

Philosophy of Ministry

Advance Community Church

Written by Scott Prentice (Summer 2014)

We are a Christian church whose mandate is to embody the Great Commission and the Great Commandment while equipping everyday people to do the work of ministry within their sphere of influence (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 12:28-31, Eph. 4:11-13). Our aim is to be faithful to our responsibilities in pointing people to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. He is building His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it (Matt.16:18). We sense the urgency of the gospel in equipping believers and reaching unbelievers as central to the Church's mission.

What is the Gospel?

I love the simplicity of how Dr. Timothy Keller describes the Gospel from a macro and micro level. The macro level describes the gospel narrative of Scripture being Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. The gospel is about redeeming that which was lost and making things new. The micro level's focus is summed up in *how* a person "gets right" with God. This refers to an individual outlook concerning how a person hears and responds to the *good news*. The gospel has three basic elements: "the identity of Jesus as God's Son and Messiah, the death of Jesus for sin and justification, and the establishment of the reign of God and the new creation" (Center Church).

In a nutshell, the gospel is the declaration of what Jesus Christ has already done to save us. It describes how God came to rescue and renew creation through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. God is holy; and we are under His wrath and curse because of our sin. The good news of the gospel helps us see our serious problem in view of God's holiness while also becoming aware of the costly and amazing sacrifice of Jesus - the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. He willingly bore the wrath of God we deserved on account of our sin out of obedience to the Father.

There is nothing we can do to earn favor with God. We cannot live a perfect life due to our sinful nature. Original sin has been passed down through every generation since sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. As their descendants, we too fall under the curse of sin and are alienated from God, citizens of the Kingdom of Darkness, and dead in our sin (Ephesians 2:1-10). *HOWEVER*, Jesus entered the world through the conception of the Holy Spirit and was born of a virgin to be the Lamb slain on our behalf.

John the Baptist prepared the way by proclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:19). Jesus came fully God and fully man - "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He ushered in the Kingdom of Light making a way for us to be adopted into His Kingdom where we experience true life, the riches of His glory, and are satisfied by His presence. We look forward to eternity where we can enjoy His presence, because of the righteousness He earned on our behalf. Our gaze is set to one day see Him face to face and forever enjoy the benefits of being in His presence apart from the sin, death, and the curse of this current age.

I am intentionally writing, “on our behalf” to emphasize the point of the good news. Jesus did it all to satisfy the requirements of God’s holy standard. We are not worthy of anything. We didn’t deserve any of it. The gospel is all about Jesus! He saves AND grows us in the gospel in the process of sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit who we received upon conversion (Ephesians 1:13). This process of gospel-sanctification changes us into the image of our Lord from one degree to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Does this mean we become perfect? No. But, it does mean we are being changed and empowered to live for the glory of God as ambassadors of Christ while on the earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). The gospel ensures we will one day receive a glorified body like Christ’s resurrected body which will be worthy of His Kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). The gospel is embodied in Christ’s perfect life, shedding of blood, sacrificial death, and resurrection resulting in victory over sin and death on our behalf.

The gospel has formed a community of believers who are saved and set apart to herald this good news. We are united in purpose for the glory of God. Christians have been regenerated into a new inheritance that makes us strangers and aliens within the wider culture (1 Peter 1:1-4). Yet, our desire is to shape a missionally-minded church which actively functions *for* its community. We are not out to just start or belong to a church; rather we are focused on impacting our region with the message of Jesus Christ (in word and in deed) through the context of **intentional relationships**. Our goal is to glorify God by bringing hope to people in need of the Redeemer.

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How the Gospel Forms and Informs Our Ministry of the Church

The Scriptures Shaping the Mission and Vision of Advance Community Church

Mission: Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). We are committed to living out this mission together through the help of partnering churches, generous donations, prayer, old-fashion hard work, and the Holy Spirit's power. **Vision:** Our vision is to advance the gospel by reproducing multi-generational, gospel-centered missional communities throughout the Route 8 corridor (South Butler to North Pittsburgh). This will include the strategic multiplication of Community Groups and Church Plants. We believe God is leading us to launch four new churches by 2025 (central, south, north, and international). In fact, 10% of our annual budget is continually set aside for church planting.

Four Central Focuses

Glorifying God by Making Disciples of Jesus Christ is the central focus of the church. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-38). We believe discipleship is the overarching process of being an ambassador of Christ in leading a person to salvation, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey the teachings of Jesus through His Word (Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 5:11-20). Making disciples is the central thrust "what believers do" (at home, in the community, and in the church) in response to what Christ did on our behalf.

Glorifying God by Equipping the Saints for the work of ministry is the next focus. This is of great importance since it is part of the sanctification process that builds up the church and leads people to maturity. The Apostle Paul writes, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,

when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Glorifying God by Boldly Proclaiming the Truths of the Bible People must hear the truth as God's very word in order to respond to the gospel and be transformed by it. The word of God is alive and His Spirit works through His Word proclaimed. Our aim is to be a voice of truth for the glory of God and not the approval of men.

Scripture says, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Glorifying God by Exalting Jesus Christ in Worship Throughout all the Scriptures, we see a clear call for people to worship God. Psalm 150 states, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord". "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Another example is Romans 12 which exhorts us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice - our "spiritual act of worship". Our desire is to connect to God in genuine, awe-filled worship and prayer knowing that it is Jesus that is the central focus of life-giving worship. We are constantly in prayer for the Spirit of God to be poured out throughout our lives - in worship services and in the community.

Preaching & Worship, Education & Training, Community & Counseling

Not only does regeneration produce a desire for others to come to saving faith in Jesus, it also leads us to worship and give thanks for all He has done and is continually doing in our lives. **The point of our worship gatherings is to lead people**

into worship through the exposition of God's Word, corporate prayer, music, testimonies, communion, baptisms, fellowship, and hospitality. The gospel forms an ever-growing community of brothers and sisters who are being renewed by the Spirit. When believers gather for worship, it does good for the soul and the church. This gathering is powerful for the unbeliever to witness since it is a place where God can (and often does) reveal His glory. Jesus Christ is worthy of our affections and adoration. God reveals this truth intrinsically in the heart of the worshipper which then is expressed extrinsically in song.

Dr. Keller writes, **"Any time you preach Christ and his salvation as the meaning of the text rather than simply expounding biblical principles for life, you are preaching toward renewal"** (Center Church). I was listening to a message by Keller which referred to David and Goliath. He made the distinction between promoting David as the hero of the text and promoting the Lord whom David trusted. Doing the latter brings the message of Jesus front and center so that the listener knows they too should place their faith in Christ. In a society where pastors preach through a motivational, self-help lens, we need to be true to the text so that people hear the context of what the Word is actually communicating in a manner that's contextualized.

Paul David Tripp was featured in a recent edition of Bible Study Magazine wrote, **"The Bible is a grand redemptive story, but it may be better to say it's a theologically annotated story. To some degree, every passage tells something about God, about me, about life in the fallen world, about the disaster of sin and the operation of God's grace - every passage tells me something about every dimension of life"**.

When people can see the Savior and Redeemer revealed and His message exposed, the Spirit ensures the message will not return void. In another article, Tripp adds, **“Awe of God must dominate my ministry, because one of the central missional gifts of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to give people back their awe of God. A human being who is not living in a functional awe of God is a profoundly disadvantaged human being.”** (theresurgence.com). Without the awe of God, people are quick to place an emphasis on the awe of men.

We desire for there to be an awe of God and wonder of His Majesty as a church community. Jesus must be exalted and His truth presented unapologetically while also functioning in an honorable manner with the people God brings into our lives and His church. The worship gathering is designed to be contextualized to meet people where they are in an environment in which they feel comfortable. We have learned our community is void of churches that present truth in a context they understand. This is especially true of young singles, couples, and younger families. Even now, there are several families who had all but given up on church, faith, religion, and God that are connecting to Advance Community Church. **We are seeing people’s lives change right in front of our eyes as they experience this community of faith who’s on mission for the gospel.**

Idolatry and self-righteousness must be exposed and rooted out of the church. Our responsibility in training lay leaders is to educate and humbly rebuke these influences in our lives. We don’t engage people in a manner of judgement or superiority. As followers of Jesus, our goal is to come along side people in the

everyday, mundane, trenches of life in order to spur them along in faith. We invite them into our homes or out to our favorite restaurants to talk about life through a biblical worldview. We use the Bible as the only authoritative resource of truth to help them understand the universal need for the Savior in a fallen world. We pray for them and encourage them to deal with the sin that has entrapped them by trusting in the cross. **We tell our story of how Jesus saved us and how He is continually transforming us - into His image NOT into a better version of "me".**

We long to see people grow in their faith and trust in Christ as they understand God's plan for His creation. As they obey His Word and follow the leading of His Spirit, we encourage them to embrace the gospel call of making disciples as well. **We have found that as people reach their friends and family with the message of Jesus that their faith and maturity in Christ accelerates all the more.** A young man early in his faith encountered a Jehovah's Witness and shared the gospel with him. That night, he spent the evening researching this cult's belief system so that he could follow up with him in a more informative manner. He found compassion for this lost man within his soul and wanted to do more about it. It's awesome to see the Holy Spirit moving, guiding, and directing!

Learning to find *rest* in the power of the gospel is vitally important. **We must realize Jesus is the Head of the Church and is sovereign over His Church.** His Spirit is actively involved in bringing people to salvation and maturing them in Christ. He gives us the chance to be His servants and ministers of reconciliation. This is a divine privilege as His children. But, it doesn't stop there.

The gospel informs us of the opportunities all around us. Spurgeon said, **“Let us be on the watch for opportunities of usefulness; let us go about the world with our ears and our eyes open, ready to avail ourselves of every occasion for doing good; let us not be content till we are useful, but make this the main design and ambition of our lives”** (Counsel for Christian Workers).

We believe demonstration will lead to proclamation.

Dr. Keller states, **“Gospel renewal in the church spreads through renewed individuals talking informally to others. It is in personal conversations that the gospel can be applied most specifically and pointedly”** (Center Church). We are constantly hearing stories of people telling others about Jesus out in the community on a very personal level.

We have learned a lesson from the VergeNetwork. The network encourages followers of Jesus to share their lives with the lost every single day by: **B**eginning with prayer, **L**istening to people who are lost, **E**ating with them, **S**erving them in a tangible manner, and **S**haring their story of Jesus (**B.L.E.S.S. is in action!**). The Gospel leads us to truly love one another inside and outside the walls of the church building as an expression of *who Jesus is* and *what He has done* on our behalf.

In the community, we have had opportunity to engage people on a level where “truth and grace” flow hand-in-hand. In my counseling, I now speak the gospel through a different lens. I used to point people to Christ in a manner of get yourself right, access accountability, and pray. It stunk of law and legalism. Now, I show them how within us all is the sin of autonomy where we want things our way even

expressed through outright rebellion before a holy and loving God. We naturally serve the idol of “self” in an endless pursuit of self-satisfaction and self-glorification. This is revealed in countless expressions of sin. **The gospel tells us that no one is righteous and able to “fix themselves” or find satisfaction apart from the Heavenly Father who loves them and sent His Son on our behalf.** It’s His righteousness that matters. People need to see the devastation of their sins, repent, and trust in the work of Jesus and His Spirit to bring change in their life. Several of the men we are discipling even now are sensing a call to vocational and/or bi-vocational ministry in order to advance the gospel.

Advance Community Church’s philosophy of ministry is centered on making much of Jesus in a community in desperate need of Him. There are estimated to be over 50,000 people in our immediate region along what we call “the route 8 corridor” who are walking as enemies of the cross (Philippians 3) - many don’t even know it (Matthew 7). Likewise, Jesus had compassion when He looked over the crowd in Matthew 9 as He described them as “sheep without a shepherd”.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd; people need to hear the truth of the gospel and experience His saving grace. Reaching people, equipping people, sending people, and shepherding people shows how much the church is about *people being reconciled to God*. Our desire is to be a Jesus-centered church where the gospel is clearly saturated. We long to plant churches, multiply gospel-centered community groups, and send out people in order to be obedient to God and make much of the name of Jesus Christ. We are praying and working to that end!