

NEDA Vision Talk

Good morning! I hope you have had an enjoyable and beneficial time at the conference. I hope it has been good to catch up with friends. I trust it has been renewing to sing in worship alongside co-laborers across the region. I hope it has been inspiring to consider together who we are and what holds us together. And I hope it has been motivating to consider how God is sending us on mission together in New England.

So, we now come to the last session of the conference, and I hope to accomplish 3 things:

- Paint a Biblical picture of what God is doing in and through us together
- Describe how we as a district can pursue togetherness for the purpose of becoming better disciples ourselves and developing more disciple-making leaders.
- Our motivation for pursuing togetherness

Prayer

(Slide 2)

When you signed up for the conference, you may have noticed this picture on the brochure and the conference package of a group of birds sitting on a log.

Specifically, this is a group of Mergansers, which are a type of duck. Maybe you wondered what that picture had to do with the conference, maybe you figured it was just a stock filler image that we forgot to remove. Bear with me, but that picture reminded me of us.

I look at this picture and I see a group that has commonality (not everything, there are differences, but there is more in common than not.

- If you were to take a snapshot of us, we don't outwardly look see the commonality that unites. There are differences in our appearance, personalities, cultures, worship styles, and ministry practices, but like these ducks; but, if you dig beneath the surface, there is a common DNA that unites us – as Keven described last night
 - Word
 - Gospel
 - Abide
 - Mission
 - Community
 - Unity

I look at this picture and I see a group that isn't posing for a picture. They aren't all neatly lined up, facing the same way. Some of their feathers are disheveled. One joker has his mouth wide open. Somebody else is scratching his back.

- Don't take this the wrong way, but when I look at NEDA, I see a group that isn't posing for a picture – trying to look better than they really are. What I see is a bunch of ordinary men and women – some jokers as well
- Ordinary and authentic men and women.
- I don't say this in a derogatory way at all. I see this as a very good thing. I believe the Kingdom of God is preferential toward the ordinary and authentic. The humble, the meek, those who know they aren't the Big Deal, but Jesus is.

- Our world doesn't need more celebrity followers of Jesus, we need ordinary but authentic followers of Christ.

I look at this picture and I see a group that is genuinely together

- They aren't together merely in a conceptual sense.
- They've gathered at the same time, in the same place. They are sitting on the same branch. They want to be together.
- Together, they find warmth. Together, they find protection. Together, they fulfill their purpose - because God didn't make them to be alone.

Transition

And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning, the fact that a major aspect of God's design for us is wrapped up in the word together. Together we fulfill the design and purposes of God.

(Slide 3)

Ephesians 2:22 "In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

I want us to consider the picture that Paul paints in talking about us, the church. He says that together we are a dwelling place for God. Together we are a building, a home. Just a couple verses earlier, Paul wrote that together we are the household (oikos) of God and God's household is being built together. There is currently a construction process in which God is building together a diverse

group into one dwelling. Think about our togetherness as part of God's construction process for his household.

(Slide 4, second click)

God's dwelling is in need of renovation: Together, we are being built into better disciples.

- My family bought a house a year and half ago to be used a discipleship center for families in need. Before we could move the family in, we had to renovate. Bad wiring had to be torn out and replaced. Walls were taken down to create more space for community gathering. Walls were put up to create healthy boundaries. Steps and doors were installed to create entrance for more people.
- Before the house could fulfill the purpose we had for it, renovation was necessary:
- God has intentions for his household, and renovation is necessary to accomplish those plans. Forgive me for reminding you of what you already know, but what are God's intentions for his household? What are His purposes for which renovation is necessary?

(Slide 5) Lifeflow Triangle:

- *Love God fully.* (Click 1) Every fiber of our being, every thought and action – is to be a love response to the One who has loved us with every fiber of His being. We are to live all of life with our identity grounded in the truth that we are Sons and Daughters of the Kings of kings.

- *Love Others sacrificially* (Click 2) Our lives are to be lived for the wellbeing of others, serving others in love as Christ as served us.
- *Make Disciples* (Click 3) as we go through all of life (work, school, play) we are to teach people to live Jesus' way of life – teaching people how to love God and love others, by the grace of God.
- In order for us to live this out, we have to be together. (Click 4 – circle)
 - We must be together if we are going to be renovated to love God fully. See, we get caught up in our own wrong thinking and feeling about God. We need one another to teach, admonish, mentor.
 - We must be together to be renovated to love others sacrificially. We can't love apart from real togetherness – sitting on the same branch with others - providing for one another, encouraging, comforting
 - We must be together to be renovated to make disciples. We need others to call out what God has placed within. We need others to equip and to coach us to be able to do the good works God has called for us to do.
- **God's design is that Together we are being built into better disciples**
 - I hope you've had a taste of that this past day and half...

God is not only renovating the current structure...God is also expanding his dwelling...

(Slide 6, click 1)

God's dwelling is in need of expansion: Together, we can be about making more disciple-makers.

- There are 2 ways that our togetherness contributes to the expansion of God's household.
- **Togetherness is attractive** [\(Click 2\)](#)
 - John 17:23 *May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.* (NLT)
 - In a world full of hostility and division our togetherness is our greatest apologetic to the reality of Christ. He is our peace, He has taken down the dividing wall of hostility. We invite others to experience this peace within God's household.
 - Our togetherness, when seen by the world is the Light of Christ shining in the darkness.
 - What do you think the church has to offer in this political season? What does the church have to offer in midst of the rising racial tension? (Togetherness that doesn't come from uniformity)
 - Togetherness is attractive and will draw more disciples into God's household who will become disciple-makers themselves...
- **Togetherness is catalytic for the development of disciple-making leaders** [\(Click 3\)](#)
 - I look my personal history – I didn't disciple myself. I had youth leaders who taught me how to lead a group of young men in a Bible study. I had college ministry leader who taught me how to share my testimony. I had a parachurch ministry leader who taught me how to

love and befriend teens who were far from Christ on their turf. I had a pastor who taught me how to handle and teach the Word of God. I had Bible School professors who taught me how to think correctly about God. I had friends in ministry who helped sand off rough edges, I had a district superintendent who taught me how to care for leaders – and then gave me his job.

- I never could have developed as leader by myself. God in his sovereign plan has been bringing His people into my life, in part for my growth. Mentors, Coaches, Friends who God has used.
- Jesus developed disciple-making leaders in community. We see Paul doing the same thing – traveling, ministering, writing with other leaders that he is developing.
- Central to God's expansion plan for his household is the togetherness of His church.

(Slide 7)

How can we, as a district, pursue togetherness for the purpose of becoming better disciples ourselves and developing more disciple-making leaders.

(Click 1)

Let's view district ministry through the lens of Loving God, Loving Others, and Making Disciples.

Together we can pursue Leader Development [\(Click 2\)](#)

- *Leader NOT Leadership*: Leadership has more to do with task and role, Leader is about the person. What we desire are leaders in our district who are grounded in their identity in Christ and who are vibrant in their relationship with God.
- Together environments for leaders to develop in spiritual vitality [\(Click 3\)](#)
 - Gateway
 - Credentialing
 - Modules
 - Pastoral Care
 - Prayer Retreat
 - etc

Together we can pursue Church Health [\(Click 4\)](#)

- The district not only exists to support pastors, to help churches grow in health. We want to see Christ's life and love flowing through our church communities.
- Environments for the development of Church Health [\(Click 5\)](#)
 - Lifeflow
 - Crisis Care
 - Pastoral Transition
 - etc

Together we can pursue Church Multiplication ([Click 6](#))

- Environments to catalyze Church Multiplication ([Click 7](#))
- Assessment
- Coaching
- Training

All of this district ministry is best done together. ([Click 8](#))

- For pragmatic reasons, this has to be done together: we don't have district staff to lead all of these different facets of ministry
- For strategic reasons, this is best done together: I believe it is more effective to do this through a plurality of practitioners). Pastors and leaders who are in the trenches helping others pastors and leaders who are in the trenches.

Intro some of the people who are leading in these areas

- Gateway: Chico Parker
- Credentialing: Jeff Keegan
- Pastoral Care: Brad Johnson
- Module Ministry: Scott Taylor
- Lifeflow: Scott Solberg
- Dave Gish – leader development
- And others

I believe that God has already resourced us with everything we need to do the work he has called us to do. What I see going forward is a plurality of practitioners guiding a relational process of leader development, church health and church multiplication. Every single facet of district ministry is an opportunity for togetherness around God's purposes. An opportunity to enter coaching relationships in which God's household is further renovated with better disciples and further expanded with more disciple making leaders.

Before I finish, there is one more question that needs to be addressed – that is the motivation question. What is our motivation for together pursuing the development of leaders, the resourcing of healthy churches, and the catalyzing of church multiplication? I have to regularly ask the motivation question because unfortunately, my motives are so easily corrupted. I am embarrassed to admit how often fleshly motivations creep into Kingdom work.

(Slide 8)

Allow me to take us back to Ephesians 2:22 *“In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

We are told that God is building us together as his household and we are given a Trinitarian motivation for participating in the work.

- **We don't create togetherness, we join. (Click 1)**
 - Togetherness is the heart of God and has existed forever.

- **Our togetherness is *in Christ* (Slide 9, Click 1)**
 - Our union with Christ came at great cost
 - Let the past work of Christ motivate our current togetherness.

- **Our togetherness is *for God* (Slide 10, Click 1)**
 - We have been brought into God's Kingdom through Christ
 - There is a day coming, 1 Cor 15:24 tells us, when Jesus delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every enemy.
 - Let our future reality motivate our present togetherness

- **Our togetherness is *by the Spirit* (Slide 11, Click 1)**
 - God has not waited for his fixer-upper to be finished before moving in. He has already taken up residence within his household. And He is doing the renovating and expanding work.
 - Let the present work of the Spirit within us motivate us toward greater participation in God's purposes for us together.

Conclusion

So, brothers and sisters, in Christ, we are being built together as a dwelling place for God by His Spirit. Let's pursue together the ministry God has for us – the making of more and better disciples.