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The EFCC Vision and Church Revitalisation

'Exalting Christ in Growing Healthy Churches' is the vision statement for the EFCC, this is why we exist, this is what we do and why we do it. As we move forward we define ourselves positively, and we set specific goals in terms of our vision statement.

We pray to the living God that he will grow his church across our nation, and that we may know an EFCC where every church is healthy and thriving, where every church has a pastor, where we all work together to exalt Christ in growing healthy churches. This is the vision. I believe that this is where the Lord is leading us in his goodness and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to break the vision statement down into two parts, and talk about what it means for us as ministers, as believers, and as churches. This is a broad sketch of the vision.

Exalting Christ

In Matthew 14:22-36 the Lord Jesus appears to the disciples walking on the water as they struggle through the stormy sea in the boat. Christ reveals his deity and his sovereignty, and the chapter puts this in the context of the vital importance of fervent and constant prayer. Two chapters later in Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus Christ promises to build his church, this is in response to Peter's statement 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' These two passages in Matthew's gospel are closely connected. Christ's sovereign promise to build his church is linked to our trust in him and our obedience to him.

But sometimes, like Peter on the water, we take our eyes off Christ and look to the stormy sea around us. When Peter walked on water it was not a calm, tranquil sea, it was the middle of a storm, and yet when he looked to Jesus, everything was OK. The Christian ministry, and the Christian life in general, is a storm. But when we look to Christ constantly, we walk through the storm exalting Christ in our trials (James 1:2).

Have you taken your eyes off Jesus because of difficult people in the church, maybe its low numbers, maybe its opposition from neighbours? Maybe long term discouragement has led you into a season of depression and in the depression you have taken your eyes off Christ? Maybe you expected more fruit and you feel a sense of failure and because of this you have looked at your life and taken your eyes off Christ?

Is there sin in your life that you are looking at that keeps your eyes off Christ? Sometimes we choose to look away from Jesus because we believe the lie that our sin will be better than Christ. Maybe it is pride in your own ability that prevents you sensing your utter dependency on Christ, maybe you are engaging in sexual sin?

Let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Let's trust Scripture in the middle of our circumstances. May we know the Spirit of glory and of God resting on us for sheer joy in our churches (1 Peter 4:12-16). As we look to Christ wholeheartedly we experience the joy of dependence on him, we know the power of the Triune God in our ministry, in our lives, and we know the joy of the Lord as our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Growing Healthy Churches

I've set out some of what we mean in the first half of our vision statement, now I want to unpack the second half - 'Growing healthy churches.'

As a fellowship we are focused on church revitalisation and replanting initiatives. When we see the number of EFCC churches with no pastor, and churches that are very small, we can be tempted to be discouraged. But this is an opportunity for us as a fellowship.

Calling a Pastor

Around one third of our churches do not have a pastor; some of these churches are actively seeking to appoint a man of God to lead the work locally, other churches let months turn into years and do not have a pastor for a long time. The lack of leadership, preaching, and ministry soon become comfortable, but it does not glorify the Lord who has given pastors and teachers as gifts to the church (Ephesians 4:11). As we move forward we are developing links with other evangelical groups, networks, and college, to give us access to men who are training for the ministry. This is a great opportunity, we need to embrace it.

Revitalisation

In order for many of our churches to grow again, they will need to receive help, and with help comes change, often radical change. We are not in the business of managing decline. We are in the joyful business of serving the risen Saviour who is able to subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:21).

To enable the growth of our churches, the EFCC is developing a church revitalisation strategy. This is central to our desire to exalt Christ in growing healthy churches. Church revitalisation is vital as we move forward together.

The model that we are developing and encouraging focuses on our priorities as a fellowship of churches. We are independent but we must never be insular. We are encouraging larger, more established churches to come alongside and partner with smaller struggling churches, especially those without a pastor. When this happens, both churches will need to be clear that change must happen in order for the church to thrive and grow. One of the reasons that churches decline is because they believe that faithfulness to the gospel is focused on keeping a building open the way it has always been.

And that as long as they are filling the pulpit with gospel preachers, they are being faithful. When churches partner for revitalisation, radical change needs to take place. This normally includes a serious review of the future of the struggling church, changes of leadership and leadership structures, and a review of the use of the building. Above all, prayerfulness and urgent evangelism must be central if a church is to be successfully revitalised. The process is not quick, it may take years.

What is the EFCC all about? Exalting Christ in growing healthy churches.

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