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Cleveland Chinese Christian Church

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Pastoral Letter, March, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Since January, I have been trying to challenge and encourage us to seek to be a church that is *Straining Godward*, *Living Heavenward*, and *Reaching Outward*. The last two months we looked at the first two of these. *Reaching Outward* naturally follows. This is the vision of *Reaching Outward*, a full embracing of Christ's great commission:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

I fear that we are easily complacent in our commitment to the great commission. We see Christ's commission as the work of the church, not *my* work. As long as the church is giving to missionaries, and we are inviting people to church now and then, we may feel that we are doing enough. We may never pray for our lost coworkers, friends, or even family. We may assume that because I am different from someone else that God would not use me to bring the gospel to them. We may be so afraid of rejection or hurting a relationship that we never speak about the heart of the gospel with them. In fact, we can find excuses for not being personally involved in leading others to Christ, but all of those excuses are ultimately selfish.

The antidote to the selfishness that kills evangelism is beholding God in His glory and experiencing the joy of growing in obedience to Him. This is why the three parts of our challenge are all essential, and why they all begin with being captivated by the glory of God. Let's see how these three essentially work together.

We've seen that by *Straining Godward*, we are talking about exercising effort to grow a deep passion for God and His glory as we come to His Word with the prayer that we may not merely learn about God, but that we may behold Him and be consumed by a desire for God alone. As we increasingly behold the glory of God in Christ, our passionate pursuit of Christ grows. May the Psalmist's prayers (Ps. 27:1, Ps. 63:1, Ps. 73:25-26) be ours.

Living Heavenward pictures the life of one who passionately pursues Jesus. As God becomes our desire and our love for Christ flourishes, our daily life will necessarily be transformed so that we seek to honor and exalt the God who is our passion. A deepening love for God heightens our longing to honor Him with a life lived in obedience to His precious Word. (Remember John 14:21?) The result is the pursuit of a heavenward life, living for the eternal pleasures in God rather than the temporary pleasures of the world; in short, the pursuit of holiness.

As the Holy Spirit empowers this transformation, another change will inevitably begin to develop. God will place in our hearts a desire for Him to be known and worshiped by all people. Being captivated by God's glory, our pursuit of temporary earthly treasures will be weakened, freeing us to grow in an obedient life. As our flesh weakens, our self-centeredness will begin to decline and we will begin to be more aware of the needs of others. Enjoying daily the freedom from bondage to sin that Christ's salvation is bringing into our lives will cause two things to happen.

One, we will long for more and more people to know how great and good and gracious God is. We will want people everywhere to enjoy the fruits of salvation that we ourselves are experiencing. Our desire for God's glory to spread through the earth so that others may discover the joy of worshiping Him will begin to further change the way we think and live.

Second, we will be more aware of the lostness of those without Christ. We will see their dreadful bondage to sin more clearly. We will be burdened by the horrific eternity that waits for them. We will feel compelled by the love of God to send out the gospel. We will want the death and resurrection of Christ to be known throughout the world so that people from every nation, language, and tribe may repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We will be moved to love the lost so that we are willing to give up our possessions and comforts to go or send missionaries equipped with the gospel. Our fear of rejection will be overcome by the power of love so that we find boldness to speak to others about Jesus and their need for Him.

This why *Reaching Outward* doesn't happen mechanically by creating programs or stirring up people to go out. Genuine biblical evangelism is the fruit of knowing Christ deeply and loving in Christ daily life.

In a few weeks we will begin worshiping in a beautiful building at our new location. *Reaching Outward* is at the heart of the vision behind our move—Reaching a New Generation. But we must remember that the church doesn't grow because of buildings or convenient locations. The church and the kingdom of God will grow as God's people give themselves to Him alone so that He may be glorified as He uses us to bring the gospel to those who are dead in their sins. May the Lord grow our vision for *Reaching Outward* as He gives us grace to *Strain Godward and Live Heavenward* together for His glory.

Praying for our ministry to the lost,

PASTOR HOUSE