

The following document is designed to give prospective leaders and servants a look at the heart of our church-planting vision. It is crucial that all of our leaders are unified in the following areas:

- Doctrinal unity
- Relational unity
- Missional unity
- Philosophical unity

## **Vision**

*Grace Fellowship exists to bring glory to God through lives transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*To that end we seek to be a Christ-treasuring community, formed and sent by the Gospel on mission to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit for the Glory of God.*

### **1. Our vision places emphasis on our new Gospel identity:**

Grace Fellowship exists to *be* something and not merely *do* something. This emphasis on identity comes from the conviction that who we are drives what we do. Ephesians 2:10 roots our actions in our identity by saying, “For we *are* God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The Gospel proclaimed in Ephesians 2:8-9 forms a community *for* good works. The book of Ephesians as a whole also ties our identity to our purpose. Ephesians 1-3 speaks about who God has made us to be in Christ, while Ephesians 4-6 emphasizes the practical ways that who we are ought to drive what we do. Ephesians 4:1 says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to *walk in a manner worthy of the calling* to which you have been called.” Paul is telling the Ephesians that their actions must be in keeping with their calling (identity); or to put it more simply, he is saying, “be who you are in Christ.” In the same way, our vision urges us to be formed by the Gospel into a community that treasures Christ and proclaims his excellencies to the world.

### **2. Our vision calls for transformed hearts that treasure Jesus above the fleeting pleasures of sin:**

When we speak of ourselves as a Christ-treasuring community, we are understanding ourselves as a community that is joyfully willing to let go of everything in order to cling to Christ who is our all-satisfying treasure (Matthew 13:44).

### **3. Our vision is Trinitarian in nature:**

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we gaze upon the beauty of Jesus Christ and are compelled to treasure him above all things (2 Corinthians 3:18; John 16:14). In treasuring Christ above all things, we glorify God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11; John 13:31; 17:1, 26).

### **4. Our vision is intentionally reproducing:**

Our vision is to be a reproducing church (Matthew 28:19; 20). We long to make and send disciples in the same way that Jesus made and sent disciples (John 20:21). For this reason, we have tried to build this reproduction into the very nature of our vision statement. For example: The Holy Spirit uses the **Gospel** to form a **community** sent on **mission** proclaiming the **Gospel** which forms a **community** sent on **mission**, proclaiming the **Gospel** which forms a **community**.

## **Core Convictions**

### **I. The Gospel:**

It is the Gospel that forms us into Christ-treasuring community sent on mission to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

When we use the word Gospel, we mean the historic Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. This Gospel is more than a collection of facts to be believed. It is also the good and true story that Jesus died and rose to defeat sin, death and evil in order to make all things new. As the only person capable of such an act, Jesus is the rightful Lord over every square inch of the universe. This "Jesus is Lord" Gospel compels us to be a community that lives redemptively in all aspects of life. As followers of Jesus, we have come to realize that we are far more broken than we really comprehend, but in Christ we are more accepted than we could ever imagine. Although we fail in following Jesus, we are confident that his redeeming grace is sufficient for our failures and strong for our successes. Grace Fellowship is part of this grand, historic Christianity which seeks the good of the whole person, city, and the glory of God.

#### **A. The Gospel is the power of God for justification (Romans 1:16):**

The Gospel means "good news." The Bible tells us that God created Adam and Eve in his own image to glorify him by living lives of joyful dependence upon him. This world was to be a place of community, peace and joy. Adam and Eve chose to rebel against their perfect Creator and sought to find joy and satisfaction on their own. Because they disobeyed a holy God, they cut themselves off from all the joy that he had offered and instead found themselves justly condemned to death and eternal suffering under his righteous wrath.

Since Adam, all human beings have inherited his sinful nature and are born dead in their sins and trespasses - unable and unwilling to please him or submit to his good commands (Romans 5:12, 19; Ephesians 2:1- 3). Because all people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, all people find themselves cut off from God and justly under his righteous condemnation (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

However, while we were still enemies of God, rebels bent on rejecting him and seeking our own way, God, being rich in mercy, sent his only Son Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus, who was both with God and was himself God, took on flesh and came to earth (John 1:1,14). Jesus spent his life serving others by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead, and preaching and teaching the Gospel. After living a perfect life and deserving the just pleasure of a holy God, Jesus went to the cross where he took on himself the punishment of death for all the sins of all God's people.

At the cross, Jesus took off his righteousness and put on our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). At the cross, Jesus took the place of all those who would ever put their trust in him. At the cross, God's just wrath was satisfied against the sins of his people and Jesus' perfect righteousness was given to them to wear as a garment. And so, when God looks at his people, he no longer sees their sin, but instead he sees them clothed in the perfect righteousness of his beloved Son.

After Jesus died on the cross he was buried, and on the third day God raised him from the dead. He has now put all things under Jesus' feet and given him, as head over all things, to the church (1 Corinthians 15; Ephesians 1:20-22). At the end of history, God will restore this material creation and destroy once and for all, death, disease, injustice, and every form of suffering (Revelation 21:3-4; Romans 8:20-21).

And so we see that God is saving for himself a people who are and who will be united with his Son Jesus, who has been placed far above all rule and authority both in this age and in the age to come (Ephesians 2:20-21; 5:25-32). This salvation is freely given to everyone who will repent and place their trust in Christ alone.

For the self-righteous, this means we must give up every attempt to merit God's pleasure and, laying aside all our pathetic goodness, cling to the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. For those of us who have lived for our own pleasure, we must give up trying to find pleasure on our own, and in repentance, cling to the precious blood of Jesus to forgive our sins and cling to his righteousness to reconcile us to God, who alone can give us the satisfaction we have always sought.

The Gospel is for everyone. For all who believe in Jesus, the Gospel is full of rich promises which include: the forgiveness of sins, the removal of God's wrath, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, reconciliation with God and one another, adoption as sons, eternal life, heaven, and countless other blessings. However, the ultimate good of all these marvelous gifts is that at the cross Jesus removed all the obstacles that stood between God and his people and now we can boldly approach God the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19; 1 Peter 3:18).

Through Jesus we can know the Creator of the heavens and the earth whose justice, grace, love, and truth were gloriously revealed at the cross where his only Son gave his life to make those who were once his enemies his friends. This God is altogether lovely and knowing him and delighting in his infinite beauty is what makes the Gospel so indescribably sweet (Psalm 27:4).

We love the Gospel because we love God and God is both the content of and the ultimate goal of the Gospel.

## **B. The Gospel is the power of God for change: Sanctification (Titus 2:11-14)**

It is absolutely vital to understand that the Gospel is foundational for every aspect of the Christian life. The Gospel is not simply the way we become Christians, but it is the way we live the Christian life. Tragically, many people believe that the Gospel is the way we become Christians, and then obedience to God's commands and discipline is how we grow in our Christian life.

Our churches are full of legalists because once people are saved they are urged to obey God's commands through fear or shame rather than through a love for their Savior. Titus 2:11-14 reminds us that it is God's grace that teaches us to renounce ungodliness. Oh how foreign such thoughts are to our everyday lives.

When we want someone to obey us, we often use fear or shame or manipulation or coercion, but God uses grace. He uses kindness to draw us to repentance and forgiveness to move us to love (Romans 2:4). Let me explain how I believe the Bible speaks of the Gospel as being the power of God for change.

(i) **All sin is failure to believe the Gospel.** Sin is building our identity — or self-worth and happiness — on anything other than God as he is revealed in the Gospel. At its very root, all sin comes from our failure to truly treasure Jesus Christ above all things. Jeremiah boils all of Israel's sins down to a rejection of God and a seeking of satisfaction in other places (Jeremiah 2:13). Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God; 2 Peter 1:9 tells us that those who forget that they have been forgiven of their past sins are near; sighted and blind. James 4 talks about the root of sin and conflict being "desiring" what we do not have, but those who are presently believing and focusing on the Gospel could never desire what they didn't have since through the Gospel we are filled in Christ (Colossians 2:10). You see when we believe the Gospel, we find that God has given us all that we need in Jesus. When we believe the Gospel, everything becomes rubbish compared to the all-surpassing value of knowing Jesus (Philippians 3:8). So, sin occurs when we fail to believe certain aspects of the Gospel and as a result begin to treasure other things more than we treasure Christ.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This does not imply that when we sin we prove that we have never believed the Gospel and are not truly justified. But like 2 Peter 1:9 says, when we sin we prove that we are forgetting the Gospel. We are taking our eyes off of the Gospel and in turn demonstrate that we are treasuring something else more than we are treasuring Jesus at that moment.

(ii) **The fight against sin is a fight to believe the Gospel.** We fight sin by treasuring Christ above all things; we find ourselves compelled to treasure Christ in this way when we see his beauty displayed in the Gospel. We fight sin by remembering that we have been forgiven of our past sins (II Peter 1:9). We fight sin by returning to Jesus' spring of living water and finding him to be ultimately satisfying. We fight sin and pursue righteousness by gazing upon "the grace of God which has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (Titus 2:11). 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory into another." We are transformed into Jesus' image as we gaze upon him. If gazing upon Jesus is the means of our transformation and the Gospel is that which removes every obstacle and allows us to truly see and savor the glory of God in the face of Christ, then believing the Gospel must be the way we are transformed. The Gospel fights sin by exposing its utter wickedness through the cross while at the same time revealing the excellencies of a Savior who died in our place and whose beauty is so enticing that everything else fades in comparison to him. This process is a battle that will entail suffering which at first seems painful, but inevitably serves to highlight the stark contrast between the powerless idols that we once clung to and the beauty of our savior who alone can truly satisfy.

## II. Community

The Gospel forms a **Christ-treasuring community** sent on **mission** to the world by the power of the Holy Spirit for the Glory of God:

### A. The Gospel forms a community:

In Acts 2:37-41 we see that the Spirit's first work is to use the Gospel to form a community both to share in the salvation of the kingdom and to be a channel of salvation to others (Acts 2:37-47). Here we see that God requires people to repent — turn from their idolatry to treasure Christ above all things — and be baptized into this community that has now received the gift of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit. The context for a Gospel-centered life is never merely individual. The Gospel takes radically diverse individuals and makes them into a community, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). In I John 1:3 we find that John preaches the Gospel (what he has heard from the beginning) **so that you too may have fellowship with us...** Clearly one of the purposes of the Gospel is to create a community, and that is exactly what the Gospel does. The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to take a people bent on their own selfish desires and form them into one body — all dependent upon one another, and all under the authority of Jesus Christ who is the head (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 2:11-22). Tim Keller notes that, "This kind of new community is not an optional thing, an 'extra' for the Christian; instead it's part of the overall purpose of God's kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller. *Church Planting Manual*. 38.

And so we must always remember that the Gospel is not merely the foundation of our community, as if we will later build upon it with something else; instead, what Jesus has done for us through the Gospel will always be the only vital thing between us. Lastly, we must remember that Christian community is not an ideal to be sought, but a reality to be lived in. You see, through the Gospel, we are a community and our call is now to go out and live in the light of this new reality.

## **B. The community fights to treasure Christ above all else:**

### **(i) The purpose of Christian community:**

**Christian community exists to treasure Christ.** To be a community formed by the Gospel is to be a community that treasures Christ above all else. In Philippians 3:7;10, Paul shows us what it looks like to treasure Christ above all things. He says, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...” (Philippians 3:7;8).

He goes on to admit that this is not something that he has obtained, but rather it is something that must be fought for (Philippians 3:12, 13b;14). Now the reason that Paul tells the Philippians how valuable Jesus is to him is because he wants them to follow his example. He is not simply bragging, but he is urging others to follow his example and treasure Jesus above all things. He says, “Let those of us who are mature think this way...” (Philippians 3:15). A moment later he says, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Philippians 3:17).

In the following verses Paul goes on to warn the Philippians that not everyone treasures Christ like this, rather many have turned from him and have set their minds on earthly things (Philippians 3:19). After warning them, he begs the Philippians to treasure Jesus by setting their minds on heaven from where their Savior Jesus will soon come and transform them from their lowly body to be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20).

So here in Philippians 3 Paul has shown us both what it looks like to treasure Christ above all things (3:7-10) and how we are able to do it (3:17). You see, the temptation to become fixated on the things of this world is real and it is strong. If we are ever to treasure Christ, it will be a fight that will require forgetting what lies behind and pressing on.

However, we cannot do this alone. The Philippians needed the example of Paul and others, didn't they? We too will never overcome the seductive calls of this world without the help of the community.

You see, we need the community to do for us what Paul did for the Philippians. The community must commend Christ to each other both through their words and through their lives. Paul spoke of the beauty of Christ to the Philippians and he demonstrated to

them what it looked like to treasure Christ through his actions. He called them to use him and others as an example and to imitate them.

Paul sees this as absolutely necessary. He says, “Join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. **For** many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:17-18). Do you see what he is saying? He is saying, “If you don’t keep your eyes on me and others who follow me, you will never treasure Christ and will end up walking as enemies of the cross.”

Our involvement in community is essential to help us treasure Christ. As a community, we must stand firm and imitate Paul by treasuring Jesus above all the false messiahs of our culture. We do this in community by hearing and seeing Christ commended to us by others. Of course, as we grow to treasure Christ ourselves, we will become examples to others as we begin to commend Christ to them in our words and actions. Christian community exists to treasure Christ.

**(ii) The ground of true community:**

**Christian community exists through treasuring Christ.** Throughout the Bible we see that the foundation of our love for one another (community) is the reality that Jesus has loved us first (1 John 3:16). Christian love does not originate in the goodness of the lover or in the worth of the beloved, but in our faithful gazing at the beauty of Jesus and treasuring him above all things. We are moons and not stars. What I mean is that we cannot muster up love from within ourselves; instead, we are only able to reflect what we have first experienced. And so we see that Christian community finds itself absolutely dependent upon the unfailing love of Jesus, revealed in the Gospel, to shine down upon us and transform us into men and women who are able to love each other. This is why those in Christian community must find themselves always commending Jesus to each other. You see when conflict arises within community, it will only be a vision of the beauty of Jesus that will melt our hard hearts and set us again on the path of reflecting the glorious love of our Savior by loving each other.

**(iii) The means of a Christ-treasuring community:**

**The community fights to treasure Christ by speaking the Gospel to each other (1 Timothy 4:16).** Because Christian community exists both through treasuring Christ and in order to treasure Christ, it is imperative that Christian community prove itself in that everything it says commends Christ. One of the chief reasons God has provided community for his people is that they would speak the Gospel to each other (Hebrews 10:24-25).

We desperately need Christian community to remind us of the Gospel for our sanctification. (Notice in Hebrews 10:24;31 that the danger of continuing in deliberate sin is the ground for the command to get together and speak the Gospel to each other in

verses 24-25.) Because all sin is a failure to *believe* the Gospel, the way that Christian community confronts one another is with the Gospel.

Christian community confronts each other with good news! The Gospel allows Christian community to be authentic and honest. The Gospel allows sin and conflict in community to be an occasion for commending Jesus to one another and giving thanks to God for his amazing beauty. Conflict no longer needs to be avoided and ignored, but rather we use conflict to expose our idols and allow Jesus to forgive us and lead us into a greater love for him.

So often we are blind to our own sin. That is why community is so vital. You see, if being forgiven is a primary means of being sanctified<sup>3</sup>, then when a community lovingly exposes our sin and then speaks the Gospel to us, they have provided the wood necessary to stoke the fire of our love for God.

That is how we have to see Gospel confrontation. If those who are forgiven much love much, we must see our past sins not as things which we must keep hidden, but things that must come into the light and be exposed and repented of and forgiven. If God uses his forgiveness to reveal to us the beauty of his perfect patience, then we no longer need to fear hidden sins; instead, we can see them as an opportunity to experience God in a far more beautiful way than we have previously known.

Because the Gospel is bigger than past sins, we do not have to be afraid of a community that commends Christ by stomping on our idols and urging us to gaze at our Savior instead.

---

<sup>3</sup> i.e. recognition of being forgiven much results in a greater love for Christ (see Luke 7:36;50). In the Gospel we find that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). As we contemplate this forgiveness, we are moved to a deep love for Jesus (Luke 7:47). Moved by this love for Jesus, we will gladly seek to obey his commandments (John 14:15).

Because Jesus is the light, the closer we get to him the more the darkness of our own hearts will be revealed. As that darkness is revealed it will lead us to an even greater understanding of our sin and deeper repentance than we have previously experienced. As we continue to grow in our understanding of the depth of our sin, the beauty of Jesus' unfailing love and complete forgiveness becomes more and more beautiful to us. As Jesus becomes more and more beautiful to us, we grow closer to him and again become more aware of the depths of our sin. However, each time we get closer to the light and become more aware of the depth of our sin and are driven to repentance, we find that God is faithful and just and his forgiveness always exceeds our sin. So our life becomes a constant journey of coming to the light and having our sin revealed and repenting in brokenness before Holy God only to find that his forgiveness is bigger and to be drawn to love his infinite beauty more and more.

**The community fights to treasure Christ by living out the Gospel before one another (1 Timothy 4:16).** Because Christian community exists both through treasuring Christ and in order to treasure Christ, it is imperative that Christian community prove itself in that everything it does commends Christ. A Christian community loves each other by sacrificially considering other people as more important than themselves, and in so doing, points others to Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:3-8). To be a Gospel-living community is to consider how God has treated us in Jesus Christ and to endeavor to treat others in the same manner. This means that because Jesus laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for one another; because Jesus served us, we ought to serve one another. We are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us; we are to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us (1 John 3:16-18; John 13:12-20; Romans 15:7; Ephesians 4:32). The call to be a Gospel-living community is a call to “be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

(iv) **What does this kind of community look like?**

1. **A worshiping community:** A community moved by the beauty of the Gospel whose only response can be to worship pits majestic God (Hebrews 12:28-29).
2. **A loving community:** A community that loves each other by commending Jesus as altogether satisfying and worthy of being treasured above all else.
3. **A truth-telling community:** A community that lovingly confronts one another with the danger of sin and the beauty of a Savior who has paid for it all through his sacrificial death on the cross (Ephesians 4:14-16).
4. **A compassionate and comforting community:** A community that weeps with those who weep and comforts one another by commending the beauty of Christ as our only source of hope and joy in suffering (Romans 12:15; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5).
5. **A suffering community of joyful, sacrificial, and generous service:** A community that joyfully spends its time, money, and reputation in loving acts of deferential service to one another in imitation of our beautiful Savior (Philippians 2:3; 1 John 3:16-18; John 13:12-20). A community that embraces Jesus’ call to suffer for his name by daily dying to our own desires and laying down our rights in order to enjoy fellowship with Christ outside the camp, whatever the cost (Hebrews 13:13; John 12:25; Mark 8:34-38; 2 Timothy 2:3).
6. **A community pursuing holiness:** A community that spurs each other on to the love and good deeds to which we have been called by faithfully pointing to the beauty of the Gospel (Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 10:24; Ephesians 2:10).
7. **An accepting community:** A community that seeks to break down racial, economic, cultural, class, and even personality barriers by proclaiming and living out the unifying work of Christ on the cross (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-19).
8. **A forgiving community:** A community that endeavors to live out the Gospel through radical forgiveness even when the cost seems overwhelming. Simply put, we will endeavor to forgive others *as* God in Christ forgave us. (Ephesians 4:32).

9. **A radically evangelistic community on mission:** A community that passionately pursues the lost with the Gospel and urges them to treasure Christ above all things and find in him the joy and satisfaction for which they have always yearned (1 Corinthians 9:19).
10. **A praying community:** A community that finds it is unable to be what God has called them to be and so must cast themselves on his mercy and the power of his Spirit if they are ever to please him (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). This dependence on the Spirit is displayed through a radical commitment to prayer (2 Corinthians 1:11).
11. **An alien community:** A community that abstains from their selfish passions and refuses to cling to their earthly possessions making it clear to others that they are seeking a different homeland (Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:17-19; 2:11).

### III. The Mission

The Gospel forms a Christ-treasuring community **sent on mission to the world** through the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

#### A. A community formed for mission:

1 Peter 2:9 tells us that God has made us into “a people for his own possession, **that** [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light.” First, we must realize that our lives are not our own, we are a “people for his own possession.”

We exist to be a people for God, in order to do the work that God has called us to do. The Bible tells us that God has called us to himself, so that we, as a new formed community, might proclaim to the world the excellencies of his character. If individuals were at the heart of God’s purposes, then we would expect the individual to be at the heart of mission. However, when we search the Scriptures, we find that at the heart of God’s plan of salvation there is a family, a nation, a people for his own possession. And so the community should be at the heart of mission.

The authors of the book *Total Church* write, “Mission cannot be done by a lone ranger. Mission must be done by a community of believers. It cannot be done in hit-and-run raids. There must be a community that can be observed and one that offers a place of belonging. When we think of ‘mission’ we must think ‘church.’”<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel calls us to be “a people for God’s possession” (1 Peter 2:9). It calls us to break down the dividing walls of hostility and bring together those who were once divided (Ephesians 2:13ff.).

---

<sup>4</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. *Total Church*. IVP, Nottingham, England: 2007. (86).

The Bible contains over 50 one another commands explaining exactly what this type of community is supposed to look like. So if the Gospel is going to call us to this type of community, then its proclamation must be born out of this type of community.

When Jesus tells his disciples “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” he is placing mission at the heart of our love for each other (John 13:35). He is telling us that one of the primary ways we are to do mission is by loving each other before a watching world. Even the evangelistic activity that we do when alone must find its roots in community and it must inevitably lead others back into that community.

Not only must we keep community central to mission, but we must keep mission central to every community. Within history, the church glorifies God by making much of him to the world (1 Peter 2:9). Because of this, mission must be central to every local church.

### **B. Mission Defined: To be the aroma of Christ to God and thereby spread the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere we go (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).**

Mission is not merely something we do, but it is part of our identity. We are witnesses and as such we witness to others the beauty of Jesus displayed in the Gospel (Acts 1:8). We are a “sent” people (John 20:21), “ambassadors” who have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). This type of broad and comprehensive understanding of mission is essential to our lives as Christians. Our mission cannot be limited to cross-cultural work or to evangelistic encounters. Mission is not merely something we do one night a week. **Our mission is to be so transformed by the Gospel so that we become the aroma of Christ wherever we go.** Because our mission is part of our identity, it must permeate every sphere of our lives.

Now when we think of mission in these terms we find that the call is overwhelming. When we begin to contemplate being the aroma of Christ to God and so spreading the attractive and offensive fragrance of God everywhere we go, we respond like Paul by saying, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16). I want to argue that part of the way we can be the aroma of Christ in our culture is by joyfully embracing our inadequacy for the call. The nature of the mission reveals our weakness and drives us to die to ourselves and depend completely upon the grace of God.

In dependence, we find God’s grace is sufficient and his power is made known in our weakness. As we experience his sufficient grace and gaze at his glorious power, we find that we are able to rejoice in our dependence upon God. In a culture obsessed with independence and strength, our lives of joyful acceptance of our own weakness and willing dependence upon God become a vital part of the aroma of Christ to God, offending many and attracting some.

One of the whole points of having a mission that is too big for us is that it would drive us to dependence upon God (2 Corinthians 1:10). This type of radical dependence upon God is central to what it means to be a Christian.

Faith is the letting go of our own abilities, dying to ourselves, and casting ourselves solely upon Christ as our only hope. In Psalm 39, David laments his own frailty and then concludes, “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you” (Psalm 39:7). You see, one of the amazing beauties of understanding the impossible nature of our mission is that it leads us to dependence upon God. How beautiful that when dependence is the goal, our own inadequacy becomes a strength (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Now what is so beautiful about God is that when we come to him utterly helpless and cast ourselves upon him, we find that his grace is sufficient for us. And so, like Paul, we can “Boast all the more gladly of [our] weaknesses, so that the power of God might rest upon [us]. For the sake of Christ, then, [we] can be content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when [we] are weak, then [we] are strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). What Paul shows us here is that we can rejoice in our weakness. We can be content and find joy in depending upon God, for his grace is always sufficient; and when we are weak, he is strong.

This understanding of mission that drives us to admit our inadequacy and joyfully depend upon God for grace is actually an essential part of the mission. You see, we live in a culture that stresses independence. Freedom, individual rights, entitlement, mavericks, strength, talent, ability, competency - these are the values of our society.

So, how can we be **the aroma of Christ to God** in our culture in such a way that people are either offended or strangely attracted? **We can accentuate our own weaknesses and inadequacies and live lives of joyful dependence upon God.** We can boast in our weakness before a culture obsessed with strength. We can boast in our dependence in a culture obsessed with autonomy. We can hope in God in a culture obsessed with what can be empirically seen and touched.

Do you see how this would make us radically different? Do you see how this would cause us to smell unlike anything else people have ever smelled? Who does this? What other religion, what other philosophy, what other world view is able to do this? None!

Who would argue that all roads led to the same place when your life put you on such a divergent path? To be the aroma of Christ to God, we must live lives that are so radical they can only be explained by the Gospel. That is why Paul says that if the Gospel isn't true, we should be pitied above all people (1 Corinthians 15:19).

A lot of us believe that we should live lives that are so attractive to other people that they will say, “Wow, you can be a Christian and still do \_\_\_\_\_.” We want them to feel like becoming a Christian is right within their grasp — so close that they are almost there. No! Being a Christian is not within the grasp of any of us. It is an impossible call and can only be done by dying and letting Christ do it through us (Galatians 2:20).

This will be a struggle for all of us, won't it? None of us naturally enjoys being weak and inadequate, and we can only do it joyfully when our hearts have been transformed by the Gospel.

Only when we have heard the roar of our Savior's infinite grace in the Gospel, can we silence the deceptive howl of our own strength. Because this is humanly impossible, we will only be able to do it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **C. The scope of the mission: The whole world.**

Not only does the mission permeate all of life, but its scope is the whole world. Jesus called his disciples to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The great commission reminds us that cross-cultural missions (all nations) are the work of every believer. The book of Revelation tells us that Jesus died to ransom people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Romans 10:14-17 reminds us that faith comes from hearing the word of God proclaimed, and that for it to be proclaimed, someone must be sent.

And so we see that our mission as the people of God is to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. To do this we must be a people committed not merely to letting our mission permeate all our life, but we must be committed to letting our mission permeate all the world. This means that we must be a people aggressively committed to going or sending others to proclaim the Gospel around the world, especially to the unreached people groups. In fact, part of the way we are the aroma of Christ to God here at home is by being a people committed to reaching the unreached people groups of the world.

We must be a people committed to praying for the nations and we must live radically sacrificial lives so that we can finance all those whom God calls to go to the nations. Reaching unreached people is an issue for which Jesus died; it is a blood issue and so, as his witnesses, it is an issue that must rest at the forefront of who we are. And so again, we find that the mission is too big for us and if we are ever to succeed, it will only be through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **IV. The Holy Spirit**

The Gospel forms a Christ-treasuring community sent on mission to the world **through the power of the Holy Spirit** for the glory of God.

### **A. A community dependent on the Holy Spirit.**

Because of the impossible nature of our mission, we need the Holy Spirit. Any mission that does not require the help of the Holy Spirit is not the mission to which God has called us. It is interesting how often the gift of the Spirit is directly connected to the call to mission in the Bible.

When Jesus tells his disciples about their call to be his witnesses, he tells them that they must first wait for the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:47-49 Jesus says, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city

until you are clothed with power from on high.” If the disciples needed the Holy Spirit, even after they had been with Jesus for three years, then we certainly need the Holy Spirit if we are to be his witnesses to the world.

In Acts 1:8 we see that the disciples must first receive power from the Holy Spirit and then they will be sent out as his witnesses to the world. The Holy Spirit is seen as absolutely necessary to fulfill the mission. The power of the Holy Spirit is not only the power behind the mission, but it is also the power which God uses to form us into a Christ-treasuring community.

Before we can ever be the aroma of Christ to God, we must be rescued out of darkness and formed into a people for God’s own possession (1 Peter 2:9). It is the Spirit who opens our eyes so that we are able to behold the glory of Jesus and so be transformed into his glorious image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Just as John the Baptist was unable to recognize who Jesus was without the power of the Holy Spirit, so today we find ourselves absolutely helpless even to recognize the beauty of Jesus and treasure him until the Spirit comes and reveals Jesus to us (John 1:29;34). For this reason, we find that our whole lives must be lived in active dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit to keep our eyes set on the beauty of Jesus and to transform us into Jesus’ image so that we become the aroma of Christ before a watching world.

## **B. What does this type of dependent community look like?**

- 1. A Praying People:** Prayer, more than anything else, reveals our dependence upon God. After Jesus left, the apostles devoted themselves to prayer as they waited for the Holy Spirit to come (Acts 1:13-14). Throughout the book of Acts we see this commitment to prayer attached to the mission of the apostles (Acts 2:42; 4:24-31; 10:9; 12:12; 13:3; and many more).
- 2. A Christ-centred people:** The role of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Christ. In John 16:14, Jesus says, “[The Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”
- 3. A Word-centred people:** The Holy Spirit magnifies Christ by bringing to remembrance his word (John 14:26). He removes the veil and allows us to behold Jesus in the Bible (2 Corinthians 3:15-18).
- 4. A people displaying the fruit of the Spirit:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (Galatians 5:23).
- 5. A community dependent on one another (1 Corinthians 12:12ff):** The Spirit uses the community working together to fulfill the mission. Paul tells the Corinthians that they “must help us by prayer” (2 Corinthians 1:11). Spirit dependence is demonstrated not only by our dependence upon our own prayers, but on the prayers of the community on our behalf (James 5:14). We also need the community to remind us of the Gospel and

“stir us up to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). So if we are ever to succeed at the mission we have been called to, it will be through the prayers and Gospel proclamation of the community into our lives.

## V. To the Glory of God

The Gospel forms a Christ-treasuring community sent on mission to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit **for the glory of God**.

### A. The goal of everything we have talked about thus far has been for the glory of God.

Romans 11:33-36 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

We exist to make God look glorious. We are formed into a Christ-treasuring community in order to display the glory of God. The salvation that we receive through the Gospel is “to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Our mission as a community is “to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

All things in creation and all things throughout history, including the sending of his only Son Jesus, are from him and through him and to him so that in all things he might receive the glory forever. 1 Peter 4:10-11 reminds us that the good things we say and do are gifts which God has given us and so ought to be used to bring him glory. Peter writes, “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. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Everything we have is a gift from God. Even the strength that we have been given to do menial tasks of service for one another have been given to us from God and must be used in such a way that in the end, God receives all the glory. God must receive all the glory both in the way we speak and act. That is why we have argued that we exist to be a Christ-treasuring community, formed and sent on mission to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit **for the glory of God**.

## Summary

The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to transform us into a people for God’s own possession. As God’s people, we are formed into a community through treasuring Christ and in order to treasure Christ above all things. We fight the temptations of our culture by constantly reminding each

other of the Gospel and commending Christ to one another in word and deed. As we behold the beauty of Christ, we find ourselves transformed into his image more and more. It is as those who are being transformed into Jesus' image, and thus are beginning to "smell" like him, that we are sent out into our hostile culture to be the aroma of Christ to all those around us.

Because our mission is too big for us, we constantly find ourselves failing and despairing or succeeding and growing arrogant. Thus, we need the encouraging and reproofing words of the Gospel spoken and lived before us by the community to once again set our eyes upon the beauty of Jesus and find joy in our complete dependence upon him.

And so the community joins together in prayer for one another and in speaking the confronting and encouraging good news of the Gospel to each other. In this way, we go from being transformed by the Gospel into the aroma of Christ before a dying world, to calling others to be transformed by the Gospel into the aroma of Christ before a dying world. All this is done through the power of the Holy Spirit as he removes the veil and allows us to see Jesus more clearly. As the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts so that we delight in our Savior, God is glorified.

In this process, we see that the purpose of the Gospel, the purpose of the community, and the purpose of our mission, is that through the power of the Holy Spirit we and those around us might grow to treasure Christ above all things; and in treasuring him, we glorify the God who sent Jesus and who is perfectly revealed in his glorious face.

## **Philosophy of Ministry**

We know that there is nothing unique about our theological convictions. Few would disagree with the centrality of the Gospel, community, and mission, all done through the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. However, it is our desire to not merely profess these convictions, but to give our lives to radically live them out. We know that this will be a lifelong battle against compromise that we cannot win alone.

So what can we say? Our hope is in God — in the power of the Holy Spirit to tether our hearts to the beauty of the Gospel. We will need this Gospel to restore our joy by reminding us of the forgiveness bought for us at the cross and to instill us with boldness knowing that even our own weakness and failure will not deter our God from accomplishing his mission through his church.

In this way, our philosophy of ministry seeks to acknowledge our utter dependence upon God and our need to take advantage of every means that he has given us so that we might continue to treasure Christ above all things and to spread his excellencies throughout the world.

**Our philosophy of ministry will be explained by showing how we hope to apply our core theological convictions to the three expressions of the church of which we desire everyone to be a part.**

## **Three expressions of the people of God identified:**

Here we desire to identify and give a brief scriptural basis for three expressions of the church that we believe are critical for the maturing and keeping of God's people and the spreading of his Gospel. These multiple forms of gatherings also serve to reflect the fullness of the church. This brief description will be further explained throughout the remainder of this document.

### **1. Large corporate gathering:**

This is where the people of God come to worship God and celebrate the beauty of Jesus through corporate singing, prayer, hearing the Word of God preached, giving offerings, and celebrating the Lord's Supper. These groups serve to exalt Christ and give us a foretaste of the day we will all gather to worship around the throne in heaven (Revelation 7:9ff). We believe that Acts 2:46 speaks of these larger corporate gatherings of God's people as they came together in the temple courts to worship God.

### **2. Missional Gospel communities:**

These are groups of around eight or more people who gather together to *Gospel* (proclaim the good news to) one another, pray for specific needs, and focus on a specific mission together. Often this is where evangelism, equipping, shepherding, Gospel counseling, and teaching theology is done.

These things take on a special flavor as the mission of the group is constantly driving them back to dependence on the Holy Spirit and pushing them to apply the Gospel to real life situations. These smaller groups are vital because they allow us to dig deep into each other's lives, to encourage one another by speaking the Gospel into specific situations, and to live out the Gospel in sacrificial service to one another.

This is where much of the actual shepherding and application of the Gospel takes place. This is also where people are equipped to do the specific work of the ministry to which God has called them (Ephesians 4:12). In Acts 2:46 and throughout the Epistles we see this taking place as people are gathered in each other's homes to fellowship and stir one another up to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25).

### **3. Intimate relationships:**

These are smaller groups, often of only a few people, who are regularly involved in each other's lives throughout the week for the purpose of discipleship, equipping, accountability, and friendship. While some of these gatherings might be of a more formal nature, for the most part these are informal gatherings.

These are people whose main concern is to live their ordinary lives together with Gospel intentionality. This doesn't mean that they will always be living together, but that they will

simply do ordinary things together while intentionally attempting to carry out the many “one another” commands of Scripture.

If we take seriously the over 50 “one another” commands of Scripture we will realize that it is impossible to do them all during the corporate gathering, so smaller missional community groups and even smaller intimate relationships are absolutely essential in. In order to really live out each of these “one another” commands we will have to live life together.

Hebrews 3:13 says, “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.” The warning is stern and the command is “every day.” This is simply an example of one of the “one another” commands that cannot take place merely on Sunday morning or a Wednesday night, and yet Hebrews tells us that our very souls are at stake.

We need one another and we need each other every day. This is why we put so much stress on people doing life together with Gospel intentionality. It is important to remember that almost everybody has these intimate relationships just like everybody lives ordinary life. However, when we speak of intimate relationships as an expression of the church, we are speaking of intimate relationships that are intentionally Gospel-centered; we are talking about ordinary life lived with Gospel intentionality, and not just ordinary life.

**Aside:** It is interesting to note that Jesus did much of his ministry within these three spheres as well.

1. Corporate: He preached in the synagogues and sent out the 72 (Luke 4:18ff.; 10:1-20).
2. Group: The 12 disciples (Luke 8:9ff.).
3. Intimate: Peter, James and John (Luke 9:28ff.).

## **Core theological convictions:**

**The Gospel forms a Christ-treasuring community sent on mission to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit for the Glory of God.**

We have divided this statement into five headings and we are going to try and demonstrate how each core conviction will be emphasized in each of the three spheres of church life. However, even though we have divided them up this way, we cannot forget that they are intricately connected and can never be ultimately separated from one another.

1. Gospel Centered
2. Christ-Treasuring Community
3. On Mission to the World
4. Spirit-Empowered
5. For the Glory of God

# I. Gospel Centered

We love the Gospel because it removes every obstacle and allows us to come to God through gazing upon the beauty of his Son Jesus. Therefore, to be Gospel-centered is to behold the beauty of Jesus and to treasure him above all things. It is also to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's marvelous light.

Therefore, to be Gospel-centered is to serve a new king. We desire every expression of Grace Fellowship to be centered around the Gospel and to demonstrate our new allegiance to King Jesus who is to be treasured above all things. We don't believe that it is possible for any one expression of the people of God to keep us centered on the Gospel, and so we urge people to be a part of all three expressions. Our goal is to see the Gospel drilled deep into peoples' lives; and to do this, they must first understand it, then hear it spoken, and see it applied in ordinary life.

## 1. A Gospel-centered corporate gathering:

- A. **Singing:** We sing because of the Gospel and we sing about the Gospel. The Gospel is so beautiful that it fills us with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. This joy causes us to respond to our God with voices raised in song. Not only does the Gospel move us to sing, but we are committed to singing about our Savior Jesus and how he has brought us to God through the Gospel. One of the ways we will do this is by singing about the cross and the precious blood of Jesus which he shed to forgive our horrendous sins.
- B. **Prayer:** We will remember, as we come before God, that it was the torn body of Jesus that has rent the veil and made it possible for us to boldly approach his throne (Hebrews 10:19-22).
- C. **Preaching:**
  - a. **We will preach all of Scripture with a Jesus/Gospel hermeneutic.** To preach the Gospel biblically means that we must not only preach what the New Testament says about the Gospel, but also how every part of the Old Testament finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46; John 5:39, 46; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5). In other words, the Gospel is the norm by which we will understand and preach the whole OT and all the exhortations and other non-gospel aspects of the New Testament. By doing this we will fight to avoid the moralizing of Scripture that can lead only to self-righteous legalism or despair.
  - b. **We will preach the Gospel as applicable to all of life.** We will talk about how every sin is a failure to believe the Gospel and we will speak about the power of the Gospel to topple our idols and transform us into the image of our Savior.
- D. **Sacrificial Giving:** The Gospel makes us radically generous. We serve a wealthy King who became poor for us so that by his poverty we might become rich. As we gaze upon Christ's sacrificial gift for us in the Gospel, we find ourselves transformed into his image

and freed to be radically generous. In our sacrifice, we find the joy of fellowshiping with Christ in his suffering (Philippians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 8:8ff).

- E. **Lord's Supper:** We will celebrate the Lord's Supper every week to proclaim his glorious death on our behalf until the day that he returns. Our weekly consumption of the Lord's Supper will remind us of our desperate dependence upon the cross, not only for justification, but for continual grace to be transformed into his beautiful image.
- F. **Baptism:** Through the baptism (by immersion) of believers we will give testimony of our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

## 2. Gospel-centered missional communities (Gospel Communities):

- A. **Speaking the Gospel to one another:** The Gospel communities will gather regularly to speak the Gospel into each other's lives in very specific ways. Since we believe that all sin is a failure to believe an aspect of the Gospel and that our natural tendency is to leave the Gospel and depend on ourselves instead of our all-sufficient Savior, we believe that it is imperative to have a community that regularly speaks the Gospel into each other's lives. We also know that we are often blind to our own idolatries and yet keenly aware of others'.

Because of this, we see the amazing benefit of a community bold enough to speak the Gospel into each other's lives and humble enough to hear it spoken into their own. We call this *Gospeling* one another and it is very simple and yet extremely difficult to do. Lamentations 2:14 says, "Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes." Oh what a difficult task it is to expose each other's sins, and yet what benefit can be reaped from it and what peril there is when it is forsaken.

The beauty of the Gospel is that it allows us to hear about our own failure without growing defensive or despairing. We don't need to be defensive because the Gospel is not about being perfect, but rather it is good news for sinners. The Gospel reminds us that we are not trusting in our own righteousness to save us, so we don't have to defend ourselves; but rather, we can acknowledge our sin and fall upon the grace of God to forgive us.

The Gospel protects against despair as well because we do not need to wallow in our sin and inability when it is exposed. Instead, we can throw ourselves upon the grace of God who is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The beauty of the Gospel is that God is able to use exposed and repented-of sin to draw us to an even closer relationship with him. And so we see that it is a loving act to expose sin, because through the power of the Gospel, God uses repented-of sin to restore our fortunes. This is just one of the many ways that the community must speak the Gospel into each other's lives. The following is a short list of other ways:

- a. Confront each other's idols with the Gospel.
- b. Comfort each other's sufferings with the Gospel.
- c. Celebrate evidences of grace in each other's lives.
- d. Counsel each other with the Gospel.
- e. Remind each other that we have been forgiven of our sins (2 Peter 1:9).

**B. Living out the Gospel before each other.**

- a. Through forgiving each other.
- b. Through considering others better than ourselves. This takes place when we sacrifice our own schedules and comforts for the sake of the community. When we give up a weeknight to spend together, when we change our schedule to enable someone else to keep theirs, when we get together even if we are tired, when we consider what we can bring to the community and not merely what we are getting out of the community.
- c. Through sacrificially giving to meet each other's needs. Again the Gospel makes us radically generous and Gospel communities make us aware of peoples' needs. It is our desire to have no needy one among us and in these smaller groups we become aware of peoples' needs and are able to take care of most diaconal work on the spot. By sacrificially giving of ourselves, we demonstrate to each other the beauty of the Gospel and show that Christ is our true treasure.

**3. Gospel-centered intimate groups**

- A. **Speaking the Gospel into each other's lives:** The church is made up of ordinary people living ordinary lives with Gospel intentionality. The Gospeling of one another spoken of above is often even more powerful and specific in these intimate groups. Idolatries that often go unnoticed in the larger groups are exposed in our friendships. The goal of these relationships is to see the Gospel applied to the everyday aspects of our lives. These intimate groups share life together, watch each other's kids, celebrate birthdays together, go to movies together, play sports, get coffee, have meals together, and through it all endeavor to speak about how the Gospel ought to inform these aspects of their lives.
- B. **Living out the Gospel:** These groups attempt to live out the Gospel through the many "one another" commands of Scripture. Many of these "one another" commands are only possible in these smaller groups and that is one of the reasons that these groups are such a necessary expression of the people of God. In these intimate relationships you will have the opportunity to forgive one another over and over again. In these groups you will be the first to weep when others receive bad news. These relationships ensure that each day you will be able to consider someone else better than yourself and think not only of your interest, but also about the interests of others.
- C. **Gospel Funnel:** The goal is that through these three expressions, the Gospel would be funneled down from the preached word into every aspect of the everyday life of the

believer. Since sermons are more general by nature, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to apply the Gospel uniquely to each individual's life. We believe that one of the chief means that the Holy Spirit uses to do this is the community speaking the Gospel into each other's lives. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary for people to be involved in all three of these expressions of the people of God. Because Gospeling each other is so foreign to us and so hard to actually do in our intimate relationships, we need to see it modeled for us in the Gospel communities. Once we see how *beautiful* it can be and even experience the painful joy of having our own idols exposed and coming face to face with the beauty of God's unlimited patience, we become inspired, yet gracious *Gospelers* of others.

## II. Christ-treasuring community

The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to take us from independence and autonomy and transforms us into a community absolutely dependent upon the grace of God and each other to remind us of our dependence upon God. Since the community is both formed and being transformed by the Gospel, there is no way to really separate the community from the Gospel. In fact, what we will find is that the Gospel forms us into a community, and living in community causes conflict which surfaces our idolatry and drives us back again to the Gospel to be transformed by it. The key ingredient for this type of transformation is a **commitment to a Gospeling community**.

Without a commitment to community, we will find ourselves retreating from people into isolation where our idols are safe and we can continue to act like we treasure Christ while clinging to our own selfishness. Commitment to community forces us to stay put as conflict surfaces our idols. The beauty of a commitment to community is that it does not allow us to be selfish and happy. However, mere commitment won't solve the conflict; it will only keep us from running away. The Gospel is the only thing that can solve the conflict and reconcile sinful people to each other through forgiveness. So, we are calling everyone to commit themselves to being a part of a Gospel community so that their sins might be exposed and they might be restored by the Gospel (Lamentations 2:14).

**Example: Marriage.** Nothing has helped me understand the benefit of a commitment to community more than marriage. It is impossible to be selfish and have a happy marriage. Marriage makes selfish people miserable. In marriage, either our selfishness must die or our love for each other must die; they cannot coexist. Many of us would say we never understood how selfish we were until we got married. Now think about that. Isn't it a painfully wonderful thing to have our selfishness exposed and be driven to the Gospel? Remember the prophets who refused to expose Israel's sin so that they could be restored (Lamentations 2:14)?

When we run away from community we are only hurting ourselves by refusing to allow our selfishness to be exposed so that we can be restored through the Gospel. You see in marriage, when our selfishness is exposed we can't leave can we? That is one of the beauties of marriage, we have to stay; we have to figure it out. This drives us to the Gospel which is the only thing that can possibly reconcile two selfish people and allow them to live joyful, humble, sacrificial lives of

love together. The reason that marriage, and often family, are the chief examples of relationships that God uses to powerfully transform us is because, for many of us, they are the only real committed relationships we have. We need more. While my wife exposes many of my selfish tendencies and I expose many of hers, together we have learned to become unified in some of our selfishness. While we expose our own personal idols, we need the larger Christian community to expose the idols that we both cling to together.

### **1. A Christ-treasuring community's corporate gatherings:**

- A. **Corporate worship:** As a community we will celebrate the Gospel together through singing and prayer. The worship will be diverse to represent and attract the diversity of the context in which God has called us to serve. We will seek to put to death the selfishness that is exposed by clinging to our own worship preferences and instead learn to submit to others by considering their preferences more important than our own (Philippians 2:4).
- B. **Preaching:** Through the preaching of the Gospel we will emphasize how God uses the Gospel to form us into a community and the importance of living out the many "one another" commands of Scripture. We will also emphasize the importance of speaking the Gospel to one another throughout the week.
- C. **Testimonies:** As a community we will get to know each other by hearing about how the Gospel is working in different peoples' lives.
- D. **Communion:** Through sharing bread from one loaf and drinking the cup together, we are reminded that we are one body, unified through the torn body of Jesus.
- E. **Baptism:** Through baptism we will testify both to our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, and with his body, the church.
- F. **Celebrating Diversity:** The corporate gathering will give us a chance to celebrate and experience the reconciliation of diverse people into one body.

### **2. Christ-treasuring Gospel communities:**

The following are primarily things that we will do together with the understanding that all these things need to be filled with Gospel intentionality. Ultimately, our goal is for these communities to function like families.

- A. **Meeting in homes and eating together:** By meeting in homes or other small venues and eating together these groups we will attempt to foster genuine, family-type community.
- B. **Gospeling each other:** These communities will express their love for each other through commending Christ to each other by their words.

- C. **Celebrating together:** These communities will celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, baby showers, and holidays together.
- D. **Recreating together:** These communities will seek to enjoy each other through recreational activities.
- E. **Suffering together:** These communities will weep with one another during difficult times. They will comfort one another with their presence and seek to encourage each other to hope in God (Psalm 42:5).
- F. **Serving together:** These communities will be united under a single mission to reach a specific people in their community.
- G. **Praying for one another:** These communities will share their gratitude and needs and bring them together to God in prayer.
- H. **Make decisions together:** In the same way that husbands ought to make decisions with regard to how it will affect their wives, we believe that people in community ought to make their decisions with regard to the implications for their community, and we ask them to make significant decisions in consultation with the community. Most of us have experienced how God uses others to speak wisdom into our lives, and typically, the decisions that we are afraid to discuss with others end up being unwise decisions. By bringing our decisions to the community, we make an opportunity for the Gospel to be spoken into our lives and to have our motivations checked for dangerous idolatries. We also experience what it means to lay down our own agenda and consider other people more important than ourselves as we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. The fact that many of us can't imagine letting others' opinions impact our own decisions about where to live, how to raise our families, where to work, etc., simply reveals just how tightly we are clinging to our own autonomy. If we were to take a look at the Gospel of John, we would find that Jesus never made any decision on his own, but instead was constantly submitting himself to the will of his Father (John 5:19). When we submit to one another we find that we are better able to fellowship with our Savior who, having all authority, went to the cross in loving submission to his Father.
- I. **Sacrificially supporting each other:** These communities will seek to meet each other's financial and physical needs through sacrificial service for each other (Eph. 4:28) (i.e., babysitting, helping pay for groceries, making meals for each other, doing yard work, fixing vehicles, etc.).

### 3. Christ-treasuring intimate relationships:

Again, these ordinary and even extraordinary things will be of no benefit unless they are filled with Gospel intentionality.

- A. **Share life together:** This would include a call for people to invite others into their homes to share life with them. We endeavor to have homes that are open for others to stop by, and to feel the freedom to stop by the homes of others.
- B. **Live near each other:** This will be a call for people to choose where to live based on where others in the community are living. By living near each other they will better be able to share ordinary life together.
- C. **Do ordinary things together:** Eat, go to movies, play games, do projects, go shopping, study, read books, etc., together. The goal would be to do as much as is humanly possible together with others. When we run errands, when we go shopping, when we clean the house, walk the dog, go jogging, etc., we will try and do it together.
- D. **Reconcile conflict with one another through the Gospel:** If you have read what is written above, you can only imagine that this type of community will inevitably lead to conflict as peoples' idols of individualism, control, comfort, and personal time and space will be stomped on by others. In response to this conflict, it is only the Gospel that will be able to reconcile these conflicts and allow people to joyfully embrace the inevitable discomfort which community will bring.

### III. On mission to the world

The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to create a community and send them out on mission.

This mission is both comprehensive (all of life) and universal (people from every tribe, nation and tongue). Our mission is to be the aroma of Christ to God and so spread the fragrance of God everywhere we go.

We desire that every Christian realize their call to missions and that they let this call drive the way they live their life. When we send missionaries overseas, we expect that their mission will radically impact every major decision they make. Imagine for a moment that you were one of those missionaries sent overseas to plant a church.

- What standard of living would you expect to have as a pioneer missionary?
- What criteria would determine where you lived?
- What would you spend your time doing?
- What would your prayers be like?
- What would you be trying to do with the new friends you made?

Steve Timmis and Tim Chester write, "We find it easier to be radical in our thinking when we transplant ourselves outside our current situation. But we are as much missionaries here and now as we would be if we were part of a cross-cultural team in another part of the world. Mission is central to us wherever we are. These are the kinds of questions we should be asking wherever we are." All of us are called to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of

darkness into his marvelous light” and we are called to be about this business always. So we need to start living so much like “real” missionaries here in our own context.

We must begin thinking of our homes, workplaces, and schools as the locations of our mission. We must begin celebrating the little victories that God gives us. We must commit ourselves to praying for each other and for the lost that God puts into our lives. As we begin to understand mission as all of life, we must be careful never to forget that the scope of missions is the whole world. If we feel called to pour ourselves into our local context, we must pray that God will send forth laborers into other contexts. We must never forget the unreached people groups of our world. We must commit ourselves to pray for and generously support missionary work around the globe, especially to the unreached people groups of the world. We must never let our commitment to the unreached people dwindle until that day when men and women from every tribe, nation, and tongue are united together around the throne of the Lamb declaring his infinite excellencies.

### **1. Corporate gatherings on mission to the world:**

We are not arguing that missions will be the focal point of our worship gatherings, but it will play a vital role in them. Just as a foreign missionary would let his call to missions impact the type of services he held, so we will let our call to missions impact the type of services we hold. We believe that it is possible to do mission through worship and as worship. We have been called “to declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 1:9). Within history, one of the primary ways the church glorifies God is by making him known to the world.

- A. **Through singing:** We will joyfully sing about the cross and the Gospel and so proclaim the excellencies of Jesus before all who are present.
- B. **Through testimonies:** We will hear testimonies from people actively involved in missions as well as from those who are the fruit of these missionary encounters.
- C. **Through prayer:** We will pray both for those doing missions in our own context and beyond. We will also pray for the unreached people groups; that God would raise up laborers and send them out into the harvest fields.
- D. **Through preaching:** We will preach the Gospel every week. We will attempt to preach as if there are non-Christians present every week. We will not preach only to non-Christians, but we will preach in such a way that both believers and non-Christians can understand the Gospel. We will do this to encourage our congregation to invite their unbelieving friends as well as model how they can explain the Gospel to others. We will not be seeker-driven in any sense, but we will try and be intelligible to the unchurched. We want everyone at church to be confronted with their sin and with the beauty of the cross where Jesus bore our sin and removed every obstacle so that we might now come boldly before the throne of our God.

- E. **Through joyful and sacrificial giving:** We will give sacrificially for the furtherance of the kingdom both in our local context and abroad. We will challenge people to give generously and sacrificially, constantly aware of all the grace that God has lavished on us through the gift of his only Son (2 Corinthians 8:8).
- F. **Through follow up:** We will attempt to follow up with all visitors and try and get them connected to a Gospel community and an intimate group of friends.
- G. **Encouraging and supporting our Gospel communities in their evangelistic endeavors:** As a corporate gathering we want to encourage our Gospel communities in their specific areas of mission. We want to pray for them, hear from them, and encourage them in their specific mission. If there are ways that the larger body can help what a missional Gospel community group is doing, we want to make people aware of those opportunities.

## 2. Gospel Communities on mission to the world:

One of the primary goals of the Gospel communities is to be a place where people come together and speak the Gospel into each other's lives. We come together in these communities to discuss the beauty of the Gospel and its application to every aspect of our lives. These communities are to be centered around speaking and living out the Gospel. We believe that if the communities do this, it will have a radical effect on their ability to do mission. We believe that one of the reasons evangelism is so hard is because we are so unaccustomed to talking about the beauty of Jesus as he is displayed in the Gospel. Since we seldom talk to our Christian friends about how beautiful Jesus is, it often rings inauthentic and unnatural when we speak to non-Christians about the Gospel. One of the beauties of Gospel communities is that as we learn to talk about the Gospel freely and joyfully with each other, it becomes more natural. **When speaking the Gospel becomes natural, then evangelism simply becomes hanging out with non-Christians.** That is the goal. The goal is to become naturally Gospel; speaking and Gospel-living people so our everyday lives become filled with Gospel intentionality. When this occurs, we find that we become the aroma of Christ to God and so spread the fragrance of the knowledge of God wherever we go.

- A. **A. Every Gospel community will look for a local group of people that they will intentionally reach out to as a community:** As a community, we will discuss who the needy people of our area are, and those for whom God has given us a heart. As a group we will commit to intentionally and strategically working to reach this group of people. This is to be done in and through community, and not simply by one or two members of the community. Examples of groups might be: The people in our apartment complexes, the people on our blocks, homeless people at the park, a school, a convalescent home, etc.
  - a. **Develop strategies:** After choosing a target community, we will attempt to come up with strategies to establish relationships and speak the Gospel into the lives of the people we are targeting. Some common strategies might be:

- i. **Celebrations:** Find what holidays our target community celebrates and join or offer to host the celebrations. (If we are reaching out to our neighborhood and our neighborhood always has a block party in July, work on helping to plan and pull off the party.) If the community we are in doesn't celebrate much, come up with something to celebrate and invite everyone.
  - ii. **Attend their events:** Hang out where they are. Find where they eat or where they go to relax and then go spend time there.
  - iii. Invite them to game nights or other events.
  - iv. Have your meetings in places that they frequent.
- b. **Pray:** Take time each week to pray for the group we are targeting. Having a mission that is too big for our group will keep us constantly relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us from getting discouraged and to give us boldness to continue the work.
- c. **Serve them:** Figure out what is broken in our target community and find ways that our Gospel community can serve them. (Tutoring, buying groceries, helping them do yard work, etc.)
- d. **Invite them to events that connect them with the Gospel community:** Invite them into our community where they can hear and see the Gospel spoken and Jesus being lifted up.
- e. **Celebrate evidences of grace:** Remember to celebrate God's grace when we see him opening doors for our mission. Don't get hung up on how slow it is going but celebrate each little step. If we cannot show our faithfulness by being grateful for the small victories, why would we ever think God would ever grant us major success?
- f. **Report needs:** Keep the mission before the group each week. Discuss progress, talk about areas where we could grow, evaluate strategies, make changes.
- g. **Encourage and support the evangelistic endeavors of our intimate groups:** We do not want to simply focus on the people whom God has called our community to serve, but we want to encourage, pray for, and support the opportunities that God is giving to the intimate gatherings represented in our Gospel communities (i.e., If two guys work together and are reaching out to a co-worker, we want to pray for them and support them anyway we can.) Example: If a man is trying to establish a better relationship with his neighbor who he was witnessing to and he knew that his neighbor loved football. The Gospel community could get together and organize a football game where this man could invite his neighbor. In this way the Gospel community could help strengthen this man's relationship with his neighbor and open up opportunities for others to develop a relationship with him as well.

- B. **Non-local missions:** Every community should pick a country, people group, or church planter that they feel God has called them to adopt. This could be permanent or on a rotating basis.
- a. **Strategize:** Consider how God might use our community to further his kingdom in this area of the world.
    - i. **Support a church planter:** The support can be financial, but should also include prayer and encouragement. Send them packages, hang out with them if the opportunity arises, email them, visit them, etc.
    - ii. **Go on a short-term trip:** Visit the people we are praying for and serve them.
  - b. **Pray:** Pray weekly for this people group or ministry. Go over updates together so that prayer can be as specific as possible.
  - c. **Celebrate evidences of grace:** Read over reports and celebrate together God's work among the group to whom we are committed.
  - d. **Evaluate:** Keep mission on the front burner and continually try and think of other ways God might use our community to serve His work.

### 3. Mission to the world in intimate gatherings:

It is at this level that most of us will have the majority of our contact with non-Christians. While there may be some non-believers at church and hopefully some will come to our Gospel communities, the goal of our intimate gatherings is that they are often among non-Christians. Remember these gatherings are meant to live ordinary life with Gospel intentionality and most of us spend a good portion of our ordinary life among non-Christians. In many ways this group is going to be able to penetrate the non-Christian world in ways that no other group can.

These gatherings are the least conspicuous and thus can go places and reach people that no other gathering of the people of God can. Certainly we will run into people at the store or at the gym who would never think about going to church on Sunday or to a small group in someone's house, but here they are next to you on the treadmill as you and your friend speak the Gospel into each other's lives. You see when we begin to speak the Gospel to each other naturally and throughout our ordinary lives, these intimate gatherings provide an amazing opportunity to go places and speak the Gospel to each other where the Gospel is seldom heard.

- A. **Each intimate Gathering should pick a person(s) or an area and target it with the Gospel:** This might be a mutual friend or it could be the people who hang out at our gyms or favorite restaurants.
- a. **Strategize:** Think of ways to intentionally reach out to these people with the Gospel. Many of the strategies here will be the same as the ones we discussed in the Gospel communities. Often this will simply deal with going where they are, developing relationships with them, inviting them into your home, etc.

- B. **Pray:** Pray together for them and with them. If they tell us about something difficult happening in their lives, stop right there and ask them if we can pray for them. If we are all hanging out and our Christian friend tells us about a struggle, stop and pray for him there while the non; believer listens.
- C. **Celebrate evidences of grace:** Celebrate together when God opens doors to have Gospel conversations.
- D. **Evaluate:** Consider how things are going and ways that we can better reach those God has called us to serve.
- E. **Encourage and support individual evangelistic endeavors:** In the same way that intimate gatherings will be able to infiltrate areas that the other expressions of the church cannot, so it is that God has put people into our lives that we have a unique opportunity to minister to individually: people at our work, family members, classmates, etc. While initially we might be the only link this person has to the Gospel, we must try to find ways to show them the community whenever possible. However, until they get to the place where we can have them over to our homes or to a game or some other community gathering, we will need the encouragement and support of our intimate gathering to be praying for us, strategizing with us, and holding us accountable in our endeavor to proclaim the Gospel to those God has placed in our lives.

## IV. Spirit-empowered

Radical missional living is impossible. Without Jesus we can do nothing. Therefore we must cast ourselves upon the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the strength. We must depend on him and so crush our arrogance and destroy our defensiveness. We must depend on him and find that in our own weakness his strength is revealed. To be Spirit-empowered requires that we are first Spirit-dependent. As long as we have any strength of our own we will try to use it, and so before we will ever become Spirit-empowered we must despair of our own strength and put our hope in God (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).

### 1. Spirit-empowered corporate gatherings:

- A. **Prayer:** Prayer, more than anything else, demonstrates what it looks like to live dependent upon the Spirit of God and not on our own ingenuity or ability. Therefore:
  - a. We will pray before our gatherings.
  - b. We will pray during our gatherings.
  - c. We will pray about our gatherings: We will endeavor to saturate our sermons and our worship services with prayer before we ever gather together.
  - d. We will be honest about our needs and pray for them before the people. We will ask the people to pray for us.

- B. **We will exalt Christ:** Believing that the Spirit exists to exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ, we will commit to always being about pointing people to Jesus.
  - a. In singing
  - b. In preaching
  - c. In our weakness: We will exalt Christ by not hiding our weaknesses or manipulating them into pious confessions that make us look good. Instead we will be honest about our weaknesses and call the people to put their trust in Jesus, because he is our only hope.
  - d. In our success: We will celebrate victories with gratitude to God. Having put our hope in Jesus, we will remember that every success comes from God through Jesus and will not hesitate to praise him for his goodness to us.
  
- C. **We will embrace a mission that is too big for us.**

## 2. Spirit-empowered Gospel Communities:

- A. **Prayer:** We will lace our gatherings together with prayer. We will not limit our prayers to petitions, but will include gratitude to God for who he is and what he has done. We love gratitude because it reminds us of our dependence upon God in the past and God's faithfulness to supply what was needed. We will also spend time confessing our sins and throwing ourselves at the mercy of God to forgive us.
  
- B. **We will exalt Christ:** We will begin each meeting by speaking about how beautiful Jesus is and this will move our hearts to gratitude and set the tone for the rest of the meeting.
  
- C. **We will embrace a mission too big for us.**
  
- D. **We will acknowledge our weaknesses before each other.**

## 3. Spirit-empowered intimate gatherings:

- A. **Prayer:** We will endeavor to pray often with each other. When needs arise or when victory is celebrated, we will endeavor to turn our eyes toward God in prayer.
  
- B. **We will exalt Christ:** We will speak with each other about the beauty of Jesus.
  
- C. **We will embrace a mission too big for us.**
  
- D. **We will acknowledge our weaknesses before each other.**

## V. For the Glory of God

Everything that we are trying to do is driven by a passion for the glory of God. **We glorify God by being a Christ-treasuring community formed by the Gospel, dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, and sent on mission to the world.** Inasmuch as God gives us the grace to actually live out our vision, we believe that God will be glorified. We believe that each aspect of our vision is so linked with the glory of God that it seems impossible to separate fulfilling our vision from glorifying God. When we treasure Christ, God is glorified; when we depend upon his Spirit, God is glorified; when we are the aroma of Christ to God wherever we go, God is glorified. Because we believe that the glory of God ought to be the foundation of all we do, the list under each expression could include everything that takes place in them. However, for this document I will simply pick a few ways that we will seek to set our hearts and minds on God so that in all things he might receive the glory.

### 1. Corporate gatherings for the Glory of God

- A. **Call to worship:** In our welcome and call to worship we will seek to proclaim some of the excellencies of our God and move our thoughts toward him.
- B. **Singing:** We will sing songs that proclaim the greatness of our God. We will seek to worship him in reverence and awe, aware of his majesty and moved by his grace.
- C. **Prayers of thanksgiving:** Since God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, one of the greatest ways we can glorify him is by demonstrating our satisfaction through thanksgiving. For this reason, we will be careful to offer prayers of thanksgiving both for who God is and for how he has revealed who he is through what he has done for us.
- D. **Testimonies:** We will have opportunities for people to praise God for who he is and what he has done in their lives.
- E. **Giving:** We will seek to show that we treasure the glory of God more than our wealth by sacrificially giving each month.
- F. **Preaching:** Our preaching will emphasize the great chasm between God and people by seeking to lift God up and by honestly seeking to reveal our own depravity so that the infinite depth of God's grace, seen in the reconciliation that he offers through his Son, might always move us to praise his glorious grace.
- G. **Lord's Table:** Remembering Jesus and his salvation entirely of grace so we would be humbled to the praise of his glorious grace.

- H. **Closing/Benediction:** In our benedictions we will remind our people of our constant dependence upon God's grace if we are ever to glorify him with our lives.

## 2. Gospel Communities for the Glory of God.

- A. **Speaking of the beauty of Jesus:** We will begin our Gospel community gatherings speaking about the beauty of Jesus, knowing that he is the exact image of God himself and that to exalt him is to glorify God.
- B. **Gratitude:** We will seek to begin our meetings with a time of thanksgiving to remind us that all good things are from God and ultimately for his glory. During this time we will be careful to thank God for his faithfulness in answering our prayers from previous meetings.
- C. **Application of sermon:** We will seek to glorify God by working together to apply his Word to our lives so that we might not only be hearers of his Word, but doers also. Through applying his Word to our ordinary lives, we will seek to show how everything we do, even eating and drinking, can be done for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- D. **Mission:** We will seek to glorify God by spreading his excellencies among the people whom he has called us to serve both near and far. We will demonstrate the value we place on God's glory through sacrificially disregarding our own comforts in an attempt to spread his glory where it has yet to take root (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).
- E. **Prayer:** We will demonstrate our dependence upon God by bringing our burdens to him together. We will speak of our needs to each other and bring them to God, anticipating our next gathering and the joy we will have in praising God for his faithfulness to us.
- F. **Gospeling one another:** We will seek to glorify God by taking all complaints, needs, sufferings, and sins to the cross where we find that God's grace is sufficient. We believe that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him and so we will try to constantly remind each other of the satisfaction and joy that can only be found in gazing upon the beauty of Jesus.

## 3. Intimate gatherings for the Glory of God

- A. **Giving thanks for everyday gifts of God:** We believe that it is through gratitude that the ordinary things in life are transformed into holy things which cause our love for God to grow (1 Timothy 4:4). Because of this, one of the best ways to take ordinary life and fill it with Gospel intentionality is to be people full of gratitude. Because there is so much to be thankful for, we will try to help each other notice the good gifts of God and together give thanks for them.
- B. **Recognizing evidences of grace:** We will try and encourage one another with evidences of grace in our lives. Because they are evidences of grace, when we recognize them we

must be careful to take time and thank God for them. In this way we glorify God for his kindness to us and others.

- C. **Mission:** We will seek to glorify God by spreading his excellencies among the people whom he has called us to evangelize. We will boldly seek to reach those God puts into our lives valuing the glory of God more than the praise which comes from people (John 12:43).
- D. **Gospeling one another:** We will seek to glorify God by taking all complaints, needs, sufferings, and sins to the cross where we find that God's grace is sufficient.
- E. **Suffering well:** We will seek to suffer well by reminding each other that our present sufferings are light and momentary in comparison to the eternal weight of glory for which they are preparing us (2 Corinthians 4:17).

## Getting people involved in all three expressions of the church.

We realize that most of the people whom we work with will not be naturally inclined to all three expressions of the church. For many in Canada, church is something they go to on Sundays and then check off the list before moving on to go about their normal week. For others who are more involved, they go to church on Sunday and maybe even attend a Bible study or small group themselves. However, few have understood a vision of church that encompasses all of life.

Most people see themselves as individuals, with church as one of the many responsibilities in life that they are juggling along with work, family, leisure, etc. For some, church might be the number one priority, but it is still just one of the many responsibilities that they as individuals believe they need to do. This is not how we believe church is to be understood. **We want people to experience church as a network of relationships rather than a meeting you attend or a place you enter.**

A simple reading of almost any epistle will show that Paul did not think of church as a meeting or as a responsibility that he, as an individual, had to juggle; but rather, he saw his own life as intricately bound up in the life of others in the church. Take the church of Thessalonica, for example. Paul says, "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Paul understands his life to be so intertwined with the fate of the Thessalonians that he later says, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? **Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy**" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

Again Paul says, "For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your

faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:8-10). What seems obvious is that Paul does not see the church primarily as a meeting that he hopes to return to, but rather as a network of relationships that form an absolutely essential role in his life. He understands himself as a person in relationship. Even his own joy before God is not merely individualistic, but is intertwined with the people of God (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

So we believe that church is not supposed to be merely a meeting we attend, but it should be the network of relationships that play a defining role in who we are and gives Christ-like shape to our lives. So the question is: **How do we instill a holistic understanding of church into a people conditioned to see it as one aspect of their busy lives?**

We believe that the best way to do this is to help people understand and value the three different expressions of the church that we have previously discussed. We believe that if people were involved in the three expressions of the church we have spoken of, it would go a long way to helping them understand church the way Paul seems to have understood church in 1 Thessalonians. So that brings us back to our original question, “How do we get people involved in all three expressions of the church?”

**Different paths for different people:** We realize that each person will be different and there is no one method that can somehow make this happen. However, we want to be intentional and we want to do all we can to shepherd people by getting them involved in these three expressions of the church. We believe that though each person will be totally different, there are some basic paths that we can use to help get people involved in all three expressions.

**1. From the corporate gathering through Gospel Communities into intimate relationships:** Many people will first come to Grace Fellowship through the Sunday morning gathering. It is our desire that these people move from simply coming to church on Sunday to experiencing all the joys and struggles of living ordinary life with Gospel intentionality. We believe that the Gospel communities play a huge role in helping people learn how to Gospel each other and putting people into contact with others with whom they could become better friends.

So, from the pulpit we will talk about the importance of community and encourage people to get involved in a Gospel Community. We want to have Gospel community leaders involved in the service through Scripture readings, communion etc. We desire to regularly hear testimonies about how God is using the smaller communities of believers in the lives of people both in the church and in the community.

We will encourage people in our Gospel community groups to greet guests and invite them to join their group. Once people have joined a Gospel community we believe that through seeing what Gospel intentionality looks like, and being exposed to people in their community, God will grow them in their ability to Gospel each other at home and in other intimate gatherings.

We will encourage the people in our Gospel communities to get together informally and have times where people are encouraged and asked about how they are doing at Gospeling each other in ordinary life. We believe that through the informal gatherings and through their time doing acts of service for the community together, people will begin to develop intimate relationships where they are able to do more and more life together with Gospel intentionality.

We believe this will even help families begin to live their lives together with a greater sense of Gospel intentionality. For some, their primary intimate relationships might be their family, and through the Gospel communities they will be encouraged to make their time with their families more intentionally Gospel-focused.

## **2. From corporate gathering through intimate relationships to Gospel community**

**groups:** Some people will come to church on Sunday but, for any number of reasons, will not want to join a smaller Gospel community regardless of how much we talk about it. Their reluctance to join a group might be based on any number of legitimate or illegitimate reasons. These people will be assigned to a Gospel community.

This Gospel Community will seek to reach out to these people and allow them to get a taste of community through serving them. They will let them know that they have been adopted by the Gospel Community and ask them if there is any way that they can love them through service (i.e., babysitting their kids so that they can have a date night, doing yard work, etc.). They will also find out if they have any prayer requests about which the community can be praying. The community will consistently try to invite them to their informal gatherings and celebrations as well.

Lastly, people from the community may try to befriend them and begin to do ordinary things with them while speaking the Gospel into their lives. If the reason that they are not joining a community is due to some type of idolatry (comfort, autonomy, even family in some cases) then they will try and speak the Gospel into their lives and show them the beauty and need of community to help us be transformed into Jesus' beautiful image.

If there are other struggles (small kids, work schedule, etc.) the community will be able to learn about these issues and hopefully come up with creative ways to work through them. Even if they are never able to come to the formal community group gatherings, they will certainly be able to be a part of it by joining them in their celebrations, service projects, prayer, financial support of one another, etc.

More than likely, I believe that we will find people will be loved into or out of the community. The key in all this is patience. There is no sense that we are trying to be coercive. If they never make it to an Gospel community meeting, that is OK. However, we also cannot sit by and allow them to miss out on everything that God desires them to experience through community. In certain circumstances, it may very well be impossible for someone to make it to the formal Gospel community group gatherings. However, we want everyone to be a part of a community.

We don't think that community is an option and we don't think that merely coming to church on Sunday fulfills what the Bible speaks about when it talks about community. Therefore we will try to make it possible for everyone to be a part of a community whether that means they come to the community or the community goes to them.

Obviously some people have no desire to ever be a part of a community and they will not stand for people coming to them even if they are only trying to serve and love them. These people will most likely not fit in at Grace Fellowship and will probably leave. Note: It is vital that in all this we are extremely patient with people. In the Gospel, God has shown us his perfect patience as an example that we might learn to be patient with others (1 Timothy 1:15-17). We must make sure that we are truly loving other people and not simply trying to manipulate or otherwise coerce them to do what we want. There will always be a fine balance and it is vital that we keep the Gospel at the center of it. However, we will not be afraid to expose peoples' idols of individualism and autonomy so that their fortunes can be restored and their hope can be placed in God alone. We know this will be hard, for these are idols that all of us cling to very tightly.

**3. From Intimate gatherings through Gospel communities into the corporate gathering:**

This will be the way that many harder-to-reach people will be reached. Remember each intimate gathering has a mission and often the people they will be reaching out to will come to Christ in this way. Often they will go from the intimate relationship to joining a Gospel community in activities and celebrations. From there they may join the group and eventually we long to see them come to truly understand the beauty of the Gospel and join us corporately as we hear and celebrate the Gospel together on Sunday morning.

**4. From Gospel communities through intimate relationships into the corporate**

**gathering:** Each Gospel community has a mission field that they are attempting to reach. As they succeed in reaching these people, they will become involved in the group. Through their involvement in the Gospel community, they will meet people who will take an interest in them and develop a relationship with them. These people will invite them to come to the larger corporate gathering together to celebrate with them the beauty of Jesus.

**Key: Living and speaking the Gospel with patience as we call one another to a greater participation in Christian community:**

The commitment to community that we are calling each other to is radically countercultural. Even for those who love community it is countercultural because this community is built around considering other people more important than ourselves.

We must be careful about how we call people to this kind of commitment to community. We cannot be coercive. Even if we know that this kind of community is what is best for people, we must be patient and let the Gospel be what motivates us and others and not any particular form

or vision that we might have. We must be particularly careful of shaming others or using guilt to draw people into community.

We join community for our joy because God uses it to reveal our idols and remind us of the satisfaction that can only be found by letting go of our idols and clinging to Jesus as our only hope. We must avoid using fear or shame and remember that it is the Gospel that forms us into a community.

So with great patience we must speak and live the Gospel before others, calling them to be a part of a Christ-treasuring community sent on mission to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. However, we cannot be content to allow people to believe that they are living out the Gospel when they are refusing to give themselves to Christian community.

As Paul told Timothy, we must gently confront one another with the beauty of the Gospel and its call to be a people for God's own possession. Again, this task is too great for us and so we must constantly depend upon the Holy Spirit and be open to the council of God's people and always be ready to repent when we have grown impatient and hurt others through our zeal.