

Survive, Stand, or Swarm?

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[0 : 00] Well, hey there. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.! And as always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, today we are excited to get into the Word of God. But most of all, let that Word get into these hearts and truly transform us into the image of Christ.

We are starting a brand new series today called Move. This is week number one, and the message is called Survive, Stand, or Swarm.

In September of 2024, a group of about 20 of us met together. Elders, staff, other key leaders working alongside a well-respected pastor named Gary Johnson from E2 Effective Elders. It's a ministry that comes alongside churches to help us get biblically healthy in every way. And on that September day, we took an honest look at the good, the bad, and the ugly of FCC.

[1 : 08] We talked about the victories and the strengths of this church body, and man, we are blessed with so many. We looked even at what needs a little bit of improvement. We even considered some of those areas that desperately need help to be a biblically healthy church.

And from that Holy Spirit-led time came a new vision, mission, and values, all based right off of the Word of God that we preached and implemented at the start of 2025.

And guys, we're going to refresh you on those a little later today. But then, in August of last year, we called that team back together, and E2 helped us take our vision, mission, and values as sort of our guide, and prayerfully work through a three-year strategic plan for us here at FCC.

And again, after eight months of seeking the Lord, we have a Holy Spirit-led plan for what Jesus wants to do in and through us in 2026, 2027, and 2028.

We are surrendering all of that to Him and letting Him do what He chooses. And if you'll join with me, let's go ahead and just be grateful for the men and women who love Jesus and this church family so much that they sacrificed so many hours to work on this.

[2 : 30] But they did so listen to say, Lord, we don't want to accomplish the things that we can do in our own strength. We want to do things so big that they would fail without you. See, guys, over the last five weeks of, or see, over this five-week series called Move, you're going to hear the leadership's heart on how we can be biblically healthy, growing in our walk with Christ, but also reaching a lost world.

We're going to set aside our preferences, our agendas, our man-made traditions, even opinions, and say, Lord, this is your church. You've redeemed us. You've set us on the solid rock.

And we want to be faithful in our pursuit of holiness in you. We want to share Jesus with as many people as we can so they too can know the ultimate hope of salvation in Christ.

And over the last three to four months, after all the groundwork had been laid by the team, I have just been praying and seeking the Lord's heart on how to share all of this with our church family. And today and next Sunday especially, I'm just going to open up my heart a little bit and I'm going to let you see what God has been revealing to your leadership. And here's what you're going to notice. It's all in line with God's perfect word.

[3 : 46] It has to be. And as your pastor, when I stand before Jesus someday and I give an account for how I helped lead this church family, I don't want to say, well, I chose to please people or I chose fear or I bowed to criticism or I even played favoritism.

But instead, I chose to follow the word of God and the Holy Spirit's leading. And Jesus, we saw you show up and do what only you can do. And as I was praying through this idea of move, moving forward for the glory of God, I really felt like the Holy Spirit spoke my love language of sports.

And he gave me an illustration that can guide us through this series. And even if you're not a boxing fan or a sports fan at all, that's okay. This is still going to make sense to you.

But listen, we can either survive, we can stand, or we can swarm. And I'm sure you've seen the clips of a boxer and a boxing ring just kind of running around the ring, trying not to get knocked out by a tougher guy who's throwing these big haymakers to try to take him down.

The guy's just trying to survive. And you know what? Some churches exist that same way. It's everything they have to keep the lights on and pay the preacher.

[5 : 06] And there's not usually a lot of outreach that's happening. And often this is the case because of unhealthy and unbiblical mindsets. And I know that's sometimes hard to hear, but they're dying churches for a reason.

Toxic thinking and behaviors that do not match the Word of God have been allowed to exist often because there are leaders in place who shouldn't be. And this can be turned around with godly and bold leadership.

And hear me today, I'm not against a smaller church as there are some wonderful smaller congregations that serve Jesus faithfully that I deeply admire. In fact, I cut my teeth in college preaching in churches of 20 or 30.

And I'm so grateful they allowed me, as bad as I was, to grow on their watch. My first full-time ministry was in the middle of the country with 65 people when we arrived.

And I've thanked God many times for the good and the bad of that ministry over eight years that showed me His power and helped mold me in so many ways.

[6 : 09] And we still have so many dear friendships from that church. But hear me, we're not called to just survive and pay the bills and put on a nice little service every Sunday.

That's not what the Bible teaches the church is ultimately for. So you may also be familiar with those in a boxing match. So to step away from the survival mode, you may also be familiar with those who just stand.

They're not on the verge of getting knocked out. They're not in survival mode. They're just standing there, landing a few punches, but not really doing a lot of damage to the enemy. More so on the defensive.

And probably more churches than not can fit into this category. It sounds something like this. We've been here as a church for a long time and will be for decades to come. A few baptisms a year, some good done in missions, several wonderful people, but also some cantankerous souls allowed to run roughshod over others, not much biblical accountability or discipline.

We may get a visitor or two a month and that's fine. Try not to ruffle feathers too much because if they leave, they'll take their money and their family members with them. And the leaders are chosen more by seniority or worldly success or financial influence than by true biblical and godly standards.

[7 : 26] But I want to show you a better, more biblical way that some have never experienced. Because you can go into the ring and you can run around trying to just survive.

I don't suggest it. It's painful. You can stay on the defensive and you can just kind of make it through. You can have a safer church environment or you can swarm.

This is a boxer with a winning mindset. They've trained hard. They know the enemy and his tendencies. They got the roadmap to victory and now they're going to swarm the enemy constantly moving forward until victory comes.

This is the kind of church we want to be because it's biblical. We want to swarm. We want to storm the gates of hell. We want to stand before Jesus someday, not choosing lazy or selfish or safe routes, but following him in faith to places we could never go in our own strength.

And in the words of the famous missionary C.T. Studd, coolest name in missionary work, he said, some wish to live within the sound of a church or a chapel bell, but I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

[8 : 38] That's a swarming church, a storming the gates of hell church, a church moving forward, grounded in the word, a church that demands healthy, biblical leadership and infrastructure, very intentional in our discipleship and spiritual growth, very intentional raising up the next generation and evangelism where we are loving our neighbors well.

It's a praying church, a church that doesn't say, eh, that's good enough, but instead, Lord, I'm going to do this with the best of my ability, with excellence, because you deserve my best.

A church that not only impacts the world through healthy missions giving, but one that sends and equips our people for the work of ministry. A church where you feel the love of Christ through the warm greetings and the smiles.

A family of unity where we love and value even the crazy uncle, okay? And we got a few. A church that cares about the community and they know it by our actions. But they also know that we won't compromise on truth.

A church that's growing because healthy things always grow. Regular baptisms, life transformation, generational mentorship, all because of Jesus.

[9 : 50] And listen, a swarming church equips the whole body to be the hands and feet of Jesus. This church cannot be about a pastor. It never can be about a pastor.

It must be about Jesus and the body of Christ serving together. And while I have a lot more on my heart that I'm going to share with you next week where I tie in our history as a church and some things that the Lord has shown me in my time here, I hope you can already see kind of our elders' hearts here.

Because we are blessed to stand upon the faithful shoulders of those saints who've loved Jesus and FCC for the last 194 years since two guys rode horseback into town, rang the courthouse bell, and called people to worship.

And ever since September of 1832, FCC has been unashamed to preach the word, sharing the love of Christ in this community and beyond.

So, let's spend the rest of our time talking about our VMV, we call it, our vision, mission, values that must guide this three-year strategic plan.

[11 : 00] And for those who were here in January of 2025, you'll remember the eight-week series we did called DNA. We talked about our spiritual DNA as a church. And let me just ask this question.

How many of you, when you visited our church or come on a Sunday, have noticed those clear signs in our entrances that share our vision, mission, and values? Okay, some of you probably have.

The rest of you, maybe you can come by and see them. But let me ask you an even better question. How many of you have noticed that the VMV is what's guiding us as a church?

I hope that's what you've noticed. So, let's start here with our little bit of a refresher to our church family. And first is our vision. This answers the why question.

And the answer to that is Jesus first. That's our vision statement. Jesus first. Why do we even exist as a church? Well, you have to answer this question first.

[11 : 57] And our answer is simple. Jesus first in everything and then we'll never go wrong. And we see our Savior's own words in Matthew 6.33 where he says, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

All these needs will be taken care of. So what's that mean? It means selfishness dies. My preferences give way to the kingdom. Jesus first and everything else falls into place.

Would I love to worship in the sanctuary and not in a gym for two services every Sunday? Of course I would. I was ordained in that sanctuary. I married my bride of 18 plus years in there. Two of my kids have been baptized in that room.

And yet, thank you Jesus that you've done such a great work that we can't fit in there in two of our services. We have to worship in a blue gym with mediocre lighting where the acoustics will never be perfect as hard as Tyler and his team are working on it.

Would I prefer not to have to ask you to park down at the funeral home or along the street for a couple blocks or even have to navigate our zoo of a parking lot on Sunday? Absolutely. Would I love to have green grass for a playground in an area where our kids can run around safely?

[13 : 12] Man, that'd be great. Would I rather not put our ladies' Bible study in our sanctuary because no other room will hold it on Wednesdays? You better believe it. Would our kids' director Lynn love to have one area that fits all the kids that are coming from fifth grade and under?

Sure she would. Guys, we could keep going but it's not about me and it's not about you. And I'm so glad it isn't. It's all about Jesus.

And there's a freedom when we die to self and we live our lives making it all about the kingdom of God. Jesus first. And when I think of Jesus' heart my mind immediately goes to the story of Zacchaeus.

You know, the wee little man that I'm not going to sing about right now. This corrupt tax collector hated by the people because he was basically a Benedict Arnold traitor working for the enemy. Done many of them dirty, overtaxing them, lining his own pockets. And Jesus sees him up in a tree and has compassion. And he loves what many would call an unlovable man. Loves him enough to eat in his home to lead him to salvation that has immediate fruit.

[14 : 18] And in Luke 19 starting in verse 9 Jesus makes his heart known. He says, today salvation has come to this house, Zacchaeus' house, because this man too is a son of Abraham.

And then he says this in verse 10, for the son of man came to seek and save the lost. That was his purpose. And it must be ours. So when you and I say Jesus first, it means my heart beats for the kingdom of God.

My heart beats to see sinners set free and children of God growing in their walk daily. Jesus first and everything else falls into place. And then next, the mission answers the how question.

And that is help people belong to, believe in, become like Jesus. Now, it sounds great to say Jesus first, but how do we do that?

How do we put him first? And there you have our mission statement. Belong to, believe in, become like Jesus. See, it has to start with us belonging to, being a family.

[15 : 24] And it's no accident that you will hear me and others say this several times in a worship service here. We will say this slogan that we use, welcome home.

because whether you're an extrovert and you love being around crowds of people, whether you're an introvert and you're kind of like, I'll take one or two people, but that's enough, or whether you're a mix of the two, which I kind of fall into, we all were designed for community.

We all long to belong and feel at home. And I can't tell you the joy I feel when someone or even a family comes up and says, hey, Ray, we've been coming here for six weeks now and we love it.

This feels like a family. We want this to be our church home. And as much as that fills my cup, occasionally we get the opposite reaction where someone fades and we reach out and we hear, hey, I just didn't feel welcomed.

And I'll tell you, that breaks our hearts as a leadership. We take that very seriously. And I also understand the FCC may not be the perfect fit for everyone and that's okay because there's some other good Bible-believing churches in the community that may be a better fit for you.

[16 : 35] But my hope and my prayer is that every single one of us take it seriously when we come here on a Sunday or a Wednesday realizing, I'm a missionary.

In my church family, I can be a missionary. I'm not just here to be fed. I'm not just here to take. I'm not here just to be a pew potato. I want to be a hurt-seeking missile. It's not just the pastor's and the elder's job to love people.

It's mine too. I can walk in these doors caring about the hurting and those who may be new to FCC who just need a friend. I, as a regular church member, can help others see that they belong in this family.

And then there's my part too because listen, some people have no desire to belong and there's nothing on our end that we can do if they're not willing themselves. And I always come back to Hebrews chapter 10 starting in verse 24.

It says, And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Not giving up meeting together. It is in the Bible, right? Not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

[17 : 47] Guys, we have a lot of opportunities for you to belong. Lean into that. And then next, we also want to help people believe in Jesus. And my favorite thing about preaching is standing up here every Sunday, standing up as a broken vessel, trying my best to get out of the way and let the Holy Spirit move through the word.

And it's so cool to see regular people who've convinced themselves that they're too bad to be forgiven. Realize, wow, Jesus has been there all along and he is ready to welcome me home.

And in John 3, 16, the most famous verse in all the Bible, for God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes, and we're not talking about phony belief, belief that changes everything, whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And I don't ever want to take for granted the joy of seeing individuals walk out of the waters of baptism with a repentant heart forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit and a purpose.

And just a guess, just off the top of my head, we've been blessed here at FCC to have around probably 250-ish baptisms in the last five or six years. Those are names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

[19 : 03] Family trees forever altered for good. And that leads to the last part of our mission. After we come out of that water, we daily become more like Jesus. We make intentional choices to forsake the world and be all in with Jesus, growing in Christ every day.

And this is going to be a heavy, heavy emphasis throughout our three-year strategic plan. We cannot, hear me, we cannot be okay with just going through the motions in our faith. We cannot keep choosing spiritual laziness. As I say all the time to those wanting to get baptized, you have to put yourself in the right places around the right people to grow in the right way. Okay? And let me be honest, we can and will do a lot better job as a church over these next three years of helping you do this. And then last, we come, we've talked about our mission, we've talked about our vision, and now we come to our values.

And honestly, this answers the what question. So you've got to have some guardrails in place, okay? So what guides this pursuit that we've been talking about?

[20 : 12] What are the parameters that keep us on the right track? What are our values? And here they are in a quick snapshot. First, the Bible is our authority.

Authenticity is our pursuit. Worship is our lifestyle. Family is our passion. Generosity is our standard. And when you go on our website, FCCGreensburg.com, you can click the description of our values that I just read.

And if you click on each one, it kind of opens up and you get the full explanation. And I just want to take a moment. I want to read all five of these to you so you can see what parameters kind of guide us and keep us on track.

Here's the first one. The Bible is our authority in all matters of faith and lifestyle. We believe God's word is without error and breathed directly from God to mankind for the purposes he set forth in 2 Timothy 3.

It says, All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[21 : 23] FCC will preach and teach the truth of God's word whether it's popular or not because it's the truth that sets us free. Second, authenticity is our pursuit.

While each of us have sinned and fallen short, continue to be a work in progress, we are recipients of grace who desire to be authentic, transparent, and real in how we live and show the love of Christ to those around us.

We believe that a lost world isn't looking for perfection. Instead, they need to see authenticity in the church that shows in everything we do. And our leadership hopes and prays that you can see the culture that we need to continue to have where we come in every week and we take off the mask that we all can wear and we get real with God and with one another.

Third, worship is our lifestyle. We seek to offer our lives 24-7 in worship to Jesus. We're also committed to the model of the early church found in the New Testament where believers were devoted to the word of God, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

We have a lost world looking for hope in all the wrong places who need to see those who worship Jesus 24-7, 365, no matter where they are or who they're around. And then fourth, family is our passion.

[22 : 44] And this is threefold. So let me read this. First, we believe God designed the family as a training ground for ministry. We believe in caring for the whole family while equipping parents and grandparents and guardians to be the primary teachers for their children and grandchildren.

Second, we believe the church is the family of God that each person needs for accountability and encouragement. This is why we are passionate about ministering to each generation no matter how old or young. Third, we want to be family for those in need, loving and ministering to them.

And what a blessing that this church family has been known for its strong emphasis on family, specifically kids and youth for many years now. And we have senior adults that are spiritually mature enough to realize the value of pouring into younger generations who are saved and blessed and say, listen, it's not about me.

I'm good. I want to see God's church continue to flourish when I'm gone. And then fifth, generosity is our standard because we have been blessed by a generous God.

Whether we're talking about our time, talent, or treasures, the Lord designed us to be big-hearted givers as we seek to make a difference in this world. We are managers of His resources and it's our heart to give generously back to Him to lead others into a relationship with Christ.

[24 : 02] And church, hear me, what a blessing. When your time, talent, and treasure is all surrendered to Christ, then you get to see Him take our meager offerings, whatever they may be, and use them to build His kingdom.

So today, today we got to refresh a little bit while also asking a really big question. Will we choose as a church to just survive, to just stand in there on the defensive, or will we swarm?

And even though it takes more effort, and it may be a lot messier at times, we choose to follow the Holy Spirit and swarm, to storm the gates of hell, to move forward for the glory of God.

And next week, I'm excited to share how the history of our church family ties in with all this and why in 2026 we are so positioned to swarm for the glory of God.

And listen, you can be an important part of it. Let's pray together. Father, we are just so grateful for how good and faithful and powerful you are.

[25 : 12] Last Sunday, we got to stand in North Decatur High School in the gymnasium and worship all together as one church, the resurrected Lord, to worship in your resurrection power and to walk in that every day.

And right now, we just ask for your strength and your leading and your unity as we launch this three-year strategic plan. May it never be about us and may it always be about you and your kingdom.

Jesus first. Help us to have that heart and we pray all this in Jesus' holy and precious name. And God's people said, Amen and Amen.

Hey, I want to kind of take your attention to one more thing. We've been talking a lot about the church today and that's good. That's a good thing. But now, let me kind of turn the spotlight on each of us, okay?

That whole idea of survive, stand, or swarm, that can be true for you and for me as well. See, you can be listening to this today and you're in survival mode.

[26 : 18] You are just trying to get through life, trying to get yourself off the floor and you just feel like life keeps knocking you back down and here's the problem.

Maybe you don't know Jesus and you've been doing all of this in your own strength and that's exactly what's going to happen every time because you weren't meant to do life in your own power. You were meant to repent of your sins, surrendering your heart to Christ, confessing Him, being baptized into Him and then living for Him for the rest of your days.

So if you're in survival mode, today's the day to say, Jesus, I invite you to come into my heart to forgive me and to live in my heart, Holy Spirit, for the rest of my days so that I can walk in your resurrection power.

Or maybe I'm talking to a Christian right now and if you're honest, you're just kind of in ho-hum mode. You're just standing there. You're just on the defensive. You're just kind of going through the motions and listen, that's not what God wants either.

He wants to do an incredible work in your life as you are growing in Him every single day and if you're not a part of a church family, you can't do this on your own. You need to get connected.

[27 : 31] The Bible is very clear about that, that we need one another. We would love to see you here on Sunday as you get serious about making Jesus the Lord of your life and following Him in every way.

And listen, our goal is to swarm. We want to move forward for the glory of God in everything. So I just want to invite you to come join us.

We have three services on a Sunday, 8 o'clock, 9.30, and 11 o'clock. We'd love to see you at First Christian Church of Greensburg. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet.

I'm the lead pastor and we hope that you have a fantastic week as you worship your resurrected Lord and as you choose not to just survive, not to just stand, but to swarm, to storm, to move for the glory of God.

Have a fantastic week.