

State of the Holy Union Address

Introduction:

1. Good morning. If you're visiting Moon Valley for the first time, hoping to see what the preaching is like, I'm sorry. This is not going to be a typical sermon. But I do think what I'm going to say may give you an even better idea of what we're about at Moon Valley than any sermon could.

It has become our custom for me to pull up twice a year and give what I call a State of the Holy Union Address in which I try to answer questions like: How are we doing? Where are we going? What's our next step as a church?

The rhythms of ministry at Moon Valley tend to follow an academic year such that a new ministry year generally begins when school does, in August or September. That's when I normally give the first State of the Holy Union Address. Today's the day for the second address of the year. It's a little like a mid-term report card with an action plan to finish the year well.

2. You may recall that, in my first address, I presented a biblical picture of what we're trying to accomplish at Moon Valley. The picture comes from Mark 2:1-12, where four guys are trying to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Remember, Jesus is there in the house, speaking to a crowd packed in like sardines. The crowd won't let the four guys get their friend to Jesus, so they dig through the roof and lower him to Jesus.

The biblical story presents two groups that tell us something terribly important about ourselves. The first group is comprised of the four guys—the guys who brought their paralyzed buddy on a pallet. I call them ► the Wrecking Crew. They are trying to bring their disabled friend to Jesus, but they can't get in the house. They're blocked by a barricade of backs. And that's the second group: ► the Barricade of Backs. So we have two groups: the Wrecking Crew and the Barricade of Backs. Which group describes us?

Those among the Barricade of Backs aren't horrible people, just pretty normal people—people who are a little self-absorbed—people who are spectators—people who don't want to give up their spot because they're looking to get closer to Jesus themselves—people who are focused primarily on what Jesus can offer to improve their own daily lives.

But a barricade is a barricade. They don't let the paralytic in. Their backs are turned. The needy one is ignored.

But then there's the Wrecking Crew. Somehow, they have ► moved up—up from being self-absorbed—up from being spectators—up toward being so concerned about the welfare of their needy friend that they're willing to do almost anything to get him to

Jesus—up to the roof. They're on a mission for others. Compared to the Barrier of Backs, those in the Wrecking Crew are few in number, but they are determined. When faced with an obstacle, they don't throw up their hands and say, "Well, I guess God closed that door." No. They climb the roof and *make* a door. They're willing to break things so that the broken can get mended. They're focused. They're passionate. They're tenacious. They're creative. They're unashamed. They're unselfish. And they're messy.

And that's what we're about at Moon Valley. We're about doing whatever it takes to move step by step from the Barrier of Backs to the Wrecking Crew—to bring another generation to Christ, to see more and more people become more and more like Christ—even if we have to wreck the roof.

- I. What steps have we taken? Let me highlight a few steps we've taken since last summer. We're doing some damage in a good way. Here's just a sampling.
 - A. Just as the Wrecking Crew showed mercy to their paralyzed friend, we have shown mercy.
 1. As part of our *Project Turkey*, we assembled and delivered a Thanksgiving meal—turkey, stuffing, yams, cranberry sauce, green bean casserole, potatoes, rolls, and pie—to 174 underprivileged families in our community.
 2. As part of our *Sharing Tree*, we provided Christmas gifts to 185 underprivileged children who might not otherwise receive gifts at all. Some families wept as they received your gifts to them.
 3. Twenty five of the children receiving gifts are a part of *Young Lives*, a program we support to help single, adolescent moms.
 4. We've provided food and clothing and supplies to the school nurse at Moon Mountain Elementary school to help her serve the large percentage of children from families living below the poverty level.
 5. We give out three to five grocery bags full of food each week to homeless or needy people who just drop by the church.
 6. We're teaching people how to speak English in our ESL program on Tuesday nights, using new computers and language software as teaching tools. And as we learn of the needs of participants, we have responded by providing things like medical care and blankets and prayer.
 7. We have taken teams to Carbo and Hermosillo, Mexico and Shonto on the Navajo Reservation to help churches with programs and building projects they can't do on their own.

8. As part of our *Mending The Soul* program, we're providing hope and healing to those who have been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused.
9. As part of our *Bless and Be Blessed* and *Team Barnabas* programs, we're providing some work around the house for those who are unable to get it done.
10. And our Life Groups are helping one another and taking on their own acts of mercy. For example, one Life Group went to the Phoenix Gospel Rescue Mission to serve meals to the homeless. Another served a meal and passed out \$400 worth of WalMart gift certificates to participants in our ESL program at Christmas.

And these efforts have not gone unnoticed in the community. Let me show you a short clip of the response of some staff members at Moon Mountain Elementary School after our most recent Project Turkey and Sharing Tree programs.

(Show ► video here.)

- B. Also ► Life Groups are growing. Life Groups are mini Wrecking Crews that meet in homes during the week to do what the very first church did: worship, connect, grow, and serve together.
 1. Over the past year, the number of people participating in Life Groups has increased 16%.¹
 2. At the same time, the number of people in Life Groups who are applying the Bible to their lives has increased 28%.²
 3. And importantly, some people are finding themselves believing in Jesus for the first time as they participate in Life Groups. Two people in the Life Group I attend have become believers—one quite recently. We wept for joy!
 4. And we have begun to produce ► *Life Today*, a weekly publication of ideas on how to worship, connect, grow, and serve. It's produced by Life Groups for Life Groups, and it's emailed every Monday, full of ideas relating to the sermon the day before. It's been very well received.
- C. Also, ► just this past week, under the leadership of Gina Orr and Felipe Gutierrez, we took a significant step in our ESL program. We introduced an optional Bible study component to our teaching of English as a second language. Last Tuesday, five Latinos

¹ From 115 to 133 per week.

² From 40 to 51 per week.

participated in our regular ESL program and then were invited to stay for the Bible study. All five stayed. In their eyes, I believe we have earned the right to be heard.

- D. We're doing some other damage, too. Good damage. Significant ministry moments over this ministry year so far include the Men's Retreat, the Women's Christmas Tea, the Children's Christmas program, the Christmas Eve service attended by over 600 people, and 18 people have been baptized since August.
- II. But ► that's just a foot in the roof. We're going for more. Let me briefly outline six steps we intend to take to finish out the year and how you can take the next steps with us. No need to take notes. I'll be posting a transcript of this message on our website this afternoon. For those who would just like a one-page summary, I'll integrate the PowerPoint slide I'm building right now right into the transcript.

- A. First, we want ► to reaffirm Life Groups as our central strategy. We want to keep working to grow and multiply Life Groups.

We currently have sixteen Life Groups, some of which are represented at tables in the lobby. They meet in different homes, on different days, at different times.

What's your next step? If you're not currently in a Life Group, I encourage you ► to check one out. Join in. You could do it right after this service by going to any one of the tables and finding out a little more.

If you are already in a Life Group, I encourage you ► to invite someone to join your group. Here's how that could work. You could walk right up to somebody and say, "Excuse me, I was wondering if you are involved in a Life Group here at Moon Valley? No? Well, I'd like to invite you to come check out our Life Group. This brochure tells a little more about it and has our meeting time, location, and contact information on the back. We'd love to have you come and see if it might be a good fit for you." Just like that. Easy.

We also invite you ► to pray regularly for Life Groups. Pray that God would continue to use them and bless them as a means of nurturing more and more people to become more and more like Christ.

So, the first thing we want to do is reaffirm Life Groups, and the next steps for you to consider are join, invite, and pray.

- B. Now here's the second step: We want ► to reposition leadership. That is, we want to reorganize and redistribute some leadership responsibilities so that we can be more effective. Let me explain.

For some time now, I have felt that I have not been doing a particularly good job of leading this church, nor have I been working at a pace that I can sustain for much longer.

My primary responsibilities are threefold: to preach, to cast vision, and to supervise all full-time staffers at the church. I can't seem to do all three consistently well. Preaching gets most of my time. Casting vision and supervising staff get my leftovers. And they sometimes end up half-baked. And some weeks I end up half dead.

The elders have had mercy on me. At my suggestion, they have decided to promote Patrick Gibbs to the position of Executive Pastor, relieving me of most of my supervisory responsibilities so that I can concentrate on preaching and vision casting. In turn, a part-time administrative assistant will be added to whom Patrick can delegate much of his current administrative duties to make room for his new responsibilities.

I'm excited about this move, not just because it's healthier for me, but particularly because it will be healthier for our church. I'm convinced that Patrick is the man for the job, and we'll be better off.

In addition, we'd like to add two new elders to our elder board: Allen Huebert and Ron Turner. We believe Allen and Ron meet the qualifications for elders laid out Scripture and will make our Elder Board even better.

What's your next step? There are several. According to our by-laws, the calling of pastors requires a congregational vote. So, those of you who are members, we're asking you ► to vote "yes" to call Patrick Gibbs as our new Executive Pastor.

In addition, we're asking you to vote "yes" on Allen Huebert and Ron Turner as new elders.

You can do both at our Next Step meeting next Sunday. In addition, we ask you ► to pray regularly for our leaders, that God would give them wisdom and strength to lead well.

We've covered the first two steps. First, reaffirm Life Groups. Second, reposition leadership.

- C. Now here's the third step: We want ► to refresh missions. We want to increase our effectiveness in reaching others for Christ, particularly our Latino neighbors whom we are going to adopt as a primary mission field.

In order to do that, fresh leadership is needed. And Gina Orr will provide it. Gina is currently Director of our children's ministry. We want to add missions to her responsibilities. Current staffers, Jeni Gibbs and Vangie Orr will step up in the

children's ministry area to allow Gina to take on missions. And so, we want to call Gina to be our new Pastor of Children and Missions.

Gina speaks Spanish fluently and has a demonstrated heart for missions in general and the Latino community in particular. Gina is already behind the recent expansion of our ESL program to include a Bible study. That's just one step in a direction Gina has mapped out that will hopefully lead us to becoming a truly multi-cultural church that integrates Spanish-speaking adults and their children.

In addition to installing Gina as our new pastor over missions, we're proposing a doubling of our missions budget. These are financially tight times, but nowhere is God's hand more apparent than in our fledgling ministry to Latinos, and we want to go where God is leading—even if it means kicking a hole in the budget.

What's your next step? First, I'm asking you ► to vote "yes" on the calling of Gina as our new Pastor of Children and Missions. Second, Gina will be hosting a table where you can find out how you ► can serve in the Latino ministry. She has a list of opportunities to serve, most of which require no knowledge of Spanish at all. Comprende (understand)? Vamonos (let's go)!

And, once again, ► please pray for missions, that God would bless Gina as the new leader and that the effectiveness of our missions efforts would be multiplied.

We've covered the first three steps: Reaffirm Life Groups, reposition leadership, and refresh missions.

- D. Now, here's the fourth step: We want ► to revitalize the youth ministry. For some time now, we have felt that our youth ministry is not realizing its full potential. That's not to say good things aren't happening. They are. But we'd like to revitalize that ministry. And to that end, two of our elders, Don Beard and Patrick Gibbs, have come alongside our Youth Pastor, Tom Cox, to evaluate, to coach, and to support as a team.

We don't have it all figured out yet, but Don, Patrick, and Tom have been working together for a couple of months now. Between them, they have many years of youth ministry experience and wisdom, and they're looking to plot a course for revitalization.

What's your next step? At this point, we'd simply ask you ► to pray for God's wisdom and power for revitalization.

So, we've covered four steps: Reaffirm Life Groups, reposition leadership, refresh missions, and revitalize youth ministry.

- E. Now here's the fifth step: We want ► to reframe Easter. That is, we want to do Easter a little differently this year. As some of you know, Easter Sunday is traditionally a time when we draw a crowd that includes many who do not know Jesus Christ and are not

otherwise involved in our church family. Our goal for our Easter service is to make it easy for these people in particular to take the next step toward knowing Jesus Christ and becoming involved in our church family.

Here's how we're going to do it. Easter is on March 23. It's only six weeks away. We're going to have a single service at 9:30AM, outside, in the same grassy area where we had our Christmas Eve service. We'll have about 850 chairs set up in 13 sections of about 65 chairs each.

Why am I talking about chairs? Good question. Each of the 13 sections of 65 chairs will be hosted by a team of 10 volunteer hosts. The responsibility of the host team is very simple, but crucially important: You make sure the people who come to sit in your section feel warmly welcomed as an honored guest. We'll equip you, train you, and direct you, but it's not that complicated. Just say hello and hand out some information about Moon Valley. Easy.

But do the math, and you'll see that we need a lot of help. A team of 10 for each of 13 sections equals 130 volunteers. Would you be willing ► to serve? Perhaps your Life Group could adopt an entire section.

And being a team host is only one of over a dozen ways that you can serve on our Easter Wrecking Crew. We've put together a list—a day-glo-lime-green list of all the ways you can serve on the Easter Wrecking Crew. We're asking you to pick one up in the lobby, pick an area to serve, and step up.

And, of course, we invite you ► to pray for Easter as well, that God would use it to draw people to Himself and to His community of followers.

Well, only one step to go. We've covered five so far: Reaffirm Life Groups, reposition leadership, refresh missions, revitalize youth, and reframe Easter.

- F. Now here's the sixth step: We want ► to rekindle marriages. Our next marriage retreat is scheduled for the weekend of August 1-3 at the La Paloma Resort in Tucson. Let me show you a little video trailer of the event.

(Show ► video here.)

What's your next step? ► Sign up. Wouldn't it make a great Valentine's gift? To entice you, if you reserve your spot today, we'll knock fifty bucks off when the registration comes due.

And, of course, we invite you ► to pray—pray that God would use the Marriage Retreat to rekindle our marriages.

Well, that's the six-pack we want to finish off this year: Reaffirm Life Groups, reposition leadership, refresh missions, revitalize youth, reframe Easter, and revitalize marriages.

III. In order to accomplish these things, we need to approve a new church budget for the new fiscal year. Most of you should have received a proposed budget in the mail. If not, I have copies up front that you're free to take after the service. Let me provide a very brief overview, and you'll have the rest of this week to think it over and ask questions at our *Next Step* meeting next Sunday.

- A. In the year we just concluded, our actual income fell short of what we budgeted by about \$73,000 or 10%. At the same time, our actual expenses exceeded what we budgeted by about \$54,000 or 8%. Like the typical household, when we've brought in less than we had hoped for, and we've paid out more than we expected, we have to tighten our belts. And the proposed budget reflects the tightening.
1. Every ministry line item in the proposed budget has been reduced a little, with the exception of missions, to which I alluded earlier.³
 2. Also some ministry positions have been cut. For example, we have discontinued our paid internship program for the youth ministry. A vacancy in the part-time Youth Director position will not be filled. And a Worship Assistant position has been eliminated.
 3. Moreover, for the second year in a row, there will be no cost-of-living or merit increases in pay for any of our staff members.
- B. This may seem like a bummer, and it's certainly not the financial situation we would have chosen. But the church is not circling the drain. We prayed. We asked. And this is what God has provided. And so we join the Apostle Paul who ► says,
- ^{NLT} Philippians 4:11 . . . I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.
- C. Some may say, "I had no idea that such tightening was going to be necessary. Why didn't you scream louder? Maybe if you would have cranked up the pressure a little, people would have given more."

Good point. Pressure often works in our culture.

³ I'm considering "ministry" line items to include those where the spending is more directly tied to people, like "Children" and "Preschool," not "Utilities" and "Maintenance"

Only one problem. As far as I can tell, it's not biblical. Paul tells us in ► 2 Corinthians 9:7 that giving in response to pressure would be wrong, and I take it that applying pressure would be wrong as well. Paul says,

^{NLT} 2 Corinthians 9:7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

And so, our approach has been and will continue to be to communicate our needs clearly, but without pressure—not even the pressure of passing a plate. Our current financial situation has been communicated for quite some time now, via snail mail, email, the weekly bulletin, and now in person.

What is your next step? You have one or two decisions to make. First, if you are a member, we're asking you to accept the proposed budget by vote at our *Next Step* meeting next Sunday. Second, regardless of your member status, we're also asking you to decide, in light of our circumstances and goals, what cheerful giving before God would look like for you in the coming year.

Please ► join me in giving thanks to God.

Lord, we are thankful that we've been able to accomplish so much so far this year. Images of progress dance in our heads. People saying, "I believe." People rising from baptismal waters proclaiming You as Lord. People transformed as they apply Your Word to their lives. More and more people becoming more and more like Christ. We humbly acknowledge that it's not by our goodness, but Yours. You have strengthened us. You are at work. You deserve the credit.

Lord, we've identified some things we think You'd like us to do to finish off the year well. But we'll fail miserably without You. Please come. Please help us. We need Your wisdom and Your power. For apart from You, we can do nothing. Lord help us take these steps to become Your Wrecking Crew. Amen.

Wrecking Crew

Rekindle Marriages: *Sign up, Pray*

Reframe Easter: *Serve, Pray*

Revitalize Youth: *Pray*

Refresh Missions: *Vote, Serve, Pray*

Reposition Leadership: *Vote, Pray*

Reaffirm Life Groups: *Join, Invite, Pray*

Barricade of Backs