

A GOSPEL VISION FOR ALL PEOPLE

Acts 1:6–8

It is great to be here with you. Things look much different from the last time I was here several years ago in the old building. I have to tell you at the beginning, I love your pastor. I enjoy every time I am able to be with Mark as he is so focused on fulfilling the Great Commission. I love the mission Christ has given us. I love this. This is what I get to do as part of EveryEthne every single day with pastors and churches across North America.

This morning I want to give a large overview of the how God is moving in the world and how He wants all of us to be involved. My goal this morning is simple: **I WANT TO EXPAND YOUR VISION FOR PERSONAL GOSPEL INFLUENCE.** This is something we all need from time to time. We need to zoom back to see the big picture of how God is moving and then zoom in to see how we are meant to play a role in it. Prayerfully, I have hope to encourage you to celebrate how the Lord has used you in His mission as well as take steps towards more faithfulness in what He desires from you.

Here is one thing I want to remind you at the beginning. Pastor Mark is awesome. He is not the leader of this church. In my conversations with him, I'm pretty sure he doesn't want to be the leader of this church. Do you know who is? Jesus is! He told Peter in Matthew 16, "*I will build My Church.*" On the shoulders of the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus has, is, and will continue to build His church. I love the church. Even in all its brokenness and disorder, I love what He is building.

I pastored for 18 years and now get to serve on the NA team of ABWE. The vision of our **EVERYETHNĒ** team is to see people from every ethnic group in a life changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Some new numbers just came out and there are 525 different ethnic groups in the U.S. & 611 if you include Canada. And our vision is that we can help some from every one of them be faithful followers of Jesus.

Can I be honest? We do not believe we can accomplish this. But we do believe the church can. Therefore, our mission is to mobilize the church to reach every ethnic group in North America through disciple making that multiplies leaders and churches. What we love to do more than anything else is to come alongside churches like yours to walk with you in any way we can to expand your impact in your community and then to the world.

I do not know if you know this, but the church in North America is not what it once was. We have felt that. Churches are closing at record rates. Young people who once

identified with Jesus are no longer identifying with Him. In a report that was published in 2019 called “The Great Opportunity”, it is estimated that from 2020 to 2050, there will be over 35 million young people who are raised in a Christian home who will no longer identify themselves as Christian.

If this happens, it will represent the largest generational loss of faith in American history and possibly ever in the world. Think about that. This means that for the next 30 years, there could be over 97k every month / 3,200 every day / 133 every hour who say they no longer wish to identify with Jesus and His people. I have no doubt as millennials have left the church in droves and the Gen Z are doing so as we speak, that it has impacted many of you. Your children who once prayed at your tables and studied the Bible in your Sunday schools do not care about Jesus. Your grandchildren have not been to church in weeks or months or soon won't be attending.

I hope this sobering reality grips us personally. Not just from nostalgia of wanting things back to what it once was . . . but because of deep love and care for your family, community, and country. We can no longer view our country as a Christian Nation. It is probably not even Post-Christian. It is secular at best. It is time to start thinking about ministry in North America as a mission field.

I am convinced that when Jesus says those words in Matthew 16 to His disciples, they had no idea what was in store for them. Their hope in this pronouncement was that He was going to restore Jerusalem and Israel to their prominence. He was going to initiate the Kingdom right then and there.

But not long after this, the unexpected happens. Jesus is betrayed by those closest to Him. He is executed on a cross and laid in tomb. Dead. The One who said He is going to build His Church is now dead. We are fortunate of knowing what happens; they didn't. The doubt and confusion would have been real for these men. But then the impossible happens. The resurrection. Everything changes for these men when Jesus rises from the dead. Hope. Faith. Courage. Boldness. Passion. Their fear is turned into resolve, and they now believe Jesus is ready to fulfill that promise of building His church. But there's one more surprise Jesus has for those who follow Him. Ready for this? How is Jesus going to build His Church?

JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH THROUGH THE BOLD WITNESS OF HIS FOLLOWERS WHO LIVE IN SUBMISSION TO HIS SPIRIT (2X).

After rising from the dead, Jesus spends 40 days teaching, training, and instructing His followers with a few last truths before He leaves them again. Of course, the most famous we have labeled the Great Commission . . .

📖 *Matthew 28:18–20* → “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

📖 *Mark 16:15* → “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’”

📖 *John 20:21* → “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”

Jesus is saying that He is going to build His church through the bold witness of His followers. The church will grow through the faithful stewardship of Jesus’ followers. Please do not miss this. All these commissions are to those who follow Jesus. They are not given as a general statement to “The Church.” I say that because they are still applicable to every one of His followers today. To you. To me.

The Great Commission is NOT just something that Allendale Baptist Church does as an institution. It is something the church fulfills because each member of the church is actively part of it. Friends, Jesus will build His church at Allendale through your faithful and bold proclamation of the gospel to those who do not know Him. Every plumber, teacher, salesperson, stay at home mom, and pastor are part of this calling.

Now, these three gospel accounts help us see the plan of Jesus. The other gospel account, Luke’s gospel, does not really have a commission, at least in book one. The follow up book to Luke’s Gospel, book two, is known as Acts, gives us the commission he lacks in his first account. And now we have finally made it to Acts 1.

📖 *Acts 1:6–9* (open & read)

These are the last words from Jesus to His followers. His plan was to build the church through the faithful witness of the gospel in their life. His plan IS to build the church through the faithful witness of the gospel in our life.

There are a few important things to note here. **First, The Followers of Jesus Need the Holy Spirit.** Think about this. These men had all the information, but they had no power. They had the message, but no influence. The power for gospel influence only happens when they are indwelt and filled with the Spirit of God. This is what happens in the next chapter of Acts when the Spirit of God comes at Pentecost and Peter stands up to preach and thousands come to faith in Jesus, are baptized, and then added to the church. Throughout the rest of the book, Christ builds His church as His followers are in tune with and submitting to His Spirit.

And let me say that not much has changed. Christ still builds His church through His people who are filled with His Spirit. It feels like every day I find myself more in need to depend upon the Spirit of God in all things. The Apostle Paul tells us repeatedly . . .

📖 *“Walk by the Spirit...”* (Gal 5:16)

📖 *“Live by the Spirit . . . keep in step with the Spirit.”* (Gal 5:25)

📖 *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God”* (Eph 4:30)

📖 *“Be filled with the Spirit.”* (Eph 5:18)

📖 *“Do not quench the Spirit.”* (1 Thess 5:19)

We could keep going. But the reality is that we so often do not live in dependence on the Spirit for our daily Christian walk, let alone for the mission Jesus has for us! I like to think of the Spirit’s impact in my life in this way . . . Have you ever been talking to someone or been thinking about someone and had any thoughts similar to this . . .

- *“I wonder if they know Jesus.”*
- *“I should invite them over for dinner.”*
- *“I should pray for them or pray for you NOW.”*
- *“Do they need some financial assistance?”*
- *“I wonder if I could serve them in some way?”*

Do you think these thoughts are from the enemy of God? No. WHEN THOUGHTS OF GODLY ACTIONS COME INTO OUR MIND, IT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD prodding us . . . leading us . . . into mission. It does not mean it will be easy. It does not mean we will not endure embarrassment or some sort of persecution. But it does mean that we will be walking in step with the Spirit of God in our life in the mission He has for us.

What gospel impact will you make in the life of a person if you walk in step with the Spirit of God, asking Him daily what you should do in your neighborhoods, in your work, in your entertainment in life? I’m going to share more towards the end of the sermon, but this is part of one of the trainings we do at churches and will be doing for your church in the coming months. We want to mobilize followers of Jesus to create a culture of gospel influence where they live, work, and play. Why? To give every man, woman, and child repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel.

Every follower of Jesus needs the Holy Spirit. **Second, The Followers of Jesus Need To Embrace Discomfort.** We read in vs. 8 that their witness would be in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. You have heard and seen how this progression of gospel influence takes place by these followers of Jesus. Let me briefly unpack this for us.

JERUSALEM = “PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKE YOU WHO LIVE CLOSE TO YOU.” → To these men, Jerusalem was their city. The city of David. A predominantly Jewish city. This was

where they thought Jesus was going to set up the Kingdom. That's what they are thinking in vs. 6 when they ask Him if the time has come. They are good Jews, ready for the promises to their Father Abraham and David to be fulfilled.

Their mission first was to their local community. It was to their friends and families. Jerusalem has come to represent to us a local community. This is what happens after Jesus ascends into heaven. The disciples huddle up in a room in Jerusalem waiting for the power of the Spirit to come upon them.

When that happens in Acts 2, the church is born. Peter preaches and we are told that 3,000 souls are added to the church. That's quite a day. That day is followed up with another great sermon by Peter in Acts 3 when several more thousand are added to the church in Jerusalem. People are getting saved; their lives are being changed. They are making an impact in their local communities.

📖 Acts 6:7 → *“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”*

Acts 2—7 is the record of the gospel influence spreading in Jerusalem. *BEFORE THEY COULD REACH THE WORLD, THEY HAD TO REACH THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY* (2x). They take the gospel to those who are like them who live close to them. They reach their neighbors and coworkers and friends with the gospel.

Illustration of Global Missions vs. Dying American Churches

- Just check out this picture that came across my feed on Twitter the other day.
- It's sad. But true.
- The caveat is that it doesn't mean we do not engage in international missions. We need to do that. More and more. We need to continue taking the gospel to those around the world who do not know. So don't think I'm showing you this as an excuse to only do missions here in the western world. I'm not.
- However, many churches in the western world are getting away from the reality that reaching a local community enables a church to expand globally. We get away from it. Why? Maybe it is too difficult. Maybe we are lazy. Maybe we have never understood the gospel ourselves, but just love religious activity. I don't know for sure, but here is what I can tell you for certain. If *Allendale Baptist Church* does not reach your local community, eventually you will not be able to reach the world.

Let me as gently and humbly as possible make what may be considered a bold statement: There are too many churches whose people were at one time a gospel influence in their local communities who no longer make an impact. Their baptismal is dry. Their discipleship ministries are outdated. They live in the past. People do not visit their church any longer. They could shut their doors and the community would never

miss them. May this never be true of this church. Remember that report I talked about earlier: 35 million leaving the church in the next 30 years. They get to the end of their analysis along with some potential solutions and they some fears they have regarding the church in the United States. I echo this last fear. Just listen friends and be moved . . .

“Our greatest concern is that the problem is not our problem. That the loss of so many from a life with Christ is God’s judgement on weak churches and a corrupt culture. That those who leave were never truly followers of Jesus, and the way is narrow. That as long as my family, or at least most of them, make it onto the ark, let the flood take the world. It is a hard heartedness. It is a people whose hearts do not break for the lost, for a world that God so loved that He spared not even His own son for it. We worry greatly that in a time of polarization of echo chambers and fearful rage, that we have forgotten how to love the world. We wonder what our church today would look like if Edwards, Wesley, Whitefield, Asbury, Allen, Seymour, or Graham had harder hearts. We wonder if our love has grown not so much cold as defensive and inward.”

Please listen very closely. I joyfully do this job with EveryEthne because I long to see churches in North America be beacons of light in an ever-dimming culture. As they reach their local communities with the gospel, the message expands beyond their local barriers. We cannot live comfortable lives. Follow the example of Jesus who did not regard equality with God something to be grasped (phil 2). We must reject the god of comfort. Sometimes, God does that for us, He refuses to let us get comfortable.

This is what happened for the early church. In Acts 6, Stephen is arrested. In Acts 7, he is killed. Stephen becomes the first Christian Martyr. This then leads to an all-out persecution on the church.

📖 Acts 8:1 → *“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.”*

Where did they go? Judea and Samaria. While reaching your local community, the gospel begins to extend beyond your comfort.

Judea = “People in your region.” → This is having a vision for your region. Your city. Your county. Your state. It takes great intentionality to develop a vision beyond the walls of your church to think larger for how God wants to use you in His mission.

Samaria = “People who are not like you who live close to you.” → I do not have to tell you about the ways Jews & Samaritans felt about each other. They hated each other. And yet the gospel was to go to them. Their gospel impact was to go to all races, all skin colors, all ethnicities, all peoples.

We still have a Samaritan problem in our churches today. We still do not do a great job

of reaching people who may live close to us that are not like us. We want our preferences the way we want them. We want to feel comfortable, even in our worship.

As of 2021, there were 45.3 million people in the U.S. who were considered immigrants. This is 13.6% of the population, which is 3x higher than in 1970. This is documented immigrants. There is estimated another 11.4 million undocumented¹ In addition, it is estimated that about 22% of the people in the U.S. speak a language other than English in their homes. It is estimated that by 2050, English will be a minority language in the U.S. Already, 54% in Los Angeles; 51% in Miami; 40% in San Francisco; 38% in NY speak a language other than English in their homes.

How about closer to home? Did you know that Grand Valley State University has over 500 international students from over 60 countries? Did you know that over 10% of the population in Grand Rapids are immigrants? Spanish is spoken regularly in many of these homes. In fact, of those immigrants, many come from Mexico, Guatemala, Vietnam, Bosnia, and the Dominican Republic. Expand it out from your city and you find over 630k immigrants living in Michigan? Do you want to reach the world, drive over to Deeborn. The world is there.

And these are just ethnic differences. There are so many more differences. Social differences. Economic differences. Religious differences. There is a gospel heart attitude that looks at someone who is not like you and says, *“I love you, and value you, and desire for you to follow King Jesus.”* This is what the disciples were called to. This is what we are called to in the abandonment of our comfort. Sometimes God does not wait for us but forces us out of our comfort zones. He works in some unique ways.

In the book of Acts, He used persecution to spread the gospel beyond the walls of Jerusalem. From Acts 8–11:17, we see the gospel go to the Samaritans. But then in 11:18—28, we see the gospel go to the ends of the earth as they knew it.

End of the Earth = *“People who are not like you who do not live close to you.”* The gospel influence extends to the entire world. I pray as Jesus builds His church, He uses something to move us beyond the walls of our buildings. I pray the church infiltrates every aspect of social and economic life in our country and beyond.

This is what we normally think of as missions. There is still a major need. We need more people to go to those places where the gospel has not yet been preached. All of us should be praying and expecting that some young people at our church sense God’s call to GO to the nations. Encourage that. Promote that. Let people know that church planting in all the world is a viable and worthy effort to give your life to. Do you know how that happens? It happens by reaching your Jerusalem FIRST!

¹ <https://usafacts.org/topics/immigration-border-security>

Our team at **EVERYETHNĒ** desires for all churches here in North America to think about the world, who is here and there. This is what we have experienced. Churches close and missionaries come home from the field. They close because they are no longer reaching their communities with the gospel. They have little gospel impact or influence locally. They write checks, which is great. But they are not sharing the gospel themselves. They are not building relationships with those far from Jesus. They are not engaging the lost. They are dying.

So how do you do it? How does a church live and engage more missionally in their community? Well, I'm glad you asked. I hope you are in town on Sunday, September 17th as I get the opportunity to come back again and walk you through MyCircle Training. For some of you, it will be a reminder. A refresher on what it looks like to engage those God has put in your life.

I can't wait to come back. See you soon.