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In this episode, we're going to talk about becoming a sports family, why Grace does video preaching, understanding your local predicament, and how that affects your church's mission and what happened this week with our ongoing piloting journey. Hello,

Derek. Hi, Danielle.

Hi.

How are you this week?

I'm fine.

Are you?

Yep. I don't know if we can start every one of these with you going, are you really okay? No, I'm not.

Okay. No, I'm fine. I'm good.

Listen, all of our staff talk about how cheery you are on these

Podcasts. It's easy to be cheery behind a microphone, I guess. I don't know. Yeah, I understand. I don't present as cheery. That's all I had to say. I don't mean

To, yeah, I wondered what the second part of that sentence going

To. I was going to say I'll get better, but I'm not going to,

I refuse.

I dunno. I don't like to come off as intimidating, but I think that is what happens. It's not my heart. I generally am insecure. Aren't we supposed to be getting to know you? I just, yeah, anyway. I'm working.

I am working

Out. I like how this is going.

All right, let's move on.

Okay,

So, well actually,

This is actually for you.

I know. I forgot

Because, and I'll do a little bit of self revelation because I did grow up in a sports family very much so. Both my parents were high school teachers and coaches. So my dad was a football coach, track coach. My mom was a cross country coach, a variety of other coaches. We were very sportsy. All my brothers and sisters played sports. I was a football player, track through the javelin, did all that. My kids were kind of sportsy kids. We had a daughter, water polo and two pole vaulters. Very good pole vaulters, both my boys. And so you and I have known each other for a long time, and that's always been my kind of personal history. And it's been fun and funny to watch you go through a little personal journey from what I would call an artsy background. I'm not saying your family was artsy, but you and Dave, you're married, you're both very artistic, incredibly gifted artists in your own right. And all of a sudden Dax comes along and you've got some sportsy stuff going on. And now I'm watching Instagram posts about races and rivals. And I'm just curious about that journey. How has the transition gone from artsy to sportsy?

Yeah, it's been interesting. And my mind right now as you're talking, is kind of flashing back to different times where people are drawn with your children. And I'm like, ah. And I had all this stuff when we went through the adoption journey, you kind of make a book kind of a thing. And it was like I had all these

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dreams of, oh, creative household and blah, blah, blah. And I did those things. I created an environment where creativity is celebrated, all the things.

How'd it turn out?

It turns out like this. Dax, do you want to learn how to draw a dragon? No. And he's not rude. He's like, no, I don't want to learn how to draw.

No desire.

And he's does a little bit, but he's not lit up by it at all. So I'm drawing these huge things, cutting 'em out, making dioramas, and he's like,

So what is he lit up by

Running,

Which is, I'm assuming it was David and your specialty at

Some point. Yeah, of course. No, I mean, okay. I grew up kind half and half. I did grow up. You played some basketball, played basketball until ninth grade, had a catastrophic injury, but I don't think I would've kept going anyway. I definitely leaned toward art. Yeah, much more theatrical. Singing, singing, all that kind of stuff. Yeah. So yeah, I don't even know how to articulate what we're learning. I guess the thing is, I dunno, I don't know how to fully engage in it yet because I am worrying

You're not a sports mom yet. You're not like a

No. Someone's talked to me about some sort of special chair and I'm like, I don't what? Okay. But the thing, okay, here's what I know. Soccer. No, not for me. I mean, that's good at it though, right? He's good at it, but he's good at soccer. He's amazing at running cross

Country. Cross country.

Yeah. No, it's different. He was great at martial arts. Everything he tries physically

Ninja

Gym. Yeah,

He's just a natural

Athlete. He's just

Physical.

Yeah, his body. I mean, you've seen him. He just doesn't stop moving and he's not hyper. He can sit and read. He can do, he just is

Physical. So one of my favorite things, because we had this with my oldest son, Caleb, when he was a pole vaulter, he had a rival.

There

Was a kid from another school who, in fact, Caleb was really good. He was nationally ranked from the time he was a kid at the pole vault. But there was this one kid his junior year that when they would go to these big tournaments, the kid wasn't from around here, but when the kid beat him every time and every time every meet through the whole season, they met again at the state championships. And Caleb won the state championship, beat him on his final jump. And so it was this most satisfying, that's so awesome. There's this and his parents, it's hard not to get involved in rivalries. So Dax has white band,

White band. He calls, I promise you, we did not help with this nickname,

Which is my favorite.

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He's calls him white band

Because

He wears a white sweat band to all the races.

And that's what he sees on his head as he's running.

As he's running behind him. Yeah, white band.

So I find myself secretly at night cheering for Dax to beat white band one of these days. I'm way

In. Oh yeah. I would love it.

I'm way in on it.

So yeah, go ahead.

Sorry. No,

Well, I had a first, I think parent parenting slash coaching. Miss, we do not do this for, I promise you, and maybe this is just hard for me to believe. I have not been around athletes in this way, but he asks us, do you have the

Video?

Can I see the video? He's six and he's asking us these questions. So Dave's at one end, I'm at the other end. And so the other day there was a race white band comes through, he comes around the corner first and I see Dax, and he's close enough that he, I don't know how much he has in the tank. I'm going to be tired by the time I walk to the finish. So I don't know. So I try not to be like, go Fest or, so I have the camera and I know white band's name because I found out that white band is related to somebody who follows me on Instagram on accident. So I'm like,

I wonder if they listen to this podcast.

They're probably not. No, we'll see. Hey. I mean, they know I'm sending them videos. They're like, oh, this is my nephew. Can you send me the video? I'm like, yep, tell him to watch out for Dex. But anyway, so I'm filming it. And the thing about cross country that I found interesting is it's very encouraging because really it's like the kids beating themselves and

It's just so brutal by

Itself. It's so brutal. And so all the parents are just like any kid that's across the finish line, it's like, oh, they're cheering. You can do it.

So I've learned that that's just what you do. I've got my phone in my hand. The kid runs by, I say, let's go his name. Okay, blah, blah. D comes obviously way more intense. So he gets back later on, he's asking, oh, do you guys, can you hear the video? Can we watch the video? Yeah, sure. You put the video on our tv. And he hears me go, come on name. And he whips his head over and he looks at me and he goes, why did you cheer on name? And I was, oh no. He said, why did you cheer on white man? That's sorry. He did, sorry, ruined the story. He said, why didn't you on white hand? And I said, I don't know. I just felt like everyone was yelling. I went, I'm like, obviously I want you to do your best. I think it was my first kind of like,

Ooh.

But yeah, he is. Anyway, this is getting way long. But he is supremely just competitive. Competitive. And one thing I've learned about Dax is he kind of came pre-wired for shame. I know this sounds bad, but there's just something in him. I've prayed against it from the beginning. He just has this, you will never have to, he's just wired for it. So my journey has been not only just the sports thing, but just figuring out how do you frame coming in second through 100th when he just wants it so bad? And I think you'll get

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it. I think he's going to actually, I know people say, oh, he's six or whatever. But Aaron's son, who we're going to have on in a minute here, he was doing a life story where he was talking about at six years old, he got a camera and he's at video school as a 19-year-old.

Yep, exactly.

And so yeah, Caleb didn't, your son didn't go to the Olympics, but he went to college on doing this and it was amazing, duke. And so part of me, I don't want to put pressure on him, but I want to foster it. And so I dunno.

I love that. I just love watching your journey too, to a sportsy mom.

What happens if I start wearing the shirts and stuff? You'll be like,  
It's going to happen.

Yeah, I did.

I'll give you a sentence that we learned early on for when the kids didn't win.

Oh yeah. Good.

Because it's hard for a parent to know what to say. It is. You don't know what to say because you want to encourage them. You don't want to be a jerk to the other kid. You'd be like, you'll do it next time.

Get to the ground.

No. So the phrase that we learned was we love to watch you compete.

Oh, that's good.

One of my favorite things in the world to say that. That's great. One of my favorite things in the world is to watch you run.

Oh, that's great. Yeah.

That's encouragement. It's all about them. And their performance has nothing to do with where they finished or where they placed or whatever. That's cool. They just need to know you love to watch them do that thing.

That's awesome.

That was a good thing we learned along the way. Hot tip. Wow. Look at

This. Listen, I'm not even saying this just because you're sitting here, and I just told you this the other day too. I think you and Kim, you've given me the best parenting advice anybody's ever given me. And you gave it to me five years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, just watching you and listening to you. And there are still things that this will be one of them. There are still things that Dax will do something. And I literally will, he'll hear your wife's voice in my head. Don't make him afraid.

Don't

Make him afraid. He's not fragile, not,

My wife is very passionate about kids being brave. This is her.

She should do a TED talk. Right. Anyway, enough about me never doing that again.

Hey, that was great. All right. We better move

On. Back to you. Yeah. Okay.

So let's move on to your inbox. And we're hoping we're taking themes from emails that Derek has gotten either recently or over the years, and we're hoping if we can bring these topics to light and give you some framework that it'll help you if you have these questions and you want a different perspective.

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So we'll put it in the show notes. You can copy it, do whatever you want, use the resources. But yeah, so this one we get a ton, and I'm assuming people are going to get it more and more as we move, just as the world changes. And probably since Covid, a bunch of you have gotten this, why does Grace do video preaching? Yeah, it's good.

Yeah. So there's a couple of different angles and really I want to hit on a couple of different questions that kind of revolve around this. And then also I'll respond with a couple of different reasons why we've landed on why we do this. And I just want to acknowledge upfront, I don't have any concept that this will be a forever and always thing. I don't think it's set in stone that we will always do this. We decided when we went multi-site to do video preaching, we thought it was best for a number of reasons, which I'll get into. But I also know that people, including pastors, have very strong feelings about this of just either our church will never do that, or our church does that and we'll never apologize for it, and all that kind of stuff. And this is just one of those, to me, kind of a gray area that there's a practical nature to it. I don't think it's unspiritual or sinful in any way. So I think it's one of those choose what's best for you, but I don't want people to get the impression that I'm pounding the table for

Video preaching. This is just kind of our journey through it and how we've answered questions along the way. So one of the questions that always comes is, isn't video impersonal? Isn't that an impersonal way to do the sermon? And the truthful answer is, yes, it is. And what we've said in response to that, that's why every other aspect of the service must be incredibly personal.

And so the ushers have to be fantastic, and the greeters have to be fantastic, and the site pastor and the worship leaders. And the truth is that video sermon is just one small element to what that whole service is. And so I know one of the things that you've talked about before and that we believe in is that just the way we record our videos is a little bit different than what normal churches do that do this. But we record in the studio to the camera, so it's not a camera watching me in another room talking to other people. And that room is just listening in. It's my chance to look straight into the camera and kind of speak to that congregation. So it is impersonal. And I think one kind of biblical illustration is Paul used these circular

Letters

When he was communicating with his churches. That was the technology he had at the time when he couldn't be two places at once or 15 places at once. And he would send these letters and they're called circular letters because they would circulate from church to church in a particular region. He wrote it to that whole region and it would circulate. And I always think of it as funny when people kind of dig their heels in over this. I'm just going, can you imagine some people in that church going, I'm not listening to that letter, unless Paul is here in person, it doesn't carry the same weight or whatever. It's like, no, you use the technology that you have at the time.

Yeah, he'll be here in two years, so we'll see you then.

Yeah.

Or Paul,

He

Did the best

With what he had. He did with what he had. Man, that dude ran himself ragged. I can't imagine what he would've done with video

Technology. No, I can't imagine.

It's crazy.

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Or the printing press,

Right?

I mean,

Honestly.

Yeah.

Alright. So the second question that often circles around this is, why would I come watch a screen when I could watch church on my computer or on my TV from my couch? It removes all motivation for a person to engage with the church. And so my response around this is just usually around that question represents a grossly underdeveloped view of the church. This aspect of theology called ecclesiology. It's an underdeveloped ecclesiology so that if somebody thinks that the sum total, the sole purpose of going to a church is listening to a 30 minute sermon, man that says more about our view of church than it does how that sermon is being delivered. And so we try to set the bar much higher than that in terms of what it means to engage with a church. And so you can't experience deep community from your couch. You can't use your spiritual gifts from your couch, you can't serve the poor from your couch. There's a whole bunch of things you can't do from your couch. And those are the very things. That's what the church is. And so I think really the response there is, man, there is more to church than a 30 minute sermon. That's good. The last question is about, some people will often say when you're preaching from a centralized location, and there are a variety of congregations listening to that, you can never address the personal needs of a congregation through a centralized message like that. And so our response to this typically is those site pastors and those leaders in that congregation will always maintain the right to be a prophetic voice of that

Congregation.

If there's something going on in their congregation, they have the freedom to address that thing in a variety of different ways. But I come back to one Corinthians 10 13 as a really interesting passage for this that says, no temptation has seized you except what is common to

Man.

And I love that passage because it talks about the commonality of our experience that I've preached in a variety of different countries. I've preached in Thailand, I've preached in Haiti, I've preached in Japan, I've preached all over the place. And it's like I can use the same message all over the world because there is a common experience of humanity that the word of God speaks to. And if it needs to be any more specific than that, there's other ways that we can speak into

That. Yeah, absolutely. That's good.

Yeah. So those are kind of three of the questions that isn't it impersonal? Why would I come if I can watch it from my couch? And then you can't address specific needs. But then I come back to just some of the benefits of video preach. And again, I want to make sure people understand I'm not lobbying for this. I'm just saying this is what that's

Learned. Yeah. We've

Learned and worked through as we've this. So the number one reason that we use it among we have three different congregations, is for unity. We believe that there should be a unified preaching voice. It's one of the best predictors of unity in the church. And so we just think really nothing else will hold us together. Kind of like the unified proclamation of God's word. And so we're in the same series all the time, studying the same scripture, having the same congregations, I'm sorry, conversations around the same truths from the word of God. So the unity is a big thing. The second one, and this is really

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important, I just had a conversation a couple of weeks ago after service. Somebody was saying, how did they frame it? It's time to free your other pastors to preach. And it sounded very

Spiritual

And compelling in the moment, but what I explained was it's really not a matter of freeing or not freeing anyone to preach. It's a matter of really the best use of our pastor's time and energies. And that if we have three congregations and we have three different pastors preparing three different sermons, or even if they're preparing the same sermon, for me, sermon preparation is usually about 15 to 20 hours per week. And so if we

Have, and that's doing it all the

Time. All the time, yeah. That's after 30 years of doing this. And if we multiply that times three, we have a great inefficiency. I like to say I would rather shoulder the burden of preaching most of the times and doing that time on my schedule and freeing our pastors not to preach, but freeing our pastors to pastor their congregations that their time could be much better spent pastoring the congregation with those 15 or 20 hours a week. They can be leading and pastoring that congregation without the burden of having to preach every week.

I don't want to overstate it, but you can even see we have a preaching team and the site pastors are on it and they like to preach. It's not, they don't like to preach, but you can feel like on the months where we're like, okay, who's taking this? Can people take this week or that week and blah, blah, blah. There's kind of a lean back from the table. Everyone's happy to do it, but they've come to just, I think appreciate being able to be the kind of pastor God called them to be in particular. So yeah, it's a cool thing that we get to do.

That's good. And often if I'm in the room and Mike, our pastor in Harbor Creek is from the room and walk into Harbor Creek, and I would say, who's your pastor? They would say, Mike,

Oh yeah,

I'm the talking head, but he's their pastor and as it should

Be. Oh yeah.

So

It's great.

We're not pastoring from a distance. It's just that teaching gift that's coming from a central location.

And I do think that's sometimes the reason people are against video preaching is because they assume you're pastoring from the screen,

Right? That's right.

And that's just not

Possible. The last one is maybe the least important, but the most practical. And that is that when we're all in the same series and listening to the same preaching, we can have the same supporting resources. And so it's kind of a cool thing. It gives our church to gather across even campuses or congregations and know that if they're in a life group here, a life group, there can be a joint collaborative life group or whatever, that they're going to be going through the same materials at the same time. And so I think that's just one of those cool things that allows a bigger group of people to kind be, and I just think about, we're talking today a little bit about engaging the community, good thinking about that community conversation that can happen because we're all kind of studying the same thing. I think there's a power to that.

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Yeah, that's cool. Also, just this is my own random thought, but our youth ministry leverages it also. And so now they have a team that's contextualizing and they can do that because of this structure, which is really cool too.

That's right. Ironically, I'm going to train the youth ministry preaching team

Tonight. They're so cool. Yeah, I want to hear how that goes. Maybe we'll talk about it next week. Again, you guys can submit an email [topic@daresanford.com](mailto:topic@daresanford.com) and we can say your name, keep it anonymous, whatever you prefer. But we'd love to help tackle some of these topics if we can. So we're going to move on and we're going to invite Aaron to join us next. So the meat of this podcast is where we pull back the curtain and show you what it looks like for us to move from an assimilation driven megachurch model to a fusion model that includes and leverages discipleship multiplication model. And we're hoping that this is helpful for you and for us, and to we're going to be talking about understanding your church's local predicament. And we have Aaron Loberg joining us.

Hi, Aaron. Hi. Good afternoon. Boy. This is like, say

Aaron. It's timeless. Podcasts

Are timeless. I apologize. So good after whatever to whatever time you're listening. Green.

This one's going to be rough. Everyone buckle up. Not because of Aaron, just because of our relationship together.

So Aaron, I mean, it's fine. Just go with it. Aaron is a dad to four kids. You have two officially out of the house now, husband to Kelly. And Aaron has been really part of this ministry since Derek before birth. Yeah. He likes to say he was born on the T of the church, which is super disturbing. But when Derrick became youth pastor, that's when you guys met, obviously, and you've been around since then. You've done everything, youth ministry, college ministry building and grounds, and kind of been derrick's right hand through it all. And now you're here on this podcast.

So that means I've made it,

I guess. So thanks for joining

Us. The 27 people listening are

Really impressed. By the way, subscribe.

People

Subscribe. There's lots of people listening.

Yeah.

If you love what you hear and subscribe and share it with your friends.

Thank you. Oh, end of segment. Thank you,

Aaron.

Alright, so we want to talk about local predicament. What is local predicament? Derek, why do we want to talk about this?

Alright, so one of the things that has been a standard part of this whole process for us is this idea, I think I talked about in the very first episode that you can define discipleship locally. That certainly there are broad concepts around what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, but this idea that we could actually get specific about what does a disciple look like here and now and for this area. And so I know the first part of the process for us with Clarity House was we had a team that was walking through this together to define what they called our local predicament. So, which just means what are the unique needs and

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opportunities right here where God has placed us. And for those listening, we're in a town called Erie, Pennsylvania.

No, it is not next to Philadelphia.

No, it's a long way away.

Is that not what you hear

All the

Time? Every time. I'm like, we're in South Carolina. Oh, by Philly?

No.

Nope. Oh, do you go to New York City often? No, that is very far from me.

Yeah, we're like eight hours from, it's an eight hour drive or so to Philly. So yeah. Anyway, we're on the opposite side of the state, way up north, really in the little people can picture Pennsylvania as a big rectangle. We're way up in the top left corner right on Lake Erie. And it's an interesting place. We're part of probably what would be considered the Rust Belt.

And we came up with, as we went through the process with Clarity House, we came up with three descriptors that we said, and we can talk with Aaron about these, but that we are a community or region that's ironically insecure, that we are fractured and that we are change resistant. And I'd like to go through those when we get Aaron on here. But we said, really those three things are what kind of dominates this local predicament that we find ourselves in. And so as we thought about what do our disciples look like that we're trying to create at Grace, we wanted to create disciples that could address those predicaments. We've framed it as these are broken narratives. And so our big concept over our discipleship processes to redeem narratives, we want disciples who will go out into the world and kind of redeem these broken narratives. So that's why we're talking about it. And Aaron, not only has he been with us, with me from the beginning, but also has a deep commitment to the city,

To

The community that we live in. And that's expressed itself in a variety of ways. And so wanted him to talk a little bit about that as just kind of being embedded in the community and what has that looked like for him. So anyway, but let's start with this local predicament stuff and

We can

Break it down.

Yeah. Want to start with, let's just start with the ironically insecure, how we came to that. Why don't you talk a little bit about just whatever comes to mind, your experience growing up, your experience just being in the community, whatever.

Well, I think ironically, insecure is almost something that we have forced upon ourselves in an effort to, we happened upon it in our desire to help speak about Erie positively.

Yeah,

You're

Right.

And so it's almost like a backfire to where we're like, okay, well you see the statements, it's okay to love Erie, all these different,

The mistake on the lake,

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The mistake on the lake. And we're just like, oh, let's grab a hold of it and really try to own it with positivity. And I think by default we started to continue to further a narrative about ourselves that then bled into other areas of, wow, geez. Wow. I guess it's alright here. Yeah.

When we would even do it, I think around here, around church, like, oh yeah, it's good. Yeah, this is better than what you would see here or there. Yeah, this is good. Yeah, it's fine. It's good for Erie. What work on Erie? It's good. Everything is blah, blah because Erie. Yeah, it's fine. It's fine for Erie.

And I think what struck us as we're kind of going through that process, just like, man, the city really is fantastic. Absolutely. The resources here, we're on the lake and it's such a beautiful spot and tourism dominates our summers and there's lots of people who want to come here. And so we said the fact that people in Erie are so insecure. Another thing I thought of that defines this insecurity is the brain drain. So it's the assuming that kids are going to come up through high school. And our oldest, he went away to Duke, you think he's going to go out to Silicon Valley or whatever, and he comes back to Erie. Why? Because it's a great place to live. It's a great place to raise a family. And so that's why we stuck that word ironic on the beginning because there is an insecurity in the air, but it's ironic because there shouldn't be there. We should be incredibly happy with where we live.

And a matter of fact, I was thinking about when we were first talking about the ironically insecure piece of this, I went to, okay, I've tried to hire a lot of people in my different roles, not only here, but in the business world to come and work for Erie. And when you think about it, you start selling people on Erie, you actually sell them on everything that Erie is not Well in a way. You're like, well, we're this close to Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. So you're selling them on places other than Erie

And

All these different things that you start to say and you're just furthering the narrative.

Yeah, for sure.

Now there are

The winters. So I mean the winters are great, but they're tough.

But you know what? The winter's never going to come blow in and take our house off the foundation's. True, true. We don't

Have

It's stagger hurricane season. Boy,

We probably shouldn't talk about that. We dunno how it's going to be because we're filming. But yeah, we have those that extreme weather, but we don't have to deal with what a lot of places deal

With. It's devastating stuff. Yeah.

Good. Yeah. So we talked about how Erie is fractured and that, I don't know where that started. I mean we kind of started investigating it a little bit, but we can I think, speak to that, just even living in the city and of neighborhoods and whatnot.

Well, I think, I dunno if you want to talk historically about some of this stuff, but it's interesting because the one thing I've noticed in just as we've been choosing to raise our family in the city and different things, it's fractured within the city, but it's also fractured within a lot of people who live in the suburb and don't dare go to the city

Or

Talk a certain way about the city. And so it's almost like there's two fractures, the one within and the one on the outskirts looking in. And I didn't expect that. I thought, well, we're feeling called to the city

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and these different things that we wanted to be involved in. And so you saw, you already knew living in the city, all of the different fractures, but then you really started to feel the impact of how people view the people of the city or the city. Not everyone, but there's a narrative out there. And then you start to kind of be like, well, I got to figure out a way to defend that, or how do I help redeem that? And it's a fracture.

Yeah, for sure.

Yeah. It's funny. I mean when you really look at how deep this goes, I've heard it. There's fracturing all over the place. Which hospital do you use? Hamit or St. Vincent. And it's like, I'm a Hammond person. I'm a St. Vincent. It's that goofy. Erie is one of the only places I know of where high school lines are still drawn way into adulthood. These rivalries between high school. Are you a McDowell person? Are you a prep person? Are you strong Vincent person, what it used to be? Or collegiate or whatever. So there's that. But the territorialism really gets weird when we get into churches. Erie's one of the most social service rich communities in the country, literally per capita. We have more social services. And I just had an incident, even just last week, talking with somebody who works with one of the agencies who does overlap work with other agencies who has no, I introduced two people. They had no idea each other's services existed.

Oh wow.

And it's like, we should be talking and we should be building some bridges across these different services so that it's not so hard for people to navigate. But it is an eerie thing that there is this fracturing in our community.

And I think about too, even historically as well, my dad talks about growing up, we still even have them. You have the kind of little Italy, even still the Polish neighborhood is still kind of there where my dad grew up and talking about the way they navigated their neighborhoods and your neighborhood had everything it needed, the church, the little corner store, the funeral home, whatever. And Erie just was built that it was kind of built on those segmented neighborhoods. And that just really stuck,

Which all started out as really good and incredible things.

Exactly.

But then sin comes in and does its thing to fracture it and figures out a way to make it a really bad thing instead of celebrating all those different unique, amazing things.

And one of the outflows is, I think it was two or three years ago, Erie's named in USA today as the worst city in the country for African-American people to live in and stuff. So that fracturing can take on a really dangerous, sad reality when it's kind of played out into the really important, it's goofy when we're talking about high schools, but when we're talking about now the fracturing between racial groups and ethnic groups, it gets really sad really fast.

It does our third predicament. Wow, should we eat some sugar or something? This is so sad. I feel like we need to carb load now building.

We're building, we're building.

So change resistant is our third one. And this one's interesting to me. But go ahead. What are your takes on that?

Well, change resistant. I mean, as anything, there's any attempt for something hopeful progress. It doesn't matter if it's construction of a certain road or a mural or whatever it is, it turns into something that's like, well, we can't do that, we can't do that, and here's all the reasons why. And we tend to steer clear as a city of, well, here's all the right reasons why if here's what it is going to look

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Like

In a positive standpoint. It's actually funny. So before I came here, I worked in a lot of restaurants and whatnot, and every restaurant corporation that I worked for would always test things out in Erie. And I've heard you talk about that. And the mantra was even in two different, a national corporation and a regional corporation, well, if it works in Erie, it will work anywhere.

Wow.

And I've heard you say that about something. And Proctor and Gamble, we're at test market

For Proctor and Gamble. So yeah, Erie is a test market because of that very thing. If a product can catch on here, man, it'll work

Anywhere. And it could be anything simple like, oh, let's try this basic steak meal, which would you think would work anywhere if it's a good steak, but if it didn't work in Erie, it doesn't work. Or it's something that's like, Hey, let's,

It's not worth the risk if it let's past

On shrimp and sell that and it works in Erie. And they're like, Hey, this is going to sell hot cakes around the world. Hot shrimp, hot shrimper.

Yeah.

But you think about parts of the world, and again, part of it is it's, I've always used the word established. We're an established community. It feels just set in its ways. This is the way it's always happened. And again, churches all around are filled with that kind of culture at times where it's like churches tend to be these little bastions of tradition. And so Erie kind of feels like that on steroids. And you think about it just compared to, I mean, I know all of us have traveled a bit and you go to

Arizona or something, a new community in Arizona and everything's new and everything just because nobody's from there. And everybody's kind of come and it's like, here's just the opposite. This is an old established, people are from here and don't mess with my stuff. The other crazy thing, and I'll try to tell this real quick, but there's actually a historical instance where Erie had a, and some people take this further than others, but Erie had a national curse put on it because of this change resistance. So it was called the War of the Gauges, and a railroad line was trying to be built from New York City to Chicago, and it ran through Erie, but the gauge or the width of the track was different in Pennsylvania than it was the rest of the country. And Erie didn't want to change the track and they didn't want to change the width of the track to match this.

Oh man.

Part of it was the Teamsters Union, there was all kind of backstories and because it had to be loaded on different trains and blah, blah, blah. And Horace Greeley, who you probably heard that name before, but he was a New York Herald columnist, wrote this curse in the New York Herald. He said, let Erie be avoided until grass grows in her streets. And so it's one of those, the real prayer warriors always pull this story out and say, we need to pray over this curse in our community. But it all goes back to this kind of change resistance that it's slow to change. So again, you said depressing. These are the three of the things that are stuck in our community that are the broken narratives that we believe the church, that disciples of Jesus are called to redeem.

And I did say depress, but the cool part about that process, which you guys could probably also speak to is just that I think for all of us, especially those of us who grew up here, it kind of gave us this new fervor for realizing why we in particular are in still here.

Correct.

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And why Grace Church is in Erie. And all of a sudden for me, light bulbs started going off of just like, oh, that person can do this. That person can do this. Oh, that makes sense. That person's here. I don't know. It just gave me a new hope.

And it's interesting. I was thinking when we went through this process, thinking back to a church planting class that I took way back when I was getting my master's degree, and I remember them talking about some different practices or exercises that pastors and church leaders could do to what they called exe your community.

Oh wow.

So often we talk about exegeting, the Bible bringing meaning out of the Bible, but they said almost before you can preach the Bible, you have to exe the community. You have to find out what are the stories that you're dealing with right in front of you. And I'll never forget this one statement, they said, most local McDonald's managers know the demographics of their community better than most pastors. And I thought that's a challenge. That's a challenge to the church.

That's

Good. We don't just assume that we can just plop in and do our thing and everybody's going to come flocking. We have to understand what is the community, what are the people that we've been called to deal with? So I know we've mentioned this process with clarity has a couple of times, but I wondered if Aaron could reflect a little bit on some of the, we did a big brainstorm with a bunch of our team to kind of go through and really just to give other church leaders maybe an idea of what could an exercise like this look like? As you think about specifically your community, what are the kind of details that might come to the surface? So do you remember any of the other stuff that we

Talked about? Yeah. Well, I'll tell you one of the things you're talking about just with that group, local predicament. One of the things that I love that they had us do, and they had to do this in a variety of the brainstorming sessions, was kind of the self and then team. And so they would give us all the post-it notes and we'd all have, I think they're asking us to fill out 10 bullet points of what you think, whatever the question was in regards to local predicament that would get us there. And you start writing, you're like, I'm never going to get 10. Then before it, you're asking for more post-IT notes

To

Keep filling it out because your brain just starts going, you're thinking about this, and then this dot connects to that dot.

And then we kind of go around the room and then we start to take our personal post-it notes and put 'em on a larger board and see where we're all connecting, what's the same, what are the common themes? And I thought that that was incredibly helpful because it's easy to just go, okay, yeah, it's probably these two things. But when you really get everyone thinking about it, you can really start to hear a little bit of what you were just speaking about, Derek, of the stories behind the things. And you start to hear some of those stories. And I think that's where I heard the train thing eventually and all these different pieces start coming out and you really get to the root of, okay, what is actually leading to what we're culminating here of the whole? And I thought that process was super helpful and I would recommend it in any group setting.

And even just thinking through the people in the room is helpful. I thought one of the coolest things was maybe one of us more like long-term or an eerie people would have something on the list and someone, an implant. I almost said someone who moved, we

Can call him that.

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Someone who moved in later in life or whatever was like, what really? Why that? And people that come here. It was just interesting in the room to have in the community. Not even differing opinions. Just surprised.

Well, yeah, no, go ahead. The ironic insecure thing came from that. It  
Came from that because

The new people to Erie were all like, we came here and we are like, this is the greatest city. You have benefits of a big city and benefits of a small city, and you have a philharmonic and a children's museum and the lake and dah, dah, dah, and all these big city things. But you have a small city feel and they're like, but it's only the people who are out of town here that love it. That love it. And the people who are from here seem to hate it. And

We're all like,

Yeah. Or we're conditioned to be apologetic about. Exactly. Well, remember, you're an hour and a half away from these three cities, and the summers are beautiful, even though you start bringing that qualification to why you should love it. And that was a good reminder. You was like, wow, I'm really conditioned within the predicament that I'm good things stuck in or have an opportunity to help change. And we now have a tech

Stream with our clarity house friends of anytime a slogan, we find a new slogan about Erie that comes up. We send it to them. You send to, oh my goodness. So what was the one the other day, Aaron? They're everywhere.

They are. You don't think about it, but it is, everyone's trying to help redeem the narrative

In your own way. But it's like you feel like it's uphill. Like, oh,

Here it is. There was a cup that I saw and now people are sending it to me. People from grace are sending it to me because I've preached about this ironic insecurity so much. That's a good one. This is a local bakery that says Erie can have nice things with

A lovely touch of a croissant. Aaron embedded of course, over the quote. He's like, how about that croissant? Yeah. Again, great idea, great

Intention.

Yeah. But it represents this ironic insecurity.

It does.

So I think one of the things we're all saying that I'd like to get specific Aaron with you on, just how have you tried to be a positive force, I think in this city? Because we've had so many conversations over the years where it's like, I think my family's going to move. I think we're looking at a new house in the suburbs, and they're like, ah, we just can't shake this calling that we have to the city. But I want to summarize this little segment and talk to church leaders and just say, I think we've all said it in different ways, but man, there's great value in grabbing some people from your staff or from your team or some volunteers in your church or whatever. And just go through the exercise of going, what is our local predicament? And again, the definition we put on that is what are the unique needs and opportunities where God has placed us?

And I literally think that was the exercise. It was like listing needs on one, listing opportunity. I think that was it.

That's

How started

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Got,

Yeah. That's good. So Aaron, why don't you talk to us a little bit about your journey in this even before all this clarity house stuff.

Well, I know about two decades now going back, we were deciding where to kind of plant our root, our family and whatnot. I was from the suburbs, my wife grew up in the city. And the more we talked about it, the more we kind of really felt like that we could potentially bring an example of light and hope to those around us and where we're at in the city.

Now,

Mind you, people in the suburbs can do that too. Oh, it's nothing like that. It was just, it was really what we were feeling. And when you're prayerfully walking through something like that and having conversations with your wife or whatever, you go, okay, this is really something God's challenged us to. And what I learned is that we wanted to raise our family in the city. We wanted to use that as an opportunity to connect with families, connect with the school with more than just PTO meetings or different things, but helping create a family movie night or different things that, to be honest, the city schools were a little under-resourced, so some of those things weren't happening. So we thought if we could help provide that for some of the families and help provide things like cleanup days at the school or a variety of things like that, edging I edge and help trim the bushes at the school near my house just to help just bring a positive light and image and hope. But what I really learned is that it's not just about all those actions, it really was, I just needed to change the perspective of what I was probably already going to do

And choose to live where I wanted to live, but do it with perspective and purpose. And I think that was the big thing. And so I think, I dunno for me, whatever your local predicament is, if you can just think about it through understanding it, but then also going, okay, if I'm called here, if I'm called to do this, don't just be a parent that helps with your kids' sports teams. Do it with purpose and help change the perspective. Because there is perspective everywhere, and we just talked about what Erie is and whether it's the city or the region. And so how can I help change that and open up doors for conversation. So like I said, whether it's with family members or of these students, our kids' friends or somewhere in the community or even I ran for school board to kind of help to see if that could be a thing. But politics is not for me. Talk about your experience a little bit going door to door in the city.

Whoa,

That's

Funny. But I will tell you the thing where I was surprised about the impact I made that we were able to make that I wasn't expecting was the open doors of conversations with teachers.

That's cool.

And that was not something we were thinking. It was all the other things, all the kids' friends and these different things, but really teachers saw what we were doing and that we were different. And again, it was just because we were like, let's put purpose behind this and really help change the perspective of what we're doing. And again, most parents are already involved with some of that stuff anyway, but we just did a little bit different.

One of the things I think, Aaron, that you brought to the staff too was this idea, I think because you're just personally passionate about it, but before this local predicament conversation, I mean decade before probably you started talking to staff people about do you have something that you're, it wasn't a requirement, but do you have something where you're on a PTO or you were very encouraging about letting people get involved in the community if that means, yeah, you can't do a Wednesday night

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something, you can't because you're on the PTO or whatever. So that was a cool thing I thought you brought.

Yeah, that's always a strong conviction I've had of, I mean, we are high empowerment culture at our church and in our organization. And so as we are asking people who are out there in community, in other sectors of society or business or education, whatever you have, we were asking them to help move the mission that God is calling us to here as an organization. And so I thought, I think it's just as important for us being within inside the organization to be out there pushing forward on, okay, what can I be involved in to help understand the community? If you're not involved in the community and somehow other than things your church does, you're going to be further removed from the community that you're trying to redeem.

That's good.

And that was very important to me. And so I always wanted to make that available, whether it was some people wouldn't join a board, some people would do specific things, but we want to make space for that for people to be able to do that.

One of the other things, you've always been incredibly creative, Aaron, about leading our church into engagement in the community and bringing positive stuff. So from your deep involvement with RI all the time stuff outside of RI really leading that organization forward. But I even think about, it just popped into my mind as you were talking, but back kind of in the throes of Covid when we were doing some community efforts, we were helping with some coats and we were helping, excuse me, with some diapers for single moms and different stuff like that. But you had this idea about helping some restaurant, small businesses and restaurants who were really struggling because of the shutdowns and stuff like that during Covid. Can you just talk about that? Any stories kind of come to mind as you think about that effort that we did?

I'll tell you what my background is from restaurants. And so as I was ordering, we were all ordering the takeout meals at all these different

Places.

And I would ask them how they're doing, and I'd be like, well, our servers are really struggling and the different situations. And I thought, what's a way that we could help make a difference here? And I could not believe we got thank you cards. So we essentially collected money and gave money out just in check form to, I think it was 25 different restaurants. I was going to say it was

Right around

30. And people were blown away that they never would've thought that a church would do that. We actually had people start attending Grace because of it, but more importantly, people in the community felt loved and seen. And we got, I think we shared with staff a lot of the thank you cards that we got. And I still see some of the business owners and they were just so blown away by it to understand that sometimes a church, I don't know if you talk about this on here, but sometimes churches are known for thanks for listening,

Known for what? They're just kidding known for what? But here we go. Sometimes churches are known for what they're

Against. Yeah, that's good.

And the reason I still am here today is because Grace has always been a church of like, Hey, we're actually for you and here's what we're for, and we want help bring you something to help soothe you where you're at. And so if it's a financial need, we want to help with that. And I think it met a lot of

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people in a surprising way to go, you know what I do? I haven't completely closed myself off to the gospel and whatever that might mean for

Me. I'm glad you brought that up too. It shines a light on just if you have people on your staff or volunteers who are in the community doing things out active, that's the kind of innovation that'll come. Exactly.

Nobody else would've thought of that idea. Aaron thought of that idea. And so it's just shine a light on that.

Yeah. Yeah. All that you just talked about I think is great. Practical examples, illustrations of how church leaders can embed themselves in the local community address the local predicament. I think about just a couple of other, I just wonder if we could just end generally here with any other ideas that we would give to church leaders about engaging their local predicaments. I mean, we talked already about maybe doing the process of identifying those predicaments and getting some people in a room and go, what are the issues that our community has? And then the next step is to see how could we leverage the church toward those issues, both through disciple making, but also through other kind of efforts. And I think about a couple of the things that we've done in the past. I think about prayer walks around a new area or whatever, just getting a small group of people that go walk around a certain neighborhood or certain school. That's something that we've done as the church has gone into new communities and things like that. I think about even just frequenting the same coffee shops.

That's a good one.

Different things where you can just hear people talking. You learn the issues of a community through things like that where you're just kind of placing yourself in a spot where you can be part of the conversation. You talked already about getting people involved in local nonprofits and boards serve on boards and that sort of thing, but anything else come to you guys' mind as we think about just mobilizing the church in general toward addressing a local predicament?

One thing that we've done that I thought was pretty cool, and we just keep revisiting it, is just the idea of learning the names of the neighbors that are around your neighbor. It sounds so basic, but it really, I mean for us too was a challenge to get to know those names. So that'd one I would think of off the bat.

That's a good one. One of the things that I was thinking of when you were speaking, and I almost mentioned it earlier, is I would say every church has a unique situation. Every ministry has unique resources, and so there's probably resources that you have that I would say do what you can to make them available to your people. So let me walk that back a little bit. We had a server trailer with tools in it that we made available to people. Because I was involved with the PTO at our school, I was able to set up a cleanup day, borrow the server trailer, have the server trailer on site. We had tons of volunteers there. We were cleaning it up

And

There was a woman there highly involved with the city schools that said, what is this? Talk to me about sri. What is this? And from there, we were able to connect the dots. I connected that person with Miriam at the time

And

Derek. And then before you know it, a few years later, we were doing large scale projects that involved thousands of people at a local high school and some of the different schools at the large one, the large local high school. We had both mayor oral candidates in a room together, painting

Together the

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Republican in the Democrat

In the

Same room working together. And you think of, we now have continued relationships with different initiatives and different community initiatives from that. I'm not saying that's all because I pulled the trailer up to that

Building. I mean, it kind of is,

But it's when you make your resources available, Hey, here's what we have. Go use it. Make a difference in the community. It opens up those doors that takes you to a place where we tell incredible stories of God's faithfulness later.

Yeah. That's good.

It's really great. It's really good.

That was a great conversation with Aaron. That was really cool.

He has lived it.

That's the thing. The one thing I was thinking when he was talking, I was like, you're being extremely humble. And he is a special kind of a person in terms of his passion in that area, but also I think he's also not in the same way anyone can do it, which is

Cool. And it always cracks me up. You can be driving by this back in the day, but you could be driving by one of the city schools, these big schools, and Aaron's out there with his weed whacker. What the heck? He didn't even talk about his parenting

Journey and

Adopting.

Oh yeah. We didn't even get into it.

I mean, it just goes deep with them.

Very, very deep. It's very cool. All right, so now we're going to talk about something that happened this week. And this week we launched a new kind of Find your calling experience. You launched

It. Well, we did. You were there.

I was there. But yeah, talk about what it is real quick.

Yeah, so I had the privilege of co-authoring a really cool experience. It's called Handcrafted. I worked on it with Dave and Shane from Clarity House. It's under their banner. And also a pastor from Florida named David Loveless. And the four of us collaborated all through the summer on writing this material. And so I'm super proud of it. I was super, you even mentioned I was nervous. I was super nervous.

I've not seen that in probably decades.

Really?

Yeah. Oh yeah. And I was like, am I the only one that can see? I think I was definitely the only one that could tell maybe if Aaron had been there, he could have told.

Yeah, I think it was part just like I was invested

In the

Process and it didn't going well. So anyway, it's a six week experience to help people find their divine calling. And I'm super excited about it. It's very much kind of the cornerstone of our vision going forward. And so one of the things that we told Grace is that this is going to be the multiplier effect from

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this vision. We'd like to see 30,000 people go through this experience from Cleveland to Buffalo. So in this whole region over the next 10 years, and we picked 30,000 because the population in those same nine counties is 3 million. And we just think if we could get a

Percent, a 1%

A of the population to understand why God put them on the planet,

Amazing.

We can start changing the changing trajectory of an entire region. So I thought it went well.

It went great.

Yeah, I thought it

Went great. It really did.

Yeah,

It really did.

I mean, you were sitting in the back. This is kind of part of our piloting thing too, so maybe remind people a little bit about that and talk about your experience in the class. What did you think?

So we learned one of our other cornerstone experiences called Launch. We piloted that with 80 or so people throughout September. And I think those of us that were involved in the piloting process valued it so much that we were like, we can't let Derek do the calling thing without somebody helping him somehow. Not that, you know what I mean? Not that you need help, but there's something about getting off the paper and getting in front of people and whatever.

And that different set of, and I'll just talk about the inner conflict of it. We've been very busy. You just talked about piloting the launch thing that involved our whole staff. And so I'm going ready to do this. And there's the part of me going, I don't want to take any more of you guys' time. It's worth it to ask somebody to come to this other thing on Wednesday night, every Wednesday night for the next six Weeks.

And so there's that tension of like, ah, I don't want to, but I think you're right. We just found it so valuable that it's like we'll ask some people to make a sacrifice just to get eyeballs that aren't in it, that can be objective and can take notes on the notes and take notes on the experience and go, this worked. This didn't work. This was too long, this was too short.

All

This stuff. So what was your experience of the class, not that you were

I liked the group. It's a very diverse in age, vocation, gender. It's like almost 50 50 male female. I thought that was really cool. Some people not connected to the church as much. You could tell just from watching them, I guess they kind of described themselves at the beginning. It was going to be interesting and just different perspectives. That was cool. And I thought just the materials that you guys created were really great. But watching, again, this is one of those experience at things. I'm sitting there at looking at your stuff, looking at the book, and I'm watching people and I'm trying to watch people when they're writing. So it feels like a dumb little thing. But someone's writing right now. There is no space in this book to write. Where are they writing that? So just little stuff like that. You need more space here just, but it's those things that are like take something from 98% to 99, a hundred. I dunno. But yeah, I thought the class was great. I thought that it was definitely more lecture heavy than you.

The first week is very introductory, so it's kind of painting the picture of calling and all that that means. And really the next coming classes are very workshopy, very exercise heavy people doing a lot of self-

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reflection. And the goal of the class is to come out of it with people naming their two word Ephesians two 10 calling. And this is two words that they will take into every room. They walk into their job, their family, their hobby, whatever it is. And they'll know this is why God put me here. So it's exciting. And I'll tell you, I was at an event on Saturday night, so that would've been four days after the first class and saw another local leader. And this was the first time this guy's a real community

Leader.

And he asked me what was going on at Grace, which is

A

Big question right now. I'm like, listen to the podcast asked. But he was asking specifically about sri, which has always been our community engagement program that we talked about a little earlier. And he's been observing that for a while. And it forced me for the first time to talk about this calling class and serve Erie to somebody who's completely outside our orbit. And so I said, here's how I described it. And Aaron was with me and he said he wished he had a tape recorder. He was like, that's the best you've ever described. Oh

Man.

But I basically said, up until now, SRI has been a mass movement of volunteers toward community projects. So paint brushes, repairing decks, doing that general work that needs to be done that people love to do, that make the beautifies and makes the community a better place. I said, what we're trying to do is to move S and some other things down to a very individualized approach where individuals in our community can find out why God has placed them on the planet, and then can wave the flag at us and say, now we need people to come alongside and help me fulfill this calling. And so that we can now go into every segment of society with individual ambassadors who know why God has put them there, and to see communities kind of come to life as a result of people finding their God-given calling.

Calling. Good one.

Yeah,

Put it in the glossary.

Yeah. Just kidding.

That's awesome.

Yeah, so it went well. And thanks for being there.

Yeah, anytime

Sort of.

All right. Thanks for listening today. If you liked this episode, you can tell us by leaving a rating or a review. Five stars. If you liked it, that'd be awesome. Seems awkward to ask for, but I'm going to also, you don't want to miss what's next. We have some really cool guests coming on soon. We're scheduling those right now. Super excited for you guys to hear those. So help a friend by sharing this with them. And you can find detailed show notes, related resources@dereksanford.com. And that's where you can also submit those questions for the questions or inbox content to us. And you can subscribe to Derek's newsletter there. So thanks for listening and we'll talk to you next week.

Thanks everybody. See you.