



Foundations

Membership Class Curriculum
Cross of Grace Church

Revised November 2018

Sections

1. Jesus -- How do we join what Jesus is doing?
2. Church -- What do we believe about the church?
3. Building -- How do we build the church?
4. Beliefs -- What do we believe?
5. Mission -- How do we participate in the mission?

How to Use This Booklet

Here's the first thing we want to say before you even dive into this booklet:

Thank you.

Thanks for being part of what God is doing at Cross of Grace Church. If you're reading this chances are that you've been around our church at least a little bit. You've probably gone through the tough first step of showing up at a new church (or at *any* church) for the first time. You've probably sung some songs with us, heard someone preach the Bible, have met a few folks from the church, and maybe even gotten connected to a small group or ministry. You've already blessed us by being part of what God is doing here.

Thanks also for taking this step of trying to get to know the church and its foundational beliefs better. You're going to invest some time exploring this with us and we're grateful for that. Our hope is that the time will be well spent and stir you to love Jesus more, help you consider whether God is calling you to be part of he's doing at Cross of Grace, and give you a vision for reaching the world around you with the good news about Jesus.

Here are a few tips for getting the most out of this material:

- Much of this material is rooted in Acts 1-2 and so as you go through this process we encourage you to **read Acts 1-2 personally** and devotionally. Ask God to renew your vision for the church and for being part of what he is doing in the world today.
- As we go through it **make notes of questions** you might have. There will definitely be time to ask questions and dialogue about these things. If anything is unclear mark it and we'll do our best to clarify it during Q&A.
- If you see an area of **potential disagreement** between you and the church's beliefs, we see a place for a great conversation. Let's talk about it.
- Our full **Statement of Faith** is attached at the back for reference and is a good summary of our beliefs on any topic.
- Our **Members Agreement** is also attached at the back and is a good summary of our commitments to one another as church members.

Lesson 1: Jesus

Acts 1:1 “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...”

This is how the book of Acts, the story of the church, begins. This book was written by Luke the physician turned historian. He meticulously researched and wrote the Gospel of Luke and this is the sequel. Luke tells us up front what this book is going to be about. “I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach...” So all of Luke was just the beginning, and the story of Jesus continues in Acts. The only problem is that Jesus ascends to heaven within a few verses and he’s gone. And yet Luke is here introducing the book saying essentially: now you’ll get to see what Jesus *continued* to do!

This one verse is so earth shattering on multiple levels:

- **It means that Jesus is alive** -- Jesus isn’t in the tomb he’s in power
- **It means Jesus is still working** -- Jesus is on the move in the world
- **It means that Jesus is working through the church** -- This book is the story of the church. For Luke the church’s story is Jesus’ story. Jesus is working *through* the church.
- **It means that Jesus is working through every gospel partner** -- Every Christian who comes to Christ and becomes part of the church and part of the cause becomes part of what Jesus is doing.

This means, Christian: you matter. You, today, in 21st century El Paso are being caught up in what Jesus is continuing to do. This story is your story. We want to join what Jesus is doing in the world today and the book of Acts shows us the foundations of the church and will give us the foundations for our church. This is our family story. Hearing the story of how our church family started in Acts should shape us. It reminds us who we are, it shapes who we are. And it all starts with Jesus.

Three questions: What did Jesus begin? What is Jesus continuing to do? How can we join what Jesus is doing today?

1) What did Jesus begin?

The beginning of Acts is all built upon Luke’s first book—the gospel of Luke. In that book we learn about who Jesus is and why he came and the work he accomplished.

How Jesus came

In the beginning of Luke we learn that Jesus was no ordinary person. He was born as the divine son of God—fully God. He was also born fully as a child who became a man. This is the incarnation—the mystery that God became man.

What Jesus came to teach

When Jesus begins his ministry with the first sermon he ever preached he reads a promise from the prophet Isaiah 61 about the coming Messiah and promised Savior of Israel and says, “today this Scripture has been fulfilled.” He was claiming to be the figure that all the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing to.

And what did he come to do? According to Isaiah 61 “To proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Our word “gospel” is literally “good news” in greek. He’s come with the gospel. He’s going to free people, help people see, free people from oppression. He would say later that he has come to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Through his teaching he showed that God’s standard of holiness is far higher than we want to believe. He also showed us that God’s love is more far-reaching than we ever dared hope.

What Jesus came to do

Jesus begins his ministry with physical miracles of healing that point to his ability to heal them spiritually. He feeds thousands. He casts away demons. He even raises the dead. And then he goes to the outcasts and the poor and the scandalous sinners. He extends fellowship with them. He invites them to follow him.

Ultimately Jesus came to do one thing. All his teaching and all his actions were leading to his death. Just as Jesus’ popularity seemed to be soaring with the whole nation looking at him, he was betrayed and falsely accused and crucified. Jesus had told his disciples this would happen. Jesus gave himself over to this death. Why did Jesus die? Hadn’t he said he came to save? How can he be saving if he’s dying? He can, if the dying is the saving.

-Death came into the world because of sin. In the beginning God created the world good, under his just and generous rule, and there was no death. Tragically humanity turned away from God, the source of life, and came under God’s just judgment. Death was the judgment for sin--both a physical death on earth then a judgment where we’d receive the punishment for our sins (a second death in a way).

-In the pattern of the Old Testament there was a picture: that people could be saved from death by the death of another. In fact, the weekend Jesus died there was a ceremony going on—the Passover. It echoed back to God’s people in Egypt when

God's justice came down and the only way to escape it was to take the blood of a lamb and place it over your door. The people were saved with the blood of a spotless substitute. This was Jesus. 2 Cor 5:21 says "For God made him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Jesus had no sin therefore deserved no death, but we did, so he was given our death so that we could be given his life.

-Jesus did not stay dead, he rose to new life. He was vindicated as the son of God. His sacrifice was accepted. And in doing this made possible for us a new life. We could die with him and be raised with him to new life. And he promised that one day after he ascended he would return. And when he returned he would right every wrong, he would bring a new creation and new earth, and that eternal life would be ours again.

So what did Jesus begin with his life and death and resurrection? He accomplished salvation. His life death and resurrection were good news for everyone.

Our Church Story: Our church, Cross of Grace, began in the early 1980s after God began saving people in powerful and surprising ways. Some were saved after growing up in church but never truly understanding or believing in Jesus. Others had rarely or never been to church. The story of our church began with people from all walks of life coming to know Jesus.

2) What did Jesus continue to do?

So why then does Luke say he continues to do something? Jesus has accomplished salvation for his people but now the message of salvation will spread. Let's walk briefly through what Jesus continues to do in Acts 1-2.

Jesus commissions his disciples: In the first few verses Jesus commissions his disciples saying in 1:8 "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..." All that Jesus has done for his people they will now tell others about. Jesus has accomplished this salvation but the disciples will now witness to it.

Jesus sends the Spirit: Jesus doesn't leave his disciples alone. He says "You will receive power when the Spirit has come upon you" (1:8). So they wait in Jerusalem and then at the beginning of Acts 2 the Spirit descends. In the Old Testament the Spirit only came to a handful over generations. Now the very Spirit and presence of God are poured out on all the disciples.

Jesus is preached: When a crowd gathers Peter, the former coward, stands up and witnesses to Jesus. He tells them that Jesus was the promised Savior. The people see their sin and they ask how to be saved and Peter tells them to believe and repent and then be baptized and they are. 3,000 people are added that day to the number of believers.

Jesus builds his church: What happens to these 3,000 people? They are built together into a church. They learn about Jesus, they join themselves to other believers, they testify about Jesus to others. And the Scripture says that day by day more people were added to the church. So the witness just continues.

Who is doing all this? Jesus. He commissions. He sends the Spirit. He enables Peter to preach and is the content of the preaching. He builds his church. So this is what Jesus is continuing to do--he's continuing to seek and save the lost *through* his people the church. Jesus works through their work. And the pattern throughout Acts is that Jesus is the one continuing to work. And in the letters of the New Testament Jesus continues to work. And after the letters end Jesus continues to work, generation after generation, place after place. He continues seeking and saving. That's why you're here today. That's why I'm here today.

Our church history: Our church exists because new believers in the early 1980s, radically saved, came together to form a church. Our church began when two new churches came together and formed Church of the Covenant. The church gathered down the street from our current building at Radford School. Not long after this the church purchased the land we currently own and began constructing a building. The church members at that time, many of them young people in their 20s, didn't have a lot of money so they did much of the physical work of construction themselves. As they built, they prayed, and many of the beams in the first half of our building have Scriptures written on them. Our church building and people stand as a reminder that Jesus continues to work in the world today.

3) How do we join what Jesus is doing?

In America, Christianity is often an add-on to life (i.e. "I love my gym you love your church"...), or maybe it checks the spiritual life box for some people (i.e. "I do mindfulness you do church"). What we've lost is this sense that as believers we have been caught up in Acts chapters 1-2, that we have been caught up in what Jesus is continuing to do and teach. So how do we join what Jesus is doing? The response of the people in Acts 2 and the way they join this brand new church is so helpful.

As you consider whether God would have you join Cross of Grace Church it's important to remember the fundamental elements here in Acts 2. They are still our starting place as a church.

1. Believe

Peter preaches to them about who Jesus is from the Old Testament Scriptures and they believe, otherwise they wouldn't cry out "What must we do to be saved?" They believe that God is the sovereign ruler. They saw that they were sinners. They believed Jesus was the son of God. In this class we're going to talk a lot about what we believe but it's all built around this one crucial center: the gospel of Jesus.

Core Theology: Gospel-Centered // This message of Jesus life death and resurrection is of "first importance" (1 Cor 15). It's of first importance in our theology. This is why in our gospel partnership covenant we clearly have the gospel written right where they sign it. This is why in membership interviews we ask people to tell us how they'd explain the gospel-- because we want to make sure people get it, that they can share it with others. It's also of first importance in our lives. As we grow to see the gospel's connections and implications to all of life we'll grow as Christians.

If you want to join what Jesus is doing the first step is believing in the gospel of Jesus and keeping it at the center of what you believe and how you live.

2. Repent

This is the first thing Peter says to do and it's an all-encompassing command. This word means to change one's mind, or to transform one's mind. It's like walking in one direction and then turning around to walk in a completely different direction. Before Christ we walk in the direction of sin but coming to Christ means that we we turn away from sin---from hatred or immorality or bitterness or drunkenness--and instead turn toward peace and compassion and love and service.

Scripture says clearly in Romans 6 that if you continue fully in sin and give yourself over to it then you may well not be a true Christian. We will all still struggle with sin but the distinction is that when we sin it grieves us and we move toward repentance.

If you want to join what Jesus is doing you must turn and seek to follow Jesus. It happens once, definitely. However, it continues happening, more and more, in every area of life.

3. Be baptized

Peter gives the whole-life command of repentance but also says we should be baptized as a practical expression of that repentance. Water baptism is a beautiful outward symbol of an inward spiritual reality. Spiritually we have died to our old way of life and been raised to new life in Jesus. So in baptism we go into the water (symbolizing death)

and are raised up again (symbolizing new life in Christ). It's very very important to note however that this doesn't help save us (the thief of the cross was saved with no baptism). It's not a requirement for salvation, but it's a clear command and it's something we encourage every Christian to do.

Core Practice: Believer's baptism// It seems clear to us that the command to be baptized was given to people who understand what it meant and were choosing to follow Jesus. Therefore we do not practice infant baptism. We believe that baptism is a clear act of someone declaring that they are following Jesus. We regularly as a church practice baptism during our Sunday services.

4. Be empowered

We'll say much more about this in a future message but it's important to note that Peter freely offers the promise of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. Jesus specifically says in Acts 1 that the disciples are to wait for the Spirit because the Spirit's work is crucial to what they are going to do. The Spirit's empowering work equips us to be part of what Jesus is doing.

Paul says in 1 Cor 12:13 that all who believe in Christ are "baptized" or "plunged" into the Spirit. This is wonderful. In the Old Testament only a few were "filled" with the Spirit in this way but in Christ all can experience the Spirit's work. It does so much: it empowers us for ministry, it helps us experience God's presence, it comforts us, it equips us for mission. If you want to join what Jesus is doing, ask for the Spirit's presence and power, be dependent on the Spirit's power, and be filled with the Spirit continually (Eph 5:18).

5. Join a church

What we see here so clearly in Acts 2 is that the people who believe in Jesus don't just go back to normal life. No they join themselves to God's people. They are connected into the life of the church. They're caught up in this life day to day not just week to week. In our day in America this has become optional but in Scripture it's assumed. It's assumed that when people come to Christ they come to the church and that's the Scriptural pattern.

If you want to join what Jesus is doing, join a church. Joining a specific local church is a way to live out your commitment to Jesus' church as a whole. Regardless of whether God leads you to join Cross of Grace, don't just be an attender, become a member of a local church and commit to joyfully partner there.

6. Join the cause.

This goes back to Acts 1:8 “You will receive power...and you will be my witnesses.” So the picture is that they’d receive power and then be sent out into the world to do something. This word witness says so much about what we are to do. Sometimes a legal case will come down to one witness--”What happened? What did you see?” We are to be witnesses of who Jesus is, that he’s alive, and tell about what he’s done in our lives. That’s exactly what Peter is doing here. He spent time with Jesus, he was changed by Jesus, and now he stands up and says all that he’s learned about Jesus.

The picture here is that they’d witness right around them in their city (Jerusalem) and then it would spread to the region around them (Judea), then across borders to people different from them (Samaria), then keep going to the ends of the earth.

Our Mission: Make Disciples // We believe our mission as a church is simple: to make disciples. A disciple is a follower. We want to make followers of Jesus. How do we do that? We introduce people to Jesus. We help them learn to follow Jesus in every area of life. God-willing, everything we do is oriented around this.

Lesson 2: Church

If we asked the question, “What do you think of the church?” we’d probably get all kinds of answers. Some people would say the church is a bunch of hypocrites, the church is outdated, the church is unnecessary, the church is wonderful. Culturally many ignore the church, some are hostile toward the church, others think “church” can be whatever makes you feel good or transcendent (like hiking or film club or running marathons).

What church is or isn’t should be defined by the one who created and sustains the church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus hears Peter confess that he is the Christ and he responds by saying, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He says “my church.” It’s Jesus’ church. On the confession of Jesus as the Christ Jesus is going to build *his* church. Therefore, what Jesus says about the church in his word is what makes all the difference.

Acts 2:41–47

[41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV)

1) What is the church?

The word “church” in the New Testament is “ekklesia” which means “assembly” or “gathering.” At its most basic level it’s a defined group of people who gather or assemble together. However, we want to go deeper. To look at what a church is we’re going to look at four images from scripture that help us understand what is going on.

1. Bride -- The church is beloved by God

The church is referred to as the bride of Christ in many places. For example in Ephesians 5 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” In Revelation 21 the gathered people of God are pictured as a bride. It’s a powerful image. Just as a husband loves his wife, Jesus loves his bride. Just as a husband would do anything for his wife, Christ laid down his very life for his bride. The

first thing we need to know about the church is that this group of people are beloved by God. And there is a unique corporate aspect to this. We are *together* the bride and precious to God.

2. Family -- The church is the family of God the Father

In Ephesians 4 when Paul is encouraging the church about their unity he says that they all have “one God and Father of all who is over all and in all.” We have the same Father. In Galatians 6:10 the church is referred to as the “household of faith” -- the family of faith. We are brothers and sisters in this one big family.

Core practice: Food // It says that they were “breaking bread with glad and generous hearts.” In their services they’d have a full meal, but probably many other meals during the week. Families eat together. We love to eat together. Don’t be surprised if we have food at nearly everything we do as a church.

3. Temple -- The church is where God dwells with his people

The Apostle Peter, the guy who just preached this message and was helping the church here, he says in 1 Peter 2 that [4] “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] 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.” This is the image of a temple. We’re being built into a temple.

The church is the continuation of the story of God and humanity. In the beginning humanity was meant to dwell with one another and with God. Humanity turned away from God and turned to sin. We broke our relationship with God and were cast out from the place God uniquely dwelt with his people. And yet God launched a plan to restore his people to his presence. In the Old Testament God dwelt among his people in the tabernacle or temple. Then Jesus came and God physically walked among his people. Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus made possible for people to be restored to relationship with God, to dwell with him again.

4. Body -- The church is diverse by design

In 1 Cor 12 Paul writes of the body 1 Corinthians 12:12 [12] “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” This is an extraordinary statement. Elsewhere Christ is referred to as the head of the body but the church is so closely related to him that it is his body. And this also adds that there is wonderful beautiful diversity that is part of the design of the church. The church is not meant to be a bunch of people who are the same, it’s meant to be people who have different gifts and talents and abilities and backgrounds.

5. Witness -- The church is where God advances his mission

When God came to Abraham he didn't just come to dwell with Abraham's family he tells Abraham "through you all the nations will be blessed" (Gen 22:18). In Isaiah 49:6 God tells his people "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." And this is exactly what you see glimpsed in Acts 2. It says that people from all over (ethnic Jews who spoke different languages) were drawn in and heard God praised in their own language. This salvation and restoration to God is for everyone, as Peter says in Act 2:39 "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." This is where it starts and leads to people from every tribe and tongue gathered in heaven.

2) What builds the church?

So this is beautiful, but we need to get more specific. How is the church built? Fortunately, Acts 2 gives us a glimpse of this. Acts 2:42 says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." That word "devoted" means they pursued these things with a stubborn earnestness. These were the means God used to build them together in Acts 2 for his purpose, and they are the same principles that build the church today. Practices change. Principles don't change. These principles are what build our church.

1. The word

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..." Now you might think "I wish I could have been there!" In a way, we can hear the same thing they did. We know what this teaching was. In Luke before Jesus leaves he explains to his disciples how all the Old Testament scriptures point to him and are about him. And Peter evidently learned because he preached Jesus from the Old Testament in his sermon. So the apostles teaching was about Jesus in the Old Testament and we have that same teaching right here.

Further, we know much of what the apostles themselves taught and how they interpreted the Old Testament. How? Because we have the New Testament. The New Testament is a collection of four gospels which all have apostolic influence, letters from the apostles or church leaders, and one series of visions by an apostle. Even while this was being written it was clear God was bringing an authoritative teaching through these men because Paul refers to one of the gospels as "scripture" and Peter refers to one of Paul's letters as "scripture." So there was this growing awareness of authoritative teaching and interpretation. 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us that men wrote Scripture as they were carried along by God so that they wrote the words of God.

So here's the principle: Just as the people eagerly sat, leaning forward, to hear the apostles explain Jesus and the Old Testament, we should sit, leaning forward, to hear the Bible.

Core Theology: Evangelical // I don't mean "evangelical" in a political sense, I mean it related to the word of God. It means we believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God. We believe that these words are God's words. Our task isn't reinventing the Bible's teaching for each new generation, our task is rediscovering the words of God for each new generation.

And that leads to one key practice have here at the church...

Core practice: Expository preaching // We have a particular philosophy of how we teach the Bible here at Cross of Grace. Our pattern is that we preach books or sections of the Bible, passage by passage. Now sometimes we do topical preaching on questions like "What does the Bible say about money?" or "How can I be a good Christian employee?" We want the general pattern to be expository preaching—or preaching through books of the Bible. We do that because we want to make sure we understand what we're reading in context, as God had it written down. And we want God to set the agenda, not us. We get to cover all kinds of great, strange, controversial, and uncomfortable passages because they're what God has in his word for us.

This devotion to the Bible wasn't just in hearing sermons, it was something they were constantly devoted to. It shaped them more than once a week. This means that we ourselves as individuals should be in the word—we want to encourage a culture where it's normal that we're all reading the Bible together. This also means that in what we do as a church Scripture and the teaching of Scripture should be threaded through it all—in every ministry and in every context to some degree. Jesus' people are Bible people.

2. Fellowship

"devoted to...the fellowship..." And this is lived out through the breaking of bread which is probably a reference to their church gatherings where they would take the Lord's supper and also eat together. This is Christ-focused fellowship around the gospel. This word "fellowship" is the word "koinonia." We often think of "fellowship" in church just as standing around eating a donut and chatting about the week. This word "fellowship" is a fellowship like in Lord of the Rings there was a "fellowship" to defeat a great evil.

In Philippians Paul thanks the church for their "partnership in the gospel" with him (Phil 1:6). That word "partnership" is related to this word "fellowship." If Peter and John

wanted to go into business on a new fishing boat they would have a “partnership” or “fellowship” in this sense. Meaning that they were invested together, owners together, committed together. This is exactly what you see where people were selling their possessions and giving them to others who needed them. Who does that? Why do that? Because they see this as a partnership, a fellowship. Many Christians approach the church like renters rather than owners. When you rent you might enjoy it but you’re not sweating every scratch, you’re not repainting, you’re not investing thousands in yard landscape. When you own, it’s yours, and you treat it like an owner.

Now I think the language here is so helpful: They were *devoted* to this fellowship. Their common faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit created this fellowship but they were devoted to it. It took effort, it took sweat, it took intentionality.

Core Practice: Membership // In our church we encourage church membership as an expression of gospel partnership. It’s formally saying, “I’m joining the partnership. I’m buying the boat with you. I’m taking on the mission.” In our church membership agreement is a commitment to gospel partnership. We encourage people to understand what the church believes, how it lives, what its mission is. Then we want them to prayerfully consider if this is really where God is calling them. Then if so, we want them to take our membership agreement and wholeheartedly affirm it.

3. Worship

“devoted themselves...to prayer...” And there’s another reference to worship. “The breaking of bread” is a reference to the Lord’s supper. So this breaking of bread and prayer is a reference to gathering for worship. This is so important and I’m glad it’s here as a reminder for us. We don’t just build the church looking at one another, we build the church looking up. Ultimately God’s opinion of the church is the most important evaluation of the church. The people in this church were devoted to prayer—to communion with God. This is a church that loved to sit in the presence of God, to talk to God.

Remember what we said about the nature of the church: It is the place where God dwells with his people. It’s a miracle. It’s unbelievable. We can pursue God personally and intimately like no other time in Scripture, so we should! And what we find is that as we pursue God personally, as we speak to him, as we pray, he shapes us and our church to look more like him.

This commitment should take both corporate and personal directions: Together when we gather, we pray. That’s why we don’t pray for 30 seconds in our service we pray for

longer, sometimes we bring some meaty topics. We need to grow in this and so in this next year we're going to be doing some more corporate prayer times and adding more of this to our services. It takes a personal commitment. The church is built through prayer.

4. Witness

Acts 2:[47] "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Now notice something really important. They didn't get saved and all move away they stayed in and among the people. They had relationships with people who weren't Christians. They lived close enough to people that people could see the change in them the witness in them.

There are two aspects to this

- Witness -- "having favor with all the people" -- Becoming Christians made them better fathers and sons and employees and bosses and citizens and neighbors. As they looked like Jesus they witnessed through their actions and deeds to the power of Jesus among them.
- Evangelism -- "day by day those being saved" -- This isn't a big revival meeting in a tent the implication is that this was person to person evangelism. People sharing the gospel with people.

5. Gospel Remembrance

"Breaking bread..." The reference in Acts 2 isn't just to eating a meal together. This phrase "breaking bread" is used in the New Testament to signify the Lord's Supper. We are commanded to participate in the Lord's Supper in "remembrance" of what Jesus has done. The early church didn't simply begin with the gospel, it continued growing in the knowledge of the gospel. The church can only grow in grace and strength when there's a continual pattern of gospel remembrance.

Lesson 3: Building

In the last lesson we considered the question, “What is a church?” This lesson we’re going to get down to the details of the church and ask, “What is a healthy church?” and “How do you build a healthy church?”

The ultimate goal of each Christian is discipleship-- following Jesus-- and in Acts 2 we see these 3,000 people turn from their old lives and follow Jesus completely. They became disciples—meaning followers of Jesus. And what’s the goal of a disciple, to look like their teacher, to think like them, to be like them. They didn’t do this alone, they did this with other disciples, they did this as a church. And the church has the same goal—to together look more like Jesus, to be like him in every area. So we are individually to look more and more like Jesus but we together as the church are to grow together to look more and more like Jesus. So how does what we do as a church help us look more like Jesus?

We’ve seen that the early church was devoted to the word, to fellowship, to worship, and to witness. These four principles are threaded throughout everything the church does.

1. Gathering

God’s people are meant to gather. Throughout the Old Testament they gathered together regularly. The word for church “ekklesia” means “assembly” or “gathering.” This isn’t an optional part of the Christian life. It’s been questioned in the last few decades whether we really need these formal organized religious gatherings. The writer of Hebrews charges us that we should be “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” (Heb 10:25).

Worship: We saw in Acts 2 that this was the vertical dimension of the church--praise (47) and prayer (42). And God’s presence was among them as “awe came upon every soul” (43). And when the church gathers a key way we worship is that we sing. Throughout the Old Testament God’s people were a singing people. There are songs throughout the books and one book that is all songs - the Psalms. This same pattern continues in the New Testament. “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.” That’s why we sing and why we want everyone to sing.

The other vertical dimension is prayer. That's why we have a pastoral prayer time each week where one of the elders or leaders leads us in prayer through the church's needs or other things. And before and after the service we want to have times for prayer.

Word: Our gatherings are built around the word, the "apostles teaching" in verse 42. When God's people gather they gather around the word. We've covered the practice of expositional preaching, however, in many ways the gathering is built around the word being open and explained and declared. And if the word is declared it is God himself who is teaching his people.

Now only that but we want the word throughout our gathering. We open with a call to worship from Scripture, it directs and informs our hearts (which is why encourage folks to be ready to go right as worship is starting). We often read Scripture in prayer or other parts of the service. Then we have a benediction from Scripture. And all the while people are teaching our kids and students in kids ministry about the word as well.

Fellowship: Now last week we talked about how this word "fellowship" in verse 42 carries a sense of "partnership." They were so linked that they were "selling their possessions and belongings and distributing to all as any had need" (45). The principle applied specifically to the poor but applies more broadly to anything the church needs to do together. We are partners.

Core practice: Serving // We want to encourage every member to sign up for a Sunday team and to serve throughout the church. This isn't a production, this is a family, this is a partnership. This is why we want to encourage every church member to serve on a church team on Sunday. We have all kinds of needs on Sunday, and all kinds of opportunities to serve, and would love to explore them with you.

Core practice: Giving // We also see a clear pattern of giving in the New Testament. Gospel people are a generous people. We see people give toward benevolence, Paul encourages Timothy to make sure pastors are paid something (1 Tim 5), funds are pooled for gospel mission. We want to encourage our church to express gospel partnership through giving.

Gospel Remembrance: This reference to the "breaking of bread" I knew was the Lord's supper but I just assumed it was half fellowship and half worship. The reality it's a separate important rhythm. What do we do in the Lord's supper? Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of me." When we gather we remember the gospel. In our songs we retell

the gospel, in the Lord's supper we proclaim and remember the gospel, in baptism we see a picture of the gospel.

Witness: We have an upcoming lesson on mission where we'll talk more specifically about strategy, but here I want to point out that it's just a regular occurrence that new people are following Jesus "day by day Lord added to their number" (47). The church gathering does not exist primarily for unbelievers—it's meant primarily to encourage believers and to worship God. However, what you do see in 1 Corinthians in particular is an assumption that unbelievers will be among the church when they gather so the service should be understandable. That's why we try to explain things, that's why in the message or other times we'll talk to those who don't know Jesus yet. We want to assume God is bringing people, adding people, and we want to help them.

Also on Sundays we practice the biblical value of hospitality. Hospitality is the Old Testament principle of taking people who are strangers and turning them into friends and family. This can be practiced with people who don't know Jesus at all or Christians who aren't yet connected to a church. So we try to make it easy for people to learn more, to get connected, to feel like family.

Summary: If we want to look like Jesus together we must gather. We need the word to shape us, we need to work together, we need to worship, we need to be a witness. When we gather Jesus shows up and works on us and through us.

2. Groups

In Acts 2 we read that "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes"... Those 3,000 people in Jerusalem couldn't know all 3,000 so they broke down into fellowships meeting in homes. We do the same thing. Apart from Sunday morning the most important thing we do as a church are community groups. We have other ministries and Bible studies that equip for specific seasons of life and are another way to get connected personally. Our main emphasis is community groups and so I'm going to break down these principles for CGs and you can work out how they apply with our other ministries.

Core practice: Small groups // If you're new, Community Groups are groups of 8-16 people that meet in people's homes in various areas of the city. They don't look impressive or spectacular, they look pretty normal. At our community group we usually show up and just eat food together for an hour, then we maybe do some life updates and people share things they're rejoicing in or tough areas, then we open the word together and discuss it and how it applies to our life, then

we pray for one another, then we eat dessert and drink coffee and decide to do a relay triathlon together (that last one is just Ricky's group).

Word: We do want the word to be present when we gather but the emphasis in community group isn't on teaching but on helping people interact with and apply the Scripture themselves. Our emphasis is that people would move from just hearing the word like on Sunday to wrestling with the word and beginning to apply it.

Fellowship: The main emphasis of these groups is fellowship and partnership. One of my favorite ways to think about community groups is that these are the context that we get to specifically practice the one anothers Jesus gave us: care for one another, encourage one another, exhort one another, bear one another's burdens, pray for one another. We can do a few of those on Sundays but there's so much more opportunity when with a group. Community groups are where we live out our value of family.

Gospel remembrance: We also want the rhythm of gospel remembrance to be in our CGs. One group has done a "gospel story" night every year where people share their testimonies every year, which is a great practice. The gospel is at the forefront of all we do.

Worship: Our community groups express this vertical dimension primarily through prayer. We want our groups to pray for each other and with each other. Sometimes that prayer is just praising God and thanking him for what we've read or what he's done in someone's life. Other times we're asking God for help or to encourage someone. And of course, it's wonderful when groups can sing together as well in worship.

Witness: Now our community groups aren't the primary places for evangelism but there's another component of witness they're great for and that is hospitality. They are places where people can be joyfully welcomed if they are learning to follow Jesus or need to get connected to local folks following Jesus. And it's also a place where we can encourage one another in our various opportunities to be witnesses in everyday life.

Summary: We are the church not only when we're all here on Sunday but when there are 8 people around a dinner table praying or talking about the Bible or eating tacos. That is profound. That is beautiful. We are growing to look more like Jesus together. We are building together.

3. Going

Now we can't spend all our time in groups. In fact most of our Christian life is lived out on our own. Even there we are still the church. So how do we live these things out?

Word: Psalm 119 says that the Word of God is life, that it is a lamp to our feet and light to our path, that by it we are warned, by it we are comforted. Our Christian life is grounded in and powered by the word shaping us. If our core value is following Jesus, then we must follow Jesus' teaching in the word.

Fellowship: Our call to fellowship is not ultimately the responsibility of a church group or program, it's our responsibility. We are called to follow Jesus, to look more like him in every area of life, and to bring others along. We're responsible to be disciplined — If our goal is to look more like Jesus we have to put ourselves in a position where we can be disciplined by others. We need to invite input and help. We need to put ourselves in relationships where we can learn from others. We're also responsible to disciple others — We bear a responsibility as the church to be the church and help other people grow to look more like Jesus. We want to make room in our lives for folks that are trying to follow Jesus and maybe they need advice or they need help or they just need a friend.

And one other really important aspect to this that we acknowledge that even while we're all trying to follow Jesus we're still sinners and we sin against one another. Jesus says in Matt 5 that if we're in conflict we should drop what we're doing and go seek to be reconciled. Paul charges us to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4). At Cross of Grace partnership means a commitment to biblical peacemaking.

Gospel remembrance: It's been said well that we must preach the gospel to ourselves daily. We soon forget the reality of what Jesus has done for us. John Stott: "The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, we must get close enough to it for its sparks to fall on us."

Worship: We also want to have patterns of worship and praise and prayer in our lives throughout the week. We want life to be an ongoing conversation with God through Scripture reading and prayer.

Witness: The primary place we live out our call to witness is in the everyday stuff of life. We are to go out and in our families and workplaces and neighborhood and city we're to model what it looks like to follow Jesus and we're to point others to follow Jesus through sharing the gospel. In many ways the gathering and our groups are to help us grow in Christlikeness so that we can accomplish this mission.

4. Governance

Now this is something that many Christians overlook in its importance. If the church's gathering and its groups and the going of its members is to be effective it must be

supported by biblical church governance. Biblical church governance is not a nice coat of paint that goes on the church, added last mostly for aesthetics. Instead, biblical church governance is like the load bearing beams that are part of the house. Usually, you don't see these beams but if they're not there then the whole house will have problems.

In this section we'll break with our previous pattern to cover some church governance basics.

Jesus: Who ultimately leads and governs the church? Jesus. 1 Peter 5 encourages pastors as shepherds but says that ultimately the Chief Shepherd will review their work. You could say Jesus is our Senior Pastor, ultimately. And he governs how? Through his word.

Elders: In terms of polity we are an elder-led and elder-governed church. 1 Timothy 1-3 uses three words interchangeably to speak of pastors:

- First, they are "elders" meaning men who have maturity and are examples for the flock. That's why there are high character requirements for them.
- Second, they are "overseers" meaning they are the governing agents watching over the church. And we believe they always govern in plurality (more than one).
- Third, they are "shepherds" meaning that they are to care for and shepherd Christ's flock.

The thing that distinguishes elders in function is that they are to be "able to teach" or rather "skilled in teaching." This can be on Sundays or in small contexts or even just in one on one counseling but there's a skill, a proven ability, a theological integrity when it comes to teaching the word. And that's why they play these crucial roles—Jesus leads his church but through his word.

Deacons: The word "deacon" literally means "servant." While every Christian is to serve one another these are unique servants. We see that the deacons are formed in Acts 6 when the apostles need help meeting the practical and material needs of the church. So a good definition of a deacon is a "lead servant." According to 1 Timothy 3 we believe that these can be men or women who are serving in a key lead servant capacity, especially in areas of material need or administration.

Members: Now we are not a congregationally governed church but we believe that the congregation plays an absolutely vital role in these things.

First, the congregation plays a formal role in affirming elders and deacons. There are specific character qualifications such as “well thought of by outsiders” (for elders) that require the congregation to affirm. In our church we have a formal process for feedback and affirmation for these offices.

Second, in issues of church discipline where there is a member who claims to be a Christian but is defaming Christ’s name and is unrepentant the congregations role is to treat them differently, to lovingly correct them, and to share the gospel with them. In addition to this, members can also play key roles in formal dispute resolutions (see church governance documents for more on this).

Third, our practice as a church is to bring significant decisions to the church membership and ask them to consider the counsel of the elders. For example, when we considered selling the building years ago we had several congregational meetings where the congregation counseled us not to sell the building so we didn’t. On significant issues like this we are grateful for the counsel and input of our members.

Church Partners: We do believe that each church in the New Testament was led and governed locally, but we also believe that churches in the New Testament were linked in vital gospel partnership with one another. We see that churches were linked in gospel mission like church planting, and that churches came together for certain aspects of governance (like Acts 15). We try to pursue that through our partnership with other Sovereign Grace Churches, which is a global family of churches united to plant and build churches with the gospel.

Churches in Sovereign Grace are united around seven key values: 1) Reformed Theology, 2) Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching, 3) Continuationist Pneumatology, 4) Complementarian Leadership in the Church and Home, 5) Elder Governed and Elder Led Churches, 6) Church Planting, Outreach, and Global Missions, 7) Fellowship and Church Governance.

In our specific partnership we own our own property and are ultimately responsible for ourselves and can leave the partnership at any time but commit to work together. We have a few key areas of partnership like common ordination standards for elders, an agreed upon judicial process to resolve disputes, support and coaching for church plants, and global mission endeavors.

Summary: So why should you care about how the church is governed? Because the right governance of the church leads to stable and strong churches over the long haul.

Lesson 4: Beliefs

In Acts 2:42 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Devotion to the Apostles Teaching is devotion to Scripture but also devotion to what they taught from Scripture, to the theology and doctrine of the apostles. PRAY-- Lord bless the preaching of your word today.

Jesus tells this parable in Matthew 7:24-27 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [Note that he has both “hearing” -- by implication believing which is theology -- and “doing” which is applying that theology] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” What’s the point? We as Christians and we as a church need to be rooted and grounded in both what the Bible teaches and how that changes our lives. We must both “hear” (i.e. receive and understand the Bible’s teaching) and “do them” (i.e. live life differently in light of what we believe).

1. About Theology

I want to pause here and ask “Why even care about theology?” Some people find theology boring. Others say things like “doctrine divides” so they don’t want any beliefs. So why is theology important for us at Cross of Grace? Why do we have a long statement of faith?

a) Everyone is a theologian

This is the starting point for why all this matters. If your theology is what you believe about God you realize that everyone is a theologian because everyone thinks things about God. A.W. Tozer said famously, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” That’s profound and it’s right. Everything else we believe about everything is tied in some way to what we believe about God. Do we believe God will judge us according to some moral standard? That changes everything. Do we believe we have purpose or are random? That changes everything. At Cross of Grace we’re not trying to help people become theologians (they already are) we want to help people become *good* theologians.

b) Theology is for worship

J.I. Packer famously said “Theology is for doxology.” So studying God (theology) should lead to praising God (doxology). The more we learn about God the more we see the beauty and glory and majesty of what God has made. I heard a pastor say once that we do wrong when we treat theology like a divine autopsy -- studying and dissecting in a cold and clinical way. Studying something doesn’t have to be that way. You can study a sunset. You can study what your spouse loves and hates. The more you study the more you are in awe. One of the results of devotion to the Apostles teaching in Acts 2:42 is that “awe came upon every soul” in verse 43. Understanding theology rightly produces awe, produces worship.

This is exactly the pattern you see throughout Scripture. When we see more about God we are drawn deeper into relationship with God. Throughout the Psalms there are truths about God listed that inform our praise to God. After Romans 9-11 -- one of the densest most theologically intricate sections of the whole Bible-- the Apostle Paul ends the section shouting in praise in Romans 11:34-36 "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

b) Theology is for life

We must have and understand faith rightly if we are to live rightly. In Matthew 28 Jesus commissions us to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." So part of following Jesus is learning to observe all that he has commanded. That theological summary of Jesus teaching informs how we live. In Acts 2:37 the people hearing Peter's sermon are "cut to the heart" and cry out "what must we do?" They believe something, it affects their heart, and it leads to a change in action.

Warning: Theology Ahead! Now we're about to go over some core theological beliefs as a church. What we cannot do in our time together is argue for each position in detail, instead our aim is to inform you and help you see clearly what we believe so that we can discuss it together. We'll also aim to try to be clear which issues are "close-handed" issues that we believe every Christian must hold to, and which are more open handed and Christians can respectfully disagree. Many issues of "" theological importance are still very important and may change or shape where you become a member. However, none of them should result in breaking Christian fellowship with someone.

2. About God

When we turn to see what the Bible teaches about God we see both the greatness of God that draws us into worship and the clear implications for how we live in light of those things.

a) God Is

The Bible teaches that God was not created, he eternally existed. We start with the very important doctrine of the trinity: We believe that God is one God in three persons.

J.I. Packer points out that we're commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt 28:19), that when Jesus was baptized we see the Son, hear the Father's voice, and the Spirit comes and rests on Jesus. Even in Peter's sermon in Acts 2 we see that God the Father sends God the Son Jesus and then that they send the Spirit.

The church has confessed this clearly in the Nicene Creed: *We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.*

b) God Reigns

The Bible begins with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” When Paul the Apostle preaches in Athens he says, “He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.... In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:25, 28). See Gen. 1:2; Pss. 33:6, 9; 148:5; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2; 11:3). The Lord created all things, he sustains all things, and he rules and reigns over all things. In Acts 2 Peter preaches that Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (1:23).

Packer: We are constantly told in explicit terms that the LORD (Yahweh) reigns as king, exercising dominion over great and tiny things alike (Exod. 15:18; Pss. 47; 93; 96:10; 97; 99:1-5; 146:10; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Dan. 4:34-35; 5:21-28; 6:26; Matt. 10 :29- 31). God’s dominion is total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.

Core Theology: Reformed // 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. Scripture says clearly, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Eph 1:4-6 (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). 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.

c) God saves

As we’ve discussed before, the gospel is the thing of “first importance” in our theology (1 Cor 15). God can do anything and he chooses to save us.

We affirm the wide-ranging effects of this salvation on the cross.

- Justification -- This is the picture of the courtroom. We were guilty and the judgment was coming down, until the judge took off his robes and offered himself in our place (see Romans 3).
- Reconciliation -- This is the picture of a family. Like the prodigal son we ran from God and yet because of Jesus we can be reconciled and brought back to God (1 Peter 3:18).
- Redemption -- This is the picture of slavery. We were in slavery to our sin and to Satan but we have been set free (Col 1:13-14).
- Propitiation -- This is the picture of the temple sacrifice where God is satisfied by an offering. Because Christ was offered as a sacrifice God’s wrath is satisfied (Romans 3).

All these are only glimpses of what God has done for us in Christ.

Why would a God who needs nothing from us sacrifice his son to save us? That's grace. Grace is us receiving, as has been famously said, "God's Riches at Christ's Expense". God did what only he could do to save us and bring us to himself.

d) God empowers

Another broad important area of Christian agreement is that God is not distant but present and active in the lives of Christians. In John 14 Jesus says it will be better for him to go so that he can send "another Counselor" meaning a helper, adviser, strengthener, advocate. Then in Acts 2 Peter quotes the Old Testament prophecy of Joel 2 to say "In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" and it's clear later that this outpouring will be for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord or the name of Jesus. Then Peter holds out the promise of this saying "repent...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Core theology: Continuationism // At our church another doctrinal distinctive is Continuationism. God has given many and varied gifts to the church. These 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. We also believe that any spiritual gifts must be governed by the infallible word of God, that they should build up the body and advance the gospel, and that they should never become a distraction from everything else God has commanded us. We also believe that these gifts are vital and important for the church to fulfill its mission and therefore want to earnestly desire them and ask for them.

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. We therefore believe that we can and should ask for good gifts from our Father.

Summary: So how do we summarize what we've said here about God? In the children's stories The Chronicles of Narnia the great lion Aslan represents Jesus. At one point one of the characters asks if Aslan is safe and the reply is "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Later another character says "He's not a tame lion." We must let God be God. He is, he reigns, he saves, he empowers.

3. About Humanity

In addition to some of those key beliefs on the doctrine of God we have some key beliefs about humanity. As you'll see these flow from our beliefs about God and matter immensely in daily life. If we let God be God and he reigns, then we want to bring everything in our lives more and more under the reign of God.

a) Humanity reflects

Gen 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." To be in the image of God means to resemble God in some ways and

to represent God in stewarding and ruling creation. This means that every single human being has dignity, value and worth, whether it's black or white - male or female - Mexican or French or Iranian; whether it's born or unborn, whether it's healthy or disabled, whether it's young or elderly.

An important implication of this is that as our creator God designed us. We rejoice that we are designed, not random, full of meaning. This means that God defines for us how we should live and act in every area of life from vocation to marriage to parenting to sexuality to finances to entertainment.

Core Theology: Complementarianism // We affirm the dignity and design of men and women as equal in value, and complementary in role. In our church we believe that receiving and celebrating God's design leads to the flourishing of the family and the church. This is a key doctrinal distinctive we emphasize at the church.

Packer: The two genders, male and female, belong to the Creation pattern. Men and women are equally God's image-bearers (Gen. 1:27), and their dignity is equal in consequence. The complementary nature of the genders is meant to lead to enriching cooperation (see Gen. 2:18-23) as their roles are fulfilled not just in marriage, procreation, and family life, but in life's wider activities also. Perception of the unfathomable difference between a person of the other gender and oneself is meant to be a school for learning the practice and joy of appreciation, openness, honor, service, and fidelity, all of which belong to the courtesy that the mysterious reality of the other gender requires.

We believe that Scripture teaches that in marriage men and women have equal value but differing roles.

- 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, 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 Eve to be a "helper" to Adam—a word which means someone who brings strength to where it is lacking. Rather than being domineering, or being passive, wives are to come alongside and help their husbands, bringing strength to areas where they need strength.

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).

Core practice: God's Design for Sexuality // We affirm that God designed sexuality to be a beautiful and good gift -- there's a whole book called Song of Solomon about how good a gift this is. However, God also set out boundaries for sexuality, that it is meant to be expressed in the context of a one man one woman marriage relationship. Why? Because as God says in Ephesians 5 it's meant to carry the mystery of Christ and the church, to be a picture of the gospel.

So the point is that the Lord reigns and we rejoice under his reign and are called to embrace his reign in every area of life.

b) Humanity is broken

We affirm that because of sin human beings are no longer what God designed them to be. In Acts 2 the reason the people are cut to the heart is that they realize they are sinners, that they've killed the son of God, that they stand condemned.

Scripture says that this affects us in two ways

- We are sinners by nature -- Scripture teaches us that we inherit a sin nature from our first parents.
- We are sinners by choice -- Scripture also teaches us that we choose to sin, to give ourselves over to it.

One of the most offensive teachings of the Bible is that we are sinners, that God is the standard of justice and righteousness and that we are transgressors, that we sin against him. If we believe God is God and we are not, then we receive this teaching. It's the only thing that makes sense of the broken world around us, and the only thing that makes sense of the sin inside our own hearts. In fact Scripture teaches that our hearts are so hardened by sin that even with the offer of salvation we would never choose it.

c) Humanity is transformed

There is good news. Even if we cannot and would not choose to turn to Christ, God does what we could not do. The Scriptural doctrine of regeneration is beautiful--teaching us that God sent his Spirit into our hearts to enable us to respond and turn to Christ.

This teaching of sanctification has two aspects:

- Definitive sanctification -- This is the sanctifying work of the Spirit that happens in our hearts when we come to Christ. 1 Cor 6 says we are "washed, sanctified, justified." We are a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).
- Progressive sanctification -- Scripture also calls us to "work out" what God has done in us (Phil 2:12). We are to work hard, to expend effort, to seek to look more like Jesus in every area of life. Ephesians 4 calls us to "put off" our old way of life and to "put on" a new way of life.

Spirit-Powered Transformation: All this is possible only through the power of the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says we should “keep in step with the Spirit.” In other words the Spirit is working on and in our hearts and we must walk with it, embrace its work, and look more like Jesus.

Gospel-Powered Transformation: And Scripture also teaches that we grow and change as we apply the gospel more and more to every area of life. As we understand and live out the implications of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we will be changed.

Summary: So how do we sum this up? If the Lord reigns then we want to bring every area in our life under the reign of Jesus. It’s gonna be a struggle, but it’s a struggle we can prevail in because we have the power of the Spirit in us.

Just one example in 1 Cor 6 may help illustrate how theology informs our lives. . Paul is trying to encourage the church in verses 18-20 “Flee from sexual immorality”... “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (doctrine of the Spirit), whom you have from God? You are not your own (doctrine of creation), for you were bought with a price (doctrine of redemption). So glorify God in your body. (ESV) That’s theology in action.

On Doctrine, Unity, and Difference

Some in our day seek to avoid doctrinal or theological distinctions, believing that “doctrine divides.” But as we’ve seen, every Christian is a theologian, every Christian believes things about God and the world, the question is whether those beliefs are clear and accurate. We believe that doctrine clarifies and therefore actually leads to greater unity. We would rather seek to help people think biblically and well than not talk about doctrine. We want people rooted and grounded in Scriptural conviction.

We consider the following tenets of theology to be essential and required for orthodox Christianity:

- Bible -- We believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God
- Trinity -- God is three person and yet one God
- Gospel -- God is the judge, we are sinners, and we need salvation. Jesus makes possible our salvation through his sacrificial death on the cross.
- Faith -- Salvation comes through faith in Jesus

However, we recognize that Christians can in good conscience differ from one another and still partner in the gospel. We thank God for brothers and sisters who differ from us and want to pray for them and support them as fellow Christians. We are also convinced by Scripture of certain theological distinctives and will teach and counsel from that perspective in our church.

These are some of our doctrinal distinctives as a church:

- Reformed -- We believe in God’s sovereignty over all things including salvation
- Continuationist -- We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers Christians for ministry and that all the gifts seen in Scripture are available today
- Complementarian -- We believe that God has designed men and women with intentional difference to display his image and this has implications for the home and church
- Baptist -- We believe that believers should choose to be baptized as an outward symbol of an inward spiritual reality

What if we differ from one another? If you see an area of potential disagreement we see an opportunity for a great conversation. Please talk to the pastor or leader facilitating this class or talk to a pastor or leader in your membership interview. We would love to understand where you’re coming from, help you understand where we’re coming from, clarify our beliefs. If there are wide and significant differences we may both decide that a believer could be better served by a church closer to their beliefs. However, there may also be times where someone has a theological conviction different from ours and still desires to be part of what God is doing at our church. In that case we would want them to be willing to explore the issue further with us, understand that our teaching falls in line with our theology, and ask that they not be disruptive within the church or subvert the teaching of the church. If a believer is willing to follow those guidelines we can often joyfully welcome into the church.

Lesson 5: Mission

Our hope is that exploring these topics has stirred your heart as we've looked at the beauty of God's design in the church. Now we're going to specifically focus in on the topic of mission and consider what it looks like for our local church to be about the work of joining Jesus on his mission.

1. Missional Call

We say that our mission is to “make disciples” — meaning to follow Jesus ourselves and bring others along to know Jesus and to follow Jesus in every area of life. Sometimes I think it feels like sharing your faith or evangelizing or doing mercy ministry is like an unexpected and unwelcome add-on to being a Christian.

This happens because we often think of Christianity as an activity not as an identity. We think of sharing our faith as an activity not as an expression of who we are. Scripture says that who we are as Christians is wrapped up in mission. We get this from Matthew 28:18–20: [18] “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” So this mission involves us following Jesus ourselves, then helping others in church follow Jesus, but it also clearly is a call to bring others along to follow Jesus.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus gives us an identity and a commission: [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.” (ESV) So our call to witness is wrapped up in who we are as witnesses. Being a witness simply means testifying to Jesus and his work in our life. A witness sees or experiences something and then shares that with others. The good news is that if we've experienced Jesus' and his work—if our sins have been paid for, if our lives have been changed—then we are witnesses. We rejoice that we are called sons and daughters of God, we rejoice that we are saints in Christ, those things are ours in Christ. Just as much as we are sons and daughters and saints we are witnesses.

And here's the encouraging thing: we have power as witnesses not by virtue of our own skill or inclination but by the Spirit's empowering work. That's such good news. Jesus gives us the mission to make disciples and then gives us the power to fulfill that mission. Perhaps no more powerful testimony of the Spirit's power can be seen than the fact that the Apostle Peter who weeks earlier was denying he ever knew Jesus was the one to stand up and powerfully witness to Jesus in front of thousands. Jesus completely links the gift of the spirit with the task of witness. So to pursue the mission with the Spirit is fruitless. To pursue the Spirit without the mission in view is a misuse of the gift.

You are a witness for Jesus. The question isn't whether you are or not, the question is whether you're a faithful or unfaithful witness.

2. Missional Life

So how do we live as witnesses? Acts 2 points us to three ways we live as witnesses.

1) Word

Acts 2:41 [41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (ESV)

In recent years people have re-emphasized the need for loving people and being good witnesses and serving the city. People say things like “Preach the gospel, if necessary use words.” The sentiment is understandable but in reality it’s simply not possible. The word “gospel” means “good news” and so how do we give good news without giving the actual news? We can’t! It says “those who received his word....” meaning that they heard his words, understood them, and believed them. Witness for Peter involved words.

We as Christians are called to both know the good news of the gospel about Jesus ourselves and to winsomely and graciously communicate that to others. What is the gospel? It’s what we talked about in our first lesson. We broke it down into four components: Who is God? The sovereign and good creator of all. Who are we? We are people made in his image, fallen to sin, under judgment. Who is Jesus? The perfect and sinless savior who took our punishment in our place. How do we respond? Repenting of our sins, believing in Jesus, and turning to follow him. All those elements are present or implied in Peter’s words to the crowd.

And what’s the result: 2:47 “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” This is so crucial to see—This wasn’t just the work of the 12 apostles, the implication is that it was through the collective effort of the church that this was taking place. Normal, everyday Christians were speaking and God was using it to save. That’s the pattern.

Now one important note in our particular culture of El Paso. This is a very religious area with a long history of religion. In speaking the gospel we’re not simply trying to get people to be religious. There’s a difference between just being religious and following Jesus. Religion without Jesus is about doing enough good things so that God accepts you. It’s all about you, ultimately. However, following Jesus is about acknowledging you can’t be good enough to be accepted, but Jesus died for you to save you. Many people think they know the gospel because they know some religion but so few truly have grasped the goodness of the gospel. We like to say “the gospel is always better news” — the gospel should feel scandalous, amazing, powerful if you truly understand it.

2) Example

We are not *just* to speak, we are to back up that speech with action and life. Look at 2:[46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. That phrase “praising God and having favor with all the people” is so important. Even though this strange

group of Christians believed strange things they had favor with the people. Why? Part of the reason is their example and character.

In Titus 2 Paul writes something profound to the bondservants in the church: Titus 2:10 [10] “not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” It would be easy, even understandable, for bondservants to take vengeance by stealing. It was very common. Paul says don’t do that, show good faith instead, have integrity even when those around you don’t. The result is that “you may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” That doctrine is the gospel and he’s saying you “adorn” the gospel or “make it clearer and more beautiful.”

3) Love

There’s another reason that I believe that the believers had favor with all the people and it becomes clear as you read the whole Bible—active self-giving love.

This teaching was only heightened by Jesus’ teaching was that we are to love radically those around us who do not know God. He summed up the whole Old Testament saying that we are to “love God...and love our neighbor” (Luke 10:27).

Galatians 6:10 charges us to “do good to everyone.” In Isaiah and Matthew 6 we’re charged to care for the poor. We’re called even to love our enemies in Luke 6. This is such a part of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles’ teaching we can be sure that this was occurring in Acts 2. They were loving those around them and that led to favor and opportunity for witness.

Two specific application areas:

The City

Let’s get specific though. We’re here in the city of El Paso TX in the year of our Lord 2018. What does it look like to live missionally here? It means to embrace our identity as sent missionaries. In Jeremiah 29 God’s people have been taken far from home and enslaved and yet God calls them in 29:7 “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” God had sent his people there and part of the purpose was to do good to the city. Similarly, we didn’t “end up” here. God sent us to this people. Across all time and the face of the planet God saw fit that we’d be here now to witness to this place. So we embrace our identity as God-sent witnesses to this place.

So how do we do this? First we reject the mindset of the people around us toward the city. When it comes to the city around us there are three ways the world often interacts with the world around us: 1) We hate the city— “I don’t like these people this place etc.” , 2) We use the city— “I’m going to get what I can from these people and place” , 3) We’re apathetic to the city— “I don’t really care.”

Our call to be witnesses involves the way of Jesus: we are to love the people and city around us, we are to serve them. This means that we do this when we have opportunity in normal life and that we intentionally find ways to do this. We have many opportunities every day -- at the

doctor, school, workplace, in our neighborhoods, etc. We should get out of our routine to intentionally ask, “How can I do good to my neighbor there?”

Vocation

Don't separate any of this from your 9-5 job. So often we think of our jobs in one category and our Christian life in another category, as if our 9 to 5 doesn't really matter in terms of following Jesus as long as we don't steal or sin really bad there. Colossians 3:23–24 says, [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (ESV) So part of it is that we just glorify God by working hard. There's a glory to God when we work hard, as unto the Lord, have integrity, and stay faithful for a long time. This also has an effect. When we work like this we are a witness and a light to those around us. Often it's only by long faithful work combined with our christian witness that is a compelling pointer to Jesus.

3. Missional Movement

Now we're going to back up and ask the question, “Okay I see we're supposed to be faithful as witnesses, but how do we do the whole worldwide commission thing?” Acts 1:8 “...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This is exactly the pattern we see played out in the book of Acts: City to Region to Hard Places to World.

-In Acts 2-7 the city of Jerusalem is reached with the gospel in a powerful culture-changing way.

-Then in Acts 8 you see that persecution scatters the church and people go out into the whole region of Judea so all the small cities and towns and neighboring cities have witnesses there now.

-Luke is careful to include that the disciples witnessed in Samaria, which was a place the Jewish people hated because of their difference in religion and culture and ethnicity. And that thread continues as the gospel reaches an Ethiopian in 8:26 and then reaches the Gentiles in general in Acts 10.

-Then the gospel goes to the world. In a lot of this God leads providentially but then Acts 13 we see that this intentional gospel advance from city to city becomes part of the church's mission and strategy. Paul and Barnabas are set apart and sent off into the world, going from region to region and city to city. Finally Acts ends with Paul preaching the gospel in Rome, the center of the Roman Empire. The picture is that the gospel continues to just reverberate out everywhere and this pattern continues through all the New Testament letters. It continues in our day.

-And in Revelation we see the end of the story in Revelation 7 that people from every nation and tribe and people and language are all singing that “salvation belongs to our God!” The trajectory of what Jesus begins in Acts 1 is nothing less than a world changing eternity altering missional movement. There's a sense in which we just stand back and marvel at this but also a sense in which we are invited to participate in this.

So how does this missional explosion happen? It happens through church planting, that's it. Pastors or missionaries or local believers in one area go to another area and live missionally

and new people follow Jesus and they are established into a church. That church then, like the church in Antioch, sends people out to do it in the next area. On and on. And here's what's amazing: if you read statistics today looking at the question, "What is the most effective means of evangelizing and reaching an area?" the answer is "church planting." Still. So how do we join Jesus?

1. Area to Area

First, the disciples in Jerusalem reached their city and their surrounding area of cities around Jerusalem. The population of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus was 50,000-80,000. What you realize is that our modern "cities" would be cities of cities to the ancient world—the Eastside zip code 79936 has about 115,000 people in it, the westside zip code of 79912 has about 80,000 people, the northeast zip code has 60,000. So I see the "Jerusalem to Judea" step one being equivalent to our metro area where you have about 865,000 thousand people in the county (with Las Cruces and Juarez nearby).

So how do we participate in reach our local region? We seek to be faithful witnesses in each area of the city where God has placed us. There are certain things we can do that have a city-wide reach like the radio ministry or internet content, or even people willing to drive 25 minutes to be here on Sunday. There's so much we can only do on a really specific personal and area level. Moving forward we want to do three things to encourage area to area reaching in the city:

- First, establishing strong community groups around the city. Those are places people experience the value of family and are rooted and established and equipped.
- Second, encouraging more and more our people to reach their area of the city—their neighbors and schools and grocery store clerks. We're doing that in central with our neighborhood outreach but we'd love to do that everywhere.
- Third, planting churches in our city. We believe that we need more gospel preaching missional churches in our city. There are on average 5,700 more people in El Paso every year. There are many people who know religion but not Jesus. We are hoping and praying that God will allow us to plant a church on the Far East side and a church on the Westside to better reach those areas.

Bottom line: We want to have a missional culture in our church that leads to us multiplying community groups, intensifying gospel witness in areas, and establishing new churches.

2. City to City

We see the gospel going from Jerusalem and Judea to a totally different area of the world like Antioch. The equivalent for us is planting churches from one city to another. El Paso to Frisco, or Phoenix to Denver, etc. In the New Testament you see people like Paul and Silas going out to do this work, but you also see people like Priscilla and Aquila who helped fund these new churches and would move around to support the church.

In our modern age when people move from one city to another they move for a better job opportunity or school and then fit church into it. The New Testament model is, yes sometimes providentially people move but then they see it as God sending them to be witnesses there. OR

they intentionally move to an area with little to no gospel presence to help a church. In the same way we want to be willing to ask, “Lord are you calling me to go plant a new church even if that means a move?”

Part of the legacy of our church is that we’ve regularly over the years sent people out to start or strengthen churches in many places. We sent two pastors to strengthen a church in Phoenix that now has hundreds of people and has planted two more churches. We sent a pastor to help strengthen Gracia Soberana in Juarez and now their church is training pastors across Latin America. We sent a pastor to help plant a church in Vancouver. We sent a family to be part of the core team of a church plant in Frisco that now has hundreds of people. Those are just a few examples. This is what we want to embrace and continue.

3. Nation to Nation

Then there is the important work of global mission. This is Jerusalem to Rome or Rome to Spain in the ancient world. There are two aspects to this: First, we want to start new works among people who don’t know Jesus. This is mission work with the goal of church planting. Second, we want to support brothers and sisters and their churches around the world. Paul called on the churches he planted to support the church in Jerusalem with financial help. We want to support churches around the world that may not have the resources we have in the US. And even more than resources we want to support them in prayer, with training, with encouragement.

We desire to see future growth in this area. We’ve sent a few folks from our church to places like the Philippines but we want to grow this aspect of our mission. We want people here to pray about whether they should go to areas with little or no gospel presence. We want to support other churches. A great example is Todd’s work to support some pastors in India through partnership and a new forming partnership with a church network in Nepal.

So how do we join this global missional movement of Jesus? We think area to area, city to city, and nation to nation.

Conclusion: Vision

Sometimes people ask us “What’s the vision of the church? What would you love to see happen if by God’s grace he allows it?”

We should have a hopes for the future. Jesus is still at work in the world around us. Jesus has sent the Spirit to empower us. While we may face setbacks, Jesus promise is true that “The gates of hell won’t prevail (or stand up to) the church.” In light of all we’ve covered in the topic of mission we should be gospel optimists. We should have hopes for the future that we work toward in dependence on God’s power:

1. Leaving a gospel legacy: We want to speak the gospel to our children in the church model gospel change and by God’s grace see them follow Jesus after us. Our lead pastor Ricky was saved in kids ministry. Another kid from our church went to Phoenix so his dad could help the church there and now he’s the Lead Pastor and the Director for Global Missions for our family of churches. Many many other kids are followers of Jesus and impacting the world around us in

the areas of business and engineering and art and family. We would love, by God's grace, to leave a legacy of kids who follow Jesus after us.

2. Lighting a gospel witness: Pastor Ray Ortlund says that he prays that his church would "make the real Jesus non-ignorable" in their city. We desire that as a church. We want to be a light in the way that Jesus describes in Matthew 5: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." We want our gospel witness to shine out in a non-ignorable way to the city around us. We want to see godly witnesses like faithful teachers and godly businessmen and businesswomen and new non-profit organizations scattered all over our city, pointing to Jesus.

3. Launching gospel works: We've been a sending church for much of our history. By God's grace we've helped start or establish churches in Arizona and Canada and Mexico and Dallas and beyond. One pastor has said that you measure church health not with seating capacity but sending capacity. We want to be a church planting church that regularly sends people out to new areas to start and establish new churches. We want to see people sent out from our church involved in global missions.

That is our hope and our prayer. May the Lord do more than we ask or think.

The Final Word

We'll end our time together with an encouragement from 19th Century British preacher Charles Spurgeon:

“As I have already said, the Church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for the Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. The Church is the nursery for God's weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep—the home for Christ's family.”

“Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. **Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us...**

“All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the Church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world!”

Amen.