

**Title: Vision Sunday 2011**  
**Text: Various**  
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In November last year we distributed this magazine (Mission and Ministry 2011). In it we articulate how we believe God is calling us to live out His vision for our church through 2011. It details some of the goals the Elders and Ministry Team has established for the year. If you have not got a copy, you can pick one up in the foyer after the service.

This morning I want to focus on just three of the twenty or so goals we have established, and I want to do that under three headings; Soft Hearts, Sharp Minds and Hard Feet.

Put another way, we believe that as we continue to serve Him this year, God is calling Newlife to be a people with soft hearts, sharp minds and hard feet.

Let me explain.

### **Soft Hearts**

Babylon had conquered Jerusalem and carried off the brightest and best into captivity hundreds of miles away on the banks of the Euphrates River. While in captivity, the prophet Ezekiel speaks God's word of judgment against Israel. Israel has been conquered and shamed as a direct result of its rebellion against God.

But Ezekiel does not just speak God's word of judgement to Israel. He also speaks a powerful word of hope. He talks about a valley of dry, sun bleached bones suddenly coming to life again. To people languishing in exile, God promises through Ezekiel:

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*  
(Ezekiel 36:26)

To a broken, dispirited, rebellious and hard-hearted people, God promises restoration. God will conduct radical spiritual surgery on them. No longer will they have hearts of stone; instead they will have hearts of flesh beating with the very life of God.

This is grace – God's amazing grace. Even though Israel had time and again turned their back on God; God never turns his back on them. Instead God offers them new life.

God's grace should always amaze us. When we say yes to God and his love he takes our heart hardened by sin and rebellion and transplants it with a heart of flesh, pumping with his life – Eternal Life!

This is the heart of the gospel, the essence of the Good News. And I don't care how long you have been a Christian – 5 minutes or 50 years – this incredible gift should drive us to our knees in wonder, love and praise.

God wants us to be a people with Soft Hearts – people ready to be amazed again and again by the grace of God.

A people with Soft Hearts will be obsessed with doing all they can to see others come to experience God's grace and love as well.

With our softened hearts we begin to see our world as God sees it; as a world full of the spiritually dead. That so many of our friends, neighbours and even family members face eternity without Christ should provoke us into action. Too much is at stake to do otherwise.

In 2010, through the ministry of this church 50 people received spiritual heart surgery as they said 'yes' to God.

Praise God! Already in February alone eight young people at Youthstreet, our Friday night community of high schoolers, have made this step. This will be a year of rejoicing as we see God to even greater things amongst us.

In 2011 one of the goals we have prayerfully set is to see at least seventy people make first time faith commitments to Jesus Christ. Of all the goals we have set, this is the most important.

Seventy people represent more baptisms, more testimonies and more stories of lives transformed by the gospel. Seventy people represent seventy opportunities to rejoice here on earth as well as in heaven as 70 lost sons and daughters find their way home.

In the end the church is a community of heart transplant patients who are desperate to see others experience spiritual heart surgery.

God transplants hearts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he also renews minds.

**God wants Newlife to be a people with Soft Hearts, and also a people with Sharp Minds.**

Paul says this in Romans:

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.  
(Romans 12:2)*

Just as our hearts need to be transplanted so too our minds need to be renewed and sharpened. There is a battle waging in and for our minds, for the very way we think and view the world.

On October 31, 1999, a full plane took off from New York, on a routine flight to Cairo in Egypt. A short time after take-off, the first officer waited for the pilot to leave the cockpit and then disengaged the autopilot. He then moved the throttle levers from their cruise power setting to idle, cutting the engines almost dead. Seconds later, the plane began to pitch nose-downward and descended into a freefall.

In the final moments before impact, the horrified pilot ran back to his seat and battled the co-pilot for control of the plane. The pilot pulled back on his controls, desperate to bring the nose of the plane up, while the suicidal first officer pushed his own controls forward to keep the jet in its lethal dive. In the end the result was a tragic crash that killed all 217 people aboard.

Every moment of every day there is a battle for our minds. Each day, we choose either to hijack control of our lives—plunging ourselves into sin—or to remain locked in the direction of God's will.

We align ourselves with God's will as we immerse ourselves in His word.

God's word is our moral compass. Without it we are at risk of plunging into deceptive sin that leads to spiritual death.

One of our church's eight core values is Scriptural Discernment. We believe passionately that every believer that calls Newlife home should be regularly reading, reflecting on and sitting under God's Word. We do this through regular attendance at worship, courses like Lifekeys, Alpha and Bethel, Winter School and of course, Small Groups.

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Building on the NT in 90 program, we are committed this year to see many more of us committed to reading the bible every day for ourselves. Soon we will be launching a new church-wide Bible Reading program. Our goal is that 200 of you will commit to this program, and with it, to the discipline and joy of regular and sustained bible reading.

Of course many of us already have our own pattern of Bible reading. That's great! But some of us don't, and this program will be encouraging you to get into the game

We are called to be a people with soft hearts and sharp minds.

**But all this is of little use unless we also have hard feet.**

The Apostle Paul says this in Romans:

*'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'  
(Romans 10:13-15)*

At the heart of the Christian faith is a Missionary God.

Our world needed to be rescued from the bondage that comes with human sin and rebellion. And God did not wait to begin his rescue mission.

First through Israel, then the Prophets and finally and fully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has demonstrated the length, depth, breadth and height of His love for us. God pursues us with his love. We see this graphically illustrated in the Cross of Christ. As one famous missionary put it:

*God has only one son. And he made that Son a missionary.  
(David Livingstone)*

Jesus walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine to preach Good News. With a heart filled with compassion and beautiful feet marked with calluses, He preached and ministered with Holy Spirit power.

And Jesus commissioned the church to do the same; to go and make disciples – to go wherever and to whomever God directs that we might tell them about Jesus and his Good News.

But the truth about us is this; too often we would rather stay than go.

The truth is we get comfortable. We seek to be blessed rather than be a blessing. Jackie Pullinger puts it this way:

*God wants us to have soft hearts and hard feet. The trouble with so many of us is that we have hard hearts and soft feet.  
(Jackie Pullinger)*

We are not called to stay and wallow in comfort, but to go and risk everything for the sake of the Gospel.

Last year Harmon Parker was named one of CNN's top ten global heroes. Parker is an American who has lived in Kenya for 20 years. He is a master mason who has found a unique calling in building bridges—literal bridges in Kenya.

Every year in remote and rural Kenya hundreds of people die as they attempt to cross swollen creeks during times of flood. Bridges are non-existent in many parts.

Motivated by his desire to love and obey Christ, Harmon has built 45 bridges in remote Kenyan villages. They are simply designed, with an average length of 120 feet and an average cost of \$6,000.

When he accepted his award, Harmon Parker told CNN:

*I have built many bridges in very remote areas... Knowing this bridge will probably save at least one life is what makes me tick .... I build bridges because I want to save lives, lives that I will never know about.*

His work has come at a high price. He has been robbed at gun point, suffered break-ins and has contracted malaria and dengue fever and spent months away from his family. And yet he has no regrets:

*I feel I'm blessed ... privileged to do what I'm doing. A bridge is a beautiful metaphor for many things. There are bridges of hope, bridges of peace, bridges of life. To me, bridges are beautiful.*

'Bridges are beautiful.'

I am moved and challenged by Harmon's story.

Just as he builds bridges in Kenya to save people from drowning, so God calls us to build bridges in our community to rescue the spiritually dying. This year God is calling us to build two, big, scary, exciting and yes - expensive bridges.

The first bridge we are building is expanded worship facilities.

Over the last few years God, by His grace, has grown us. Every Sunday, 850 of us worship in these facilities across four services, 700 on Sunday morning alone. To create more space to grow, last year we added a third morning service – and last year we grew again as a result. But three services are not ideal – for volunteers, for community – even for preachers! Healthy churches should expect growth. Growth is normal. And so we will need more space. So this year we will step out in faith and create not so much a bigger building, but more seats for more people who are now far from God can come and drawn near to him.

Our Property Development Committee has worked incredibly hard, and with great wisdom and insight for that last eighteen months. This video tells you where they have led us:

## **PLAY VIDEO**

We are not so much extending our facilities as we are creating more space – space where people we do not know, and have not met will encounter and we pray, respond the gospel.

We are committing time, money, effort to making space for people we do not know and have not met. We have enough seats for you and me and our families. But we don't yet have the seats for those who God is calling into relationship with Him.

We are building a bridge for people who are currently far from God in the hope they will walk across it as they experience the transforming power of the gospel.

The second bridge we are building is on the northern Gold Coast. On June 12 we will hold the first celebration of our new northern campus. With it we will become one church meeting in two separate locations – Robina and Northern Gold Coast.

As we have stepped out in faith, God has provided.

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In Hebrews, the writer defines faith like this:

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.  
(Hebrews 11:1)*

We are stepping out in faith as establish this new campus.

Last year we began the search for a Campus Pastor. There were some people we knew we wanted to talk with, but every door seemed closed. Then we were given the name of a man with a strange name; Orrell Battersby. Stranger still, he was from the Church of Christ but was in the process of becoming a Uniting Church minister. We met with Orrell and straight away saw; God has provided for us.

Planting a new campus is an expensive business. It will cost us \$180,000 or so over two years. And so last year we came to you asking for over and above giving to our Vision 1000 appeal. Already you have committed \$40,000, which is fantastic. Then just last week while I was in Cambodia, I got an email from Barry Jeffries our General Manager. He told me that \$40,000 had been deposited into our church bank account. Unexpectedly, our denomination – which is currently facing a financial crisis – had given these funds to us to support our new campus. As we have stepped out in faith, God has provided. God is good! Amen?

And now we need 30-40 missionaries to be a part of the core team with Orrell and Christine as we establish this new campus. So far we have 5 people committed. But as God has always done, so God will do – God will provide!

In this defining moment in the life of our church we face one of three choices.

We can Step Back from taking a risk. We can retreat into the certainty of what we have always known. Planting churches and extending buildings – isn't that too risky.

Or we can Settle. We can settle for what we have. What we have is pretty darned good! Why mess with a good thing? Why fix it if it's not broken? After all we are one of the biggest churches in our denomination and in our city.

We can step back and we can settle. Or we can step forward. We can risk everything for the sake of the Gospel, knowing this is the only risk worth taking and that as we step out in faith, God will meet us there.

This congregation has always been at its best, held to its true identity when it has decided to Step Forward. Newlife was born out of adventurous faith.

It was adventurous faith that bought this land more than 20 years ago when all around was vacant blocks or land still to be cleared.

It was adventurous faith that built a 420 seat worship centre when the congregation was half that size.

It was adventurous faith that under Ken Anderson's leadership moved to two morning services when the easy thing was to stay with the comfort of an almost full church.

It was adventurous faith that began ministries like our Playgroup and Crossroads, both of which began with just a dream and a handful of people.

It was adventurous faith that partnered with John and Annette Tully as they ministered to the broken and marginalised of our city through Newlife Care.

It was adventurous faith that called a Pastor from South Australia who at that point never lead a congregation to lead this one.

We are at our best, our most faithful when we do not step back nor settle, but step forward into the future.

After entering the Promised Land and conquering the Canaanite tribes, the people of Israel faced a Defining Moment. The land had been divided between the twelve tribes of Israel. Joshua, their leader, was now an old man. One last time he summoned the tribal elders together. He reminded them of all the ways God had blessed them. Joshua speaks on God's behalf:

God gave them land on which they did not toil and cities they did not build.  
(Joshua 24:13)

The people of Israel have received a rich inheritance which they did not earn, nor deserve. After listing all of God's blessings, Joshua then challenges the elders:

Choose for yourselves this day who you will serve....As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.  
(Joshua 24:15)

We have been blessed with rich inheritance which we have not earned, nor deserve. For example, only a handful of the 1500 people who call this church home laboured to see it built.

All of this is a gift from God. Like Israel, we receive it all with humility and thanksgiving.

And like Israel we have a choice – who will we serve?

Will we serve ourselves, our needs, our wants, our desires?

Or will we serve God?

As for me, what can I do but serve the Lord?

Sundar Singh was born a Sikh in northern India in the late nineteenth century. At the age of 14, Sundar's mother died and this plunged into deep depression and anger towards God, the Christian God in particular. On one occasion he bought a Bible and invited his friends to watch as he burned it page by page.

Finally life was all too much and Sundar planned to take his own life by laying on some railway tracks. He gave God, any god, one last chance and called out to the heavens. In an instant he had a vision of Christ that led to a radical and instant conversion. Before the sun was up, Sundar woke his father to tell him that he was going to follow Jesus Christ for the rest of his life. His father was stunned and angry, eventually holding a farewell feast for Sundar and casting him out of the family forever. At the farewell dinner, Sundar's younger brother attempted to poison him.

For the next twenty years Sundar wandered the dusty roads and tracks of Northern India, Tibet and Afghanistan preaching the Good News. Dressed only in a turban and the yellow robe associated with Hindu mystics, Sundar suffered the cold, was stoned, beaten, imprisoned, left for dead and ridiculed for his faith. But thousands were converted and many were healed through his ministry. In 1926, Sundar set off on yet another trip into the mountains of Tibet. He never returned.

Sundar spent the entirety of his mission walking with bare feet. To the small Christian communities of Northern India he became known as the 'Apostle with the Bleeding Feet'.

Soft Hearts – Sharp Minds – Hard Feet.

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A song was written by Sundar, or was inspired by his life – we are not sure which. The tune is a Indian folk melody. It is a song very familiar to us. The first line, 'I have decided to follow Jesus.' It adds defiantly, 'No turning back, no turning back.'

As we enter 2011 and all that it promises, let us sing this as our commitment.