

Engage Culture

What motivates us?

The Bible tells the universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation. This overarching narrative begins with one God, three persons in community, who have loved, served and enjoyed one another in perpetuity. At the center of this story are the climactic saving events of the cross and resurrection and ascension of Christ which constitute the heart of the gospel. It is this story that tells us who we are, what we are here for, and where we are going. This story of God's mission defines our identity, drives *our* mission, and assures us the ending is in God's hands.

The whole Bible reveals the mission of God to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity under Christ, reconciling them to himself and to one another through the blood of his cross. In fulfilling his mission, God will transform the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation in which there is no more sin or curse. God will fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless all nations on the earth, through the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the seed of Abraham. God will transform the fractured world of nations that are scattered under the judgment of God into the new humanity that will be redeemed by the blood of Christ from every tribe, nation, people and language, and will be gathered to worship our God and Savior. God will destroy the reign of death, corruption and violence and oppression when Christ returns to establish his eternal reign of life, justice and peace. Then God, Immanuel, will dwell with us, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever. (Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:20; Genesis 1-12; Revelation 21-22)

God calls his people to share his mission. The Church from all nations stands in continuity through the Messiah, Jesus, with God's people in the Old Testament. With them we have been called through Abraham and commissioned to be a blessing and a light to the nations. With them, we are to be shaped and taught through the law and the prophets to be a community of holiness, compassion and justice in a world of sin and suffering. We have been reconciled through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to what God has done in us and in the world through Christ. The Church exists to worship and glorify God for all eternity and to participate in the transforming mission of God within history. Our mission is wholly derived from God's mission, addresses the whole of God's creation, and is grounded at its center in the redeeming victory of the cross. This is the people to whom we belong, whose faith we confess and whose mission we share.

What does it mean at The Journey?

The local church has a responsibility to impact culture in a manner that reflects the character of God and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Journey mission describes us ***as a diverse community, centered on Jesus Christ, seeking to wholly enjoy grace, embody the love of Jesus Christ and engage culture with His truth.*** As followers of Jesus who wholly enjoy His free gift of grace, and are stirred by His sacrifice to faithfully embody love toward others, we must then live as

participants in His mission; not simply as obligated followers, but in fruitfulness of an abiding relationship with Jesus. The overwhelming reality of the grace we have received, in order that we might be reconciled to God, should catapult us toward reconciliation with others (2 Corinthians 5:14). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are commissioned beyond the local church context to proceed as a sent people, for His own possession (John 20:21, Isaiah 6:8, 1 Peter 2:9), called to be “streams of living water” wherever we go (John 7:38). The Gospel is the good news of Christ’s finished work in rescuing us from the God’s coming wrath. We are saved by believing the Gospel, and that Gospel transforms how we think and feel. Yet this “Living Word” promises to redeem, renew, and reconcile not only hearts, but lives, communities and cultures. As God the Father sent His son, Jesus then invites and *sends* us, a broken and imperfect people, to join Him as He restores, redeems and reconciles every part of culture. While only He consummates the process, we must act in faith, with our eyes upward and our trajectory outward, into our neighborhoods, communities, nation and world, armed with both word and deed that reflect the life and light of Christ, bringing glory to God our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). As the Holy Spirit works through and outside of us, He promises to simultaneously be working in us, growing us in grace and intimacy with our Savior.

The Gospel changes everything; starting inside and flowing out.

We want to be a church that is sent and sends others out into the world to be “streams of living water”, bringing blessing to the relationships and places of which we are a part.

Where must we go?

We must first go where we already are. God sent Jesus to be born into a context, a culture and among a people. His ministry began there. God, in His sovereignty, also placed us into a context--a family, a neighborhood, a workplace. This is our inaugural mission field. This is the culture we must learn to engage first, in large part because these are the places in which we spend the most time. Here we have the greatest opportunities to build relationships, identify and meet needs, and live lives that can be observed over time.

We want to be a church that disciples people toward intentional investment where they are.

As the Holy Spirit stirs and grows our passions for the people and place where we are, they should overflow and expand to contexts beyond our immediate surroundings; often first to contexts just outside of our own, and further outward over time, and sometimes in reverse order. God invites us to a broader view of His kingdom by repeatedly reminding us to make Him known in our cities, regions, and ultimately to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As followers of Jesus, we are each invited and called to participate in restorative work, both near and far. This means not only considering our connection to our immediate context but also identifying and cultivating kingdom interdependence, from neighborhoods to nations, as together, we pursue salvation and flourishing for all who bear His image.

We want to be a church made up of disciples whose love for their contexts overflows into a love for those beyond it, seeing themselves as participants in God's global mission.

How must we go?

With Prayer

As we join God in His work of restoring, we must follow Christ's example of ongoing communication with the Father. Entering into the brokenness, hardship, injustice and spiritual blindness of others and of our culture can be overwhelming to the point of paralysis. We must draw our hope and strength from the one who has already overcome the world (John 16:33). As we seek scriptural guidance for wisdom and frameworks for bringing healing to brokenness, our prayers will be more aligned with God's plan for redemption, restoration and reconciliation. If we are not committed to intentional prayer, our own preferences and comfort will guide our engagement of culture rather than God's design for human flourishing (1 Chronicles 16:11, Proverbs 3:5-6, Colossians 4:2).

We want to be a church who devotes ourselves to intentional prayer and prioritizes prayer as our most powerful resource in engaging culture.

With Love

In His earthly ministry, Jesus drew near to those in proximity to him and cultivated a love for them that included a knowledge of both the individuals with which he was in relationship, but also the place of which he was a part. He drew near, and continues to draw near, in intimacy, with His beloved. In order to effectively Engage Culture, love must be the antecedent and the impetus; Not a general and generic love, but one specific to a people and/or a place, that drives us into deep relationships that overflow and impact how we see understand God and how we engage with the world around us.

We want to be a church that possesses and demonstrates a genuine love for the people and place to which He has called us.

With Contextual Accuracy

Loving a people and place requires study of it, seeking to know and understand its complexities, past, present, hopes, fears, beliefs and objections. In Acts 17, Paul relentlessly studies the cultural context of Athens. He studies their way of life in an effort to better understand the people to which he's been called. In seeking to know them, he looks at their behaviors but also beyond them to compassionately investigate their motivations, their deepest longings, and their most pertinent questions. When we participate in this cultural exegesis, we are better equipped to identify both the beauty and the brokenness before us and respond in Gospel-centered *and* contextualized ways.

We want to be church that encourages ongoing learning about the people and the contexts to which God has called us.

With Cultural Humility and Repentance

As we pursue understanding of contexts and cultures not our own, our aim should be that of humility rather than competency (Philippian 2:3-5). Even in an effort to better understand people and environments outside ours, we must actively resist the urge to feel and behave as if we have arrived at cultural understanding. Rather, we must see cultural humility as a permanent posture beginning with self-evaluation, examination and the recognition that even with the very best intentions, the impact of our own cultures is pervasive and sometimes even hurtful to others.

We must enter contexts having considered that our history is ripe with patterns of both systemic and individual sins against one another. These sins have left a legacy of pain, anger, distrust, guilt and shame, particularly in the Church. These consequences have resulted in a compromised witness to the unbelieving world. It is impossible to predict *all* of the ways that these sins and pains have created barriers in the relationships we want to pursue. Yet, considering this will help to curb our assumptions, make us more slow to speak and quick to listen.

These reflections and interactions should lead us to identify and repent of our implicit biases, blind spots and overt prejudices toward fellow image bearers. They should also lead us to repent of our sins of unforgiveness and vengeance toward those fellow image bearers who have sinned against us. Scripture convicts that reconciliation with members in the body of Christ must be a priority, even before we seek to worship and participate in religious practices (Matthew 5:21-25, Hosea 6:6, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 12:7). Willingness to confess, admit wrong, and acknowledge the hurt we have caused to both God and our fellow man is a priority to God (Proverbs 28:13, James 5:16). Reconciliation must also be sought with a posture of humility and a motivation of love rather than vengeance or obligation. (Proverbs 10:12, Galatians 6:1-5, and Ephesians 4:1-3, 25, 29-31). This two-way transaction is a process whereby the offender humbly admits wrongdoing and seeks forgiveness and the offended releases their right to seek ultimate punishment for the one who has sinned against them.

Exposure to other cultures can be a means of God's grace in our lives, for as we interact with more of His image bearers we can better understand them, ourselves and most importantly, the character of God Himself.

We want to be church that enters into the cultures of others with curiosity and humility, never behaving or responding as if our learning is complete. Rather, we want to regularly examine ourselves, consider and repent of the unconscious and conscious sins we bring to every context.

With Others and "the Other"

By God's design, the work of "engaging culture" is as much about our own ongoing sanctification and spiritual growth as it is about those with which we are engaging. Therefore intentional inclusion of others in the body of Christ and more specifically, in the local body of believers, will result in better and broader outcomes than anything thing we can do as individuals (Ephesians 4:15-16). While it is not always easier to include those who are different than we are, the diversity of our personalities, experiences, cultures, and perspectives will enrich our experiences and likely, our effectiveness.

By nature, we are partial to our own comfort, interests and preferences and prone to conflict with those who are different than us (Romans 3: 23, 24, James 4:1-2, Deuteronomy 16:19). So while we may *desire* for our community to reflect the diversity of the kingdom of Heaven, our natural tendencies tempt us toward the sins of exclusivity and selfishness. These predispositions and preferences tempt us to commune with those that are most like ourselves and exclude those whose differences make us uncomfortable. However, we believe that because of the person and work of Jesus, people from *all* groups have been ransomed and redeemed by the power of the Gospel (Galatians 3:28, Revelation 5:9) Diversity, in this case, becomes not only an end, but rather, a means by which we celebrate the most beautiful part of God's creation. It is a platform from which we connect with the people dwelling in the communities surrounding our local church. At its core, diversity is one means by which we demonstrate to the world the redeeming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We want to be a church in which collective efforts to engage culture are prioritized and preferred to individual ones, but out of which individual relationships are formed.

We want to be a church that intentional pursues diversity of giftedness, background, and perspective in every context. We want to be a church that intentionally pursues diverse inclusion, where people of many racial, cultural, and socioeconomic groups experience authentic relationships, empowered participation, leadership, and a true sense of belonging.

With Affirmation and Confrontation

When we begin to look more closely at the contexts to which God has called us, we must ask the Holy Spirit to train our eyes to see individuals and cultures as He does, and respond out of that wisdom. Because God's law is written on the hearts of each individual (Romans 2:14-15) yet we are all marred by sin, every human being and thus, every human culture contains both elements that need to be affirmed and others that must be confronted. Each "is an extremely complex mixture of brilliant truth, marred half-truths and over resistance to the truth. Every culture will have some idolatrous discourse within it. And yet every culture will have some witness to God's truth in it." (Tim Keller, *Loving the City*, p.51) Therefore we should actively recognize, celebrate and affirm the beauty, insights and expressions that are reflections of their creator, God, in every context we enter. Simultaneously we must actively recognize, grieve and be willing to confront the specific distortions of the Gospel that are an impediment to their true flourishing.

We want to be a church whose stance toward culture is one of palpable enjoyment and wise dissent.

What must we do?

Gospel Proclamation, Justice and Mercy, and Cultivation and Creation are all necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor, and our obedience to Jesus Christ and integral aspects of our faith in Him. As we participate with Christ who is building his Kingdom here and now, we do so with hopeful expectation for the day that he returns to reign with justice and righteousness in His eternal Kingdom. As we encounter and pursue our fellow image

bearers, love them, grow in our knowledge of them and their context, we have the opportunity to respond to the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit who sees clearly the needs of all involved, including us. It is Him who promises to work with and through our time, talents and treasure to renew and restore all things to Himself.

We want to be a church that proclaims the Gospel, pursues mercy and justice, and brings cultivation and creativity to our “work”, that sees each of these as fruit of those abiding in the Vine (John 15:4) and disciples our people toward them.

Gospel Proclamation

Gospel Proclamation, or *evangelism*, is the communication of the Gospel (the good news of the cosmic victory of God’s salvation, accomplished through the life and work of Christ) with an aim to convince the listener.

We see the foretelling of this proclamation in the Old Testament. With the election of Israel through the promises made to Abraham, God foretells that salvation for the nations will come through Israel (Genesis 12:1-3). Though Israel was called to relate to other nations through a “come and see” paradigm in which they showed the love and care of God through physical, emotional, and spiritual reconciliation, they were to explicitly proclaim the glory of God to the nations around them (Exodus 19:6). The proclamation of coming salvation is most clearly exemplified in the prophecies of Isaiah (40:9-11; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1), as he predicts the fullness of redemption for both Israel and the nations that will come through the messiah. This understanding of “good news” is the foundation for the term “gospel” as it is used in the New Testament.

In the Gospels, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom and the victory foretold in the Old Testament, is imminent and is coming through his fulfillment of the messiah role. In his life, death, and resurrection he IS the good news, the proof of victory over sin, death, and hell, and the declaration of all that is to come in his consummating return. The church is given the explicit command to proclaim this good news to both Jews and Gentiles, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), and Jesus’ teaching denotes world evangelism as a reality that will occur between his initial coming and his future return (Matthew 24:14/Mark 13:10; Matthew 26:13/Mark 14:9).

We want to be a church who proclaims the Gospel as a rhythm of life, in ways planned and spontaneous, to our friends, families, neighbors, and the strangers we come across.

Justice and Mercy

As our knowledge and love of others grows and deepens, and we seek to discern spiritual need, we will inevitably encounter physical needs. The same love that propels us to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus must then drive us to seek the physical flourishing of those we encounter.

Justice is used to describe two Hebrew words in scripture. The first, *mishpat*, is repeated across the Old Testament, and translates most simply into treating people equitably and giving people what they are due, whether it be, protection, punishment, care, or rights. (Isaiah 61:8a, Proverbs 31:8, Jeremiah 22:3, Psalm 68:4-5) The second Hebrew word used, and often accompanying *mishpat*, is *tzadeqah*, and can be described as being right with God and therefore committed to putting right all other relationships in life. This kind of justice is sometimes described as “primary” justice, because if it was widely and rightly applied, it would render *mishpat*, or “rectifying” justice unnecessary.

Ultimate **justice** and freedom from oppression can only be found in the gospel, yet God calls us to live justly here on earth, to “correct” oppression, and pursue **justice** for those who cannot do so themselves. (Luke 4:18-19, Ephesians 2:14-16, Isaiah 1:16-17, John 17:23). Though we are ALL inclined to prioritize our own interest, it is the “underprivileged” and “underrepresented” that are most vulnerable to oppression and injustice, while those with social power that are challenged to take the largest share of responsibility because injustice negatively impacts all of us, not ONLY the oppressed. (Zechariah 7:10, Luke 12:48b, Proverb 29:4) Scripture calls us to share God’s **mercy**, His special concern for those in human society who are especially vulnerable to mistreatment, both individual and systemic. As such, we are instructed to walk humbly, seek justice, correct oppression, and work to restore dignity to the marginalized until Christ’s return. Scripture specifically highlights widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor as the most vulnerable in those societies, and continue to be in ours (James 1:27, Isaiah 1:17, 1 Timothy 5:1-6, Psalm 68:5, James 2:14-17).

We want to be a church made up of people who do justice, as an ethic of life; who live in right relationships with their neighbors, but also seek to make wrong things right for those who have been oppressed, abused and marginalized.

Cultivation and Creativity

A desire for the holistic flourishing of individuals and communities should also motivate our desires to steward well our world, and the gifts and talents we possess that can serve to make it better. *Culture* can be defined as what people make of the world. God is both a Creator and a Cultivator. In His creation, we see His particular value for uniqueness, diversity and beauty. Yet the care, precision and interdependence with which He formed and placed each part of creation highlights His value for order. Daily He cultivates our world, tending and nourishing what is good, and weeding out what brings harm.

In Genesis 1, God gave Adam dominion over the earth and invited him to participate in both the cultivation and creativity that would continue to point to the splendor of the One whose image we bear. Followers of Jesus must seek to be image-bearers in this respect as well, mirroring the Father’s intentions. When we are attentive to where we are, what is there and what we bring, our posture toward our “work” can be purposeful. We are invited to tend and nourish what is best in our culture, approaching the world not as consumers, or even as custodians, but as those who have something worthwhile to contribute. Our ability to be creative and to cultivate, using our gifts and talents, are evidence of His kindness and example. When we make something of the world He gave us, we participate in His redeeming work and bring God glory.

We want to be a church who promotes and encourages cultivation and creation as a posture toward our gifts, talents and work. We want to be a community made up of people whose joy in their “work” is palpable and contagious and who intentionally seek to make much of what they have been given.

We want to be a church that desperately longs for the flourishing of all those who bear the image of God and the restoration of the world where we dwell.

Resources:

Bradley, Anthony B., “What is Your Salvation For?”

Coleman, Robert, *Master Plan for Evangelism*

Crouch, Andy, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling*

Crump, Leonce, *Renovate*

DeYoung, Kevin and Gilbert, Greg, *What is the Mission of the Church?*

Greear, J.D., *Gaining By Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*

Keller, Timothy, *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*

Keller, Timothy, *Loving the City*

Keller, Timothy, *The Prodigal Prophet*

Stetzer, Ed, “Exegete Your Culture: 10 Checkpoints for Knowing and Reaching Your Culture”

