

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JANUARY 13TH-14TH, 2024 // VISION

## FOLLOW ME (MATTHEW 4:18-22)

Whenever Jesus issued an invitation, it wasn't just an invitation to believe—it was also an invitation to follow Him as a student (disciple).

- Jesus' invitation was to imitate and follow Him, to be transformed by Him, and to join Him in His mission on earth.
- When Jesus ascended into heaven, He commissioned His followers to continue that same mission. Jesus tells His disciples in Matt. 28:19–20 to go, make more disciples, baptize, and teach people to do all the things He commanded.
- The Church ("ecclesia") is built upon disciples of Jesus practicing radical obedience to these commands of Jesus—to imitate, obey, and follow Him; to be transformed by Him; and to actively participate together as His people in this mission of making disciples of all nations.

## WHAT WENT WRONG? FOR SOME, CHURCH IS...

A once-a-week service or show to consume (we don't "go" to church; we ARE the church).

- A clique, country club, or civic organization (the focus can never be just on us: we must be thinking of those outside these walls).
- A place to circle the wagons, talk about how bad the unbelieving world is, and how we're the only ones doing it right (we must be GROWING spiritually).

## IT ISN'T WORKING.

For the first time in American history, less than half of Americans now claim to belong to a church.

- Since the 1990s, the number of Americans who have identified themselves as atheists, agnostics, or religious "nones" has risen from 8% to 29%.
- Thousands of churches close their doors every year, and only around 4% of the upcoming generation (Gen Z) appear to have a biblical worldview.

## SOMETHING HAS TO CHANGE!

How we're doing church as Americans is not working—the consumeristic, preference-driven, "once-a-week" event model is leading to the rapid and dramatic decline of American Christianity.

- Do you care enough to change how you join in with Jesus' vision for His Church?
- Are you a consumer? Or are you a disciple?
- Are you contributing and being a part of Jesus' vision?

## A SIMPLE VISION...

- The Experience Community creates authentic disciples of Jesus Christ through Authentic Worship, Authentic Community, and Authentic Community Service.

## WHAT WE DO

### WE MAKE DISCIPLES THROUGH...

Expository Bible teaching—verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter.

- Encouraging and practicing benevolence (20% of our campus budget given away, 30% of ECC Network budget).
- Community-minded—we serve in various outreaches and support local non-profits, schools, police/fire department/first responders (Matt. 5:16).
- Intentional disciple-making—we want everyone to go through our Following Jesus and Authentic Discipleship classes and be in a Life Group.
- Authenticity and Simplicity—we strive to be sincere, honest, real, and keep things uncomplicated.
- Pushing people out of their comfort zones in a biblical way—if you never want to serve, give, or grow, you are probably not going to be happy here.

## OUTSIDE THESE WALLS

### OUR COMMUNITY

- S2L, Lion's Club, WeCareCannon, Child Advocacy Center, S.A.V.E., Gideon's, Cannon County Food Bank, Church benevolence requests, Generations of Woodbury, Cannon County Rescue Squad, 5,000 Ministry, CASA, Forgotten Initiative.
- Local outreach events: Community Cleaning Day, WeCareCannon, Fall Festival, Experience Christmas.
- Folks from our church were responsible for ministering to and baptizing 43 inmates at the Cannon County jail in 2023!

### OUR STATE

- Murfreesboro (2009), Cannon County (2017), Shelbyville (2021), Tullahoma (2023)
- M.I.T., finances, and organization

### OUR NATION

- Hope Church (Seaford, DE), City Church (Albany, NY), Garden City (Beverly, MA)
- We plan on taking two trips in 2024

### OUR WORLD

- El Salvador: ministry to elementary-age kids. Two trips in 2024
- Guatemala: One trip in 2024.
- Eastern Europe: EEM, and we are trying to find churches to partner with in Europe
- We also support missionaries in Haiti, Thailand, South Africa, and Egypt

Everyone on our leadership team (staff & elders) is godly, trustworthy, wise, biblically sound, and Spirit-filled.

- Our church is growing. As one pastor, I cannot possibly be in all places at all times.
- Our staff and elders are here to lovingly lead and serve you as we seek to follow Jesus together. Let them lead you, pray for you, and let them serve you.

## GROWTH THIS YEAR AT OUR CAMPUS...

In a year's time, our campus went from a weekend average attendance of 550 to 750 (we're growing already in 2024, 785 last weekend).

- This has created challenges for parking, sanctuary seating, and children's ministry (particularly on Sunday mornings, especially at the 10 am).
- We're now at five weekend services and we struggle every week with enough volunteers to serve.

## GROWTH THIS YEAR...

The Murfreesboro campus is completely capped—they're out of space in parking and in all areas of

their building, and they can't add another service.

- We're praying about and looking to add another campus toward McMinnville—frankly, if we are struggling to find volunteers at our campus there is no way we can support another one.
- Something has to give.

## CHURCH FINANCES & NUMBERS

### WHY TALK ABOUT MONEY & THE NUMBERS?

- "...it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." 1 Cor. 4:2, ESV
- We (staff, elders, and leadership) are accountable to YOU for how we invest the money you give—we want to provide financial transparency.

## ACROSS ALL EXPERIENCE CAMPUSES

- 2024 Budget: \$13,000,000. Network and Murfreesboro: \$9,644,539. Cannon County: \$781,064. Tullahoma: \$825,801. Shelbyville: \$426,475. Overall staffing: 35% of total budget. Overall benevolence: 30% of total (\$3,892,627). We're debt-free at all four campuses!

## CANNON COUNTY

- Annual Budget for 2024: \$781,064
- Administration: \$407,668 (all staff salaries, benefits, payroll taxes, childcare, custodial crew, etc.)
- Operations: \$81,387 (utilities, maintenance, technology, office equipment/supplies, etc.)

## ANNUAL BUDGET FOR 2024: \$781,064

- Ministry Expenses: \$97,926 (equipment, supplies, audio/video hardware & software, volunteer meals, Life Group resources, hospitality supplies, Security Team, pastoral expenses, ECCO, student ministry, etc.).
- Benevolence/Missions: \$ 194,082 (20%); Local nonprofits, community outreach, church benevolence requests, and missionaries/mission projects.

## ATTENDANCE (CHILDREN & ADULTS):

- Last quarter of 2023: 750 avg, a week in person
- Online: 1,050 subscribers on YouTube and 49,872 views last year
- **TOTAL NUMBER IN LIFE GROUPS:** 144 adults, 26% involved in a Life Group, 40–50% is the goal
- **TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:** 306 adults, 55% volunteering regularly\*, 60–75% is the goal
- \*Probably closer to 200–220, 36–40%

## GIVING

- 2023 Total Giving: \$970,413
- 80% of what was given stayed at this campus, but because we're financially connected with the entire ECC Network as one church, any giving beyond what we have budgeted goes to help The Experience as a whole.
- Giving per person: \$1,336 (national average is \$2,300 per person).

## CONCERNING TRENDS: SERVING AND GIVING.

Discipleship is the goal: biblically, a byproduct of true discipleship is always giving and serving.

- The call of Jesus and the biblical way to do church is to give your life away, die to self, and live on mission.
- The fact that our campus gives the least per person out of any ECC campus is an indictment on our leadership—and I'm sorry.

## WHY SERVE?

Jesus came to serve (Lk. 22:24–27), Jesus modeled serving, and Jesus commanded us to serve (John 13).

- Greatness in the Kingdom of God looks like putting others' needs ahead of our own, dying to our selves, and giving our lives for Jesus' mission.
- We all have different gifts, and we are all in different seasons, but we all can serve (Volunteer Fair).

## WHY GIVE?

An important spiritual practice is regularly giving to God through supporting the ministry of the local church through tithes (10% of our income) and offerings (anything beyond 10%).

- Regularly giving reflects a grateful heart that wants to give back to God a portion of what He has given us; in reality, everything is already His. Giving regularly is our opportunity to trust God with our finances.

## THE CHALLENGE

### WHO THIS CHURCH IS FOR...

- People from all walks of life, all religious backgrounds, people burnt out from church, people who want something different than the status quo and are simply seeking to know Jesus
- Those who are hungry to know Jesus and are seeking to live the kind of life He invites us to live
- Those who are seeking to grow, serve, give, and actually BE a disciple of Jesus

### WHO THIS CHURCH ISN'T FOR...

- Religious consumers who have no desire to contribute, serve, or give and get offended when they're asked to step up and live like Jesus
- Those who have no desire to live biblically and simply want a once-a-week event that has little to no relevance on their everyday life
- Those who simply are not interested in Jesus' mission to be a disciple who makes disciples

## WE ALL MUST TAKE A STEP OF OBEDIENCE.

- We have reached the limit of what we can do as paid staff, elders, and current volunteers to address these challenges—we now need more of you to step up and join this mission.
- If this is your church home, get disciplined, serve, and give. There's a community that needs Jesus.
- Do you care enough to change how you join in with Jesus' vision for His Church?

## WHAT YOU CAN DO.

- Be present and make church a priority.
- Don't just attend; get involved in our discipleship process because it will help you grow, mature, and connect with other people.
- Join us in the 40-Day Fast (starts Monday)!
- Prayerfully consider tithing as an act of worship and obedience.
- Serve—come out to our Volunteer Fair coming up!