

Ground Rules

Week 4 - Ownership

Ice Breaker Questions

If you joined a club, what kind of club would it be?

Have you ever been a member of a club?

What do you understand about being a member of a church?

Vision Owners at East Valley Bible Church

You are the focus of this reading. So far, everything we discussed has been about who EVBC is. This week, we want to invite you to go from merely a spectator to a participant in God's mission and East Valley's vision. So you can make a God-honoring decision, we will be authentic and transparent. Should you become a Vision Owner or not?

1. Membership or Ownership?

Membership is common language in church culture while Vision Ownership is not. We want to begin by making a clear distinction between these two and explain why we believe this distinction is important.

Traditionally, membership in a church has meant exactly what **1 Corinthians 12:12-14** says. (*I would highly encourage you to read **1 Corinthians 12**.*) We are the body of Christ, who is the head. We have different roles and talents that are given to accomplish Jesus' mission. A body has a variety of necessary parts to make the body work properly. All parts, when healthy, come under the authority of the brain (Jesus).

More recently, an ugly, distorted head has changed membership for the worse. Instead of membership being focused on service to Jesus, it has become an exclusive club that serves ourselves. The more recent rendition of membership is centered around rights, voting power, influence, and entitlement.

If we accept this view of membership, there will be little progress toward Jesus' mission. A church focused on making people happy, a "holy huddle" mentality will be reinforced and our vision will become unimportant. If a thumb is more concerned about what the other fingers think rather than what the brain is asking the thumb, it will never respond to what the head has asked.

Our attempt at guarding against an incorrect view of membership is *Vision Ownership*. We are inviting you to own the vision at East Valley. An owner is not a passive investor, but a responsible actor. It is the difference between how you treat your own car and a rental car with full insurance coverage.

A quick clarification is necessary. We are not asking you to own the church. Not even leadership owns the church. There is only one owner of the church, Jesus, and He purchased the church with His blood. (**1 Peter 1:18-19**)

2. Expectations

We have specific expectations for every Vision Owner. At the heart of every one is love.

A lyric in an old rock song by Larry Norman says, “the Beatles said all you need is love and then they broke up.” This is all too true of the church. There have been countless church splits over countless reasons. Some over very serious things and some over things like style, decorations, and preferences. At the risk of generalizing, the majority of church splits come because the church talks a lot about love, but there is no real application of love.

Before you decide to become a Vision Owner, we want to challenge you to pause and consider something. Will you choose to love the people of East Valley? Even the ones who are annoying, frustrating, dumb, and argumentative. There are hundreds of churches, but if you choose to join East Valley, we expect you to take love seriously.

Consider Jesus’ love for us. Jesus’ love for you started when you were in open rebellion toward Him. **(Romans 5:8-10)** Jesus’ love continued for you when you cheated on Him and were unfaithful. **(2 Timothy 2:13)** No matter what, His love isn’t going anywhere. **(Romans 8:37-39)**

To take a cue from Jesus, love means we forgive unintentional and intentional hurt. Love means we tolerate others’ opinions instead of trying to control them and doing the Holy Spirit’s job of convicting and transforming their lives. Love means we build into each other and encourage one another. Love is not passive. Love is always active and always adapting. If this love is absent from the church, at the first sign of choppy waters, the solution in church is leave.

Another question to ponder is: if hurt comes and our Vision Owners leave instead of love, what kind of church is that?

Jesus’ love is lived out in many unique and specific ways. We have summarized a Vision Owner’s responsibilities in 7 areas.

1. Surrenders to Jesus

As the head of the church and the Lord of the universe, we must surrender to Him. For this to happen, we must listen and submit to the authority of God’s Word, the Bible. The Bible is in direct conflict with our desires and the world’s desires. **(1 John 2:15-17)**

Warren Weirsbe said, “Christian maturity is not measured by Bible knowledge but by obedience.” We must not only hear God’s Spirit, but we must obey. We are either becoming more sensitive or stubborn toward the Holy Spirit’s voice. **(Galatians 5:16)**

One painful but effective tool Jesus uses to bring us to surrender is accountability. Another sinner telling us we sinned is not fun or comfortable. But when we are held accountable and confess to other surrendering believers, there is healing, freedom, victory, and progress! **(Galatians 6:1-4, James 5:16)**

2. Spreads the Gospel

This expectation is central to Jesus’ mission. We are called to be messengers. We don’t need to reinvent what Jesus did. We don’t need to save anyone. Our responsibility is to spread the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection. **(Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)**

Vision Owners are to prioritize two locations where the gospel must be told. The first is in your present relational areas and the second is everywhere else. The message of hope to this world is the mission. We must actively participate in spreading it.

3. Spends Time with Church Family

Gathering times on Sunday along with other organized gatherings give opportunity to build relationships with others in the church. These are planned by leaders within the church with the purpose of practicing love and unity. Time in groups rather than solely one-on-one helps loosen the grip of factions and divisions. **(1 Corinthians 1:10)**

Another invaluable time together is when it happens organically. We want a culture where hospitality and community is intentionally happening outside of official gathering times. Leaders model this, and we celebrate when it happens without us! **(Acts 2:46-47)**

4. Safeguards Unity

Unity is attacked constantly. Division comes from the most unlikely places from the most unlikely sources. Division is an ugly thing. Even when it is necessary, it is rooted in sin. It is so heartbreaking when we see church splits, divorces, runaways, firings, and death.

To safeguard unity we expect fair treatment of everyone. Favoritism is natural but detrimental to the health of a church. Preference is fine until preference is necessary. We slip into demanding our preferences as if we are the only one that matters. When that happens, unity is at risk. **(James 2:1-5)**

We also expect forgiveness to be rampant. When we experience pain, forgiveness is the last thing our natural self wants to give. Instead, we choose the physical, mental, and spiritual unhealthy options of bitterness, anger, and hate. It is like making the decision to eat fast food for lunch every day. It isn't good for us but we do it anyway. Forgiveness is letting go and releasing the wrong done and the wrongdoer. When we refuse to forgive, unity will die.

(Ephesians 4:31-32)

5. Shares Generously

Generosity is being willing to share willingly and openly. This includes but is not limited to giving financially to East Valley. **(Acts 2:44-45)**

The church is given three "golden" rules regarding money in the Bible. Don't love money. Give cheerfully. Match Jesus' generosity. **(Hebrews 13:5, 2 Corinthians 8, Ephesians 5:2)**

We don't expect a nonVision Owner to give financially, but we do expect Vision Owners to put their agreement into action.

If your very best friend is having a birthday, you are not forced to get them a present. They won't stop being your friend if you don't get a gift. They will not ask you how much you spent on the gift. You aren't even forced to spend anything. But, because of your relationship, it would be strange to do nothing.

We challenge Vision Owners to share generously. The finances we receive are used to accomplish our vision. Vision Owners that don't contribute don't own the vision.

6. Supports the Broken

All of us are broken because of our sin. **(Romans 3:23)** Some of us just hide our brokenness better than others.

If a person dressed and smelling like they are homeless comes in cussing up a storm and talking to themselves, they are not more broken than the physically fit dad and mom of well behaved kids who drive a Cadillac. This is an example of obvious and subtle brokenness.

We all need the same healing. Jesus is the only answer to broken, sinful people. Our vision statement says, "Jesus came full of grace and full of truth. This means Jesus showed us our message and how we are to deliver the message."

We support the broken by showing grace and empathy and by speaking the truth in love (**Ephesians 4:15**). This is not one or the other. It is not a multiple choice. It is both, and.

7. Speaks Out Against Mediocrity

We want a culture of "see something, say something." If the vision is being ignored or if the mission has taken a back seat, we expect our vision owners to notice and say something. We want confrontation to happen over excellence. If apathy is encouraged we will never accomplish our vision.

3. How to become a Vision Owner

As we wrap up Ground Rules, we want you to make a decision. Is God's Spirit leading you to become a Vision Owner at East Valley Bible Church? Will you replace the spectator sport of church with participating in Jesus' mission of reaching the world with the gospel?

If yes, here are your next steps.

a. Attend Ground Rules

If for whatever reason you were unable to attend all 4 classes, we want to give you the opportunity to retake it. We feel the conversation and the time invested into this is crucial for you to understand what you are joining.

b. Agreeance and application with the Vision Commitment Form.

Our Vision Commitment states our Vision and asks a few questions. We want you to agree via signature on the form. Leadership also wants to hear answers to what we believe are valuable questions regarding your position spiritually.

c. Allow a 10-day notification period

During these 10 days, we will notify the other Vision Owners of your desire to join. Leadership spearheads the way, but the Vision Owners are part of this process. These 10 days give accountability and ensure we are faithful to our vision before the whole church.

We will notify you of your acceptance or refusal. If refused or if you withdraw your name, a leader will initiate a follow-up conversation. If accepted, a leader will notify you and the rest of East Valley Bible Church.

Upon acceptance, we offer tools to become Connected to Grow and Equipped to Go.

Conclusion

We have been praying for you throughout this class. We want your decision to be based on what God wants for you. Before you make a decision, would you spend time praying? We are convinced Vision Owners who are committed to living out the love of Christ are the most effective way to accomplish Jesus' mission. God willing, East Valley can be a place where you experience the joy of loving God and loving people.

Review Questions

- What distinction do you see between membership and ownership?

- Why is it so easy to leave a church?
- What questions do you have regarding the 7 expectations of Vision Owners?
- Do you have questions about next steps after this class?