

State of the Church

Fellowship Denver | August 29, 2010

I. TWO WAYS OF LIVING: “ABLE TO” vs. “CALLED TO”

There are 2 different ways of looking at life: “able to” vs. “called to.” One looks at what we have, where we are, and what we’re capable of. It thinks within the realm of what is reasonably possible. The other looks ahead and asks, “What is God calling us to?” It then lives today in light of that calling, regardless of whether it seems reasonable and plausible.

This second way of living is described in various ways in the New Testament. In all of these instances, the theme is seeking for, pressing ahead for, moving toward something that isn’t comfortable but is GOOD and VALUABLE and WORTH SEEKING!

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. – Matthew 6:31-33

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. – Acts 20:24

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way... - Philippians 3:13-14

We might summarize the difference like this:

Able to	Called to
Begins by asking, “What resources do we have?”	Begins by asking, “What does God want us to do,” then seeks God for the resources to do what he has called for.
Fits comfortably within my current life – but doesn’t lead to much joy.	Makes me uncomfortable – but results in great joy.
Contributes and serves out of the margins – spare time, spare money, leftover energy.	Rearranges life around the priority of the calling.
Remains conventional, reasonable, balanced, and respectable.	Sometimes appears to be reckless, audacious, and out-of-balance.
Supports and maintains what already exists	Anticipates and supports future visions
Says “yes” to lots of good things.	Says “no” to lots of good things so it can say “yes” to the best things.
Makes sure I get my needs met first.	Assumes God will meet my needs when I move toward his calling.
Requires little dependence on God; rarely prays.	Requires total dependence on God; prays constantly.

II. WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP DENVER CALLED TO?

A Brief History

- 7 years ago, Hunter Beaumont and Dave Morlan discussed planting a gospel-driven church in central Denver. Their initial reaction to this crazy idea was, “We can’t do *that*.” But God began to convict us that this is what he was calling us to. So we started moving in that direction, waiting to see how he would provide.
- Over the next 3 years, we rearranged our lives around this calling – praying, planning, working, learning, and eventually moving to Denver. Along the way, God provided everything we needed: training, coaching, places to live in Denver, financial supporters, and a small core of people who wanted to help start the church.
- On September 16, 2006 Fellowship Denver had its first worship gathering. 50 people attended. Attendance then dropped to an average of 25. The church grew slowly. End of year 1: 100 people. Year 2: 200 people. Year 3: 300 people. Today, coming up on the end of year 4, we are approximately 500 people.
- Along the way, God has provided everything we need and given us tons of joy!

If you had asked us in the beginning, “What are you called to,” we would have said, “To plant a gospel-centered church in the middle of Denver.” That would have been the official, brochure answer. A more honest answer would have been “to survive.”

So where are we today? Our initial vision has been fulfilled. God has done it. We survived and planted a church in the middle of Denver. Fellowship Denver is financially self-sustaining, growing, reproducing leaders.

So, now what?

Most of the people we’ve talked to who have planted healthy, vibrant, influential churches say, “Our dreams were modest in the beginning. We never imagined God wanted to do more.” But as they became established, it became clear that God had envisioned more than they had.

We have a biblical example of this dynamic, where Paul prayed for the Ephesian church:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen – Ephesians 3:20-21

This leads us to the conviction that we should be thinking more broadly. Here’s how we’ve chosen to describe this bigger dream:

To seek a gospel-movement in Denver and along the Front Range

Gospel Movement...

- Is based on our original core value – that the gospel is the power of God, the way he works. The gospel is powerful, on the move, able to get stuff done.
- Suggests something bigger than a church. It has a great church or churches at its center, but it’s not limited to a single church or activities that can be organized under the banner of a church.

- In other words, we're a church that wants to be part of something bigger than just having a good church – a work of God that we can't even get our arms around.

To seek...

- “Seeking” seems to be the right way of describing our role in such a movement. It strikes the right balance. We pray, plan, and prioritize while acknowledging that it's a movement of *God* by the *Holy Spirit*, using the *Gospel*, which is all about *Jesus*. So a gospel movement is not something we can “lead” or “produce.” But it is something we can seek – by asking God for it and prioritizing our lives around it.
- This is the same language Jesus used to describe our approach to the Kingdom of God – “seek first the kingdom and his righteousness” – make it a priority, arrange your life around it, pray for it.

In Denver and along the Front Range

- Suggests that God could call us to help plant other churches, both in Denver and in other cities along the I-25 corridor. In fact, this is already happening through our involvement with Acts 29 and Fellowship Associates. Plans are afoot to support a Boulder church plant and to begin a training residency for church planters.
- It gets the order right. Our first priority has always been – and always will be – Denver proper, especially the central part of the city. We see our work taking root here before expanding out.

III. PRIORITIZING FOR THIS – PLANS FOR THE NEXT YEAR

This dream of a gospel-movement is beyond what we're able to do. Right now, we're living comfortably at the “able to” level – having a nice church that is healthy and growing. So we need to decide together if we want re-prioritize our lives around this bigger idea.

Orienting toward a movement is not something that will be done instantly, but we can take steps. Here are some steps that the pastors think God is calling us to take in the next year. All of these will help us be more ready for a gospel-movement. They will also require a more costly seeking of the kingdom.

Follow-through on what we started last year

In last year's State of the Church, we discussed two priorities. By God's grace, we have made significant progress on both of these over the past year and simply need to keep doing what we've started:

1. Deacon Ministry

As the early church grew, they established the office of deacon to help the community function more smoothly. “Deacon” literally means “servant,” and refers to men and women who are appointed to a role of servant-leadership with a specific responsibility. We see the first example of deacons in Acts 6:1-7. The narrative makes it clear that appointing deacons enabled the word of God to continue to increase and multiply (Acts 6:7). Paul also taught about the role and qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Traditionally, deacons have served by helping to meet people's tangible needs inside and outside the church. This creates a remarkable synergy: Deacons lead the church's deed ministry. Pastors lead the church's word ministry. The combined effect is a

church that ministers to the *whole person* and reaches more people with the gospel of Jesus.

For the past year, we have been evaluating the needs of people inside Fellowship Denver. We've also been evaluating the gifts and talents that God has given to people in our church that can be used to serve our neighbors. In the process, a handful of leaders have stepped forward who we believe are qualified to develop and lead these ministries.

On September 12, we will introduce to you deacons who will be developing ministries in the following areas: connecting new people; helping people in sickness, grief and life transitions; serving the homeless; praying for the church and city; responding to womens-specific issues; mentoring and developing at-risk youth; financial coaching; training and intervention.

2. Leadership Development

For the past year, we have been piloting a program to identify and develop emerging leaders in our church. 30 men and women have been serving as our beta group. This year, we will take what we learned and improve the training. We aim to launch 2 more emerging leader cohorts this year – one in the fall and another in the spring.

New goals for the new year

1. Raise the priority of church membership

Membership is how the New Testament describes being a functioning contributor to the church and our dependence on each other (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). In our culture, this calls for making an intentional covenant to live this way as part of a specific local church.

We have always honored this principle at Fellowship Denver, but we are at a stage of growth where it needs to be taught more clearly and lived out more intentionally. So, we will be creating more opportunities for those who call Fellowship Denver home to affirm their membership by officially joining the church. We will also be implementing a quarterly members' meeting to increase communication between the pastors and church members. These meetings will include opportunities for the members to speak into the direction of the church and to hear more detailed updates from the pastors.

2. Be more coordinated and intentional in prayer

We are completely dependent on God once we move from "able to" to "called to." So, we need to cultivate a more intentional approach to praying together. Over the next year, we will be teaching on prayer and organizing ways for the church to pray together.

3. Develop our approach to 3 key people groups

We recently identified three people groups that we think God has given us favor with and equipped us to develop as disciples of Jesus. Over the next year, our pastors and leaders are going to be discussing the best way to engage these groups (they sometimes overlap). This might not lead to any new ministry initiatives in the next year, but it will set us up to be more fruitful down the road.

These groups are: (1) Non-Christians – especially people who are open to exploring Christianity given the right environment, teaching, and exposure. (2) Emerging adults

– typically 20-somethings who are still figuring out long term direction for their lives. Decisions made during these years will likely set the trajectory of the rest of their lives. Denver is mecca for emergin adults, and we love developing folks at this strategic time!
(3) Urban families – the growing phenomenon of families living in urban areas and the many issues they have to wrestle with for how to live and raise children in the city. Christians doing this in large numbers has huge potential to influence the city!

4. Grow our staff to 4 full-time pastors

In order to effectively cultivate all that God is doing, we need more pastors working full-time to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). In particular, we see two needs on our team:

Our current pastoral team does not have enough “execution” strength – getting stuff done, putting plans into action, staying organized, moving projects along. We are beginning a search for a man with this gifting to serve on our pastoral team. This man would raise the impact of our current team and the many members of Fellowship Denver who are serving in significant ways. We will be looking both inside and outside Fellowship Denver. Let us know if you have suggestions on someone to consider.

Last fall, we hired Adam Anglin as Worship and Arts Director. He has been working part-time in this job since September. Not only has he done a great job developing our music on Sundays, but he has also grown a lot pastoring people, discipling men, and thinking theologically. He has much more potential as a pastor. And he has many more ideas for integrating the arts into the life of the church. Therefore, we would like to bring him on staff full-time during the next year.

5. Settle our facility issue for the medium-term (3-5 years)

We are currently maxing out our facilities for both Sunday worship and office space. While we still have some empty seats in the auditorium, the children’s space has become crowded. Our current offices will not be able to accommodate a larger staff. Furthermore, we need a space to host medium-sized gatherings for prayer, leadership training, and special events.

Over the next year, we will be looking for a suitable solution for a 3-5 year period. We don’t know a lot of details or specifics right now. Potential solutions include: (a) staying at our current worship space under a renegotiated agreement that provides better use of the facility; (b) moving to a new Sunday rental space; (c) complementing our Sunday rental space with a mixed-use space that we would have access to 24-7 for offices and medium-sized gatherings; (d) leasing 1 building that would meet all of these needs – worship, offices, and smaller gatherings.

In all of this, we need to keep 4 things in mind: (1) We get our identify from Jesus and the gospel, not a building. (2) We seek to be efficient but not extravagant in our approach to facilities. They are a necessary tool but not our hope. (3) We are a central Denver church and committed to remaining in the central part of the city – the closer to downtown the better; (4) We have to listen to God’s leading. We don’t know yet what he wants to do. We have to pray, see what doors he opens, and respond wisely.

Financial goals for the new year

Given the goals above, we have considered what it will take to make this financially doable. We will be calling the church to pray about, trust God for, and reach for these two goals over the next year:

1. Raising our monthly, general giving by 45%

We need to increase our operations budget to cover three areas: (1) Personnel costs for new staff positions – salary, insurance, and supplies. (2) Flexibility for new facilities – increase rental costs, furnishings, supplies, and moving expenses. (3) Ministry costs of serving more people – the cost of things like gospel class, children’s ministry, and worship supplies all increases as our church grows.

While we realize that “operations budget” doesn’t sound sexy, this is what enables us to keep doing effective mission. It’s like going to the grocery store – not as thrilling as going to the Apple store, but if you don’t eat, you won’t have any energy to do what you do. So it is with these costs. They are essential to the health of the church.

Growing our budget by 45% translates into an increase of about \$14,000 per month. This means we need our general offerings to increase by this much. We believe this represents a stretch – something we have to trust God for – but is also a reasonable goal for our church. We have run comparisons to other churches our size and found that our budget is significantly lower. For example, one comparison church in a similar city had slightly fewer people than we do and a budget twice the size.

We anticipate this increase coming from 3 areas: (1) Fellowship attendees who currently don’t give to the church being called to give. In an average month, approximately 500 people attend Fellowship Denver and 150 give to the offering. This means that approximately 67% of our attendees are not yet giving. (2) Current givers trusting God by giving more. (3) New members beginning to give.

In all, this is not just a pragmatic issue. It’s an issue of our hearts’ attitude toward God. In the OT, Israel was called to give 10% of their income (a “tithe”) to the work of the temple. In the NT, a tithe is not required because God wants people to give cheerfully, not under compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7). But God anticipates that if our hearts are being transformed by the gospel, we will trust him with our money. For most of us, this means we need to move toward greater generosity.

In this way, our own personal need to grow and the church’s need to grow are the same – God wants to do a work in our hearts so he can do an even bigger work through us as a church.

2. Establish a “Serve Denver Fund”

While growing our operations budget, we are going to simultaneously challenge Fellowship Denver to invest in ministry beyond the church. One way of doing this will be to establish a special fund by which we can bless others.

This “Serve Denver” fund will be used for these areas: (1) Benevolent financial assistance to individuals inside and outside our church. This will likely be at our deacons’ discretion and will enable them to provide immediate, short-term assistance to some of their clients. (2) Supporting ministry partners in the city. We have several organizations that we have partnered with who are doing excellent mercy and justice work in Denver – Save Our Youth, Denver Rescue Mission, Street’s Hope, Extreme Community Makeover to name a few. We would like to be able to support some of their projects. We would also like for our deacons to be able to develop strategic partnerships with organizations like these. (3) Church planting – helping to train and fund new church plants in Denver and along the Front Range.

All of this will only happen if God first does a work *in* us. So...we’re back to our original vision – to be a people shaped and sent by the GOSPEL of JESUS.