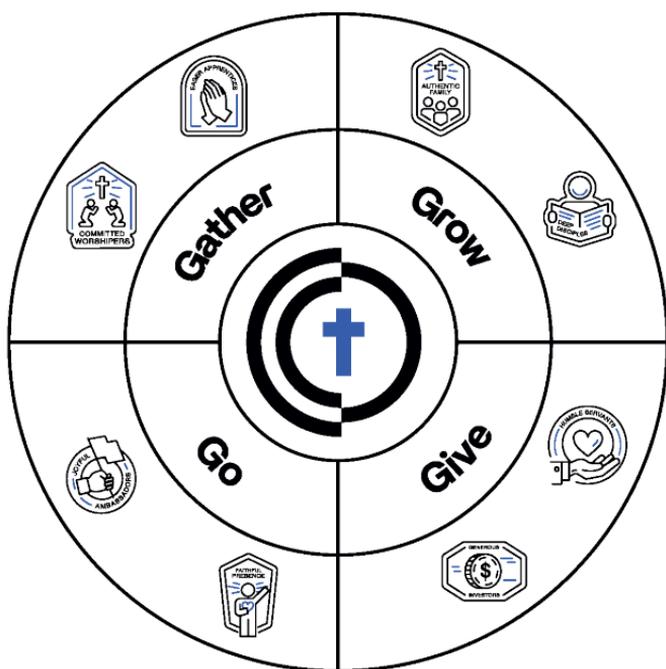


THE CENTRAL WHEEL



MAKING WHOLE DISCIPLES
WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

DANIEL PATTERSON

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WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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CENTRAL CHURCH

The Central Wheel: Making Whole Disciples Who Make a Difference
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THE CENTRAL WHEEL

Main Point: All healthy Christians need to gather, grow, give, and go in the context of the local church.

The local church is God's prescription for your growth.

That said, too many Christians see local-church membership as an optional add-on for the super-committed, and too many churches fail to provide a coherent path for individuals to see exactly how the local church is custom-designed by God to deepen their faith, expand their capacity for joy, and lead them to flourish. That's what the Central Wheel is designed to do.

DESIGN

The Central Wheel can be understood as three concentric circles, each one stemming from the one inside it. It's designed to illustrate why we exist as a church (at the center), what we ask of all our members (the middle ring), and what that leads us uniquely to be (the outer ring).

- **Core.** *Why do we exist?*

At the center is our church logo, designed to represent the gospel. Everything in the Central Wheel, and everything at Central, is designed to stem from the centrality of the

gospel.

- **Commitments.** *What do we do?*

In the middle ring, you'll find four commitments we ask all our members to make. All healthy Christians need to gather, grow, give, and go in the context of the church.

- **Characteristics.** *Who are we becoming?*

In the outer ring, you'll find two characteristics that give shape to each of the four gospel commitments in the middle ring. These are the things we want to be uniquely true of us.

Why a Wheel?

In the book of Acts, before Christians were even called Christians, they were often called followers of *The Way* (Acts 9:2; 24:14). Jesus called himself the way (John 14:6) and spoke of the Christian life as following a narrow path (Matt. 7:14). That's why we think a wheel is an appropriate image to explain the basics of the Christian life, because:

THE CENTRAL WHEEL IS DESIGNED TO PROPEL YOU
ALONG THE CHRISTIAN WAY.

If you think of the wheel as a tire that is balancing your vehicle and propelling it forward, the components you see inside the Central Wheel are like different air chambers. To be clear, we *aren't* saying you have to have each of these elements equally full and at all times. Some are more vital than others. But what we *are* saying is both (a) that there is no such thing as a faithful Christian who isn't also committed to the local church, and (b) that if you're lacking many of these elements you'll have a flat tire, so to speak, and, at a minimum, will fail to find the flourishing Jesus offers. As a church, we invite people into the fullness of life Jesus offers by shaping them with the gospel. The Central Wheel is

designed to show what is necessary for that to happen, show how you can be a part of it as a member of the church, and articulate in a fresh way what has been the heartbeat of our church for a century.

THE GOSPEL

All of this begins with the gospel. We're a gospel-centered church, which means everything we do is designed to be fueled by the news of the gospel and designed to advance the message of the gospel. But it's important to be clear what we mean by "the gospel." That's especially true because when some people hear the word gospel they think the word means simply the information about Jesus you respond to in order to become a Christian and receive forgiveness. The gospel is certainly no less than that, but it's much more beyond that too. The gospel isn't merely what you learn to begin the Christian life but the good news that is designed to fuel every day of the rest of your life.

The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. But what exactly has God done in Christ, and what does that mean for our lives and our church? At the simplest level, the gospel is the good news that, through Jesus, the power of God's kingdom has entered history to redeem sinners and renew the whole world. But there's so much more to be said.

At the core, the gospel is a royal announcement of a rightful ruler and a toppled tyrant, of one who is bringing light that invades darkness and liberation from slavery to sin and the sentence of death. These things are possible because Jesus—the Son of God Incarnate—lived a perfect life in our place, died a substitutionary death on the cross for our sins, rose triumphantly from the grave to launch God's new creation, and is now exalted as King of the world. Seated on

the throne in heaven, in the present, Jesus brings the power of his kingdom to work upon and within all who receive him in faith, and in the future, will return to make us whole and make all things new.

What that means is that when we turn from our sin and trust in Christ, we receive newness of life, forgiveness of sin, a new heart, and a new identity—precisely because the Holy Spirit bonds and binds us to Jesus, such that what is true of him flows through us. That means the gospel is the good news of an offer of salvation and also good news about the power of God that awakens our faith and also sustains it. It's good news that the horrors and evil of the world will be broken, that Jesus is King, that he has toppled our enemies, that the world will be renewed, that we'll be resurrected, that our future is bright, and that nothing can tear us from his hand.

That means the gospel isn't just good news. It's the best news and most important reality in the universe. That's why we want everything that takes place in our hearts and across our church to proceed from the gospel and why we want everyone to understand the gospel in all its fullness.

COMMITMENTS

These are the concrete things we ask all our members to commit to. Because the gospel fuels everything we do, all of these commitments stem from the truth of the gospel.

- We *gather* around the gospel in weekly corporate worship and daily personal devotion because we need the regular, faith-stirring, soul-satisfying experience of God's presence.

- We *grow* in the gospel within learning environments and community environments so both our minds and our hearts are trained to love the Triune God and live in light of his story.
- We *give* for the gospel both practically and financially to invest in the advance of the gospel and the increase of our joy, showing with our actions that God is our ultimate treasure.
- We *go* with the gospel to our neighbors, nations, and the next generation because the lost need to see, hear, and receive the newness of life and forgiveness on offer in the gospel.

CHARACTERISTICS

We'll say more about each in the sections to come, but at the most basic level these characteristics are what we aspire to be true of us as we pursue the commitments above.

- **Committed Worshipers.**

We gather weekly in God's presence in corporate worship, coming with a posture of expectant hope and eager to be fed with the word of Christ.

- **Eager Apprentices.**

We gather daily in God's presence in personal devotion, actively embracing the practices and habits of grace designed to make us more like Christ.

- **Authentic Family.**

We grow in community, committing to groups where our hearts are strengthened as we know others deeply and are known deeply by others.

- **Deep Disciples.**

We grow by learning, committing to classes where our minds are strengthened as welcome to know God more deeply.

- **Humble Servants.**

We give practically of our talent and time as an act of commitment to the sacred mission of the church.

- **Generous Investors.**

We give financially as an act of worship in response to the extravagant grace of God.

- **Faithful Presence.**

We go, working to declare and demonstrate the gospel by living lives of virtue, doing work with excellence, and bearing witness as front-door missionaries.

- **Joyful Ambassadors.**

We go, participating in the work to advance the gospel to unreached peoples around the globe.

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

In this life, we're in a constant state of becoming—being made more like Christ. That's *God's* work within us, and work *we* cooperate with. And that's one of the things the Central Wheel is designed to show—that we never “arrive” in this life. We stay on the path. We keep pressing on.

At the same time, the wheel also shows a basic progression: it “starts” with the commitment to gather. In other words, the first and primary thing we ask of people is that they gather in corporate worship, next that they engage in daily personal

devotion, and so on. If you look closely you'll see two main movements—the first four characteristics (the top of the wheel) are all about formation—worship, devotion, groups, and classes. The next four (the bottom of the wheel) are about action and mission—serving, giving, living, and evangelizing. That's why we call the wheel our *discipleship pathway*.

This *isn't* to say that you shouldn't give until after you're part of, say, a group and a class, but it *is* to show a basic level of priority and proportion. It's also to illustrate a vital truth: there's no such thing as a Christian who isn't an *active follower* of Jesus. That's why the Central Wheel exists: to make it easier to know how to be an active follower of Jesus. Our prayer is that, by God's grace, this tool would help us find the fullness of life he offers, and make generations of disciples who make a difference with the gospel.

GATHER



GATHER

COMMITTED WORSHIPERS

*Main Point: We gather weekly in God's presence
in corporate worship to be fed with
the word of Christ.*

The weekly gathering of the local church is the place where heaven and earth overlap in this age.

You may have never thought of worship or church that way. You may even prefer “church online” or time with your small group or events put on by Christian organizations. But the Bible teaches that there’s something unique about the in-person, gathered worship of the local church that is irreplaceable and indispensable.

WHY DO WE HAVE CORPORATE WORSHIP?

The word *church* comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means gathering. At the core, then, the church is not an event or a building but a *gathering of people* who have pledged their commitment to Jesus and to one another. On top of that, Jesus has promised that he will be uniquely present “there” and “among” those “gathered” in that physical space (Matt. 18:20).

That makes more sense when you think about the broader story of Scripture. From the beginning, God’s ultimate goal

has been to establish an everlasting kingdom where God's *people* reside in God's *place* and dwell in the midst of God's *presence*. We see this pattern at key points:

- **Garden of Eden.**

In the beginning, Adam and Eve (God's *people*) lived in God's *place* (the Garden) and there enjoyed God's *presence*.

- **Temple.**

Throughout the OT, the temple was the focal point of the worship of God's *people* and the *place* where the *presence* of God dwelled.

- **Jesus.**

The NT makes clear that Jesus himself replaced the temple—he *is* the *place* where God meets his *people*, deals with their sin, and welcomes them into his *presence*.

- **New Creation.**

When Jesus returns, heaven and earth won't just overlap—they'll be made one. This renewed *place* is where God's resurrected *people* will live forever in his *presence*.

In this age, though, it's the gathering of the local church where God is uniquely present. That's why Paul says we are a spiritual temple (2 Cor. 6:16–17)—because as Christians the Holy Spirit binds us to Jesus such that God dwells *in us*. On top of that, the kingdom that is to come when Jesus returns has already broken in, and it's present in the form of local churches, which are like claimed territory in an enemy land or an embassy in a foreign nation. So, in our life together, like ambassadors, we represent to the world what the kingdom will look like, and, like an embassy, when we step into a

gathering of the church, we're standing on what is essentially heavenly soil.

That's why corporate worship is central to the Christian life. It's where we are uniquely met with the presence of God. It's a connection with an already-present and overwhelming multitude in heaven. And gathered together—through sermon, song, and sacrament—the voice of Jesus is addressing us directly and forming us for service in his ranks and for life in a new regime. In worship, we're in the presence of the rightful ruler of the entire universe who is promising to work within us and make us whole. Why would we not make this a priority?

WHAT HAPPENS IN CORPORATE WORSHIP?

We live in a world where all sorts of alternatives vie for our weekend attention: college athletics, travel leagues, vacations, brunches, and even just rest after a wearying week. Yet sometimes we can think of Sunday-morning worship like every other event—designed to entertain us.

But if corporate worship is what the Bible says it is, then it's more like a life-saving medication. Imagine you have an illness, and there's a treatment that doesn't just keep you alive but leads you to flourish. Sometimes when you take it you feel immediate relief or improvement. Other times it just feels like life as normal. Here's the catch: the medication is designed to be administered weekly, and, if you miss a week, you'll live, but you'll begin to deteriorate—sometimes in ways that aren't even perceptible. If that were the case, you'd prioritize these treatments precisely because they make everything else in your life possible.

The analogy isn't perfect. And it certainly isn't designed to guilt anyone. Perfect attendance isn't a mandate, obviously,

there are all sorts of rhythms in our lives and unexpected twists and turns, and the Lord gives grace. But in our culture, it can be easy to evaluate the weekly worship gathering either (a) based on what you “feel” you get out of it in the moment, or (b) as something that’s *valuable* (you get there when you can) but not truly *essential* to your well-being.

Admittedly, church doesn’t always feel as exciting as other events. But remember: God regularly uses what *seems* mundane to do the miraculous. His kingdom is like a mustard seed that starts small but grows to be mighty. Our Lord, even, was a low-born carpenter’s son who was executed in disgrace, but then raised to eternal glory. In the worship of the local church, what is truly unique is not *what* you get but *who*. In corporate worship you are addressed with the voice of God and welcomed into his presence in a way that is distinct from any other moment. It comes to us in forms that may not always seem dazzling—bread and juice, water and words, in regular buildings surrounded by regular people. But it’s God’s good pleasure to work in and through these moments, in this gathering, and, crucially, in the presence of one another, to reoxygenate our lungs and fit us to find the fullness of life Jesus offers.

If that’s the case, then it’s worth ordering our lives to make this possible and structuring our days to remove barriers that would keep us from it. This could be as simple as setting alarms and laying out clothes the night before, or as all-encompassing as deciding in advance what sort of activities you will and won’t commit to if they regularly take you away from church, or what events you’ll attend if they keep you out late the night before.

What does that look like? To give you a target, we can say it two ways. Generally, plan to be at church unless you’re providentially hindered from being there. More concretely,

a healthy Christian should ordinarily be at church the overwhelming majority of Sundays each year. We say that not to lay down a binding rule but to help you, because we know the value of corporate worship and know that Sunday-morning church is a Saturday-night decision.

HOW DOES OUR CHURCH STRUCTURE CORPORATE WORSHIP?

You may have never thought about how a worship gathering is structured. On the outside, it may just look like some songs and a sermon, with prayer and other stuff mixed in. But we approach Sundays with a great deal of intentionality. Here's what you should know.

The Shape of Corporate Worship

Every service is patterned after the shape of the gospel. That means we structure each service to have it follow the "plot" of Scripture. It starts with the reminder that God is great (adoration), then it reminds us that we are sinners (confession), next that Jesus saves us (assurance), and finally that we are sent (benediction). This subtle substructure helps form us over time.

The Elements of Corporate Worship

Corporate worship is designed to administer and apply the Word of God to the hearts of hearers. Here's how each element is designed to do that as individuals and a gathered body.

- **Call to Worship.**

This reading from Scripture formally opens our gathering, summons us to worship, and reminds us God is great.

- **Singing.**

The corporate singing of the truths of Scripture. Our gathering has people from all ages and stages, and we prioritize songs that are biblically-true and theologically-rich rather than catering to a particular taste or style.

- **Thanksgiving.**

The public recognition of God's goodness to us. We frequently pause to mark milestones, tell stories, and share successes to encourage one another and honor God.

- **Giving.**

Our investment in the advance of the Word. Each week after highlighting what God has done for us, we invite others to give to support the ministry of the church in the world.

- **Scripture Reading.**

The public reading of God's Word. Each week we feature a passage of Scripture designed to highlight the theme of the morning's sermon.

- **Pastoral Prayer.**

A prayer on behalf of the congregation, offering adoration to God, intercession for our church, area churches, mission partners, and for understanding of the Word.

- **Sermon.**

The preaching of God's Word. The expositional sermon is the focal point of every gathering and is designed to be Christ-centered, gospel-focused, and richly-applied.

- **Baptism.**

A visual proclamation of the gospel. Baptism tells the

story of what has and will happen to the one who has come to faith in Christ. In baptism, the church affirms the faith of the one being baptized, and the individual publicly commits to Christ and his people.

- **Lord's Supper.**

A physical proclamation of the gospel. This meal tells the story of the gospel to our senses. As we take this meal we renew our commitment to Christ and one another.

- **Benediction.**

This reading from Scripture formally closes our gathering, spurs us on, and reminds us we are sent into the world to be a faithful and loving presence of Jesus.

The Experience of Corporate Worship

Every worship gathering is designed to be a total experience of gospel reassurance in Christ, communicating the beauty, joy, gentleness, and shalom of a gospel culture.¹

In our services, we strive to create environments marked by excellence, carefully curated, thoughtfully spoken, and oriented toward beauty. In service to God and one another, our prayer is that we would be renewed by the presence of God in the presence of one another as committed worshipers.

GATHER

EAGER APPRENTICES

Main Point: *We gather daily in God's presence in personal devotion to be made more like Christ.*

There's no such thing as a "non-practicing" Christian.

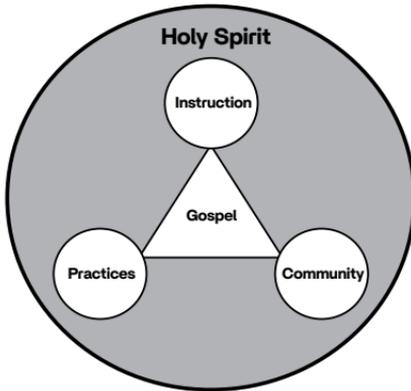
When we come to faith in Christ, the gospel changes us at the very core of our being—we are new creations, given a new heart, new identity, and new desires. God's own power is at work within us, resulting in our forgiveness, but also gradually restoring, reshaping, and reforming us from the inside out. That means there's no such thing as a person who is *forgiven* by Jesus who isn't also an active *follower* of Jesus. The two go hand in hand. That's why, alongside gathering in the presence of God in *weekly corporate worship*, the Christian faith has forever stressed the importance of gathering in the presence of God in *daily personal devotion*—devoting oneself to God by actively embracing the practices that put us in the path of God's grace.

WHY IS PERSONAL DEVOTION IMPORTANT?

Your life in this age is an apprenticeship for eternity.² You may have never thought of it that way, but the Bible says that Christians have been adopted (Gal. 4:5), made heirs of an everlasting inheritance (Rom. 8:17), and will one day

rule and reign over the universe with Jesus (2 Tim. 2:12). Between now and then, Jesus says we're to "abide" in him (John 15:4) so that we'll grow—in knowledge, in love, in fullness of life, into our new identity, into the image of Jesus, and into the truest version of who God has created us to be in this age and the next.

That requires change—*supernatural* change. This is change that can only be wrought in us by God, as a miraculous gift of grace. At the same time, remarkably, it also requires *our effort* and cooperation. How exactly does God bring about supernatural change? Here's an image designed to summarize what the Bible teaches.³



- The Holy Spirit is the **person** who brings about supernatural change in us.
- The Gospel is the **power** the Spirit uses exclusively to bring about supernatural change.
- Instruction, Community, and Practices are the **paths** where God has promised the Spirit will use the gospel to change us.

Gospel instruction, gospel community, and gospel practices: we need all three. These are the ingredients the Holy Spirit uses to bring about supernatural change in us. Sometimes as breakthroughs, but most often gradually, as we devote ourselves to them, over time, and over and over again, in order to grow in God's grace. Additionally, what you'll notice is that all three of these are found in the life of the local church and on the Central Wheel.

- **Instruction** is what you'll find in sermons, classes, books, and learning.
- **Community** is what you'll find in groups and gatherings.
- **Practices** are the things handed down by Jesus to help us become more like him.

And among those practices, when it comes to daily personal devotion the two most important are Bible intake and prayer. Healthy Christians ought to create space for what many today call a quiet time or devotional, but what has also been called daily worship, personal spiritual disciplines, habits of grace, or (by the Puritans) “keeping the heart.”⁴

Whatever you call it, the reason why we engage in this practice is because it is one of God's promised paths of blessing. That doesn't mean that merely opening a Bible causes blessing to rain down. Nor does it mean that every morning will feel like a mountaintop experience. But it does mean that when we approach God in Scripture and prayer, with faith and need, then we can do so with a posture of expectant hope, as beloved sons and daughters trusting our indulgent Father will meet us where he promised to.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN PERSONAL DEVOTION?

The primary habits of daily personal devotion are Bible intake and prayer. That's not to say there aren't other significant formative habits and practices in Scripture. But what we're talking about here are the practices that are designed to be *daily* (rather than weekly or occasional) and *personal* (rather than corporate).

Receiving the Lord's Supper, as one example, is designed to

be one of the special channels through which God regularly forms his people. But communion is, well, *communal*. It's something we do with one another in the church, not individually. Other practices in Scripture, such as fasting or silence and solitude, are God-given, formative, and designed for the individual, but aren't necessarily designed to be *daily*. Together, though, Bible intake and prayer are the inhale and exhale of the Christian life.

Bible Intake

The Bible is vital for the Christian life, in part, because of what it *says*. It contains the most important news of all time in words given by God himself, words that are truthful and trustworthy. But the Bible is also important for the Christian life because of what it *is*. It is living and active (Heb. 4:12), the instrument through which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, awakens faith, imparts grace, deepens joy, brings comfort, forms us into the image of Christ, and catches us up into the divine presence of the Triune God. In other words, the Bible is of supreme significance for our daily lives because in it, God *himself* communicates, and God *communicates* himself.⁵

That means the Bible is perfect and priceless—and we should know it deeply. This can (and should) take lots of different forms. On the one hand, we need to have a 100,000-foot level understanding of the overarching story of Scripture, and that sort of breadth comes from the compounding interest of reading the Bible regularly, even in just minutes a day. At the same time, the Bible is inexhaustible in its intricacy, depth, and beauty, and these riches are discovered in detailed study. More still, the Bible is designed to be the fuel for the Christian life—the story we find ourselves in and the message we preach to ourselves in times of temptation, doubt, and fear. The surest way for the Bible to function this way in our lives is to let it sink deep roots in our hearts, which is done most effectively by meditating on Scripture and memorizing

it. Finally, the Bible comes to us as a divine summons of sorts—the words of our King calling us to a certain way of life, which makes application of Scripture and obedience to it part of our apprenticeship to Jesus.

Prayer

Sometimes people ask: Why does God ask us to pray if he already knows what will happen? One (small) part of the (long) answer to this question is (1) because God has included *our* prayers in *his* plans—in other words, some things happen only because we prayed for them (and God planned for us to); and (2) because God has designed the act of prayer itself to shape us. In prayer, we are welcomed into the heart-transforming light and life of the presence of the Triune God, where we experience connection with God and clarity from God. But also, in prayer we offer God praise and pour out our needs—which puts us in a heart posture of submission, wonder, and need, and cannot help but change us over time.

That's part of the beauty of prayer. It takes many forms. We can pray simply, as children asking help of a loving father. We can pray Scripture—the book of Psalms is an encyclopedia of human experience, including everything from adoration to abject terror, and can give us words when we have none of our own. We can also pray what are called set prayers, which are prayers written by others (often from Christian saints of ages past) that allow us to lean on the wisdom and beauty of expression of those who have gone before. We can pray at length or in spans as short as a breath. Regardless, a healthy Christian is a praying Christian.

HOW DO I START IN DAILY PERSONAL DEVOTION?

The Bible nowhere demands we read a daily devotional (in fact, the majority of Christians who ever lived were illiterate).

At the same time, the Bible everywhere demonstrates the need for daily devotion—being people of faith and faithful prayer. Here are some tips to get started.

- **Start small.**

People don't go from the couch directly to a marathon. You don't need to either. 5 minutes of reading and 5 minutes of prayer is a perfectly acceptable starting point.

- **Pick your spot.**

Routines are your friend. Pick a time of day, a location (maybe even a certain type of coffee or snack) that you associate with this time and try to be consistent.

- **Pick a reading plan.**

Don't open the Bible at random. You'll profit more from a method that takes you through the Bible in a systematic and sequenced way.

- **Develop a prayer plan.**

No prayer is bad prayer, but unplanned prayer is often self-centered. Think through different categories of people you can spend time praying for each day.

- **Minimize distractions.**

Consider putting screens away. Keep a sheet of paper nearby to list to-do's that come to mind. Jot them down so you can return your focus to God.

- **Mark milestones.**

Consider keeping a notebook, whether it be to house observations you have about the Bible or to record answers to prayer.

- **Give yourself grace.**

You'll miss a day. Some days will feel hurried. You'll stumble in sin. Keep showing up. Perseverance is the goal, not perfect attendance.

Finally, take advantage of the resources of the church—whether books, groups, or classes that devote time to training Christians how to be faithful and eager apprentices of Jesus.

G R O W



GROW

AUTHENTIC FAMILY

*Main Point: We grow in community spaces,
where our hearts are strengthened as
we are known by others.*

Your salvation is a group effort.

That may sound crazy. After all, we tend to talk about salvation as an individual decision and as an irrevocable gift. Both those things are true. At the same time, Jesus himself says “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:13). Biblically, a saving faith is one that perseveres: “we have come to share in Christ, *if* indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Heb. 3:14). That means we need one another if we’re to keep the faith and keep pressing on. That’s also why we’ve created intentional spaces in the church designed to foster community and grow us together as authentic family—and it’s why we encourage every member to be a part of a group.

WHY IS COMMUNITY IMPORTANT?

When you think of small groups at a church, what comes to mind? For some, it’s awkward small talk, lukewarm coffee, and mismatched furniture. If that’s what you have in mind, it’s not hard to understand why joining a group hasn’t been at the top of your priority list. But here’s what I want you to

consider: Jesus died for the sake of community. What do I mean? Consider this:

1. Community is eternal.

Our God is Triune, and before creation, before sin, before time itself, Father, Son, and Spirit existed in perfect community—eternally complete and lacking nothing. God then created and invited humanity into his own inner life, *communing* with Adam in the Garden (Gen. 3:8).

2. Sin destroys community.

Satan is fundamentally one who tears apart what God has made whole, and that’s precisely what we see in Scripture. In the Garden, sin resulted in things torn apart—God from man, husband from wife, and alienation spread from Eden to the ends of the earth and innermost parts of our heart.

3. The cross restores community.

On the cross, Jesus rescues us from sin and reconciles us to God *and* one another. We overlook that last part sometimes, but Scripture insists: we “have been brought near by the blood of Christ” who has “*made us both one* and broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” not just individually but has created “in himself *one new man* [to] reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph. 2:13–15).

We’ve already talked about how the Greek word we translate as *church* means gathering. That means the church is a *body of people*, and both aspects of this phrase are important. The church is made up of *people*, but they’ve been made into a *body*. Paul talks about this at length, comparing the church to

a human body (2 Cor. 12:12–20). His main point is that God has arranged the human body to be interdependent, in need of each part and its contribution in order to make it function properly, and that’s also what he has done with the church. God has knit you together with other believers to be a people committed to one another—because you need one another. Simply stated, the church is a group of people who have been bound together in Christ and who belong together as family.

That means our growth comes not just from the proclamation of God’s word in gathered worship (though that is vital and foundational). It also comes from the population of God’s people. In the church God calls you to live in community with people he has engineered to be your truest family. Like any family, you won’t be exactly alike—and that’s precisely the point. After all, it’s never been easier to cloister ourselves away into tribes of people just like us, whether in age, preferences, politics, interests, income, or whatever else. On top of that, our technology lulls us and pulls us toward isolation, and chronic loneliness has never been more dangerously widespread.⁶ In the church, though, God intentionally binds us together, often with people we have nothing in common with except Jesus. He tells us to live life together, to bump into one another, to learn to build one another up and forgive, to benefit from the gifts God has given to others and to exercise those he has given us. The local church is the place where we carry out our apprenticeship to Jesus, and committing to deep community is one of the main ways the Spirit uses the gospel to bring about supernatural change within us—together with one another.

WHAT IS OUR STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY?

The church’s most basic mission is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). But how do we as a church leverage community

to actually shape and form disciples? As we saw earlier, the primary source of Christian growth is the weekly corporate worship of the gathered church. No small group can substitute for the work of the Spirit through the Word of God in song, sermon, and sacrament over years and decades. At the same time, one weekly gathering isn't enough. In part that's because large groups like corporate worship gatherings can be a place where it's all too easy to feel alone in a crowd. But even if that weren't the case, gathering merely that one hour a week isn't enough to make us fully-formed disciples when we're being formed by the world every other hour of the week.

If the church wishes to form whole disciples and be men and women with both hearts and minds shaped by and oriented toward the gospel, then we need to be a church that is *learning* the way of Jesus together and *living* the way of Jesus together. That means we need classroom environments designed primarily to produce learning outcomes, and we need group environments designed primarily to produce community outcomes. Often, churches try to combine both into a single experience in equal parts, and the unfortunate reality is it just doesn't work.⁷ You have to lean heavily in one direction or the other for either learning or community to take root. That's why our church has two basic categories of discipleship spaces: groups and classes.

- **Groups** are designed to be (roughly) 80% *community* and 20% learning.
- **Classes** are designed to be (roughly) 80% *learning* and 20% community.

When it comes to groups (we'll talk about classes in the next chapter), the main thing we need is *Christian* community.

In other words, it's easy to find community in general. The question is whether it's the right kind. Because the communities we commit to conform us to their culture. That is to say, the things and people we allow to saturate our attention—whether it be media, cultural vibes, political ideologies, friendships, trends, books, you name it—all of these have a built-in perspective toward the world, a story they tell, and when you immerse yourself in it, you can't help but be shaped by it.⁸ As Christians, then, we need to be particularly conscious of and discerning toward what we intake. We become what we behold.

Within Christian community, though, we find key elements necessary to the Christian life. At the most basic level, we come to know others and be known by others. When community is done properly—as we share burdens, celebrate victories, confess sin, and come to be known by others—then we flourish. We grow in part because we receive encouragement. When people know us, and relationships form, we can't help but feel connection, joy, and purpose—we're made in the image of God and designed for relationship. But we also grow because we receive *exposure*. Just in terms of our presence, when people know to expect us it's harder to hide because people notice when we're away. But more than that, when people know us beyond the small talk and the politeness we show the world, then it's harder to hide our struggles. And that exposure nudges us toward godliness.

HOW DO I FIND COMMUNITY?

The primary spaces in the church we've built to foster growth through community are our groups. And we encourage all our members to find one to join. Here are some things you should know:

- **We can help.** Stepping into new spaces can be a challenge. We've tried to make that easier by detailing everything online. But you may still have questions, and we're happy to help.
- **There's a group for everyone.**
Some churches have a one-size-fits-all approach, with groups all the same size and strategy. Instead, we have groups large and small, at church and in homes, ongoing and short-term, some focused on lessons and others on conversation. Find what works for you. If one group isn't a fit, try a different one or try another time.
- **You aren't limited.**
We have spaces that feature recovery, care, and enrichment programs for a set number of weeks that can complement the community your groups are designed to give. You don't have to quit your group to receive support elsewhere in the church.
- **But you don't have to do everything at once.**
We want all our members to be in community and to be learning, and we have spaces devoted to both. But you don't have to be in both at the same time. If you need to take a break from a group in order to take a class (or vice versa), you should feel free. You know best what you need most.
- **Childcare is provided.**
All our on-campus groups have childcare available on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday nights.

Part of the beauty of local church membership is that, in the gospel, God has knit us together with other believers. He has made us one and made us family. In groups, we come to be known as we are but we don't stay as we are. We grow, and we grow in community as authentic family.

GROW

DEEP DISCIPLES

Main Point: We grow in learning spaces, where our minds are strengthened as we know God more deeply.

The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your thoughts about God.⁹

If that's true, that means learning is life-changing. And yet, many people think it's not for them. Maybe it's because theology feels too disconnected from life, or because serious Bible study feels like it's only for devoted Christians. Maybe it's because you've seen theological discussions lead to division. Or maybe it's just that you think of your student days as a part of your past, not your present.

But here's the reality: pursuing learning in the church is for everyone because everyone has beliefs about God, consciously or subconsciously, and those beliefs shape how we live and how we experience the world. On top of that, if what we believe about the gospel is true, then you and I are being shaped by the living God to be a certain sort of person—our lives, thoughts, and habits of mind and heart are caught up in a process of being slain and made alive by the gospel. That means a vital part of being a follower of Jesus is *learning the way* of Jesus.

WHY IS LEARNING IMPORTANT?

The Great Commission is a declaration of war, and learning is one of the primary weapons. Standing before his disciples, Jesus opens the Great Commission by revealing himself to be the triumphant Warrior-King, saying “all authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). Because of that, Jesus says, “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). Follow the logic. Jesus possesses all authority in the universe, and he sends the church into the world armed with his authority, which they wield by making disciples and teaching others. Why is that?

It’s because the Great Commission and the Christian faith center on wrapping our heads and our hearts around the reality of the long-hidden mystery of the Messiah. At the core, the gospel is an announcement, which means it’s information—information we receive in faith and order our lives around. But this isn’t something that happens just at the start of the Christian life: life-changing learning is a lifelong endeavor.

But the real reason for this is because of what we talked about earlier—God is interested in supernatural change, and instruction is a primary tool he uses. When Jesus is announced, the Spirit shows up—with power—and works in and through the proclamation of gospel truth to engage the hostile powers of our own hearts, tearing down strongholds of sin and conforming us to the image of his Son.¹⁰ Paul uses the same sort of warfare imagery when he tells the Christian to be strong in the Lord and “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11), which begins with the “belt of truth” that holds everything else together, and ends with the “sword of the

Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:18). Why does that matter? Because the belt and sword, the primary weapons used in the advance of the gospel among the unreached and across the unrenovated parts of our hearts, are instruments of *instruction*.

That’s part of why Paul insists, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2), which is part of how we “train ourselves for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). We need instruction, which, when combined with our effort and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, tears down the false stories of the world and rebuilds right understandings rooted in truth. As a result we learn—and we grow in our ability to *love* the Triune God and *live* in light of his story.

WHAT IS OUR STRATEGY FOR LEARNING?

We’ve been stressing that learning is important, and it is. But it’s important to point out that learning isn’t merely intellectual. We aren’t brains on a stick; we are humans created in the image of God, complex beings made up of body and soul. On top of that, sin has radically impaired our affections and disordered our desires. We need to be made both holy and whole. With these needs in view, here is how we leverage learning to deepen our discipleship:¹¹

1. Shape. Design spaces for transformation.

It’s worth reiterating: we believe the Bible teaches that we are shaped (a) by the power of the Holy Spirit, (b) through the gospel, (c) in instruction, community, and practices pursued in faith and over time. That’s the logic that sits behind the Central Wheel—we design our church to live at the intersection of instruction, community, and practices, since that’s where gospel

transformation happens. In worship, for example, we don't gather just to sing, and in community we don't gather just for conversation. Learning environments are no exception: these spaces are designed to be active *learning* environments but ones that learn in *community* and do so while engaging in key Christian *practices*. When you come to one of our classes, we'll work hard to provide high quality content and teaching, but we'll also engineer the experience to make you an active participant. This is designed to make the information stick, and also help us stick closer to one another as we learn together. We're gathering in classes not just for the sake of information but for the purpose of transformation.

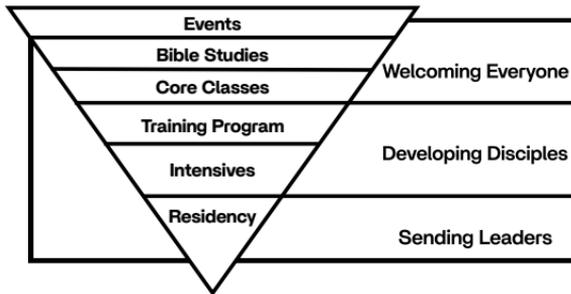
2. Scope. Deliver the content disciples need.

Some churches do a great job fostering community, but have a patchwork approach to learning, offering a little bit of everything but no clear rationale for what they do or why. Others might major in great Bible teaching but have little to no focus on doctrine or formation. As a church, though, our goal is to make *whole* disciples. That's why we've worked to create learning environments that deliver the primary things all Christians need: Bible, doctrine, and formation. We need a broad understanding of the Bible, deep roots in Christian beliefs, and formative habits that put us in the paths of God's grace and nudge us toward holiness and wholeness. That happens at the macro-level as we step back and try to make sure we regularly offer classes that give attention to all three. If, for example, there's great Bible preaching, a broad array of doctrinal classes, but nothing on the spiritual habits or practices, then there's an imbalance. It also

happens at the micro-level as we try to make sure our learning environments marry all three together, which is why, for example, in Bible Studies, we'll also learn Christian beliefs and practice Christian habits.

3. **Sequence. Draw disciples to their next step.**

The right spaces need to be placed in the right sequence because our goal isn't just to make whole disciples but to make whole disciples who make a difference with the gospel. That's why we've created spaces to reach people at every level, develop them, and take them to the next level. Our learning environments function at three basic levels:



- **Spaces that Welcome Everyone.**

Our events, Bible studies, and classes are designed for everyone. Many churches have these spaces, but our sequence is built to start here and take a next step.

- **Spaces that Develop Disciples.**

Our training program and intensives are designed to raise the bar and to raise up more mature disciples.

- **Spaces that Send Leaders.**

Our residency program is designed to equip and

send those who will go out from us to lead in ministry and marketplaces around the world.

WHERE DO I LEARN?

If you're eager to get started, here's more on each of the active learning environments we've designed to combine Bible, doctrine, and practices for the sake of your growth.

- **Events.** *1-day* experiences combining an expert teacher and essential topic. We want to address a key topic of discipleship relevant for and accessible to all.
- **Bible Studies.** *1-semester* experiences working line by line through the Bible most often in a single-gender environment. We want to draw disciples into active learning in the context of community.
- **Core Classes.** *6–12-week* experiences covering basic principles in Bible, doctrine, and formation. We want to provide pathways for learning for disciples at every stage.
- **Training Program.** *1-year* discipleship program integrating Bible, doctrine, and formation. This hallmark program is designed to train every generation into deeply-rooted disciples.
- **Intensives.** *1-semester* experiences for Training Program alums. We want to further deepen disciples with further study in specific areas of Bible, doctrine, and formation.
- **Residency.** *1-year or 2-year* leadership experience. We want to help hone the craft, develop the character, and advance training for leaders of the next generation.

We're fully known by God, but we will never fully know God. His beauty and perfections are infinite and inexhaustible. That means in eternity we'll still be learning, not in classrooms as those who strive but as those who bask in the light of the glory of Christ. In the church, we get a foretaste of that now, as those who grow by learning together and becoming deep disciples.

GIVE



GIVE

HUMBLE SERVANTS

***Main Point:** We give practically of our talent and time as an act of commitment to the sacred mission of the church.*

Jesus didn't die to create individual Christians. He died to create a church.

This is important to keep in mind because today people often think of faith as a primarily individual matter and church as either an optional enhancement or a lesser expression of faith compared to the “purity” that comes from just living life with Jesus.

That said, Jesus is quite clear. He died to form a people—the church—and he binds us together and turns us into our truest selves *in relationship to one another*. That means life together in the church is an accelerant to your growth and satisfaction in Christ. That's why we think all Christians are designed to give of their time and talents as humble servants within the life of the local church.

WHY IS SERVING IMPORTANT?

A reasonable answer to this question might be something like, “Well, because the pastors and staff can't do everything themselves.” And that's true. But there's a deeper answer to

this question that's important to grasp. And it's this: serving within the local church is critical because it is the catalyst Jesus uses to complete his victory over Satan, sin, and death.

That may sound overstated. But it's precisely what the Bible says. By virtue of his faithful life, atoning death, and world-renewing resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 1:3, 10:12; Col. 3:1; Eph. 1:20; Rom. 8:34). That reality is the core of the gospel message. But we need to ask: What is Jesus doing at this moment? In answer, Jesus is ruling. That's why the NT says he is "seated" (as in seated on a royal throne). And Paul gives us a window into exactly how he is exerting his royal authority: he is forming a people and fitting them for service in his war for human hearts. He does that by gifting the church with gifts of service.

This in turn makes sense of why the church does what it does. If you think about it, the church exists for three main reasons: worship, maturity, and mission. Service is vital for all three.

1. Worship.

We serve one another with our presence when we gather for worship. As just one example, when we sing we lend our faith to others who feel weak. Imagine a major sporting event—tens of thousands of devoted fans, cheering in unison, singing fight songs, engaged and enthused. In this case, there's something distinctly different (and greater) gained in person as opposed to merely watching on TV. In worship, though, we're in the presence of one another *and* the rightful ruler of the universe who is promising to work within us and make us whole. God shapes us as we're together through our service in worship.

2. Maturity.

The church exists as God’s plan for our growth, but we need one another for that growth. Paul writes that Jesus has given “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for *building up the body of Christ*” (Eph. 4:12). The point is God has made our life together with one another a precondition for our growth in godliness and gladness in Christ. And he has given us gifts designed to draw out growth in one another: shepherds to care for the weary and wayward, teachers to instruct us in deeper knowledge, prophets for awakening us to the blind spots of our indwelling sin, and evangelists to spur us on in gospel advance. He has given gifts, we see elsewhere in Scripture (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:7–10, 28), of mercy, wisdom, faith, exhortation, leading, administration, helping, and more. But it’s only as we give of ourselves, in areas of service that may not seem glamorous—rocking babies, leading small groups, stacking chairs, preparing meals, and more—that the Spirit uses that as the instrument by which he shapes and forms us into “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

3. Mission.

Jesus has sent the spirit to the church to flood it with spiritual gifts designed to combat the lies of the world and the doom of sin with the life and light of the good news of the gospel. Returning to the same verse as above, notice that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers were also given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). One could argue then that the primary job of a pastor is not

to *do* ministry, but to *train others* to do ministry. Later in this same passage, Paul speaks of church leaders as the “joints” of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16) that allow the muscles of the body (the church’s members) to be exercised and effective. The point is the advance of the gospel requires all of us, and Jesus calls us to service in part to equip us for and unite us in that mission. That means our service within the local church—whether designing Bible studies, welcoming guests, mentoring students, or changing diapers—are all threads that form a seamless whole on the tapestry of redemption God is weaving across the world.

Simply stated, when you serve the local church, you are doing nothing less than joining in the defeat of Satan and sin and joining in the victory march of the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHERE CAN I SERVE?

At a church like ours, there are hundreds of service opportunities every week. Rather than trying to list every one, below you’ll find categories that highlight the main things we engage together.

1. Welcoming.

We strive to create warm and friendly environments for guests, to create on-ramps to the gospel. To accomplish that we need help in our parking lots, at our doors, at coffee bars, and elsewhere throughout the church serving and connecting with guests.

2. Presence.

We lend our presence to provide care for others in the life of our church, in spaces like our preschool

ministry and special needs ministry. This provides direct ministry to individuals and facilitates other ministry across the church.

3. Practical.

We have ongoing, practical needs that need to be met each week. These include help with upkeep and care of the property, helping prepare the Lord's Supper, attending to those being baptized, administering benevolence, and helping guests take next steps.

4. Technical.

We host regular events, which means we need the help of those with technical expertise in areas of media and music. Additionally, to care for our people we also need those with specialized training in security and medicine.

5. Next Generation.

We have an active sports ministry in need of coaches and a full suite of age-graded ministries, each with their own learning spaces, community spaces, and volunteer needs, all of which are designed to help the next generation come to faith and grow in faith.

6. Investing.

We host a variety of different kinds of groups each week designed to cultivate community in different ways. Needs here include those willing to facilitate community groups, coach new members, and mentor in spaces designed to provide care, recovery, or support.

7. Equipping.

We have a constellation of active learning environments designed to grow us as deep disciples. Needs here include help from those trained to teach and others willing to guide conversations as table leaders.

Some of these spaces have applications or requirements, ranging from the most obvious like medical training to serve on our medical team, to others like background checks and sexual abuse awareness training for those serving kids and students, or completion of relevant training prior to teaching classes or leading groups. All of this is in service of providing the safest and soundest environments possible so we can grow together.

HOW DO I GET STARTED SERVING?

If you're not sure where to get started, here are a few tips.

1. Commit to the church.

One of the best ways to know where to serve is to be known by others. That means being a committed worshiper, who is devoted to Christ, engaged in community, and actively learning. Ordinarily, the way God invites us into service is through the lives and needs of those around us. In other words, we often discover our gifts when we're deployed by the needs of others, only finding out that very sort of service was what we were made for all along. Regardless of what we *think* we're good at, if someone asks for your help, be humble enough of a servant to lean into that space.

2. Identify a need.

As you commit to the rhythms of church life, you'll begin to notice where there are gaps and needs.

Proactively volunteer to help. Sometimes we look for some sort of quiz that will tell us exactly what our spiritual gift is, but it's not uncommon that we find our gift only in the midst of opportunities we didn't envision, like when we jump into a space where there is a need.

3. Reevaluate periodically.

Ministry needs change over time—but so do you. All that to say, you aren't required to stay in a particular place of service forever. As you grow, your interests and skills will develop, and it may be that there are other areas that interest you or you're invited into. Have a bias towards openness to whatever needs present themselves.

When we gather together to serve the church and serve one another, Satan doesn't hear prayer, praise, laughter or lessons. He hears a drum beat and a war hymn. And he sees Jesus assembling an army. When you serve you are participating in the advance of the gospel all while stepping into the fullness of who God has made you to be—a humble servant devoted to Christ.

GIVE

GENEROUS INVESTORS

***Main Point:** We give financially as an act of worship in response to the extravagant grace of God.*

You may feel too obsessed with money, but it may be that you're not obsessed enough.

That's because, when you read what the Bible has to say about generosity at least two things are clear. First, what you do with money reveals what you believe about God. Second, there is a way to spend money in this life that will accrue to you in the next. The question is whether you believe what Jesus says when he claims that those who leverage their lives for the advance of the gospel in this life will receive a hundredfold in the next (Mark 10:30). That's why we think giving is crucial for the Christian—because it works simultaneously for God's glory and your gladness.

WHY IS GIVING IMPORTANT?

Following Jesus should significantly change your relationship to money. If it doesn't, there's danger. That's because to be a Christian is to be one who is being shaped and formed into the image of Christ, and Jesus' heart pulses with joyfully-sacrificially, generously others-directed divine life. In other words, being in Christ makes us more generous because Jesus

himself is radically generous—at his innermost and to the uttermost. That means a conversion to Christianity leads to converted thinking about money.¹² But to be formed by Jesus in this space, we need a biblical vision for how to think about money. Here are three things to keep in mind.

1. You're a recipient of the priceless grace of God.

The NT occasionally uses financial terms to talk about the gospel. Jesus “paid” for our sins, “according to the *riches* of his grace” (Eph. 1:7), by cancelling “the record of *debt* that stood against us” (Col. 2:14). This isn’t to put a price tag on salvation, but the opposite—it’s to show our utter hopelessness apart from Christ. The price of our sin was infinitely beyond our capacity to pay, and only one who was infinitely righteous could settle our sin and offer us grace. That’s why, as Christians, we’re always to keep the gospel in our spiritual field of vision. Because when we live in light of the gospel, we will maintain a deep awareness of the extravagance of the mercy we’ve been extended, to which we respond with lives that deploy all we have, money included, to accelerate the advance of this priceless and inexhaustible treasure.

2. You're *already* wealthy beyond your wildest dreams.

Sometimes people say things like that and point out how the average middle-class American is living the life of a king compared to most people in the world. That’s true. But I’m saying much more. Instead, I’m reminding you that if you are in Christ you are an adopted child of the king and heir to an everlasting inheritance. Remember, by virtue of his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has been appointed the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). He created the world and then

reclaimed a world spoiled by sin—and everything within it belongs to him. But it also belongs to you. That’s because you have been named “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), such that “all things are yours” in the present and the future (1 Cor. 3:21–22). Every material object in the world will be at your disposal in the age to come. When we grasp that, it allows us to loosen our grip on the things of the world. What does it matter what we accumulate over the next fifty years when we have the next fifty trillion to enjoy all that is and ever was?

3. You’re designed to give the world an alternative vision of the good life.

The Bible portrays money, and the pull of acquisitiveness behind it, not as a neutral object but as a powerful force. Money leads the world to think the good life is found in accumulating wealth and the pleasure and security it brings. As Christians, we’re called to resist the way of the world (1 John 2:15), and Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that the good life is found, counter-intuitively, in positions of weakness, meekness, and suffering that the world considers worthless (Matt. 5:3-12). That’s not to say we’re to pursue pain and poverty, but it is to say that we’re to demonstrate that true human flourishing is found by living in such a way that is willing to use and even lose all we have for the gain of Christ.

WHAT DOES GIVING DO?¹⁵

A wise investor pursues investments likely to yield a return. If that sounds overly calculating when it comes to giving to the church, remember that Jesus said the same—teaching about a

shrewd investor (Matt. 25:14–30), a dishonest manager (Luke 16:1–13), those who built homes on sturdy foundations (Matt. 7:24–27), and those who invest in things that cannot be lost (Matt. 6:19–21). Add to that the reality that God doesn't *need* our money. He is the creator and owner of all and is incapable of lacking anything. Taken together, it becomes clear that according to Jesus it's not unreasonable to ask what good it does to give. Here are three things to consider.

1. When you give, you invest in yourself.

We tend to think that if we get something out of giving then it “doesn't count” as being virtuous. But when it comes to giving to the church for the gospel, the Bible disagrees. Scripture tells us that what we do in this life will lead to real differences in our experience in the age to come. That's what Jesus means when he tells us to “lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven” (Matt. 6:20), which Jesus defines in part as living a life defined by giving rather than accumulating: “sell your possessions and give to the needy [to] *provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old*” (Luke 12:33). Jesus even says we will “be *repaid* at the resurrection of the just” when we give to those who can't pay us back (Luke 14:14). That's also part of the reason Jesus says it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). To be clear, this isn't to say that some people will feel envy or regret in heaven. But it is to point out that all humans are motivated by the promise of future reward—even Jesus (Heb. 12:2).¹⁴ It seems that what we do with our money now can lead to rewards from our heavenly Father, greater responsibilities in the age to come, and expanded capacities to enjoy God. So it's not greedy or selfish; it's a God-given motivation that we're to pursue for

our good and his glory.

2. When you give, you invest in your family.

Scripture speaks of the church as both a body and a family. Both images show how God has bound us together and made us dependent upon one another. With our earthly families, we don't hesitate to invest in the care of one another. The same thing ought to be true with the church—our truest family. That's also why it's no coincidence that the very first thing we see the church recorded as doing in the NT is being generous toward one another, selling what they had to care for the needs of one another (Acts 4:33–35). That's what God has designed the church to do. Why? Remember, the church is designed to be like a movie preview, showing in advance and in miniature of what the kingdom will be like. When our life together is characterized by love and service toward one another, and when we live with wholehearted devotion to God in a manner that leads us to give joyfully and sacrificially, then we demonstrate what the kingdom of God looks like and give the outside world an alternate vision of the good life.

3. When you give, you invest in the mission of God.

Perhaps most importantly, when you give you fuel the advance of the gospel in your neighborhood and across the nations. What you give goes to fund ministry, ministers, and missions that take the life-saving message of the gospel forward. That's why we're to remember that giving is part of a war. This age is part of a cosmic conflict (Eph. 6:11–13), and we should adopt an approach to money more akin to wartime spending than peacetime luxury—living

below our means for the sake of funneling as much as we can toward the mission, knowing that no time is more expensive than wartime, and no effort is more worthy of investment.¹⁵

HOW SHOULD I GIVE?

If you're just getting started or ready to take a next step in giving, here are some tips to help you maximize the impact of your generosity and the effectiveness of the church.

1. Make your giving *consistent*.

When you give regularly (or automate your giving) rather than just occasionally, it frees the church to make clearer plans and set more ambitious goals.

2. Make your giving *primary*.

The biblical pattern is to give of our first and our best, not our leftovers. Consider whether your budgeting and practices reflect that priority.

3. Make your giving *percentage-based*.

Basing your giving off a percentage of your income helps answer how much you give, and gives you a baseline to reevaluate and grow over time.

4. Make your giving *church-focused*.

The NT encourages us to focus our lives (and giving) on the church, not just on pet projects but on its basic needs, prioritizing its operating fund and then giving above and beyond to other church needs or outside organizations as we're able.

5. Make your giving *sacrificial*.

We want to be generous in the amount we give. A good general rule is that our giving approaches generosity when it feels like it stretches us.

6. Make sure your giving is *joyful*.

Israel was required by law, no matter how wealthy or poor, to tithe a sizable percentage of their income (often 30 percent!).¹⁶ In the NT, we're to give not as a duty, but a delight, thinking of all our money as belonging to God, which we steward.

To help make things easier, we have multiple ways for you to give and multiple forms of giving we can accept. In all, biblical generosity is the response of a heart so astonished by the lavish gift of the gospel that it gives lavishly to advance the work of the gospel.

Your faithful giving changes lives and communities not only locally but around the world. That's why, having freely received the greatest gift in the world—the love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ—we seek to extend the witness of the life-saving message of the gospel ourselves as generous investors.

G O



GO

FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Main Point: We go, working to declare and demonstrate the gospel in our homes, jobs, and lives.

Your dinner table might be the tool the Lord uses to bring the next Billy Graham to faith.

That may sound intimidating to you. You may not feel equipped. But the point isn't for you to feel pressure, it's to invite you to see potential. That's because the Lord uses our everyday experiences to bring everlasting life to others. We call that living on mission, and it's the calling of every Christian.

WHY IS LIVING ON MISSION IMPORTANT?

To understand this better, let's connect the dots with everything else we've been talking about. Remember, the church is designed by God to be the training ground that equips our minds, activates our hearts, and cultivates our consciences *so that* we are able to go out into the world, bearing witness to the truth of the gospel. But here's what we need to keep in mind.

1. The Plan of God.

Our daily lives are a part of God's master plan, which

is to glorify himself by redeeming sinful humans and restoring his corrupted creation in order to unite all things in heaven and earth under the lordship of Christ in an everlasting kingdom. At this moment, Father, Son, and Spirit are making that end goal a reality—and the local church is the epicenter of that plan.

2. The Rule of Jesus.

The church is the force leading the charge of gospel advance precisely because Jesus has authorized us to speak on his behalf and empowered us to do so. Remember, directly before Jesus says “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), he bases that on the reality that he possesses “all authority on heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18). He is seated at the right hand of God as the heir of all things. And with his royal authority Jesus sends the church into the world and sends the Spirit to fit us for service.

3. The Work of the Spirit.

Sent by Jesus, the Holy Spirit imparts gifts of service to the church to form us into the image of Jesus and unite us in mission. On top of that, he works in and through the proclamation of the gospel to awaken faith within us at the start of our Christian lives, indwells us, and then continues to use gospel proclamation, gospel presence, and gospel practices to nourish and sustain our faith throughout our lives so we’re fit to engage in the mission Jesus has given to the church and to engage the world with the gospel.

4. The Mission of the Church.

Equipped by the Spirit and sent by the Son, the mission of the church is to glorify God by bearing

witness to the gospel—declaring the gospel in evangelism to form Christians, developing mature disciples in light of the gospel to reform Christians, and demonstrating the power of the gospel to transform the culture. That’s why the Central Wheel exists. Each component part of it is designed to be one of the key ingredients God uses within the life of the local church to extend his presence and enlist us in this mission.

But this all builds to an important point: for most of us, our primary mission field isn’t found in remote villages oceans away but rather in the rhythms of our daily lives. One of the key ways we’re to engage the world with the gospel is within our families, with our lives, and in our homes and workplaces. We’re to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. And that missionary call begins at our front door.

WHAT WAYS CAN I LIVE ON MISSION?

A faithful Christian walks out his front door and sees the entire world as a mission field. But if we’re to be effective front-door missionaries, we should think strategically about how to best be a faithful presence in the world.¹⁷ To get us started, here are a few steps we can take:

1. Commit to gospel formation.

To be a faithful presence of Christ in the world, we need to be *formed* more into the image of Christ in the life of the local church. That’s why the Central Wheel invites us first into formative spaces and then sends us out on mission. That’s not to say we shouldn’t share the gospel before we’re fully trained in systematic theology. But it is to say that gospel mission flourishes best when we’re vigilant in our pursuit of growth and

godliness together in the life of the local church, not when we're vigilantes, disconnected from community and coordinated effort.

2. Live a distinctly Christian life.

Part of being a faithful presence is demonstrating the culture of the gospel in the way we relate to one another in the church and to those in the outside world. That means pursuing growth in virtue is part of growing in the grace of the gospel. Christians above all people should be known for their love, patience, and kindness. If our friends and coworkers are shocked to learn we're Christian, something isn't right.

3. Live strategically for God.

In our vocations, regardless of what they are, we should work as Christians striving to be known for faithfulness and excellence. If you're starting out in your career, consider what fields you could train to work in that have the highest potential for a Christian's faithful presence to have a transforming impact on cultural change and gospel witness.

4. Look for opportunities.

Whether at a baseball field or a board meeting, if we're in Christ we can walk through life knowing that wherever we are, God has sent us there. With that in mind, pray for opportunities to model the beauty of the gospel and share the message of the gospel. Additionally, have a bias toward action. When in doubt, err on the side of inviting someone to coffee, offering hospitality, showing compassion, or whatever else. As those who have been forgiven, we've been given the peace and confidence that comes with

knowing Christ and his kingdom which means we have nothing to lose.

HOW DO I GET STARTED LIVING ON MISSION?

There are many different ways we can engage the world around us. Here are a few ideas:¹⁸

1. Pursue training.

Often, people are scared to take a first step toward living on mission because they fear rejection or don't know how to share their faith when the moment comes. Our church has multiple outlets to train you.

2. Create margin in your schedule.

It's hard to live on mission when you're on a hamster wheel of never-ending activity. Take time periodically to ask whether your life has enough margin. This is both for the sake of preserving unhurried time for personal devotion and for space to engage with others, with intention, seeing others as opportunities rather than interruptions.

3. Engage where people gather.

As Christians, it's easy to close ourselves off from non-Christians and surround ourselves almost exclusively with people just like us. At the same time, there are all sorts of regular gatherings in our neighborhoods and communities. Find where people are and spend time in those spaces.

4. Do what you love with others.

You are created in the image of God with unique interests, loves, skills, and passions. Leverage them

for the sake of the gospel. When we do things with excellence and beauty, we model (in a small way) the beauty of God. Why would we not invite others into those spaces where we are arguably living most distinctly?

5. Ask good questions.

Living on mission doesn't mean shoehorning Jesus into every conversation. Genuinely show you care and are interested in other people. In a world that is radically-oriented around the self, curiosity is countercultural in its own way.

6. Listen.

Honor the people around you not just with your faithful *presence* but by being actively *present* in conversation, listening to what they say to come to know them for who they are. Take every opportunity you can to be authentic and create inroads for gospel conversations.

7. Share your story.

Part of getting to know other people is getting to know their stories and them getting to know yours. People are also less resistant to hearing what led you to become who you are than they are to hearing (what they feel like is) a sales-pitch on why they should become Christians. Think about how you can talk naturally and compellingly about what the gospel rescued you from and how Jesus shaped you into the person you are.

8. Share the gospel.

Inviting people to your home for dinner or even

to come with you to church is great. But it isn't evangelism. The Spirit works to awaken faith through the active proclamation of the gospel. That means we should work toward opportunities to explain the good news of Jesus and make an appeal to them to repent and place their faith in him.

You and I may never change the world. But Jesus has—and will again.

He's bringing heaven down to renew the earth and bringing a glistening and everlasting new creation (Rev. 21:1–3). Until then, we live on mission in our homes, at our workplaces, with our friends and neighbors by living distinctly Christian lives, striving for faithfulness, excellence, and love. As we do, we are showing in a small way what that world will be like. Along the way, we offer the grace and mercy of the gospel, and the Lord uses our faithful presence to welcome sinners into his saving presence.

GO

JOYFUL AMBASSADORS

*Main Point: We go, working to join the advance
of the gospel to our neighbors
and the nations.*

You are sent.

That's the way we end our weekly worship gatherings. It's a reminder that we gather in worship to remember and rehearse the story of the gospel, and then we scatter on mission to take the gospel forward. We do that because Jesus is calling together a people *through* the power of the gospel *by* the proclamation of his people. That's why every Christian is called to take an active role in missions—advancing the gospel to our neighbors and the nations.

WHY IS MISSIONS IMPORTANT?

Jesus is alive. Jesus is king. And that changes everything. And it's important to remember that when Jesus commissioned his disciples—and us—to engage in missions and go with the gospel it was a signal that the decisive battle in the war against sin and the Serpent of Eden had been won. That means the expansion of the gospel to the ends of the earth is part of the triumphant victory march of the Warrior-King. It marks the onset of the last days, and it reinstates God's plan for humanity to rule on earth with God's own authority. That

means that missions isn't the duty of the spiritual elite but the destiny of all who are spiritually alive. Let's consider why.

1. The war has been won.

On June 6, 1944, a day that became known as D-Day, the Allied forces fought the Battle of Normandy and won. With that victory they established a beachhead on the coast of France, which made certain that Germany could not ultimately prevail in the war. After the Allied victory, all that was left was the gradual liberation of Europe. I'm pointing this out because it was on D-Day that the decisive battle was won that secured the outcome of the war and ushered in the victory. But it wasn't until V-Day that the victory was made complete. That's also what's going on when it comes to the kingdom of God. In the cross and resurrection, Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom, established a beachhead on the earth, and secured the victory that guarantees the future. Missions exists to spread the rule of Christ in the hearts of men and complete Jesus' victory until the day when Jesus returns—to bring the fullness of the kingdom, to stamp out Satan forevermore, and to bring heaven down to renew the earth.¹⁹

2. The church is the embassy of the future.

To stick with our metaphor, if the cross and resurrection are akin to the D-Day victory, the local church is equivalent to the beachhead established by the Allied forces. With his death and resurrection, Jesus planted a people in a place on the earth, designed to expand its foothold across enemy territory over time. That people and that place are the church. Another way to think of the church and our call to

mission is like a foreign embassy. The purpose of the American embassy, say, in France, is to represent the interest of the US in a foreign land. There, when the American ambassador delivers a message to the French government he speaks with the authority of the President of the United States. In the same way, we, having been commissioned by Jesus, carry his word as representatives of another kingdom to the kingdoms of this world. That's why Paul writes, "we are *ambassadors* for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). If we're to function as faithful ambassadors, then part of our job is proactively taking the message and the interests of the kingdom we represent to the foreign kingdoms we inhabit on the earth.²⁰

3. The work is unfinished.

Though D-Day was the decisive victory in World War II, the official end (V-Day) wasn't until the next year, with many battles in between—including the Battle of the Bulge, the deadliest battle for Americans in the entire war effort. In the same way, there's a tension in this age. Though Jesus has defeated death, we still die. Though Jesus is King, evil still remains. Though Jesus is the "savior of the world" (1 John 4:14), not all people receive him. That's why missions exist. Jesus is extending his rule gradually rather than immediately, spiritually rather than physically, persuasively rather than coercively, *through* the power of the gospel *by* the proclamation of his people. As God's ambassadors, we speak on his behalf, and when we proclaim the gospel the Holy Spirit works in those words and wields divine power in the hearts of our hearers. In so doing, we fulfill God's earliest design—a desire

for human beings to exist as God's own under-kings. Like Adam ruling in the Garden on God's behalf, God extends his rule in this age by the work of humans, sharing the words of God.

In this, we can see the beauty and intricacy of God's plan, bringing to end the war begun by human sin, bringing home former rebels who've been returned as royal sons and daughters, and bringing us along to share in the growth of God's kingdom as we go with the gospel to the ends of the world. Missions isn't something Christians do. It's the *reason* the church exists—to savor and to share the beauty and victory of God in the gospel of Jesus for the joy of all peoples.

WHAT AREAS CAN I SERVE ON MISSION?

Sometimes, when people hear the call to engage in mission, they fear it means dangerous journeys to far-away places. And while it can mean that (the gospel *is* to go to every corner of the earth), it doesn't mean you can't be a faithful ambassador in other ways and places. Here are the spaces we've designed to help reach every nation and generation.

1. Sending.

We send short-term and long-term. Every year, we train members to go on short-term trips to places all around the world. In recent years we've taken trips to Mexico, Ireland, England, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Czech Republic, just to name a few. We've designed our trips to be at convenient times, in a variety of places, with detailed training, doing meaningful gospel work. We also work to send missionaries long-term, identifying those the Lord is calling to missions, training them, and deploying them.

2. Serving.

Every day, there are opportunities to engage in ministry across our community through local missions efforts. We tend a garden together to provide food for the needy, have an active prison ministry designed to guide inmates through gospel-focused study pointing them to redemption and rehabilitation. We care for orphans and children in need through multiple ministries—some constructing beds, others donating tangible needs, others helping support families through the adoption and foster care process. We also work to provide meaningful support to those in need—whether home repairs for widows and single moms, relief in response to natural disasters, or benevolence and meals to those in need. No matter one’s age or stage, we’ve designed spaces for all to be involved.

3. Partnering.

On top of the ministries we run as a church, we also support and partner with other area organizations to advance the gospel across our community. These partnerships include pregnancy centers designed to promote life and serve women facing unplanned pregnancies with care, support, and the gospel; vocational ministries designed to provide shelter, job training, and Christian discipleship for at-risk youth; and recreational ministries designed to extend the message of the gospel through the influence of area coaches and athletes.

4. Planting.

No single church has a monopoly on the ministry of the gospel. That’s why we actively pursue a strategy to plant churches in strategic places around the

globe and plant people in strategic contexts. This includes investing in those spaces financially, but also mobilizing our people to go and serve the unique needs in those places, while cultivating a sending culture that would inspire some in our church to uproot and go and be a permanent part of these new churches for the sake of gospel advance.

HOW DO I GET STARTED IN MISSIONS?

God calls us all to be involved in the advance of the gospel. But that takes different forms. Here are some basics to consider:

1. Pray.

On the one hand, make it a priority to pray for the advance of the gospel, the work of individual ministries, and the efforts of our church. On the other hand, pray that God would provide opportunities to engage in meaningful gospel work and conversations.

2. Support.

As a church, we funnel as many of our resources as possible to the active advance of the gospel. We give to support the work of missionaries around the world, seminary training across the US, and gospel efforts across the state. When you are a generous investor into the church's operating budget, you allow us to take the gospel further and faster.

3. Grow.

We have regular classes designed to train us to grow in our skills in sharing the gospel and our abilities to go with the gospel to other nations. As part of our

commitment to be deep disciples, consider pursuing one of these classes.

4. Go.

Carve out space to go with our church somewhere around the world for the sake of the gospel. In addition to being a way to carry the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth, the Lord often uses these trips to awaken a deeper awareness and passion for the gospel.

The glory of the gospel is the news that the victory has been won. The privilege of the gospel is the fact that God has included *our* efforts in the expanse of *his* kingdom. That means the reality of the gospel is that if we don't proclaim the news of the gospel, sinners won't receive the new life of the gospel. That's what Paul stresses: "How then will they call on them in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15). We have been sent. And that's why we go—with the gospel as joyful ambassadors.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX: CHURCH COVENANT

Main Point: All our members covenant before God to gather, grow, give and go.

Having been brought by divine grace to repent of our sins and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and having been baptized as Christians in the name of the Triune God, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, joyfully covenant with one another and with God to be members of this local church as one body in Christ. Therefore:

- We commit to **gather** in God's presence regularly—corporately by prioritizing the church's weekly worship above other worldly pursuits, personally by abiding in Christ through lives of devotion and daily habits of grace. In this we submit our lives, thoughts, and habits of mind and heart to be shaped by the transforming power of the gospel.
- We commit to **grow** our knowledge and love for God and one another—engaging as an authentic family in church community environments and pursuing God as deep disciples in church learning environments. In this, we share each other's joys, bear each other's burdens, hold fast to the hope we profess, and savor the mystery and

beauty of the gospel.

- We commit to **give** regularly to the sacred mission of this church—financially by investing generously in the church’s operating fund and practically by volunteering our time in humble service. In this we meet the expenses of the church, extend the reach of its ministry, provide relief for the poor, and advance through all nations the spread of the gospel.
- We commit to **go** with the gospel to our neighbors and the nations—living as a faithful presence in our homes, community, and workplaces, and establishing a bold and joyful witness to all generations taking the gospel to unreached peoples. In this we honor the Great Commandment and Great Commission of our Lord as we bear witness to the gospel.

In all, we give wholehearted assent to the Christian faith and this church’s core convictions, adhere willingly to its confession of faith, and submit joyfully to the accountability, care, discipline, and oversight of the church body and its leadership. As such, we commit to pray for one another, outdo one another in showing honor, striving to live in felt union with Christ, ever pursuing unity and peace in the body of Christ. Should the Lord ever lead us away from this local body, we commit to resign from membership and unite with haste to a like-minded church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant.

We make each of these commitments by the love of God the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and in service to his kingdom, now and forevermore.

APPENDIX: SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

The aim of the Christian life, according to C. S. Lewis, is to help us so encounter the living God that we become our truest selves, becoming fully human and fully whole in the presence of God.²¹ To that end, this tool is designed to help you pause periodically to step back and reflect. It helps you consider: What has moved the needle in your life or family? Are there things that are nudging you away from Christian flourishing? The most important work we do in this life is the effort we put in to grow in love, virtue, and Christlikeness by the grace of God, through the gospel, and in the community of God's people. Consider working through these questions once a year, like a spiritual check up.



COMMITTED WORSHIPERS

How well am I investing my time?

- Make a list of the ten areas where you have invested the most time this year, including weekends—from most to least time spent.
- Evaluate your list and consider: Is this the best and highest use of your time? Is there anything you need to spend more or less time

doing?

What keeps me from worship?

- Make a list of the most-recurring to least-recurring reasons that explain why you miss church when you do (or when you're unable to focus at church).
- Review your list and consider: What change could you make that would remove some of the friction keeping you from worship either physically or spiritually?



EAGER APPRENTICES

How would I articulate my approach to daily devotion?

- Describe as best you can what you've done over the year to pursue spiritual growth, formation, and health.
- Review your list and consider what worked well, what didn't, and what adjustments you should make.
- **First Step.** If you haven't been consistent or don't really have an approach, consider taking a class on Christian habits for help.

What formative habits am I engaging?

- Make a list of any Christian habits you've adopted this year (e.g., Bible reading, meditation, memory, silence/solitude, sabbath, fasting) and their frequency.
- Analyze your list and consider whether there are any gaps. If so, pick one and try and

incorporate that into a plan for the next year.



AUTHENTIC FAMILY

Who are the people in my life?

- Ask yourself: If you missed 2–3 Sundays in a row, who are the people that would notice your absence and reach out to check in?
- **First step.** Make a point to arrive on time for church and not leave early. Consider joining a group or serving in some way. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

What are my social spheres?

- Sketch the different circles of people you spend time with. Label each on a 1–5 scale on how deeply you're known in each (1 = barely at all, 5 = deeply).
- Is the church one of the places you're known deepest? If not, that may be an indicator that you need to lean in more deeply for your growth and good.



DEEP DISCIPLES

What is discipling me?

- Take a rough inventory of what you consume. Check your phone screen time settings, add to that the rough amount of time you spend on TV, podcasts, etc.
- Take a slice of that time and consider devoting it to reading, study, a class, or something that will grow your knowledge and love for God.

What did I intake this year?

- Write down any Christian books you read, church classes you took, or ways you intentionally sought to grow in the knowledge of God.
- Make a plan for a list of items you want to pursue in the next year to either start, continue, or accelerate growth in this area.
- **First Step.** Stop into the church bookstore to identify trusted books, hand selected by our pastors, that will help you grow.



HUMBLE SERVANTS

What role do I have?

- Make a list of times or places when you've given of your time this year in order to serve others within the church.
- Ask yourself: If you could guarantee your service would make a difference, based on your gifts, what do you think is the most impactful thing you could do?

Where is there a need?

- Make a list of spaces where you've been asked to help at some point and things you've noticed that don't seem to be operating as well as they could be.
- **First step.** Often the Lord reveals our gifts through others (I see how you could help) and through observations (I see how this could be better). When either of those

happen, have a bias toward involvement.



GENEROUS INVESTORS

How have I invested?

- Take a look at everything you possess, what you've earned this year, how you spent, and what you gave.
- Ask yourself soberly: Did you do your best to leverage all you have to maximize the advance of the gospel and lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven?

Where do I need to grow?

- Consider your heart and where you struggle: fear (Will I have enough?), greed (I want more.), or doubt (Will giving really lead to greater treasure in heaven?).
- **First step.** Pray that the Lord would awaken joy in giving, and commit to a dollar or percentage-amount to go to the church's operating budget next year.



FAITHFUL PRESENCE

What are my passions?

- Take stock of your gifts, interests, skills, and experience. Make a list of the places and spaces where excellence comes easily to you.
- Ask yourself whether you have been or how you can utilize these areas to make a difference for the gospel.

What is my mission field?

- Consider where God has put you. Who are

the people in your life with whom you have the most influence or to whom you might have unique access?

- Make a plan, no matter how small, for how you can take an intentional step toward making a difference in the life of someone else with the gospel.



JOYFUL AMBASSADOR

What steps have I taken?

- Make a list of any direct gospel efforts you've taken: inviting people to church, sharing your story, inviting people to trust in Christ.

- **First step.** If you struggle with fear or focus, set a goal and a date by which you will plan to invite one person to church and to share your story with another.

Where can I focus my efforts?

- Start a list of people who don't know Christ and commit to praying for them.
- Pick one person, pray for him/her regularly, commit to sharing the gospel with them, and make a plan to do so by a particular point in time.

APPENDIX: PLANNING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual growth never happens by accident—it requires intention and action. That’s why many Christians down through the ages have adopted what is called a “rule of life”, which is an intentional schedule and set of habits designed to keep God at the center of our lives and hearts.

Similarly, the Central Wheel is made up of the commitments all our members covenant to pursue and practices we believe will help all our members grow. But all our lives look different. After you’ve given thought to your rhythms, needs, and unique circumstances, this tool provides you a way to design a set of plans for the upcoming year to help keep your commitments and expand your capacity to find joy and fullness of life in Christ. Once you do, keep the list nearby, since goals are far more likely to succeed when you are confronted with them on a regular basis.



What will you do to prioritize corporate worship?

This may include things you’ll start doing, things you’ll give up, rhythms you’ll include,

or even things you can do around the house the day before to reduce stress and enhance focus on Sundays.



What steps will you take to pursue God in personal devotion?

This should include daily habits like Bible and prayer, but can also include more occasional or seasonal elements like solitude, fasting, or goals like Bible memory.



What kind of local-church community will you pursue this year?

This can include being a part of a group at church, but if you're in need of support, recovery, counseling, care, mentoring, or accountability, consider this here too and the spaces the church offers to serve you in each.



What will you do to increase your knowledge of God this year?

Is there a class you should plan to take? Book(s) you commit to reading? This can also include a plan to deepen your learning by teaching what you've learned to others, which would simultaneously make it a place of service.



Where will you invest your time and talent in service to the church?

There are hundreds of opportunities to serve each week. You don't need to do all of them. But it's great to have a place where you're uniquely committed. If you're not sure, you

can simply ask the church where help is needed.



How do you plan to grow your financial generosity toward the church?

This could include giving something up, setting up an auto draft, increasing giving by a percentage point or set amount, setting up a personal budget for the first time, even heart work to strive toward greater simplicity in life and joy in giving.



How will you intentionally be a witness for the gospel right where you are?

This could include committing to hospitality efforts, developing strategic workplace relationships, or even pursuing support for areas in which you need to grow in virtue or recovery.



What will you do to take the gospel to non-Christians this year?

This could include a combination of daily reminders, weekly rhythms, quarterly goals, or end-of-year commitments consisting of things like focused prayer, intentional conversations, evangelistic goals, mission trips, etc.

Wherever goals are present, a reminder of grace ought to be nearby. In that case, a final reminder is in order: as important as is the local church and the Christian's active effort toward growth, it's important to remember that (a) this isn't a list of boxes to check to earn favor with God; (b) even our ability

to pursue growth is a gift of grace; and (c) life happens. There may be seasons where you're doing well to show up on Sundays and keep putting one foot in front of the other. You're no less loved and no less in Christ in those seasons. Instead, we strive to embrace these habits of grace and the gift of life in the local church in the ordinary seasons of life to sink gospel roots deep into our minds and hearts to sustain us through extraordinary seasons. You are loved and have nothing to prove. So keep pressing on.

Because you are sent.

PLANNING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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5. Scott Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 35–36.
6. For more on the isolating effects of technology, see Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). For more on loneliness, note the recent Surgeon General’s report that claimed loneliness is more dangerous to health than smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Office of the Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

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8. Some of this material was adapted from Daniel Patterson, *Field Guide to Christian Ethics: How Do I Live?* (Oklahoma City: Stand for Life, 2025), forthcoming.
9. This statement is adapted from a line attributed to Stoic philosopher Marcus Auerelius: “The happiness of your life is determined by the quality of your thoughts,” though it is translated as such in only one English translation: Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, trans. Jeremy Collier (London: Walter Scott, 1887) III.9.
10. For more, see Russell Moore, “Theology Bleeds: Why Theological Vision Matters for the Great Commission, and Vice-Versa,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 103–20.
11. Much of this strategy is drawn or adapted from English, *Deep Discipleship*.
12. Nathan W. Harris, *A Short Guide to Gospel Generosity: Giving as Act of Grace* (Nashville: B&H, 2024), 7.
13. This section is adapted in part from, *The Covenant Wheel: An Explanation of Our Convictions, Values, and Rhythms* (Atlanta: Christ Covenant, 2023), 24–28.
14. For a helpful overview of how rewards function in Scripture, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 233–44.
15. For more on giving as wartime spending, see Tony Reinke, *Ask Pastor John: 750 Bible Answers to Life’s Most Important Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 95–121.
16. People often wrongly think of the OT tithe as 10%. While a tithe is 10% (tithe means a tenth), what often gets overlooked is that Israel was required to give *three* tithes: (1) 10% of all they had went each year to the Levitical tithe (Num 18:20–24); (2) another 10% went to the festival tithe (Deut 12:17–19; 14:22–27); and (3) a third 10% went once every three years to the charity tithe (Deut. 14:28–29; 26:10–16). Harris, *A Short Guide to Generosity*, 59–66.
17. The language of “faithful presence” is drawn from, James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
18. This list is adapted from, “10 Practical Tips for Living on Mission in Your Community, North American Mission Board, accessed at www.namb.net/send-network/resource/10-practical-tips-for-living-on-mission-in-your-community-1/.

ENDNOTES

19. One of the first to make this D-Day/V-Day connection was Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 146.
20. Some of this section is adapted from Daniel Patterson, *Field Guide to Christian Doctrine: What is the Christian Faith?* (Oklahoma City: Stand for Life, 2025), forthcoming.
21. Joe Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life: Becoming Truly Human in the Presence of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 22.

AN INVITATION TO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE JESUS OFFERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH.

The local church is God's prescription for your growth. That said, too many Christians see local-church membership as an optional add-on for the super-committed. At the same time, too many churches fail to show Christians exactly how the local church is custom-designed by God to deepen their faith, expand their capacity for joy, and lead them to flourish. That's what *The Central Wheel* is designed to do.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Patterson serves as Executive Pastor of Central Church in College Station, Texas, where one of his key roles is directing doctrinal training efforts across the church. He has a passion for church-based theological education and has led hundreds of Christians through programs designed to train in Bible, doctrine, and Christian formation. Prior to this pastoral role, he served as Acting President, Executive Vice President, and Chief of Staff across eight years at the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. He holds a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he served as Assistant Editor of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* and Associate Director of Research Doctoral Studies. A native of the Nashville, Tennessee area, he has been married to his wife Molly since 2010 and has two daughters and one son.

