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# Preface:

The purpose of this booklet is meant to acquaint you with the Mission, Vision and Values of Gracelife Beachside Church. As a new staff member, ministry leader, or strategic volunteer – this manual is meant to better familiarize you with our church. Within it – contain our Mission, Vision and Core Values.

Now, I know what you are thinking… “Geez – why should I even bother reading the Mission statement for a church? Isn’t that sort of thing reserved for the business sector of life? CEO’s are concerned about Mission Statements – not pastors – right??” Well – not exactly. Because the church is called to preach the saving message of grace to sinners, having a clear direction and mission about “HOW” you will go about doing that is of upmost importance. Our mission statement should be taken as serious as our mission – which the New Testament says is a matter of life or death (2 Cor 2:15).

With that in mind – we are asking you to read, digest, soak, marinate and truly OWN everything you read in the following pages. This is WHO we are at Gracelife Church – and how we roll. Thanks for deciding to join up with us to reach the beachside community!

# Introduction:

The Roman philosopher Seneca once declared, *“Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind.”* In other words, having a proper vision and direction is imperative to the success of any organization – and the same is true in Church. The reason why so many churches begin well, but then fizzle out over time is because they become disoriented and lose their sense of direction. The main reason why churches succumb to legalism, division, ineffectiveness, lethargy, and burnout is because they have forgotten their purpose on this earth, as Proverbs 29:18 warns, *Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained (Prov 29:18)*. I love the word picture in that verse as the word “unrestrained” in Hebrew can mean,

“To run wild, to slacken in duties, to become wayward, to cause disorder, to run out of control, to neglect, to become untied and unbraid.”

Therefore it is clear that the church must have a clear vision that it continually champions and presses home if it is to be effective. With that in mind, GraceLife Beachside must first be clear on 3 specific things: It’s Mission, It’s Vision, and It’s Values. In fact – tons of research has been done on what makes the difference between a successful organization successful and an unsuccessful organization – and what’s interesting is that success has very little to do with the product. What matters most is the consistency of service, continuity and communication within the organization.[[1]](#footnote-1) In other words – organizations where every employee is well acquainted with the Mission, Vision, and Values of that organization – tend to perform very well. With that in mind – we must begin by asking the question “*What is the Mission of the Church?”*

# Our Mission:

Thankfully, the mission of the church is not up for debate because Jesus didn’t leave us in the dark regarding what the church is supposed to be doing. In Matthew 28 Jesus gave us the **Mission Statement** for the church when He said,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:18-20).

The church is a community of redeemed sinners with a specific mission to evangelize the world, and everything else the church does is subordinate to that great end. Evangelism is not merely one task among many that Jesus gave to the church, Evangelism is ***THE*** primary task of the church.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Mission of the Church is Missions - and that must be firmly rooted in our minds because everything that a church does must support/undergird that vision. A church must first understand what her mission statement is – and then the Vision and values must flow directly from that. In fact, the great theologian and preacher John Stott noted that if a church is not structured in such a way that it furthers and fulfills the great commission, it is a “heretical structure.” He noted,

Our static, inflexible, self-centered structures are ‘heretical structures’ because they embody a heretical doctrine of the church. If our structure has become an end in itself, not a means of saving the world, it is a heretical structure.

When a church begins to see itself as existing *simply* to conduct beautiful worship services, or to preach excellent and ornate sermons, or to provide fulfilling opportunities for relationships and fellowship, or to minister the sacraments, or a host of other really good things, it has become a heretical institution. We must never forget that the church is on mission. It is a place where the insiders exist for the outsiders. With that mind, the Mission Statement and Motto of GraceLife Beachside is as follows,

## Mission Statement:

We exist to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in our beachside community.

# Our Vision:

Since the Bible clearly outlines the Mission for every church – the next step is to define exactly how we believe God is fulfilling that Mission through our local church. This is where a Vision statement comes into play. A vision statement is a clear and concise statement of how we believe God is going to fulfill the great commission through our local assembly. While the Mission Statement of a Church is static – the Vision Statement of a church is somewhat fluid and may change/be tweaked over time as culture changes and the way we engage a culture with the Gospel may change. With that in mind: developing a vision statement for a church involves 2 things:

1. Praying and asking God to show us relevant cultural trends and opportunities which we can leverage to make disciples
2. Show us how our corresponding strengths may allow us to exploit those opportunities.

It’s been said that a good vision statement for a church is a lot like surfing – as surfers don’t create the waves – they simply recognize the waves on the horizon that the world/culture/etc… are already sending its way. It’s their job to simply be in the right spot and paddle in! In fact, it’s been said,

Vision is not the ability to see the future. Vision is the ability to accurately assess current changes and take advantage of them. Vision is being alert to opportunities.

When we look at our culture – we notice 2 very interesting trends. First, people in our culture are lonelier than they have ever been. Most people have a million Facebook friends, but few close face-to-face relationships – and yet they have a desire to be in community since they are created in the image of God. Jared Wilson has noted,

Baby Boomers & Generation X-ers were generally open to compelling arguments. Millennials & Generation Z increasingly find a community of love strongest apologetic. Event-driven, programmatic ecclesiology is becoming increasingly irrelevant and ineffectual. We are closer to the days of the early church where Christ-centered communities adorned the gospel to greater effect than rhetorical arguments.

In order to leverage this opportunity – we will emphasize small groups at our church. I personally believe that Hospitality is one of the most powerful gifts in the modern church b/c many people are too intimidated to visit a church – but they will come over to your house. Therefore – our small groups[[3]](#footnote-3) are meant to be sort of like a half-way house between the church and world – where people can begin to be exposed to the Truths of the Gospel.

Second, people are just as broken and hurting today as they always have been since the fall of mankind (Gen 3). However, because people are also leaving the church in record numbers, they don’t have a Christian worldview to help them heal and overcome their wounds. Not only is our society dealing with addictions, anger and abuse in record numbers - but because of their religious upbringing – they don’t want people “preaching at them.” Jesus dying on a cross seems irrelevant to their everyday struggle as they have heard it all before – and so they don’t want you knocking on their door on Saturday afternoons while they are trying to enjoy their favorite college football team. Jonathan Dodson has insightfully noted,

For many people today, hearing that Jesus died on the cross for their sins is entirely irrelevant. It is an abstract concept that doesn’t connect with the heart. It’s our job to show them how it does. When we speak to people’s deepest desires, dreams, hopes, fears, or longings, we make the gospel believable. We get to show them more than a proposition; we get to show them the person of Jesus and the difference he makes.[[4]](#footnote-4)

People don’t want to hear your canned Gospel presentation and be treated like a project - but do you know what people do want to hear? They want to know how the Gospel enables them to deal/overcome/cope with their anxiety, anger, addictions, and their blended-families. They are curious if we have any GOOD NEWS for that! If the Gospel is “GOOD NEWS” – and it is – then the church should be speaking the Good News into every area of life. We shouldn’t be a “Bad News” institution that exists to hammer them – but rather be lifter of their head and burdens.

With that in mind - I believe we have a tremendous opportunity to minister to our 21st century American Culture by adopting a therapeutic approach to ministry. What I mean by that is – we can evangelize our culture and woo them back to Jesus by ministering to their wounds in both Word & Deed. This means first of all – preaching on counseling related issues. Christians ought to be experts at applying the Gospel – and bringing the Truths of Grace to life in every ailment, addiction and situation. Second – this means we should bandage the wounds of the weary, wounded and strung out. We shouldn’t just be the “voice” of Christ – but His physical hands and feet - as words without love are “a sounding gong”[[5]](#footnote-5) (1 Cor 13:1-3). With all that in mind, the Vision Statement of GraceLife Beachside is as follows,

## Vision Statement:

*We provide a safe place where the unchurched and dechurched can rethink their lives and explore a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

## Vision Strategy:

GraceLife Beachside exists to make disciples of the Beachside community thru multiplying Small Groups and Therapeutic Community Outreach[[6]](#footnote-6).

## Church Motto:

GraceLife Beachside: Your Refuge by the sea.

# Our Core Values:

Now that we have established our Mission & Vision, we turn our attention to a discussion of our core values as these will naturally flow from both of these. If you are curious what I mean when I refer to our “values”, I’m speaking about a definite set of characteristics - that if everyone in the organization adheres to and practices – we’ll be successful. In other words, the core values of GraceLife Beachside are a set of Biblical principles, ethics, and convictions - that if embraced and lived out by our core team – we will undoubtedly see great Gospel growth in our community.

The Core Values of a church are super important because they will both cultivate and protect the culture of our church. In fact - what we value will be clearly seen and felt by everyone who steps foot in our church. For example, if I visit “Church A” on any given Sunday morning, I don’t need to read their leadership handbook or philosophy of ministry or anything else to discover what their core values are. That is because I will be able to see, smell, feel and sense their core values through my church experience! In fact - the best definition I have ever heard of Culture is,

“Culture is that voice that is talking to you when there is nobody in the room. What does that voice say? How does this place make you feel? Do you feel welcome and accepted or judged and critiqued? Culture is the silent voice that is always speaking.

**Hear me - culture is the most important element of any church.** In fact – it doesn’t matter if you’re beliefs are biblical – because if people experience your church as cold, sterile and unforgiving – your culture will eat your theology for breakfast! That is because, when people visit your church – their first questions aren’t doctrinal – they are cultural. They walk in wondering, “*Do I belong here? Does anybody here really want to know me? How do people feel about my presence here?”* Rick Warren reminds us*,*

The greatest emotion un-churched people feel when they visit your church is FEAR. Fear of looking stupid by not knowing where to drop their kids off. Fear of not knowing the words to the worship songs. Fear of not knowing when to kneel and when to stand. Fear of not having anyone sit next to them. Fear of nobody saying hello to them. FEAR. Therefore don’t insult them if they say their sister is a Mormon! Don’t argue with them about theological stuff right off the bat. DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO MAKE THEM FEEL WELCOMED AND WANTED WITHOUT FEELING WATCHED!!!![[7]](#footnote-7)

Culture is the single most important element of any church – and listen – Healthy Church cultures never happen by accident! Nobody wakes up 3 years into a church plant and says “*Wow, this church is so loving and gracious – how in the heck did we get here???”* That never happens. Culture is always purposely being formed. Culture is like Earth – it didn’t evolve into this perfect utopia by accident where life could somehow exist and thrive, no – it was the work of a divine designer.

Therefore - it is vital that we clearly articulate our core values because our core values will directly shape the culture of our church. Culture must be fostered and worked on and tweaked constantly – therefore – with that in mind – we turn to a discussion of our core values as:

🕮 🡪 Mission 🡪 Vision 🡪 Values 🡪 Culture

**GraceLife Beachside Core Values:**

## Core Value #1: Grace

We are humble as our Lord and Savior Jesus was humble. We don’t scold each other, berate each other – or motivate by fear.

## Core Value #2: Authenticity

We are an open and honest church – we tell the truth at all times and freely confess our faults. Because the Gospel tells us that we have nothing to fear, nothing to prove and nothing to hide – we practice transparency with confidence.

## Core Value #3: Joy

We are a joyful body of believers who like to laugh and not take ourselves too seriously – while at the same time - we take our mission very seriously. Even though we like to laugh – it’d be a mistake to underestimate us – our joy makes us tenacious!

# Core Commitments

## 1st – We will be Gratitude-Driven and Shame-Averse

First of all, GraceLife is centered on the Gospel – and everything else flows from that. The Church is called to exercise a number of means in order to fulfill the Great Commission including: preaching, disciplining, counseling, fellowshipping, mercy ministries, social justice, church planting, etc… and at the center of each of these means is the Gospel. The Gospel alone - has the power to save and sanctify our souls (2 Cor 3:18). By repeatedly hearing the Gospel (Rom 10:17), we are reminded of the ***Means of change*** (God the Holy Spirit) and the ***Motivation for change*** (the love of God) that empowers us to live lives of holiness. The Gospel of God’s grace reminds us of our new identity in Christ that both enables us and fuels our Christian lives.

In a nutshell: every means of Grace/ordinance that the church conducts is, in its very essence, a re-heralding of the Gospel that allows the Gospel to penetrate our hearts deeper and reach the un-evangelized parts of our souls. John Calvin said that every Christian remains part an unbeliever until the day that they die. Therefore, the Christian is constantly fighting a battle against their old nature, the remaining power of flesh, which is constantly rearing its ugly head and stirring us up to sin. The Gospel needs to be constantly massaged into our souls in order for any true change to take place. Any change not rooted in Grace, Love and Mercy of God and the Gospel is unsustainable.

With that in mind – Jesus will be the hero of every sermon. He will be the answer to every need – and the power behind every command. Guilt is never the proper motivator for change in the Christian life because guilt will always remain. No Christian, no matter how disciplined, is able to keep the Law perfectly and therefore totally avoid guilt in this life. No matter how flawless the performance - a remnant of guilt will always be present in a sinners heart at the end of the day. Therefore - to motivate a sinner out of guilt, or shame, is thus counterproductive and leads the believer into further paralysis, fear, anxiety and lethargy. The Love of Christ, revealed in the Gospel, is the only proper motivation for change. Again – any obedience in our lives that is fueled by anything other than grace is unsustainable. This is our first and most important Core Value – as all the others flow from it.

## 2nd - We will embrace Sacrifice and shun Comfort.

**23**If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? (1 Cor 14:23)

Now we saw above, the Mission statement of the church is Matthew 28:18-20. In other words, the mission of the Church is Missions – and everyone claims to knows this. In fact – every church website out there states unequivocally: “*We exist to fulfill the Great Commission*” – but the reality is they don’t! The reason I know that is because most churches are not purposely structured to fulfill the Great Commission. That is because:

* The songs they sing are for Christians
* The message is preached in such a way that only Christians can understand it
* The Announcements are for Christians
* The Prayers are for Christians
* Most, if not all, of the budget is spent on Christians
* Everything the church does is about meeting the preferences and comforts of Christians.

That is how most churches conduct business, and there is 1 major problem with that approach! **Christians aren't our target market!** We’re not here to steal sheep, were here to win souls! Here’s the thing - whenever you decide how you’re going to structure a church – you have to answer a couple of key questions like:

* Who are we asking to be inconvenienced – The Insiders or the Outsiders?
* Who are we asking to lay down their preferences – us or them?
* Who are we going to spend our money on? Us or them?
* Who’s preferences are we going to cater to? Ours or theirs?
* Who are we concerned with communicating Truth to – us or them?

The main question you must answer when you do church is: **Who’s going to get grace extended to them, us or them?** Our default mode is: *Doing church for church people*.

Listen, it’s very easy to do church for church people. All you do is get a group of Christians together – and you start a little church body – and you design everything in the church around meeting the needs and preferences of everyone inside the church and what they like, and what makes them feel comfortable and then you explain it all away and condone it all by saying something really theological like “*We exist for the Glory of God and we don’t really care about pandering to the preferences of our culture!”* This happens every day in churches all across America who claim to “***EXIST”*** to fulfill the Great Commission.

So many churches modify their services in order to “Keep the riff raff out” and the Pharisees did the same thing. You see, there was a section of the Jewish Temple called the Court of the Gentiles. This was a part of the temple that was sorta labeled “Guest Parking” because it was where non-Jews who were curious about YHWH God could come and hear about the One True God of heaven. Gentiles were not allowed to enter the inner sanctuary – you had to be a Jew for that – but they were perfectly welcome in the outer courts to hear the sermon.

But, do you know what the Pharisees did? Not only did they not offer good seating in the Court of the Gentiles – but they actually turned the entire place into a gift-shop! They turned the Court of the Gentiles into a bazaar where they had people selling doves and animals for sacrifice and all sorts of things. The Court of the Gentiles was designed to be a place where Outsiders could come to hear about YHWH God, but the Insiders had turned the entire place into a Family Christian bookstore – where they could buy all the religious items that made their worship easier!

Now when the gentiles came in and visited the temple – they didn’t really have a chance to hear about YHWH and worship Him because their seating area was pandemonium. I mean – could you imagine trying to worship while at the same time you hear the sound of money changers haranguing over prices, and the smell of animal excrement all over the place. You ever been to a Circus before? Not a very worshipful environment is it? This is the reason why - when Jesus was on earth – we read about Him cleansing the Temple 2x with a whip. Why? BECAUSE the Pharisees had turned the Court of the Gentiles into a gift-shop and they kicked out the newbies and seekers to make room so they could worship God even better. We do the same thing today.

Now, I realize, at this point someone objects and says: “*But where in the Bible does it ever say that we are supposed to be seeker-sensitive and adapt our worship services in order to cater to unbelievers?”* The answer is many places – but how about we start with 1st Corinthians chapter 14. Do you know one of the reasons why Paul said that believers are not supposed to speak in tongues during the church service?[[8]](#footnote-8) It’s because if people are speaking in tongues during the worship service – and an unbeliever is present – they will think we’re all crazy! That is what Paul says in 1st Corinthians 14:23.

**23**If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? (1 Cor 14:23)

Listen – speaking in tongues is a real gift, a valuable gift, it just isn’t a gift that is supposed to be exercised during the church service[[9]](#footnote-9). Why? Because God doesn’t want us to scare off our mission field! The church should not feel “foreign” to people visiting, but should feel welcome and accommodating. In fact, in 1st Corinthians 14:23-25, Paul insists that the church service should be understandable to outsiders and that all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Cor 14:40). That means that visitors shouldn’t feel like they have been beamed up to a different planet[[10]](#footnote-10) when they visit our church.

Listen, if God is so concerned about communicating Truth to unbelievers that He’s willing to check the ministry of the Holy Spirit, don’t you think we should do the same thing? Of course! If the Holy Spirit is willing to be inconvenienced, shouldn’t we lay down our preferences too! However, the reality is – its human nature to erect theological walls to defend personal preferences. We are addicted to comfort – and therefore we think church is place where I come to feel comfortable instead of a place where I come to make outsiders feel comfortable – that jacks up the great commission. SBC Church Planter Ed Stetzer wrote an article recently where he listed the top 3 reasons why churches fail to grow and reach their neighborhood. They are:

1. **Too many churches love past culture more than their current context.**
2. **Too many churches love their comfort more than their mission.**
3. **Too many churches love their traditions more than their children.**

Friends – this is the reason why the church in America is failing. I know it’s easy to throw stones at the millennials like they are somehow so much harder to reach than generations in the past – but the reality is – millennials don’t want to come to church because of us! It’s sad - but I have found that many churches consider it a badge of piety based upon how well they can offend their mission field. They keep doing the same things over and over again and they say things like,

“If we just stay the course and if we just keep praying and if we just do what we’re already doing better – then God will bless our church. If we just stick with the King Jimmy Version and pound the pulpit harder and pray longer – then the millennials will finally see we are right and come back!”

Friends: That’s evangelistic insanity. In fact - if you looked up the word “Evangelistic Insanity” in the Christian dictionary and Almanac - it would probably read:

Evangelistic Insanity: noun. *“A stubborn state of mind where you fall victim to doing church the same way over and over again and expecting a different result*.”

One of the reasons why the American church isn’t growing is because of evangelistic insanity. Something worked 30 years ago – and we’re holding onto that ministry model and it’s long passed us by (bus ministry anyone???). Many churches are still running Windows 98 and people have moved on to SmartPhones and skinny jeans – and we sit here wondering why the church isn’t packed on Sunday mornings. Well, the reason is,

“The greatest enemy to future success is past success.”

If the 1960’s ever come back around again – many churches are locked, loaded and ready to go. The problem with holding out hope for the dear “wayward ones to come back to Mayberry” is - culture changes and the church stays stuck!!! We’ve got to update our operating system. If you weren’t yelling during your sermon 30 years ago – you weren’t preaching. If you yell during your sermons today – you’re gonna be called a cult leader and trigger someone’s PTSD!!! We have to admit it – as Christians – we’re outta touch with the culture around us and the problem is – the longer you are a believer – the less you think like an unbeliever.

For all these reasons, we need to be diligent to reach out to unbelievers and minister to felt needs. Again – you may not like that kind of talk but whether we realize it or not - we have many preferences when it comes to what we want to see in a church. If you don’t think you struggle with being a “cafeteria Christian” and you don’t realize that the only reason you attend a church is for what they provide you personally – then come see me and let me know – and then allow me to tell you where you HAVE to go to church for the next 5 years and you can’t leave. You wouldn’t sign up for that would you??? No way – because you choose the place you go to church based upon your preferences just like non-Christians do! But so often as Christians – we become blinded to that fact.

During our first year of planting GraceLife Deltona[[11]](#footnote-11) - we had a couple who visited one Sunday - never met them before - but they said they were looking for a church that "*Really preaches the Bible*" - so immediately I knew that I was in trouble. In fact - I met the wife first - and when she introduced me to her husband she said: “*This is my husband, he's very intelligent.*" Very first words out of her mouth… ☹ I knew - the whole time I would be up there preaching - this dude wouldn't be listening for Truth but for error. You know Christians like this - they are like guard dogs. They are there to point out error and to bark when things go wrong. Listen, guard dogs are good to have around because they bark when things go wrong - but what do you do with a dog that barks all the time? He barks at the moon. He barks at squirrels. He barks from day till night. What do you do with a guard dog like that? Exactly: You get rid of him right??? Homeboy is pound bound!!!

Anyway - I knew I'd probably be getting an email that next week - and sure enough I did the very next morning and it was one of those emails that is supposed to be just for you but it's cc'd to the entire world! It was cc'd to my seminary, the church I came from, the dude cc'd my grandma, everyone! And he called me a false teacher who was teaching heresy - and he listed all the things that our church was doing wrong. But do you know what the very first thing was that alerted him that our church was heretical? It was when Tommy (my co-pastor) met the couple - he explained to them that we teach theology here - but we try not to use big words so that new people can understand better. That really offended this man because he said "*Why are you dumbing down the Bible?*” In his mind – we were compromising because we tried to illustrate and define some of the very complex theological realities of Scriptures. To him – the church existed for Christians! It existed to teach Christians the “deep things of God” and to go deep with Christians – and what we were doing was offensive. But this dude had gotten confused on 2 very basic questions:

* Who the church is?
* Who the church is for?

He got those 2 questions confused – and the reason why we were preaching in smaller words is because we were trying to make the Gospel plain and clear to ALL PEOPLE. We’re not just supposed to preach to the giraffes but to the sheep also. We try to put the cookies on the bottom shelf – because we want everyone to get a taste of grace!

Friends, if we’re going to reach this culture – we’re going to have to adapt to our present day culture because that is what effective missionaries do. Let me give you an example – if we all packed up right now and flew over to India to start a brand new church – what kind of changes would we make?

* We’d change the way we dress. We’d adopt their dress right?
* We’d change the way we eat. We’d adopt their diet to reach out.
* We’d change the way we talk. We’d adopt their language.

We’d change all sorts of things to reach them – we wouldn’t be so arrogant as to fly over there and build a church with a steeple, and speak in English and wear a 3 piece suit on Sundays on the pulpit would we? No. Why? Because missionaries need to sacrifice their own cultural preferences in order to blend in and adopt the cultural preferences of the people they are trying to reach to be effective.

The Million Dollar Question is: How come we’re not doing that over here in America? The reason is - if we’re honest – we would confess that we prefer our comfort to winning souls for Jesus. But putting someone else’s preferences ahead of our own takes maturity And in 1 Cor 14:19-20 - Paul says that when we think only of meeting our own needs in church we are actually behaving like selfish and immature Christians. Check the verse,

Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. (1 Cor 14:19-20)

1st Corinthians 14 is a fist fight over who's preferences are going to win out during the worship time? Everyone thought their gift and their vision for the Sunday service was the only way to do church - but Paul says the mature believers consider the needs, fears, and hang-ups of unbelievers and are willing to place those needs ahead of their own! This flies in the face of the American church as most churches end up catering to the member’s needs, instead of the community’s needs, because the members pay the bills. But we are called to be mature and to lay down our preferences for the sake of the outsiders.

**Application**

Now with that said – Core Values are just rhetoric until you actually hold people accountable to them. So – with that in mind – ask yourself the following question:

What am I willing to personally sacrifice in order to further the Great Commission at GraceLife Beachside? What personal preferences am I planning on laying aside in order to fulfill the Vision Statement of this church?

Here are some possible answers to that question:

* I am willing to lay down my preference for the music I like to hear in church (i.e. the old Baptist hymns led by a pipe organ).
* I am willing to lay down my preference for keeping my money so I can have a bigger house, car, etc…
* I am willing to lay down my vision for what this church should be and embrace the vision laid out by my pastors and leaders. I may disagree with the vision statement of our church – but I agree to commit to it.
* I am willing to lay down my preference for hearing sermons with tons of information. I am going to lay down my preference for hearing a 50 minute sermon with 10 Puritan quotes – and put up with one that features Tupac Shakur (cuz most unbelievers know him!).

We are called to adopt the cultural preferences of the city around us – and as we model self-sacrificing love – I believe God will use us mightily in our city. That’s our first core value and it flows naturally into our second which is…

## 3rd – We will stress Cooperation over Competition

19For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Cor 9:19-22)

As we have seen above – the Mission of GraceLife Beachside is to make disciples of our Beachside community. With that said – good missionaries not only travel to their place of ministry – but they also must blend in and adapt to the cultural customs of their community if they want to gain a hearing.[[12]](#footnote-12) We are here to cooperate[[13]](#footnote-13) with the beachside culture – not to compete with it by introducing our own “CHRISTIAN CULTURE.”[[14]](#footnote-14) With that in mind, GraceLife will seek to be a “Missional” Church that cooperates with beachside culture – and Ed Stetzer defines “missional” this way,

“Missional means to adopt the posture of a missionary, learning and adapting to the culture around you while remaining biblically sound. Think of it this way: missional means being a missionary without ever leaving your zip code.”

This is the way that Jesus taught His disciples to be, and in Luke 10:8, Jesus said to His disciples, “*Eat whatever is set before you*.” Now this is a rather shocking command, because the people Jesus was talking to were Jews and Jews had very strict dietary restrictions. They had to keep kosher – and for that reason, traveling outside of Palestine was not a very pleasant experience because at times they would be hard pressed to find cuisine that was allowable in their religion. Imagine how relieved they must have felt when Jesus lifted the banned foods list and told them – eat whatever is set in front of you even pulled pork! In other words, Jesus said to them “*Adapt to your culture and blend in bro!*” Paul told the Corinthian Christians the same thing when he said, “*I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some*” (1 Cor 9:22). Good missionaries blend in and integrate into their culture, instead of taking a posture of elitism and separating from their culture.

With that in mind, we believe the best way GraceLife Beachside can reach her community for Christ is to mobilize our people to be intentional with the Gospel throughout every area of their lives which means:

### We will practice Life-style Evangelism

Evangelism is nothing more than living everyday life with Gospel Intentionality[[15]](#footnote-15) and the biggest way that believers share their faith is in the every-day participation in community. The reason why people get sucked into cults like Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses is their natural God-given desire for fellowship with others. To desire relationship with other humans is healthy and good because that is how God Himself is (God in 3 Persons, blessed Trinity!). God is a relational God, and companionship is vital to life and happiness, and Christians should not only share the Gospel with their unbelieving friends, they should share their church with them too!

The most essential way that the Gospel expands is through Christians living everyday life on mission. Even a casual reading of the NT reveals that the Gospel spreads through personal relationships as:

* + Andrew heard about Christ and told his brother Peter.
	+ Philip told his brother Nathanial about Jesus.
	+ Matthew a tax collector held a huge evangelistic dinner with Jesus there as his honored guest so that his friends met Him.
	+ Woman at the well told her entire village about Jesus.

The most essential way that the Gospel expands is through normal Christians living their normal everyday lives on mission. In fact – 39 out of the 40 miracles recorded in the book of Acts are performed during the week! In other words, the church expands during the week and not on Sundays! Though paid clergy are responsible to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4), the laity are truly the “end of the spear.”

Now I realize – some of you are like – “*But I’m too busy to do relationship evangelism because – I work 80 hours a week.”* Listen, it’s a myth to say that you’re too busy to pursue evangelistic relationships with nonbelievers – because not matter how busy you are - you do 2 things every single day that allow you to live like a missionary.

**1st – you EAT.** You may work long hours – but you still stop to eat unless you are solar powered. Here are some ideas.

* **Grab lunch with the unbelievers in your workplace.** Instead of always eating with other Christians or brown bagging it and catching up on ESPN during lunch break – start grabbing lunch with those who don’t know Jesus. Take an interest in their life. Ask how you can pray for them.
* **Eat at the same places from week to week – and get to know the regulars.** I learned this principle from Mark Dever – as he pointed out to me that people love routines – and chances are – if you hit Subway every Monday at noon – there will be regulars there too! If you grab coffee every morning on the way to work – go to the exact same coffee shop or gas station and get to know the names of the people who work there – you will be surprised how much of a relationship you can develop in just 5 mins a day. Just to give you an example of how this has worked effectively in my own life, I will tell you that I have gotten to know the ladies that work at the RaceTrac near my house very well. And here’s the best part – and I spend less than 5 mins there a day! Seriously – when I walk in they say “*Pastor Jeff!*” – we have a great relationship and they are the sweetest bunch of ladies. Do you know why we have such a good relationship – not only because I stop and get iced-tea there 4x a week and have gotten to know them – but also because I have filled out about 50 RaceTrac surveys online where I have told RaceTrac just how kind and valuable those ladies are. Listen – we live in a world where everyone is angry about everything – and most people are negative – and so those ladies get a ton of negative criticism from their customers and much of it is undeserved. Their livelihood depends upon those surveys. That is how RaceTrac determines who gets raises, etc… So what I do – is I take my receipt – I go to TellRaceTrac.com and I am honest about my experience and I tell the Truth because those ladies do great work. They have a really clean, well-kept gas station. And so I let the corporate big wigs know about it. Do you know what – it only takes about 3 mins and I get a free drink, hotdog or donut every time I fill out one of those surveys? It’s a win-win. Even if those ladies never come to my church – guess what their impression is of Christianity? We exist for human flourishing. And I have built a great relationship with them – in less than 5 mins a day. You’ve heard of 5 min abs – this is 5min relationship evangelism!

So anyone can do relationship evangelism because no matter how busy you are – you’ve gotta eat, you gotta get gas, grab coffee etc… Those are all things that you likely do every single day of your life – and chances are – other people are also doing the same thing right alongside you. That’s the first thing you do every day that can be used to evangelize others, and the second thing is…

**2nd – You live in a neighborhood.** One of the biggest lessons that God has taught me over the last few years is my greatest mission field is the people who live right next door.That is because people had something 50 years ago that they don’t have anymore; Friends. People who genuinely knew them and that cared about them. Most people today live in isolation. Everyone works in their cubicle, eats alone at lunch – then rushes home to watch the latest episode of Game of Thrones. Seriously, how many of us live in neighborhoods where we don’t even see people outside anymore???? I drive down the road – and there’s nobody on the street where I live. I’m like is the Children of the Corn or something? Did the Rapture occur and I’ve been left behind for being too funny or something? Where are all the people at???

It’s tragic – but we live in a day where the only time we see people outside – is when we see them drive by and wave at us – and they pull into their driveway and the garage door goes up and then goes down – all we see of people is from the torso up – we don’t even know if they have legs. That’s the world we live in – and it’s not healthy. In fact – it’s starting to come out lately that America is one of the most touch deprived countries in the world. One of my good friends Melissa Affolter has done a little bit of research on this – and recently she sent me a very interesting study that Psychologists did where they observed people from different countries having lengthy conversations over coffee. And what they did was - they monitored their body language and studied how affectionate they were – and here is what they discovered.

* + 2 French people talked over coffee for 2 hours and they touched 110 times.
	+ 2 Puerto Ricans talked for 2 hours over coffee and they touched 180 times!
	+ 2 Americans talked for 2 hours and they touched 2x.

Friends, that’s your neighbors – that’s the people who live next door, that’s your mission field – a friendless, touch deprived people! That’s your opportunity to press in, show some love and at least throw them a side hug or something! People are longing for love, and closeness and affirmation, and your neighbors don’t want you to be friendly – they want you to be a friend! Listen, this is a huge opportunity for the Gospel as people in our country are so touch deprived – that what colleges are actually starting to do now is offer free hugs during finals weeks to help students deal with stress. In fact – 6 years ago - the University of Indiana actually started renting puppies over finals week so that students had something to love and cuddle with and touch so it would help them relax. What does all that tell us? A: It tells us that we live in a world of people desperate for relationships. With that in mind - here are 10 simple ideas to reach to non-believers from 2 totally different Christens: Tim Keller & JD Greear.

### We will Partner with our City

Though the entire world lies in the lap of the wicked one (1 John 5:19), it still possesses common grace, and contributes to the well-being of society as evidenced by things like:

* **Community:** Eastern Suring Association, Little League, Community Centers, Parks, Libraries, PTA
* **Generosity:** Hospitals, Hospice, Welfare, Shelters, Soup Kitchens, Recovery Centers, AA
* **Protection:** Military Men, Policemen, Fire Men, Life Guards, DCF, Domestic Abuse, Neighborhood Watch programs

When you take a moment to think about it, the unbelieving world is *already* participating in community, and it’s our job not to separate from them but to jump in alongside them where appropriate. This is what we mean by “Cultural Integration.” We in the church like to “Christianize” things. If we desire to work towards feeding the homeless, we find a bunch of people in the church with money and we run out and start a “Christian” soup kitchen. Founding such an agency takes a whole lot of time and money and planning – and we miss out on the fact that we could simply partner with an existing secular soup kitchen (like Halifax Urban Ministries) and be that much more effective! If we desire to reach byciclers with the Gospel, then we create a “Christian” bycicling club, instead of joining a bycicling club that already exists. We reinvent community, and mercy ministries, instead of looking first to see if such opportunities already exist.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Because man was created in the image of God, he still possesses common grace, despite the fact that he is totally depraved. Therefore, it is vital that we don’t prematurely rubber stamp everything in the culture as “evil” and “wicked” and piously separate ourselves from it, but instead we ought to carefully identify what things in a culture should be affirmed and what things should be challenged. Culture is not wholly bad, there are some redeemable elements to it. Our stance towards culture should be neither wholesale assimilation nor all out confrontation and as Os Guinness has said,

We are to live in the world in a stance of both “yes” and “no,” affirmation and antithesis, or of being “Against the world/for the world.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

When we find areas of commonality between the church and the world, we will use them as bridges to reach unbelievers.[[18]](#footnote-18) Through Cultural Integration – we will develop intentional missional relationships – where we can begin to disciple unbelievers. Some areas that we could explore for cultural integration are:

1. Beach Cleanup Projects (International Coastal Cleanup)
2. Turtle Patrol
3. Eastern Surfing Association

Further, cultural integration will be key to introduce people to our small groups where they can receive even more intensive discipleship. We shouldn’t just strive to share the Gospel with people 1-on-1, but we should also strive to share our entire church with people.

### We will Partner with Outreach Organizations

Through partnerships with local outreach organizations like Christian Surfers, CrossWaves, and Campus Outreach, non-Christians are connected by affinity ministries and invited to investigate the claims of Christianity in a relational context at GraceLife Beachside.

### We will offer Counseling to our Community

From day 1, the GraceLife family of churches has always stressed a strong counseling model as we believe life-on-life soul care is the new door-to-door. The days of knocking on people’s door and asking them the million dollar question about where they will spend eternity are long gone. People hide now when they see you coming with your Bible under your arm, and you are seen as a nuisance instead of a witness.

At the same time, people do experience struggles, temptations and trials in life that they need help with. Alcoholism, drug abuse, cutting and self-harm, and pornography are all at epidemic levels. Though people may not be open to having heaven and hell shoved down their throat – they are open to hearing how God can help them overcome/cope with everyday life. By connecting experienced, Christ-centered counselors to our community, we won’t have to go knocking on people’s doors to share Jesus, they will come knocking on ours. We will work closely with Fieldstone Counseling services to prove Gospel-Centered counseling to the beachside community as we see counseling as an effective means of outreach. In fact – life-on-life soul care is the new door-to-door.

### We will offer Small Groups of every type

Tim Keller says that “*Contextualization is just answering the cultures questions from the Bible*.” Like good missionaries we must pay careful attention to our context, which means we look for common ground that can support meaningful conversation. Because we know Ormond by the Sea is a highly moralistic culture, seeking an honest and transparent environment where they can hash out issues in their: Marriage, parenting, past sins, etc… With that in mind, we will encourage people in our church to offer targeted[[19]](#footnote-19) home based DVD Bible Studies on relevant topics such as:

1. A mingling of Souls by Matt Chandler (Marriage Study)
2. Stuck in the Middle by Paul Tripp (Middle Age Study)
3. Child-rearing by Paul Trip
4. When Suffering Enters your Door by Paul Tripp

#### We will offer specialized home groups

We will not insist that every home group fit into a “one size fits all” category. We will allow people to select a home group that fits their needs, interests, and season of life. Therefore: We will allow home group that will focus on:

* Spiritual Growth – These are our normal home groups that are sermon-based.
* Counseling Needs – Anxiety, Depression, Addictions, etc…
* Season of Life – Raising Kids, Marital Harmony
* Seeker Groups – Where people can come to ask questions, express doubts, and search out the claims of Christ.

###

### We will make Church a Refuge

Being sensitive to our culture around us is one way that we show Christian hospitality, and though we must never equivocate on the tenants of the Gospel, we must be cautious not to lay up stumbling blocks before people either. Those who reject such an approach to ministry and who think contextualizing[[20]](#footnote-20) the Gospel is a “failure to trust God” will eventually find themselves all alone on an island wearing a suit and tie and asking the question, "*How will they preach without a hearer?*” With that in mind – below are a few ways that we will cultivate a Hospitable Church Environment:

### We will truly welcome the outsider.

This resolution is key – as the church should be a placewhere people can “***belong before they believe***.” In Luke 15, Jesus tells 3 parables about a lost sheep, lost coin, and a lost son – and the point of all 3 parables is GOD LOVES AND GOES AFTER SINNERS. That cannot be overlooked – because God didn’t create the church and then give them a mission, God already had a mission of saving sinners and He created the church to join Him in this great endeavor! We are called to create a church environment where unbelievers feel like they belong while they are working things out.

Now at this point someone asks “*but if we just accept people as they are, doesn’t that mean we’re showing approval for their sinful lifestyle*?” Not necessarily. In fact – Jesus is our example of how we are to relate to unbelievers and we cannot forget that he was called “a friend of sinners” and yet the Bible never says he approved of their sin. The holiest man that ever lived wasn’t a jerk, and people who weren’t Christians actively wanted to be around him. For example:

* The Samaritan woman in John 4: Jesus showed acceptance and love for this woman while also not approving of her sinful lifestyle.
* The Woman caught in Adultery in John 8: He defended her dignity without minimizing her sin. Don’t forget – He told her “*Go and sin no more*.”
* Zacchaeus the Chief Tax Collector in Luke 19: He ate with Zacchaeus before he committed to change a single thing about his life. He reached out to Zacchaeus without condoning his dishonesty.

Just because you accept someone where they are, doesn’t mean you approve of where they are. There is a vast difference between Acceptance and Approval and you can accept the Sinner without approving of their sin. This is hard for us to wrap our minds around though because so often we want to fix people so fast instead of giving them space to work things out. We have a buddy who starts coming to church – but he’s still smoking pot all the time too – and we’re like “*I gotta tell him this wrong! I gotta let him know!”* Listen – yeah, let him know 1x – but don’t beat him over the head every time you see the dude. Seriously – he’s not a professing Christian yet, what do you want from him?

You have to remember that Jesus likened evangelism to fishing for men – and if you know anything about fishing then you know that you have to give some fish extra line or else you’ll snap your line. Same is true with unbelievers. Give them space to work through the demands of Christ. Don’t beat them over the head over and over again! A lot of their sins will be dealt with after they come to Christ. We can’t expect unbelievers to look and act like believers. In fact – unbelievers don’t have the Holy Spirit – so they can’t act like believers! That is why Jesus was a friend of sinners before He was their Savior – and He didn’t walk up to people and say “*Clean up your act and then we can hang out!”* No – he loved them before they changed – and he expects us to do the same to people. Believe it or not – sanctification comes AFTER salvation.

Now I realize, this sounds like compromise and actively introducing sin into the church and so they are wondering “Where’s the balance? How to do we accept people where they are, and at the same time encouraging them that it’s not right to stay there!” That’s a great question – and I want to let Joanna Collicutt answer as she nails it,

When Jesus visits Zacchaeus, he starts where he is and loves him as he is, but there is also a sense in which Zacchaeus is also seen for what he is capable of becoming. Jesus isn’t forcing change upon him, simply opening up the possibility of change. By being seen to have sufficient faith in Zacchaeus to visit him in his home, Jesus also shows that he expects Zacchaeus to respond by rising to the occasion; to become more fully the person God created him to be. There is an almost exact parallel with the Samaritan woman whom Jesus asks to host him by giving him a drink. Jesus affirms this woman by entering into a serious conversation with her, and at the same time he makes it clear that he sees her and understands her situation fully. She in her turn responds by rising to the occasion and becoming a highly effective evangelist. Jesus doesn’t tell her to do this; the manner in which he visits her enables her to discover this capacity herself. To see the potential in the other is to cherish her strengths, to invite her to arise to visit like Jesus is thus to confer dignity. Our visiting with others should then also take the form of subtle strength - spotting. Part of having the mind of Christ is to see the signs of the kingdom in the behavior of the people around us (Luke 17:21), to see folk as not only created by him but as capable of rising with and through him – being literally ‘up for it’. Instead of wishing people would fail less, we should wish that they could succeed more; **instead of conveying the message ‘You are not good enough’ , our attitude should be ‘You are better than this’ (Eph 4:1).[[21]](#footnote-21)**

I love that thought! How do cultivate a church culture where people feel safe to come “as they are” but are encouraged not to stay there? The answer is we need to focus on positive affirmation instead of negative condemnation. We need to stop communicating “you don’t belong” and “you’re’ not good enough” and start communicating “you’re better than this” and “you can beat this!” By becoming advocates instead of judges of outsiders, we help them become what they are capable of in Christ. That is why it’s been said,

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being." - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

### We will preach where you itch

At GraceLife Beachside, we intend to make the worship gathering a Biblically based, culturally relevant, creative, and dynamic worship experience. We believe the gathering of the Body of Christ is a time to hear God’s Word and to worship God with each other. We intend to accomplish this by having Christ-Centered Redemptive preaching that engages both believer and unbeliever. In other words – we promise not fill your head with useless facts about how Deep the Sea of Galilee was – but instead – scratch you where you itch.

The corporate gathering will be a time for people to be encouraged and refreshed in Christ with the intention of strengthening God’s people to continue the Mission we have been called to in Ormond by the Sea. Therefore, we will contextualize our Gospel messages and preach on topics that the culture is interested in including:

1. Is Abortion the unforgivable sin?
2. Is God Anti-Gay?
3. What should I do if I’ve been divorced?
4. How can I know I’m good enough for God to accept me?
5. Why retiring in Florida and playing golf everyday still won’t make you happy. (Series in Ecclesiastes)
6. How should I handle my Anxiety?
7. Is there a way to Conquer my Codependency?

### We will be seeker-sensitive.

This resolution doesn’t mean we will change or water down the Bible – but that we will seek to speak in a way that is non-offensive and intelligible to unbelievers. From the Bible translation we will use (ESV) [[22]](#footnote-22) to the words we use in the pulpit – we will strive to make the Bible understandable to the common man. We will seek to get rid of “insider” language that is “cultic” and only makes sense to Christians. Words like “justification” and “propitiation” will be defined every time they are used. Just as we saw in 1st Corinthians 14 – church is supposed to be intelligible to unbelievers! Further, we will strive to drop offensive terms to unbelievers like “lost” or “unsaved” and instead elect for more polite terms like “undecided” and “on the fence.”

### We will reflect the natural beauty of OBTS

There is a reason why people have moved to Ormond by the Sea to live, and we seek to leverage the natural beauty of our area for the sake of Christ which includes:

1. We will offer an Easter Sunrise service at beach.
2. We will conduct Beach baptisms.
3. Communion will be an actual meal, not a lunchable. This will take the superstition out of this sacred time, and also properly contextualize the Gospel to this current culture. We may even consider doing it as a Picnic at Bicentennial Park.
4. We will reflect the laid back – comfortable beach vibe in and thru our services. In other words - we will adapt our worship services to integrate well with our beachside community. Now that title may sound like we're going to be shallow, but the reality is we're actually being strategic, Biblical and hospitable. Hosting people in our church should be no different than when we host them in our homes. We want to make sure they feel comfortable, know where the bathroom is – etc… Again, we need to lay down our preferences and embrace the preferences of our community in order to fulfill the Great Commission. We want to make it as easy as possible for a person to come to Christ at GraceLife Beachside. This includes:
* **Background Music:** We will have surf videos playing as our countdown clock before service. This makes people feel more comfortable.
* **Worship Style:** Acoustic guitar, bongo drums, cahone. We are going for a tasteful beachside sound.
* **Dress:** Beach casual which means Flip-flops, sandals, shorts, flower shirt. Please try to accommodate your dress code to this ☺ Trying to mimic the laid back beach culture we are part of environment – and if when people come to church and they feel under-dressed – they will feel self-conscious and their guard goes up.
* **Creative arts:** Getting rid of the big pulpit in exchange for a Plexiglas lectern. Small, classy and simple looking.
* **Clear Signage:** We will put up carefully worded signs that tell people exactly where to go, bathroom, nursery check-ins, etc…
* **Lanyards:** All workers should wear an easy to read name tag.

### We will partner with local churches – not compete.

We will adopt a Kingdom-mentality instead of a marketing mentality when it comes to our stance towards other churches. A church that doesn’t champion and support other churches in its own zip-code – that church hasn’t gone into ministry – it’s gone into business!!!! We refuse to adopt an adversarial “*us versus them*” mentality – when it comes to viewing other churches. We commit to:

* Speak well of and champion other churches as much as we can
* Invite other churches to partner with us when appropriate
* Pray for other churches in our city publicly
* Do everything we can to cultivate a Unified Spirit w/ other churches

## 4th – We will choose Trust instead of Suspicion

***Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor 13:7)***

From time to time – within the church – there will be situations where there is a gap between what we expected someone to do and what they actually did. For example:

* Someone shows up for their shift in the nursery at 9:15 when they should have been there at 9am.
* Someone doesn’t show up to a very important meeting that they should have been at.
* Someone gets up in the middle of a sermon – and walks out.
* Something is said in a conversation by another person that makes us question their morality.

Constantly – things are happening in church where there is a gap between what we expect from other people - and what we actually see/experience from them. Here’s the thing: **We get to choose what we place in that gap – either trust or suspicion.** And here’s the bottom line: What we choose to place in that gap – either trust or suspicion - will impact the culture of our entire church. And hear me, Healthy Churches have a culture where people choose to view others with **TRUST** instead of viewing them with **SUSPICION**.

That is because – how a person views us has a tremendous power over us doesn’t it? The characteristics we attribute to others: Either Positive Vibes or Negative Vibes – has a huge impact upon them personally. Think about how that works in your own life - what happens when you are around someone who thinks you hung the moon and they are always encouraging you and telling you how thankful they are for you and that they believe in you and that you are a rainbow and bag of skittles and all that – what happens when you are around that person? What happens when you’re around grandma? We are more confident and tend to do better in life. We tend to live up to the hype. We tend to fulfill their expectations for us. Their encouragement actually empowers us to fulfill our potential!

On the flip-side, what happens when we are around someone who is skeptical of you, and distrustful of you feel like they are always questioning your motives? It has the opposite effect upon us doesn’t it? When we get around that person – we immediately become a putz. Our IQ drops 50 points. We fumble over our words, our keys, purse, whatever. We become instantly uncoordinated. We live way below our potential – it levels us. The way a person’s view of us holds enormous power over us.

Therefore, how we view other people directly affects their performance – and this is especially true in a church setting! How we view other people will directly impact the overall effectiveness of our church. That is why Reggie McNeal has said,

"Teams use trust as currency. If trust is in short supply, then the team is poor. If trust abounds, the members of the team have purchase power with each other to access each other’s’ gifts, talents, energy, creativity, and love. The development of trust then becomes a significant goal within an organization. Trust creates the load limits on the relationship bridges among team members"

In other words, one of the fundamental reasons that teams breakdown, and churches break down, is a lack of trust. An environment where people are suspicious and skeptical and judgmental of one another – is going to be an environment where you’re going to have to twist someone’s arm to get anything done! So write this down in the front of your Bible and never forget it – the minute trust goes out the window at a church – people go from active participants to passive spectators. They won’t serve, give or sacrifice – because people won’t pour themselves out for people they don’t trust and it doesn’t matter how gifted the leaders of the church because as Mahatma Gandhi pointed out,

"The moment there is suspicion about a man’s motives, everything else that man does becomes tainted."

You can be the most gifted person in the world, with the most compelling vision I’ve ever heard, but if I don’t trust you, I don’t want to serve with you. Trust is vital to the health of a church. In fact, trusting others is just a synonym for loving them according to 1st Corinthians 13 which reads,

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8Love never fails.

Here’s a couple of highlights from this text:

**Love keeps no record of wrongs (vs. 5) –** and that phrase is the Greek word “Logizomai” and it is accounting term and it means to make an entry into a ledger. In fact, think of an Excel Spreadsheet that is completely blank because love purposely chooses not to keep a running checklist of people’s sins against them.

**Love always protects (vs. 7) –** that is the Greek word “Stego” and it means “*to cover in silence or to conceal*.” Think of a crime scene, when they take the white sheet and use it to cover a dead body, that’s the idea behind this Greek word. That means, when someone sins around you and *rips their britches* – you don’t run out and tell others all about it, instead you cover their shame with love. Love hides and conceals the faults of other instead of repeating them, so this is really the flipside of gossip.

**Love always trusts (vs. 7) –** wow this is a biggie because love always chooses to believe the best about someone. It believes the best about their motives, their intentions, their character, their life. It may not have all the answers, but it chooses to give them the benefit of the doubt when there are unanswered questions.

**Love always hopes (vs. 7) -** Love believes a person’s future is brighter than their past – no matter where they have come from and what they have done. Love never says, “once a liar, always a liar” – love looks to the future with eager anticipation of what God is going to do in through another person’s life.

Now I have a question for you: Who wouldn’t want to be part of an organization like that? Who wouldn’t want to be part of a church that functioned this way and always believed the best about people instead of assuming the worst?

Here’s the good news: We get to choose how we view others. We get to choose whether or not we will view them with either trust or suspicion as every single one of the 15 attributes of love mentioned in 1st Corinthians 13:4-7 aren’t nouns (i.e. feelings) they are all verbs (i.e. actions). Trust isn’t a feeling, Trust is a choice! This text is telling us – trust others the way you want others to trust you!

Now this is just a no-brainer for a healthy environment, right? Christians are called to believe the best about others – and that means people are “not guilty” until proven innocent – although many churches function the other way around. The Problem is: We naturally are prone to put suspicion in that gap! In fact – psychologists have told us that we all have a bias towards being suspicious of others and social psychology calls this the fundamental attribution error which is,

Fundamental Attribution Error is our tendency to explain someone's behavior based on internal factors, such as personality or disposition, and to underestimate the influence that external factors, such as situational influences, have on another person's behavior.

What that means is – nobody automatically believes the best about another person. For example:

* When Monica shows up late for her nursery shift – instead of putting trust in the gap and reasoning “*She probably got stuck in traffic*” I instead reason “*Monica is a lazy person who’s always late to everything she ever attends. She’s untrustworthy*.”
* When George’s daughter goes off the deep end at age 20 and falls into drugs – we immediately start to Monday morning quarterback his parenting techniques by saying things like “*Well, I knew George in the past and he was pretty legalistic, that’s why his daughter went off the deep end*.”

Our default mode is to be suspicious of others – and that breeds a toxic culture in any organization and especially in the church. So what that means is – we are going to have to repent of our own sinful inclinations to doubt others and actively trust each other.

**APPLICATION:**

So with all that in mind – ask yourself – the following question:

How am I personally endeavoring to trust others at GraceLife Beachside in order to further the Great Commission in North Volusia County?

Here are a couple of pledges I am asking each of us to make to one another in order to cultivate a more healthy, vibrant church:

#### Pledge #1 - I’m going to attribute the best possible motives to others instead of the worst.

Whenever there is a gap between what a person promised and what they actually delivered – I will fill that gap with trust instead of suspicion. I’m going to fill in the gaps with the benefit of the doubt

#### Pledge #2 - I’m going to squash Gossip and resist slander and instead come to your defense when I hear someone else running you down.

When I hear someone filling in a gap about your performance with suspicion – I am going to remind that person that we don’t have all the facts available and that there is likely a very good reason why this person is doing what they are doing. The Truth is – we often excommunicate the adulterer out of the church but few affairs ever tear apart a church, while we allow the gossip to run wild and unchecked as they burn up unity and sow discord. We need to be so careful with our tongues and how we speak of others as Proverbs says,

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts. - Proverbs 26:22

What that means is - there may not be any Truth to the stuff that I think I see in your life – but once I have told you about all my suspicions – they are like dainty morsels that go deep down inside and take hold of you – and now you can’t help but see it! Once I have said to Bob “Hey man, have you noticed that Nancy has bruises on her arms nearly every week? Do you think that Keith may be beating up on his wife?” Once I say something like that - now every time I see Nancy at church – I’m reading into her facial expression, looking for further evidence, I’m evaluating, critiquing and reading into things that may or may not be there. The suspicion has tainted the relationship. There is a reason it’s called “The Power of suggestion” but we need to squash suspicion quick before it spreads like wildfire.

#### Pledge #3 - I’m going to come to you if I ever get suspicious.

If I ever get to the point where your performance has made it difficult for me to give you the benefit of the doubt and I find myself becoming suspicious of you and your motives - I will come to you directly and ask for an explanation about your performance. And listen – this is a reality in church because the Truth is “*nobody’s perfect*.” We all have blind spots and the church is a construction site not a showroom. Christians still sin – we all see things in others from time to time that need to be confronted in love.

But our tendency when we see something in another person is at best to refuse to address the problem – or at worst – we gossip about it to others and label it “*Christian concern*.” Now we’re clever as Christians because we *Christianize our gossip* in the church and put a sanctified spin on it because we go to people and say: “*Hey bro, do you see the way that Keith talks to his wife??? Yeah. Okay cool – just making sure it wasn’t just me. I just wanted to make sure I wasn’t being legalistic…” And listen,* he “*checking principle*” sounds so innocent & pious but its deadly because again it places thoughts in the minds of other people about things that may or may not even be true! We do everything we can to avoid having frank conversations with people in church because we’re so afraid it’s going to hurt the other person. When you share honest feedback – people are wounded – but the Bible also says:

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. – Prov. 27:6

Our default mode though is to avoid the tough conversations and it causes all kinds of bad fruit in the church. In fact, many people in a church can be continually hurt by this 1 person’s bad performance. Oftentimes, we confuse in the church sensitivity with untruthfulness and deceitful. When I sit on something that I know needs to be addressed – that’s not loving. That’s actually poising the entire culture of the church. That’s why it’s been said,

“When a leader won’t deal with a problem, then the leader has become the problem.” – Shawn Lovejoy

So often as leaders – we sit on things and what happens is we spend an awful lot of time talking about people instead of talking to them. Or – we try to correct the problem in an indirect way by addressing everyone and we pray the Holy Spirit makes them listen very closely. We laugh, but we’ve all tried the approach where we knew we needed to talk to someone – and instead of being upfront and talking to them 1-on-1, instead we just called a “group meeting” and showed them a DVD or YouTube clip or something. We made a “*blanket announcement*” about how we all need to get better in this 1 specific area – and then we prayed and fasted that the Spirit would convict this 1 single person in this 1 glaring area. It never works does it! Nope – it accomplishes nothing – and further by not talking to this person directly you are punishing the entire group by making them watch a video that has little or nothing that pertains to them! We laugh – but so often we try to correct the problem in an indirect way by creating new company wide policies because of 1 person! Why do we see the need to punish everyone in the church just because of one person???!!!

Friends, let’s pledge to have real conversations with one another. Let’s not be cowards, but let’s love each other enough to tell each other the Truth. Because we you refuse to talk to others about their blindspots, it robs that person of getting better! Listen to Psalm 141:5

Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; - Psalm 141:5

Here – the Psalmist actually welcomes feedback and correction from a fellow Christian. What’s interesting is that he likens correction from a friend to be a direct blessing from God. In fact - he says a rebuke from a friend is like *“oil upon my head*” which is an OT reference to a person being “*under the anointing*.” In the Old Testament – 3 types of people were usually anointed (Prophets, Priests, Kings) and they were anointed with oil on their forehead to symbolize that God’s power and blessing rested upon their life & ministry. So what David is saying is *“I love feedback from a righteous person – because that is how God anoints and empowers my life and ministry!”*

Now that is certainly a counter-intuitive thought isn’t it? I don’t know about you – but when I think of an “*anointed*” leader – I tend to think of someone who is highly autonomous and never in doubt. I picture someone who never needs to ask for feedback about their performance because they go so deep in prayer and they are so close to God – that they never take a step outside the will of God. But then I come to the Bible and that view is demolished because when the Bible talks about the anointing and blessing over a man’s life, it doesn’t speak of a Type-A, Alpha Male, but instead it speaks of a man who is so broken and humble that he’s not only open to correction – but actually welcomes it! MIND = BLOWN!

So how important is it for us as Christians to give honest feedback to other Christians about their performance and blindspots? Well –according to Scripture - if you withhold feedback from other Christians – you are actually withholding the source of anointing and blessing over their life! If we see a brother going off the deep end spiritually, and he’s about to ruin his marriage, his relationship with his children, his life – the most loving thing we can do is confront him in love.

Nothing good ever comes out of harboring suspicion and doubts – and when we sit on things that we know we need to discuss with others – bad things happen like:

1st - **It will usually lead to us blowing up on someone.** When we see something going in another person’s life that needs to be addressed, but we sit on it – what happens is all of this bitterness and anger builds up over time. Then, the next you get into an intense discussion with that person – your suppressed emotions tend to find a way to escape and you end up erupting on that person and have a bashing session where all your suppressed feelings come out! Suppressed communication usually leads to over-communication! And if you sit on something and simmer on it long enough – then you will usually end up saying way way more than you should to a person – all because you didn’t communicate with someone in a timely manner. In fact – whenever I have dreaded having a difficult conversation, I have never looked back and said “*Wow, I had that conversation too soon*!” That’s never happened. I’ve usually had the opposite problem, I’ve waited to long and in the process, it had drastic consequences.

2nd – It will lead to the culture of our church being poisoned. We are the core team – we’re the people who will lead others into worship of God and so we set the ceiling guys! Water seeks its own level – and a church will never out worship the ceiling of its leadership. That means, if we have dysfunctional relationships with one another, and we walk around harboring bitter suspicion of one another, that will spill out onto others in our congregation. If we aren’t willing to be honest with one another – can God bless that? Is that an environment that God can bless? Are we modeling healthy relationships as a staff? No way! Therefore we must actively choose to trust others – by following these 3 pledges.

## 5th - We will gladly Send rather than Hoard

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

Imagine for a moment you are on your lunch break. You’re hungry, and you know the only thing that will satisfy you is a large, juicy, BigMac. Ok. Now I realize that everyone is all health conscience today and people think drinking from a water-fountain is an abomination. You guys don’t crave Big Macs anymore – you crave boiled fish and acorns with an Aquafina water - but just pretend for a moment that it’s the 80’s when everyone still ate Big Macs and people still used their blinker when they turn okay..

So you walk into MacDonalds and you walk up to the counter to order, and the first thing you notice is that all the ladies who usually stand behind the counter are all huddled around the soda machine filing their nails and gossiping about everybody else that works in the restaurant. Nobody comes up to greet you, instead you stand there and a few minutes go by and it’s almost like you’re invisible. And you finally say, “*Hello. Ladies. Ladies*.” But they continue to ignore you and pretend like they can’t hear your voice while at the same time you hear them whispering about you under their breath saying, “*Look at him.* *He’s a weird duck. I wonder where he wandered in from*.” And you start to think to yourself, “*Only in Ormond Beach!*”

Suddenly, you hear a bunch of cars honking their horns. And you look out the window into the parking lot and you see that the cars from the drive-through are backed up so far that they are snaking all the way around the parking and back out into the road blocking traffic. And you look over and the young man who is supposed to be manning the drive through has his nose in a book. It’s a really thick - 500 page book– and the cover says *“The life and times of Ronald MacDonald*.” This young man looks fascinated – he’s so captivated by studying the history of MacDonald’s that he’s oblivious to the hungry patrons waiting outside. And you are like, “*What in the world*.”

Then all of a sudden you hear someone say, “*Excuse me sir. Excuse me*.” And another employee with a mop almost bowls you over, as he is frantically mopping the floor of the restaurant. And he says, “*Sir, could you please move out of the way. In fact, could you please stand over there in the corner or better yet, could you stand outside for a little while. I really gotta get these floors spick-and-span and you are in my way*.”

And you respond, “No I won’t wait outside, in fact - where is your manager? I want to talk to the person in charge around here.” The man ignores you and keeps mopping. So you look around, and you glance back into the kitchen area, and you spot the manager talking to one of the Grille men who appears to be a new employee. You can hear their conversation and the manager asks him,

“How does your uniform fit? Too tight? How does the air conditioner feel in here? Is it cool enough for you, the grille gets pretty hot during the day – just let me know if you are uncomfortable in anyway – I want to make sure my employees are well taken care of.”

Then the manager starts explaining all the nuances of the Big Mac, and how the lettuce goes between the beef patti and the special sauce because it serves like a barrier to keep the special sauce from heating up and the pickels go on last because they secure the Big Mac Bun in place – and he lays out the art of making the Big Mac. And you shout back to the manager, “*Excuse me, sir. Are you the manager*? *Can you help me please*.” And he looks at you and says,

“Sir, you’re going to just have to wait a few minutes. I am in the middle of a training session right now. You are going to have to wait your turn, we are trying to run a business here.”

And by now, you are so frustrated that you lose it and you shout, “*What in the name of Ronald McDonald is going on in here! All I want is someone to help me so that I can order some lunch*.” And suddenly the manager whips his cell phone out and dials 911 and tells the dispatcher,

 “Yeah, we have a 9091 down here, an angry white dude at MacDonald’s. Could you please send an officer immediately and escort this man off the property.”

And so the police show up, immediately cuff you and escort you off the property. Your trip to McDonalds has landed you in prison!

Now this is a crazy story, but I think it illustrates well what happens to an organization when it forgets why it exists. This is what happens when an organization forgets their primary purpose and mission. MacDonalds, as we all know, exists to ***serve people hamburgers***. They gauge success and failure based upon how well they fulfill that calling. The whole world knows how well their doing at it because it’s right there on their sign, **Over 100 billion served.** In other words, McDonalds wants us all to know that they are nailing it!

But if MacDonald’s ever forgot the ultimate reason they exist, something like what I described could very well happen. They could be doing 100 good things that are needful in business, like keeping the restaurant clean and training their staff and researching company the history, but if they neglect their overall purpose to serve hamburgers chaos would ensue.

 That is because whenever an organization loses its focus, bad things happen – and the same thing is true in the church! In fact, Proverbs 29:18 puts it this way, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.” The* NIV reads, “*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint*.” In other words - when a church forgets what its purpose and mission is - Mardi Gras breaks out and it’s a free for all. That’s from the Message Version the Remix ☺

When a church forgets that its mission is the Great Commission – all heck breaks loose – and people start inventing new missions for the church. In fact, what usually happens in most churches is an outbreak of legalism. Because nobody in the church is using their energy to reach out disciple unbelievers, everyone starts focusing their energy inward in attempt to help disinfect other Christians. A church forgets that God has left us here to reach unbelievers, and so they begin to think that God has left them here primarily to “clean up” other believers. Then, pretty soon you find yourself in a counseling session trying to mediate between 2 families where one dad has beef with another dad because when his kids go over to their friends house to play – they are allowed to watch Sponge Bob! I always love those types of meetings as a pastor!

Seriously – when I was in seminary – and I would be working on a Hebrew paper late into the night – the thing that kept me going was the thought that “*You know, one day, I will be able to use these amazing Hebrew Skills to prevent Sponge Bob Square Pants from destroying the Christian youth of America*!” Hehe - was that what kept me going in Seminary???? Heck No!!! I went to seminary because I wanted to tell people about Jesus. It was the mission of God that excited me. My best friend Tommy Clayton and I went to an informational luncheon and sat in a room for an hour and half where the dean of students at the Masters Seminary warned us that pastoral ministry was a very difficult work, and that Satan would attack us – but he said to us, “*We train men as if lives depended upon it*!” And Tommy and I said “*Sign us up! We are there bro*!” Maverick and Goose are going to seminary!

It was the mission that excited us! But what happens to many churches is that they forget what their mission is and so people start running around trying to sanitize each other and this is not the mission as David Platt has said,

 “Our goal is not to disinfect Christians and separate them from the world but to disciple them and send them back into the world!” - David Platt

*In other words, t*he Church has bigger problems than Sponge Bob Square pants! In fact – if Sponge Bob offends you – then you better never join a fitness club or a gym – because I have heard language and sounds in a men’s locker room that are far more disturbing than anything Sponge Bob is putting out. The Church is called to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, but when a church loses that vision – people perish and flounder in their faith and lose interest.

However: On the flip side – when a church is clear about its mission and vision. When everything in a church is structured around fulfilling the Great Commission – people thrive! There is life and vitality. Everyone is excited. People have direction and purpose and meaning for their life! In fact – that was the case at the church at Antioch. The Christians in Antioch were all fired up! And the reason this church was on fire is because the church at Antioch modeled health in every dimension there was. For example:

First of all, they had mercy ministries in full effect as Acts 11 says they took up a disaster relief offering for the Christians in Judea who were starving during a famine. (Acts 11:13-30). They were a church that reached out to those in need.

Second of all they had sound doctrine with prophets and teachers like Paul and Barnabas filling the pulpit chopping up the Word! With a strong theological background people were growing and flourishing in their faith.

Lastly, they had diversity in their church that you don’t read about anywhere else in the Bible. While the apostles in Jerusalem were struggling with racism and were still trying to decide whether or not gentiles could get into heaven, the elder board in Antioch was like a Bag of Skittles. Their leadership team was like - Baskins Robbins as they had 31 flavors. They didn’t have to photoshop in a token black dude, or white dude on their website - No – they had pictures on their Facebook page of pot lucks where the Last of the Mohicans were sitting down and breaking bread with the Duggars. They had Tremendous unity in Antioch.

This church was a paragon of health in every dimension – and I believe that is why this is the first church in the NT were people were called Christians. So you have this healthy and vibrant church - and the elders were fasting and praying together one day and asking God, “*What’s next Lord? Our church is growing! We have solid leadership! We are living holy! What do you want us to do next*?” God says in Acts 13:2 “*I want you to separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the work I have called them*.”

Now that is very interesting because God doesn’t say, “You guys are growing huge and so I want you to buy a couple hundred acres and start a building campaign.” He also didn’t say, “I want you to start putting back money for a rainy day or for when a famine hits.” He also didn’t say, “I want you to start a private school so that none of your children will ever have to mingle with the children of unbelievers again.” He didn’t even say, “*I want you to start a seminary to preserve sound doctrine.”*

What God tells the leaders in Antioch is, “*I want you to go! The Gospel has penetrated here, and now I want you to take the Gospel somewhere else*!” What that teaches us is that God is a sending God, not a keeping God. God is a missionary God. **That means: Churches are called to send – not to hoard.** In fact, the famous missionary to India Henry Martyn, once said,

“The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become.”

God is a sending God, not a hoarding God. But here’s the thing: Only Healthy Churches like Antioch will obey that calling and use their resources to send – because it takes faith and guts to obey the Great Commission. Sending people and money away involves risk. When we send away resources – we lose control. We put ourselves out there, and it could all blow up in our face. Leaders may fail, money may be lost! Obeying the Great Commission involves taking a step out in faith – and therefore only healthy churches are down for that.

You see – the church has to make a decision with every person and every dollar it takes in – are we gonna use our resources here or there? Are we gonna use our resources to grow here or send there? Are we going to focus on seating capacity or sending capacity? One idea has a mindset of sending, the other hoarding. One is driven by faith – the other fear.

Fear says “We’re gonna keep everyone here – nobody leaves!” Faith says “We want the Gospel to impact not only our neighborhood but yours too!” Fear says “We’re gonna focus on growing big” Faith says “We’re gonna focus on sending far.” Fear says “*We need to be careful and play it safe*.” Faith says “*We’re gonna take risks in order to get the Gospel out*.”

Some churches try to hedge their bets and do both and say “Yes, we’ll send missionaries & plant churches, but only after we grow to a certain size or only when we can afford it.” That’s a ridiculous statement because the primary mission of the church is missions. Why are you gonna hoard money for missions when the mission of the church is missions? That’s absurd. It reminds me of another absurd statement that you hear a lot today from people who are living together but they haven’t gotten married yet and the dude usually says something like,

“You know, I love her so much and I just don’t want to jack up our relationship by getting married. We have such a good thing going and I don’t want to screw it all up by introducing marriage into the equation.

It’s like “Hold on a minute. Let me get this straight. Are you telling me that you are so committed to this relationship that you don’t’ want to jack up the relationship by introducing more commitment into it?” That sounds absurd!!!! How in the world does commitment screw up commitment? It’s funny, but that comment about relationships makes about as much sense as saying “*We can’t spend any money on missions right now because we need to save money to keep our church going*.” That’s ridiculous because the whole reason your church exists is to send people on mission! That’s like a soup kitchen saying “*We don’t have enough money right now to buy soup and bread because we need to conserve money to pay the electric bill*.” It’s like – Dude – you exist to serve meals – and if you can’t do that anymore – why do you want to even survive? To tease homeless people? Some hungry dude see the lights on to your building and walks up and and knocks on the doors – and you say “*Go away – we don’t have any food.*” It’s ridiculous.

The primary mission of the church is missions. We are called to send, not to hoard. This may sound counterintuitive: but when a church begins to hedge it’s bets and hoard up resources in order to fight off death – that is actually the moment when the church begins to die. The moment a church starts to focus on self-preservation instead of the Great Commission – it’s at that point that God begins to remove his hand of blessing. John Stott has said,

Whenever a church begins to exist for anything other than fulfilling the Great Commission - it has become a heretical institution.

Listen: Churches never die because they didn’t budget well for the future - churches die because they stop trusting God. Churches never die because they failed to have a nest egg – churches die because nobody ever leaves the nest!

Let me ask you a question: How many empty church buildings are there for sale all over this country? Tons. Churches close their doors every day that have 0 debt. They have buildings and acres and acres of land that are all paid for – and yet they die anyway.

The question is why? Why do 3,700 churches close their doors every year? It isn’t because they mismanaged their money. It’s because they started to operate according to fear instead of faith. They started to hoard instead of send and so God wrote over the door of their church ICHABOD - *the Glory has departed.* They forgot what their mission was – and so God pulled the plug on their power and said “Game over.” That is why it’s been said, "*The Church must send or the church will end*." — Mendell Taylor

The reason why many churches with 0 debt are spiritually sick and on the respirator is because they aren’t focused on the Great Commission. They don’t have a passion and zeals to save souls – they just sort of exist in maintenance mode. Pastors in those churches are sorta like chaplains – they exist to just marry and bury people. And everyone is faithful to attend on Sunday morning – and the preacher pretends to preach and the people pretend to listen – but his speech is sweet but saltless – and nobody ever does anything about the Truth they hear. There isn’t any activity – the church has basically called in hospice. It’s sorta like – will the last person out please turn the lights off.

Why are such churches dying? Because without a vision – people perish. The reason people in those churches are bored stiff is because there is nothing more boring than doing church for church people! Seriously – if you remove the mission out of the church - it's not very exciting - it's just a bunch of people hanging out. If we don't have any greater purpose than being here and hanging out - and church becomes all about Softball leagues and Bingo - that's lame. There isn’t any excitement to that kind of life. And before long, people start asking themselves,

“Why am I even here? I could be over at the Buccaneers game on Sunday mornings doing the exact same thing that I’m doing here – and over there they serve beer instead of Grape Juice!”

Before long people checkout because there is nothing more boring than doing church for church people. We must never forget that the church is the only organization in the world that exists for the sake of its non-members. Do you realize that? The church is unlike any other organization in the world. Think about this:

* Why does Planet Fitness exist? In order to provide exercise equipment for its members.
* Why does SAMS Club exist? To sell food to those who have paid the annual fee and have a SAMS club card.
* Why does the NRA exist? To protect and uphold the rights of gun owners all across America because we all know “guns don’t kill people” but “people with mustaches kill people.”
* But why does the church exist? For the sake of the unchurched. The insiders exist for the outsiders.

The Mission is the Great Commission – and therefore we will seek to be a sending church – not a hoarding church. in order to do that – we’re gonna have to keep an open hand with the people and money God has given to us. And you can mark it, it’s only as we remain openhanded and generous with the resources that God has given us that will God bless GraceLife Beachside. I mean, think about it: Do you think God is going to give our church more money and more people if we are not being faithful with the people and money that we already have now? The Bible is crystal clear that hoarders die – only those who are generous with the resources they have been given – receive more. Check the verses below:

* *One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty*. – Proverbs 11
* *A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed*. Proverbs 11
* “*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. . . . Test me in this*,” says the LORD Almighty, “*and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it*.” Malachi 3:10

Those verses were not just written to Christians as an encouragement to pony up when the offering plate comes around – those verses were also written to churches. Those verses refer to the way that the church is supposed to use her resources. We need to hold the resources that God has given us with an open hand because only when we are faithful with what we have will God give us more. And we’re going to have to trust that sending resources away will actually prosper us instead of crippling us. But as Hudson Taylor said, *“God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.*"

You trust God - you be about God's business - you will never lack the provision you need. But to use our resources that way – involves stepping out in faith and relinquishing control.The reason that the church at Antioch was willing to obey the Great Commission is because it was a healthy church! That is the reason why when God told them to send away Paul and Barnabas they said “*Yes, Lord*.”

Think about it – put yourself in their shoes – if your pastor didn’t just write books about the Bible – but he actually wrote books of the Bible like Paul – would you want him to leave? No way – I am sure Paul’s Sunday School class had standing room only. We read in the book of Acts that people even sat in window sills to hear him teach. Barnabas appears to be a disciple making machine according to Acts 11 – who wouldn’t want a guy like that on the staff. God said to them “*Send away your best 2 servants”* and the church at Antioch didn’t blink an eye. That must have been tough for them – because God sent away his best!

The church did not decide to send Paul and Barnabas away – in fact – if they were asked who they should send - they probably would have been the last two chosen, since they were the best the church had. If I am an elder in that church, I’m not sending Paul and Barnabas away - I’m sending away our youth pastor. But the Holy Spirit chose the two best men, the men that least could be spared. I want to tell you – God always sends His best.

When God raises up a missionary or church planter – God doesn’t use B-rate apostles. He doesn’t call the slackers and half-committed, the half-hearted. When God separates someone apart for ministry – He always chooses the best. That means – we need to send our best too. We need to be willing to send our best people to plant the next church. We need to send the best part of our staff and budget. And whenever we get apprehensive and start to think “But what will we do if that person leaves? Won’t that leave us in a lurch? Who is going to fill her shoes? Etc…” *Whenever those thoughts cross our minds and we are tempted to hoard instead of send – we need to take a step back and remind ourselves of the Cross. When we contemplate the Cross, we* remember that it isn’t Christianity unless you are sending away your best. Isn’t that the case with Jesus? God the Father sent Him away – to live as a man – and to suffer and to die – God sent the best He had. Do you ever think about what that must have been like for God the Father – it must have been bittersweet!

God didn’t look around heaven and find some defective angel with only 5 wings and offer him for you and I! Instead he sent His only begotten Son. He sent the best He had. In fact – Jesus told a parable about it in Matthew 21 – the parable of the tenets. Jesus said,

“There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”

So last of all – the Master of the field sent this son? Who the heck would do that? What would cause a Father to send His best – after the wicked tenets have already murdered the first 2 servants He sent? What would drive this Father and Son team to act in such a way? The answer is: Love for broken, hopeless sinners. For God so loved the world, that He sent His Son He didn’t hoard His Son. God sent His best to the worst because the salvation of sinners for all eternity was more important to Him than the temporary fellowship with His Son. God is a missionary God! If God was willing to send His best – shouldn’t we do the same?

**With that in mind:**

### We will endeavor to be a church that plants churches

We will always have a church planting “project” that we are working on. We will also seek to put back a percentage of our budget money for future church plants as well.

### We will be devoted to Leadership development.

Through intentional shepherding and investment leaders are organically developed for ministries of service to the body of Christ and the community. Below are a couple of key areas where GraceLife Beachside shall raise up leaders.

* 1. We will apprentice and mobilize Home Group Leaders
	2. We will identify and raise up our own elders
	3. We will mentor and mobilize Church Planters
	4. We will equip people to be Christ-Centered Counselors

### We will actively Minister to felt needs

Because a Biblical church does not exist simply to “take” but to actively “give back” to our community - we have a responsibility to minister to the physical needs of our city. Some people think the church is only supposed to preach to people – but James warns about that kind of super spiritual thinking:

15If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Look beyond the hype of every growing and flourishing church – and you will discover that they have found a way to meet the real needs of people in their community. If your church genuinely helps people, then attendance will be the least of your problems. I realize that people scorn ministry that appeals to peoples felt needs - but appealing to peoples felt needs isn't wrong!! In fact, it’s been said,

People say “It’s not the churches responsibility to give people whatever they want, but felt needs, whether real or imaginary, are the starting point for expressing love to people. That’s not marketing, it’s just being polite.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Think about it – the basis of our relationship with God is largely built upon Him meeting our felt needs! We don’t simply worship God because He’s God – but because He’s a good God. That’s why the Psalmist reminds us,

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Would we truly worship God if He wasn’t all of these things???? No! The basis of our relationship with God stems not simply from the fact that “He’s in charge” but it stems from the fact that “He’s in charge, and He loves us!” I mean, do you realize that God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible is completely predicated upon meeting our felt needs! Just take the names of God for example:

* Jehovah Jirah - the God who provides.
* Jehovah shalom - god your peace.
* Jehovah Nisshi - the god who upholds.

When God reveals Himself – He reveals Himself in response to the Meeter our felt needs. Shouldn’t we be reflecting His nature to people? Part of our calling to evangelize the world includes ministering to the physical needs of those around us. In fact, James defines true religion as *both* pursuing holiness *and* tending to widows and orphans when they are in need (Jas 1:27). Jesus called Christians the salt of the earth, and the light of the world and said our good works should lead people to seek our Father in heaven. In other words, Jesus said that our good works will be an evangelistic tool in the lives of unbelievers!

Most churches are content to preach the Gospel to people outside and disciple those inside and think they have done their whole duty, but according to James and Jesus that isn’t enough! Christians are called to minister in both Word and deed, and if we are not actively involved in making our community a better place to live, we should not be surprised that unbelievers don’t show up on Sunday to see what we have to say in our sermons.

Perhaps the main reason why so few people attend church today compared to 50 years ago is that the modern day society views the church as irrelevant. We have our weekly meetings, and life goes on quietly within the confines of our church building, but people rarely see Christians in the community, meeting the needs of the least, the last, and the lost. If we are truly the salt of the earth, then in order to be effective we are going to have to get out of the “salt shaker” and permeate our neighborhoods! This was the ethos of the early Church. If you read through the book of Acts, you will discover that 39 out of the 40 miracles recorded took place outside the church![[24]](#footnote-24)

The early church embraced the vision that *the insiders exist for the outsiders*, and if a church has an adversarial relationship with their community, then something is seriously wrong. In fact, the church should be so beloved by the community because of its charity, that if we ceased to exist, the community would weep! That is the picture portrayed in Acts 9 when a disciple named Dorcas died. She was so well known for her kindness and charity (9:36) in clothing the poor and needy that when she died the community held a vigil at her bedside (vs. 39). That was a woman on mission, and the Church should be so involved in the community that if we folded up shop and shut down then the city would have to raise taxes! Practically, that means the church should actively pursue mercy ministries, social justice, and relief of the poor and needy[[25]](#footnote-25)

# Appendix

## Life-style Evangelism: 10 Tips from Tim Keller

1. Let people around you know you are a Christian (in a natural, unforced way). Make statements no matter where you are that let people know you know God.  Simple things like "Hasn't God given us a beautiful day?" or "Your children are a blessing from God!"  show people that you know God and that way, if God is already at work in someone's heart, you can be a person they talk to.  This is something I am trying to adopt more and more in my life, whether on the subway or in the grocery store or on the street.
2. Ask friends about their faith – and just listen! People don't like to be preached to, but they do like to be asked their opinions, and they do like to hear your story.
3. Listen to your friends problems – offer to pray for them. This can go miles.  Some people will say “no” or be annoyed of course... be prepared for that.  But others could be deeply affected by hearing their name in your prayer and seeing you model personal and simple prayers to God.  Pray for them right there!
4. Share your problems with others – testify to how your faith helps you through your problems.
5. Give them a book to read.
6. Share your testimony. Make sure to include details about being saved from sin, hell, and God’s perfect wrath.
7. Answer objections and questions
8. Invite them to a church event
9. Offer to read the Bible with them
10. Invite them to church

What Keller also advises is that we (generally) start with 1-4. If people are interested and want to talk more you can move them to stages 5-7. If they’re still interested go on to stages 8-10. Sometimes people will want to go straight to 10, but often people start from way back and need some time to think and discuss things in a non-pressured way. We often think that only stages 8-10 count and invest all our energy there. Keller suggests that to get people at stages 8,9,10 you have to put the work in at 1-4. Sometimes you’ll have to keep going round the loop multiple times.

## Life-style Evangelism: 10 Tips from JD Greear

1. **Eat with Non-Christians:** Whether it is lunch with co-workers or dinner at a dining room table, dinner is a place where we still get to know one another well. Eating consistently with someone is a sign of friendship, and it almost always gives you an hour to joke, talk, and discuss things going on in your lives.
2. **Throw Parties:** People love parties. Whenever a neighborhood has one, people walk away thinking, “We should do that more often.”  Why are we as the church not leading that in our communities? Jesus was a fixture at parties in the NT.  Parties allow us to open our doors to many different kinds of people, give us a chance to practice hospitality, and allow for a casual atmosphere of conversation and relationship building.  One of our campus pastors recently found out that his HOA would give $75 for hosting 3 or more families. Maybe yours would too.
3. **Community playgrounds, pools, and dog parks:** There is almost nothing that makes it easier to break the ice with people you don’t know than if you both have kids or dogs. That makes being a regular at play grounds, community pools, and dog parks an easy place to start up conversations. On top of that, you will be modeling in front of your children how to reach out to new people.
4. **Join Neighborhood Committees:**Relationships easily and naturally occur when you and another person care for the same thing, and almost all people care about their homes and their neighborhoods.  I recently talked to a man who joined his neighborhood committee, and he now has friendships with people he had not been able to even have a descent conversation with.
5. **Play Groups (mom’s):** All mom’s need adult conversation and relationships. What a great way to connect with and build friendships with other women in the neighborhood.  What a great environment to invite other women to who you may meet through doing community ministry.
6. **Be a regular, meet the other regulars:**I frequent the same places. People in our society don't respond well to strangers, so I try to eat, drink coffee, buy gas, get my car worked on, and shop, etc at the same places. Relationship is not essential for evangelism, but it sure helps. At most of those places I mentioned people know me by name. Inevitably a chance comes up to pray for them, ask about their lives, invite them to church, etc. For example, several of the people from my local coffee shop have started to come to our church, and a few have become believers and gotten baptized. My mechanic has recently attended our church. Where relevant, I leave BIG tips. Especially if I know someone is having a bad day. I'll jot a little note and tell them I'm praying for them. I ask people, sometimes, how I can pray for them. Most people don't mind to be prayed for, and if they don't want to talk, they answer shortly and I let it drop. I invite them to church. Over and over.
7. **Be Outside:** This simply puts you in a position where you can see and talk to your neighbors.  Work in your yard, play with your kids outside, or sit on your porch or in your driveway.  This is how almost everyone meets and builds friendships with neighbors. The more you are outside, the more informal touches you can get with the people that live around you.
8. **Volunteer with Non-Profits:**Non-profits are a great way to serve your city and to meet people that you would never have a chance to meet.
9. **Participate in City Events:**There are many festivals and events the city of Daytona Beach puts on.
10. **Hobbies with people:** Do what you love with people. Love to run? Join a running group. Love to read? There are book clubs that would love to have you.  Do you go to a gym? Don’t just nod and walk past the people you see every day. Talk to them and begin to work out together. Hobbies give people a common ground to start building friendships.
1. It’s be said that “*Vision and Purpose need to be restated every 26 days*” as the mission of an organization tends to leak out over time. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many theologians see the church being called to a 3-fold task of: Worship, Discipleship, Evangelism, but I contest that Evangelism is our primary task and worship and discipleship are subordinate along with a host of other things. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Small Groups at Gracelife include: Men’s Groups (33 Series), Ladies Groups, Home Groups, Equip and New Life. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jonathan Dodson, The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing (p. 50). Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Think the “Lunk Alarm” at Planet Fitness. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Preaching on Counseling Topics, ministering to broken and traumatized families – are all ways we are going to execute our vision. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. By the way – it’s fine if you speak in tongues during service – many of our people – they just don’t shout it out and disrupt other people as they worship and listen to the preached Word. What is prohibited is not tongues in service – but out of order and disruptive tongue talkers. In fact – Paul even warns us “not to forbid” speaking in tongues. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Unless there is an interpreter present – and it’s been organized effectively so there isn’t confusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It’s funny – but I heard a well-known radio-preacher say once that church should be “lofty” and feel “foreign” to outsiders – and that they should “feel beamed up to another planet” when they walk thru our doors. Sadly - I’ve been to his church – and I can tell you – there isn’t a whole lot of evangelism happening – his ministry is more geared towards “equipping the saved with discernment” than it is “Making disciples” and winning the lost to Jesus. His trade is sheep stealing – not disciple making. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The first church I planted in 2015 over in Deltona, Florida. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. To penetrate any culture – you must be willing to make small concessions in matters of style in order to gain a hearing. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Obviously – cooperation doesn’t mean adopting sinful practices like: Abortion, homosexuality, etc.. – it just means we don’t draw lines in the sand where the Bible doesn’t! [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. FYI – there is no such thing as a distinctly “Christian” culture. Hair length, dress length, pants, shorts, flipflops, etc… are all relative to the place and time you live. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. By intentionality we mean going about your day with your Gospel antennae up – by actively looking for opportunities to evangelize wherever God has opened a door (2 Cor 2:12). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It is not wrong to create ministries that do not exist yet if they are needed. For example – a Palm Coast Christian Surfers chapter is a very real need since one doesn’t exist there yet. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Quoted by from *Everyday Church*, by Tim Chester pg. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Tim Keller, *Center Church*, Chapter 10 – *Active Contextualization*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. People targeted will be neighbors, friends, co-workers, and those who live in their community. www.nextdoor.com is a great website to advertise home Bible studies to those in your immediate vicinity. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Contextualization basically means “*Being fundamentally like those around us yet profoundly unlike them at the exact same time… Christians must be like their neighbors in the food they eat and clothes they wear, their dialect, general appearance, work life, recreational and cultural activities, and civic engagement. They participate fully in life with their neighbors…at first glance – Christians should look reassuringly similar to the other people in their neighborhood…at the same time Christians must be also unlike their neighbors…Believers must be known for being scrupulously honest, transparent, and fair. They should be marked by generosity. If they are employers, they should take less personal profit so customers and employees have more pay. As citizens, they should be philanthropic and generous with their time and with the money they donate for the needy. They should consider living below their potential lifestyle level. Believers should also be known for their hospitality, welcoming others into their homes, especially neighbors and people with needs. They should be marked by sympathy and avoid being known as self-serving or even ruthless in business or personal dealings*.” See Tim Keller, *Center Church*, pgs. 282-283. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Joanna Collicutt, The Psychology of Christian Character Formation (Kindle Locations 3760-3780). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Although sometimes I will elect to use the NIV for understandability. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Church [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. J.D. Greear, *Gospel: Rediscovering the Power that made Christianity Revolutionary*, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. There should be a line item in the church budget strictly for outreach and minstry to the local community. When we have our budget meetings, unbelievers from our community are not present to vote or voice their desire for assitance or benevolence. It is our job to make sure they are not forgotten and that they have a place in our thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)