

LEADING IN A CHANGING CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Churches are changing but not necessarily for the better. If the typical church were to go to a hospital's emergency room, the attending physician would likely admit it to the hospital and put it on life support. Churches all across America are struggling. Some are plateaued and in decline, while others are in the last stages of dying.

Data: Proverbs 4: 5-7

- 5 Get wisdom, get understanding:
Forget *it* not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.
- 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee:
Love her, and she shall keep thee.
- 7 Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom:
And with all thy getting get understanding.

One in four Black Americans claim they are atheist, agnostic, or no faith at all.

Acknowledge Opportunities & Challenges

- Overwhelmingly, Black adults are familiar with and grateful for the Black Church, describing their experiences as safe, important and comforting. Roughly one-third, however, tends to see the Black Church as “old-fashioned” rather than “fresh” or “stifling” rather than “liberating.”
- Though Christianity and faith practice among Black U.S. adults trend higher than among all U.S. adults or white adults, affiliation and practice are still on the decline.
- Gaps emerge in the data between older (Gen X, Boomers) and younger (Millennials, Gen Z) Black Christians on everything from church attendance to views of God and confidence in scripture.
- Almost one in five Black adults is “dechurched.” Black Church pastors assume people may distance from church because of programming options or differences in preferences for worship. But questions about integrity or the purpose of churchgoing are bigger problems for the unchurched.

Take Time to Reflect

- What is your church most known for among people who don't attend your church? Is it congruent with perceptions of the Black Church at large? What adjectives might someone use to describe your church's worship experience or community presence?
- Have you witnessed downward trends in Christian affiliation or church attendance in your own community? What social or cultural forces, at large or in the Black community, do you feel might contribute to declining faith? What are you doing locally to confront, combat or explore these trends?
- Even if your pews might be filled with all age groups, it takes more than listening to a sermon sitting side-by-side to create cross-generational community. In what ways does your church encourage older and younger generations to build relationships? What can different generations learn from one another? Where is the common ground?
- Is your church accessible to members of your community who don't attend church? Are you able to listen to their felt needs or concerns? How would people be most likely to discover your church, and what might their first impression be?

Determine a Next Step

- Through social media, special services, videos or church communications and emails, continue to find creative ways to compile and amplify stories of the people in your church and celebrate the impact of your ministry.
- Don't process the data alone. As you consider faith trends across the Black Church and within your own congregation, read and process the information with a group and over time. Determine the data that means something now and means something later—in other words, what do you need to urgently act on, what do you want to learn more about and what could you return to?
- Model healthy intergenerational relationships and mentorships in your own life and through your staff. This allows you to lead by example but also to apply lessons from your cross-generational experience toward groups, programs and gatherings that allow for meaningful interactions across age groups.
- Identify at least one new avenue or forum for your church to "go out" and to "bring in," with the purpose of welcoming and listening to unchurched or even dechurched members of your community. Don't forget to explore digital environments, which appeal to people of low religiosity and could deliver unexpected opportunities for connection over time.

DOCTRINE: Psalms 119: 129-136

- 129 Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.
- 130 The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
- 131 I open my mouth and pant,
longing for your commands.
- 132 Turn to me and have mercy on me,
as you always do to those who love your name.
- 133 Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.
- 134 Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may obey your precepts.
- 135 Make your face shine on your servant
and teach me your decrees.
- 136 Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed.

The Bible is God's Word, which means it supersedes culture. There are cultural differences in the Bible; however, through diligent study, believers will know how applicable it is for all people for all time.

There have been many different cultural changes since the Bible was written. There are distinct cultures in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The present-day culture is not the same as the culture during the time when the Bible was written. Since culture has changed, does that mean we should read the Bible differently?

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The Word of God as Culture Changes

The Bible is the infallible Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Everything contained within the pages of the Bible is divinely inspired. The Bible contains different time periods with different cultures, but it never changes. The Bible does not change because God never changes (Hebrews 13:8).

Even though the Bible doesn't change does not mean that culture hasn't since the time the Bible was written. There are many parts of the Bible that are hard for people to understand due to cultural differences.

There are also different cultures and time periods in the Bible. Similarly, there have been cultural changes in the present-day world, which can make the Bible difficult to read at times. Despite these changes, how can a believer read the Bible as culture evolves?

Modern Culture

- The modern 21st-century culture is focused on the self. The 21st century is infiltrated with books, movies, and social media that are all focused on the self rather than others. Before a believer reads the Bible, they have to acknowledge that the culture of the day has influenced and impacted the way they come to the Bible.
- Each person has their own distinct worldview, which influences their approach to the Bible. Each person also carries their own presuppositions with them as they read the Bible. In other words, people tend to read the Bible

with different rose-colored glasses. As believers, the goal is to read the Bible for what it actually says — not what we want it to say.

- Since modern Western culture is focused on the self, modern believers are reading the Bible with the goal of discovering passages that are relevant to them (Christopher Hall, “How Does Culture Affect the Way We Understand Scripture?”).
- Rather than reading the Bible to learn more about God, the culture is promoting a self-focused reading of the Bible. In this type of hermeneutic, God is not receiving the glory due to His name. Believers should not read the Bible with a “what can I get out of this” mentality.
- When a believer reads the Bible, the focus should be on learning about God and deepening their relationship with Him. The Bible does give believers guidance and help; however, the focus of the Bible is not on the self. The focus of the Bible is God and His glory.

Culture Changes Are Ongoing

- Changing culture is unavoidable. The culture and philosophy of the time will change in the future. Even though culture has changed and will continue to change, there is always a better way to read the Bible. As believers, we can still read the Bible no matter what the culture presently advocates or promotes.
- As established, the philosophy of the 21st-century Western world is focused on the self. Relativism permeates society today, as the key teaching of this philosophy is “whatever is true for me is the truth” and “whatever is true for you is the truth for you.”
- It would be confusing to apply this philosophy to the Bible as the Bible is the absolute truth. There are no different meanings of the Bible.

Culture and Hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and biblical hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of the Bible. As culture changes, believers need to adhere to reading the Bible with the correct hermeneutics. The Bible is meant to be read with a literal hermeneutic.
- This means that the Bible should be read as you would read any other book. It is historically and factually true. The information contained in its passages contains literal history that occurred in the past and some passages such as in the books of the prophets and in Revelation will occur in the future.
- When an individual approaches the Bible, it is important to clear out any presuppositions he or she may have concerning the Bible. If the culture has enculturated you with the belief “God is not real,” then the presumption that “God is not real” will infiltrate your mind as you read the Bible.
- This means that you will be reading the true Word of God, but your presumptions, worldview, and culture have convinced you that God is not real. Thus, it is important for all individuals to not pose any presumptions to the Bible before they read the text.
- Rather, all individuals should read the Bible the same way they would read any sort of historical, non-fiction work of literature. Likewise, as the individual reads the Bible, they should understand the Bible with a literal interpretation.
- This is not to say that the Bible does not have any allegories because it does. The literal interpretation of the Bible does acknowledge the existence of allegories, such as parables and metaphors.

REVIVING THE WORD OF GOD

[T]he Bible is the word of God and tells you what you must do to please God; it tells you how you may escape misery and be happy forever. In the Bible, God has told us everything it is necessary we should know in order to be happy here and hereafter. The Bible is the mind and will of God to men.

Anyabwile, Thabiti. *Reviving the Black Church*. B&H Publishing Group.

RECLAIMING BLACK PREACHING

that the heart of black preaching combines (1) a particular view of God, (2) emphasis on the black sociocultural experience, and (3) practical and relevant application to black life.

Powerful black preaching has at its center a biblical hermeneutic that views God as a powerful sovereign acting mightily on behalf of dispossessed and marginalized people. A belief in this God, an awareness of the sociocultural context of the black experience, and the creation of a sermon that speaks in a relevant and practical manner to the common domains of experience in black life, when taken together, ultimately result in a powerful sermon that resonates in a potent and meaningful way with those listening in the congregation.

Anyabwile, Thabiti. *Reviving the Black Church*. B&H Publishing Group.

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. —2 Corinthians 4:1–2 (niv)

DEVELOPMENT: LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

GPBC SAMPLE:

Leadership Covenant

At Greater Progressive Baptist Church (GPBC) our desire and commitment is to cultivate the highest quality of Christlike leadership in and among our people. Our mission statement reminds us that our church exists “to change lives through worshiping, witnessing and working to make disciples to follow and serve Christ”. This Leadership Covenant serves as a guide for all our leaders and ministry volunteers in the personal pursuit of this purpose. It also serves as a guardrail for the spiritual and moral health of our ministry community as we seek to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Hebrews 10:24

As a servant of Jesus Christ and a leader at GPBC, I will endeavor:

1. To love the Lord with wholehearted devotion.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’.” [Mark 12:28-30](#)

2. To grow as an authentic and Spirit empowered leader, making consistent choices in my life that will keep me connected to God, His Word, and His people. (John 15:4, 1 Timothy 4:7-8)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” [John 15:5-10](#)

3. To live a life before God and others that is above reproach. (Romans 13:8-10 & 13-14, 1 Corinthians 6:9-18)

This includes abstaining from sexual misconduct, the practice of the occult, cults, divination or sorcery, the use of illegal substances, the abuse of addictive substances, addictive behaviors, criminal misconduct, domestic abuse, financial mismanagement, or using a position of leadership for personal gain. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness. [Titus 2:7](#)

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. [1 Thessalonians 4:3-8](#)

4. To work towards the fulfillment of the purpose and vision of the church.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." [Matthew 28:18-20](#)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. [Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

To guard the peace and unity of the church. (Titus 2:1, Matthew 18:15-17)

This includes abstaining from gossip, lying, unresolved conflict within the body, and the teaching of false doctrine. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

[Ephesians 4:2-3](#)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. [Romans 14:19](#)

5. To honor the leadership of the church through Christlike submission.

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Live in peace with each other. [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#)

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith... Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. [Hebrews 13:7, 17](#)

6. To serve with my Ministry Team faithfully, fulfilling my Ministry Tasks willingly, and offering God my very best. (Colossians 3:17, 1 Peter 5: 2-4)

This includes finishing the volunteer application process completely and truthfully, including the submission of the Volunteer Application Form.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. [1](#)

[Corinthians 15:58](#)

7. If at any time, my life does not reflect these commitments, I will initiate a conversation with my Ministry Team Leader to discuss my situation and seek an immediate resolution.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____

The commitments we ask leaders to make at GPBC are very serious. This covenant is grounded in the Biblical expectations for those who take on the awesome responsibility of serving Christ in the church. Because these commitments are so important, if a leader is found to be in violation, it will result in a conversation with a Ministry Supervisor and will lead to corrective intervention.

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