

The Church God's Looking For  
Don't Go to Church – Be the Church  
CrossPoint's Vision Series  
Community Centered: We are FOR others  
Romans 8:28-31 -- August 26, 2018

Welcome and series intro...

As a church we are living into a new three-year vision that began on January 1, 2018. That vision stated that in the time between 2018 and 2020 we would purposely do things that would help us become a church that is *Family First, Community Centered, and Mission Minded*. That means that in three years we are not as much about accomplishing things as we are becoming something. That's a pretty huge thing because in my first twenty years here at CrossPoint Church we had four – five-year visions that challenged us to do things like build something, change something, start something...you know, all of those things we've done over the years. But, this time we are looking at a vision from God that is all about becoming a church that has clarity around its purpose and that has focus in the things we are about. What that means is that those three statements: *Family First, Community Centered, and Mission Minded* will guide and direct the decisions we make about spending, ministry, worship, Christmas and Easter, and everything else we do.

Why...why do this? Great question and one that we should all be asking. We are doing this first and foremost because we believe this is what God has asked us to do. After prayer and research and prayer and conversations and prayer and looking at demographics and prayer and looking at trends we believe this is how **God is calling us to reach people for the Kingdom of God** and eternal life. In effect...this is the way we believe God has told us to make it hard to go to hell from Harrisburg. That's the first thing. Secondly, we believe that without a vision we just become wonders who do the same thing week after week with no real reason for doing it or way to measure if we're there yet or not. **Our vision helps us stay on track with what God wants** for Harrisburg through CrossPoint Church. Lastly, it helps us set priorities. It helps us say to one another what we believe is important to us. And **we believe that family, community and missions are important** to all of us and so we called out to God and received this Word back to become this kind of church.

Last week we talked about what it looks like to be *Family First* and the importance and significance of the family the way God sees it. We looked at what has been called the *Shema* – a statement found in Deuteronomy 6 that talks about who God is and how we are supposed to live in families with each other. That we are to be purposeful about being family and that the church is a key part of who and what a family is.

Today we are talking about what it means to be a community of believers that thinks more about the communities we live in than we think about ourselves. What does it look like to be a *Community Centered* church? Ultimately it means living out our ministries in such a way that **the communities we live in should know that God is FOR them** and that as a church we are FOR them. The world we live in seems to know Christian for what we are against. All of the things that end up in the news seem to highlight what the Church or the Bible or believers stand against. Seldom do we hear about the humanitarian things that the Church is doing in communities all around the world every single day.

Let me tell you what happened to me. Last year there was a post going around on Facebook that pictured a homeless man and the words, please pray for all those without a home tonight. A few well-meaning friends of mine jump on what they saw as an opportunity to call out Christians. Response after response was posted blasting Christians for praying for people but stopping at prayer and not doing what was really needed – providing a place for this homeless man to spend the night. So, I did a little research and discovered that right around 90% of all of the efforts to help people that are done in the United States of America are being done by...do you want to take a guess...yep, Christians. Either denominational infrastructure or para-church organizations or individuals setting up 501-c-3 non-profit Christian relief ministries and the list goes on. Right here in Harrisburg, the Pennsylvania Food Bank is heavily supported by churches, Bethesda Mission and all of its branches is a Christian mission and a large number of the retirement homes were set up by religious organizations and many of them are still run as faith-based centers for people with needs in the later years of life.

But, what I thought was amazing was this...Christians were being criticized for only praying when the reality is...it is Christians who are doing the vast majority of work for the under privileged. Now, prayer is the most powerful tool we have in the world we live in. So, to think that prayer is not a sufficient thing is one thought but, to not know that it is Christians and faith-based organizations that are the majority of those who are caring for the needs of the least, the last and the lost is sad. People just don't know. Oh, and when I showed them the statistics the conversation stopped cold.

So, what do we do to help people see the Church and Christians as people who are FOR them instead of the condemning, finger wagging, do nothings they think we are? This passage in Romans 8 can be a huge help in reaching out beyond these walls and letting people know that God has something good FOR everyone. Listen to this part of the book of Romans 8:

*<sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes everything to work together **for** the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. <sup>29</sup>For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup>And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. <sup>31</sup>What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is **for** us, who can ever be against us?*

There are three places where the word FOR appears in this passage. Each time the word FOR shows up it tells us something about the who God is and who we are in the Kingdom of God. Look at verse 28...the first FOR tells us that everything God is doing is FOR the good of the people who love God and show that love by living the way God wants us to live. God is doing good things and God would love nothing more than having people who love Him be the vehicles for that love to go out into the world around us...that's the together part. God is working together with us and when we show people that God is FOR them we are living out this passage to it's utmost. That's what we're here or what this passage says is our purpose. We are called for a purpose...expanding the Kingdom of God so that people see and know God through our love and the good that God is doing. God is not "out to get people" but to show them His love and to do good things for those who love Him.

The second FOR is in verse 29 is the reason why God calls us to tell people that God is FOR them. Because God has chosen us to be the way God tells people they are loved. God uses us because we have a relationship with people...we know people, we know Harrisburg. That's how we can be FOR Harrisburg because we know this city, we know the people here, we have relationships with people and God wants them to know the God is FOR them. God is calling us to be for Harrisburg. **We are the ones God has chosen and called to reach this city**, these neighborhoods, these people. Have we claimed our right standing? We are acting on behalf of God FOR Harrisburg? Are we praying FOR the city? Are we praying FOR the people we work with? Are we praying FOR the people we live next to?

How do we give a right standing to Harrisburg, to bring glory to Harrisburg like verse 30 says we can? What we believe, as a part of our vision 2.0, is that it will take relationship building efforts on our part. That means we are going to choose a few places that are already striving to be a blessing and partner with them to bring a greater impact to the greater Harrisburg area. For example, we are looking at our relationship with Morning Star Crisis Pregnancy Center, DayStar Recovery Center, Paxton Ministries, and the Bethesda Mission. These are places that are already offering the goodness of God to those in need and we already have relationships with these organizations. Our relationship with NorthSide Elementary school and Rutherford Elementary school will continue as we hope to impact those who live right in around the block for each of our campuses. Our current drive at Colonial Park is a great example of the kinds of things we can do to let the families in our neighborhoods know that we are FOR them. Amen?

Between now and the Christmas season we are going to be talking about how we, as a church who is FOR Harrisburg can LOVE BIG. That is the theme of our Advent and Christmas season for 2018. We want Harrisburg to know how much God loves them and is FOR them. So many times, people know what the church is against but, they don't know what we're FOR. And that means they don't know that God is FOR them because the people who are supposed to be representing God don't seem like they're FOR those outside our walls. We can change that...we are called to change that. We are called to make a difference and the Community Centered part of our Vision 2.0 will do just that.

So, go back to Romans 8 with me for a moment...look at verse 31: *What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is **for** us, who can ever be against us?* The bold statement in this passage is that God is FOR us! The guy named Paul, who is writing this down, is saying look, since God has done so much FOR us; saved us, healed us, rescued us, loved us and so many other wonderful things. Then if **God is FOR us**...isn't that GOOD NEWS...then what can stop us from telling all of Harrisburg? The answer to the question that is asked is found in the way we respond to God's love FOR all of us and FOR the city.

So, what are you willing to do to let someone know they are loved. As a Church we are going to do some things on purpose with the intention of letting people know that God is FOR them and so are we. I want every one of us to get one of these t-shirts and get ready to show Harrisburg just how much they are loved. Wear it every where you do...it's a great discuss starter...and let's let Harrisburg know just how much God is FOR us. Amen!