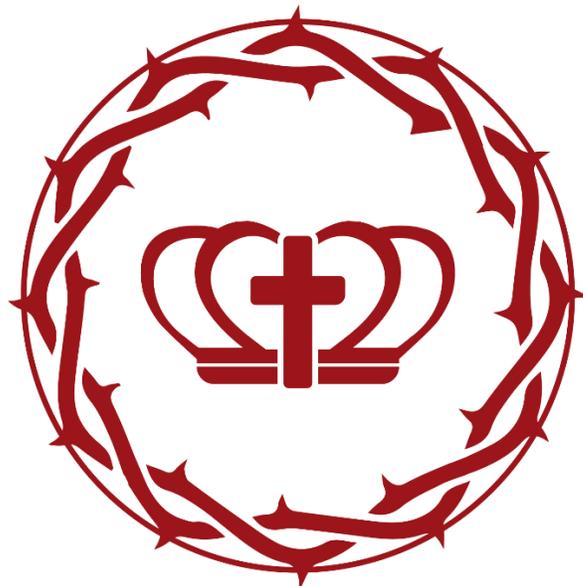


Exploring Membership in



KING OF GRACE
CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to introduce you to King of Grace Church in a way that will help you discern whether God is calling you to become a member, really a partner, in what God is doing in and through this church¹. We will take time to explain our core beliefs and values, the nature and structure of our church, our life and mission and our ministries. Our final session will cover our commitments to one another. Hopefully, after going through this material you will know better if you are hearing God's call to join in with what God is doing here.

Each chapter is designed to be read before a 45-minute session where we will meet to discuss the chapter and any other questions or comments you may have. Please make a point of getting the reading done and attending each session, so you can best prepare to discern your next steps. We want to do all we can to help you in this process so feel free to ask any question you may have. We don't believe there are stupid questions, there only stupid if they are never asked or answered. Asking good questions is the best way to learn and understand.

So, thanks for being a part of this class and thanks for committing to reading and meeting and asking questions. We pray God will bless you in the process and clarify what he is doing in your life through this class!

¹ We must give credit to a number of key sources for this booklet that may not be annotated properly. Jeff Purswell, Bauer Evans, Mark Dever, the Elders of Covenant Fellowship Church and Covenant Life Church all contributed material that was adapted for use alongside original material generated by King of Grace Church.

CHAPTER 1: OUR CORE BELIEFS & VALUES

I. INTRODUCTION

Why start a class on church membership with beliefs & values? Because what we believe about God, about the church, about life, about others and ourselves determines everything else. God has given us truth that we might know and experience all the benefits and blessings that come with the truth and therefore experience life as he intends.

Our beliefs and values land us in three key categories that may be helpful in understanding who we are as a church. While labels can be misleading, if properly understood, they can prove helpful. So, in a desire to better describe our church, we use the labels “evangelical,” “reformed,” and “continuationist.” Let’s look at each of these.

II. WE ARE THEOLOGICALLY EVANGELICAL:

Being theologically evangelical (as opposed to politically evangelical etc.) basically means two things: (a) we believe that the **Bible is God’s word** and is, therefore, our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine, and (b) we believe people need to be saved by responding to the **good news (the gospel) of Jesus Christ**.

A. THE WORD OF GOD

We have the indescribable blessing of having the very words of the infinitely glorious and good God of the universe. His word is living and active and under the power of the Holy Spirit imparts true life to us. Our God is a speaking God, and he has given us his amazing word. We understand and seek to live by the following qualities of God’s word:

- 1) **God Inspired**² - The basis for the reliability of the word of God is that it is just that, the word of God. And God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-sufficient God has determined to record for us his perfect word that we might know Him and have true life. The scriptures are inspired by God. They are “breathed out” by God himself as men wrote scripture.
- 2) **Infallible**³- Because Scripture is God-breathed, it is fully capable of accomplishing the purpose God intends - it is fully able or “infallible,” it will not fail to accomplish its purpose.
- 3) **Inerrant**⁴ - Since the bible is God’s very word, it is without error as originally received. God is all-wise and all-knowing and, therefore, does not communicate falsely. Many claims of errors arise from a misunderstanding of the manner of speaking or the genre of literature used in the bible. Closer study and a deeper understanding usually are sufficient to dispel any misperceptions.
- 4) **Sufficient**⁵ - God has given us His word that we might have all we need to know Him and obey

² 2 Peter 1:21. 2 Tim 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12 et al.

³ Isaiah 55:10-11 et al

⁴ Psalm 19:7 et al

⁵ 2 Tim 3:14-15 et al

Him. His word, as illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is able to instruct us in all the essentials of life in Him.

- 5) **Authoritative**⁶ - Given that the word of God has all the preceding qualities and it is from God for us, it is therefore authoritative for our lives. It has the final say on God, on man, on truth, on reality, it has the final say on church life, the life of the soul (psychology), marriage and family, community, and essential history. It stands as the ultimate authority - God's clear and definitive declaration.
- 6) **Life-Giving**⁷ - Jesus teaches us that feeding a hungry stomach is not the essence of our existence. Satisfying our need for food isn't the basis of life. Having clothes on our back or a roof over our head or being surrounded by family and friends, as good as all these things are, is not what life is about. Man does not live by bread alone - mankind's life is not ultimately determined and fulfilled in any of these things. Jesus is saying, the only thing that brings true life is the word of God.

B. THE GOSPEL

It comes as a surprise to many to learn how very different Christianity is from other religions; at its core, it isn't about morality, or philosophy, or self-fulfillment. Rather, it's about news—good news - the greatest news that the world has ever heard. In fact, the word “gospel” literally means “good news,” and it is this news that stands at the center of the Christian faith and should be the informing core of the Christian life. It is what the apostle Paul called a matter “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3).

- 1) **The Background of the Gospel** - Before we talk about the gospel, it is important to understand the backdrop to the gospel. This backdrop includes important topics such as man's sinfulness, God's holiness, God's wrath, as well as his great love and mercy.

*(a) Man's Sinfulness - Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.*⁸

- Not just actions, but attitudes,⁹
- Not just acting wrongly, but also failing to act.¹⁰
- Not just actions and attitudes, but our nature—who we are at the core of our being.¹¹
- Defining sin in relationship to God reveals its true nature: sin is essentially rebellion against God.¹²

⁶ John 5:9-10

⁷ Matthew 4:4

⁸ This definition is taken from Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 490.

⁹ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Matt. 5:27-28

¹⁰ “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.” - James 4:17

¹¹ “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” - Genesis 6:5

¹² “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” - Psalm 51:4

- All people are sinners and stand guilty before God. Adam's sin brought sin and death to all men. All people sin because all are by nature, sinners.^{13, 14}
- Man's sinfulness extends to every part of his being; nothing in him has been unaffected by sin.^{15, 16}
- Not only are we, therefore, enslaved to sin, but we are completely responsible before God for our sin.

"A person must confront his own sinfulness in all its ravaging depths before he can enjoy the comforts of salvation." - Martin Luther

(b) God's Holiness and Wrath -

The other facet of mankind's grave dilemma is the character of God. Indeed, man's sinful plight can't be fully grasped until it is viewed through the lens of God's infinite purity and holiness. The Bible portrays God as holy. This idea has two main components: God is transcendent: He is infinitely higher than man—separate, different—He is wholly other than us.¹⁷

God is morally perfect and infinitely pure—untainted by evil desire, motive, thought, word, or deed.¹⁸ Because God is holy, He must respond with fierce opposition to sin. This is the meaning of God's wrath. Wrath is God's holy response to sin: His personal, active antagonism to sin that derives from His settled opposition to every evil thing. It is, therefore, right and necessary for God to hate sin and all who practice it.¹⁹

"The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations." - John Stott

Some think that the idea of wrath is unjust or unbecoming to a God of love. This is largely because we underestimate both the extent and seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. Not only is God perfectly justified in His wrath, but without it, His very character would be compromised. In light of God's holiness, sin has grave and inevitable consequences:

- A broken relationship with God²⁰
- Enslavement to sin and Satan. Sin places us under the dominion of sin and Satan, unable to break free from their control.²¹
- Consequences in life. All the sorrow, pain, suffering, sweat, tears, strife, sickness, and death we experience were not part of God's original good creation. They resulted from the entrance of sin into the world.

¹³ "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" - Rom. 5:12

¹⁴ "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" - Rom. 3:22-23

¹⁵ "...None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Rom. 3:10-12

¹⁶ "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." - Rom. 8:7-8

¹⁷ "...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me" -Isaiah 46:9

¹⁸ "...ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."-Deuteronomy 32:3-4

¹⁹ "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." -Habakkuk 1:13"

²⁰ "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."-Isaiah 59:2"

²¹ "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."-Colossians 1:13"

- Eternal punishment. The ultimate, final, and irrevocable punishment for all who die in sinful rebellion against God is separation in hell from God's beneficent presence.²²

(c) God's love and mercy

As we have seen, the holiness of God demanded that sin be punished. If God failed to punish sin, He would cease to be just. If He ceased to be just, He would cease to be God. But the Bible teaches that not only is God holy, He is also loving—love is essential to His very nature.²³

Even though we were deserving of eternal punishment, God, motivated by His infinite love, chose to take upon Himself in the person of His Son, the full measure of divine wrath.²⁴

This is the glory of the cross: God saved us in such a way that, *in one and the same act*, He preserved His uncompromising holiness and expressed His fathomless love and mercy.²⁵

1) The substance of the gospel: the person and work of Jesus Christ

As stated earlier, the gospel is the “good news” of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ *is* the gospel; it is His holy history, the news of who He is and what He has done for us. The gospel includes Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming return.

(a) Jesus' birth: Jesus is fully God, yet He was born into this world as a man, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin named Mary. Jesus is, therefore, both fully God and fully man.^{26, 27}

(b) Jesus' perfect, sinless life: Even though Jesus was subject to all the temptations to which we are all subject, He never once sinned in any way.²⁸

(c) Jesus' death on the cross: At the heart of Christ's life and ministry stands the cross. His life had been preparatory for and led to that moment. At the cross, Christ provided the ground of our salvation—the basis upon which God saves us. Jesus' death was substitutionary in nature. He died on our behalf, receiving the legal penalty for our sins and satisfying God's

²² “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.” -2 Thessalonians 1:8-10`

²³ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” -1 John 4:7-8: ``

²⁴ “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” -1 John 4:9-10`

²⁵ “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” -Rom. 3:25-26 (NIV)

²⁶ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh, and made His dwelling among us ” -John 1:1`

²⁷ “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” -Matt. 1:20-21`

²⁸ “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.” -Hebrews 4:15`

wrath towards us.^{29, 30}

Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, God no longer holds us responsible to pay for our sin. All of our sins are forgiven: past, present, and future.³¹

Not only are our sins forgiven, but we are also “justified”—that is, we are declared righteous by God.

- *Righteousness* is a legal term: it speaks of a “right standing” before God
- God considers the righteousness that Christ achieved as belonging to us
- This declaration is a once-for-all, permanent event in our lives that nothing can change.

(d) *Jesus’ resurrection from the dead:* The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus’ death was an acceptable and effective sacrifice on our behalf. Death is the penalty for sin, and Jesus’ conquest over death in the resurrection shows that sin has also been overcome.^{32, 33}

(e) *Jesus’ ascension and return:* The ascension marks the beginning of Jesus’ reign. He now has all rule and authority and He reigns in heaven with the Father, building His church, defeating its enemies, and interceding for His people. At the time that God has determined He will return to consummate His work and initiate a new heaven and a new earth. Then we will reign with Him for eternity, worshipping God and experiencing the full fruits of His saving work.^{34, 35}

2) The nature of the gospel: Grace

It is often said that “we are saved by grace;” and so we are. Perhaps the best one-word summary we could use for what God has done for us through Christ’s work on the cross is “grace.” Grace refers to “God’s free and unmerited favor.” It is God freely bestowing His goodness to people who deserve only punishment. Notice the components of this idea:

- God is in no way obligated to show kindness and mercy to anyone—least of all those who have rebelled against His rule.
- We are completely unable to earn any merit from God; we stand condemned in the courtroom of God’s justice.

²⁹ “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” -Isaiah 53:4-6`

³⁰ “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” -2 Cor. 5:21`

³¹ “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” -Colossians 2:13-14`

³² “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” -Rm.4:25

³³ “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” -1 Cor. 15:17`~~~~`

³⁴ “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” -Matthew 24:30-31`~~~~`

³⁵ “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” -Revelation 21:3-4`~~~~`

- Yet God resolves to extend mercy and favor to us in spite of our guilt.

It is this grace—this “merciful resolve”—that is the source of our salvation and characterizes what Christ has done for us.³⁶ Because we are saved “by grace” alone, we can never earn our salvation or contribute anything to it. For all eternity, God alone will receive the glory and credit for graciously giving to us what we could never merit on our own.³⁷

3) The centrality of the gospel: “The Main Thing”

It is no mistake that our journey begins with an exploration of the gospel. It does not simply mark the beginning of the Christian life; the gospel is to remain at the *center* of the Christian life. It is therefore to remain central to the life, ministry, and proclamation of the church.

“We never, therefore, move on from the cross of Christ—only into a more profound understanding of the cross.” - David Pryor

At King of Grace Church, our goal is to keep the gospel at the heart of all that we do. It will be the substance of our proclamation, the fuel for our adoration, and the source of our motivation. We will do all we can to ensure that our zeal for the gospel is never eclipsed by any other doctrine, teaching, or practice. Our commitment to you is that, with all our might, we will endeavor to “keep the main thing, the main thing.”

“The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living by it.” - Jerry Bridges

- 4) **Our Response to the Gospel** - The appropriate response to the gospel has two components, which are often summarized under the term “conversion.” Although repentance and faith are spoken of separately, they always work together in conversion. There is no true repentance without faith, and no genuine faith without repentance.

(a) Repentance - The Biblical words for repentance have at their core the idea of turning around or changing direction. To sin is to rebel against God and His rule over our life. To repent is to turn back to God and to embrace Him and His rule and authority over our life. This repentance has three primary aspects:

- Mind: an awareness of the holiness and majesty of God, of our sin and guilt, and of God’s mercy and readiness to forgive.
- Emotions: a heartfelt sorrow for sin and joy at the prospect of forgiveness.
- Will: a steadfast decision to turn away from sin and to turn to God in obedience.

“The New Testament word for repentance means changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one’s whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly. . . . Repentance means starting to live a new life.” - J.I. Packer

(b) Faith

³⁶ “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . .” -Rom. 3:23-24

³⁷ “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.”-Ephesians 2:8-9”

Faith is the instrument through which the saving benefits of the cross come to us. Salvation is “*by* grace”—grace is its ground—but it is “*through* faith”—faith must be exercised before salvation is received (Eph. 2:8). It is both a gift of God and an act of our will. God gives us faith, but we are responsible for exercising it.³⁸

Saving faith has three elements:

- Knowledge: We must have certain information—the gospel—revealed to us.³⁹
- Assent: We must believe that what is revealed is true.⁴⁰
- Trust: We must place trust in what is revealed, gladly willing to stake our life on it. This is expressed through our obedience and commitment.⁴¹

(c) Water Baptism

We respond to the gospel with repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. Having been converted, believers are also to respond by obeying the command to be baptized.⁴²

Baptism is an obedient response of someone saved by grace. In baptism, we identify with the Lord who has saved us. Baptism cannot contribute to or bring about salvation. Baptism doesn’t save us—Jesus saves us through faith.⁴³

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work which has already taken place. Therefore, only those who have believed the gospel and repented from their sins should be baptized. For this reason, we do not baptize infants. Water baptism is a sign and symbol of the believer’s union with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection.⁴⁴

We practice baptism by immersion, which vividly illustrates the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is a landmark moment in a believer’s life, clearly marking one’s identification with Christ and entrance into His body, the church. It is therefore our wonderful privilege as a church to celebrate these times together. We set aside specific times for the baptism of new believers (or those who haven’t yet been baptized), enabling us to rejoice together and to welcome new believers into the life of the church.

III. WE ARE ESSENTIALLY REFORMED

Behind these truths are some important assumptions that we collectively call “Reformed Theology”. We call them this because they were rediscovered by church reformers as they studied the scriptures during the Protestant Reformation. They are as ancient as God himself

³⁸ “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous shall live by faith.”-Rom. 1:17

³⁹ “How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” -Rom. 10:14, 17

⁴⁰ “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”-Heb. 4:2

⁴¹ “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. . . . You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”-James 2:17, 22

⁴² “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” -Acts 2:38

⁴³ “when they believed . . . they were baptized, both men and women” -Acts 8:12

⁴⁴ “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too we may live a new life.” -Rom. 6:4

but were brought back to the church through the many blessings revived through the Reformation.

In the previous section, we spoke about the effects of sin and the power of the gospel. Sin is not only what we do, but who we are: apart from God, we are sinners *by nature*. So if we're truly "dead" in our sins (Eph. 2:1) and powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing. We can sum up a key tenant of Reformed Theology as "**God acts, so that we can act.**"

A. CHOSEN IN ETERNITY PAST

God's actions begin in eternity past when He chose us and determined that He would save us. This is often referred to as "election."⁴⁵

B. EFFECTIVELY CALLED

God's choosing of us eventually results in His calling us and drawing us to Himself. God's drawing us to Himself is often called "effective calling": God's work of inviting and drawing sinners to Himself by His Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel. While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the "divine summons" of God brings about the response it requires.^{46, 47}

C. REGENERATED ("BORN AGAIN") BY THE SPIRIT

When God calls us, He then changes our heart so that we can freely respond. This change is called "regeneration." In regeneration, God acts to change our inner nature and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are then able to believe the gospel and repent of our sin.⁴⁸

D. THE SUPERNATURAL NATURE OF CONVERSION

Given what Scripture teaches about sin, it is not surprising that God must do a supernatural work in our hearts before we can be truly converted. Such an understanding of our conversion is important for our spiritual health.

"I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love." - Charles Spurgeon

⁴⁵ "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." -Eph. 1:4-6: ""

⁴⁶ "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." -Rom. 8:30

⁴⁷ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." -John 6:44

⁴⁸ "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ." -Col. 2:13

E. WE MUST ACT, BUT GOD GETS THE GLORY

Recognizing God's grace does not eliminate our responsibility to repent and believe. All people everywhere are commanded to do this (Acts 17:30). However, when we reflect back on our salvation and recognize that it was God's prior actions that drew us to Himself, we are humbled and exult all the more over God's amazing, undeserved, and glorious grace. We realize that, in the end, the difference between ourselves and someone who is unsaved is not our own superior goodness, intelligence, spiritual aptitude, or anything within ourselves at all. The only difference between us and them is the mercy and grace of God.

Again, these Biblical teachings are often put under the heading of "Reformed theology." The Reformed view of salvation places emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners. At King of Grace, we refer to ourselves as "essentially Reformed." This means that we embrace the general, informing components of Reformed theology that we see as eminently Biblical. Our loyalties are not to a man-made system of theology, but to the Scriptures. Our goal is to think Biblically in order to know God truthfully, respond to Him appropriately, and glorify Him most fully.

In calling ourselves "essentially Reformed," we imply that we do not necessarily hold to all of the doctrines that some Reformed churches do (for example, our view of water baptism, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc., differ from many who would call themselves Reformed). We never want to focus on more narrow aspects of Reformed theology at the expense of Biblical truths that are central, and that we share with many other Christians. The gospel itself is what unites all true believers, and it is the gospel that matters most.

IV. WE ARE CONTINUATIONIST:

This means that we believe in the present day work of the Holy Spirit in the many ways that the Spirit is described in Scripture.

A. GOD'S ACTIVE PRESENCE

God's active presence among His people accomplishes many things. It is not uncommon to focus narrowly on more dramatic aspects of this, such as miracles, healings, or prophecy. Scripture, however, portrays the Spirit's work as pervasive and multifaceted—what might be called "the broad work of the Spirit." To fully appreciate God's active presence, we need to recognize the countless ways in which the Spirit is at work in and among us.

"Believers in Christ, who for Paul are 'Spirit people' first and foremost, are variously described as living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit... The Spirit conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God. The Spirit is therefore the empowering presence of God for living the life of God in the present." - Gordon Fee

- 1) **The New Birth.** - The greatest miracle one can ever experience is the miracle of regeneration, in which the Holy Spirit changes our nature and imparts spiritual life to us. Nothing can ever

compare with this mighty work of the Spirit in our lives.⁴⁹

- 2) **The Holy Spirit.** - One of the Spirit's primary activities is to remove sin from our lives and to make us more and more holy, just as God Himself is holy.⁵⁰
- 3) **The Fruit of the Spirit.** - As the believer cooperates with the work of the Spirit in his life, the Spirit produces "fruit" in his life, consisting of godly attitudes and behavior. This supernatural work is the opposite of our natural tendencies, and is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the believer.⁵¹

B. GOD'S EMPOWERMENT

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service.⁵²

The New Testament envisions not simply one initial experience of being baptized in the Spirit at conversion, but rather a process of repeated, continual *fillings* of God's Spirit. A Christian may have been *indwelt and baptized* by the Spirit at conversion, but yet not be presently *filled* with the Spirit.⁵³

The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. Our responsibility and privilege is to live a life of dependence upon God, asking for His Spirit to continually fill us, to empower us, and to strengthen us to live lives for His glory.⁵⁴

"Being continually filled with the Spirit is, in fact, the challenge of a lifetime and the challenge of each new day." - Anthony Hoekema

C. THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

While King of Grace identifies with and teaches that we are *baptized* in the Spirit at conversion and then receive subsequent *fillings*, we recognize that some Christians hold to the doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit as an experience distinct from conversion. We desire, and have found it to be possible, to accommodate believers who have a differing view on this issue but who nonetheless share with us many beliefs and values concerning the Spirit's ministry. Those common values that we feel would be most important would include:

- A recognition of the need for ongoing empowerment by the Spirit in the Christian life.

⁴⁹ "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." -Titus 3:4-7

⁵⁰ "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." -2 Cor. 3:18

⁵¹ "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." -Galatians 5:16, 22-23

⁵² "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." . . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." -Acts 1:4-5, 8

⁵³ "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." -Acts 4:8, 31

⁵⁴ "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."-Eph. 5:18

- A belief that Christians are to seek to be continually filled by the Spirit.
- A belief in the continuity of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, and an earnest desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.
- A commitment to an attitude of love and humility towards those with differing gifts and experiences of the Holy Spirit.

It has been our experience that, if these values are held in common, a person can comfortably and fruitfully be a part of King of Grace, even though they might refer to an experience with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion as the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

D. SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In addition to giving us increased boldness and effectiveness in witness (Acts 4:31), prompting worship and thanksgiving in our hearts (Eph. 5:18-20; Acts 10:46), increasing our growth in godliness (2 Cor. 3:18), and strengthening our relationship with other believers (Eph. 5:18, 21), the Holy Spirit also imparts supernatural gifts for the edification of the church and for works of ministry in the world.

- 1) **All believers have and receive spiritual gifts.**⁵⁵
- 2) **All of the gifts are supernatural.** - In Scripture, all of the gifts, from seemingly “natural” ones like mercy and serving to “supernatural” ones like healing, are all viewed as being from God and empowered by the Spirit.
- 3) **Available Today**⁵⁶ - All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today. Scripture suggests that the gifts are given to the church until Christ’s return, and there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that any of the gifts were intended to pass away with the early church.
- 4) **Earnestly Desired** - The gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.⁵⁷
- 5) **For the edification of other believers.**⁵⁸ - As believers, we should never be satisfied with anything less than the nearness of God—His active presence. He has promised to draw near to us, and He empowers us by the Holy Spirit to glorify Him and serve Him more effectively as He accomplishes His purposes through the church. To be a Christian is to be marked by the presence of God, and how gracious He is to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us for our lives, our service to Him, and our life together as a church. How desperately we need this. And how wondrous it is that we can pursue this in faith, and do so together.

⁵⁵ “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” -1 Cor. 12:7

⁵⁶ “ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” -1 Cor. 1:7-8

⁵⁷ “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” -1 Cor. 14:1

⁵⁸ “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” -1 Cor. 12:7

V. CONCLUSION

Hopefully this has helped you better understand who King of Grace Church is at the core. What we believe determines everything about us. Our commitment to the Bible, the Gospel, the Sovereign Grace of God as the foundation of our Salvation and the unceasing presence and power of the Holy Spirit as the source of our ongoing life together defines us as “evangelical”, “reformed” and “continuationist.” We’ve included some further references in the appendix. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have so you can better understand if God is calling you to be a part of this local church’s life and mission. Thanks!

VI. APPENDICES (VIA THE WEB)

- Statement of Faith: <http://kingofgrace.org/about/what-we-believe/statement-of-faith>
- Our Core Values: <http://kingofgrace.org/about/what-we-believe/our-values>
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration :
<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/gospel-jesus-christ-evangelical-celebration/>
- Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy:
<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/chicago.htm>

CHAPTER 2: OUR CHURCH

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

What is the goal of the church? What should a church be doing? What is church about? How would you answer this question? How would you sum up the ultimate reason for church if a non-Christian friend asked? Is the goal of the church to be a place to worship and celebrate the sacraments? Is it to merely serve as a social or charitable group of people who believe certain things about Jesus? Is it a community of faith? Is it about relationships? Is it a place for the lost and downtrodden? Is it about works of charity like feeding the homeless and helping the destitute? Is it more or less a Christian social club? What is the goal of the church? Could you sum up the purpose of the church, this local church, in one simple sentence?

Well, God's word instructs us in the purpose of the church. Let's take a look at what He says to us about the church through the letter to the Ephesians.

- The church is Christ's body and the very fullness of Christ himself!⁵⁹
- The church is the dwelling place of God himself!⁶⁰
- The church is how the wisdom of God is put on display to all the heavenly hosts⁶¹
- The church is vehicle of God's glory alongside Christ himself!⁶²
- The church is the bride of Christ, to which marriage points!⁶³

At the core of the statements about the church in the letter to the Ephesians stands Ephesians 4:1-16. This important paragraph has much to teach us about the purpose and nature of the church. We will quote from sections of it.

A. WHAT

So, what is the goal? Well, look at verse 13. It says that the goal of the leaders and members of the church is to so build the church that it might reach mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.⁶⁴

1) The church is to be as Christ himself.

The church is to be the earthly expression of his life and presence, his character and truth. The church is to experience and reflect the fullness of his glory and goodness. The church has as its goal to be as Christ in the world. This is the church's goal - both universal and local. Ephesians is written to a local church comprised of many house churches or small groups, really. And they are to understand that this call is not just for the church in her final state, as she will be when Christ returns. Neither are they to understand this as meant only for

⁵⁹ "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." -1 Cor. 12:7

⁶⁰ "In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." -Ephesians 2:22

⁶¹ "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." -Ephesians 3:10

⁶² "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." - Ephesians 3:20-21

⁶³ "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." -Ephesians 5:32

⁶⁴ "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," -Ephesians 4:13

the church in heaven nor merely for the church as a whole. No, this is meant for the church in Ephesus itself, a local church.

And it is meant for the church in Haverhill too. And it is meant for all the local churches in Haverhill. And it is meant for this particular church in Haverhill, King of Grace Church. We are to be as Christ in greater Haverhill. This is our ultimate goal - to be as Christ here - in character, in conduct, in the experience of his truth and presence and power - Christ making his glory known through his people at King of Grace church.

All other activities and expressions of King of Grace church must flow to and from this prime and central goal - to be as Christ in the world, in Greater Haverhill and beyond.

B. HOW

- 1) **Speaking the Truth in Love** - So what does this mean, speaking the truth in love? Does this mean somehow lovingly confronting each other in some frank way? Like saying something like - *"Bro, I love you and obviously no one else loves you enough to tell you that you have a piece of broccoli in your teeth and your breath is really bad, here have a breath mint."* That's not the sort of truth it means and not the sort of love, for that matter.
- 2) **The Truth** - The truth here is the truth of the gospel - the truth that Paul has been talking about for three chapters - the truth that God has come in the flesh to rescue us from ourselves through the life, death and resurrection of Christ along with his current reign and return. And the truth is also that through his gospel he has called us to be his people, he has cleansed us from our sins and given us new life together in him. The truth is He lives in us and amongst us as God the Holy Spirit. He calls us to love and forgiveness to one another, to be gentle, to love unity, to care for one another, to encourage each other in the good news of Christ, to spur one another on to love and good deeds, this is the truth - the good news of the gospel and all that follows from it. This is the powerful tool to see transformation in a church to really look like Jesus.
- 3) **Love** - And the second essential ingredient is love. It is truth in love. It is truth in the context of genuine loving relationships where we really care about the welfare of one another, where we forgive each other, where we think the best of one another, where we are patient and accepting just as God is patient and accepting of us. It is a community that sacrifices for one another willingly from the heart because God has sacrificed for us. It is a community that prays for each other and gathers together regularly for worship on Sundays and small groups throughout the week and just to be together and serve and reach out together.

C. WHY

- 1) **Blessing to the Church** - Why do all this? First, when the church does this it brings great blessing and joy to the church itself. All these things we see in Ephesians are for the blessing of the church and its eternal joy. We are told in 1:3 that we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. When we walk out these truths we experience those blessings in a tangible way. There is nothing better than when we truly love each other and enjoy Christ amongst us together. This is the greatest blessing imaginable - to be with

Christ and his loving people in perfect unity, peace and fruitfulness.⁶⁵

- 2) **Witness to the World** - Second, when the church does this it is a powerful witness to the world and attraction to those who he is drawing. When we walk in these things we are the aroma of Christ - an attractive aroma to those being drawn. Jesus said that all men will know we are his disciples when we love one another. The world looks at the church full of truth and love and sees Jesus and knows something different is happening. When the church is as Jesus and lives to love our neighbors and community we shine for him. If we want to truly reach lost sheep let us build up the church to be as Jesus.⁶⁶
- 3) **Glory to God** - Third, and most importantly, when we do this it brings great glory to God. It is not by mistake that the passage right before this section in Ephesians says, *“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* How does he receive glory - in the church and in Christ Jesus when the church is as Christ in the world. The heavenly hosts marvel at the miracle - people give praise to God for our good deeds, the lost get rescued, God’s people rejoice in him and he receives the glory that is do his infinitely worthy name.⁶⁷

II. PASTORS

We live in a culture and age where a number of factors are working very hard to undermine biblical pastoring. First, there are numerous models of pastoral leadership that seem to draw more from tradition than the bible. These models understand the pastor as the one who brings a heart-warming message on Sundays, leads the church in religious services, visits people when they are sick and provides key religious services for key moments in life like baby dedications, baptisms, weddings and funerals and generally serves as a spiritual advisor or religious figure of sorts.

Next, there are numerous models that seem to draw more from the business world than the bible. The pastor is the mover-shaker who can build the organization, get people in the door, get them motivated, get them trained, get them busy and keep them happy all so we can repeat the above steps building a bigger and bigger and wealthier and wealthier organization that makes an impact on the community, whatever that may mean. This is the pastor as CEO.

Then there is the pastor as non-existent. Increasingly, in a culture that would rather not have any authority figure in the church to hurt or mislead or dominate anyone, the preference is to have no pastor at all or a pastor as facilitator that simply helps the body be the body, whatever that means, for without authorities I’m not sure we can say.

⁶⁵ 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,-Ephesians 1:3

⁶⁶ 14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? -2 Corinthians 2:14-16

⁶⁷ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. - Ephesians 3:20-21

Contrast this with the letter to Titus. This letter is built around Paul's instructions to Titus to appoint elders in every town in Crete so that the churches there can flourish. This verse and the entire book of Titus and really the whole New Testament teaches us that God's prescription for sound churches is sound pastors who bring sound doctrine.⁶⁸

A. SOUND CHURCHES

Paul and Titus and probably a whole team had spent some time on the island of Crete apparently sharing the gospel in multiple towns. This was likely after Paul had been released from jail. And likely just as we have seen in the book of Acts, the gospel did what it has done throughout history - it transformed lives and formed vibrant community. And now, after some amount of time, those churches throughout Crete are in need of something that will ensure the completion of their journey towards maturity amidst a world full of sin and falsehood.

Paul tells Titus that he needs to "put what remained into order." The idea here is almost one of a doctor fixing someone's broken bone. It is the idea that there is something wrong or incomplete that must be addressed and set right, set in order.

What is incomplete and out of order is that these churches don't have elders and they are being attacked by heretical and divisive false leaders. These precious churches full of relatively young believers lack the protection and guidance and encouragement and equipping that comes from godly pastors.

1) Free from Heretics & Division

Paul tells Titus that there are some problems in Crete.⁶⁹ And later on he says that there are people who are divisive and engaging in foolish controversies and dissensions.⁷⁰

These churches are in grave danger of being ravaged by false teachers and division. This is not unlike today. We live in a time when false teachers have full access to the people of God. They may not be allowed to preach in our church but they have full access to the internet and blogs and social media and their error and even malice can easily infect any unsuspecting believer. Sadly, there are millions of Christians who are listening to their words and following them into danger. And often it is their use of truth that attracts folks and then, once convinced of their sincerity many folks fail to see the error in what they teach.

2) Fruitful - And they work against the fruitfulness and blessing God desires for local churches.

Paul's stated goal for the churches in Crete.⁷¹ He exhorts Titus to help all different groups of

⁶⁸ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you-Titus 1:5

⁶⁹ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. -Titus 1:10-11

⁷⁰ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. -Titus 3:9-11

⁷¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. - Titus 2:11-14

people to apply this to their different contexts. He speaks about older men, older women, younger women, younger men, servants, political rulers and civic authorities, neighbors and community, and all the good works that are to be done in these different roles and contexts all flowing from the power and truth of the gospel. It is quite a vision for the Christian life that is laid out here! There is really nothing more beautiful, humanly speaking, than a church that looks and acts like Jesus!

B. SOUND PASTORS

1) Pastors=Elders=Overseers

And so Paul brings God's solution to the need and promise of sound churches - sound pastors. Some churches and denominations would distinguish pastors from elders and both from overseers. But the New Testament groups these three terms under one role - what we usually call pastors. We see right here in Titus that Paul uses elder and overseer interchangeably.⁷²

And elsewhere, notably 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20, elder and pastor or shepherd and overseer are interchangeable ideas.^{73, 74}

So, just for clarity, we understand pastor, elder and overseer as three terms for three slightly different aspects of one role, what we call pastor. And our elders are fully ordained pastors, whether full or part time.

(a) Character

First, they are men of character, having earned a reputation for godliness, enjoying a healthy and happy marriage, having children who are faithfully thriving under his leadership. They are men who are trustworthy as God's stewards, taking care of what is precious to God, not justifiably maligned by any, not arrogant or angry or a substance abuser or violent or greedy but instead the opposite - generous with his home, loving good, controlling his life for holiness.⁷⁵

These men are not perfect men but they are to be exemplary. They are to demonstrate the characteristics all Christians are called to and expected to produce from the life-changing and life-shaping good news of Jesus Christ. They are to be living examples that the truth of Christ's life, death and resurrection is more powerful than sin and weakness and actually produces changed lives. They are men who have experienced the salvation God brings and the change it makes. They are to be advertisements for the product they sell. Not perfect but

⁷² This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ...⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach... -Titus 1:5-7

⁷³ 1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, ...-1 Peter 5:1-2a

⁷⁴ ¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ... ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. -Acts 20:17-38

⁷⁵ 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. -Titus 1:6-8

certainly exemplary. Otherwise it makes no sense for them to be proclaiming the benefits and virtues of the gospel centered life.

(b) Capability

Next it says that they are to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. They are to have a solid grip on the fundamental truths of the faith. They must understand the gospel thoroughly. They must understand the bible well. They don't have to be ThD Bible scholars but they need a firm enough grasp on the bible and theology that they can effectively teach others and lead others in leading a lifestyle that flows from these truths.⁷⁶

They are to minister truth through all sorts of means mentioned here in Titus and taught elsewhere. Here are some of the many ways Pastors are to relate to their people.

Shepherds

- Instruct in sound doctrine : Titus 1:9,
- Rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine. : Titus 1:9
- Preach : 1 Tim 5:17
- Teach : 1 Tim 5:19
- Equip the saints : Ephesians 4:12
- Raise up leaders: 2 Tim 2:1-2, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1, 1 Tim 2:22-25
- Shepherd the flock: 1 Peter 5:2
- Watch Yourselfs : Acts 20:28
- Watch the Flock : Acts 20:28
- Care for the Church : Acts 20:28
- Be alert for wolves : Acts 20:31
- Work Hard : Acts 20:35, 2 Tim 2:4-5
- Relate to the body in love : Ephesians 4:16

Overseers

- Exercise Oversight: 1 Peter 5:2
- Rule well : 1 Tim 5:2
- Settle Theological Issues : Acts 15
- Give an account for: Heb 13:17
- Keep watch over souls : Heb 13:17
- Oversee Worship : 1 Cor 14:40, 1 Tim 2:8-15
- Oversee funds: Acts 11:30

Elders

- Be examples: 1 Peter 5:3, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1
- Model a gospel-centered life: 1 Peter 5:3, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1, 1 Tim 4:12, Titus 2:7, Phil 3:17

⁷⁶ 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. -Titus 1:6-8

C. SOUND TRUTH

And all these activities are aimed at helping people understand and live out sound truth or doctrine as the bible calls it.^{77, 78} What is this sound doctrine exactly? Well, Paul details what he means in the rest of the letter to Titus. He gets into the details of the content and intent of sound doctrine throughout the letter. At its core, sound doctrine is the wonderful good news of God's grace to us in Christ. Listen to how Paul explains this in Titus 3.

- 1) **Gospel of Grace**⁷⁹ - This is the core good news: the pronouncement of God's victory in Christ over this sin and death and all their horrid consequences. When the goodness and loving kindness of God, the One who Rescues Us, Our Savior, he saved us not by what we have done to earn his favor somehow by our own righteousness but by mercy - not giving us what we deserve - instead giving it to Jesus Christ, by his bearing our sin and receiving the white hot justice of God for our transgressions, dying in our place and offering his righteous beautiful life in our place as a substitute. And then, through the washing of the new birth and renewal brought by the Holy Spirit, for Christ's sake, we stand anew by faith in him, justified before God and more than that, made sons and daughters, heirs of his eternal kingdom, all by his grace. This is the wonderful good news and the core of sound doctrine - it's source and power to change lives and make a beautiful church, a sound church.
- 2) **Gospel Entailments** - And much of the rest of the instructions for Titus and all pastors and therefore all churches revolve around implementing a lifestyle that flows from this good news - to walk out holiness rooted and fueled by grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by the love and life of Christ and simply a matter of working out a new identity in Christ until who we are conforms to who we really are in Christ. Good works and a good life flow out of being forgiven and united to a Good God.⁸⁰

D. ELDER LED

"Pastor", "Overseer" and "Elder" all connote roles which involve decisive authority and leadership. It is the elders that are held responsible to oversee, lead and care for the local churches. Though there are many forms of church government which seem to work effectively,

⁷⁷ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. -Titus 1:9

⁷⁸ But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. -Titus 2:1

⁷⁹ 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. -Titus 3:4-7

⁸⁰ 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. 15 Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. -Titus 2:11-15

it is important that whatever form is used honors and fully enables the biblical call of the elder to “rule.” 81, 82, 83, 84, 85

Because of the clarity of the biblical call to elders to lead or “rule” the local church, King of Grace is committed to a polity that leaves the decision making {governing) responsibility and authority in the hands of the elders. Constitutionally and functionally the elders serve as the governing body for King of Grace Church.

E. PLURALITY AMONG ELDERS

We practice plurality of church leadership for the simple but compelling reason that the churches represented in the New Testament were governed by more than one leader. We call this plurality “team ministry.” It is the strength and unity of team ministry that provide the foundation from which elders serve the church and stand accountable for their lives and doctrine.

Equally important to church leadership and a necessary protection for the church is the concept of team ministry or a plurality of elders. The Bible clearly models a plurality of elders as normative for church leadership. Jesus appointed twelve apostles, not just one, to succeed Him in the founding of the church. In Acts 6:1-6, the apostles appointed twelve deacons, not just one, to serve the physical needs of the congregation in a way that brought unity to dissenting groups. The following references document instances in which the plural “elders” is used in combination with the singular “church”: Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; James 5:14. The plain meaning is that there were multiple elders in each local assembly.

At King of Grace Church we have a team of three or more pastors as a requirement in our bylaws. Each pastor works as part of the team and has an equal voice in decision making. We strive for unanimous agreement whenever possible and would hesitate to move ahead without it.

F. THE LEAD PASTOR

The role of lead pastor is based upon the foundation of plurality, which prevents a drift towards autocracy. The Old Testament offers a gallery of names that remind us of God's practice of using one to influence many. In the gospels, we are told that Christ chose the Twelve, but ordained Peter to fill a uniquely prominent role. In New Testament times, the Jewish synagogues were ruled by a council of elders, but each council had a chairman, or “ruler of the synagogue.” In like manner, Paul led a growing team of apostolic men. In the Trinity there is a head, in the church there is a head, and in the home there is a head. These examples, and many others, illustrate the notion that biblical leadership, though shared, is most frequently organized and facilitated by a central figure. The lead pastor is therefore called to

⁸¹ 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.-1 Timothy 5:17

⁸² “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight . . .”-1 Peter 5:2:

⁸³ “[An elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”-1 Timothy 3:4-5:

⁸⁴ “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: . . . the one who leads, with zeal;”-Rom. 12:6, 8:

⁸⁵ 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.-Hebrews 13:17

build a team, not a personal ministry. His effectiveness should be measured by the maturity of his plurality.

G. RESPONSE

There are probably many applications we can make in light of this wonderful letter full of powerful truth. It is interesting that God's chief interest in giving us instruction and commands isn't that we would be most focused on what the other guys needs to do but instead what we ought to do. No marriage works well if both spouses focus on getting what they expect from the other. They both must learn to chiefly focus on dying to preferences and instead give themselves to serve the other. That is how the best marriages work. Similarly, the best churches work when each member is not chiefly holding expectations over others, be they pastors, deacons or other members, but instead these churches thrive when each member is chiefly focused on serving others with their gifts and lives.

So we would not be teaching sound doctrine if we left you with the impression that the chief application of this message should be what you should expect from your pastors, as important as that may be. Let us direct your attention to this table that lists the ways the sheep are called to relate to their pastors. Indeed the pastors must lay down their lives for the sheep, we are called to a very tall order. But the congregation is also called to serve their pastors. So let us invite you to consider the following ways a sound church is called to support sound pastors bringing sound truth.

The Call of the Sheep to the Shepherds

- Relate to them properly in love: Eph 4:16
- Receive them as gifts from Christ: Eph 4:8-11
- Love them: 1 Thess 5:13
- Be at Peace with them and church: 1 Thess 5:13
- Respect admonishments: 1 Thess 5:12
- Esteem them highly: 1 Thess 5:13
- Honor them: 1 Tim 5:17
- Pray for them: 2 Cor 1:11, Eph. 6:18-19, Phil 1:19, 1 Tim 2:1-2, 1 Thess 5,
- Call the elders to pray for sick: James 5:14
- Respect labor: 1 Thess 5:12
- Receive Instruction 2 Tim 4:3-4, Titus 2:15, Gal 6:6 et al
- Respect oversight: 1 Thess 5:12
- Be subject to them: 1 Cor 16:16
- Obey: Heb 13:17
- Submit: Heb 13:17
- Protect from slander: 1 Tim 5:19
- Care for financially: 1 Cor 9:14, Galatians 6:6, 1 Tim 5:17-18

III. DEACONS

A. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEACONS

There are numerous passages in scripture that speak of deacons (Rom 16:1, Eph 6:21, Col 1:7, Col 4:7, Phil 1:1, Acts 6:1-6). The word “deacon” simply means servant or minister. In one sense, all God’s people are called as “ministers” or “deacons”. Ephesians 4 makes clear that Elders are to equip all the saints for ministry - for deaconing. However, there seems to be an official role for some to share that is designated with the title of “Deacon”. Although the many passages give us a sense that a deacon is a mature servant of the local church, the clearest passage on the qualifications and call of deacons is 1 Timothy 3:8-13.⁸⁶

B. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEACON

The qualifications for a deacon parallel those for an elder in every way except one. They do not need to have the ability to teach. They must hold to the gospel with integrity, they must be proven, they must be examples in home life. While all believers are called as “deacons” in the general sense, official deacons must set a pace for maturity in Christ.

C. THE ROLE OF A DEACON

Some churches would limit the role of the deacon to serving the physical needs of the church only. While the physical needs of the church are definitely part of a deacon’s responsibility, the passage in 1 Timothy 3 seems to hint at something much more than just physical needs. This passage calls the deacon to the same level of spiritual maturity as elders, without the need to be able to teach. This clearly indicates that their duties are spiritual as well.

It is our understanding that deacons serve as pastoral assistants in the local church. They help care for the flock through their example and care for the church. They free up the elders to oversee the church, to minister the word and to pray for the church.. They assist in the care and leadership of the church under the leadership of the elders in such a way as to extend the effectiveness of the elders and to build the church up into maturity.

While deacons are to be as godly as elders, they differ from them in terms of their ability to teach. The authority of pastors and elders is based on their proclamation and exposition of God's Word. Yet right alongside the elders come those who implement what's been taught and whose lives are no less godly than theirs. Deacons are to seem to raise the congregation to the highest level of spiritual virtue, not to set themselves apart as abnormally pious people whom the congregation could never expect to imitate. - John MacArthur

⁸⁶ “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” -1 Timothy 3:8-13

D. GENDER OF DEACONS

We believe the scriptures teach that women can and should serve as deaconesses, a feminine version of deacon fitted to biblical gender roles.⁸⁷

It seems to make a lot more sense to understand 1 Timothy 3:11 as giving instructions for women deacons - what we can call deaconesses. The character qualifications here are similar but not as intense as deacons, this and other scriptures teach us that the tasks and responsibilities of deaconesses are slightly different from deacons.

There are a few other places that give us reasons for considering an official female role in the church. Romans 16:1 mentions Pheobe, a women, who is designated as a deacon. Now, the word “deacon” can mean just servant but in this passage Pheobe has been commended by Paul to receive support and respect from the church in Rome so it seems that the word is meant officially.

Elsewhere Paul speaks similarly of prominent women like Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, Eudoia and Syntche in Phillipi, also Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are all commended for their hard work in the Lord by Paul at the end of Romans. And there are many other women who are praised but without any designation as a worker or deacon.

Such was the practice of the early church, particularly in the east, such was the practice of John Calvin’s Genevan church, such is the practice of other churches led by men like Ligon Duncan, Tim Keller, Mark Dever, John MacArthur, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, John Piper - all well respected bible teachers and pastors. Such is the practice here at King of Grace Church.

IV. DENOMINATIONAL CONNECTIONS

A. BAPTIST CONVENTION OF NEW ENGLAND

Our church is vitally connected to two families of churches, Trinity Fellowship Churches and the Baptist Convention of New England. In a day when many Christians and churches avoid any formal affiliation you may wonder why we have chosen to commit to being connected to other churches in a formal way.

We believe that while each local church is to be essentially self-governing, they are not to exist independently from other churches. The New Testament knows no such thing as an independent local church. Churches need to come together to share in mission, to share in mutual accountability and mutual care.

The Baptist Convention of New England is a regional convention of Southern Baptist Churches committed to the Baptist Faith and Message and church planting throughout New England. Our connection with them is based on our shared biblical commitments and a desire to maximize our impact in New England through cooperative church planting efforts. It offers very specific partnership for our mission in New England unlike any other denomination connection available to us.

⁸⁷ “Women—in like manner grave, not false accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things.” -1 Timothy 3:11 (YLT) “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”-1 Timothy 3:11 (NASB95)

B. TRINITY FELLOWSHIP CHURCHES

We are grateful for our connection to Baptist Convention of New England. It strengthens us for church planting in New England. Our connection to Trinity Fellowship Churches goes deeper in three key areas: mission, accountability and care. Trinity Fellowship Churches are structured around four key levels of operation: the Local Church, local Cohorts, the Regional Assembly of Elders (all the elders from churches in a region) and the General Assembly (the central council staffed by pastoral representatives from each church). Each of these levels contains committees staffed by elders from local churches. These committees perform church planting functions, church support efforts, ordination & theology functions, leadership and judicial functions. Each of these levels also contain elders who are elected as leaders to spearhead our partnership as chairmen of the various committees.

This union of churches is formed around the biblical call to churches to connect and partner together for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Let's visit a key section of scripture that calls us to partnership, Acts 11-15.

1. CHURCHES NEED MISSION PARTNERS

Partnership was vital and essential for the early church's success in mission.^{88, 89, 90, 91} What a beautiful picture of gospel partnership among the churches we see in scripture! Jerusalem sends the gospel to Antioch and sends Barnabas too. Antioch grows and sends the gospel to Asia Minor and it does it work and then they bring back the blessing to Antioch and then Jerusalem through their reports. Here we have church helping church for the sake of the mission!

Accordingly, Trinity Fellowship Churches is a formed as a substantial partnership built around shared theology and values guarded by a wise, delimited polity and propelled by genuine, gospel-driven relationships. It is a powerful accelerant to fulfilling our part of the Great Commission. We need the benefit of pooling resources, consulting with others, and partnering together for greater effect. We need the horsepower to not just reach our geographical region but overseas as well. We need the benefit of maintaining essential doctrinal standards and practices in the quality of churches we plant. We need the benefit of gifted and experienced

⁸⁸ 19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. -Acts 11:19-24

⁸⁹ 1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. -Acts 13:1-3

⁹⁰ 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.-Acts 15:3-4

⁹¹ 12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. -Acts 15:12

church planters. We need the care and support required to launch and sustain a church plant. We need the finances to do all this. This union of churches fulfills this role through a partnership represented by local Cohorts and Regional Assemblies of Elders. The Regional Church Planting Committee allows church planting to be done wisely and efficiently at the regional level. The Regional Chairmen serve to augment the mission and likely exceed previous effectiveness because of the support of the regional committees. The Committees of the General Assembly will further serve the overall mission by supporting local planting, providing key resources, and providing a way for regional, national, and international missions to work together. Participating in this union of churches is an exciting prospect as we seek to obey the call from our Lord to fulfill the Great Commission.

2. CHURCHES NEED ACCOUNTABILITY

In Acts 15 we have the church in Antioch encountering a very serious doctrinal controversy about whether new Christians had to obey the Mosaic Law, essentially as converted Jews.⁹² Did they just decide on their own as a local church? Did Paul, as an apostle and elder simply say, “this is how it is.”? No, the whole church in Antioch was involved, possibly comprised of 100’s of house churches and perhaps as many elders. And they didn’t see themselves as independent from each other nor independent from their planting church, Jerusalem. They determined to hold a council with the church of Jerusalem, itself comprised of 100’s of house churches and many elders and some apostles. So they came together and discussed the doctrinal issues and one of their elders, probably the senior elder in Jerusalem, James, led the council in its final decision to not require believers to obey the law but merely live respectably with those that did. And then the council sent representatives back with Barnabas and Paul to deliver the news to Antioch and probably the churches throughout the region.

And what was the result? Joy, Encouragement and Strength! The accountability that came through this association made all the difference at this key moment in church history. Their cooperation, joint decision and mutual submission to the letter provided protection for their understanding of the gospel and the lifestyle that follows. Antioch needed Jerusalem and Jerusalem needed Antioch! They needed each other for the purpose of mission and the purpose of accountability!

This is why we belong to a family of churches that defines itself by key biblical values that lead to gospel faithfulness and fruitfulness. We have a common confession of faith based on the London Baptist Confession of 1689. We have a common commitment expressed in the Trinity Fellowship Churches Book of Church Order.

And we share ordination standards based on biblical qualifications for elders and a commitment to build our churches around our confession of faith. Furthermore, we provide training for churches and pastors in mediation and biblical conflict resolution as well as a system of three levels of ecclesiastical courts or panels to help churches deal with difficult conflicts and issues such as church discipline or erring pastors. All church members and pastors have full access to these courts as a means to protect the churches and provide wise

⁹² See Acts 15:6-35

biblical resolution to issues that might otherwise split and destroy churches. And this accountability is not some cold distant court that pontificates what should be done but accountability not only based on truth but relationships and mutual partnership with other churches and pastors.

3. CHURCHES NEED CARE

In Acts 11 mutual care being exchanged between at least three churches.⁹³ First, the Jerusalem church cares for the Antioch church by sending their best encourager, Barnabas to help them get established. Then Barnabas recruits the best teacher and missionary he knows from the church in Tarsus, Saul, to come to Antioch and become part of the Pastoral team there. And they together care for the church and when they hear of a need in the Jerusalem church they return the favor by going to Jerusalem to deliver a significant financial gift.

Local churches need the accountability, advice, and assistance of other elders and churches. No eldership is capable enough to independently navigate through all the ups and downs of pastoral leadership on its own. They need others who are wrestling with the same issues and have experienced God's grace in leadership in such a way that they can offer some help and advice. Pastors need to lock arms with other pastors who will ask the hard questions and stand by them through the storms. Pastors need to create relationships with other pastors and churches that are not merely informal associations, but partnerships that can carry the weight needed to help them and call them to account when the going gets tough. Trinity Fellowship Churches fulfills this role through the friendship and support of the local Cohorts and the Regional Assembly of Elders. Additional help is provided by the Church Development Committee of the General Assembly. All together, these roles serve a vital network of mutual care so that the result is maturity, fruitfulness and glory to God.

Trinity Fellowship Churches are organized to best serve our churches and our mutual mission. Through this we serve with the global church so that God's people are blessed, lost sheep are rescued, nations are reached and God is greatly glorified.

V. APPENDICES

- KGC Leaders <http://kingofgrace.org/about/leadership>
- King of Grace Church By-Laws <http://kingofgrace.org/about/kgc-by-laws>
Trinity Fellowship Churches Book of Church order:
<https://trinityfellowshipchurches.com/connectional/>

⁹³ Acts 11:22-30

CHAPTER 3: OUR MISSION & LIFE TOGETHER

I. OUR MISSION

*WHOLEHEARTEDLY LOVING GOD AND ONE ANOTHER
BY WORSHIPING, WITNESSING AND WALKING IN
THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST FOR ALL OF LIFE.*

A. WORSHIP

Worship is a contraction from the old English word “worth-ship”. That is, worship is assigning worth to someone or something. Worship is something we all do in one way or another. We all, as beings created in the image of God, assign worth to everything. Ultimately, the question is, “What is most worthy?”

Now we may and should find worth in many things. But there is one thing or being that is ultimately worthy. From this being flows the worth of every single other entity in all creation. Only because of who this being is do other things appear worthy. Apart from him there is no worth. And this being is the eternal self-existent triune God who tells us He is to be called “I AM.” He is, he is the ultimate eternal reality. Because he is everything else is and if he wasn’t nothing would be that is. As a matter of fact, it is a complete impossibility that he would not be, He is. Or as he puts it, I AM. And it is the I AM that is most worthy and the ultimate one whom we worship.

We believe that above all other things and all other creatures the Creator is supremely worthy and satisfying. Romans 11:36 says, **“For from him and through him and to him are all things.”** and Jesus says in John 17:24, **“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me..”** David prays, **“Your lovingkindness is better than life!”** and Jesus says in John 17:3 **“Now this is eternal life, to know you the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**

1) Gospel Connections

The greatest tragedy of fallen man is that we have exchanged that which is most precious and worthy for lesser things as Romans 1 describes.⁹⁴ The good news (good news -- good spell -- go-spel) is that Jesus Christ has come to rescue us from the insanity of living for lesser things to live for God in all things. Our redemption in Jesus Christ includes a restoration to true worship of God in all that we do.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”-Romans 1:21-25

⁹⁵ “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” -1 Peter 2:9-10

God is a giving God and because of his infinite goodness wants to share with us that which is infinitely good. Do you know what is infinitely good? That's right, God himself. And in his goodness he desires to share his goodness and invite us into heartfelt and all-encompassing worship.

Jesus says in John 4:23, **"But the hour is coming , and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."** What an amazing statement. The Father seeks worshipers. He is actively recruiting worshipers. God is the one who is active sending out his gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit to make worshipers. He is desirous of this. And you know what, there is nothing better for us than to wholeheartedly worship God with all our being and all our resources and all our lives. But in order to do this, we must encounter the gospel. Only because and through the gospel can we truly worship God.

You may know the book of Romans. Paul spends about 11 chapters explaining the gospel message and its associated truths. Then, in chapter 12, right after he celebrates the wisdom of God in the gospel, he begins a section on Christian relationships with this statement, **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."**

In other words, in light of the reality of the gospel and the mercy and grace it brings, give your life to God in worship. You see, the point of the gospel is ultimately the worship of God. Jesus didn't come and die on the cross just so your sins could be forgiven. Jesus didn't die on the cross just so you could go to heaven. Jesus didn't die on the cross just so you could be with God's people. Jesus didn't die on the cross just so you could have a better life. No, Jesus died on the cross to purchase men and women for God. Jesus died on the cross and dealt with your sin and separation from God so that you might know and enjoy God fully and supremely. That is the point of the gospel, worship. And if you merely desire these other aspects of your salvation without desiring the core of your salvation - worship of God, that is knowing and enjoying God as the ultimate object of your affections, thoughts and actions, then you may not be truly His. For worship is the objective of the gospel.⁹⁶

And so the first and most important way we build on the foundation of the gospel is to worship. And so we as a Church are committed to worship as a way of life - we are committed to being worshipers in all that we do, individually, as families and corporately.

2) Corporate Worship.

Corporate worship is the worship we do together. The intention of God is not merely to have a bunch of persons for his name but to have a people for his name. Again and again in scripture the attention of God is on the corporate people of God, not to the exclusion of the individual but to the inclusion of the individual. God wants to meet us as a corporate people in a way we will not experience his presence as individuals. He is very keen on manifesting His glory amidst his corporate people for the sake of worship. And so, Sunday gatherings are a very important time of the week for us. In many ways they are a highlight of the week. And they are one of the greatest privileges of life.

⁹⁶ "and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."-2 Cor. 5:15.

We are so blessed to meet Sunday after Sunday as God visits us as a congregation. May we never take for granted this amazing privilege of corporate worship! And that is why we gather, not just to hear good music, not just to meet with good friends, not just to hear a good word from the bible, not just to hear preaching, but to corporately worship and encounter God. That is the goal of our Sundays and the chief reason we do what we do. From this conviction flows all our goals and practices regarding Sunday!

3) Personal Worship.

It would be an unacceptable contradiction if we pursued worship of God in singing, sharing, praying and responding to God's word on Sundays but did not reflect this same pursuit when on our own. We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God, not temporary sacrifices. God invites us into continual worship, not just on Sundays but every day of the week and every moment of the day. So to be transformed by the gospel means to be transformed in our personal lives. And God calls us to know and enjoy him in all things. So we as a church are committed to walking out worship in this sort of integrity. So, we meet on Sundays, but we also do all we can to equip, encourage and exhort each other to worship throughout the week. We are to come before God in the word in prayer in the presence of the Holy Spirit not only on Sundays but during the week. There are various ways to do this.

A core and vital practice is to daily get time with God in reading the word of God and praying. If you were to poll Christians you would find that those who are growing and enjoying their relationship with Christ are likely having regular devotional times of bible reading and prayer. And I think you would find that those who are struggling are much more likely to be neglecting these simple and regular practices. To worship God is to depend on him and we know him by his word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we commune with him through the word and prayer. So, if you haven't yet, start getting up a little earlier or find some time in your day, even just 5 minutes, to practice personal worship or devotion.

There are other practices we can build into our lives, family worship, listening to good teaching, worship music, praying, reading good Christian books all can help us walk out personal worship.

4) Worship In All Things - The Cultural Mandate.

So we've talked about corporate worship, personal worship, but there is another aspect of worship that we must cover. You see, we are not supposed to be just one-dimensional or two-dimensional worshipers. For God has made all things for his glory. And when we are affected by the life-transforming power of the gospel we start to see all things in a new way. We start to see all things as made by God, existing through God and directed to His glory. And so to live in this world is to be surrounded by the glory of God. Truly the seraphim say, "***Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!***" (Isaiah 6:3).

What does this mean for worship? Well, it means there are limitless possibilities for the worship of God. For if the whole earth, indeed the whole universe is full of his glory, than each and every created thing is an opportunity for worship. And so, the call to worship is to engage every aspect of creation and encounter and enjoy and promote God's glory.

Are you a nurse or a doctor- then see God's glory in how you see the human body work in all its' intricacies, wonder and worship at the elegance, functionality and beauty of the human

body. God is an artist folks and not just an engineer. He isn't just interested in functionality. He loves beauty and elegance. And so when he makes it he makes it not only to work but to sing of his glory. And our bodies are like that. And nursing and doctoring is worship as it enjoys and promotes God's glory in the body and as it expresses God's care and kindness and character, thus extending the kingdom of God even at the doctor's office or hospital

Are you a student? Than see your studies as a grand adventure to discover the glory of God in your topics of study. Algebra shows God's order and sovereign rule over relationships. History shows God's sovereign goodness and wisdom over the affairs of men. Language shows God's image in the amazing use of language to recreate and convey meaning. Name any subject and there will be countless ways to worship God.

There are a thousand endless roads of discovery and enjoyment of God's glory. And this is what we are all called to in our vocations and our everyday lives. And so we as a church recognize the call to worship in everything we do. And so we refuse to take a narrow view of worship, that it is merely confined to church activities or spiritual disciplines, as important as these may be, but instead we see endless possibilities of worship. And so we must exist as a church not only to promote corporate worship, not only to assist in personal worship but to deploy our people for the kingdom of God in every aspect of creation, science, art, humanities, government, culture - all things he has created for his glory.

How are you enjoying and pursuing worship? Are you aware of God's call to worship? Is he highlighting some aspect of life which you need to see as worship?

B. WALK

Walking is an image the bible uses to portray an ongoing action of relating to someone or something. In Genesis 5 & 6 the patriarchs are described as "walking with God." Later, in the New Testament, we are exhorted to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, Romans 8:4, and "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him," (Colossians 2:6 et al.) Furthermore, the bible teaches us that our walk is not an individualized walk, but a walk with Jesus Christ together with the people of God.⁹⁷

Walking is a convenient word that portrays the call of God to walk with him as a corporate people - as his church. Our walking with God together involves building relationally around the good news of Christ, growing together in Christ-likeness, caring for one another according to our different needs and with our various gifts, and serving together in our church and in our community and beyond.

When God calls us to himself he does not just call us individually to him to struggle along through the Christian life on our own. No, the Christian life is inescapably corporate. We are all called to the vital means of grace of Christian fellowship. Truly life in Christ is better together.

1) The Foundation of our Walk: God's Community

To fully appreciate our identity as God's people, we have to recognize where in the unfolding drama of God's redemptive purposes we stand. Throughout the history of

⁹⁷ "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."-1 John 1:7

redemption, God has been acting to create “a people for His own possession” (1 Peter 2:9). God called Abraham from the midst of a people who worshipped false God’s to follow him. God promised Abraham that He would make him “a great nation” and through him “all the families on the earth” would be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3). It wasn’t enough just to bless Abraham, but God’s purpose was to create a corporate people, a great number of people, to enjoy his glory. Carrying forth God’s purposes, Abraham’s descendants were formed into a nation. Their faithfulness to the covenant would result in their peculiar identity as the people of God.⁹⁸

Fast forward to the New Testament. Christ came as the promised descendent of Abraham who would accomplish all that was promised to him. Through his life and death Jesus not only provided forgiveness of sins, but advanced God’s work of creating a people for Himself by bringing into existence the church.^{99, 100}

Our true nature as the church, and as Christians, is corporate. God is saving a people, not an unconnected group of isolated individuals. This is not merely theoretical. Our lives are to give expression to the reality of our existence as the people of God. To deny this by pursuing individualism or independence is to isolate ourselves from the express purpose of God. The local church is God’s appointed context for this to take place. Any conception of the Christian life apart from this is a great error.

Mark Dever, pastor and theologian, says the following:

“If you are not a member of the church you regularly attend, you may well be going to hell. I don’t mean for a second that you literally have to have your name on a membership card in a church somewhere to go to heaven. I believe in justification by faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone. At the same time, in the New Testament it seems that the local church is there to verify or falsify our claims to be Christians. The man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was sleeping with his father’s wife thought of himself as a Christian...I don’t care how much you cry during singing or preaching. If you do not live a life marked by love toward others, the Bible has no encouragement for you to think that you’re a Christian. None. Do you want to know that your new life is real? Commit yourself to a local group of saved sinners. Try to love them. Don’t just do it for three weeks. Don’t just do it for six months. Do it for years. And I think you’ll find, and others will, too, whether or not you love God. The truth will show itself. Joining a church won’t save you. It’s only the death of Christ that saves you. He alone is our righteousness. But if He really is our righteousness, if we really love Him whom we have not seen, it will show itself by us loving those that we do see.”¹⁰¹ - Mark Dever

What does this mean practically? What is God’s intention for our lives together? Is it simply attending the same gathering on a Sunday? Is it merely acknowledging the same body

⁹⁸ “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:5-6

⁹⁹ “..waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Titus 2:13-14

¹⁰⁰ “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”¹ Peter 2:9-10 (cf. Ex. 19:5-6)

¹⁰¹ Mark Dever as quoted in Stop Dating the Church, Josh Harris, p. 55-56

of doctrines? Far from so many of our modern misconceptions, the Biblical picture of the church (Acts 2:42-27) can best be described as *community*: a group of people, joined by a common life, united by common values and a common purpose, devoted to living out this life together within the larger society.¹⁰² This is the type of church life God calls us to—a life that shines as a testimony to His work in our lives. This picture of the early church may seem too good to be true. But in reality, it is this kind of community that God desires to create in His church, “a people for His own possession.”

2) The Nature of Our Walk

Because the Holy Spirit has joined us together as a community, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don't simply attend the same service, or enjoy the same interests—we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. The New Testament characterizes our relationships with each other by the word *fellowship*.

“We should not think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercises of private devotions. Fellowship is one of the great words of the New Testament: it denotes something that is vital to a Christian's spiritual health, and central to the Church's true life. . . . The church will flourish and Christians will be strong only when there is fellowship.” - J. I. Packer

The word often translated *fellowship* in the New Testament (*koinonia*—cf. Acts 2:42) is also rendered participation, partnership, and communion. The word expresses the idea of sharing something in common, or joining a mutual endeavor (often with sacrifice involved). Biblical writers took up this word to describe the relationship believers have with God through Christ.^{103, 104}

The significance, then, for believers is profound: our fellowship is nothing less than our participation together in very life of God, made possible by Christ's work on the cross and brought about by the Holy Spirit. Such fellowship is exceedingly profound and precious: This is human relationship at the deepest level possible. This is a type of relationship that only Christians can hope to experience. This is relationship that transcends all other human considerations. This glorious nature of Christian fellowship must be the informing reality behind our relationships with other Christians in the local church.

3) The Fruit of Our Walk

Fellowship that is truly Biblical has both profound purposes and rich benefits in our relationships together in the church.

(a) Growth in godliness. Sanctification is a group project. God never intended it to be

¹⁰² “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

¹⁰³ “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:9

¹⁰⁴ “. . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” In 1 John 1:3

accomplished in isolation from other Christians in the local church. All genuine Christians should have a desire to grow in godliness, and we simply can never progress on our own like we can in close relationships with other believers. We need the consistent encouragement of others.¹⁰⁵ We need others to help us resist sin and to strengthen our resolve for godliness.¹⁰⁶ We need the input of others to help us see our sin and repent from it.¹⁰⁷ We need to confess our sins to others so as to weaken sin's power and invite accountability.¹⁰⁸

(b) Providing mutual care. We live in a fallen world, and the effects of sin—our own and others'—are all around us: pain, sorrow, sickness, death. God has promised to care for us, and much of His care comes to us through other believers. Indeed, Christians are to be distinguished by their sacrificial love for one another.¹⁰⁹

(c) Benefiting from the diversity of gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to build the church. But God has also made us dependent upon one another—no one person has all the gifts necessary. We need one another and the unique gifts each one brings to mature as a body.^{110, 111}

(d) Presenting a compelling witness. Ultimately, our lives together are intended to present to the world a compelling witness of the grace of God. Our unity and love for one another is one of the most powerful testimonies we can give to unbelievers who are lost, isolated, fragmented, and ultimately without hope.¹¹²

4) The Substance of Our walk

These benefits and more are to be the fruit of genuine Biblical fellowship. However, to enjoy these benefits we must recognize our responsibilities as members of the body and position ourselves to serve others. In short, we must give ourselves to *purposeful involvement* in each others' lives.

“Those first Christians of Acts 2 were not devoting themselves to social activities but to a relationship They understood that they had entered this relationship by faith in Jesus Christ, not by joining an organization. And they realized that their fellowship with God logically brought them into fellowship with one another. Through their union with Christ they were formed into a spiritually organic community. . . . We must grasp the idea that fellowship means belonging to one another in the Body of Christ, with all the privileges and responsibilities that such a relationship entails.” - Jerry Bridges

¹⁰⁵ “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” 1 Thess. 5:11

¹⁰⁶ “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Heb. 3:13

¹⁰⁷ “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

¹⁰⁸ “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” James 5:16

¹⁰⁹ “But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” 1 Cor. 12:24-26

¹¹⁰ “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Eph. 4:16:

¹¹¹ “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Cor. 12:7

¹¹² . “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35

The Bible is filled with things we are to do “*to*,” “*with*,” or “*for* one another.” Here is just a sampling of how we are to position ourselves to experience true fellowship.

- ***Worship God together (Eph. 5:18-20).*** Our fellowship with and worship of God is both the foundation and catalyst for fellowship with others.
- ***Pray for one another (Eph. 6:18).*** Few things draw us closer together than entering God’s presence together.
- ***Carry one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2).*** This requires that we *know* others, and *share* with others—don’t expect people to perceive your burdens through divine revelation!
- ***Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).*** Consistent, intentional, and specific encouragement is to be a mark of those who serve “the God of encouragement” (Rom. 15:5).
- ***Confess our sins to one another (Jas. 5:16).*** Few things are more effective in cultivating humility, weakening sin, and promoting fellowship than confessing our sins and pursuing others’ evaluation and perspective. Thankfully, God doesn’t leave us on our own in our fight against sin!
- ***Correct one another (Gal. 6:1; Mt. 18:15).*** When we fail to recognize and take responsibility for our sin, we desperately need the correction of others. This requires humility and examined motives but, done in a godly way, is a true expression of Biblical love and one of the most effective ways we can help each other grow.
- ***Serve one another (Gal. 5:13).*** Effective serving requires knowing the needs of others. Fellowship will both reveal these needs and provide opportunities to meet them.
- ***Invite others into our walk with God.*** This, perhaps, sums up what Biblical fellowship is all about. C.J. Mahaney defines fellowship as

“The communication of our current relationship with and experience of God Himself.”

Biblical fellowship is not merely “socializing”—it is sharing our common life in Christ: life that is rich, enduring, and eternal.

C. WITNESS

Witnessing is the simple act of “telling it as it is”, that is, telling it as you have seen it and experienced it. As Christians we are to simply and humbly witness to the joyful reality of Jesus Christ. We believe that witnessing to Jesus Christ in our lives is a natural overflow to our experience. We all witness to something. Usually that something is what is most important to us. A proud father witnesses to his son’s achievements. A enthusiastic fan witnesses to the exploits of her sports heroes. Similarly, for the Christian, we testify to the blessings of the good news of Jesus Christ.

This involves both demonstrating to others the lifestyle of following Christ as well as explaining & declaring the truth behind it. Demonstration and declaration are two key elements to being effective witnesses to anything. We are instructed this way in scripture: Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” and in Matthew 5:16 Jesus says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” And Jesus also says in John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one

another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We must understand that this call to witness is fundamental to what a Christian is. We might think that being connected to God and connected to a local church is the sum total of what a Christian does. But a third, sometimes neglected aspect is that we are called and commissioned by Christ himself to be his witnesses, to go in his name and represent Him and His truth that others might come to know Him and that the name of Christ might be glorified. This is a core part of our mission.

1) We Are Sent As Jesus is Sent

This bible passage is profound in convincing us that we must live as Christ's witnesses in all that we do. It is Easter Sunday and Christ has unexpectedly risen from the grave. The disciples are still in run and hide mode after the horror of Christ's arrest and crucifixion, even though they have heard of the resurrection multiple times already that day. They are in a locked room, probably the upper room, hiding in hope of avoiding the Jewish authorities, even with the encouragement of the news of the resurrection. Despite locked doors Jesus suddenly appears and stands among them, assuaging their shock with the blessing, "Peace be with you!" He shows them his hands and side and the disciples are amazed and glad that he is alive. He then says a key phrase, especially for our topic today, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." We learn more about this statement as we look through the gospel of John. The word "send" or "sent" is used 60 or so times in this gospel. Here is a sampling.

(a) Commissioned By Him^{113, 114}

(b) Backed by Him^{115, 116}

(c) Doing His Will in Dependence on Him^{117, 118, 119, 120, 121}

¹¹³ Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. John 8:42

¹¹⁴ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. -John 12:49

¹¹⁵ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. -John 5:36-38

¹¹⁶ I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." -John 11:42

¹¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17

¹¹⁸ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. -John 4:34

¹¹⁹ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. John 5:30

¹²⁰ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. -John 6:39

¹²¹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." -John 8:29

(d) Communicating His Word^{122, 123, 124, 125, 126}

God has always been a sending God, his nature of going after lost people and sending his people after lost people, for the sake of his love for them and for the sake of his glory. Take it as granted for now, from these readings in John, that if Christ is the fulfillment of the scriptures and his “sentness” is such a central part of who he is, then certainly the mission of God, his going after people for redemption, his sending of people for these purposes, obviously is at the center of God’s mindset for the world. And as a sending God he has sent the ultimate solution, his Son, commissioned by Him, backed by Him to obey Him and represent Him and communicate his word. This is the mission of Christ.

Our sending by Jesus has the eternal Father’s sending of Jesus behind it. And just as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us! That is truly amazing! The same commission is there, the same backing is there, the same message is there and the same sort of obedience and carrying forward of his will is there. That is significant weight, a high privilege and an inspiring honor. As the Father has sent Jesus so are we sent. Don’t let anyone tell you anything less. You are emissaries of the eternal God of the universe, sent like Jesus was sent! You are sent as his unique witnesses!

2) We Are Sent by Jesus

It probably would be helpful to understand that the word “send” and the word “mission” and the word “apostle” are all the same word in the bible. To be a sent one is to be a missionary is to be an apostle. They all say the same thing. And what we are learning is that the people of God are a sent missionary apostolic people. Just as Christ was sent, so are we sent. And it all began with the Father sending the Son. He has sent the Son. Now the Son sends us. The entire church is sent of Christ to be his missionaries, his witnesses, in the world.

Some would argue that it was only the first apostles that were sent. They are called apostles after all. But this is a serious misreading of the New Testament. If we read the New Testament as commands merely to the apostles than we do great harm to the truth and the role of the scriptures. Also, it is pretty clear from other verses besides this one in John, that Jesus expected his apostles to teach others to do the same that he had commanded them.¹²⁷

(i) Resurrected Christ

It is the crucified & resurrected Christ who is sending the disciples! He has just shown up in their midst miraculously. He has shown him his hands and his side. He has spoken peace

¹²² For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. -John 3:34

¹²³ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. -John 5:24

¹²⁴ So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. John 7:16

¹²⁵ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. John 7:18

¹²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” -John 8:26

¹²⁷ 18b “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

to them. It is the victorious resurrected Christ who is commissioning them. It is the Christ that has died for sins and expired on the cross. It is the Christ who said on the cross, "It is finished." It is the one who has conquered sin and death who is sending them out.

In some ways our sending is just like Christ's and in some ways it is radically different. Though we are sent by Jesus as the Father sent him, though we are commissioned by the Father himself to go, though we are backed by the Father and communicate his truth and are to be shining examples of lives of faith and obedience, like Christ, we do so following Christ not replacing him.

He alone is the unique eternal Son of God. He alone is the sinless spotless One. He alone has paid for our sins in full on that cross. He alone has fulfilled all righteousness. He alone pleases the Father. Through Him alone are we forgiven and accepted and welcomed into his family. We are followers of Christ who are sent like him but not sent exactly like him. There is a limit to the likeness to our sending. Jesus alone is the unique sent one.

But now, in Him, we are given new life and an amazing message to deliver to mankind. We have good news to witness to and a new life to demonstrate to all those around us. It is the message and life of the crucified & resurrected Christ, a message of forgiveness and hope and love and redemption and a new everlasting kingdom of faith and goodness and glory. It is a message demonstrated by the sacrificial love and overcoming grace experienced in his people. We are sent to tell others about him and demonstrate the reality through how we live. The sending is by and for and about the crucified & resurrected Christ.

(ii) Spirit Empowered

Next, it is a Spirit-empowered sending. Did you notice what Christ did right after he commissioned them? He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Now, this was only a precursor to the receiving they were to enjoy on Pentecost, but it is an important picture to what this sending entails. There is no going without the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sent to us and we are sent in the Holy Spirit to proclaim and demonstrate the kingdom of God throughout the world. God the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to believe his word, to obey it, to love one another, to love our neighbors, to love all the nations. The Holy Spirit gifts us to serve the mission according to the particular roles and opportunities he assigns us. The Holy Spirit creates his fruit in us, the divine character that is so attractive - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. The Holy Spirit guides us and strengthens us and empowers us and convicts and confirms the word of God.

God has not left us as orphans in this sending. We are not sent out alone. God the Holy Spirit dwells in us and amongst us. It would be a very scary prospect otherwise.

(iii) Salvation Holding/Withholding

Finally, Jesus says in John 20 verse 23. **"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."** That is really heavy. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." We have the power to dispense or withhold forgiveness. And this doesn't just mean that we can choose to forgive or not. No, this is about forgiveness from God. We have the ability to grant someone forgiveness from God or not.

How could that be? Well, who alone can grant forgiveness from God? God, right! And who has God sent as his emissaries and witnesses to this world? Us - right! That is such an important aspect of our sending - we are sent with the power to bring the forgiveness of God.

And we know that this forgiveness is granted as the church proclaims the gospel of forgiveness and affirms the right standing of his people as people of genuine faith. The church holds the keys to heaven, the power of forgiveness. If the church shares the gospel and people believe they experience forgiveness. If the church withholds the gospel people can't hear and therefore can't believe and therefore can't be forgiven and therefore meet the worst fate possible - to live eternally separated from God.

The terrible fate we are all naturally in is a fate of eternal separation from God because of our sin - our rebellion, doubt and disobedience to God. The right response to this sin is God's just punishment of banishing us from his presence. And if we don't receive the forgiveness he provided through the good news of Christ's death for us and his resurrection, we will remain in our sin forever. This is a sober duty of the church - to be the arbiters of eternal life. This is a sober commission. And its weight should compel us, along with the rest of the church, to do all we can to see that forgiveness is granted to all and any we know. How can we fail in our mission when so many are waiting to hear of the good news, so many are waiting to see the reality of the love of Christ, so many are in darkness and need the light?

There are 1800 people groups in the world without any portion of the bible - that is 180 million people, more than half the US population. May God raise up some from our church to go for him. There are over 4,000 unreached people groups in the world, that is ethnic groups without an indigenous, self-propagating Christian church movement. That represents 42% of all the people groups in the world. May God send some of us, even many of us to these groups.

An unreached people group is a group with 2% or less indigenous believers in their ethnic group. Does you know how many bible believing, Christ-following, church-forming believers there are in New England? There are somewhere between 1 & 3 %, depending on where you live. New England is pretty much an unreached people group, at least certain parts. And we are all called by Christ as missionaries to New England.

And all you need to do is start praying for your neighbors and looking for ways to love them and tell them about Jesus. The church's mission is to serve as a missionary outpost to support you in your missionary work. To mentor you, train you, prepare you, support you, walk with you and assist you in your missionary work. Small groups are your missionary team. You are to be a missionary outpost full of missionaries to your individual neighborhoods.

And some of you are already doing this, because you have the Spirit of the sent One dwelling in you and you yearn to go in his name, be it across the globe to the nations or across the street to your neighbors. Have you prayed for your neighbors lately? Thank you for being a missionary to your neighborhood! Have you got to know your neighbors in some way beyond just a greeting? Thanks for loving them in Christ's name! Have you had a neighbor over or helped a neighbor in crisis or allowed a neighbor to help you? Thanks for representing Christ who sends you to show his strength, even in weakness! Have you had an opportunity to talk about God's goodness with a neighbor? Thanks for building bridges for the gospel and preparing them to receive his truth! Have you had an opportunity to share the good news of

Christ with a neighbor? Thank you for fulfilling the missionary task of proclaiming the good news! We are all called as missionaries, and many of you are already living it out!

By his grace we must continue to determine whether you will take Jesus at this word and go where he sends us. Do you understand yourself as a commissioned missionary sent by Christ himself or do you think there is some other sort of Christian? Have you been rescued and know it? Than you must also go and be part of the rescue of others. Decide today, will you go where he has sent you, trusting him all the way? Go in his name, sent like the risen Christ, sent by the risen Christ.

3) Our Witnessing Pursuits

At King of Grace Church we seek to witness to the reality of Jesus Christ in how we live, how we love and what we say. We seek to do this in every arena of life in which we live that we might shine his light and see many others come to know, enjoy and worship the King and Savior who will one day soon come back to complete his reign over all of creation.

In pursuing this call to witness we affirm the following points:

- We affirm that a right approach to witnessing springs from a gospel-motivated, grace-empowered, joy-filled engagement with the our neighbors, our families, our friends, our community and our culture.
- We pursue a multi-faceted, relationally-based, church-wide ministry of outreach.
- We pursue a church-wide culture of mission with the equippers equipping, the ministers ministering.
- We believe in a deep and broad community and cultural engagement.
- We pursue a love for and involvement with our communities, not isolation from nor abandonment of the culture.
- We exist to be a church-planting church.

II. CONCLUSION

Our life together as a church occurs through the three key functions of worshiping, walking and witnessing, all in the Good News of Jesus Christ, all aimed at loving God, one another, our neighbors to the nations. We hope you will be a part of this at King of Grace Church!

III. APPENDICES

A. STATEMENT ON CONFLICT, DISPUTES, AND LAWSUITS

For Members of King of Grace Church, Adopted June 1, 2002

The church is populated by sinners who have received grace but continue to face challenges in working out their salvation,¹²⁸ especially in relationships. As the people of God, we commit to overcome our offenses in a biblically prescribed manner leading to resolution and

¹²⁸ Philippians 2:12

peace. Bitterness, resentment, and broken relationships are not acceptable for the people of God.

The church has adopted as its practice the principles taught in Ken Sande's book, *The Peacemaker*¹²⁹, which provides wise biblical counsel for resolving disputes.

When two church members cannot resolve a conflict privately, they should seek the help of other wise church members. The church's pastors also are trained and desire to assist members in mediating disputes. If a dispute becomes long-standing without successful conciliation, members should seek pastoral help.

According to 1 Cor. 6:1-8, Christians should never bring a dispute among believers before a civil law court. Instead they should seek the mediation of the church through pastors; if one or both parties prove to be refusing to turn from sin that produces the conflict, the pastors should seek to apply the steps of church discipline to restore peace and order in the church. Church members agree to refrain from any law suits between Christians and to seek means of conciliation through the church.

If a church member has a dispute with a pastor that he does not believe has been successfully resolved after repeated attempts, he should seek the assistance of another pastor and if he deems necessary inform the Lead pastor for evaluation by the pastoral team.

Church members agree to refrain from filing lawsuits against other Christians and to seek conciliation through the church, *unless* a minimum of two pastors review their situation and confirm that litigation is biblically legitimate.

B. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

For Members of King of Grace Church, Adopted June 1, 2002

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: those God loves, he disciplines.¹³⁰ Discipline is a sometimes-challenging process of God correcting his people's thoughts, words and behavior so they can fulfill their calling to become like him. God disciplines his people through a variety of means. He calls his people, first, to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as he reads the Bible and hears the Bible taught and applied.¹³¹ As he compares his life to God's Word, he adjusts himself to conform to his Savior. But individual interaction with God through his Word is not the only means that God uses to make his children holy. God also uses his people. "Brothers," writes Paul, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness..."¹³² As members of King of Grace Church we take seriously our responsibility to "restore" members who fail to allow God to discipline them personally for their sins. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the

¹²⁹ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 2nd Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997).

¹³⁰ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives". (Hebrews 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13)

¹³¹ See John 15:3, 10, 20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:11-13;

¹³² Galatians 6:1 ESV

Bible clearly defines as sin.¹³³ This includes not only sinful words and behavior, but also refusal to turn from heretical doctrine.

Jesus outlined a process for addressing another believer's sin in Matthew 18:15-17.¹³⁴ As a church we agree that this is the way for us to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God's grace for change. Initially, church discipline should be informal: if a Christian sees sin in a brother or sister that appears to be continual, he should approach that person and inquire about it. If in fact there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include a pastor. If this group confirms that, in fact, sin continues without repentance, the process must move to formal church discipline.

When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church's pastors inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church of the member and his sin, urging members to contact the erring member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord's Supper or attend meetings for the purpose of fellowship. Instead, his participation with members should revolve around his need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers: in other words, when they interact with this person they should not have "fellowship" as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put his faith in Jesus' work on the cross for them and turn from his sin.

Church discipline has nothing to do with "shunning" a person. It involves first confronting in love and gentleness and, if unsuccessful, withholding fellowship. It is not rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of a relationship. If a person under discipline is not factious or disruptive or a harmful influence, he is welcomed to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers with the exception of small groups that meet for the purpose of fellowship. The pastors may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be factious, disruptive, or leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the pastors may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate his sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Matt. 18:12-14; Ezek. 34:4,8,16), so shall the pastors and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline. Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the Board of Governing Pastors determines that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering

¹³³ Other New Testament passages (besides Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-17) that support this practice include: 1 Cor. 5; Acts: 20:28ff; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 2:5-11.

¹³⁴ If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (ESV)

member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person's membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged. In doing so, the Board of Governing Pastors, at its discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure.

If a member leaves the church while he is under the scrutiny of the disciplinary process or while a censure against him is still in effect, and if the Board of Governing pastors learns that he is attending another church, the Board may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of his sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

Once the pastors make a sin publicly known, they commit as well to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church.

Christians who attend King of Grace Church and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship in King of Grace unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church or unless the pastors of King of Grace are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

C. STATEMENT ON REDEMPTIVE SPEECH

For Members of King of Grace Church, Adopted Sep 1, 2007

A distinguishing mark of the New Covenant people of God is their love for one another. Jesus says in John 13, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35. This commandment is fulfilled in our attitudes, actions, speech and behavior. A common challenge for us is to speak in ways that are loving and helpful not uncaring nor harmful (James 3:10.) Ephesians 4:29 clearly exhorts us towards redemptive speech in all we do, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29 At King of Grace we are serious about loving one another in our speech. We believe this is one significant way we fulfill Jesus' commandment to love one another and thus testify to the reality of his life among us. Accordingly, we adopt the following policies:

1. When we encounter a person, practice or policy that concerns us we will go directly, discreetly and immediately to those who are responsible for responding to our concerns. If the matter involves sin we will appropriately involve others according to Matthew 18:15-20 and our

policy on church discipline. If it is not a matter of sin but preference or perspective we will gladly defer to others and the responsible parties once we have communicated our concern.

2. We affirm that our speech should always be helpful and never harmful. We therefore refrain from sharing critical comments with any parties not directly involved in our concern. We will not participate in negative talk about a person, policy or practice outside of our jurisdiction. This is described as gossip, grumbling or complaining in the bible (1 Cor. 10:10, 2 Cor. 12:20, Phil. 2:14-15, 1 Pet 4:9)

3. When we encounter others practicing gossip, grumbling or complaining we will quickly and graciously redirect them to those who are responsible to address their concerns and we will encourage them to refrain from discussing their concern with any others. We will thus aggressively seek to preserve the love and unity of the body (Eph. 4:3, Phil 2:1-2, Titus 3:10.) If their unhelpful speech continues we will address it according to our church discipline policy.

4. We will seek to submit to and support our leaders as they seek to serve and lead us as a body. We recognize that they labor as those who must give an account to God for the church and thus bear a unique responsibility for our lives (Heb 13:17, 1 Cor. 16:16.) Additionally, we recognize that our heartfelt support is essential for their success and blessing. While we will bring our concerns to the appropriate leaders so they can benefit from our observations and better serve the body, we will be careful to enthusiastically support their decisions and submit to their instructions even when our preferences or expectations are not met.

5. If we perceive that a leader is sinning in a decision, practice or policy we will address their sin according to Mt. 18:15-20 and 1 Tim. 5:19-20 while observing the above. We will immediately, discreetly and directly address the leader and, if necessary, involve other leaders including the King of Grace elders and apostolic overseers. We will submit to the final decision of the elders and apostolic overseers. If we are not able to submit to and support the final decision of the elders and apostolic overseers because of conscience we will seek to peaceably pursue fellowship elsewhere being careful to protect the broader body of Christ from harmful speech.

D. STATEMENT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

For Members of King of Grace Church, Adopted June 1, 2002

Divorce is a sad fact in our society and in the church at large. While God has, from the beginning, intended that marriage be life long¹³⁵ and glorify God by reflecting the relationship of Christ to his church¹³⁶, there are times when our Lord permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. The conditions under which this may happen are only two:

- When a spouse commits sins that involve sexual contact with another person;¹³⁷
- When an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Matthew 19:4-5; 1 Cor. 7:10-11

¹³⁶ Ephesians 5:22-33

¹³⁷ Matthew 5:31-32

¹³⁸ 1 Cor. 7:12-16

It is important to note that God *permits* divorce in such cases. Divorce is not required, nor will the church encourage a spouse to divorce when he or she has faith toward God for the marriage to be restored—even when the situations listed above exist.

For the church to condone a divorce in these cases, the spouse must submit the facts of his or her marital situation to the pastors to determine before God in Scripture what he would permit. If a spouse who is a member of the church should seek a divorce from another member due to abandonment, he or she must first wait for the church to follow its practice of church discipline to the end of treating the sinning spouse as an unbeliever before divorce may become an option.

Separated spouses awaiting a pending divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court declares the divorce final and legally recognized. They should thus conduct themselves in the church as a married person.

If a divorced person becomes a member of the church, he or she must understand that remarriage will only be condoned by the church when the circumstances prior to the divorce, or following after the divorce, fall under the two conditions listed above. If the circumstances of the divorce do not conform to what Scripture deems acceptable, the divorced person should consider before God whether he or she should seek reconciliation with their former spouse. He or she should also seek to confess to God and to his or her former spouse any sins committed in the seeking of a divorce that did not comply with the teaching of Scripture. He or she must recognize that apart from these conditions, remarriage is not an option

E. THE 10 AFFIRMATIONS OF THE DANVERS STATEMENT

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1Tim. 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen. 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity, which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28). Both the Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - In the family, husbands should forsake hardship or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).
 - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission - domestic, religious, or civil - ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan. 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet. 3:1-2).
8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim. 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain and authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor. 12:7-21).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

CHAPTER 4: OUR MINISTRIES

I. SUNDAYS

A. INTRO & OVERVIEW

Sundays are an important part of the life of our church. It is the time we come together to worship the Lord as a whole church. It is a time we come together to meet with God himself. There really is no higher priority for us than to be gathered as his people to enjoy his presence and magnify his name. Sundays are meant to be a highlight of the week for God's people.

B. WORSHIP IN SONG

We spend a significant portion of our time together worshipping God through corporate singing. This singing is not a warm up for the message but a central part of our worship. When we survey the scriptures we see singing and music as a means of worship throughout. It never is portrayed as a warm up for hearing God's word but as worship itself. ¹³⁹

So, we spend a significant time of our corporate worship singing God's praises, giving him thanks and remembering what he has done. This is a vital and essential part of our corporate worship.

C. WORSHIP THROUGH PROPHETIC SHARING

During our singing time we provide time for prophetic sharing that is aimed at encouraging God's people and reaching those who don't yet know Christ. Our understanding of New Testament prophecy is derived from such important passages like Acts 2:16-18, Acts 11:27, Acts 13:1, Acts 15:32-34, Acts 21:7-14, 1 Thess. 5:19-21, Timothy 4:14, 18.

We understand that New Testament prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy. It is broadly distributed among God's people, non-canonical, non-authoritative, partial and subject to error and in need of oversight and testing. Nevertheless, it is to be earnestly desired by all because it has great power to edify, comfort and encourage as well as confirming the presence and power of God amongst his people. We have experienced these many benefits as a church.

We seek to train our members in the practice of New Testament prophecy in all the areas of church life and mission. We require formal training for those who would serve in this capacity on Sunday morning.

D. WORSHIP IN WORD

1) The preached word saves

. It is through the word that we come to understand the essential truths that are necessary for salvation.¹⁴⁰ God does indeed reveal his character and power through his creation but it is the scriptures that explain what we need to know to have a true relationship with God.

¹³⁹ Psalm 150, Ephesians 5:18-19, Revelation 15:2-4 et al.

¹⁴⁰ "14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:14-15

It is the scriptures that teach us of Christ and it is in Christ that we find eternal life. The word makes us wise for salvation by declaring Christ Jesus- the fulfillment of all righteousness, the second and perfect Adam, the ultimate prophet, priest and king of the bible, the true Son of David, the promised Messiah king of God's people, the true Israel, the apple of his father's eye, the suffering servant, the perfect sacrificial lamb, the willing substitute for our sins on the cross, our ultimate kinsman-redeemer, our captain and champion, our victorious risen king, he who sits at the right hand of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Judge of the living and the dead, our elder brother, the first fruit of the new humanity, the eternal word of God, Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord at whose feet every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father.

2) The Preached Word Sanctifies

We may think that our growth in Christ comes as we spend time reading and studying the word of God, and yes, there is great value in that practice. But 2 Timothy 3 teaches us that our growth in Christ comes through the preaching of the word of God.¹⁴¹ Do we want to grow up in Christ? Do we want to be increasingly transformed to love God like he does, to love others like he does, to think and act like he does? Than listen to the preached word of God. For as the preacher wields the word, he does so in order to teach, reprove, correct and train in righteousness.

3) The Preached Word Creates a Healthy Church

In light of all the challenges the church historic and the church local faces from both without and within the faithful preaching of the word by a man of God who both understands and lives out its truth is the most essential ingredient for its health. That is the point of the section and that is the indisputable record of history.

"I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and with Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the Word did it all." - Martin Luther

Of all the means of grace there is one that stands out in scripture and in the history of the church as essential for church health - the preaching of God's word. Think of all the great moves of God and all the great churches throughout history. What do they all have in common? What does the church of Antioch and the church of Jerusalem, what does the missionary work of Patrick and the leadership of Chrysostom, what do the Waldensians and Wycliffe have in common, what does the ministry of Luther and Calvin, Knox and Bunyan all have in common, what do the first great awakening, the Methodist movement, Edwards, Whitefield, Finney, the circuit Riders, Moody, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, Tozer, Graham, Swindoll, Evans, Piper, Sproul, Keller, MacArthur. What do all these have in common? The faithful and effective preaching of sound doctrine by sound men. John MacArthur has said the following:

¹⁴¹ "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." And what does it say next? "That the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16

“You show me a church where there is strong biblical preaching and teaching, and I will show you strong people and strong ministry. You show me a church where there is weak biblical preaching and I will show you a church with weak people and weak ministry. That’s just how it goes because the Word of God is the food that makes believers mature and strong.”

4) We Must Wisely Receive It

It is not enough for us to say amen to the previous three points and not respond - that would mean that we don’t really believe it or we don’t truly value it more than we value the status quo. If God has given the preaching of the word such a central role than we must give it a central role in our lives. Calvin put it this way:

“Now the fact is that it [the church] cannot be built up, that is to say, it cannot be brought to soundness, or continue in a good state, except by means of the preaching of the Word. So then, if we earnestly desire that God should be honored and served, and that our Lord should have his royal seat among us peaceably, to reign in the midst of us, if we are his people and are under his protection, if we covet to be built up in him and to be joined to him, and to be steadfast in him to the end; to be short, if we desire our salvation, we must learn to be humble learners in receiving the doctrine of the gospel and in hearkening to the pastors that are sent to us”

John Calvin

E. WORSHIP IN SACRAMENTS

1. BAPTISM

We understand and practice baptism as the initiatory sign, seal and celebration of our new life in Christ. It is very closely tied to conversion in scripture in a similar way confessing our faith with our mouths is tied to believing it in our hearts. We would never think someone could believe in Jesus and never say anything about Him. Neither was it conceivable to a New Testament believer to believe in Jesus and not be subsequently baptized. We see this truth about baptism along with many others throughout the scriptures.

(a) Baptism is an object lesson of our life in Christ.

The way Paul identifies the faithful in Romans 6 is they are those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus.¹⁴² And he is not speaking figuratively here. Whenever the term “baptized into Christ Jesus” is used in scripture it is speaking about the actual sacramental act of dunking a new believer under the water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as a initiatory sign of their new life in Christ (see Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5, Gal 3:27). This is

¹⁴² ¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:1-11 (ESV)

actually getting wet with real water that Paul is speaking of here. So how are those who have been united with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection described? They are those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus!

In our culture we often use the praying of a special prayer or walking forward in response to a message as the event to mark our conversion. While these events may be special in some ways this is not the biblical pattern of marking off our conversion. Baptism is the key event, baptism is how we mark our conversion, baptism is the outward expression of the new reality of our life in Christ, not prayer, not walking the aisle, not joining a church, none of these but baptism! As a matter of fact, the association between baptism and conversion is so close in scripture that it is hard at times to distinguish them and many have fallen into the error of actually confusing conversion with baptism and teaching that baptism saves us or in baptism we are converted. Baptism is a sign and seal

(b) It Does Not Save Us

So, first and foremost of concern, is that we understand that baptism does not save us. There is no inherent power or grace in the mere performance of the sacrament of baptism. Baptism doesn't save, the Triune God does; God the Father as the one who has loved us from before the foundation of the world and has chosen us to be his very own, God the Son, Jesus, as the worker of our salvation through his perfect life, death for our sin, and resurrection from the grave to eternal life; and God the Holy Spirit as the one who brings understanding, conviction of sin, new life, repentance and faith in the Son because of the Father. And we are saved as a free gift from the Triune God through faith. Faith is the only essential means of our salvation and this itself is a free gift from God and a necessary gift for our salvation. So, we don't see people being saved through baptism in scripture. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17 **"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."**

If baptism was how people got saved certainly Paul would have not only preached the gospel but baptized people. Yet he knew it was the hearing of the gospel with faith that saved people. Also, in Acts 10 Peter is preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his household.¹⁴³ They clearly came to Christ as they responded to Peter's preaching through faith, received the Spirit at their conversion and then were baptized not SO they could be saved but BECAUSE they WERE saved. You can see the same pattern in Acts 11 and Paul's conversion in Acts 9.

So, the scriptural basis for denying that baptism saves us is pretty clear. But we must not swing the pendulum the other way and think that baptism is therefore insignificant. It is in no way a trivial event.

(c) Not trivial

In Acts 2 when the people respond to that first gospel message after Pentecost they ask Peter, "What shall we do." Peter calls on them to express their repentance and faith in Jesus

¹⁴³ "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." -Acts 10:44-48

through baptism as their initial response to their new life in Christ. Their act of being baptized is a walking out of their repentance and faith.¹⁴⁴

Peter associated baptism and faith so closely together that he actually says “baptism now saves you.”¹⁴⁵ But then he qualifies it by saying it is not the mere act of baptism, getting wet and removal of dirt, outward things, but the heart of repentance and faith that is the means, expressed through baptism. Folks, this is a very significant sacrament. Though it doesn’t save us, only grace through faith saves, it is to serve as the marker of our repentance and faith and if we refuse this God ordained marker we have reason to be concerned about the genuineness of our repentance and faith.

(d) A sign and seal.

Not only that, but we are missing out on the tremendous blessing God would bring to us through this sacrament. You see, baptism is to serve as the sign and seal of our new life in Christ. John Calvin said this about the sacraments,

"it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men"¹⁴⁶

and he says elsewhere,

“the sacraments, therefore, are exercises which make us more certain of the trustworthiness of God’s word... Augustine calls a sacrament “a visible word” for the reason that it represents God’s promises as painted in a picture and sets them before our sight, portrayed graphically and in the manner of images.”¹⁴⁷

Baptism is meant to be a blessing to God’s people. It is to operate as a sign of our life in Christ and as a seal of its reality to our minds and hearts. A sign points to a reality, a seal secures something. This is the role of baptism - to be a sign and seal of our salvation. And that is why Paul can use baptism to communicate to the Romans the realities of their life in Christ. And it should work this way for us too!

There are few things more exciting than a baptism. We have had the privilege of many baptismal celebrations in our years of church life. And each time has been a glorious celebration of life in Christ. The way we do baptisms is we have the candidate share while in the water why they want to be baptized. Usually it is a simple public profession of repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. Then we dunk them under water briefly and bring them back up. While they are covered with towels we gather around them, lay hands on them and pray for them and share encouraging words we believe God would give us to edify. They have been rich and wonderful times and I trust each person baptized will treasure that time and refer to it the rest of their life. It is a sign and seal of our new life in Christ and as such, as we practice

¹⁴⁴ “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” -Acts 2:38-39

¹⁴⁵ "Baptism, which corresponds to this [Noah’s Ark], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," -1 Peter 3:21

¹⁴⁶ John Calvin, Institutes, IV.xiv.i, John T. McNeill, ed., Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, p 1277

¹⁴⁷ John Calvin, Institutes, IV.xiv.v, John T. McNeill, ed., Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, p 1281

this sacrament in faith God is faithful to show up and bless and pour out his grace in this important step of response and obedience.

(e) A Sign and Seal of our union with Christ.

In particular, baptism signifies and seals our union with Christ. As we are dunked under the waters, so we die with Christ to sin and self. And as we are lifted out of the waters, so we are raised with Christ to newness of life for the love of God and others.¹⁴⁸ So baptism is a vivid sign of the reality of our death and resurrection with Christ, a present reality to be completed and finished upon the return of our Lord and Savior. And it is a seal for our soul of the truth that we are indeed counted in him. What a wonderful assurance this sacrament grants us! And what a wonderful additional blessing the Lord's supper is in assuring us that we remain as his.

(f) A Sign and Seal of Our Cleansing in Christ.

Also, it is a picture of our cleansing from our sins.¹⁴⁹ And so celebrate baptism and so remember it that we are freshly reminded of the wonders and blessings of being forgiven for all our sins, past, present and future. What a blessing and what power for obedience and joy and gratitude!

Baptism should remind us as a sign and seal of the wonder that we are united with Christ! We belong to him and are one with him and will be one with him forever! The Triune God has welcomed us into the most exclusive and glorious fellowship in the universe.

(g) So let's joyfully and obediently practice this sacrament!

(i) Get baptized

Well, first, if you are a believer who has repented from sin and self and placed your faith in Jesus Christ and his life, death and resurrection as the only Savior from sin and Lord of life then you should get baptized as soon as possible. And your baptism should occur in the context of the covenant people of God because to be in Christ is to be united with his people. The usual practice in scripture is to be baptized publicly before God and his church. Baptism is to be a public and corporate celebration and a blessing to all involved.

(ii) Infant Baptism

We would also encourage you to consider getting baptized if you were previously baptized at a time when you did not repent and believe. The scriptural example and instruction is that those professing faith in Jesus are to be baptized. If there is no faith present in the person getting baptized the result is that he or she gets wet and that is about all.

While we respect the other Christian communities that practice infant baptism we cannot find scriptural justification for this practice and so we only baptize those who are able to profess conscious volitional faith in Christ. Also, we in good conscience cannot recognize

¹⁴⁸ "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." -Colossians 2:12

¹⁴⁹ "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." -Acts 22:16

infant baptism as biblical baptism and would encourage those who were baptized as infants to examine the scriptures and determine if they should be baptized as those who now exercise conscious faith.

(iii) Children.

A question that naturally arises in light of this is, “When should my children be baptized?” And that is a good question. The bottom line is that baptism is something a believer participates in and when our children are old enough to responsibly and knowledgeably profess and demonstrate their repentance and faith in Christ they are ready to be baptized. The particular age this occurs at is up for debate. There are many who advocate waiting till the end of the teen years. While there are benefits to waiting till a child is fully developed to baptize them, I believe the scriptural hints at an age of accountability points more to the early teens or late childhood years - sometime around 12 or so.

We leave a good bit of latitude here and rely on the careful judgment of the parents in consultation with our leaders. It is important in all this that we reserve baptism for believers and are careful to not provide false assurance to our children when it is not clear yet whether they truly know Christ. While we want to do all we can to encourage them to follow the Savior, it will serve them and the church better if we are careful here. But also, if they are truly ready it would be improper and even disobedient to withhold baptism from them. We would be glad to answer any further questions you might have after the message.

2. COMMUNION

This sacrament of communion had marked centuries of Christian celebration. This sacrament stands out as very significant for the Christian a faith, for the Lord Jesus himself explicitly instituted this practice for us and called us to celebrate it until he returns. He intends much blessing for us in this sacrament.

(a) A Holy Encounter

In 1 Corinthians 11:27 **“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.”** Paul is saying that this sacrament of remembrance is so significant that if we mishandle it we actually profane the body and blood of the Lord himself. So while the elements themselves possess no significance unto themselves, the sacramental act of commemorating the giving of Jesus’ body and blood for us carries very significant spiritual implications. It is as if we are personally and corporately encountering Jesus Christ himself in our midst as we handle the bread and wine. Folks, this is no mere memorial to Jesus. There is something going on here beyond just remembering. There is an actual holy awesome spiritual encounter with the living Christ that takes place in the Lord’s supper or what we fittingly call communion. Otherwise Paul would not say what he says.

And he goes on to say that there are those in the Corinthians church who are experiencing God’s judgment because they are not coming before the Lord’s supper in a right manner. They are getting sick and some have even died. Folks, this is no mere memorial of Jesus. This sacrament carries very very significant meaning in God’s eyes. To take communion is to

encounter Christ himself and so to do this irreverently or arrogantly is to mock God and suffer his discipline.

(b) Towards a biblical understanding of communion

So what exactly takes place in communion? Do the elements actually become Jesus actual body and blood in every way but appearance? Or is it merely representative of his body and blood and a way to visually remember the gospel? Good, evangelical and wise men have differed over this one. Allow us to do the best I can to explain this in light of how I understand 1 Cor. 11 and the rest of the scriptures.

First, we do not believe we can understand it as a mere memorial. That doesn't seem to be a possible conclusion from what we see in 1 Cor. 11. Paul considers communion so tightly linked to Jesus body and blood that the Corinthians are in danger of profaning the actual body and blood of Christ. So we believe it must carry greater spiritual significance than that.

On the other hand, to say that it is actually the body and blood of Jesus in every way but appearance is to take it too far. When Jesus said "this is my body, broken for you." He didn't mean that he was holding himself while he said it. He says elsewhere, I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the gate, He says John the Baptist is Elijah. In all these cases the use of the verb "to be" does not mean the very same. Jesus is not an actual door or gate or shepherd. John the Baptist is not one in the same as Elijah. But each of these represents something about Jesus or John.

So it is with the elements. They are not one and the same with Jesus' body and blood but are tied very tightly to the actual thing. So our best attempt to understand the meaning of the Lord's supper is this, This sacrament is a God ordained remembrance of Christ's body broken for us and his blood shed on our behalf. As we partake of the it with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we encounter God through the power of the Holy Spirit as we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body. So the spiritual presence of Jesus is with us through faith by the Holy Spirit as we handle the elements in faith and right understanding.

(c) What to do

Now the Corinthians were not doing this properly and so Paul rebuked them for their own good. How about us? How should we handle the Lord's supper? How should we approach it?

(i) Soberly

First off, we are to approach this sacrament soberly. We are not just having a church wide snack. Neither are we coming robotically to take a magic pill. We are coming before the living God in light of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. How we come says a lot about our faith. This sacrament is to be a sign of the gospel and a seal of the gospel to our hearts. We are to come and remember him and remember that we together are his people. We meet with the Lord together in communion and so, as we come before the holy God, as we remember the Savior bleeding and dying for us on the cross, as we remember his life given for us we are to have a sense of sobriety and awesomeness. There is no place we are to approach more reverently than the place where our Savior died and communion brings us again and again to that holy place. So we are to come soberly.

Paul tells the Corinthians to examine themselves before they come. So we are to examine ourselves before we come. Let us see if there is any bitterness in our hearts, let us see if there is any strife or factions in our midst, any arrogance or selfishness. And if we examine ourselves and see this let us humble ourselves before the cross and turn from the things for which Christ died. If we need to, before we celebrate communion, go to those whom you have sinned against and reconcile. Release any bitterness, any at all. Sacrifice any sense of indignation or self-righteousness towards others.

It would be a great contradiction and dangerous to come to communion while holding onto known sins. So we are to come soberly, examining ourselves and actively turning from sin and turning towards the Savior and our new life in him.

(ii) In Faith

We are to come in faith as well. This sacrament is a wonderful privilege to be celebrated by all those in Christ until he comes again. This is a special privilege for his people that serves as a blessed sign and seal of our life in Christ, a joyous remembrance and celebration of our salvation that refreshes us and reassures us of his great promises in the gospel.

It is to be celebrated in faith. Therefore, we respectfully ask those who have yet to repent and trust Christ to abstain from communion. It would be a contradiction and inappropriate for those who don't belong to Christ and don't depend on his gospel to celebrate his gospel. So we ask those who are not yet believers to abstain. Yet we invite them to observe and consider the great love of God shown in this sacrament, that they might consider turning from self and trusting Christ.

Parents, we leave it to you to discern whether it is appropriate for your children to take communion. We should apply the same test we would for baptism to communion. Is there knowledgeable faith and the fruit to affirm this? If this is so, they should be baptized and they are welcome to enjoy communion. It would be fitting to have them baptized first and then celebrate their first communion with God's people. If they are not yet ready, encourage them to observe and encourage them in the good fruit you do see in their lives and your hope that they will soon enjoy this sacrament with the rest of God's people when they are ready to trust and follow Christ.

(iii) Regularly

Finally, this sacrament, unlike baptism which is once in the believer's life, is to be celebrated regularly. Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of me." And the pattern in the NT seems to indicate that it was a frequent observance, perhaps weekly or so. There is nothing in scripture that says it must be at a certain frequency - be it yearly, monthly, weekly or daily. The emphasis is that this is to be a regular remembrance for God's people that is to function strongly in the life of the church. The Lord gave us this sacrament for the church on earth to continually remember him and his gospel. It is to be a regular practice.

Now, how do we determine exactly how frequently to do this? Well, we believe it must be frequent enough that is a regular experience of God's people. We think that means we do it more than yearly and for us, more than monthly. We celebrate communion every Sunday as a powerful way to encounter the goodness of Christ given for us as his people.

(iv) Corporately

One final aspect of communion. This is a corporate sacrament, as baptism is to be as well. In our passage in 1 Cor. 11 the Corinthians were abusing the Lord's supper by not recognizing this key element. They came to the Lord's supper in cliques and so insulted the Lord and denied themselves the blessing of true communion. Paul has a play on words, it seems, in verse 29 where he says, *"for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning he body eats and drinks judgment on himself."* We believe he is speaking not just about the body of Jesus given on the cross but the body of Jesus known as the church. When we come together to celebrate communion we come as a church. This is corporate communion and it is to bind us to Christ and bind us together. Communion is not a sacrament that you can appropriately celebrate on your own - it should always be as a body and include all of the body present when celebrated.

F. MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

We believe that God is the Father to the fatherless (Ps. 68:5) who cares for our children even more than we do (Ps. 27:10). In fact, Jesus beckoned little children to come to him, saying that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them (Mt. 19:13-15).

For this reason, on Sunday mornings, we have fun and exciting kid-targeted Sunday School for 1st to 6th grade kids. Sunday School is a safe and loving environment where we teach the children about God and his truths revealed in the Bible, and model for them a Christ-centered and Holy Spirit-empowered life. We also host a variety of special children's events during the year like summer Vacation Bible School.

Our Sunday School classes are staffed with loving and nurturing volunteers who have been carefully screened and selected to serve our children. We use fun songs, crafts, games, and more to teach important lessons tailored to the children's learning levels. Our curriculum is called the Gospel Project, which helps children understand that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible is all about Jesus and his good news of salvation.

Sunday School is open for drop-off starting at 9:45AM on Sunday mornings. Parents/guardians may pick up their children immediately following the service at 11:30AM. For those who are unable to drop-off the children at church, we operate a van service with limited seating, call us to sign-up.

G. MINISTRY TO GUESTS

We understand ourselves as a missionary people at the very core. Therefore, wherever we are and whenever we gather we gather to invite those without Christ to come and see that he is alive, true and powerful and makes himself known through the lives and proclamation of his people.

Perhaps no other place is more important in this than Sunday mornings. As we worship, as we sing God's truth and praises, as we hear biblical prophetic ministry, as we hear the preaching of God's living word, we fully expect and have regularly seen God open the eyes of unbelievers to trust and follow Christ.

So, we orient ourselves around making our guests feel loved and welcomed. We seek to serve them without overwhelming them. We recognize that all of us need the same gospel of

grace and so we can identify with everybody who comes through our doors in a genuine and loving way.

We seek to follow up our guests and use cards and phone calls and personal interaction to best help them wherever they may be spiritually. We also seek to direct them to small groups and investigative bible studies to help them encounter more of Christ.

H. ROLES

Because Sunday is so important to our church life, we ask all of our members to find some way to use their time and talents to serve in some role on Sunday mornings. Next chapter will detail some of these specific opportunities.

II. SMALL GROUPS

A. BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

This picture of the early church may seem too good to be true.¹⁵⁰ But in reality, it is this kind of community that God desires to create in His church, “a people for His own possession.” Because the Holy Spirit has joined us together as a community, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don’t simply attend the same service, or enjoy the same interests - we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. The New Testament characterizes our relationships with each other by the word *fellowship*.

“Those first Christians of Acts 2 were not devoting themselves to social activities but to a relationship.... They understood that they had entered this relationship by faith in Jesus Christ, not by joining an organization. And they realized that their fellowship with God logically brought them into fellowship with one another. Through their union with Christ they were formed into a spiritually organic community.... We must grasp the idea that fellowship means belonging to one another in the Body of Christ, with all the privileges and responsibilities that such a relationship entails.”

Jerry Bridges

One of the primary means of experiencing fellowship with each other at King of Grace is through our network of small groups - what we call Small groups. While we are joined to all believers in the local church, Small groups allow us to relate and minister more deeply with a smaller number of people. Small groups are not a passing fad at King of Grace; they have been a part of our group of churches since its inception, and they provide an important context for accomplishing a number of essential Biblical priorities.

“The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons and in it the benefit of relatedness cannot be missed nor its challenge evaded. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say, therefore, that small groups... are indispensable for our growth into spiritual maturity.” - John Stott

. Although a deep biblical understanding of fellowship is very helpful and even essential in understanding the purpose of small groups, sometimes we lose the forest for the trees. Perhaps a summary description would be helpful. We can describe our small groups simply as,

¹⁵⁰ Acts 2:42-47

“gospel-centered communities of care and mission.” We believe this is a good encapsulation of the biblical concept of “fellowship” applied to small groups and may help you remember the heart of our discussion here.

B. OUR CHURCH MISSION AND THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS

Our church mission serves as a convenient way to elucidate the biblical background and purposes of our small groups.¹⁵¹ While none of our small groups are meant to be a church within a church they do function in some key aspects of our overall church mission. Each small group, as a small group within our church, will function to some degree in each aspect of our church mission. No small group will function in any aspect of our mission to a degree that the small group would qualify as a mini-church. However, as a key constituent component of the structure of our church, it will need to function in a balanced and significant way in all the key functions.

- 1) **Small Group Life** - Our small groups are more than meetings, they are interconnected groups of about 5-20 people usually living in relatively close proximity, committed, as members of King of Grace church, to walking in light of the gospel together, growing in Christ, caring for one another, helping each other to reach out to their community and neighbors with the love and truth of Christ. There are various elements to being a small group community.
- 2) **The Small Group Meeting** - The small group meetings are usually on a given evening two to four times a month, depending on what best serves the group. The usual meeting will involve elements that help the group fulfill its goal of being “gospel-centered communities of care and mission,” that follow our mission of “Wholeheartedly Loving God and One Another by Worshiping, Witnessing and Walking in the Good News of Jesus Christ for All of Life.”
- 3) **Primary Elements** - As a rule, the following primary elements will be a regular, planned part of the small group’s experience; 1) Hospitality & Care, 2) Discussion and Application of the Word of God, 3) Prayer, Worship and Personal Ministry and 4) Outreach & Evangelism. The small group leader should be open to God’s sovereign intervention which might bring spontaneous ministry or a change in direction, perhaps leaving out one of these elements or doing something entirely unplanned.

(a) Hospitality & Care - The atmosphere the host family and leaders create through a welcoming, comfortable and gracious context is essential as a foundation to all other aspects of the small group meeting and the small group’s vitality as well. A welcoming host home, providing food and beverages, expressing a genuine interest in people’s well-being and taking time to update one another on life are necessary backgrounds to each small group meeting and the relationships shared outside the regular meeting as well.

(b) Discussion & Application of the Word - A key purpose of small groups is to nurture the personal growth of the members in the understanding and application of God’s Word. This can be done either through discussing the most recent Sunday sermon or an approved curriculum. The final goal of all study and discussion is changed lives resulting from

¹⁵¹ Wholeheartedly Loving God and One Another by Worshiping, Witnessing and Walking in the Good News of Jesus Christ for All of Life.

obedience to God's Word.

- (i) ***Sunday Sermon Discussion*** - Most times the leader will dig into the word of God by leading the group in a discussion from the Sunday sermon's biblical text. The sermon itself should provide the needed commentary to understand the text and consider appropriate applications. The sermon notes and questions can be used to lead the group through both understanding and application of the text.
- (ii) ***Approved Curricula*** - Through study and experience, the pastors have identified certain resources to be of proven value as tools for study and application. These resources serve as a recommended curricula for small groups to use. Additionally, if the small group leaders or members are aware of a curriculum that might be helpful they may request to use it. Inquiries should be directed to the Lead Pastor or Pastor overseeing the small group.
- (c) ***Prayer, Worship and Personal Ministry*** - If possible, each meeting will make time for corporate worship in song, prayer for one another in general as well as targeted times of encouragement, ministry and prayer to various members of the group according to need.
- (d) ***Outreach & Evangelism in the Meeting*** - The small group is a gospel community on mission. There are three ways that small groups help one another in this area through the regular meeting: 1) Welcoming Non-Believers, 2) Praying for Others, 3) Sharing Plans for Outreach
 - (i) ***Welcoming Non-Believers*** - The small group meeting itself is open to non-believers who are interested in learning more about God as they observe and participate in the small group meeting. The conversation and bible discussion should be simple enough for someone new to the bible to follow and understand. Patience and hospitality towards non-believers will help them see the character of God and aid in directing them towards his truth. While the small group is not geared primarily or exclusively as an evangelistic meeting, because the edification of the believer and the evangelism of the non-believer flow out of the same gospel it is not hard or inconsistent to welcome non-believers into a group of believers.
 - (ii) ***Praying for Others*** - In addition to welcoming non-believers, the small group will take time to pray for friends, neighbors and family who don't yet know Christ. Each member should be encouraged to pray regularly for at least three non-believing neighbors, friends or relatives.
 - (iii) ***Sharing Plans for Outreach & Evangelism***

The small group members should not only pray for people but plan and implement ways to concretely love non-believers around them. A simple beginning is to simply spend time with neighbors, friends and relatives on a regular basis. A rule of thumb of two hours a week is a good starting place. There are thousands of different practical ways to love those around us like making them cookies, inviting them over for dinner, enjoying hobbies together, assisting in household projects, helping them in time of crisis, conducting regular neighborhood block parties or potlucks.

As we practice these things we trust God for open doors to share more about our life with them including our testimonies of faith and the good news of Christ. As there is interest we can invite them to a home based investigative bible study or the Alpha Program. The small group is an important place to share these plans together and pray for each other.

4) Crisis Care

Small groups and small group leaders are our first responders to church families in crisis. A crisis is any situation or circumstance which causes a substantial disruption in the life of a small group member. This disruption can involve a relational, spiritual, financial, physical, emotional, familial or psychological event of such a magnitude that the individual is unable to immediately and completely deal with it with normal resources on hand. Some specific examples would include unemployment, hospitalization, chronic sickness, relocation, addictions, serious sin, depression, social withdrawal, divorce or separation, despair or doubt, or the many positive crises we face such as a new child, marriage, new job, new home etc.

The long-term care for those in crisis can include some of the following.

- Referring people to pastoral counseling.
- Meeting with those in crisis for encouragement and relevant biblical counseling on a casual or formal basis for members going through crises.
- Facilitate care for members in crisis through helping the small group provide
 - 1) Meals
 - 2) Transportation to doctor etc. if needed
 - 3) Visits
 - 4) Regular communication and updates
 - 5) Keeping the small group up-to-date on the crisis as appropriate.

(a) When Financial Help Is Needed

The Benevolence Fund is a mercy ministry of King of Grace Church designed to assist the poor and needy within the local congregation and those known by folks in our church. Needs should be brought to the attention of a pastor through a small group leader. Needs which come first to the pastor's attention will be referred back to the appropriate small group leader.

5) Counseling

Although a small group is not considered responsible to provide biblical counseling for small group members, there are many situations that are more or less biblical counseling sessions that are just a normal part of the Christian life and a normal part of providing care for people. Because a purpose of the church is to help people to change, we are all going to be in settings where counsel is requested and given. Offering counsel to the people of God with a view toward permanent and positive change is both a tremendous privilege and deep responsibility. Any case that truly constitutes a crisis should be referred to a pastor.

6) Participation

Each small group is lead by a small group leader but he is not responsible to provide all the leadership and care needed for the group. The small group leader is more of a facilitator and a discussion leader. It is vital that each small group collectively provide the roles needed for a

healthy small group. This includes a host family or single person who can host the regular meetings. It would also include someone responsible to coordinate prayer requests and small group communication as well as somebody who could help facilitate outreach projects together as well as some who can facilitate social gatherings for the small group. There are other roles that a small group might want to create to best serve the life and mission of the small group. Using a team approach is really important to the vitality of our small groups. Is there some way you can help in your small group?

III. SPECIALITY MINISTRIES

A. WOMEN

We have various women's bible studies running at any given time that focus on the biblical truths most helpful for walking as a woman of God. Some of these studies will focus on issues particularly relevant to women. Some of these studies will serve as key opportunities for growing in Christ in general and sharing the struggles and blessings of life in a confidential context among women.

B. MEN

We have a weekly men's breakfast that focuses on the biblical truths most helpful for walking as a man of God. Some of the topics will focus on issues particularly relevant to men. Some of the time will serve as a key opportunity for growing in Christ in general and sharing the struggles and blessings of life in a confidential context among men.

C. YOUNG ADULTS

We have a young-adult small group that meets regularly. It functions similarly to other small groups in our church. It offers a higher amount of outreach and social events geared for young adults. It is meant to be a place of community, Christian growth, service and preparation for full involvement in the life and mission of King of Grace Church.

D. YOUTH

We have a Youth Ministry that meets regularly for teaching, fun activities, community and discipleship. It is available to children 12 to 18 years old. Pastor Toby Gayner leads this ministry with the help of his wife Kelly and various student assistants. It is meant to be a place of community, Christian growth, service and preparation for full involvement in the life and mission of King of Grace Church as adults.

E. GROWTH GROUPS

At various times we offer specialized classes aimed at growing in the understanding and application of particular Christian theological or biblical topics. They typically include 8-10 sessions that will meet on a weeknight or Sunday before or after our worship service.

IV. EVANGELISM

A. LIFESTYLE

We seek to be active in sharing Christ's love and truth as a lifestyle. We don't necessarily need any other program than the one put right in front of all of us in our daily lives. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor and our neighbors are those nearest to the regular routines of our lives, those who need God's grace just as much as we do. Therefore, we all have many opportunities to be God's sent ones by just responding to the needs right under our noses.

B. SMALL GROUPS

Our small groups are key ministries for evangelism in our church. They exist to be missionary support teams to assist and empower us to reach out to those in our lives. They are where we can pray for our neighbors, friends and family. They are where we can partner together to better serve others in time of need. They are where we can invite those interested in the things of Christ to come and experience more of his love and truth.

C. VBS

We run a yearly Vacation Bible School that has been very effective in bringing the good news of Christ and his amazing love to children in the Haverhill area. We regularly have 100 or more children attend and it is always a highlight of the year for us as a church.

D. QUARTERLY EVENTS

We seek to run quarterly outreach events that serve as means to get out into our community and love our neighbors, build friendships and serve Christ. These events include things like a Fall Festival, Santa Parade Outreach, Ladies Christmas Tea, Winter Fest, Easter Egg Hunt and whatever ideas might be effective in enjoying time together in a way we can invite and bless our community.

E. EVANGELISTIC COURSES

We offer regular evangelistic courses and Investigative Bible Studies to reach people with the good news of Christ. These include the Alpha Program, Christianity Explored as well as various resources that can be run out of homes, small groups and church wide programs.

V. CHURCH PLANTING

While we have a specific mission as a church, we are also part of a family of churches under the name of Trinity Fellowship Churches. Trinity Fellowship Churches partner together to plant churches throughout the United States and across the globe.

Individual churches participate in church planting by helping to raise up leaders and sending teams of people to new cities for new church plants. Chesapeake Community Church of Joppa, MD and Covenant Fellowship Church of Glen Mills, PA were instrumental in establishing King of Grace Church. We, in turn, helped plant King's Cross Church, Manchester, NH, Trinity Cambridge Church, Cambridge, MA and King of Peace Church, Salem, MA.

VI. MISSIONS

To know Christ is to desire to see every tribe and nation come to know Christ in all his goodness and greatness.¹⁵² At King of Grace Church we participate in the world-wide mission of the church through three avenues. First, we are part of Trinity Fellowship Churches and their mission to plant churches worldwide. We are excited about church planting going on in New England. Secondly, we support efforts in short term missions through Trinity Fellowship Churches, The Southern Baptist Convention and other mission agencies, both domestic and international. Thirdly, we are seeking to build up our support for other worthy mission agencies and church planting teams as we have the resources. Our long-term goal is to build a missions budget of 20% of our total income. We are currently donating 10% to support Trinity Fellowship Churches as well as supporting local church planting efforts. Additionally, we currently support the Englands in Thailand, the Kirks in Indonesia and the Millers in Nepal. We look forward to doing more and more as our people generously give this great endeavor.

Would you pray for us and participate in our mission of helping to “make disciples of all nations”?

VII. OTHER

We believe the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection transforms us and gives us heart-felt motivation to fulfill these two commands by fully engaging and loving our city and our communities.

At King of Grace we are involved with our city through ministries of feeding the needy at G.A.R. park and partnerships with groups like Common Ground Ministries and Somebody Cares New England, as well as hosting various Haverhill community groups at our building like NA/AA, Red Cross Blood Drives, the Brownies, etc.

We also encourage all our members to be fully involved in their neighborhoods and various civic organizations, like Team Haverhill , the Haverhill Cultural Council and Haverhill Brightside , Haverhill Schools and City Government functions.

¹⁵² See Matthew 28:19-20

CHAPTER 5: OUR COMMITMENTS

I. SERVANTHOOD

One of the realities of Christian existence is that we now belong to Another: “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). All that we are and all that we have now belong to God. Of course, everything that we are and have—our personality, intellect, gifts, abilities, opportunities, possessions—has been given to us by God anyway (1 Cor. 4:7)! Conversion simply gives the believer the opportunity to offer all of this back to God for His glory and for our eternal good.

A common metaphor in Jesus’ parables is that of the servant—we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are “Well done, good and *faithful servant*.” Such is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion—it is a way of life. The Christian journey is not one of observation, but *participation*. In this lesson we will explore two of the primary ways we participate, through servanthood and stewardship (the faithful use of our resources) within the context of the local church.

“Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, our talents, and our energies in serving one another in the Body of Christ.” - Jerry Bridges

A. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO SERVE

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the express purposes of our salvation is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve God.¹⁵³ Serving is therefore a God-given expectation of every Christian; as we sometimes like to say, “We are saved to serve.” But it is much more than merely a duty; what higher privilege is there than to give one’s life in glad service to our gracious, sovereign God who saved us? Since our service for God is closely connected to our salvation by God, we begin our exploration of servanthood with the greatest servant of all: Jesus Christ.

- 1) **Servanthood is modeled by Jesus’ example.** - Although Jesus was worthy of the worship and service of all creatures, he humbled himself as a servant, and modeled a lifestyle of servanthood for all who would follow him.^{154, 155}
- 2) **Servanthood is mandated by Jesus’ call.** - While we can do nothing to earn our salvation, our salvation nevertheless ushers us into a life of following our Master, relinquishing our prerogatives and rights. A critical aspect of following Christ is following his example of

¹⁵³ “. . . how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” -Heb. 9:14

¹⁵⁴ “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” -Philippians 2:5-8

¹⁵⁵ “But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” -Mark 10:43-45

servanthood.¹⁵⁶

3) Servanthood is motivated by Jesus' sacrifice.

At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross. Because we stand forgiven, we are set free to find joy in knowing and serving God. Because the Spirit indwells us, we find we have fresh affections for God and a new desire to glorify God. We do not serve God in order to be forgiven or to gain God's favor, but because we have *been* forgiven and have received God's favor as a gift. Gratitude and joy provide the fuel for the believer's service to God and others.¹⁵⁷

"We should serve God not just because it is a duty, because serving Him is much more than that. We should serve God because it glorifies God. He is worthy of everything we can do for Him and His church. Wouldn't you agree?" - Donald Whitney

B. THE REQUIREMENTS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

The grace of God expressed through the cross of Christ provides the primary basis for our service to God. When this is the case, our servanthood will be characterized by certain qualities that both provide godly motivation for service and assure that our service is glorifying and pleasing to God.

- 1) **Christian service is God-centered.** - When we serve other people, whether they be fellow Christians in the local church or non-believers in our lives, we are actually rendering service to God Himself. This reality helps to purify our motives for serving, helping us to put to death the isolation that comes from selfishness and the craving for others' approval that comes from pride.¹⁵⁸
- 2) **Christian service is others-focused.** - When serving is motivated by grace, it will not be self-serving, but rather characterized by an authentic desire to glorify God and to meet the needs of others. Few things so distort our service than selfishness, but grace-motivated service actively places the desires of God and the needs of others above one's own.¹⁵⁹
- 3) **Christian service is characterized by humility.** - True servanthood adopts a posture that others are more important than self. A servant doesn't demand recognition or dictate how he is to serve, but rather takes simple delight in being used by God to meet the needs of others.¹⁶⁰
- 4) **Christian service is empowered by the Spirit of God.** - The believer not only labors for God, but by the power God provides. Dependence upon God for motivation, strength, and

¹⁵⁶ "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."-John 13:14-17

¹⁵⁷ "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."-2 Cor. 5:14-15

¹⁵⁸ "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."-Colossians 3:23-24

¹⁵⁹ "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."-Galatians 5:13

¹⁶⁰ "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." -Philippians 2:3-4

effectiveness in serving assures that God receives the glory for our service. God gives each believer spiritual gifts that motivate and empower our service for His glory and others' good.¹⁶¹

II. SERVANTHOOD AT KING OF GRACE CHURCH

An important aspect of membership at King of Grace is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others. Involvement in service typically takes one of two forms:

A. SPONTANEOUS MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES:

We all have numerous opportunities provided to us by God to serve Him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and our cultivation of a servant's heart. It is essential that we respond to these unique opportunities as the Lord provides them.

B. STRUCTURED MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH:

These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as small groups, ministry teams, and children's ministry. These ministries provide concrete service opportunities and meet specific needs, as well as providing a source of relationship building and ongoing accountability.

Ministry Teams provide wonderful opportunities to serve alongside others to accomplish specific objectives, meet identified needs in the church, and use your gifts for the glory of God.

C. SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING STARTED:

1) Consider which ministry(s) would be best suited to whom God has made you:

- What do I have a passion for?
- What spiritual gifts and talents has God given me?
- Where do others see God's grace in my life?
- How much time do I have available to serve?
- Where in my schedule can I make room for opportunities to serve?

2) Begin as soon as possible!

Opportunities abound for you to serve. Your small group is a good place to start; feel free to surprise your small group leader by asking to be "put to work." There are other (and numerous) immediate needs, such as children's ministry, ushering and the greeting team, outreach teams, building team, the financial advisory team and prayer ministry. It is usually wise to get involved soon and start small. And don't worry too much about your function: adopt the heart of a servant and seek to serve a ministry in a way which best serves it. We are all in the process of learning how we can best serve God and His church, so we might bear fruit for His glory.

¹⁶¹ "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."-1 Peter 4:10-11

III. STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. An important part of following Christ is the use of our material resources for God's purposes and to meet the needs of others. In fact, Scripture is clear that an authentic relationship with Christ *will find expression* in the faithful use of our resources for His purposes. For the remainder of this lesson, we will examine the use of our money and possessions for the glory of God, the work of His church, and the well-being of others.

"Christian stewardship is the management of life and all its resources for the glory of God." - Murray J. Harris

A. THE REALITY OF STEWARDSHIP.

The faithful use of our resources begins with a stark realization: God owns everything! All that we have comes from Him, and therefore we don't really own anything; we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—over things that belong to God.¹⁶²

- 1) **The significance of stewardship.** - The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over money—all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God—by such things we confess that God is the source of our life, not our possessions.^{163, 164}
- 2) **The substance of stewardship.**

In addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of His kingdom through the local church. Throughout salvation history, God has called His people to support His work through giving.

In the Old Testament, God's people were to give a tithe, or the first tenth, of their income to God. This practice predated the giving of the Law (Gen. 14:20; Gen. 28:22), and was later formalized in the Law of Moses for the maintenance of the temple and provision for the priests and Levites who served there (Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 14:22-24).

In the New Testament, giving to support the work of the church remains an expectation of believers:

(a) Giving to support the needs of individuals.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."-Psalm 50:10-12

¹⁶³ "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."-Luke 16:11-13

¹⁶⁴ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." -Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁶⁵ "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." -Acts 4:34-35

*(b) Giving to support the church's leaders so they can devote their time and energies to serving the church.*¹⁶⁶

*(c) Giving to support the extension of the gospel.*¹⁶⁷

1) The practice of tithing illustrates important guidelines and provides a helpful starting point for regular giving to the church.

The financial support of the New Testament church is likened to the support of the temple in the Old Testament.¹⁶⁸ Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and training.^{169, 170} We are to give regularly and systematically. This demonstrates a commitment to God and a trust that He will provide for all our needs (see Ex. 23:19).¹⁷¹

In the New Testament, obedience to God's law is intensified due to the transforming work of the Spirit in light of Christ's work on the cross (for example, hatred is likened to murder—Matt. 5:21-22; lust is likened to adultery—Matt. 5:27-28). In the same way, our giving is not merely to be thought of as "paying our dues," but should flow from the giving of our entire selves to God. In light of this, tithing is a reminder of God's ownership of us, and is an appropriate starting point for our giving.¹⁷²

2) Offerings over and above our regular giving provide for special needs, specific ministries, care for the deserving poor, and the expansion of the gospel.^{173, 174}

3) The heart of stewardship. - What we actually do with our money reveals where our heart truly is (Matt. 6:21). But in addition to the command to give, Scripture also addresses our motives and attitudes towards giving. Here is just a sampling:

*(a) Giving is to be generous, not stingy.*¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁶ "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." -1 Cor. 9:13-14

¹⁶⁷ "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again." -Philippians 4:15-16:

¹⁶⁸ "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." (cf. Matt. 10:10) -1 Cor. 9:13-14

¹⁶⁹ "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages.'" -1 Tim. 5:17-18

¹⁷⁰ "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches." -Galatians 6:6:

¹⁷¹ "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper. . ." -1 Cor. 16:2

¹⁷² "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." -2 Cor. 8:3-5

¹⁷³ "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." -Acts 4:34-35

¹⁷⁴ "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again." Philippians 4:15-16

¹⁷⁵ "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." -2 Cor. 9:6

(b) Giving is to be enthusiastic, not grudging.¹⁷⁶

(c) Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard.¹⁷⁷

(d) Giving is to be discreet, not showy.¹⁷⁸

(e) Giving is to be with faith, not anxiety.¹⁷⁹

IV. THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTICIPATION

One of the great tragedies in much of western Christianity is the misconception that “church” is an ornate building or a service to be attended, rather than the community of God’s people, saved by His grace. By definition, then, to be a member of the church is to be a participant in the life of God, with the people of God, made possible by the grace of God. Viewed in this light, our participation in the life of the church is not an option, or the prerogative of a privileged few, but the call and responsibility of every person redeemed through the work of Christ on the cross. Having been purchased by God, we have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and have to Him for His glory.

Ultimately, the giving of ourselves through servanthood and stewardship is not merely a duty—as if we somehow could “repay” God through our giving or service. On the contrary, before we can give, we must possess, and before we can possess, we must receive. Therefore, all of our serving and giving is simply offering back to God what we have been so graciously given. Our time, talents, and resources are all gifts from God, and it is a consummate privilege to offer these gifts in service of God’s glory and purposes. What a gracious invitation God has given us to experience the Christian life! Who could imagine a more noble, meaningful, and fulfilling existence?

V. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: A LIFE TO BE SHARED

The Christian life is not a matter of privatized belief. Jesus described the existence of believers in astonishing terms: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but **has passed from death to life.**” (John 5:24). As we see in the New Testament, this life is one that is to be shared with others. Just the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of our eternal life in heaven (2 Cor. 1:21-22), so is the life of the church—with all its imperfections—to be a foretaste of our fellowship with the saints in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). May this amazing privilege be our ongoing experience!

¹⁷⁶ “Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”-2 Cor. 9:7:

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” - Matthew 6:1-4:

¹⁷⁹ “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” -Malachi 3:10:

VI. NEXT STEPS

If it is your desire to take part in our mission by becoming a member of King of Grace, the process is a simple one with a few straightforward requirements:

- 1) A clear testimony of personal faith in Jesus Christ.
- 2) A demonstrated desire to serve as an active member of this body shown by the following:
 - (a) *Successful completion of the class “Exploring King of Grace Church”*
 - (b) *Affirmation of the church’s statement of faith.*
 - (c) *Support of the values and leadership of King of Grace Church.*
 - (d) *Affirmation of our Mutual Church Pledge*
 - (e) *Regular attendance of the Sunday morning meeting.*
 - (f) *Active involvement in a small group*
 - (g) *A meeting with a pastor to discuss church membership.*

Upon completion of these requirements, you will be welcomed into membership with other new members during the Sunday morning meeting. We welcome new members into the church on a regular basis, and consider these special Sundays as significant days in the life of our church.

We are so grateful that you have joined us in exploring King of Grace Church. We trust that the past eight weeks have been encouraging and informative as you seek to determine God’s will for your life, especially with regard to your involvement in a local church. What we have said before bears repeating: although we do hope that you will find in King of Grace a church home where you can thrive, our main burden is not that you become a part of *this* church, but that you become a part of *some* church. It is our desire that you develop a Biblical, enthusiastic conviction about the importance of active involvement in the local church, and with this conviction find a church home where you can worship God, grow in your relationship with Him, and serve in ways that glorify Him.

If there are any remaining questions, please do not hesitate to ask. We desire to do all we can to serve you as you consider the very important decision of local church involvement. Whatever decision you make, we hope your time here has increased your love for the Lord, and has strengthened you as you seek to glorify God, cherish the Savior, and serve His purposes in the context of the local church. May God’s richest blessings be upon you!



OUR MUTUAL CHURCH PLEDGE

The basis for our joining together as members of King of Grace Church is our relationship with God the Father through the work of his son Jesus Christ communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. As a member of King of Grace Church, I joyfully agree to walk together with the members of this church making the following commitments according to God's grace:

- to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).
- to pursue the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of spiritual disciplines (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Eph. 5:1-21; 1 Thess. 5:12-22).
- to follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the sacraments prescribed to His Church: by being baptized after my conversion, by regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through communion.
- to submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).
- to regularly participate in the life of King of Grace Church by regularly attending weekly services, engaging in gospel-centered missional community and serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25; Titus 3:14).
- to steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful and voluntary (Matt. 25:14-30; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- to walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Pet. 1:13-16, 4:1-3).
- to pursue conciliation when offense occurs between me and another member, rejecting all opportunities to speak or to hear gossip or slander, supporting the church's "Statement on Redemptive Speech." (1 Cor. 10:10, 2 Cor. 12:20, Eph 4:29, Phil. 2:14-15, 1 Pet 4:9)
- to watch out for church members and admonish anyone whose practice of sin requires it. If a church member requires corporate discipline, I will support the efforts and direction of the church, as led by its pastors, to call that member to repent of his sins. I agree with the church's doctrine and practice of church discipline. (Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14)
- to support the church's teaching on conciliating disputes and agree to abide by the church's "Statement on Conflict, Disputes, and Lawsuits." (1 Cor. 6:1-8, Matt. 18:15-20)
- to promote marriage as a reflection of Christ's relationship with his church and bring up any children God gives me in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. I support the church's understanding of the Bible's teaching on gender, marriage, divorce and remarriage. (Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10-11)
- to honor God if I should need to leave the church for good and biblical reasons by interacting with my pastors prior to the decision and seeking to transfer with pastoral commendation to another church (1 Cor. 12:12-31, Heb 13:17, 3 John 12)

Signature _____ *Print Name* _____ *Date* _____

Pastor _____ *Print Name* _____ *Date* _____