

Reality Ventura Church Update

Introduce self.

In advance... I'm so sorry.... so much to cover.

Happy Anniversary - 8 years

Today is going to be a little bit different than a normal Sunday gathering. Today we're giving an update on some things. If Reality Ventura is your home, I hope that today will be helpful for you.

If you are visiting, you might be a little bored today, but we're super glad you're here and you're definitely going to learn a lot about Reality Ventura and the current season that we are in as a church.

Also, if you see a photographer walking around during the service, he is totally legit. His name is David. Don't trip out on him. He goes to church here. He's just taking some pictures for us.

So we're gonna do this a little different today. I've broken this up into chapters as if we were reading a book or a paper. Or, given the length of it, maybe we would call it a **novel**. It will be long. Maybe this would be helpful. Can we just pretend like we're in a college classroom, where professors teach for like well over an hour? Cuz... yea.

But, we'll take a little stretching break in the middle.

By show of hands, how many of you have been attending Reality Ventura on a regular basis:

- Longer than a year
- Less than a year
- Longer than 5 years
- Very beginning of RVTA
- since the beginning of Reality Carp?

Chapter 1: First Things First

(or "Don't build ya house da sand.")

Last update like this that we did was 7 months ago. And our goal as church leaders today, and always, is to communicate **what** we know, **when** we know it. And to be honest, there are STILL a lot of unknowns. But we **do** want to communicate what we **DO** know, and hopefully that will be helpful for all us. BUT, we are **not** going to communicate or speculate about what we DO NOT know.

Just like in life, God only shows us what he wants to WHEN he wants to. So it is in his church.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the head of his church. And so, as elders, we are looking to him to lead us, and as he speaks, it is our job to listen and obey — to do our best to stay right in step with him.

Do we always nail it? No. Do we sometimes misstep? Yes. Do we sometimes get ahead of God or lag too far behind. Absolutely. But, it is our goal and our role as elders, to do everything we can to hear his voice, be sensitive to his leading, and then act upon that.

So, if you had hopes this morning of hearing a five year plan for RVTA, you're going to be let down. I'm not going to do that. I don't have that. And I am not going to assume what God will do even six months from now, much less five years from now. But I will share with you what we believe God is doing right now, and what the implications of that are.

And listen, I just want acknowledge that this season has been hard for some of us. All of the changes and all of the unknowns. Some of you feel like, "Ahh... are we gonna be ok??" We're in this like limbo place. I just want to acknowledge that. And say, "Yes, we're gonna be ok. And yes, there is unknowns. But we don't have to worry. Because I know this kind of stuff can bring some anxiety to some of us. I get it. I've been there. But for us, Jesus had some beautiful things to say in Matthew 6, when He said, "Don't worry about your life. Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you even ask. But instead seek the Kingdom of God, and everything you need will be provided for you."

My paraphrase, "Guys, don't worry about it. I got this. You can trust me. It's gonna be fine."

But that's hard right? Because we like to worry. And we like a plan. Most of us try to plan our whole lives out. And I do too. But then I get slapped sometimes with the words of James, when he says in James 4 "But don't say 'tomorrow, we're gonna do this or do that'. But rather, **'if the Lord wills**, then we'll do this or that". James isn't saying it's wrong to plan. But it is wrong to plan without being totally submitted to God in your planning.

I want to read us a verse that I believe is from God for our church in this season. And I want us to allow it to frame our thoughts and emotions as we move forward this morning and in the coming weeks and months.

Proverbs 16:9 "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." (repeat)

"The mind of a man plans his way." In other words, we set out and plan to go a certain direction. As best as we know how, we try to discern the leading of the holy spirit for the direction we should go in. And then we start moving in that direction.

But the LORD is going to direct our steps in **how** we get there. In other words, the Lord is going to determine what the path **looks like** in getting to the destination. And, the implication

here is that **SOMETIMES** that path and those steps look different than what we thought they would look like. (can anyone testify?).

And this truth has to be the foundation that we are building our thoughts and emotions on this morning, and in this season. We have to stand on the rock of who God is. He is the faithful One who knows exactly what we need before we ask. And he is the One who is ultimately directing our steps.

And we have already seen him doing this right? 18 months ago, I don't think any of us would have guessed that part of the path to becoming an autonomous church with live preaching would have us guys on staff taking over the preaching responsibilities and team teaching on Sundays. Who knew? Well, the Lord did. **And the Lord is directing our steps.**

So, here's what I would like to do. I would like to **affirm** the **direction** we are heading in. I would like to talk about the **path** that it seems like God is using to get us there. And I would like to mention some things that may be **required** of us for the journey.

So let me affirm the direction we're going. It hasn't changed.

The Direction: An Autonomous Church Fulfilling the Great Commission, With An In-House Pastor for Preaching and Vision

So, nothing has changed here. In January 2016 we started transitioning from being a video campus of Reality Carp to becoming fully autonomous church. The goal of this shift was to provide a way for all three campuses (VTA, Carp, SB) to fulfill the great commission more effectively. **We are still on this path.**

Our mission in fulfilling the great commission as a church is pretty simple.

Reality Ventura Mission Statement: Fulfilling the Great Commission locally as a sent people, strategically through church planting, and globally by reaching the unreached.

As a church we want to fulfill the great commission, and equip others to do the same.

And as is stated in our mission statement, one of the ways we do that is by equipping and sending missionaries to unreached people groups. And as I shared in March, that task was too big to accomplish as one church, so we have partnered with other Reality churches to accomplish that.

We also do that through planting churches in strategic locations as God leads. As a family of churches, Reality plants churches, and we participate in that however we can.

The way that we fulfill the great commission **locally** here in Ventura county is by **equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.**

- **Eph. 4** says that the job of church leadership is to equip the people in the church to do the work of the ministry. That means that the responsibility of reaching Ventura County with the good news of Jesus is not primarily the job of the pastors' or church staffs, but it is primarily the job of the church — meaning the people. And the pastors primary job to equip you to go to do so.

And THAT frames how we think about everything we do, from how we teach the Bible to what happens in kids ministry, to what songs we sing, to what our youth group is all about. Those things are intended to equip the Christian to go out and do the work of the ministry. Like that part of the mission statement says, “We are a SENT people” — who have been sent by Jesus to GO into our context, wherever that is, and be on mission.

This is our mission as a church. That has not changed. The direction is still the same.

But that's the macro-level — big picture. On a micro level, the direction has also not changed. The plan was to become an autonomous church with independent leadership, preaching, vision, staffing, and finances. **And we have... almost.** We are there with the exception of having a preaching and vision pastor (as you probably gathered given the fact that we have continued to do this team teaching thing on Sunday mornings, which I will talk about more later.)

So, just to be clear, **We are still searching for a preaching and vision pastor.** This team teaching thing, at least in it's current form, we still view as being a temporary solution to a long term need. The direction is the same. But the path to get there has looked a little bit different than we had expected, and is maybe taking a bit longer than we had imagined. **“The mind of a man plans his way. But the Lord directs his steps.”**

This truth is the foundation on which we stand this morning. That the Lord is directing our steps. And he is trust worthy. And so we should build our thinking and feeling on that firm foundation. “Don't build ya house on da sand.”

Chapter 2: Practical Updates and F.Y.I.s (or “Fo' yo' info'mation!”)

We just wanted to briefly share a few practical updates with you here before we move on.

- First of all, as of last month, **Reality Ventura is Officially Incorporated** as its own Non Profit Organization. We used to be a subset of Reality Carp's corporation, and we have been **ACTING** independently as a church for about a year, but now we are legally, in the eyes of the state and the government our own independent church.
- That also means that we put together a **board or directors**, as is required by the State of CA. It is three of us as of now. Myself, Tyler Morgan who is one of the pastors at Reality Carp, and Don Tucker who is a part of our congregation here at Reality Ventura.

- Unlike corporations, that board will not be **leading** Reality Ventura. The Bible is clear that that is the job of the elders. However, we **will** call on that board from time to time to act as an auxiliary finance team when financial decisions have to be made where there may be a conflict of interest among the elders. For instance, if one of our kids is going to YWAM and is asking the church for financial support, we would ask the board to step in as an auxiliary finance team to lead in making that financial decision.
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- Secondly Reality Coastlands **Central Administrative Team (A-Team) Is Dissolving.** And by January of 2018, each of the three coastlands Realities (Carp, SB, VTA) will be individually responsible for their own administrative responsibilities.
- Basically, it's just no longer the most fruitful way to do our administration as three autonomous churches.
- **So, for Reality Ventura** that means that the money that we **were** contributing to that central A-Team's salaries will now be reallocated to salaries for in house administrative staff that would serve RVTA exclusively.
- Specifically, we are looking for a full time administrative director who would oversee finances and human resources (sensitive, important job). And a part bookkeeper who would be responsible for bookkeeping and financial reporting.
- **If you know someone who may fit the bill, please let them know that we are starting to look.**
- Last little update here is a **Youth Ministry Update** (which is long overdue). Those of you who have kids in our j. high or high school know that we had been looking for a j. high youth director, and in the interim Kevin (our HS youth guy) was doing both j. and high school.
- So, in order to accommodate both groups, we moved j. high to Thursday night and kept HS on Wednesdays. And Kevin has been faithfully leading both with the help of Elaina Buffon, and he has been doing a great job.
- The youth groups are healthy. The kids are growing. There's new youth leaders serving.
- This summer we baptized a dozen students.
- We are very thankful for Kevin's faithfulness there.
- So, given the fact that Kevin has been doing a great job leading both youth groups, there is no real need to hire another youth director right now. Besides the fact that, as we'll talk about later, even if we wanted to hire an additional youth director, we currently don't have the funds to do so. Fo Yo Information.

Chapter 3: The Preaching Pastor

(or "Am I ever gonna find the right guy???)

- As you know, six months, we transitioned from preaching via video that was piped in from Reality Carp, to live preaching in the form of team teaching. This was not part of our **plan** originally. But this was part of GOD's plan, and part of the path that He would have us on.

- And I think it's been really good for us. Some of you have loved it and don't ever want to stop. And some of you... not so much. But I do believe it is exactly where God has wanted us. I mean, we haven't even had a main preaching pastor. And yea, it's not ideal. But, guys, God is here. People's lives are being changed to the glory of God. And I am so thankful, to have guys right here *who can teach word of God; faithful men who rightly divide the the scriptures; deep bench; most churches don't have that.*

And this team teaching thing has even been helpful in refining our expectations as we've been meeting with potential preaching pastors.

And over the last six months, we have continued to meet with potential preaching pastors. And, we have not yet found one. Well, we've found many. But not **THEE** guy.

And here's part of why...

I'm not really sure that the guy we're looking for actually exists.

- Here's what I mean: whether we realize it or not, most of us have an idea, albeit some of us a subconscious idea, of what type of person we imagine standing at this pulpit, and fulfilling the role of the preaching and vision pastor. And I am as guilty as any of us.
- In some ways, I think we did it ourselves. Britt Merrick, who was basically the preaching pastor here at RVTA for the first seven and half years, was a very very good preacher. And so that naturally created a bit certain expectation in our minds for what the preaching should be like at Reality Ventura.

(BTW, if you don't know who Britt Merrick is, he is preaching and vision pastor at Reality Carpinteria, and until March of this year, every Sunday the sermons from Reality Carpinteria were piped in here via video.)

- And it wasn't just preaching. I mean, until a year ago, Reality Ventura also shared with Reality Carp and SB in all of their resources, expertise, experience, wisdom, personnel, and vision. And among the three campuses, there were 12 of us elders, 30 staff members, decades of experience, millions of dollars, all contributing to the health of all three campuses including Ventura. And again, leading that team was Britt Merrick, this very charismatic, very gifted, strong leader. There was **a lot** to draw from there. And we as the Ventura campus experienced the benefits of that. And that's what got used to. And rightly so.
- And so I think the assumption, even if it was a subconscious assumption, when we starting becoming an autonomous church, was that God would bring someone along who could kind of keep things **AT LEAST** as legit as they were when RVTA was a campus, if not even better.

- And when I came on staff 18 months ago, this is the kind of the person I had in mind. And so this is the kind of person myself, and others, began to look and pray for. And as we did, there were just **three** basic qualifications we were looking for.
- This was like a bare minimum to us. And you'll agree with these I think. This is what we would expect.

Qualification #1: Have Reality DNA

Qualification #2: Be an Anointed, Gifted, Called Teacher and Leader

Qualification #3: Have A Specific Level of Expertise and Experience

So that was it. We didn't care what he dressed like. We didn't care what his style of preaching was like. We didn't care if he grew up in California. Or what hobbies he was into. It was just these three things. Seems like a no brainer right?

He had to have Reality DNA if he was gonna pastor a Reality church.

If this guy was going to be the main voice on this stage, and a vital part of leading this church, then he was going to have to have our DNA. Every church has their DNA right? It's what makes them unique. Christ is the head, and all believers are a part THE Church (Capital C). But there are different expressions of that Capital C Church in the form of local (lower case c) churches. And the biggest thing that differentiates those local churches from each other is what we would call "DNA".

- I would venture to say that 90% of what we **connect with** at any given church, can be traced back to that church's DNA, and that church's leadership's DNA, **especially** the DNA of the preaching and vision pastor.
- So he's obviously got to have that. Because if you get a guy in here who doesn't have our DNA, that's not wrong, but Reality Ventura very quickly then turns into to something other than Reality Ventura.
- And honestly, we have been open to that from the beginning. If God wanted a pastor in here that had Qualifications 2 and 3, but he didn't have the DNA, then we were 100% ok that. This is about the Kingdom of God, not about Reality. And if the best thing for this church was for it to not be a Reality, then praise God, we'd be totally ok with that. But, we don't believe that's what God has for this church right now. So this DNA qualification is an essential.

Secondly, this guy had to have an anointing and call on him to do this job. This is an obvious one right? We are all designed by God to play different roles in the body. So this guy had to have that call on his life. That drive and desire to help lead a local church. A passion, a gifting, and a calling on his life for pastoring at a local church. And he had to have a heart to equip people; build them up, and send them out. And a heart for VTA. He had to have passion for the word of God. And an obvious anointing on his life for all of that.

And lastly, he had to have certain expertise and experience. Specifically, he had to have the expertise and experience necessary to lead a church with a fairly large staff, and

hundreds and hundreds of people who have all grown accustomed to expecting things to **kind of** operate like Reality Carpinteria where, again, Britt Merrick was leading and preaching.

Reality DNA; an anointing and calling; and that level of expertise and experience.

Guys, here's the deal. I've been looking for a year and half, and this human, to my knowledge, does not exist. And if he does exist, he's already pastoring one of our Reality churches.

Because here's the deal: you can find someone with two of these three qualifications.

- **Like the Reality Church planter guys**, before they go and plant churches — they have numbers 1 and 2. That's the requirement. They have the call and anointing to pastor and preach; and they have the DNA. And they've got some kind experience and expertise, but certainly not what would be required to lead at a church like Reality Ventura.
- **And then there's guys who have numbers 2 and 3.** They've totally got the right experience and expertise, and an anointing, but they don't have the DNA.
- **Guys, I'm telling you. I've been in the trenches here. I've been temporarily trying to fill this role here. I know what this is. And after having meetings and meetings with many many guys over the last 18 months, I have to say, I think we have imagined a person that's not actually out there.**
- Because honestly, if someone has **that** level of experience and expertise to be able to lead a church this size with all that comes with it, AND has that level of Reality DNA, then they're probably already pastoring one of our Reality churches.
- And of those eight guys pastoring our Reality Churches, there's only three that could get the job done in a way that you or I would even kind of be ok with— Britt Merrick, Tim Chaddick, and Dave Lomas (and even Dave is wild for some of us super conservative types).

But, if we were going to continue doing things like we have done them at this church, and we were going to keep things at a certain level (for lack of a better word), this was the type of person we would have to find.

So like the prince in Cinderella, I think we had this glass shoe, and we've been going from person to person trying to fit them into this shoe. And time and time again, for one reason or another, they just didn't fit into it.

- And so we'd write people off because they didn't fit the shoe. We'd look at a young guy, for instance, and say "Yeah, but that guy's young enough to be Chad's son." (*doesn't fit the shoe*).
- Or "They don't have the level of expertise or experience that they need to lead and maintain what our church has come to expect (*they don't fit into the shoe*).

- **And then a couple months ago, God kind of tapped me on the shoulder and I felt like he said,** “Dom, that shoe that y'all are holding is from Reality Ventura 1.0 - The Campus. And I know it **looks** the same to you. But it's not. This is Reality Ventura 2.0 - An Autonomous Church.”
- **And that's the truth. This is a different thing.** An autonomous church is entirely different than a campus. It is not what it was before. It kind of looks the same. But It is a new thing.
- And I felt like God was saying, “That shoe you're holding isn't for this new thing. That shoe was for the old thing. Reality Ventura 2.0 needs a **new** shoe.
- **It's like new wine. You don't put new wine into OLD wine skins, or else the skins will burst. New wine doesn't fit into new wine skins.**
- **You put new wine in NEW wine skins.**

And so THAT is why, I believe, we haven't found the guy yet.

- I think we've been looking at it the wrong way. Maybe it's not that we need to find a new guy to fit into our old shoe. Maybe we need to find a new guy who will fit into a NEW shoe.
- And when I'm talking about the shoe, I am mostly referring to our expectations — how we assume and expect things will be here. And, what I'm suggesting is that our maybe our expectations aren't totally in line with what God has in mind. And that's me too.
- I think we assumed that what God wanted to do here was maintain the same thing that we had going on as a campus, and then **improve** upon it when we became our own church. And if that was the case, the we really did need this person that I've been describing.
- But we had no idea how rare this person would be, until we really started actually meeting with guys.
- But, I don't know that that's a bad thing guys. I think is all part of God's symphony that he is orchestrating here at RVTA. I think he allowed us to discover this to teach us some things. I think it was his plan to have us doing this team teaching thing. I think that was exactly what our church needed for this season - on the ground pastors who knew you guys, to teach the word to you. I think we needed that for a transitional step to whatever is next. I think we're setting up the next guy for success because we did this team teaching thing.
- My point is, God's ways are higher than ours. And so when I say, that this person doesn't exist. I'm not saying, “**Lets** Lower your expectations.” I'm saying, “**lets** Change your expectations.” And expect God to bring exact right guy for RVTA. But also expect that that guy may be different than what any of us had originally imagined.

A few day ago, I was thinking on this as I was working on this update, and I was praying for us and this guy, and it hit me like a ton of bricks. I literally almost fell off my chair. It was one of those holy spirit moments...

King David.

- Guys, do you remember the story from 1 Sam 16 where God chooses **David** as the king for Israel? David — this unassuming little shepherd boy. He was young. ~~He was weak.~~ He was

inexperienced. He was the last one that anyone would have assumed could do the job. Even his own dad didn't think of him as a potential candidate.

- If anyone didn't fit into the shoe it was David. But he was the guy that GOD WANTED to lead his people. His holy people. His holy nation. Of all the people in the world, God chose DAVID. This little shepherd boy. And from the outside, nothing about David seemed like he should be a king. But do you know what God says in that chapter, **"The LORD does not look at things that people look at. People look at the outward appearance. But the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)**
- I'm gonna be honest... over the last 18 months, in some ways, I've kind of written off guys like David. I mean, there's even a couple of guys **IN** the Reality family who I would look at be like, "Man, they're super rad. And anointed. They've got a heart of gold. A decent leader. Good teacher. They've got the DNA. They've got **a lot of potential**. And they'll probably make an amazing church planter some day. But they're just too young. Or, they don't have the experience or expertise."

And I felt like God spoke to me the other day and said, "Dom, things are always as they appear. In the Kingdom of God man made credentials are not always the primary qualification."

God's ways are often totally different than ours.

So, I'm not saying for sure that God will bring us someone like David. Or someone we didn't expect. But I am saying that we need to be open to it if that's God's guy for RVTA. **He may be just be some shepherd boy tending sheep on some hill over there.**

What I'm saying is we need to be open handed with this moving forward.

So that's where we're at. We're approaching this with a new level of open-handedness, and some reset expectations. And we are praying through and about certain people right now. And we would ask that you would join and pray with us in that.

Now, before we move on to the next chapter, let me quickly address this question because I've heard it a few times over the last couple months. **"Dom, why don't we form a search committee? Why not go through one of these pastor finding companies like Vanderbleomen, and do an official candidacy like most churches in America do when they're looking for a pastor?"**

And we could do that.

But we would get the results that most churches in America get. Do you know how long the average tenure of a pastor in America is? **3.6 years.**

That's why we haven't done this like most other churches. We don't want to rush into this. We're not looking for a pastor for the next few years. We're looking for a long term pastor who is going to be here for the long haul. We're thinking about the kind of church that we're going to hand over to our kids, to your kids in 10 or 20 years. This isn't a short play here. This is a long play.

Finding the right pastor is like finding the right spouse. Sure you can go to bars, and join dating services, but at the end of the day, God kind of has to bring you that **right** person at the **right** time. And we have to trust him for that.

BREAK

Jesus We Trust You. This is Your Church. You are faithful.

3 minute stretching break.

Chapter 4: Expectations
(or "Get me some new kicks!")

I mentioned this in the last chapter as we were talking about the preaching and vision pastor, but let me say it directly. As a church, moving forward we are going to have to release and reset some of our expectations if we are going to remain faithful to the call of God on this church. Not just with preaching. But with other things also. And let me say this again: When I say "release and reset". Don't hear "lower". I'm not saying lower our expectations. I'm saying, "Expect God's best to be different than what you expected."

Has that ever happened in your life? You expecting (or even *wanted*) something to go a certain way, but it ended up going a different way which actually turned out better than you imagined? I think that's what God wants to do here.

Here's what I mean: As a video campus of Reality Carpinteria, we all got used to things being, feeling, moving a certain way. That created subconscious expectations (totally normal). And rightly so. And naturally, we have brought some of (or all of) those expectations over to what we are now, which is an autonomous church.

For instance, when you are a part of an eight year old established church you expect there to be some:

- Stability
- Lots of stuff going on (programs and ministries)
- A certain level of quality and dialed-in-ness in the the way things are done and run.
- Plenty volunteers to help meet our needs and run the ministries
- Defined vision and direction
- Good preaching

- The quality of leadership that you would come to expect from an established church (for us, our Ref. would be something like Reality Carp with Britt Merrick leading and preaching).
- Those are pretty general, practical, expectations for an eight year old church. And as an eight year old video campus under the **umbrella** of Realty Carp, those were pretty realistic expectations. In fact, about a year after this campus was launched, we probably could've come to expect those things because we were **immediately** able to draw on everything that Reality Carp was. That's why Reality Ventura felt almost like a full fledged church — we were basically an extension campus of a full fledged
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- **And today we celebrate eight years of God's faithfulness here at Reality Ventura.**
- But let me say this. And don't close your ears after I say this, because it sounds like a weird statement: **RVTA Is Not An Eight Year Old Church. And here's what I mean by that.**
- Reality Ventura was 7.5 year old campus of Reality Carpinteria, that has **now** been operating as it's own church for **about six months** (since we started live preaching).
- RVTA started as video campus of Reality Carp. And for all intense and purposes we were a part of Reality Carp. And you know that. It felt like that right? On purpose. It felt like we were apart of Reality Carp.... until it didn't anymore (different story)...
- **We were not our own independent, established church. We were a campus of a different independent, established church.**
- But that is not what we are any longer. We are not a part of Reality Carp. We have like separated from that. And now we are a newly-autonomous church.
- Now, here's the hard part: RVTA kind of looks like the same thing as before? Or at least a very similar. I mean, it **seems** like an established church right? We've got this rad building. There's a good sized staff. There's some systems in place. Our Sunday morning gatherings are pretty dialed in. We've got kids classrooms with pictures on the walls. We're sending missionaries out. There's youth groups and Bible studies, and community groups.
- It kind of **looks like** a normal eight year old church, so of course we would think of it like that.
- **But guys, I'm telling you. It's not. And your staff here at RVTA... we're just figuring this out.**
- So much of Reality 2.0 is different than Reality 1.0.
- **For the staff here, it's kind of like going from riding a Mountain Bike Bicycle to riding a Ducati Street Bike Motor Cycle.** It's like, yeah I mean, they're of the same family for sure. They're both bikes. **look** the same. - Get you from **point A to B.** - Got **two wheels.** - **Handle bars** - They've both got **some gears.** Require you to **wear a helmet.**
- And from SUUUPERRR far away they kind of even look like each other. But once you get up close, and start looking under the hood (so to speak) you realize, "Oh wow, this Ducati is way bigger. It's way heavier. It goes way faster. It's got way more things that can go

wrong with it. It way complicated and nuanced. It's a lot more little scary. And it requires and entirely different skill set to ride it.

- **I know it looks the same from there. But come look under the hood, and this is a whole different beast.**
- **And we're only** 18 months into even STARTING to figure out what it looks like to be an autonomous church. I mean, six months ago we still had Britt preaching on a screen every week. We've only even had live preaching her for 6 months. That's not very long.

Realistically... in a lot of ways, we're almost more like a new church plant, than an eight year old autonomous church.

- Now, I know that might sound like a drastic statement, and an unfair to comparison. But I use it to illustrate a point. Obviously we're not a **actually** brand new church plant — we're not a newborn with no real capacity to accomplish anything significant.
- But my point is, we are also not what Reality Carp is. We're not like a 40 year old man with his career figured out.
- **We're MANY ways, we're like this in-between thing** (awkward pre-pubescent tweenager.) That's alright. God loves Tweenagers. David was a tweenager.
- The weird thing is, we kind of look like a grown up. We're like those 13 year old kids in El Centro that I used to play football against. They were in Jr. High but had like full on beards and chest hair.
- You know.. **it looks like we're this mature thing, but in all actuality we're not. We're like somewhere in between.**
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- And I'm not saying that YOU GUYS are immature or spiritual tweenagers or something. I'm saying that **AS A CHURCH** we're like teenagers.
- When a brand new church plant starts it's like a little new born baby. It's just trying to figure stuff out. But it's not a baby because the people are like baby Christians or something.
- But how the church functioning, and is learning to operate, those things are in their infant stages at a new church plant.
- And for us those things are at their young adolescent stages.
- **And that's not BAD. Being a teenager is rad in so many ways.** It's definitely an exciting time of life. You're starting to discover who you really are. You have faith to believe God for anything. You haven't gotten all tired and wrinkled yet.
- And that's where we are as a church. We're in this exciting time. And we get to discover who we are as a church. Not as a campus of Reality Carp (we know what that looked like.) But as our own independent church.
- And that's awesome. It is a necessary stage in the life of the church.

- And honestly, it's **probably** going to be a stage that this church in for a while. Even after we have a preaching and vision pastor. We will still be in this adolescent stage. And we should embrace that. It's right and good to be here right now.
- **And if we keep our on Jesus and do our part, it's gonna be awesome.**

Speaking of doing our part. What do we **do** about all of these expectations? What do we do with the old shoe that the new thing may not fit into? (We get new kicks. We get new wine skins. *Trade the old ones in*)

So, what do new kicks look like then? What does it look like to get new wine skins? How do we do that?

Well, step one is releasing the old ones. **We Release our Expectations.** And surrender to God's plan and God's steps. And we place expectation in Jesus - the author and finisher of our faith. Remember, I said in the beginning that there may be some things God **requires of us** on this path he has us on? Well, this one of those requirements. We need to release, and possibly reset, some of (or all of) our expectations.

It is totally understandable that we would have gotten used to things being a certain way. But Reality Ventura 2.0 the autonomous church is a different thing than Reality Ventura 1.0 the campus. And NEW is good. New leaves are good. New fruit on vines is good. And the Lord says, "BEHOLD, I do a NEW thing." And it is good. This is like new wine. And you can't fit THIS new wine, into THOSE old wine skins. The skins WILL burst. Our expectations, and plans, and system WILL burst. We gotta get new wine skins. We gotta get new shoes. That's the first thing it looks like.

This also means, as we talked about before, that we need to **Expect God to bring us a preaching pastor that is different than what we had imagined.** Remember King David.

Specifically, I think that that the right guy for RVTA could be possibly be a totally gifted, anointed, and called guy, with Reality DNA, who just may not have the **type** of experience and expertise that we all might have expected that to find in one guy.

Be okay with things changing.

- God is doing something new guys. We really believe it. Many of you see it and feel it too. And I, or the other elders aren't going to **force** things to change. But God may.
- Some of us are holding so tightly to the things we love, or have grown accustomed to, or even things that we just think are really good for the Kingdom of God. But we've got to loosen our grip guys. This is not our church. We are in not in charge here.

- And sometimes His will is different than ours. So some things may change. Ministries that were once no brainers could stop. People who had been a part of RVTA for years may end up going to church somewhere else. Some already have.
- New people may come. Some already have. The church may shrink way smaller than you want it to. Or grow way bigger than you want it to. We could end up going down to one service.
- As we'll talk about it a minute, the staff is going to have to change a bit. We've been doing this live team teaching thing. Some of you love it. Some of you hate it. But when God brings a permanent preaching pastor, at least **some** aspect of the teaching element will change... again.
- Some things that we have loved or gotten used to may change or cease to be. Some things may have to die.
- But you know what Jesus said? Because **culture** says that when something vibrant dies it's a bad thing, right?
- But Jesus said in **John 12:24**, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."
- Jesus is saying that life, fruitfulness, and multiplication actually come from death. He was saying that true life for us comes from us dying to our self. And that eternal life would come through him dying on a cross.

Sometimes something has to die in order for it to multiply, bear fruit, and truly be alive.

So I'm taking my old kicks, and putting them up in the closet (thank you Lord. those served me well.) And I'm taking my new kicks you're giving me (but these kicks... this is gonna be awesome)

And some of our expectations will be reset due to circumstances... which brings us to the next chapter:

Chapter 5: Financial and Staffing Update

I don't have any cute subtitle for this one cuz it's a little bit solemn.

- As of August, the giving here at RVTA is down about 20%. We started on a downward trajectory in the spring and then it leveled off a couple of months ago, and it appears that this is the new norm.
- Why? Well, it's one or a combinations of a couple of reasons. Some people have stopped going to church here (maybe in part because Britt Merrick's not on the screen anymore. I don't know). Maybe those people are giving financially somewhere else now.
- There's a lot of new people here. Maybe you don't know yet if there is where God has called you, so you are giving here.
- And some of you are still here and used to give, but have stopped giving for one reason or another.

- Whatever the reason, we know that the finances are down 20%. And while I believe this is probably also part of God directing our steps, this obviously has certain implications.

We're basically going to have to reorganize things for this new season that we're in. And so we're stepping back and looking at **everything** that pertains to the budget. And the first place we have to look is at the staff.

We have been really blessed to have a pretty robust staff here. Nine of us on the ground, plus the few "central" staff members that serve SB, Carp, and us with stuff like global mission and the administrative team. If you average it out, it would be like 13 staff people here. That's like 5 or 6 more staff people than most churches our size are able to have. **And that's bee** awesome for RVTA. And honestly, it's been due, in part, to your generosity. So, thank you for your faithful investment in the Kingdom of God.

But there is a new norm now. And we are going to have to make some adjustments.

So we're doing a couple of things.

- **First of all**, we have put together a Staffing Advisory Team to help us make these decisions. Obviously, it wouldn't be right for the elders to make decisions about staff reductions, when we are on staff also. So we have asked, non-RVTA-staff members to act as an advisory team to help us. If you'd like more details about who is on that team, or how that's going to work, I would love to talk to you about it. Please ask me.
- **Secondly**, we have asked the whole staff to approach this thing open handedly. And so we all, individually are all asking God to speak to us if He's leading us in a different direction. The staff is taking this as an opportunity to say, "Lord, if you're doing a new thing at RVTA, I'm not in the plans the staff of that new thing, then show me. I don't want to be where I'm not supposed to be.
- My prayer has been, "Lord, I would way rather YOU tell people that their time on staff at Reality is done, than ME tell people that their time on staff at Reality is done."
- And God is starting to do this already. Long before we told the staff about the financial situation, Jill Flint (who was just up here) had already been sensing God leading her in a new direction. And God is stirring in other people's hearts on staff. So, we just have to trust him in this, and pray that he would lead the staff as he wills.
- I am praying that God would speak so clearly to the staff that by the time the Advisory Team starts to make decisions, that there wouldn't be any more decisions left to make.

We would ask you to please prayer for the staff and that Staffing Advisory Team for great wisdom and discernment in this time.

So, depending on what happens with the staff, this may force us also reset some of our expectations.

Because certain staff positions may go away. And if those go away, then there may not be people to lead certain ministries, which changes things.

- And just a reminder here, that we have been essentially outsourcing the administrative jobs to the central A-Team. And by Jan 2017, we will be taking those funds and using them to hire one full time person and one part time person who will be here on staff at Reality Ventura doing those administrative duties.
- So don't trip out when you see that happen. Like, "why are we hiring that guy, but we fired that other guy". This is money that is already being used for administrative positions that are mandatory. We will just reallocate them to a people here on the ground here in Ventura.
- **We are also are now giving less money to global missions and church planting. As giving has decreased, the amount of money that we are giving there has decreased also, which is a bummer, but again. We plan our way. But the Lord directs our steps. And so we trust him.**
- So what does all of this mean. It seems that God is doing some pruning. I said in Chapter 1, that we try to communicate what we know when we know it. And we're not going to speculate about things. Well, what we know is that things have changed and are changing, and that God is trimming things down a bit.
- I was talking with Debbie Hill in our congregation the other week, and she said, "Dom, I think the Lord is just pruning our church." And she's right. That's what this feels to me. It literally feels like God is this Divine Vine Dresser, and he is tending to his orchard and pruning his church. He's doing it with the staff. He's doing it with the congregation. He's doing it with finances. He's doing it with our expectations.
- And it's beautiful.
- And so, let's be faithful with whatever our part in that is. Let's embrace whatever pruning is of him. Because He knows best.
- These are big changes guys, please pray for us as a staff as we navigate these things, and for our church as we all walk through this together.

Chapter 6: The Last Chapter (or "What Happens Now?")

Well, **We allow the Divine Vine Dresser to do His work.** And like I said, we really believe that's what he's doing.

- **Sometimes a church can look like it's being pruned but it's actually it's just dying** (*image of dead tree*). But that's not what God is doing here. If that's what he wanted to do here then we would all feel it, and we would honestly say yes and amen if our season as a

church was done. But, for the time being He is using this little church — you to do kingdom work in this county, this city, and the nations.

- What God is doing here, is **pruning**. And that's rad, because pruning is always for the purpose of more fruitfulness.
- But let me warn us, things may look more bare before they get more beautiful. That's just the way pruning works. So remember this in the coming months. If stuff looks like this (*image of dead tree*). It may actually just be this (*image of pruned tree*). Which is necessary for this to take place (*image fruit tree*).

The second thing that will be happening is a shift in the way we approach Sunday morning preaching.

- Like I said, we started doing this team teaching thing because we believed it was what God wanted to do. And it has been fruitful I think.
- But we also knew, that it wasn't sustainable to have the five of us rotating every week (just too much inconsistency. and for other reasons. Just not the best thing).
- So, moving forward, we will **still** be doing team teaching, but I will be preaching the majority of the time (on average, twice a month). And instead of five rotating, we will be narrowing it down to a team of three of us rotating.
- At this point, some of you might have a question about my commitment because when I came on staff in March in 2016, we told you that the plan was for me to be here for **1-2 years** to be the interim pastor for vision and the acting "first among equals" or "quarterback" on our team, where I would help lead us to becoming an autonomous church, and lead the charge in finding a preaching and vision pastor.
- Well, I have led the charge, and spent oh so many hours meeting, emailing, driving, watching sermons, reading resumes, **but** God has seen fit to **not** brought that guy yet.
- And while I am not called to **be** that guy, I do still love this church. And care deeply about the health of this church, which is why I came on staff in the first place. And I love you guys, and the staff, and so I don't really feel **released** to go until the right people are in place for RVTA to have a healthy successful future.
- So I have reset my expectations for my life plan, and I'm committed to seeing this through (whatever that may look like).
- But because **I know** that I am not the best guy for the job, you better believe that I am still going to be working my butt off to find the best guy for the job. **But for now I am the acting "Interim Pastor for Preaching and Vision"**.

Speaking of Jobs...

Some of you are saying. "Ok. So what can I do to help?" "Dom. I'm in dude. What is my role in all of this?"

Well, thank you for asking. The best thing you can do is **Pray**. Pray for RVTA. Pray for the staff and elders to be led by the spirit and have wisdom. Pray for that Staffing Advisory Team. And pray that God's kingdom would come through RVTA in this city and county.

Release and/or Reset Expectations

- Expect God to do different than you imagine. But expect that different to also be BETTER than you imagined, because time and time again, that is what God does.

Be Here.

- If you're here, then be here. Be invested. Don't just be a spectator waiting to see what will happen. Be a participant. Get in a comm group. Our Wednesday night prayer and worship meetings are the heartbeat of this church. You want invest, come be a part of those. If you're here, let's dig in.
- And if not going to be here, and your season at Reality is done and you truly believe God is calling you out, then that's ok. You don't need to feel bad about that. And it doesn't need to be weird. Let that be a beautiful transition in your life. Not some awkward break-up thing.
- Sometimes God gives us a "Holy Discontentment" with something when he's calling us to something else. If He's doing that, then embrace that for what it is. Thank God for the way He used Reality in your life, and move on with joy in your heart. Finish well. But, first, come let us know, so we don't think you're all bitter or something.
- But if it's not a HOLY discontent, and it's just a discontent, don't let that turn into discontentment turn into you being disgruntled. If you need to talk about something going on at Reality, please come talk to us.
- This city has a long ugly history of broken churches and and broken relationships in the body of Christ. But, in Jesus name, you don't have don't have to be a part of that heritage
- But, if you're staying, then let's BE HERE. Let's BE IN more than ever. And many of you already are. But for those of you who are kind of teetering on the fence, lets really press in in this season.
- And let me encourage you - you are valuable here. The **needs** you have are valuable yes. But ALSO who you are is valuable. You are a unique body part in the body of Christ and the body needs you. So, I would just encourage you to walk in that. Get involved in a community group where you can not just receive, but also love people, and pour out your life for the good of others.
- Some of you have a God given call on your life to minister in this community in a specific way. Dude, don't wait around for Reality to do that. YOU DO THAT. Look at the Fowlers for an example. Heather's a stay at home mom, and Daniel's like an insurance salesman or something, but they saw a need in the community for Foster Care families to be served and ministered to, and so they just started doing it. And it's turned into maybe one of the most effective Foster Care support services in the County! We didn't do that for them. They had

a heart and a call to do this, and so they did, and as a church we just support and partner with them however we can.

- Whatever that is for you, do that!
- Now, some of you 'aint got nothing to give. You just need to rest in this season. I hope and pray that Reality Ventura can be that for you right now.
- We're in this transitional season, so I have no idea how restful that will or won't be for you. But I know this, Jesus is in in our transition. And ultimately He's the one who brings rest, so am hopeful that He will for you.

And last you need to do is Volunteer to serve in kids ministry. Cuz our volunteer pool is bleak right now. And Jesus loves the little children. Amen?

You guys good? We're in this together. Jesus is the chief shepherd. He is the Vine Dresser. He is in control. I am not. He cares for me deeply. He knows what I need.

So that's it. Now you know every we know. And which is not much. But we know Jesus is in charge. And we know that the vine dresser loves us. And we know that the Spirit is leading. And we're doing our very best to hear His voice, and be faithful to Him and His church. We love you guys...

- Crazy couple of years (and few years)
- **Those of who have been here through it all — thank you for sticking it out. Thank you for showing us** what it looks like to keep your eyes on Jesus and not on circumstances.
- **5 years from now** look back...

PRAY:

1. That God would show each of us what expectations need to be reset, and give us faith to believe that He can do exceedingly abundantly above all that I could ask or imagine.

2. That God would lead us to the RIGHT preaching and vision pastor,

3. For God's financial provision for whatever **is of him**.

- And don't assume that money is the answer. Sometimes it is. But sometimes God uses the LACK of finances to accomplish his will. Sometimes he uses less to accomplish more.
- Like God did with Gideon — huge army down to 300 soldiers in order to accomplish his purposes.
- Bigger is not always better. With the staff. With the church attendance. With the money. Sometimes God prunes stuff back in order to accomplish his purpose.

4. That we would trust the Divine Vine Dresser as He does His work.

5. God would speak to staff if he is leading any of us to step down

6. God would give wisdom to elders and "staffing advisory team" for a way forward.

7. That God's Kingdom would come through RVTA in this city and county.