



Cross of Grace Church

Membership Class

Session 1 – Membership: Why the local church? (2-6)

Session 2 – Doctrine: What do we believe? (7-12)

Session 3—Values and Mission: Where are we going? (13-20)

Session 1: Membership—Why the Local Church?

1. What can I expect in the class and process?

This class will introduce you to Cross of Grace Church as you explore involvement with the church. You'll learn more about what membership is and why we love the local church (session 1), about what we believe (session 2), and about our mission and values (session 3). Our hope is ultimately to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus as we explore his word together.

We also aim give you the information you need to decide if Cross of Grace should be you church home, and if so, to prepare you to be a thriving member of the church. There is no obligation to join after the class—we're simply grateful you're taking the time to prayerfully consider it.

The class material helps explain and explore the core membership documents all members agree to at Cross of Grace:

- Our Membership Covenant
- Our Statement of Faith
- Our Statement on Mission & Values

After the class if you have more questions, or desire to join the church, we'll coordinate a one on one meeting with you and one of our pastors or leaders. Moving forward into membership will involve agreement with the core membership documents. Then we'll formally recognize and welcome our new members during a special time on Sunday morning.

2. What is the church?

Here are some common reasons people give for not becoming part of a church today:

- “Church is just for ‘those people’ (i.e. conservative, or wealthy, or poor, or unscientific, or social justice crusaders, etc.) and I don't feel like I belong”
- “I was hurt by a church leader. I had a bad experience”
- “Church is just a bunch of hypocrites who say one thing and do another”
- “Church is just a crutch I don't need in my life”
- “Church is too intrusive and they always ask for your time and money”

At the core of many of these attitudes is the idea that church is not essential. At best it's helpful (but not required), and at worst it seems like sometimes it even hurts people. But the Bible calls us to go back and see what God himself says about the church.

The Apostle Peter describes the church this way: “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the

excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:4-10 ESV)

The apostle Peter says that those who have been saved by Jesus are being built together by Jesus. We're not meant to live our Christian lives alone. Some believe that you don't really need other believers in order to follow Jesus. But for the Apostle Peter, coming to Jesus meant coming into fellowship with other believers. Rather than being optional, the church is an essential part of following Jesus.

The Church Was God's Idea

In the beginning God created humanity to be in perfect relationship with him, and in perfect relationship with one another, living under his good rule. But humanity rejected God and chose sin instead (Gen 1-3), breaking this relationship with God and one another. So God launched a plan to restore and redeem a people for his own possession. The Old Testament contains the long story of God and his people—a people who were called by God back into relationship with God and formed into relationship with each other. This people and plan were glimpsed and foreshadowed in the Old Testament people of Israel but find full expression in the New Testament church (Gen 12, Is 49:6).

The pictures used to describe the church help us see how closely God relates to it:

- the bride of Christ, with Christ as the husband (Eph 5)
- the body of Christ, with Christ as the head (Col 1:18)
- a building, with Christ as the Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:1-10)
- a flock, with Christ as its Shepherd (1 Peter 5)

Each picture emphasizes that far from an optional accessory, the church is beloved by God and that he Himself guides it, sustains it, and leads it.

The Church Has a Mission

After humanity's fall God launched a plan to save and to restore. From the very beginning of God's people, God told Abraham that through him "all the nations" would be blessed (Gen 22:18). God always had in mind a unique purpose for this people: that through them he would accomplish his redemptive plan.

Today the church receives this commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28, Acts 1-2). God intends to use the church proclaim the gospel of Jesus to make disciples, and to model a community of disciples shaped by this gospel (1 Peter 2, Eph 2). This means that the church is not optional, but essential to God's plan in the world today.

Each Person Matters to the Church

God has seen fit to accomplish this mission and build this body as variously gifted people come together, working as part of a body, to accomplish his will. In 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul emphasizes says "For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body." (1 Cor 12:14-15).

Additionally, the church is not simply for one class of people, one ethnicity, or one “type” of person. Instead, rather than losing your identity and what makes you unique God gives you a new identity in Christ and fits individual gifts and talents and personalities into the body as a whole.

3. What Is Membership?

When we speak of “membership” we’re not speaking of a country club, gym or discount warehouse, though that’s the image that first comes to mind in our culture. Instead we mean “membership” in the sense of Romans 12:4-5: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:4-5 ESV).

Just as the body requires many members to work, and requires them all to work together, the church requires each “member” to work, and to work with the other “members.” While every church member will be very different they are all important to the function of the body as a whole. Formal membership is a practical way we express this Scriptural principle.

When we speak of “membership” today some Christians wonder why a formal membership is even necessary. Is this Scriptural? We believe it is and here are a few reasons we treasure formal membership at Cross of Grace:

Membership Matters Because Disciples Don’t Follow Jesus Alone

Disciples are not called to follow Jesus alone, but in specific and real community with a specific and real local group of believers. This was the pattern of Jesus’ disciples throughout the gospels and in the early church. Overwhelmingly, when the New Testament references “the church” it’s speaking of a specific local church of specific people in a specific place. Christians participate in all that the church is in a universal sense by participating in a specific local church with real disciples around them.

Membership Expresses the Scriptural Picture of Life Together

The pictures used to describe the church connote a close relationship of interdependence:

- living stones built together (1 Peter 2)
- one body working together (Eph 2)
- members of a family functioning in a household (1 Cor 12)

This kind of life is expressed as believers come together in close fellowship, worshipping together, confessing sin to one another, serving one another, encouraging one another to holiness (Acts 2, James 5:16, 1 Peter 4:9, 1 Thess 5:11, Mark 10:42-25). Church membership is a key way this relationship is defined and expressed.

But do we see the early church actually doing this? There’s strong evidence that disciples in New Testament churches had a clear understanding of who was part of that church body and who was not. This was necessary for them to hold one another accountable, and necessary so that local church leaders knew who they would give an account for (1

Cor 5, Heb 13:17). While these biblical principles can be expressed in various practical ways across cultures and centuries, we are seeking to follow what we see in the early church through a formal recognition of who is inside and outside the body's formal "church membership."

Membership Provides a Process for Commitment and Involvement

In light of all that Scripture says about disciples and their relationship to the local church, Christians must prayerfully and soberly consider where God is calling them. We would encourage people to consider the theology and mission of the church in light of Scripture and their individual call from the Lord. We strive to have Cross of Grace members united around our mission, our statement of faith, and our core values.

But what if there is a difference? While complete agreement on secondary issues of theology is not required for membership be aware that the elders will teach and defend our statement of faith through regular preaching and teaching. Additionally, while complete agreement on the application of our mission and key structures of our church is not required, our elders will lead the church toward the mission of making disciples according to these convictions. We do require new members to have clear agreement on primary doctrinal issues, especially the basic gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-15), expressed in our statement of faith.

Epilogue: Our Story

A word about our church history: This section of our material can't be shared without sharing how God began our church. In the late 1970s God began to work in a powerful way through the hearts of people in El Paso. God was sovereignly and powerfully saving people and pouring out his Spirit, and these believers came together with a passion to build with one another for the glory of God. God called people to himself, but called them together and our church was born.

Our building today was literally built by many of the members of the church, using their nights and weekends, and across the beams of the church are written Scriptures. This illustrates well how membership is meant to function—that each part of the church is necessary and needed and built together for the purpose of God.

Through the years the church encountered difficult seasons but these were weathered because of a commitment to God and to one another, even when things were not easy. And slowly but surely God built his people. In recent years we've seen God work in unique and surprising ways but through the same means: his people committed to God and to one another. And now, as we look ahead to future years we want to hold to these same things, and to one another.

Session 2: Doctrine –What Do We Believe?

At Cross of Grace we believe theology and doctrine matter because what we believe about God, ourselves, the church, and the world around us, shapes everything we do. “Theology” just means the study of God, and “doctrine” means the collected body of the Bible’s teaching on a specific topic. We want to value our doctrine and our theology, teach them clearly, and apply them to life. For our full statement of beliefs reference our Statement of Faith, which gives a much more detailed overview of all we believe. This section contains specific doctrines or beliefs we want you to be aware of because they are distinctive beliefs of our church.

We must think carefully about doctrine and theology because if we get these things wrong, our whole lives could be wrong: *Is God real? Does he care about sin? How do I make progress as a Christian? Should I let the Bible tell me how to live my life?* All these questions are utterly crucial. As theologian J.I. Packer has said, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us, because it’s the foundation for everything else we think and do.

In our theology we want to strive for a “humble orthodoxy.” We want to firmly hold to truth that we see in Scripture (orthodoxy) and to speak and clearly and boldly where Scripture speaks clearly and boldly. However, we know that we are still fallible human beings and therefore must hold our beliefs with humility. In the words of the Apostle Peter we are to “always be ready to give a defense” of our faith, but “do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

In each section we have a commonly use Christian theological category (i.e. “Reformed” or “Continuationist”) as the subtitle. We do this to help those familiar with the categories understand our general orientation. However, it’s possible in every case to find extremes or abuses in those holding that believe. This is why we try in each section to explain how we view and apply each category, but we would love to answer your questions in person as well.

1) Grounded in the Word—Evangelical

“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.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

We believe that God’s Word is utterly unique as a book because it was “breathed out” by God. This means it is uniquely inspired, clear, authoritative, and infallible.

The means Bible alone is the final authority of our life and faith as Christians, from our personal lives to our church teaching. Regardless of our personal preference, current cultural belief, or even doctrinal system, we are committed to allowing Christ through his Word to govern our church and our lives. We also hold no human system of teaching or doctrine, or any teaching of even a church leader, on the same level as the Bible.

2) Centered on the Person and Work of Jesus—Gospel-Centered

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-5 ESV)

Paul the Apostle clearly tells us what the church must hold out as of “first importance” in its doctrine and its life: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Paul calls us to be centered on the gospel of Jesus. There are so many things a church or Christian can be “centered” on—politics or worship styles or secondary doctrines—but we commit to hold out on the gospel as of preeminent importance over all else.

Here are a few implications of being centered on the person and work of Jesus:

We see the gospel as the central issue of all Scripture

The Bible tells one story from Genesis to Revelation: the story of the gospel. Jesus himself said in John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” Jesus was saying that the whole of Scripture was pointing to him.

We cling to the gospel as the only hope for salvation

The Bible is clear that we are each separated from God by our sins (Romans 3). But Jesus came as our substitute to suffer in our place: “For God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). It is only through trusting in Jesus and what he’s done and turning from our sins we can be saved (Mark 1:14-15).

We apply the gospel to our lives to grow in our faith

We also believe that being “gospel-centered” means that the gospel is not just the ABCs of Christian life, but the whole alphabet of Christian life. Paul says we “stand” in this gospel and elsewhere calls it powerful to work and change us (Romans 1). This gospel changes us as we see the implications of Jesus’ work for our lives and as our love for Christ pushes out a love for sin. This means we want to ask often “How does the good news of Jesus change this issue in front of me? How does it call me away from sin? How does it call me toward godliness?” For example in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul is exhorting the believers be sexually pure and says “you were bought at a price” (a reminder of the gospel) “therefore honor God with your bodies” (the implication of the gospel to be lived out).

We believe the gospel is always better news

This is why we believe that the gospel is not meant to be heard and responded to once but regularly revisited, applied, and proclaimed. At our church we often say “The gospel

is always better news than you think.” This reminds us that as we read Scripture we understand more and more of the depths of what God has done, we grow to treasure our salvation more and more, and we grow in applying its truth to our life. We never stop pursuing a better and deeper understanding of the truths of the gospel and how they should be lived out.

3) Rejoicing in God’s Glory & Sovereignty—Reformed

All Christians would confess that salvation is only possible because of what God has done. In addition to this we are committed to emphasizing God’s unique saving work in calling us and causing our hearts to respond, as well as the end of salvation being the glory of God.

On this issue we must at the outset acknowledge that there is an element of mystery involved in how salvation works. It seems clear in Scripture that human beings make real choices and that they are responsible for these choices (Exodus 8:32, Joshua 24:15, Matt 11:28, Rev 22:17) but it is also clear that God is sovereign over all things in the universe, including the choices of human beings (Exodus 7:3, Acts 13:48, Eph 1:11, 2 Tim 1:9). There are Scriptures clearly spelling out our responsibility to exercise faith in Christ and be saved (Acts 2:37-38), just as there are Scriptures clearly saying even our “faith” is a gift (Eph 2:8-9). We must be committed to submitting ourselves to God’s word on this matter, and be comfortable affirming what Scripture affirms, even if mystery still exists. This is the case with doctrines like the Trinity (each person fully God, and yet fully distinct) and the nature of Christ (fully God and fully man).

Unfortunately at times this doctrine of God’s sovereignty and the doctrine of election is used wrongly, in thinking that our choices and actions don’t matter, or to excuse responsibility. This doctrine should be taught and applied the way Scripture teaches it, but we should refrain from going beyond the Bible’s own teaching. Instead we must learn to be comfortable with some mystery where God has chosen not to reveal everything to us, while we joyfully affirm what is clear.

We affirm that God chose us in him

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in according with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Eph 1:4-6 (NIV) This action by God in eternity past is sometimes called “election.”

This choosing led to God calling us and drawing us to himself: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). Indeed, we read that “those he predestined he also called and those he called he also justified” (Rom 8:30). When we had nothing to attract God to us, he chose us. When we could not come to him, indeed when we *would not* come to him in our sin (Romans 3), he drew us to himself.

We affirm that God caused us to be born again

Ephesians 2 puts our condition on display: “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” The condition of humanity is not wounded, but spiritually dead. Romans 1 shows us that as a result of sin humanity “became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21) and even our ability to think rightly and comprehend the things of God rightly was darkened and twisted by sin.

But there is good news: “When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive with Christ” (Col 2:13). God did what we could not do by awakening our hearts to hear and respond to the gospel. As theologian R.C. Sproul once quipped, rather than simply throwing us a life preserver, God found us on the bottom of the ocean and brought us back to life.

We affirm that this doctrine is a comfort and help to the church

This doctrine causes us to worship God. It means that from first to last, salvation is all of God. Ultimately only God can be credited with our salvation on every level. “In love he predestined us...to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph 1:3-6).

This doctrine is of immeasurable comfort in times of difficulty or uncertainty, reminding us: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified....If God is for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:28-32). Paul encourages us that all things will work together for the good of God’s children but then grounds encouragement in the truth of election. From first to last our salvation is a miracle of God and therefore we should be encouraged in light of this that we can trust him with the uncertainties of our lives.

We affirm that this doctrine is an encouragement to sharing the gospel

Far from making evangelism unnecessary this doctrine actually encourages us to share the gospel often, knowing that God can save even the hardest heart. For example, God encourages Paul to keep preaching the gospel in the face of opposition “for I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:9-10). When we consider that the hardest hearts can be made alive by God we are encouraged to persevere in evangelism, knowing God can bring them to life. It’s also important to note that while this doctrine is taught in Scripture clearly it does not negate the fact that the church is still charged with the Great Commission work of making disciples (Matthew 28). God in his providence often works through the natural means of one person sharing the gospel with another to accomplish his saving work.

4) Intentional in Marks of Christian Community—Baptistic

At Cross of Grace Church we practice the sacraments of baptism as well as the Lord's Supper. We believe that both are used intentionally to mark the Christian community and are only for believers in Christ.

We believe baptism is an outward sign of an inward work

In Acts those who respond to the gospel are called to be baptized as a symbol of their repentance (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:12). Romans 6:4 says that the act of water baptism is a picture of what has happened in our souls: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life." Baptism does not save anyone, rather it's an outward proclamation of what the person has already experienced in their heart.

If you have not been baptized as a believing adult we want to encourage you to be baptized as a symbol of what God has done in your heart. We baptize when the church gathers to give those being baptized an opportunity to publicly profess faith in Christ, so that the church may be encouraged at God's work, and so that unbelievers may see this picture of the gospel.

We believe the Lord's supper is a time of grace-filled remembrance

Jesus gave us the symbol of the Lord's supper—his body broken and his blood shed—and said "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25). When we take this meal we do so in the gathered church, knowing that there is a unique grace from God present as we follow his commands. We invite any Christian to participate in this with us but ask that unbelievers refrain from participating, according to Scriptures command (1 Cor 11:29).

5) Empowered by the Spirit—Continuationist

Jesus said that it would be better for him to go be with God, because when he left he would send "the Helper" (John 16:7), the promised Holy Spirit (John 14:15-24). We need this power to live the Christian life, to build the church, and to accomplish our mission.

We believe the Spirit gives us power for the Christian life

In regeneration God sends the Spirit to cause us to be born again (John 3:3-8), a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27). In Galatians Paul encourages the believers to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16) While the Spirit dwells in us to sanctify we're called to walk according to this new nature.

We believe the Spirit gives us power for his mission

Jesus says he would send the Spirit to empower the church to do what God had called them to (Acts 1:8), and indeed after Jesus left the Holy Spirit came to empower the church and many are saved (Acts 2). In fact when the gathered church prays for boldness to share the gospel the Spirit comes in power to empower them for the work (Acts 4).

We believe the Spirit gives specific spiritual gifts

1 Peter 4:10-11 encourages us: “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 other that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” God has given many and varied gifts to the church and this include seemingly “unspectacular” gifts like administration and service (Rom 12:7) and the more “spectacular” gifts like tongues and prophecy (1 Cor 12:8-11). We believe that all the gifts described in the New Testament can be given by God today.

In the exercise of these gifts the emphasis is that they be exercised in love (1 Cor 13), for the building up of the body (1 Cor 12), that they be understandable and not distracting both to the church and unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22-25), and governed by God’s Word. It’s important to remember that the gifts are given to help build the church up and advance its mission, not become a distraction to those things.

We believe we should pursue the Spirit’s work

In light of this we should desire to be “filled continually” with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), asking God to fill us anew with more of his Spirit so that we might be edified, the church built, and the lost saved. The emphasis is on earnestly desiring those gifts that most build up the body of Christ (1 Cor 14:5). We therefore believe that we can and should ask for good gifts from our Father. In our services there may be times of prayer for this and times that some in the church exercise spiritual gifts to build up the body.

6) Flourishing in Design—Complementarian

The Bible is clear that God created men and women equal in value, dignity, and worth because they are made in his image. However, men and women each image God differently, and this is part of God’s design. Gen 1:27 says “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” While we affirm the dignity of each man or woman made in God’s image we also affirm the Bible’s teaching regarding their roles and functions. We believe our homes and churches flourish as we follow God’s design.

We affirm these roles in marriage

In Ephesians 5 Paul lays out the “mystery” that a picture of the gospel is hidden in marriage—that the husband is meant to model Jesus’ self-sacrificing love and the wife is meant to model the church’s sacrificial following. Each Christian marriage should display this gospel picture. In light of this, God calls both the husband and wife to follow the Lord but calls them to follow the Lord in specific ways in relationship to each other:

- *Husbands:* According to Scripture, men bear the responsibility to lead in marriage: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). Men are to leaders in their homes, feeling the weight of responsibility for their family. But

men should never take this responsibility lightly or abuse this or use it as an excuse. Instead men, in marriage, should imitate Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5 men are commanded to love their wives as “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” So while men have responsibility to be spiritual leaders of their families, their leadership is exercised in self-giving love for their wife.

- *Wives*: In Genesis 2 God calls us Eve to be a “helper” to Adam—a word which means someone who brings strength to where it is lacking. Rather than being domineering the wife is to come alongside and help her husband, but neither is she to be weak and lifeless but strong in this role. In the New Testament we read: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (22). Wives first submit to Christ and the Bible, never following the husband’s lead on something that is ungodly or evil. But they should also have a posture of help and support, allowing husbands to flourish as the spiritual leaders they’re called to be.

We affirm these roles in the church

In our church we affirm the vital ministry of women—they are gifted and called and equipped for this service. At Cross of Grace both men and women may be called as deacons and set before the church as lead servants (1 Timothy 3). We also affirm that eldership in the church must be male in light of Scriptural teaching (1 Timothy 2:12-14, 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Apart from this specific role women serve on many levels, including in teaching positions to other women (Titus 2).

7) Living on Mission—Missional

God is a missionary God, and church must be a missionary people. As Jesus was sent by God he now sends us “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). A key doctrinal distinctive of our church is that we are Scripturally convinced of our missionary call and seek to apply that practically in the life of the church.

This shapes us on an individual and a corporate level: we believe each Christian has the call to demonstrate and declare the gospel in their personal life; at the same time we believe we as the corporate church uniquely demonstrate and declare the gospel. Both are necessary.

This also shapes our church in that we are committed to spread the gospel beyond our individual church through church planting and global mission. We see in Acts that the believers were committed to sending out disciples to reach areas of gospel need, both nearby and across the known world.

We’ll say much more about our mission in the next section.

Session 3: Values & Mission—Where Are We Going?

As you explore Cross of Grace Church understanding our values and our mission are key to understanding our church life. In the last chapter we covered our doctrine, our foundation as a church. In this section we seek to show you how we apply that body of biblical doctrine to life in our church.

How do we evaluate whether we are succeeding as a church? Well that depends on what our mission is and who defines it. The fundamental question about our church should not be “What do I think of it?” or “What do visitors think of our church?” or “What do mature believers think about our church?” Rather the fundamental question we have must be “What does God think about our church?” he is the one that defines its purpose.

In this section we will start high up at a conceptual level, then get progressively closer to the details of daily life.

Our Broad Mission: Glorify God by loving God and others

From *The Westminster Catechism*:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

As this classic confession states so clearly and so well, we are here to bring glory to our creator and our savior. Romans 11:36 says “For from him and to him and through him are all things, to him be the glory forever.” Especially as those who have been saved and redeemed we should make this our goal, as Paul says in 1 Cor 6:20 “You were bought with a price, so glorify God...” On the most fundamental level Cross of Grace exists to bring glory to God.

But how do we do this? By keeping the commands he has given us, and these commands are summarized in the Great Commandment: “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.” (Matthew 22:35-40 ESV) We glorify God by loving him with all we are—our hearts, souls, and minds. Then we see that part of that love for God is expressed by loving others he has made—our neighbors. This is our broad mission.

Our Specific Mission: Be and Make Disciples

The gospel of Matthew is bookended with discipleship. As soon as Jesus begins his earthly ministry the first scene is him calling his disciples: And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19 ESV) In the ancient world this would be a familiar and yet unfamiliar scene. In this era people would find good teachers and ask to be their disciples—literally following them, traveling with them, learning from them constantly. Here Jesus is the one initiating, and calling these first

disciples to leave their old life and be devoted to following Jesus' teaching and imitating him. The first calling of these men, and all Christians, is to be a disciple of Jesus.

Through the gospel of Matthew Jesus trains these disciples and then after his death and resurrection he gives them his commission: 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." (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV) These disciples are not just told to be disciples, but told to *make disciples*. This is what Jesus alluded to in chapter 4 when he promised to make them "fishers of men." These people who follow Jesus are to introduce other people to Jesus and then help them learn to follow Jesus.

At Cross of Grace our mission is to make disciples. We want to help those who already know Jesus mature to look more like Jesus and follow the Bible's teaching in every area of life. And we want to help those who don't yet know Jesus hear about Jesus and as God saves we want to help them follow Christ. We aim to have this threaded through everything we do.

Three Values: Jesus, Family, Mission

What does it mean to be a disciple? While there are many helpful ways to define this we've found it helpful to use core values to give some more specificity to what we mean. We use the core values of Gospel, Community, and Mission.

We see these values in 1 Peter 2: "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 ESV)

Discipleship is built on and around the gospel of Jesus. As we've discussed early the gospel is of "first importance" to us as a church, not just doctrinally but practically as well. We are brought into what God is doing by encountering Christ (v. 4). Disciples are those built on and around the reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and who apply this gospel to all areas of their life. We never want to assume this or move beyond this. Our life as a church is centered on abiding in Jesus (John 15). Healthy groups, ministries, and churches are those that keep this gospel focus.

Disciples follow Jesus with a family. None of the disciples were called and then left to themselves, but brought into Jesus' community, brought alongside other disciples. This is what we see in verses 4-5 that the "living stones" are built together into a spiritual house to glorify God. Discipleship is meant to be walked out together. This is why our church life emphasizes life in community—in small groups and large groups, informally

and formally. Elsewhere in the New Testament this is picture as us being gathered in to be “members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). We follow Jesus together with our new family made up of other disciples of Jesus.

Disciples follow Jesus on mission. We learn in verses 9-10 what the spiritual house is meant to do—it’s mean to proclaim Christ and all he has done. The church is to “witness” (Acts 1) about what God has done—showing and sharing how it has gone from dark to light. And in so doing the message of the gospel sounds forth, through the community. This is why the mission should be threaded through all we do as a church. Our lives, groups, ministries and services should have points of connection to the lost around us.

Six Practices: Discipleship in Everyday Life

Now as we apply this core values we pursue seven practices as we move to the ground floor of life at Cross of Grace. These seven practices give us a good barometer of whether disciple-making can be happening, or is happening, in our lives and group and church. By pursuing these things we pursue discipleship.

We see these things in the pattern of the early church in Acts. The church had just received the command to “make disciples” and in a single day 3,000 were saved. What did it look like for the church to go about making disciples in practical terms? “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47 ESV)

This early church was a devoted church. This word “devoted” means an earnest and fixed attention. What they gave attention to we must give attention to. We see that if we were to look at this passage through the lens of our three core values we would see seven clear practices emerge:

Jesus –What does it mean to follow Jesus?

1. Bible—“the apostles teaching”

In its earliest days the believers gathered to hear the apostles explain and explore how the whole of the Old Testament was about Jesus. As time passed God, through his Spirit, inspired writers like Paul and Peter to pen letters and gospels as the apostles teaching was gathered into Holy Scripture.

For us today, this means being devoted to the Bible at all levels of our church. We want each member to be able to read the Bible for themselves and their family. We also want groups of people to study together in community groups and in meetings. This is also

why the Word of God takes center stage on Sunday morning through preaching. This Bible points us to Jesus and what it means to follow him.

2. Prayer—“devoted to...the prayers”

This was focused prayer that was a key part of the life of the church. Even in the face of opposition the church turns to prayer (Acts 4:23-31). Prayer is a time to commune with God, to confess who he is and remind ourselves of truth, and to bring our petitions before him. God’s people are called to pray prayers of thanksgiving, pray for the sick, pray for gospel advance, pray for our enemies and everything in between.

For us today, this means being devoted to prayer everywhere in our life as a church. Prayer should not simply be a optional add-on but a vital part of what we do in our own homes and in the church.

Family—How does the church live as a family of disciples?

3. Shared Life—“day be day attending the temple together...[and] in their homes”

It’s clear that the church gathered almost daily, in both large group and in small groups. Many of these churches met in people’s homes in the courtyard there. Put simply, they shared their lives. Rather than devoting 1 or 2 slots a week to God’s people, these disciples followed Jesus together.

We do not want our church to be a series of meetings, because theologically it is not a meeting but a family that shares moments big and small with one another.

4. Mutual Care—“selling...and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need”

In a heroic way the early church was alert and attentive to any need in the church body. In an age when there was no social safety net apart from their family, the church became the family for many who were in need. In the New Testament the church is instructed to care for the vulnerable. But beyond physical needs the church also encouraged and exhorted and counseled one another.

We are strongest as a church when the whole church is involved with caring for one another, practically and spiritually. While leaders can take initiative here the whole church is needed.

Mission—How does the church live on mission?

5. Declaring—“Peter lifted up his voice...The Lord added to their number daily...”

The church in Jerusalem began with a declaration of the gospel and 3,000 were saved in a day. But what is notable is that this church eagerly took up the call to declare the gospel and the result was that the Lord added to their number daily. This is presented not as an isolated event but as part of the life of the church.

We must all take up the call to declare the gospel in our personal lives and together take up the call to declare the gospel in our groups and church gatherings. Many today are

uncomfortable with the idea that we should seek to tell others about Jesus in the hopes of convincing them to become Christians. But in light of the urgency of eternity, and in light of what Jesus has done for us, we are compelled to share the gospel with all who will listen. At Cross of Grace this means that we seek to make all we do understandable to those outside Christ, as well as equip our members to go with the gospel to declare the gospel.

6. Demonstrating – “having favor with all the people”

The early church had a remarkable witness. They not only declared the gospel message, their lives reflected it. They not only preached Jesus, they reflected Jesus. In Titus 2:10 Paul encourages the church toward conduct that can “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” Through strong moral witness, practical service, and sacrificial love the church was to demonstrate the reality of the gospel to those around them, even to those who did not yet believe.

In our cultural context in El Paso we live in a place where many people have some passing familiarity with Jesus or the story of Jesus, but not many have seen powerful witness of who Jesus is in the lives of those around them. This means we must intentionally demonstrate the gospel to our neighbors, coworkers, family, and friends.

Practical Life Applying Our Values

We’ve just gone over our values and mission at the highest level, then looked at the practices where we apply these things, but there are a few other important things you should know about how we apply these values in our life as a church.

Leadership & Governance

How do we lead the church on a practical level?

- *Jesus*: We strive to be submitted to the leadership of Christ through his word. Jesus is the “Chief Shepherd” of the church (the “Senior Pastor” to use today’s language) and leadership in the church should be under Jesus, and should model Jesus.
- *Family*: We strive to lead the church as a family. In families there is some formal leadership necessary but there should also be a healthy involvement of the whole family.
- *Mission*: We must remember that leadership and governance must have a missional component—that it does not exist for its own sake but to facilitate the church’s mission.

With that in mind here are some practical ways this is walked out at Cross of Grace:

1) Governance Overview

Scriptures provides not only a mission and values for the church but a structure as well. This structure has some things very fixed (such as the character qualifications for elders

and deacons) but other things are flexible and not mandated and instead adaptable to context and culture (such as how long the elder teaches). Nevertheless there are some key components:

- *Elder-Governed*: While elders are part of Christ's body just as members are, they do have a unique role. Under Christ and submitted to his Word, they are to lead, direct and manage the affairs of the church. (See Romans 12:8; Acts 20:17-38; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5) Elders equip the rest of the body for ministry (Eph 4). Elders are not to govern alone but instead are to govern in a healthy plurality, submitted to one another and working for the good of the church.
- *Vitally Involved Membership*: They are not a special "classes" of Christian, but simply Christians with specific functions and gifts for the good of the body. All believers have access to God, have the Spirit and unique gifts, and access to all spiritual blessings in Christ (See Gal 3:28, Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor 6:19; Jer 31:31-14). Members are each "ministers" carrying out the work of ministry (Eph 4). In addition to carrying out everyday functions in the church there are specific moments where the congregation is involved in the governmental functions of the church, such as in the affirmation of elders.
- *Broader Partnership*: While each church is to be led and governed locally, it is not meant to be isolated. Instead the New Testament picture is that churches are interdependent. We partner with Sovereign Grace Churches for mission, doctrine, and accountability. One of the key functions in our partnership with other churches is an extra-local accountability so that elders and members have appeal and recourse outside the local church. The most direct roles that affect local churches are carried out in a regional assembly of churches in a geographic region (on which our elders also sit). Beyond that there is a leadership team for the whole group of churches as well as a Council of Elders that functions as the formal governing authority (on which each church gets 1-2 seats).

2) Officers: Pastors & Deacons

There are two formal offices made clear in the New Testament: elders and deacons. Of the two, elders hold governing functions and more Scriptural guidelines are given for elders.

Pastors

In the New Testament the terms "elder" "pastor" and "overseer" are used interchangeably but each highlights a specific aspect of the role (see 1 Peter 5:1-5, Acts 20:29-31):

- Elder highlights the high calling of character and example
- Overseer highlights the governing function of the role, and role in organizing the affairs of the church (1 Peter 5:2, 1 Timothy 5:17)
- Pastor or literally "shepherd" highlights the care given to the body (1 Peter 5:1-5)

All these functions are carried out with the authority of the Bible, and elders themselves are submitted to the Bible's authority. The only skill qualification listed in 1 Timothy 3 is that the pastor must be "apt to teach"—able to use the Scriptures to instruct and exhort and equip the church. This happens in small contexts and large contexts and should also function to help the elders make key decisions for the benefit of the church.

Deacons

The word "deacon" literally means "servant." These are men and women who meet specific character qualifications and function in key recognized ways to lead the church. One of their key roles is helping with practical needs in the church in order to keep the church running effectively, and so the elders can remain focused on the task of teaching the word (Acts 6).

3) Members

As we have said before, the church is only healthy when each member plays its part. What does this mean?

Relationship with God: In Jude the believers are encouraged "keep building yourselves up in your most holy faith" (20-21). As members spend time with God and build themselves up the whole body is strengthened in character, in doctrine, and in mission. We are called to "abide" in Christ that we might bear fruit (John 15:5). In our membership covenant we commit to this together.

Relationship to other members: In John 13:34-35 Jesus gives us the commandment to "love one another" and this is to be done just as he has loved us. In our membership covenant we commit to walk together in unity, pray for and serve one another, put away division, and encourage one another.

Relationship to the church's leaders: In Hebrews 13:17 believers are called to follow their God-given leaders. This should also include a prayerful support for leaders in the church (Eph 6:18-19).

4) Practical Life

What does our life look like week to week and day to day at Cross of Grace?

Sunday Gathering: Our Sunday gathering is a time for us to hear and receive the gospel of Jesus, hear teaching, hear what God is doing among us, respond in worship, and minister to one another. Hebrews encourages us to not neglect to meet together (Hebrews 10:23-25), likely a reference to the weekly gathering of the church.

Community Group: Community Groups are our attempt to emulate the early church in Acts 2 as we share life together around the word and seek to impact those around us who don't know Christ. Apart from Sunday morning they are the most important thing we do. This is a key context for us to apply all we're learning on Sunday morning and use our gifts to serve each other. Our goal is that these would be groups of between 8-20

people meeting generally in the same geographic area, or around some other point of commonality.

Supplementary Disciple-Making Ministries: In addition to Sunday and Community Groups we have several supplemental ministries that seek to equip the saints. We encourage participation in these as helpful in order to grow together.

Serving: Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and now calls us to do the same as his disciples (Matt 20:28). We want to encourage each member of the body to serve others with the gifts God has given them. This should happen both formally and informally; indeed, much of the real ministry of the church happens outside any formal events at all.

On a practical level we encourage members to find one way to serve on Sunday mornings (as part of our gathered family) and one way to serve outside Sunday morning (as part of our scattered family).

Giving: In Scripture we are called to give individually, to give to the local church, and to give beyond the local church. Some needs can and should be met individually (see Acts 4:34-35). At the same time Paul practically exhorts the church to give, especially so that those working to proclaim the gospel can be supported (1 Cor 9:13-14). And then beyond the church, we should support gospel work as well (Phil 4:15-16).

On a practical level, how much should we give? Often in the Old Testament God's people gave the first tenth of their income to God (Gen 14:20, Lev 27:20-32, Deut 14:22-24). In the New Testament no specific amount is prescribed, instead Paul encourages us to prayerfully consider what we should give in light of God's generosity to us (2 Cor 9:6-7). This giving is to be generous, enthusiastic, intentional, and sacrificial (2 Cor 9:6-7).

Our City: We believe that God has specifically placed us here in the El Paso area to love and minister to this area. For this reason we seek to be part of the life of our city—encouraging our members to study the city and grow in their love for it as an expression of love for the people here.

SEE FAQ Page for Updated Answers