

Us: Igniting a Passion to Follow Jesus

Our Values (part 1)

Colossians 1:15-29

Mark Vroegop

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me (Colossians 1:15–29).

A few months ago, my wife and I decided we needed a weekend get-away. We love downtown Indianapolis, so I booked a hotel near the circle. We enjoyed a great meal together and explored the city. But the most memorable moment came as we walked the canal.

It was a beautiful night. Not a lot of foot traffic. And I suggested that we talk about us—our relationship, our kids, our family. I said, "Let's list things that are encouraging. And then let's talk about our concerns." It was a delightful and helpful conversation—the kind of moment when you think: "we should probably do this more often."

Do you know what was interesting about that conversation? There really wasn't anything new. There were no "ah-ha" moments. We talked about things that we'd already talked about. But here's the thing: it *still* was helpful. Talking about "us" even if it was a review was still helpful.

We were able to remind each other of God's good grace ("When we see grace, say thanks"), and we were able to confirm that we were on the same page. That was helpful, especially for me, because I tend to lead as a husband and father responding/reacting to problems that need to be solved, rather than rehearsing what we already know to be true. I'm better at responding than rehearsing, better at solving than celebrating.

Perhaps you resonate with that in your relationships or your leadership.

Well, what's true in marriage is also true when it comes to church. And I thought it would be helpful as we started 2020 to rehearse and even celebrate some things related to our church. I envisioned a church-wide walk on the canal where we talk about "us."

By that, I mean we discuss a few important questions:

- What is the unique grace of God that has been and continues to be on our church?
- Among all the gospel-preaching churches in our city, what is our unique identity? Why do people—why do *you*—come here?
- What is our unique role in the city, the country, and the world?
- What do you love about your church?
- How can we continue to grow, improve, and get better?

We could spend a number of weeks talking about this, but I wanted to at least spend the first three weeks talking about us—who we are as a church.

A Brief History

It's important to remember that College Park Church has a story of God's grace—one that we benefit from every single Sunday. So, let me remind you about our history.

College Park Church was planted thirty-five ago, in 1985. A group of Bible-believing churches, the Indiana Fellowship of Regular Baptist Churches, had a vision for planting a church in the northern part of Indianapolis—an area that was showing promise of growth and expansion. At the time, the population of Carmel, Indiana was just over 20,000 people, compared to the current population which exceeds 92,000.

This fellowship of churches called Kimber Kauffman, and a Bible study was started with ten families, who met at the Holiday Inn, in Casino Room B. God blessed the faithful exposition of the Word and the commitment of these believers to one another, and the church began to grow. It wasn't long before the church outgrew the Holiday Inn and relocated to a nearby warehouse.

In 1986, it was clear that a permanent location was needed for this growing body of believers, and ten acres were purchased at 96th and Towne. Over the years, God miraculously allowed College Park to acquire additional property, leading to our existing thirty-five acres today plus the eleven acres at the Ministry Center at Shelborne Road.

In 1992, the first sanctuary was built for 450 people. Another sanctuary was built in 1997 and it held about nine hundred people, and it wasn't long until three services became the norm at College Park. Attendance continued to grow, a great staff team developed, and College Park attendance was consistently at over two thousand people each Sunday.

After some challenging years in the early 2000s, there was a pastoral vacancy and our family felt God's call to College Park in 2008. Over a two-year period, the church grew by a thousand people, we rewrote our mission and values, the elders started the Brookside initiative, and we addressed our facility needs with a \$19 million expansion in the midst of the Great Recession. God continued to bless us, we planted Nehemiah Bible Church, and started a residency program. And we worked hard to pay off our debt such that by 2014, we were debt-free.

We then used our yearly mortgage payment to start the Next Door Mission—our church planting strategy that has led to churches in Fishers, Castleton, Greenwood, and Pike Township. At the same time, we continued to give generously the unreached peoples. Since building our new sanctuary, we've had seven consecutive years with Christmas offerings over one million!

Over the last twelve years, our church has grown from two thousand to four thousand; from one congregation to six; from a budget of four million to thirteen million; and from an eldership of less than twenty to almost forty. Since 2008, our Christmas Offerings have totaled over eleven million!

That's a lot of grace. That's a lot of growth. And that's a lot of change. We are not the same church we were in 1985, and I hope you are thankful for that. But at the same time, some things have remained consistently true about our church over the last thirty-five years.

Our Core Values

When you step out of the Sanctuary today, take second to look up at the banners hanging in the Atrium and the six sets of words on the bulkhead around the Sanctuary walls. Our elders crystalized our mission statement and Core Values in 2008. It was the product a years-long effort to make a previously long and unusable statement shorter and more memorable.

Honestly, all churches have the same divinely given mission which is prescribed by Jesus in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20:

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.

We've summarized that with a simple phrase: **Igniting a passion to follow Jesus**. It's our unique expression of the Great Commission. It communicates that we want to be part of putting together the right, divinely-given resources such that every part of you (your heart, thoughts, feelings, actions) are driven to follow after Jesus. Our desire is to set the table so that your heart is set on fire in love for Jesus! Everything we do at College Park centers on this singular vision and mission.

Do we do it perfectly? No way! Sometimes igniting can feel like manufacturing or even extinguishing. Sometimes passion can feel contrived or empty. Sometimes, following Jesus is too esoteric or too general. But even in our imperfection, I love this compelling mission.

But our six Core Values reflect the way that we uniquely live out this mission. Values reflect your history, commitments, culture, and your emphasis. Now, these Core Values were a summary of twenty-one cultural commitments. Our elders crystalized the historic culture of the church with six values:

- Pre-eminence of Jesus
- Authority of the Word
- Redemptive Community
- Extravagant Grace
- Biblical Unity in Diversity
- The Call to Go!

Today we are just going to talk about the first three.

Pre-eminence of Jesus

It seems like we read the Scripture a long time ago, but I want to take you back to Colossians 1. The first sermon series I preached at College Park was on the book of Colossians. The second was on the book of Job and how Christians think about suffering.

The church at Colossae faced many challenges, especially regarding what kinds of ideas should be considered most important. The church knew that it needed to grow in spiritual maturity, but it was falling into a spirituality that was drifting from the centrality of Christ. The church felt spiritual, but it didn't feel Christ-like.

And that's why Paul writes the following:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

Did you hear all the amazing statements about Jesus? Paul's point in this text and the point of this value is that you don't make Jesus the core; he is the core. He's the first, the last, the beginning, and the end.

When we talk about the pre-eminence of Jesus, it means that we are committed to centering our church, our worship, our preaching, our singing, our ministries, and our discipleship on the only one who is worthy of worship and our allegiance. The main thing is to keep the main One the main thing.

More than a religious system, we want you to know a person named Jesus. More than a set of rules, we want you to live like Jesus. More than a theological system or what you know, we want you to follow

Jesus. Don't forget that the most spiritually-minded people were the ones who killed Jesus. Success for us is determined by how much people are talking about, falling in love with, and looking like Jesus.

Authority of the Word

Our second Core Value relates to the source of our understanding of Jesus, our hope, and the basis for our ministry. It is rooted in our belief in the authority of the Word of God. In Colossians 1, we see this in verses 25-26 and verse 28.

²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints...²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom. . . (Col. 1:25–26)

We express this value like this: The Bible is the foundation of who we are, what we believe and everything we do. We are committed to preaching, teaching, counseling, sharing and living by the sufficiency of the whole counsel of God, because it contains everything we need for life and godliness. Real life change is found in the Spirit-empowered Word, not our ideas, thoughts, or opinions. God's Word is written in ink while our plans and theologies are in pencil.

We believe that the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). We believe the Bible is living and active (Heb. 4:12). We believe God has given us everything we need to know about him and ourselves in order to be godly people in the Bible (2 Pet. 1:3).

This means that our theology; our ministry philosophy; our governance model; and our views of sexuality, the roles of men and women, marriage, the sanctity of life, biblical justice, counseling, missions, parenting, etc. all flow out of what Scripture says. Success and power look like faithfulness to what the Bible says.

The most obvious expression of this is in preaching. To understand College Park, you need to know that our church was birthed on a commitment to unleash the power of Scripture. We believe that the possibility of life change comes not from our opinions but from the truth of the Word of God. That's why the typical diet of our Sunday morning is looking at a particular text to see what it tells us. That's why we normally make our way through a particular book of the Bible. Or, if we are looking at a topic, we anchor our study in a particular passage or a few passages.

The authority for ministry and to help people change comes from the power of the Word of God.

Now, we placed these two values first because they are the most important. If you get the pre-eminence of Jesus and the authority of the Word wrong, nothing else really matters. And I can also tell you from the history of this church that in the midst of some really challenging years in the mid-2000s, it was the anchoring of the Pre-eminence of Jesus and the Authority of the Word that God used to preserve this church.

Finally, in order to understand who College Park is, you have to know that it is the unique combination of these two values that defines us. Our elders and staff talk a lot about the word “both.” Too often, churches settle on “either-or” choices. Typically, you’ll find churches that are really committed to experiencing a relationship with Jesus or they are deeply committed to understanding the Word. Some churches don’t emphasize theology, they just want you to be in love with Jesus. Other churches treat their congregations like they are a class. Success for them relates to how much you know about the Bible.

We strive to combine a deep love for the Word that results in a deep love for Jesus. And you need to know that our aim on Sundays—through everything we do, but especially singing and preaching—is for you to exult in Jesus based upon what you see in the Word. The success of our church is directly related to how much you look like, act like, and follow Jesus based upon the Word of God.

And we are deeply and convictionally committed to seeing that happen in your life. We want you to love Jesus through the Word.

Redemptive Community

The third value relates to how this happens together. And this is so important. Spiritual growth and life change were never meant to be merely individual. Following Jesus is a community project—something we do together.

Here’s how we’ve said it: We are broken people loved by the Father, redeemed by Jesus, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We strive to minister God’s love by repairing the broken and bringing into restoration those lost to sin, by the power of the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus. Our focus is Jesus; our authority is the Word; our dependence is prayer; and our aim is Christ-likeness as we live together as the community of God’s redeemed.

In Colossians 1:28-29, we find these words: “warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Our labor together is to present everyone mature in Christ. That means that this church is a hospital for sinners. It’s a place for broken people. It’s a place where people can be authentic and real. We want our church to be a place where you belong—a place where you’ve covenanted together with other believers, willingly placed yourself under the care of this church and our elders, and where you work to help other people spiritually grow.

We want you to be in relationship with other believers. That starts with regular gathering on Sundays. It continues as you become a member. And it flourishes as you find a place to grow and multiply. We want to be known by other believers. We want you to be in venues where you receive care and content. The largest way we do this is through Small Groups. But it also happens in Bible studies, Adult Big Groups (Sunday School), and other classes. Quite frankly, I’m not as interested in the program as I am in you finding community—a place to grow through care and content.

I say this every month in our DISCOVER event: I love this church because I've benefited and my family has benefited from our redemptive community. My kids follow Jesus better today because they've walked alongside men and women who follow Jesus differently and better than Sarah and I do. I've received counseling and advice in some dark moments from people in this church. I marvel all the time at the unique gifts that God puts together to make his Church something special. I'm thrilled to be part of the staff and elders at College Park because I'm more in love with Jesus today because of this church.

College Park isn't perfect. No way. And since I've been here now for over ten years, most of our greatest weaknesses and deficiencies are probably my fault at some level. But here's what I know: This is Jesus's church. He bought her. He created her. And he has sustained her. Jesus has written the story of this body of believers for almost thirty-five years.

And as we think about who we are, my heart is full of gratitude. I love this church. And I love how this church has helped me love Jesus.

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