

Us: Igniting a Passion to Follow Jesus

Our Values (part 2)

Romans 12:9-21

Mark Vroegop

"¹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰ To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:9-21, ESV).

Nearly ten years ago, Tim Keller wrote an excellent article¹ on the way church culture and strategy changes with churches of different sizes. Here's what he said:

"We tend to think of the chief differences between churches mainly in denominational or theological terms, but that underestimates the impact of size on how a church operates. The difference between how churches of 100 and 1,000 function may be much greater than the difference between a Presbyterian and a Baptist church of the same size. The staff person who goes from a church of 400 to a church of 2,000 is in many ways making a far greater change than if he or she moved from one denomination to another. A large church is not simply a bigger version of a small church. The difference in communication, community formation, and decision-making processes are so great that the leadership skills required in each are of almost completely different orders."

Keller is not minimizing theological distinctives. Rather he's speaking into the reality that the size of a church probably has a more substantial effect on a church culture than what we realize. As I shared last week, College Park Church was planted with a handful of families in 1985. Now we are a church of four

¹ <https://seniorpastorcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Tim-Keller-Size-Dynamics.pdf>

thousand with a family of self-governing churches, an eldership of almost forty, and a budget of thirteen million.

The challenge is that most of us did not grow up in a church this size. In the 1960s, only sixteen churches in the United States had over two thousand in attendance on a Sunday morning. By 2007, there were 1,250. Now there are more than sixteen hundred around the country. However, the average church size in the United States is still below one hundred.

The effect of this is that most of us have an experience or even an emotional attachment to a certain sized church, even though we are part of a large church. This can lead to even further challenges when the experience of a size is over-spiritualized. Again, here's Keller:

"Most people tend to prefer a certain size culture, and unfortunately, many give their favorite size culture a moral status and treat other size categories as spiritually and morally inferior. They may insist that the only biblical way to do church is to practice a certain size culture despite the fact that the congregation they attend is much too big or too small to fit that culture."

Strengths & Weaknesses of Church Sizes

Keller's point is simply that every church size has strengths and weaknesses. In the 1980s, a church growth author named Lyle Schaller suggested that church size creates an entirely different "animal" or species. He used the following metaphors:

- Cat Church: Less than 35 people; overgrown small group; pastors come and go but people stay
- Collie Church: 35-75; friendly, eager; loved to be loved, decisions by consensus
- Garden Church: 65-100; variety of people and ministries; needs lots of attention (weeding)
- House Church: 100-250; family reunion feel; too large for staff, too small for quality
- Mansion Church: 250-400; big house; specialists needed; everything's an event; still know people
- Ranch Church: 400-1,500; broad ministry comprised of multiple groups; can't get your head around everything
- Nation Church: More than 1,500; a connected union with diverse backgrounds and opinions; highly structured, formal

I've found these metaphors to be helpful because there is a lot that changes with differently sized churches. But there are also some things that remain the same. As I shared last week, every church really has the same mission. It's the great commission from Matthew 28. But every church expresses that mission in a unique way. At College Park, we express Matthew 28 as "igniting a passion to follow Jesus."

Core Values

The distillation of how we live out the mission of our church is expressed in our Core Values. Besides our Confession and Member Covenant, the Core Values flesh out how we "do" church.

Last week I walked us through our first three values:

- **Pre-eminence of Jesus** – Everything we do is about helping people meet, love, and obey Jesus. The main thing is to keep the main One the main thing.
- **Authority of the Word** – God speaks through his Word, and the Scriptures are the basis upon which our entire church is built
- **Redemptive Community** – Spiritual growth is never meant to happen alone. Our goal from Colossians 1:28 is to present everyone mature in Christ together.

Next week, we'll be back in the gospel of John. But this week, I want to help you understand our remaining three values. You might consider the previous three to be the most important. The next three, however, make College Park unique among other gospel-preaching, Jesus-loving, theologically-oriented churches. Those values are: Biblical Unity in Diversity, Extravagant Grace, and the Call to Go!

I want to start in Romans 12 with a little different order.

Extravagant Grace

Romans 12:9-21 is a signature passage regarding how believers are to relate to one another and the world around us. In verses 9-13, there are thirteen commands, and they reflect the basics of Christian living.² In other words, the Bible acknowledges that people are not perfect and the world around us is broken—even hostile. So, how are believers to live?

Notice a few of the commands in this text:

- **Let love be genuine (v. 9)** – without deception or hypocrisy³
- **Abhor evil; hold fast to what is good (v. 9)** – surely in general, but especially as it relates to relationships with people
- **Love one another with brotherly affection (v. 9)** – your relationships should have a family-feel to them
- **Outdo one another in showing honor (v. 10)** – live in consideration and deference to other people. Consider others more important than yourself (Phil. 2:1-3). As Tim Keller says in *Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*: humble people don't think less of themselves; they think of themselves less.

Remember what John said about Jesus in the first chapter of his gospel? "...we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We need to be not only committed to truth but also to grace. And usually, people and churches are known for either truth or grace. We strive to be a church with both.

In other words, we want to impact our world by finding creative ways to go deep with the truth of God's Word and our care for people.

² Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 236.

³ Ibid.

We've expressed this as Extravagant Grace. Here's how we describe it: We desire to be a community of believers who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us. We yearn to demonstrate this grace through our church culture and our lives in a way that is transparent, real, and helpful. We are blessed to be a blessing to each other, the city of Indianapolis, and the world.

Romans 12 continues by saying: "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

The church of Jesus Christ is to be marked by a different spirit. We want to be a church marked not only by a deep commitment to truth but also a deep commitment to grace. The culture around us and even within evangelicalism is losing the "gracious middle." Rants, sharp words, and being against things are in vogue. I know more people who are characterized by what they are against than what they are for. So this value is really important.

Extravagant Grace shows up in how we handle our money. People who know they've been "graced" and who know that everything is a gift from the Lord, hold their money and their time loosely. They give by contributing to the needs of people and they are hospitable with their time and their home.

We want people to experience the extravagant grace of God as we are quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to get angry (James 1:19). We want the extravagant grace of God to be felt in our relationships as we balance truth with a kind of love that bears all things, believes all things, and endures all things (1 Cor. 13:7). We want new people and especially those searching for answers to feel loved and cared for. We want to practice biblical hospitality.

Rosaria Butterfield says, "Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs at all but as God's gift to use for the furtherance of his Kingdom. They open doors; they seek out the underprivileged. They know that the gospel comes with a house key."

This means that we care for one another. Last year our benevolence team gave away over \$161,000 to help people with medical bills, funeral expenses, overdue bills, and other needs. And that's just what we know about. I know that individually, our people do so much more. For instance, I received this encouraging email from Kendall Carlson, whose husband is in a fight with cancer:

"I think you would be so very proud of the people in your church if you knew even a fraction of the ways that they have poured out overwhelming support on us in the past few months. People we didn't know deeper than a 'hello' in passing have jumped in enthusiastically to meet needs we didn't even know we had—doing our laundry every week, packing our kids' lunches, bringing them home from school. Not to mention meals, ironing, yard work, cleaning vehicles, hospital visits, house cleaning, babysitting, financial gifts, and COUNTLESS offers of help and pledges of prayer. Certainly those close to us have cared for us incredibly well, but also an amazing number of College Parkers we don't know have rallied around us too. I just thought that if I were in your position, I would want to hear how Jesus has done something really incredible and special

through the people at College Park and it has been so humbling and beautiful to witness. To Him be all the glory!

We want to extend the same kind of grace that has been extended to us. But there's more.

Biblical Unity in Diversity

Another important and defining Core Value at College Park is Biblical Unity in Diversity. Since College Park was planted, we have strived to be a church where people from all walks of life could worship together.

In Romans 12:15-16, it sounds like this: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."

This value means that we see something beautiful in the diversity of the church. And this church has worked hard to be convictional about the right things, but not everything. When we walked through Romans a few years ago, I shared the model of absolutes, convictions, and preferences. It's really important to know the difference. Legalism treats a preference like an absolute. And theological liberalism treats absolutes like they are preferences. For instance, your view on alcohol or music style shouldn't hold the same weight as your view on the lordship of Jesus.

Understanding this distinction—knowing where to draw lines and how to draw lines—is really important.

This value also relates to ethnic harmony and racial reconciliation. It acknowledges that Jesus seeks to redeem people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9). It realizes that Jesus created new people through his death, burial, and resurrection. "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11). It recognizes that Jesus tore down the walls between ethnic groups and made "one new man" (Eph. 2:15).

You could think of Biblical Unity in Diversity like this:

We want to reflect the beauty of the Father, Son, and Spirit, in building the multi-faceted and multi-ethnic body of Christ. In our personal relationships, theological systems, and our ministry forms, we are committed to celebrating both our unity and our diversity in Christ. Within the framework of sound doctrine and humility, we desire for our differences to be in the right order of importance.

There is something beautiful about male and female, young and old, new convert and mature believer. There's something right about people of different education levels and backgrounds, different cultures, different ethnicities, different tastes, and different political positions, who all worship at the feet of Jesus.

In a world that is increasingly tribal, both inside the church and in the world, we have a great opportunity to be a different kind of community of believers. For instance, today is both Sanctity of Life

Sunday and the day before Martin Luther King Jr. Day. We need to be clear that the killing of innocent children in the womb is horrible. We also need to be clear that treating people inferior in any way, due to their ethnicity, is horrible. We should be a church that is anti-abortion and anti-racist.

I love the fact that Romans 12 uses the word harmony—a word that captures the kind of music made when two different keys are struck together. Biblical Unity in Diversity makes a powerful statement about the triune nature of God and the transforming power of the gospel. The term “Christian” was created in the segregated city of Antioch because the people of the city didn’t know what to call these people whose ethnicity was secondary to their relationship with Jesus. And I pray, especially this year, that we’ll be a church marked by gospel-centered unity in diversity.

Call to Go!

The final Core Value connects us back to Jesus’s words in the Great Commission. On top of a mountain in Galilee, Jesus told his disciples to “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). They weren’t instructed to huddle on the mountain; they were purposed to live on mission, to spread and share the news about the resurrected Christ.

So, as we gather on Sundays and in various places of spiritual community, it’s always important to remember that God calls us to take what we learn and experience here and look for ways to impact our world.

This is why we started a residency program almost ten years ago. We wanted to deploy people to help serve the mission of gospel around the world. We have residents who are now pastors at our church, within the College Park Family of Churches, at other churches, and even one who is serving in the Middle East.

This is also why we started planting churches in 2014 through the Next Door Mission. After we were debt-free, we used our debt-service to plant churches in Fishers, Castleton, Greenwood, and Pike Township. Since 2014, we’ve sent over six hundred people to these churches and funded their start-up. Now they are part of a family of churches that collaborates to reach our city. We are hoping that our next plant will actually be a joint effort with one of our prior church plants.

Beyond our programs, our greatest impact is just church members following God’s calling on their life. A few examples:

- Two of our juniors in High School Ministry, Lincoln and Mya, are intentional about witnessing to their friends at school. They even host a monthly worship gathering in their homes where up to thirty students come, and many who come are not a part of a gospel-preaching church.
- One of our former elders, Josh Harber, left his job in the United States to use his gifts overseas helping missionaries and ministries with partner development
- One of our former residents, Luke Humphrey, is now planting a church in the United Arab Emirates

- Many of you may have heard about Purposeful Design. One of our elders, David Palmer, and his wife, Cindy, sold their home in Carmel and moved to Brookside on the east side of Indianapolis. They started Purposeful Design and Heart Change, a discipleship program for women.
- Frank and Dori Morton were members at College Park for years. They helped plant Nehemiah Bible Church in Brookside. They also started Makerspace (a math and science initiative for neighborhood kids), and a boys Bible club where they play video games and study the Bible.
- Rick and Danielle DeMulling sold their farm in Brownsburg and moved into Brookside to be a part of new housing initiatives in the city. Their story was featured in the Indy Star in August.

I could go on and on. I'm privileged to run into people all the time who tell me about the amazing ways the people of our church live on mission. In their neighborhoods, at their schools, and in the marketplace, our people find amazingly creative ways to platform and share the gospel.

Applications

The aim of these two weeks has been to help us understand who we are as a church. I hope it's been helpful and maybe even clarifying. Our vision for discipleship is that College Park would be a place for you to belong, grow, and multiply.

I'd like to invite you to belong. If you haven't already, take the step to be baptized and also to become a covenant member of this church. In a society and an age of low-commitment, embrace the historic pattern of being in covenant together with us.

I'd like to invite you to grow. Find a place where biblical community is a part of your life. The largest way that community happens is in our Small Groups. But you can also find it in our classes, Adult Big Groups, and Men's & Women's Bible studies. We just want care and content to be a part of your spiritual life.

I'm also inviting you to multiply. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Use your gifts to advance God's mission. Support your church financially. Find a place to multiply yourself in service to others.

We want you to covenant together with us, to find community, and to multiply the gospel as we impact the world together.

I want to invite you to be a part of our mission to ignite a passion to follow Jesus this year.

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