

- ***Read Luke 14:25-32*** As Luke records his account of Jesus's teachings not the topic of discipleship, we find Jesus stating that those who seek to follow Jesus must first take some time to count the cost and make plans for our following of Jesus. Those who failed to plan and just ran into discipleship of Jesus could find themselves in a place they never thought they'd be. Their lack of preparation would be their ultimate downfall. Just as the builder and king who failed to plan, the individual who fails to plan for the future will have no goal, no game plan, and much lower chances of success.
- This church is a church that operates with a purpose and a plan. We are blessed to have men serving as shepherds who are forward thinking and plan instead of flying wherever the wind blows. What we are trying to do within this congregation is build a spiritual house. In order to build a strong house, plans must first be made and the the house can start taking shape piece by piece. At the risk of sounding like a football coach, it could be said that we are trying to build up this church brick by brick. My first full year serving this church was focused on glorifying God. We considered what it meant to glorify God and how we could do that in our lives. This year we focused on Serving the Kingdom. All year we have given great attention to becoming strong servants of our God and one another. In 2017, we want to take the next step in our growth as a church by continuing to build upon the strong building blocks we have already laid down over the past two years.
- The Apostle Peter in **II Peter 1:1-11**, writes to the recipients concerning how they were to build their spiritual house and the awesome result that would come to be realized. These brethren were encouraged to continue to build upon their faiths and grow stronger and stronger day by day. As a church, we want to continue to grow strong year by year. For the remainder of our time this morning, we will discuss our plan for growth for the year 2017.

I. 2017 Focus: Seeking Wisdom From Above.

- A. As we continue to grow as a church, we want to be sure that we are doing so as wisely as possible. We want to make sure we move forward as a church and as individuals with proper knowledge so that we can make the best decisions and live as godly as possible.
- B. There are many people who claim to have wisdom. They claim to have all the answers, and they aren't bashful about letting you know about it. What does the Bible have to say about people like this?
- C. In what is probably the most practical letter in the New Testament, James writes by inspiration and tells us what wisdom is according to God. **James 3:13-18** will serve as our main focus text for 2017.
- D. Just as we have the past two years, the lesson on the first Sunday morning of every month of every month will dedicated to focusing on our theme of Seeking Wisdom From Above. Our guests speakers throughout the year will also be encouraged to focus on this subject. Our hope is that by the end of 2017 we feel even more equipped with the knowledge from above to live and make wise decisions according to the will of our God.

II. Daily Bible Reading: Wisdom & Poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Solomon)

- A. To help supplement our studies on the subject of gaining godly, we will dedicate 2017 to the reading of the wisdom and poetry literature which consists of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Solomon.
- B. These books are overflowing with knowledge and wisdom that can help us live lives that are pleasing to God. They can help us to make wise decisions as we go day to day. Especially when we consider the teachings that are found within the Proverbs. Whereas James is probably the most practical book in the New Testament, we must consider Proverbs to be the most practical in the Old Testament.
- C. The beginning of the collect of writings of Solomon (**Proverbs 1:1-8**) is pretty clear about the intent of the book, and I am very excited about our studies in these writings and the other writings of wisdom and poetry.
- D. As I have it broken down at the moment, there are about 264 sections/chapters of these writings. Divided up over 52 weeks, this leaves us with about 5 sections/chapters per week. I don't have the schedule finalized at this point, but there might be a couple days where we read a couple of the shorter Psalms together. We will work through the books minus Psalms one by one with Psalms being divided up evenly though out the year. Be on the lookout for our Focus Booklet which will be ready to hand out the first Sunday of the year.

III. Continued Commitment To Growth For All

- A. As we move into 2017 we want to continue to build upon the successes of our previous years. We read earlier from **II Peter 1:1-11**, and I want to revisit this text for a few moments.
- B. Peter writes to these individuals encouraging them to continue to grow because of their escape from the corruption of this world. His admonition is for them give great diligence as they develop their faith by building upon the foundation of their faith through the different qualities that are mentioned in this text.
- C. Peter doesn't just tell them to give great effort to develop these qualities within themselves, but he even tells them the result of their hard work. He actually begins by telling them the bad result of failing to grow in **v.9**. But beyond this he tells them the desired result of their efforts. They would be certain of their calling. They would never stumble. They would make a glorious entrance into the eternal kingdom of their God. These promises were to these original recipients and they are also true for us if we will give great efforts to grow in our faith.
- D. Our leaders want to continue to facilitate the growth of all individuals in this congregation by being committed to studies for all ages. Of course, we will continue in our Bible classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday night. The class schedule for the entire year will be found in our 2017 Focus books. We will also continue to offer opportunities to grow outside of these regular assemblies.
 - 1) Our ladies' class will continue to be held on the 1st Tuesday mornings of each month. A book of study hasn't been nailed down to this point, but as soon as it is those books will be distributed.
 - 2) Our mens' class will also continue on the 1st Saturday morning of each month. This year we will go through two different books of study. The first half of the year we will study through Doy Moyer's "Mind Your Faith: Essays in Apologetics." This book focuses on argumentations for the existence of God and our faith. The second half of the year we will study through Kyle Idleman's "Not a Fan." This book focuses on firming up our faith as disciples to where we are more than just fans of Jesus, but true followers as He desires.
 - 3) Our young peoples' class will continue its studies on the last Sunday night of the month, and go through a book entitled "Do Hard Things." This book is similar to the "Not a Fan" book in that it encourages young people to rise above the mediocre expectations that many have for them simply because they are young people.
- E. Our hope is that all of these studies will result in the many members that make up these group growing and working towards the blessings that are mentioned in **II Peter 1:10,11**.

IV. Implementation of Service Groups

- A. An outgrowth and progression from our studies this year on serving the Kingdom, our shepherds have made the decision that we will implement service groups for the year 2017.
- B. The members of this congregation have been divided up into 3 groups. Our deacons have been chosen to lead these groups. The groups will have 4 months throughout the year where they will have various responsibilities such as visiting the sick, encouraging the week, thanking guests, etc. Group 1 will take January, Group 2 February, Group 3 March, and so on throughout the year.
- C. The group rosters and responsibilities will be outlined in our focus books, and it is the shepherds wishes for the group of the month to meet at the beginning of their months to discuss their plans of action for that month. Every single member is highly encouraged to be a part of their assigned group so that we will become closer and brethren and be more connected than we have been in the past.
- D. This year we spent multiple lessons considering what is said in **I Corinthians 12:14-30**. This single group is made up of many members and those many members have many different talents. Every member has a role to play, and the point of these groups is for each person to know exactly how they can use their talents for good within this group. It is certainly our hope that we will take the work of this year concerning our service and put in into action within these service groups.

2016 has been a great year. I have seen the growth that has taken place within this church and the individuals that make it up, but growth this year doesn't mean that our work is done. Certainly our work isn't done and it is simply time for us to take the next step in our growth as a church and in our faith as individual Christians. May God bless us in this new year as we take the next step in our faith and continue to grow into the disciples and church that Jesus desires of us.