

Our Priorities: The Values that Shape our Church

Visit different churches and you'll invariably find different emphases. This isn't wrong—we all have different parts to play in the body of Christ. However, Christ didn't leave his church without instructions. Here are two of the main ones:

The Great Commandment (Matt 22:35-40): *"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"*

The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20): *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"*

These instructions suggest three key dimensions of the church's life: a *vertical* dimension (loving and worshipping God), an *internal* dimension (loving and nurturing each other as followers of Christ), and an *external* dimension (bringing the gospel to those who don't know Christ).

While all true churches seek to be faithful to these different aspects of Christ's commands, no two churches will pursue them in exactly the same way. At CCK, we have identified a few main priorities to help us be faithful to Christ's call. These priorities shape our life together and give rise to the kinds of activities we pursue individually and as a church. Understanding these values will give you a good sense of the kind of church we're seeking to build, by God's grace, at CCK.

I. Applying the Gospel

Although we say this often, "applying the gospel" is no mere slogan. It's a thumbnail summary of what it means to "observe all that [Jesus] commanded," in light of his person, teaching, and work.

A. This seeks to honor Jesus' claims that all of Scripture points in some way to him (Luke 24:44; John 5:39).

B. This follows the NT's practice of rooting the Christian life, in all its dimensions, in the person and work of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 6:18-20; 2 Cor 8: 7, 9; Gal 2:14; Phil 2:5-11; Eph 4:32; 5:25-33; Col 3:12-13; Heb 12:1-6; 1 Pet 2:13-25, et al.).

Phil 1:27: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel."

C. We desire CCK to be a community that views all of the Christian life—our beliefs, values, and obedience—through the lens of Christ's person and work. This involves making real connections

between the gospel and the thinking and behavior that make up our daily lives. Such connections help ensure that our lives are biblically informed, grace motivated, and Christ exalting.

II. Expository Preaching

This priority speaks of a *value*, an *activity*, and an *effect*:

A. God has ordained that his word be the saving and sanctifying instrument of his people.

Rom 10:14, 17: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

John 17:17: "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth."

B. God has ordained preaching as the unique means by which his word is brought effectively to his church.

- Throughout salvation-history, God has chosen to transmit his word to his people through commissioned servants.

" . . . God's standard way of securing and maintaining His person-to-person communication with us His human creatures is through the agency of persons whom He sends to us as His messengers . . . Such were the prophets and apostles, and such supremely was Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son . . . That is the succession in which preachers today are called to stand."
J.I. Packer

- Scripture testifies to the necessity of preaching in both pattern and precept.

Matt. 10: 6-7	Acts 10:42
2 Cor. 2:16-17	1 Tim. 4:13
Mark 3:14	Acts 19:8-10
Mark 13:10	Acts 20:7
Phil. 1:12-18	2 Tim. 4:2-5
Luke 24:45-49	Rom. 10:14-17
1 Thess. 2:13	Titus 1:3, 9
Acts 2:42	1 Cor. 1:17-24
Acts 5:42	1 Cor 9:16
Acts 6:2-4	

- Everywhere we see the church in the NT, we see the regular teaching and preaching of God's word.

C. Expository preaching, that is, preaching that explains and applies Scripture in its biblical context, enables God's word to shape our lives individually and as a church.

2 Tim 3:16-4:2: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

III. Every Member Serving

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the primary reasons God saves us is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve Him with joy.

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

A. Servanthood is modeled by Jesus' example.

Phil 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

B. Servanthood is mandated by Jesus' call.

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

C. Service in the church is empowered by the Spirit of God.

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

D. Equipping members for service is the call of pastors.

Eph 4:11-13: "And he gave 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, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

IV. Intentional Relationships

Just as the Christian life isn't to be passive, neither is it to be *isolated*. Because the Holy Spirit at conversion joins us to Christ's body, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don't

simply hold the same beliefs or attend the same service or share the same interests—we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. Biblically speaking, our fellowship is not merely “socializing”—it is sharing together our common life in Christ.

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

Because of the importance of relationships in the body of Christ (and our sinful tendencies to be independent, casual, or selfish in relating to others!), we need to be intentional in pursuing them. Here are two key aspects of relationships that are genuinely biblical:

A. Discipleship

- This word has many connotations, but by it we mean simply *people helping each other understand and apply God’s word to their lives to become more like Christ*.
- In the Great Commission of Matt 28:18-20, the mandate of “making disciples” (v. 19a) is characterized by “baptizing” (i.e., making converts through evangelism—v. 19b) and “teaching [disciples] to observe all that [Jesus] commanded” (v. 20).
- Within the church, the most fundamental way we do this is through relationships, fueled by the word of God, that encourage us, exhort us, and strengthen us in our walk with Christ.

Eph 4:15-16: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Col 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

B. Care

- As “members one of another” (Rom 12:5), we have a responsibility to care for one another. The Bible describes our fellowship in concrete terms as actions we do with or for “one another.” Here is just a sampling:
 1. Love one another with brother affection (Rom 12:10a)
 2. Outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10b)
 3. Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
 4. Comfort one another (2 Cor 13:11)
 5. Serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
 6. Bear with one another (Eph 4:2)

7. Forgive one another (Eph 4:32)
8. Worship God together (Eph 5:18-20)
9. Pray for one another (Eph 6:18)
10. Carry one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)
11. Encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11a)
12. Build one another up (1 Thess 5:11b)
13. Confess our sins to one another (Jas. 5:16)

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

- In short, we *need* each other, and so we must give ourselves to purposeful involvement in each others' lives, for the strength of the body, the witness of the gospel, and the glory of God.

Heb 10:24-25: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

John 13:35: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

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

V. Faithfully evangelistic

We desire to cultivate a church culture in which every member understands and embraces the biblical responsibility and privilege of sharing the gospel with others.

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

1 Peter 3:15-16: "but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect . . ."

A. The content of our evangelism: the gospel.

- We aren't merely calling others to live a moral life, or asking them simply to "believe in God" or "go to church," much less trying to convince them that Christians are "nice people." Salvation comes only through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf.

- We want to equip every member to verbally share the good news of the gospel with others.

B. The context of our evangelism.

1. Personal

We encourage each of our members to bear witness to Jesus Christ and share the gospel (a) in the network of relationships he provides for us, and (b) in contexts where we have particular opportunity or for which we have a particular burden.

2. Corporate

The New Testament presents unity in the church body as a primary witness to the supernatural power of the gospel. Various CCK contexts provide opportunities to introduce people to what is perhaps the most powerful witness to the truth of the gospel: the community of our local church.

VI. Praying Together

We desire the life and ministry of our church—individually and corporately—to be dependent upon and fueled by prayer.

A. Prayer is at the heart of our *existence*.

- Prayer lies at the very heart of God’s eternal plan to have a people for himself—a people who know him and who are known by him.
- Therefore, prayer is not simply something Christians do; it’s an expression of who we are: children of a heavenly Father who live delighting in and depending upon him.

Matt 6:5-7: “And when you pray . . . but when you pray . . . and when you pray . . .”

Matt 6:9: “Pray, then, like this: “Our Father in heaven . . .””

1 Thess 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.”

B. Prayer is at the heart of our *ministry*.

Acts 2:42 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Eph 3:14-19: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of

God.”

Col 4:2: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

C. Prayer is at the heart of our mission.

Matt 9:37-38: “Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Col 4:3-4: “At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison -that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

VII. Experiencing God’s Presence

A vibrant experience of the Holy Spirit is not meant to be the domain of a narrow brand of Christian; the Spirit is God’s empowering presence for the entirety of the life of the Christian and the church.

John 14:16-18: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

“. . . the Spirit’s major role in Paul’s view of things lies with his being *the absolutely essential constituent of the whole of Christian life*, from beginning to end. The Spirit thus empowers ethical life in all of its dimensions— personal, corporate, and in the world. Believers in Christ, who for Paul are “Spirit people” first and foremost, are variously described as living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit. . . . the Spirit conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God. The Spirit is therefore the empowering presence of God for living the life of God in the present.” Gordon Fee

A. The Bible doesn’t just tell us things to believe about the Spirit—it exhorts us to a posture of heart concerning the Spirit’s work.

1 Cor. 14:1 “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...”

James 4:6-8: “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

B. This posture has both personal and corporate implications: we experience the Spirit’s empowering work as we passionately seek God and dependently serve God.

1. Pursue God's active presence personally.

- Approach God daily with an attitude of dependence, gratefulness, and hunger.
- Recognize your need to be filled with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

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

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

- Serve others diligently.

1 Peter 4:10: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

- *The Spirit's empowering work aims at our personal sanctification, mutual edification, and evangelistic witness.* To pursue godliness, serve others, and share Christ with non-believers is to pursue the Spirit's work in our lives.

2. Expect to experience God's presence when we gather.

- While individual believers have the privilege of experiencing God's presence, this is especially true of the gathered church. The glorious reality of new covenant worship is worship *in the presence of God*.

Heb 12:22-24: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

When we gather, we seek to experience his presence by:

- Attending to God as he addresses us through his word
- Responding to him in grateful adoration
- Seeking to love, serve, and encourage each other with our gifts

VIII. Partnering in the Broader Mission

While we have a specific mission as a church, we are also part of the Sovereign Grace family of churches. Sovereign Grace is a union of over 60 churches in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, and the U.K. We also have partnerships with churches in 15 other countries.

As churches, we partner together and with Sovereign Grace Ministries in a number of ways:

- Church planting locally and internationally
- Pastoral training via the Sovereign Grace Pastors College
- Short-term missions
- Music materials for the local church
- Conferences

We are grateful for the privilege we have to participate in a broader mission through Sovereign Grace. We look forward to exploring more ways in which we can directly contribute to the Great Commission as a local church.

