people, because it is no longer just one of the things we add to our list of things we should do, it is who we are, *sent ones* from God to reach people.

None of us exist to live for ourselves, we belong to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says we have been bought with a price, we belong to Him! The Great Commission that every Christian and church is responsible for **is not** just about teaching, it is first about reaching.

So in everything we do, we want to talk with God about how He wants to use **us in it** to reach others: our job, our social activities, our volunteering in the community. God wants to use every aspect of our lives in reaching others.

God has put us together as Gretna Baptist Church not just that we might have good times of fellowship, and good times of instruction, but that through the collective activities that make up our lives we might reach some, whom we can bring into our congregation for training, that they too will become part of God's plan for reaching people.

Will you make a commitment today to rearrange your life around God's plan, rather than your own plan?

Until we believe that's how God wants to use each of us *and our church*, and we make a commitment to changing the way we live and think then we likely will not reach people. But once we make that commitment, then God will provide us with the opportunities to do so. And once God uses us to reach someone else we will want it to happen again and again.

God loves people, wants to reach people, has a plan to reach people, and wants to use us and our church in reaching people!