

ASPIRE

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON THE
CHURCH WE ASPIRE TO BE.



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Dear Reader,

This book aims to capture the heart of the dreams we have for the future of ChristCentral Church and the role each member has to play as we 'Aspire' together.

In these pages, we take time to reflect biblically on our ten major values as a church, which we hope are already visible for all to see, however we are calling these 'aspirations' as we have a vision that they become increasingly more evident over time.

We are a 'work in progress'.

I pray that as you read through this book you will be encouraged in your faith and inspired to join with us as we long to see...

Lives and communities in, around and beyond Portsmouth transformed by the Gospel, enjoying God, and glorifying Him in all things.

Tim Blaber,

Lead Pastor

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

“What is the chief and highest end of man?”

**Answer: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and
fully to enjoy him forever.”**

(Westminster Larger Catechism)¹

¹ Westminster Assembly, Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)

A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A WORSHIPPING CHURCH?

Worshipping God is the single greatest activity any person can engage in, as St. Augustine famously put it, 'our souls are restless until they find their rest in God'.

Our mission as a church - '**bringing hope and sharing truth**' - is really about helping people to realise that their greatest purpose in life is to know God and delight in Him, indeed that is the very essence of Biblical worship.

So our first aspiration as a church, before everything else, is to call all people to be happy in God. If we get this bit right all else will follow on nicely.

Everyone longs to be happy. All of us would choose a life of delight and pleasure, given the choice, God Who created us to experience longings in the depths of our being, which only He can fulfil, knows this is true.

C.S Lewis wrote: "If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire... if you want joy... peace, eternal life, you must get close to... the thing that has them".²

The reason we worship is the reason we were created, to enjoy and glorify our Creator. As we worship Him, we get close to Him and as we get close to Him we come to realise how incomparably wonderful He is.

As implied by our name at ChristCentral, we want Christ to be the centre and focus of our church life. When you are in the presence of beauty and greatness you can't help but praise, whether it's a work of art, a stunning voice, or a glorious sunset you instinctively express your delight. How much more should we, when in the presence of the Creator of all that is good, be moved to praise and delight in Him? Jesus Christ is the source of all that is wonderful in the universe and as the 'created' could never be greater than the 'Creator' we seek to know and worship Him first and foremost.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A WORSHIPPING CHURCH?

A) We are called to worship in everything

² CS Lewis, Mere Christianity

³¹*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31)*

God has made it possible for us to enjoy and glorify Him in all things and at all times. Whether you are cycling to work, singing a hymn or changing a nappy, you are invited to 'do all to the glory of God'.

A heart of gratitude and humility, which acknowledges God's provision of every breath and every morsel, is one that glorifies Him.

We aspire to be a people who glorify God in all we do - in our working, our playing and our living. We seek to direct the applause toward Jesus as an act of worship in everything.

B) We are called to worship together

²⁴*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not 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. (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

Throughout the history of the Church, worship has been a central feature of the Christian community. Every time we meet together as God's people - for a Sunday service, midweek in homes, or for prayer and worship gatherings - we stir up one another to love and good works. You and I have been joined together in Christ. As a family we bless one another by being together in the presence of our Heavenly Father, enjoying His goodness and favour as a diverse community of people.

In a wonderful way, our worship becomes more beautiful when we join together as one people, with one voice to lift up one name!

C) We are called to worship in Spirit and in Truth

²⁴*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
(John 4:24)*

Jesus is our great teacher. And when it comes to the worship of God, He explained that this

A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

is something to be done ‘in spirit and truth’. These are not alternate ways of worshipping, i.e. worship that is ‘in spirit’ and worship that is ‘in truth’, for Jesus had in mind a wonderful union of the work of the Holy Spirit to direct His people to The Truth, namely Jesus Himself!

*¹³When The Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13)**

When we worship together, the Holy Spirit - whom Jesus Himself has poured out to us³ - draws us into the presence of God. We want our times of worship to be full of the life and love of God, as we sense and experience the Spirit of God among us drawing our attention to Jesus.

The Holy Spirit has a primary role in us knowing the love of God together as we worship:

Love that is sensed

⁵God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

As we worship God we anticipate knowing a true ‘experience’ of His love as His Holy Spirit moves upon us, a love we can sense in the very depths of our being.

Love that is seen

⁸God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

The cross is a glorious picture of the love of God, when we are tempted to doubt His affection toward us we are invited to ‘behold the tortured figure on the cross’ and to ‘see’ in this vivid expression of his sacrificial love.

D) We Are Called To Celebrate The Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion)

²⁶...for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

* All verses are from the ESV, unless otherwise stated.

³ See Mark 1:7-8, John 14: 16-17, Acts 1:8

We celebrate The Lord's Supper most Sundays at ChristCentral Church as part of our worship together. As we break the bread and drink the wine, we are reminded of God's love for us and of our need to depend on His provision for all our needs.

We believe that Christ's presence is truly with us as we celebrate this together. We reject the teaching that the bread becomes his 'literal body' and the wine his 'literal blood'. Rather as we eat and drink, we rely upon the Holy Spirit to strengthen our beings with all the benefits that come through Christ's sacrifice, stirring in us deep gratitude and affection for this most spectacular display of The Father's love toward us.

Spurgeon described this moment in worship like this...

"I think the moments we are nearest to Heaven are those we spend at the Lord's Table"⁴

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A WORSHIPPING CHURCH?

¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:10-11)

The Holy Spirit stirs in us various gifts that God has given to strengthen the church. When we gather together we expect times when a member of the congregation comes forward to bring an encouragement, using one of the gifts described by The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.

Utterance of wisdom and knowledge (verse 8) – when a person has a sense that God has revealed to them a particular situation someone is facing, and bring them encouragement about God's purpose and faithfulness.

Prayer for healing (verse 9) – We believe God heals and so we are a church who pray for those who are sick and longs to see greater evidence of His healing power among us, recognising that it is His power and not our own that can achieve a miracle.

⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, 'Homage Offered to the Great King', MTP, (54, No. 3100)

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Prophecy (verse 10) – Paul makes it clear that prophecy in the New Covenant (after the death and resurrection of Jesus) is *'in part'* (1 Corinthians 13:9) and so we receive words that people believe God has put on their hearts as an encouragement but also do not see them as an equivalent message to what we receive in the Bible (our final authority on all things). All prophecy needs to be weighed by the Elders for its ability to encourage and edify us.

Tongues and interpretation (verse 10) – God gives heavenly language to help us pray and praise. Whilst not everyone speaks in tongues, this is a gift that we should eagerly desire⁵. If a tongue is spoken during a service then we would expect an interpretation to follow. The Holy Spirit impresses on someone's heart the essence of what has been prayed, for the benefit of the congregation and particularly those who do not 'believe'. Otherwise this would be a very strange experience for them.

NB – The Spirit's work among us as we worship is always to draw our attention away from ourselves and onto Jesus. Therefore worship 'in spirit' will always lead us to 'the truth' that is revealed in Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

How does knowing that you are primarily called to 'enjoy God' and 'glorify Him forever' affect your approach to your day?

In what ways can you make worship something you do 'in everything'?

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 12: 27-31 where Paul lays out the variety of gifts that God gives to the church. Paul stresses that these gifts are given to the church for the church and that they are not possessed by everyone.

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What are the 'gifts' God has given you and in what ways are you using them to strengthen the church?

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WE ASPIRE TO BE

A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

“The Gospel is this: we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” (Timothy Keller)¹

¹ Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH?

We become the worshippers God created us to be on account of the gospel's power transforming our hearts. Without the gospel, we would have no message of hope in a world dominated by darkness and evil. With the Gospel, we can make bold invitations to all people to know the light and life of God!

Jesus has tasked us to be those who bring good news to the people we encounter in life. From friends and family, to colleagues and others we encounter, it truly is good news for everyone, without exception.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH?

²²Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24)

These words were spoken by the Apostle Peter following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. In this 'sermon', Peter shared with the vast crowd who had gathered, The good news concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - the Son of God.

Over 2,000 years later these same words are given to us as a church to share with the people of Portsmouth. These are the words of life that have the power to take a man like Peter from being a 'coward' to a 'champion' for the sake of Jesus.

According to the gospel, no one is beyond the reach of a God who loves to rescue sinners. The gospel tells us what God has done to make it possible for people 'dead in sin' to be 'made alive' and to have both peace and relationship with Him.

While we understand that all scripture points to the gospel, The Apostle Paul gives us very clear guidance as to what we **must believe** in order to be saved by this gospel.

A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

A) What We Must Believe

⁹...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame". (Romans 10:9-11)

We all start out as sinners: we all need a Saviour. Sin exists in every human heart from conception- an inheritance we receive from our distant ancestor Adam. However, we all choose to sin when we fail to trust God's word, preferring instead to believe the lie that our greater good exists outside of God.

We are powerless to defeat sin with our own efforts and so are under the judgment of God, Who is holy and just. However, our God is also abounding in mercy and gave Christ as our substitute. Jesus, the Son of God - fully man and fully God - is the only Person to have lived a perfect life; the only Person able to fully represent humanity (being fully man) and able to fully satisfy the perfection the law demands (being fully God). He went to the cross innocent of all crimes. He was utterly sinless.

Jesus bore the penalty for our sin in His crucifixion and was 'judged' in our place. Removing from us our 'guilty' verdict and pronouncing a glorious 'not guilty' verdict over every person who confesses belief in Him - irrespective of how 'well' or 'badly' they have lived.

To be 'saved' therefore requires us to believe in Jesus for our salvation, accepting His work on our behalf in order to be made right with God.

More - the good news includes Jesus' resurrection from death. At the cross Jesus triumphed not only over our sin but also over our greatest foe, death itself. Because Jesus is alive, all who believe in Him are made 'alive'. We undergo a spiritual resurrection, but also have the hope of a bodily resurrection like His.

What must we do?

Believe: Jesus is fully God and fully man, lived a perfect life, died as the sinners' substitute on

the cross, removed the wrath of God from us, paid our debt and rose to life after three days - defeating death once and for all time.

B) What We Must Receive

When the crowd in Jerusalem heard Peter speak these gospel words, something crucial happened to them...

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart... (Acts 2:37)

This 'cut' they experienced is something the Holy Spirit performed in them. Indeed we believe that faith in Jesus Christ is only possible when a person receives faith from the Holy Spirit.

Faith is a gift from God: a free gift - and what the Bible calls grace.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Grace of God is stunning.

God makes us perfectly acceptable to be in his presence. In fact, grace takes us further still, enabling us to be in the place where God dwells, through being '*justified by faith in Christ*' (Galatians 2:16)

This justification by faith means that none of our good works or evil deeds can add to or detract from Christ's complete work on the cross. Grace stamps our hearts with Christ's glorious triumph over sin and death. It demolishes the wall of hostility, resulting in our stunning reconciliation with God. We no longer oppose but adore Him.

The bottom line is we boast in Christ's victory. Through grace it is also our victory! What an exchange took place upon the cross: My life of sin and shame, for His life of purity and obedience. When the Father looks at those Jesus has justified, He sees sons and daughters, dressed in dazzling white garments, radiating the glory and aroma of the Son of God.

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The significance of God's grace can't be overstated. We must constantly protect it from all attacks and abuses from those who seek to produce counterfeit versions to snare men and women.

Two particular ways in which the gospel of grace has been undermined throughout church history, remain rife today. The early church father Tertullian put it like this:

“As Jesus Christ was crucified between two thieves, so the gospel of justification is always justified between two opposite errors”

These need to be clearly defined.

We find the gospel undermined by 'legalism' in the Galatian churches, and by 'liberalism' in the Corinthian church, both inciting stern letters of rebuke from the Apostle Paul. Both errors are like 'thieves' robbing the riches of God's grace from the Christian and undermining the churches mission to the lost.

Legalism - adding 'law' to the gospel.

Legalism imposes on believers a heavy burden of 'rules' and 'customs', which must be observed in addition to the gospel to be acceptable before God. By implication Christ's work on the cross is not sufficient for salvation, and needs to be supplemented by man's efforts if God is to be pleased.

A person who is being robbed by legalism will be so preoccupied with measuring up to the prescribed standard that they won't enjoy the freedom that grace provides. They ultimately make little progress as their eyes are not focused on enjoying Christ but in observing 'law'. The beauty of grace, however, is that our lives are now empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our behavior and conduct change because we are enjoying God - not in order to somehow earn his approval, or to try to keep Him happy.

Liberalism - preferring sin to obedience.

The error of liberalism is also terribly damaging. A person robbed in this way, sees grace as a 'licence' to continue in sin; because we have free justification through Christ, the way we

live our lives has little meaning. The Apostle Paul often writes about this error (also known as antinomianism) in his letters. In Romans he writes:

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2)

And to the Galatians he says:

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. (Galatians 2:20)

Far from being an incitement to sin, grace is an incitement to sing.

When we realise what it cost God for us to be 'crucified with Christ', we are awed that His love would go to such lengths for us. So, how can we prefer sin to obedience - to live as enemies of God instead of sons? I love how Spurgeon challenges this error.

"Salvation by the death of Christ is the strongest conceivable promoter of all the things which are pure, honest, lovely, and of good report. It makes sin so loathsome that the saved one cannot take up even its name without dread.

He looks upon it as we should regard a knife rusted with gore, wherewith some villain had killed our mother, our wife, or child. Could we play with it? Could we bear it about our persons or endure it in our sight?

No, accursed thing! Stained with the heart's blood of my beloved, I would fain fling thee into the bottomless abyss! Sin is that dagger which stabbed the Saviour's heart, and henceforth it must be the abomination of every man who has been redeemed by the atoning sacrifice." (C.H. Spurgeon)²

The gospel of grace calls us not to live under law or as slaves to sin but as beloved children, who

² C.H. Spurgeon, Christ Died for the Ungodly

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respond obediently and happily to the voice of a good Father, trusting His desire for us to enjoy lives that are full and abundant through obedience.

We are all prone to lean into one error or the other. But let us pursue grace.

To illustrate this, I'll share a story about my sons.

Our older son, William, is prone to 'liberalism' and our younger son, Calvin, to 'legalism'. Here's how they learnt to scoot.

As a young toddler Calvin watched William on his scooter from his pushchair, being too young to scoot himself. As my wife, Lizzy, walked to the park she would call out time and again:

"William, use your brake, use your brake"

"Slow down or you will crash"

"Will, use your brake!!!"

"STOP!!!!"

Will wanted to be free to scoot without guidance or instruction from his Mum, but was moments away from a crash, because he never used his brake.

But when Calvin reached scooting age, he approached it differently.

He jumped on, scooted a yard or two, put his foot down, turned around to look at his Mum and said, "Look mummy: brake". He scooted another two yards, put his foot down and repeated, "Look mummy: brake".

He did this all the way to the park. In the end Lizzy pushed him, as he made little progress through his own efforts. He was intent on not behaving like his elder, reckless brother.

William had no regard for his brake while Calvin was obsessed by his. Both needed correcting.

Men and women who have received the grace of God will hear Him differently from those in either liberalism or legalism. When He speaks we listen, and our obedience to the Father's voice

is motivated not by a desire to impress by showing how ‘good’ we are: it’s an instinctive response reflecting the restored trust we now have in His guidance.

Adding law to your life says, ‘Christ isn’t enough to save me’. Persisting in sin says, ‘Christ isn’t enough to satisfy me’. But the grace of God is all sufficient - both to save and to satisfy.

In the gospel we have received freedom from sin and the heavy expectation of the law, by becoming sons of God and receiving the right through the Holy Spirit to call ‘Abba, Father’.

A Gospel-Centered church proclaims this new way to live, the way of grace, that teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness³ and to enjoy the freedom for which Christ has set us free.⁴

C) How Should We Respond?

After those in the crowd were ‘cut to the heart’ they made the following plea to Peter:

³⁷...“Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. (Acts 2:37-38)

We Repent

When we receive the Holy Spirit, He empowers us to change how we live. Simply put we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ. This involves a dramatic turn around in our hearts.

The Greek word that we translate as ‘repent’ is the word ‘metanoeo’ from which we get the word ‘metamorphosis’. It means a complete change - like a U-turn. A notable difference in the heart of a believer is a totally different attitude towards sin. The believer now resists and fights it, choosing to pursue Christ instead.

We Are Baptised

We love to baptise people at ChristCentral Church.

³ See Titus 2:12

⁴ Galatians 5:1

A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

It is again helpful to understand the original language here; as the idea of baptism is understood differently largely on the basis of upbringing or church background.

The Greek word used is baptizo, which refers to the action of dunking fabric into dye. So would have been a full immersion. Whenever we encounter baptism in the New Testament, it is always a full immersion of people who believe in Jesus, often in a river or the sea. It doesn't matter whether we are baptised in the sea, a river or in someone's bath. What matters is that we are obedient to the command that those who believe are baptised.

Paul explains that the baptism of believers helps us to identify with Jesus' death and resurrection. All who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death.

⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Only a full immersion baptism is able to adequately portray the believers' union with Christ's death and resurrection.

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH?

To grow in your passion for what Jesus has done, and to increase your understanding of what He has done:

“Never be content with your grasp of the gospel. The gospel is life-permeating, world-altering, universe-changing truth. It has more facets than any diamond. Its depths man will never exhaust.” (C J Mahaney)⁵

A) Delight yourself in the Gospel

It is impossible to exhaust the truth of the gospel. It doesn't matter if you've read the Gospels a hundred times or listened to a thousand sermons; there is an infinite supply of riches available to us in it.

⁵ C J Mahaney, *The Cross-Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing*

We want every member of ChristCentral Church to study the gospel, never growing tired of what Christ has done for us and never failing to be moved by the love of God as we reflect on it. The more we dig into the depths of the gospel the stronger we will become, both as individuals and as a church family.

B) Share the Gospel

“Disciple-making is not a call for others to come to us to hear the Gospel but a command for us to go to others to share the Gospel.” (David Platt)⁶

This gospel is good news for everyone. We should live our lives seeking to bring this message of hope at every opportunity to those God leads us to. Our children need to hear the gospel. So do our colleagues, neighbours, friends - and foes.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Do you remember when you first heard the gospel? How did you respond?

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In what ways is the gospel a picture of God’s love for us?

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Have you been baptised?

⁶ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From The American Dream*

A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

“The Bible is endlessly interesting because it is God’s story, and God by nature is himself endlessly interesting. The Bible is an ever-flowing fountain. The more you read it, the more you find its truth and beauty to be inexhaustible.”

(D A Carson)¹

“To read the Bible as God’s word one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God’s Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God.”

(Kierkegaard)²

¹ D A Carson, The Gospel as Center,

² Attributed to Kierkegaard, quoted in B Utely, The Superiority of the New Covenant.

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH?

We live in a diverse world, with many different backgrounds, worldviews and ideas for what life is about. That which is considered to be right and moral by today's society is not necessarily going to be agreed with by tomorrow's. So what confidence can we have for our convictions and values?

At ChristCentral Church, we are determined that God shapes our thinking and our living through what He has revealed in His Word. So the Bible is our primary source for understanding both God's purposes in our lives individually and together as His church. Inevitably, we will say things which sound unusual and even offensive to those who don't believe the Bible. But we seek to be resolute in affirming and submitting to God's authority - even if it means we lose popularity and are criticised. Without the Word of God guiding us, we are subject to the winds of change in our society. With the Bible, we have a solid foundation that remains constant and unchanging.

*⁸The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.
(Isaiah 40:8)*

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH?

This might seem like an odd question: what does the Bible say about the Bible?

But it is a vital question. If the Bible is God's Word and if the Church should revolve around it, we would expect to find texts which underline this point. And happily, we do.

Below is a collection of passages that emphasise the necessity of scripture in shaping the life and activity of the Church...

⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

²...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for

themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4: 2-4)

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3: 16-17)

Drawing on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we learn that Scripture is:

A) Breathed Out by God

Every book of the Bible has a human author, with a distinct style of writing that reflects the context into which the book was first delivered and its particular moment in history. But, as Paul states, it is the Spirit of God Who is the force and the authority behind every word.

Martin Lloyd-Jones has a helpful way of illustrating this, which I have paraphrased below.

Imagine a child being asked to write a thank you card to his grandparent, the child cannot write independently and requires the help of an adult. His father takes hold of the child's hand that holds the pen and moves it to produce words that are legible and sentences that are comprehensible. It is true that the child is writing the letter, for his hand grasps the pen, but it is also true that the father is the force and authority behind what is written.

When we read the Bible we are listening to God's precious and timeless words. What a privilege!

Because we have received the Scripture from God Himself and He is perfect in every way - without flaw - the words that emanate from Him are also perfect. The Bible makes clear that it is impossible for God to lie and that every word that comes from Him is truthful³. So the words of scripture are 'inerrant': they contain nothing that is contrary to the truthfulness of God.

B) Profitable for Teaching

The Apostle Paul expected the Scripture not only to be read or heard but also taught. At ChristCentral Church we make the teaching of Scripture a top priority. We don't merely want

³ See 2 Sam 7:28, Titus 1:2 and Heb 6:18

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

to use the Bible as a source for quotes, like pegs from which we 'hang our sermons'. We expect the Holy Spirit to reveal God's truth through the passage to lead us into freedom.

Whenever the Scripture is taught we would expect answers to the following questions:

What do we learn about Jesus?

In Luke 24 there is a wonderful account of Jesus speaking to His disciples following the resurrection. He is walking with them along the Emmaus road.

²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

Jesus taught His disciples that the whole of Scripture leads us to know Him. So, when we read the Bible we expect to learn about Jesus - not just from the New Testament but from the Old Testament too. Jesus is the protagonist and champion of Scripture. The more we read the Bible and the better the Bible is taught, the more we hear and learn about Jesus.

What do we learn about the Gospel?

If Jesus is the protagonist of Scripture, then the gospel is the major story being told. On every page we expect to learn about how our Creator God is on mission to reconcile sinners to Himself through the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. When we teach the Bible, we want to help people to see what God has done for us through His Son. We want our hearts to be warmed again by the extravagant gift of grace that has come to our hearts through the gospel.

Timothy Keller puts it like this:

"There are, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: Is it basically about me or basically about Jesus? In other words, is it basically about what I must do or basically about what he has done?"⁴

The gospel tells us what God has done, so when we teach the Bible we expect to hear this explained!

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*

What do we learn about God's purposes in our lives?

Encounters with Jesus always result in changed lives. If you have heard the gospel and not been changed by it, then you haven't yet understood it.

When we teach the Bible we expect people to respond to what they have heard by living in the grace given to them through Jesus. This means that we have a radically different approach to sin and worldliness, choosing to follow Jesus instead. Our motivation is not to earn God's favour - something we could never achieve by our own efforts - but to enjoy His favour - something Jesus has freely given to us.

The truth is that the gospel is more wonderful than we will ever know. The Scripture presents this reality to us and compels us to live in the light of all that has been revealed through Jesus.

Run, John, run, the law commands,
But gives us neither feet nor hands.
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings.
(John Bunyan)⁵

C) For Reproof, Correction and Training

No-one enjoys being corrected. But we all recognise that a parent who doesn't correct or discipline their child is failing to love them as they should. In the same way our Father in heaven has given us the opportunity to lead one another into freedom and away from error and danger, by giving us the Scripture.

¹⁰⁵*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

This is how Jesus used Scripture to rebuke Satan in the wilderness...

³...*"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."*
⁴*But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* (Matthew 4:3-4)

⁵ Commonly attributed to John Bunyan, however no direct source available

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

We will find ourselves similarly being tempted to think wrong thoughts on a daily basis. By saturating our minds with The Word of God we too will be able to resist the lies of Satan and stand firm in the truth revealed to us in Scripture.

You may wonder how you achieve your life goals, how to become a better parent or friend, to avoid error; I love how Tedd Tripp answers this:

“The only safe guide is the Bible. It is the revelation of a God who has infinite knowledge and can therefore give you absolute truth. God has given you a revelation that is robust and complete. It presents an accurate and comprehensive picture of children, parents, family life, values, training, nurture, and discipline - all you need to be equipped for the task”⁶

There may well be occasions when Elders in the church bring a correction to a member, urging them away from worldly behaviour and to trust upon Jesus and His word instead. A heart that is soft to the seed of God’s word will receive this correction with humility, eager to return a great harvest before God. Every follower of Jesus is called to be His witness. Our lives are to point those who are perishing to see our Lord as Saviour - the only one able to rescue men and women from darkness. So, how we live is a gospel issue. If our lives show no evidence of having been changed by the good news of Jesus Christ, then why should we expect others to follow him?

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us some very clear guidance on the subject of correction and church discipline...

¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Mark Dever describes the seriousness of this issue so helpfully:

⁶ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*

“God created the church, we have said, so that it might increasingly reflect the character of God as it's been revealed in his Word. In keeping with the storyline of the entire Bible, then, church discipline is the act of excluding an individual who carelessly brings disrepute onto the Gospel and shows no commitment to doing otherwise.”⁷

Renewing The Mind

*²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.
(Romans 12:2)*

Genesis 3 provides us with a tragic description of the moment sin first took root in the heart of humanity. The tactic of the evil one, was not to deny God's existence (atheism) but to distort his character by undermining His Word.

¹...He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”...⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:1-5)

Adam and Eve were deceived by God's wicked foe. They allowed the truthfulness of God's Word to be displaced in their minds, preferring their own distorted judgment.

¹⁷As those who are called in our discipleship to war against sin, our most powerful weapon is the ‘sword of the Spirit - which is the word of God’. (Ephesians 6:17)

The more our minds are saturated with God's word, the more empowered we are to resist Satan's wicked temptations - as our Lord Jesus did in the wilderness.⁸

God is doing a work of transformation in our lives. It's a staggeringly beautiful work, which begins in our minds, as the Spirit of God guides us into all truth.⁹

⁷ Mark Dever, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church

⁸ See Matthew 4:1-11

⁹ See John 16:13

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH?

We are so privileged to have constant access to The Word of God. Over the centuries many men and women have died so that we can to read the Scripture in our own language.

Your first and foremost contribution is to READ THE WORD! Make time spent with God in His Word the top priority of your day. Where possible, find a private place for this, free from interruption, and enjoy being with your Father.

Read the Bible together as a family: if you have children then you do them a great disservice if they are not hearing God's Word read to them daily. I have recommended a couple of resources for the family that I hope you'll find helpful.

Memorise scripture; learn about scripture by reading books; share the truth of scripture by telling Bible stories to your friends and family. The gospel is good news to be shared with as many people as possible.

We would encourage all members of ChristCentral Church to challenge the leadership if there are any practices or teachings that appear to be inconsistent with God's Word.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Do you make reading the Bible a top priority in your day?

What passages of scripture have you found most helpful in your life?

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Is God's Word the final authority in your life?

Have you come to treasure His Word above all 'worldly' wisdom?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH

“All the good that is ever done in the world is worked by the Holy Spirit and, as the Holy Spirit honours Jesus Christ, so Christ puts great honour upon the Holy Spirit. If you and I try, either as a Church or as individuals, to do without the Holy Spirit, God will soon do without us.”
(C. H. Spurgeon)¹

“The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.” (Francis Chan)²

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon Gems

² Francis Chan, Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit

A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH?

There are many ways that a person may go about getting a task done, but how does a group of 100 or so uneducated, first century, Middle-Eastern men and women start a movement which would span the globe?

In fact, it is estimated that by 300AD, ten percent of the known population of the world were confessing Christians. That is around six million people.³ The reason for the staggering advancement of Christianity can be found in Christ's own words to his disciples before ascending into heaven:

*⁸But 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.
(Acts 1:8)*

It was the power of the Holy Spirit working through the disciples that enabled them to be witnesses for Christ. It was the Holy Spirit Who led the disciples to go into new situations and places, proclaiming the gospel in power, and they subsequently saw hundreds of thousands come to believe upon Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. If it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit there would be no Church today and without the same Spirit continuing to work through the disciples of Jesus there will be no Church tomorrow.

We aspire to be a 'Spirit-Led Church' because that is the only way we can bear fruit and pursue our vision as a church: "To see lives and communities in, around and beyond Portsmouth, transformed by the gospel, enjoying God and glorifying Him in all things."

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A SPIRIT LED CHURCH?

The early disciples saw some incredible things as they spent time with Jesus: lame people walking, deaf people hearing, blind people seeing. They saw: thousands of people fed by a few loaves and fish. They even witnessed resurrection from the dead, most significantly that of Jesus, who appeared to them having been executed before their eyes.

And yet, despite all this Jesus said to them *'it is to your advantage that I go away!'* (John 16: 7)

³ See Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*

What an incredible thing to say! This wasn't false modesty; Jesus knew that there was a great gift His Father was preparing to send His people, a gift which was prophesied:

*²⁸And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.
(Joel 2:28)*

Jesus continued in John 16 by further explaining the work and role of the Holy Spirit.

A) Conviction of Sin

⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin. (John 16:8)

Essential to receiving the good news is a conviction of sin, and recognition of a profound need for forgiveness from a Holy God. A Church which is led by the Spirit will be an environment where men and women don't continue to sin, but are moved by God to repent. No-one can induce this. It is a primary role of the Holy Spirit when working in the lives of people.

B) Guide into all truth

¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16: 13)

Our mission statement as a church is this: To bring hope, and share truth; in, around and beyond Portsmouth.

Jesus famously said of himself that He is '*the way, the truth and the life*'. (John 14:6)

When we 'share truth' we are in essence sharing Jesus, who He is, what He has done and how He can bring hope to all people. The role of the Holy Spirit is to lead people to that same truth concerning Jesus Christ.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit 'the spirit of truth', meaning that all we have concerning the work and person of Jesus Christ has been brought to us by the Holy Spirit. The Bible itself was written as the Spirit of God empowered men to write the words of God, so that the Apostle Paul could say

A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH

¹⁶*all scripture is breathed out by God. (2 Timothy 3:16)*

A church that is led by the Spirit and is full of the Spirit will also be saturated by the truth of God's word.

C) Glorify Jesus

¹⁴*He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14)*

A church that is led by the Spirit will make much of Jesus!

The Spirit of God has been sent to us to help glorify Jesus, to make him the focus of our adoration and worship. When we worship, we don't sing to an unnamed, unknown deity, rather we declare the praises of Him Who the Spirit of God has revealed to us as Christ, the anointed Son of God and the One worthy to 'receive glory and honour and power'. (Revelation 4:11)

There is a wonderful account in Acts 4, as Peter and John are brought before the Council in Jerusalem who were irritated by the volumes of people believing their message as they preached the gospel and healed the sick. Luke provides us this invaluable insight as to what bearing witness to Jesus in the power of the Spirit looks like:

¹¹Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them... This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.... Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:11-12)

Men and women filled with the Spirit have a certain, distinct 'I've been with Jesus' look.

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A SPIRIT LED CHURCH?

As disciples of Jesus, called to be His witnesses in the world, we all desperately need the Holy Spirit. The great news is this: God loves to give His Holy Spirit. Read these words from Jesus:

⁹And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹²or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11: 9-13)

Jesus wants you to ask, seek and knock; He wants you to come to God with your requests and you can be quite certain, our Good Father will give us the very best: namely the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul said 'walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh' (Galatians 5:16). There is a daily opportunity for each of us to walk with the Spirit, putting to death human desires and becoming increasingly fruitful.

We aspire to be a church that is full of people displaying the fruit of the Spirit:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

There is honestly no greater evidence for a 'Spirit led church' than the above fruit being on display in the lives of its members. Bearing this fruit is the best way to contribute.

Be full of **love**.

Be full of **joy**.

Be full of **peace**.

Be full of **patience**.

Be full of **kindness**.

Be full of **goodness**.

Be full of **faithfulness**.

Be full of **gentleness**.

Be full of **self-control**.

Be full of the Holy Spirit!

A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH

We are beyond privileged, to live in this New Covenant, where God's promised Holy Spirit has been sent - a gift not for a few but for all God's people. Let us, therefore, respond by eagerly seeking to be filled with His Spirit, enjoying ongoing and frequent encounters with Him.

He is God without measure, so don't limit yourself in an expectation of the freedom you can enjoy as you walk with the Spirit.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Have you known times when the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin?

In what ways has the Holy Spirit led you to truth?

In what ways has the Holy Spirit glorified Jesus in your life?

How have you seen the Fruit of the Spirit develop in your life?

When was the last time you asked God to fill you with His Holy Spirit?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

“The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus.”
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)¹

“Being a member of a church means so much more than standing next to someone else and singing some songs once a week. Being a member of a church means realizing that we are responsible for helping the brothers and sisters around us to grow as disciples of Jesus.” (David Platt)²

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost Of Discipleship*

² David Platt, *What Did Jesus Really Mean When He Said Follow Me?*

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH?

How do you stand strong during times of intense persecution as a Christian? Polycarp was a Bishop who lived in AD 70-156, aged 86 he was arrested for being a Christian, all he needed to do in order to avoid torture and death was to proclaim 'Caesar is Lord'. Polycarp's response was this: 'Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?' A decision, to follow Jesus led Polycarp to the stake, and on the 22 February AD 156, he was martyred.

We aspire to be a disciple-making church, whose people see Jesus as more valuable and precious than any other 'treasure' this world offers. People like this shine like stars. They are unmistakable. They go on adventures with Jesus and invite others to follow.

We take seriously Jesus' command to His first disciples: to 'go make disciples'; to help others as He helped them; to call all people to follow Him as He did. 'Bringing Hope, Sharing Truth' doesn't end when a person hears the gospel for the first time, or even at their baptism. Rather we exist to help one another follow Jesus, every day of our lives, wherever He leads.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH?

The best place for us to learn about Christian Discipleship is of course the teaching of Jesus!

²³And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9: 23-26)

Disciples follow Jesus.

We must never be afraid to state the 'Biblically obvious'!

When Jesus called out His disciples, He invited them to follow. As Bonhoeffer points out, the first

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

test was obedience for these men. Would they listen and respond to Jesus' invitation?

Our Christianity is nothing, if it's not all about Jesus! As a church we explicitly have this core gospel principle in our name, that all might know we exist as a church because of Christ and that He is the central figure in our lives and ministry.

We become Jesus' disciples by...

A) ...Fighting Sin

In this passage Jesus offers a sobering perspective on what it means to be His disciple, starting with self-denial. Disciples of Jesus deny themselves. What does that mean?

We fight sin!

The battle with sin doesn't end when a person becomes a Christian. In fact, that's when it begins in earnest! The Bible makes it clear that before we come to Jesus we are '*dead in our sin*' (*Ephesians 2*) and therefore have no ability to fight it.

God places new desires in our hearts, a longing to become more like Jesus, and enjoy relationship with Him. These affections cannot be contrived. They either exist or they don't. One clear evidence that they are present in us is how we respond to sin.

The Apostle in *Romans 8:13* writes '*put to death the deeds of the body*', the Puritan Theologian, John Owen puts it like this: "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you."³

By calling us to follow Him, Jesus is leading us away from a life of self-indulgence and sin - to a new dwelling place.

In 2011, Lizzy and I went to Berlin for a wedding. It was a few days before Christmas. When we returned to the airport at the end of our long weekend, we discovered our flight was cancelled due to snow. We were stuck. Lizzy was five weeks pregnant, and my wife does not like the cold at the best of times - let alone -15°C!

³ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*

There was no guarantee of a flight home for days, due to the severe weather. What were we to do? We decided that we weren't just going to stay put and risk being stranded for days, but would do our best to get home, one way or another. And so we travelled on trains, taxis, buses, ferries, camels. You name it we took it! We were determined to get home for Christmas.

The further from Berlin we travelled the warmer the weather became, the snow lessened and our spirits lifted! We experienced overwhelming relief when we finally got onto the ferry at Calais after several days travelling.

Becoming a Christian for most of us isn't like taking the quick easy flight home. To be a disciple of Jesus is to begin a journey with Him, beside Him, pursuing Him. We are called to walk increasingly away from the cold darkness of our sin. Though we are never totally free from its allure before we enter into His paradise and become perfect - as He is.

If you have been called to follow Jesus, you won't live in sin, you will deny yourself as you walk with Him. Along the way, we call others to join us, what a thrill! We aspire to be a church that helps many people to fight sin by following Jesus, to challenge one another not to get stuck, but to keep our eyes focused on Christ.

B) ...Suffering with Him

No human being has ever lived who didn't suffer! Yet this topic is one we might be tempted to bypass as a discipleship priority. However, scripture repeatedly emphasises that those who know and love Christ respond to the pains of life in a radically different way. The path Jesus leads us on is not free from trouble; He doesn't call us to a life of comfort. In fact it would seem from the passage in Luke that Jesus wants all His followers to be clear that to be His disciples requires daily sacrifice.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

The great eighteenth century preacher, John Wesley, made the following comment on this passage.

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

“...taking up our cross goes a little farther than denying ourselves... and is a more difficult take, it being more easy to forego pleasure, than to endure pain”⁴

Romans 8 is a chapter that is precious to so many of us, as it includes many brilliant statements concerning our lives in Christ, but it also has plenty to say in relation to suffering.

¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8: 16-17)

We all long for the day when we are glorified with Christ; to be made perfect as He is, free from all pain and sadness. But according to Romans 8:17 all who enter Christ’s glory will have a testimony of suffering with Him. Even in life’s toughest moments they did not reject Him.

In fact, Paul continues to show that suffering is used by God to make us disciples:

²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8: 28-29)

What great comfort we gain from these verses, knowing that in every challenge of life, nothing is wasted as God works in us to make us increasingly more like Jesus.

I love how John Newton captured this aspect of discipleship:

“Everything is necessary that He [God] sends; nothing can be necessary that He withholds.”

A ‘disciple-making church’ will display the true work of God within the community, as men and women cling to Him, trusting Him even during times of trial, knowing that His goal isn’t to simply improve our circumstances but make us in ‘the image of his Son’.

⁴ John Wesley, On Self-Denial (The Works of Rev. John Wesley)

C) ...Making Disciples

When Jesus first called out to Peter and Andrew he presented them with a great adventure:

¹⁹Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. (Matthew 4:19)

And in some of the final words Peter and Andrew heard Jesus speak before his ascension, he said:

¹⁸All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28: 18-19)

Disciples of Jesus make more disciples of Jesus. We are all called to share in the adventure of making disciples. The goal every disciple has, to become like Jesus, is achieved not in isolation but in community.

Disciples are made as the Gospel is shared⁵

Disciples are made as truth is shared⁶

Disciples are made as lives are shared⁷

Disciples are made as the love of God is shared⁸

From witnessing to our friends, neighbours, family and colleagues about all that Jesus has done in our lives, to challenging a Christian friend who is not trusting God or encouraging someone to take a step of faith - all disciples of Christ are called to make more disciples of Christ!

D) ...Becoming Like Him!

The Apostle Paul is inspiring on so many levels. He was a leader with great integrity and a huge heart for Christ, such that he could say this:

¹Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

⁵ See 1 Peter 3:15, Acts 1:8, Psalm 96: 2-4

⁶ See Colossians 3:16, Romans 15:14, John 8:32, Galatians 6:1-5

⁷ See Acts 2: 44-45, Hebrews 13:16, 1 Corinthians 12: 25-26

⁸ See Matthew 22:36-40, 1 Corinthians 13, James 2

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

Paul knew that the great goal for all Christians is Christlikeness, something that he expressed over and over in his letters.

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Romans 8:29)

¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

A disciple-making church is full of men and women calling others to imitate them as they imitate Christ. Therefore how we live really matters. All our ministry, all our programming, all our groups, all our teaching, everything we commit to as a church has this goal in view.

Let's listen to Paul once more.

²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1: 28-29)

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH?

Taking the four steps to making disciples that we ended the last section with, here are some very practical steps that you can take to help us as a church to make disciples.

Share the Gospel

The early church grew as ordinary men and women shared the wonderful news of how God had changed their lives in an extraordinary way through Jesus.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Invite your friends to attend a ChristCentral Church service. Every week we preach the Gospel and expect people to meet Jesus for the first time.

Invite your friend to a course like Christianity Explored.

Pray for God to use you!

Share The Truth

Jesus said '*I am the, way the truth and the light*', He is truth! When we share truth with one another, we are really sharing what we have learnt about Jesus, through following him. What a great gift.

As you abide in God's word, so you will become increasingly confident to encourage others with truth from it.

Join a small group in the church to build friendship with others, and to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Within the church family it is an act of kindness and love to bring correction when a brother or sister is in error. As elders we recognise a God given responsibility to lead from God's word and to share what we have received in caring for our members.

Share Life

We are called to be disciples – men, women and children following Jesus together, sharing our lives, belongings, possessions, money, and homes; is a natural consequence of being added to this wider community – ⁴⁴*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.* (Acts 2:44-45)

Our midweek groups are an excellent way to share life, hence why they are called 'Life Groups', by belonging to one of these you are able to share life with a group of friends with whom mutual discipleship can occur.

Share The Love Of God

Paul said to Timothy '*the goal of this command is love*', in *1 Corinthians 13*, he wrote a whole chapter on the significance of love, above all other gifts a person might receive. Jesus emphasised love for

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

God and for people as the first and second greatest commandments!

As your love for God increases, so will your love for people, and your Christlikeness in turn. Be someone who loves people!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

What are the battles you are fighting?

Have you known what it is to suffer with Christ?

Will you willingly follow Jesus wherever he leads?

What aspect of being a disciple of Jesus do you find most challenging?

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What aspect of being a disciple of Jesus most thrills your heart?

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In what ways are you helping others in their discipleship?

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Are you meeting with anyone in the church to help you in your battle against sin?

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WE ASPIRE TO BE

A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH

“We should all be inspired by the eschatological vision of the great multitude which no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, redeemed and standing before God’s throne. The Lord’s Supper should be a dramatic foreshadowing of the Messianic banquet of the kingdom of God.” (John Stott)¹

“Being united to Christ means being united to every Christian. But that universal union must be given a living, breathing existence in a local church.” (Mark Dever)²

¹ John Stott, *The Living Church*

² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks Of A Healthy Church*

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH?

Few people would argue that we live in a divided world, where there is little crossing over of people groups in displays of true unity and solidarity, let alone love and friendship. Lines are so often drawn according to such things as education, race and wealth, but the church envisaged by Christ looks very different: He saw a united family, from every people group joined together by the love of God. The church we aspire to be reflects the God who has called and designed us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, different and yet one, distinct and yet indivisible. Unity and diversity within the church has meaning beyond our understanding. It is an evidence of the sincerity of God's presence among us that is compellingly attractive to a fractured world.

We aspire to be a united and diverse church, to display the wisdom of God to those living in, around and beyond Portsmouth, bringing hope that in Christ, all can belong and become whom He intended them to be.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH?

John 17 records Jesus praying to His Father shortly before His crucifixion, and is a wonderful insight into the heart of Jesus, because you learn a great deal about a person from how they pray!

*²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.
(John 17:22-23)*

The unity of the disciples mattered to Jesus. Really mattered! And not just between the 12, for He prayed for all who would come after them.

*²⁰I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
(John 17:20-21)*

A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH

What's so important to see from these verses is that Jesus' desire for His disciples to be 'one', had a purpose beyond simply the 'closeness' of Christians within the church. There was a gospel witness aspect to it.

Jesus foresaw that the Gospel message would be scrutinised by a fractured world, begging the question 'are these Christians really any different?' For where an extraordinary unity exists between Christians of various backgrounds and ethnicities those looking on 'may know' and 'believe' that Jesus had truly been sent by The Father to bring about reconciliation. The unity that exists between Christians points to the very nature of God, eternally existing in unbroken oneness. Tozer helpfully explains this vital feature of the Gospel Community like this:

"Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship."³

A great deal of what is written in the New Testament has to do with unity, which in light of what Jesus prayed in John 17, should not come as a great surprise to us. The Apostle Paul saw it as a top priority to emphasise this great accomplishment of Christ's atonement, using many different metaphors in his letters to convey unity within the church. Here are some examples:

Body of Christ

⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)

¹⁷We who are many are one body. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

¹²Just 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. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

³ Tozer, The Pursuit Of God

²⁷*You are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)*

¹²*Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)*

²³*Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. (Ephesians 5:23)*

Bride of Christ

⁹*Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:9)*

⁷*The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. (Revelation 19:7-8)*

¹²*For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:12)*

³¹*‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)*

Family of God

¹⁸*I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:18)*

⁴⁹*Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’. (Matthew 12:49-50)*

¹⁹*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19).*

A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH

House of God

⁶Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Hebrews 3:6).

¹⁴...I am writing these things to you so that ¹⁵... you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

Temple of God

¹⁹...The household of God [is] ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

⁵You 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. (1 Peter 2:5)

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

All of these images reflect various precious aspects of the unity Christ enables within His people, and are applied across the Church, universally. But as Dever points out "...that universal union must be given a living, breathing existence in a local church".⁴

Unity within the church doesn't negate diversity. In fact it is our distinctions that make our unity so stunning to observe, for we belong to one another and need one another in order to remain healthy.

Different yet one. The picture of the church as 'body' helpfully conveys the dichotomy of unity and diversity. Let us look a little more closely at Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians:

⁴ Mark Dever, Nine Marks Of A Healthy Church

¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

God Himself adds us to the body at the point of conversion, so that we are simultaneously reconciled to God and to one another. So belonging to the Church isn't a 'choice' for the Christian but a 'consequence' of being a Christian, refuting the idea of 'free floating Christianity' detached from the church community.

More, in being added to the body, we become 'one' with it, irrespective of race, nationality, class and gender. Our unity does not depend on these distinctions which are very 'earthbound' in nature. In Christ we have become 'one new man' - equally loved and valued by God - and are recipients of a new status: a heavenly one.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (1 Corinthians 12:14-16)

The Spirit of God, who places us into the body is also responsible for us finding our function within it, with every part of equal significance and value.

We reject any notion that implies one member is more important or significant than another. Such worldly thinking must be resisted. There can be a temptation to consider the more 'visible' parts as having greater significance than the less conspicuous members. Yet how many of us have seen our own spleen, or lungs? Not many I presume. But we would have a hard time living without them.

We aspire to be a united and diverse church, because that is the design God has given us in scripture for His people and so we celebrate everyone He adds to us, as all enter through the same gospel by the same Spirit.

A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH?

Firstly, you need to know that you have a contribution to make. God has added you to this body and therefore you can be confident He has done so for a reason.

A good place to start is to consider where the needs are in the church, perhaps by asking one of the leaders and making yourself available to respond.

Beware the dangers of 'comparison'.

We live in an age of comparisons - wanting to be like someone else, or have what another person has. If we're not careful, this can lead to coveting or an inferiority or superiority complex.

Whether the matter in question is a particular role or opportunity, we must avoid the associated perils of comparison, asking not so much 'what can my church do for me' as 'what can I do for my church' to borrow and customise a line from JFK.

We hope all members of ChristCentral Church will be helped to discover how they can most fruitfully contribute to the overall health of 'the body'. As part of our discipleship we have an obligation to spur one another on in this, through encouragement and opportunity.

Please look out for those who may appear to be on the fringe of things, or who are struggling to know where they fit in.

Above all else, we know we are to love one another. Our greatest commandment. Sandwiched between chapters 12 and 14 of 1 Corinthians that speak about spiritual gifts is a whole chapter on love, which the Apostle Paul says 'never ends'. For the eternal seed that comes into the heart of every Christian is sown in love, and will abound in fruitfulness from now until eternity.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Have you noticed ways in which ChristCentral Church displays unity and diversity? In what ways could this aspiration develop?

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Why is it important to you that the church is united and diverse?

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Why do you think God designed His Church to be like this?

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In what ways might you help us become more united as a church?

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WE ASPIRE TO BE

A PRAYING CHURCH

“To pray is to accept that we are, and always will be, wholly dependent on God for everything.” (Timothy Keller)¹

“Without prayer, local churches are telling God, ‘It’s OK, we can handle things, thank you’.” (Terry Virgo)²

¹ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*

² Terry Virgo, *The Spirit-Filled Church*

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A PRAYING CHURCH?

When we consider the Church's task - 'going to the ends of the earth, making disciples of all nations' - and when we at ChristCentral think about the masses living in our city and picture the faces of those we desperately want to know the love of God, prayer is our instinctive response. A deep, humble-cry, expressing our total and utter dependency upon God and, crucially, an expectation of His willingness to act.

Prayer flows from the conviction that the children of God have constant access to our Father and permission to ask. We believe Him to be good, and the giver of good gifts, Who loves people more than we ever could.

We aspire to be a praying church, because we recognise that without the help of God all our labours are in vain. He is the Master Builder, the great Architect, the One with the plan. We work with Him and for Him.

The church that prays is the church that expects. And we expect our great God to do great things in, around and beyond this city.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A PRAYING CHURCH?

A) Prayer That Is Private

⁵And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6)

As we read the Gospels, we see over and over again, times when Jesus would detach himself from the crowds, to find a quiet place, where he wouldn't be interrupted - where he could pray to His Father.

¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:16 NIV)

A PRAYING CHURCH

Think about this: Jesus, the sinless One, who was full of power through the Holy Spirit for the task before Him, made time to pray a top priority.

How much more so should we, who sin and are weak, acknowledge our need to be constantly in prayer?

Jesus withdrew to a place where He knew he could be alone, where He could pray to His Father free from distraction, expressing all that was on His heart – and listening.

Jesus similarly tells us to go to our ‘room and shut the door’, and ‘pray to your Father’. It really does seem to be a very simple formula. Yes, there will always be things that come up, we can raise as reasons why this is ‘too hard’. But Jesus doesn’t make provision in Matthew 6 for those who are especially busy, or too tired, to pray.

Christ, as always, is our example. At ChristCentral Church, we aspire to be a community of people who pray: men, women and children who know a true and wonderful relationship with God and make time with Him a top priority in their day.

A praying Church, is so much more than simply a church that organises prayer meetings. We are those who bring into the ‘corporate place’ what has been enjoyed in the ‘secret place’. Do you have a place to go and pray?

B) Prayer That Is Personal and Trinitarian

The Bible doesn’t portray prayer as a lifeless, one-way speech to some distant ‘god’. Far from it. In fact as we listen to Jesus and the apostle Paul on the subject we find prayer to be all about knowing and enjoying the Father. Yes we bring our requests before Him. But more than that, it is a practice which brings us peace and purpose from our Heavenly Father.

Look at these verses:

⁹*Our Father in heaven. (Matthew 6:9)*

¹⁵*You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

(Romans 8:15)

⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6)

The privilege of those who are children of God, is the right to call Him 'Abba Father', made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

The reality is this: God is eager for us to know Him better and enjoy Him more. He knows everything there is to know about us, and still loves us (wow!). We will, for all eternity, delve deeper and deeper into the richness of who our Father is.

Prayer is coming to God and calling Him Father, as Jesus did. It is personal in nature! So when we describe prayers as 'personal' we are not saying it private and excludes others. We mean that we pray to a Person - to God 'The Father', God 'The Son', God 'The Holy Spirit'.

But notice as well that this prayer to The Father is something 'we' are able to enjoy, not simply something 'I' enjoy. Look again at these verses and notice their plurality:

Our Father in heaven.

You have received the Spirit of adoption **as sons**, by whom **we** cry, "Abba! Father!"

And because you are **sons**, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into **our hearts**, crying, "Abba! Father!"

The Word of God teaches us that our prayers should acknowledge both the vertical (man-to-God) and the horizontal (man-to-man) relationships that have been established in our lives through the gospel. Praying like this will prompt us to remember the wider family that we belong to, prompting us to be grateful for one another and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

C) Prayer That Is Together

⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the

A PRAYING CHURCH

breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

The verses at the end of Acts 2, show us what is in the DNA of the first church, and praying together very much is.

Occasions when the church gathered to pray are found throughout the book of Acts. Whether it is the appointment of elders³, for the release of prisoners⁴ or the healing of those who are sick⁵, prayer features prominently in the early church community.

D) Prayer That Is Persistent

⁷And [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart... will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. (Luke 18:7-8 regarding the parable of the Persistent Widow)

¹⁶...pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

What does it mean to be persistent in prayer? What does it mean to 'pray without ceasing'?

Wait for it...

IT MEANS: PRAY ALL THE TIME!

Paul's instruction to the church in Thessalonica is not difficult to understand. He means it is possible to work hard, parent and teach our children, invest in our relationships, serve in the church (instructions he gives elsewhere) while simultaneously persisting in prayer.

If a person relies solely on prayer meetings, or just a slot in the morning, it wouldn't be possible to live out this instruction. So I understand Paul and Jesus to believe that a heart centred on God has constant access to Him. We truly do have 'His ear' - and we must take full advantage of this

³ See Acts 14:23

⁴ See Acts 12:5

⁵ James 5:15

great privilege - submitting every longing, desire, concern, confusion and request to our heavenly Father.

Until the glorious day when our Lord returns and renews heaven and earth, we, His people, must be persistent and faithful in prayer; for the souls of those who are yet to know His grace, for our own sanctification as we become increasingly like Jesus and for the glory of God to be made known in our world.

E) Prayer That Is Expectant

¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)

God will do what we ask, when we pray in the name of Jesus... this point couldn't be any clearer from what our Lord teaches in John 14.

'Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do.'

And so we should expect that when we pray God will act.

You may say, 'why then, doesn't He do all I ask Him to do?' I have prayed for many things in my life, in the name of Jesus which didn't come to pass, I can think of sick people who weren't healed, of prayers for material provision that didn't happen, for jobs that people didn't get.

Isn't John 14:13 entirely true then? Of course, the answer is 'Yes it is'. These are the infallible words of God, they are absolutely true and to be trusted. So how are we to pray expectantly, if there's a track record of our prayers going 'un-answered'?

There's a very important qualification in verse 13 we mustn't overlook.

'Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.'

Prayers prayed 'in the name of Jesus' to our Father in heaven have one goal - namely that the Son

A PRAYING CHURCH

would be glorified. So we can be quite confident that when our goals align with His, when our desires are that Christ would be glorified, we can pray all manner of prayers and be confident of the Father's intent for His Son to be glorified.

As we pray, there will be times when we see God act in exactly the manner we hoped He would. So we expect to see people healed when we pray for the sick, and for breakthroughs in personal circumstances. But there will be times when we might not see the particular result we had hoped for. However, in those moments, we must be careful not to doubt or question the love and faithfulness of God, but rather trust His perfect plan. I find Timothy Keller's explanation of this point really helpful:

"There's a place where Paul says, 'If God loved us so much he spared not his own Son, how will He then not together with Him freely give us all things?' What he's really saying is, If God gave you the diamond ring, is He going to begrudge you the ribbon? If God did this for you, if he loves you like this, is he going to somehow abandon you and not take care of you?"³

The point is simply this, God has demonstrated His phenomenal love for us in sending His Son to be punished as our substitute. He loved us in the cross of Christ in ways that stretch beyond our ability to comprehend. On the occasion when the specific prayer request appears not to be answered, or at least not in the way we had hoped it would, because of the cross we have to conclude that God has a better route for glorifying Jesus in our lives, and certainly not that He doesn't love us.

We were given the 'diamond ring': What's the 'gift wrapping' by comparison?

Let us then agree with Paul...

*²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)*

³ Timothy Keller, The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A PRAYING CHURCH?

...pray without ceasing.

There is no greater contribution any member of ChristCentral Church can make towards this aspiration than being a person devoted to prayer!

Cultivate your own private prayer time and eagerly pursue intimacy with our Father, and as you do watch how blessed you are and we are as a result.

Please commit to praying into these aspects in particular:

A) Our Vision

To see lives and communities, in, around and beyond Portsmouth, transformed by the Gospel, enjoying God and glorifying Him in all things.

Please pray for the places and people you are connected to, for Portsmouth and the surrounding areas.

B) Our Mission

To bring hope and share truth, in around and beyond Portsmouth.

Pray that God would use us all daily to be stewards of hope and ambassadors of truth.

C) Our Family

Please pray for those in the church. The staff team will always have available a number of specific individual prayer requests. Please make sure you receive them.

D) Our Leaders

Please pray for the Elders and Deacons of the church, that God would sustain them and give them joy in their work.

NB- We hold regular church prayer meetings. Please make them a priority as they are wonderful moments for pursuing God's presence and purpose for us.

A PRAYING CHURCH

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Have you made time with The Father a priority in your daily routine?

What 'place' do you go to for private prayer?

In what ways have you known God to answer prayers?

What are the big prayers you are praying right now?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A GENEROUS CHURCH

**“If you have money, power, and status today, it is due to the century and place in which you were born, to your talents and capacities and health, none of which you earned. In short, all your resources are in the end the gift of God.”
(Timothy Keller)¹**

“God comes right out and tells us why he gives us more money than we need. It's not so we can find more ways to spend it. It's not so we can indulge ourselves and spoil our children. It's not so we can insulate ourselves from needing God's provision. It's so we can give and give generously (2 Corinthians 8:14; 9:11)” (Randy Alcorn)²

¹ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice*

² Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*

A GENEROUS CHURCH

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A GENEROUS CHURCH?

We have received abundantly more than we deserve. The necessary response is to bring what God has given us and invest it into the lives of others. Therefore, the aspiration to be a generous church is deeply rooted in our vision ‘to see lives and communities in, around and beyond Portsmouth, transformed by the Gospel, enjoying God and glorifying Him in all things’.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A GENEROUS CHURCH?

It would be valuable to take some time to read 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, as we draw out lessons from this passage regarding generosity.

¹We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord. (2 Corinthians 8:1-3)

A) Generosity Flows From Grace

Paul doesn't begin the encouragement to the church in Corinth by telling them about the amount given by the churches in Macedonia, but with the source of their generosity: the grace of God.

Grace... it is amazing, said John Newton, it is what distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions, said C S Lewis, and it is what motivates us as a church to be generous.

Grace empowers generosity because it teaches us to see that all we have, our talents, time and treasure, have come to us through God's limitless bounty - and are for us to share, not 'possess', in order that we might glorify Him. We aspire to be a generous church in order that the world around us may know how wonderful the grace of God is and to see through our actions, a freedom to give that defies the cultural norm, in this materialistic society. Such a radical way of living is only possible through the Gospel working through our lives and community - an authentic expression of our faith in Jesus.

Generosity isn't achieved by legalism – pressure prompting a joyless act. If a person who had

given a large amount of money to charity were asked “why, did you give so much?” and they replied, “because I was made to”, you would not interpret the act of giving as generous. You would conclude there was some form of manipulation in the process, that the gift was grudging and not a joyful offering.

Grace works in a very different way. It opens the eyes to see the extravagance of God’s provision and the riches of His mercy - not treating us as our sins deserve but exalting us through Christ to heavenly places. The overflow of this spills into the lives of those around us, as we love others in the same way in which Christ has loved us.

B) Generosity Leads To Joy

The church in Macedonia knew abundant joy. Their poverty was ‘extreme’. It is hard to imagine what life must have been like living in such conditions during the first century and yet, despite the limitations of their circumstances, this excellent church would not be deterred from exercising generosity. This commendable act led not to great misery for having parted with their treasure but abundant joy. Who doesn’t want to have that?

It is a biblical truth that sacrificial giving, done through faith (trusting in the plan and provision of God), always leads to joy.

²...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2)

No one can out give God. There is no-one who has ever sacrificed like Jesus. And His motivation was Joy. We aspire to be a generous church because we want to be a happy church. Greed looks to keep as much as possible, but generosity seeks to keep as little as possible, obediently trusting that God has our best in view.

C) Generosity Reveals Love

⁷... see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. (2 Corinthians 8:7-8)

A GENEROUS CHURCH

Paul holds up the Macedonian Church as an example to inspire the church in Corinth to imitate it.

Today the Church is often accused of hypocrisy. This was an issue that Paul also addressed in his letters, urging the churches to demonstrate their love for God through their love for each other. While he doesn't 'command' generosity (as we have already observed that is unlikely to result in 'cheerful givers'), he exhorts the church in Corinth to aspire to be generous³. Not only does generosity result in joy, it also reveals to those around that their love is sincere.

How we use our money accurately reveals the primary object(s) of our affection. Jesus said '*where your treasure is there your heart is also*'. (Matthew 6:21)

We aspire to become an increasingly generous church, looking for opportunities to give our time, treasure and talent, to further the Advance of God's Kingdom, that the love of God would be revealed as genuine in us to the world around.

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A GENEROUS CHURCH?

We have made several references to 'time, treasure and talent' already. Through investing these you are able to make a truly meaningful contribution to this aspiration.

Some people have more 'time' than treasure, others more 'treasure' than time, but for all, the grace of God flowing through our lives must lead to generosity. Consider what God has given you. How can you share this with others?

Time

In what ways are you able to serve the church? Do you have time during your week to befriend someone who is lonely? There are often a number of things happening in the church, run by volunteers who generously give their time to ensure others are looked after and served well.

We would hope that every member of ChristCentral Church will belong to at least one serving team on a Sunday. How can you generously give your time?

³ See 2 Corinthians 9:7

Treasure

Few of us might consider ourselves to be rich, but there is little doubt, living in the West, during the 21st Century, is to belong to the 'richest' group of people who have ever lived! From food, water and clothing, to a roof over our heads and even the luxury of holidays and meals out etc., we have a quality of life that starkly contrasts with the lives of the majority of people alive today, let alone across the centuries.

How will you worship God with your treasure? Indeed, is it your treasure?

The Bible has always set a benchmark for giving at ten percent of first fruit (gross income) - a principle that can be traced right back to Abraham. However, Jesus shows us a better, more radical way to live, the way of grace, of generosity, that can even go beyond means to display the love of God to the surrounding world.

As a church, we give away to many causes from the treasure we have received and we aspire to be increasingly generous with how we steward what God has given us.

Talent

In the previous chapter we spent some time looking at the various gifts God has given us in order to strengthen His body. All of us have particular, God-given talent, that is to be used to serve His mission and edify His church.

Do you play an instrument? Do you love to serve? Do you enjoy showing hospitality? Are you a teacher? Do you play sports? What are your strengths and are you willing to invest these into the church?

Don't sit on your talent, but generously invest it.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Would you consider yourself to be a generous person?

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A GENEROUS CHURCH

In what ways are you using your time, treasure and talent to serve God?

Have you set up your giving to the church?

Have you joined a serving team?

What are your talents? How might they be used in the church?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A CHURCH FOR THE CITY

“All churches must understand, love, and identify with their local community and social setting, and yet at the same time be able and willing to critique and challenge it.”
(Timothy Keller)¹

¹ Timothy Keller, Center Church

A CHURCH FOR THE CITY

WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A CHURCH FOR THE CITY?

We love Portsmouth!

There is much to love: beaches, restaurants, museums, Pompey F.C.: but mostly the hundreds of thousands of people who call Portsmouth and the surrounding areas 'home'.

Our mission: 'to bring hope and share truth' must begin in the places where we live, work and study. It must begin in Portsmouth.

We feel a God-given responsibility to be a church that really makes a difference to many lives and communities in this city. This is an aspiration to go out and identify with those around us - especially the poor - building authentic loving relationships rooted in the love of God and displaying Christ both in word and deed.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A CHURCH FOR THE CITY?

A) Settle and Pray.

The Bible makes it clear that those who have faith in Jesus are 'exiles' and 'strangers' (*Hebrews 11:13*) on the earth. Christians have been given a new citizenship, their 'home' is the new heavenly city prepared by God.

Therefore, while we are living in this city now, we do not belong to it, in the sense that our rest and identity is not found here. Praise God, our rest and identity is found 'In Christ'. Our home with Him and in Him, is forever secure and incomprehensibly wonderful! However, in God's plan, He has positioned His people in particular places, with a particular purpose. While it is true that we don't belong here, we have been sent here. And more than that, we have been given responsibility to make a difference.

The term 'exile' is one often encountered in the Bible. Particularly we think of the Israelites, as they were taken from Jerusalem and brought to Babylon. Babylon was a vast and evil empire, where there were almost as many 'gods' as there were people. The great challenge to the Israelites was this: "how do we live in exile and not lose our God given identity?"

It's a question we should also ask. How do we live in and love this city, yet remain distinct from it?

Should we hide away? Keep ourselves to ourselves? Do we blend in and become indistinct from all around us?

Let's look at how God spoke to the Israelites during their exile through the prophet Jeremiah:

⁴This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:4-7 NIV)

Not only did God want His people to settle and "do" life in Babylon, He also urged them to pray for it to prosper: to see this foreign land go from strength to strength. It is clear God had a purpose and plan for his people in Babylon. They were there because He ordained it. This wasn't a mistake, or error on His part - far from it. He would be glorified through their exile.

We at ChristCentral Church, care deeply for the communities and towns in which we live and work. We really want to see Portsmouth prosper. Applying the words of Jeremiah to our context we aspire to embrace the city, to raise children here, to invest our time, treasure and talent, to be willing and happy to settle. God would want us to pray constantly for the city, its people and communities, expressing our heart earnestly in petition before our gracious Lord.

B) Be Salt and Light

Jesus also had much to say to his disciples about how they were to live in the world:

¹³"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so

A CHURCH FOR THE CITY

*that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
(Matthew 5:13-16)*

This is a compelling picture.

We Are Salt

Salt was used to prevent decay by absorbing moisture from food, thus creating a hostile environment for bacteria etc. to spoil it. Jesus says that His followers are salt.

We are no longer subject to the decay and destruction of this world because we have become citizens of a kingdom that is eternal and will never be subject to decay.

We Are Light

Similarly, the world is full of darkness: spiritual darkness. Portsmouth, like every city, is a place where darkness abounds. Hidden in the shadows are crowds of people, distant from God, and lacking hope, having been sold the lie that freedom is found outside of God's Word. Hope comes as truth is shared! Light comes as God's Word is revealed.

¹⁰⁵*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

¹⁶*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. (Colossians 3:16)*

As the Word of God fills our hearts and minds, we will shine increasingly brighter in this world, directing souls to the source: to Jesus.

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A CHURCH FOR THE CITY?

¹⁸*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* ¹⁹*that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* ²⁰*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
(2 Corinthians 5:18-20)*

A) Be an Ambassador for Christ

At work, university, among your neighbours, friends and family, even on social media, be an Ambassador for Christ!

To be 'salt and light' requires us to stand out, to be different, to show the world around us that our lives have truly been changed by the Gospel, compelling others to respond to this life changing message. The ministry of reconciliation that all disciples of Christ have received is applied, not just during Sunday services, but in everyday life situations, as we encounter the people in this city who do not know Jesus yet.

In a hostile and divided world, you have been entrusted with Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Hope follows you, so by being a faithful ambassador for Christ - away from gathered church community - you help us in this aspiration to be a church for the city.

B) Loving Our City

As a church we run a number of initiatives that are particularly tailored to serve the needs evident in our city. This ministry is called 'Loving Our City'.

We particularly aspire to be a church which looks after the poorest people in Portsmouth. We hope to be a safe place for the marginalised and hopeless. We aspire to see addicts set free, those in loneliness and isolation befriended, and those living on the streets provided a home to live in. There will be many opportunities to join in 'Loving Our City', by serving on a team and in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

How does knowing you are an 'exile' affect how you view what you do and where you live?

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A CHURCH FOR THE CITY

In what ways can you be an 'Ambassador for Christ' where you live and work?

What are you able to do in response to the needs in this city?

WE ASPIRE TO BE

A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”
(John Piper)¹

“There are three stages to every great work of God; first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done... ‘The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed’.” (Hudson Taylor)²

¹ John Piper, Let The Nations Be Glad

² Attributed to Taylor, quoted in Leslie T. Lyall, A Passion for the Impossible: The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began

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WHY DO WE ASPIRE TO BE A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS?

We exist as a church in Portsmouth today, because men and women were once willing to leave their homes and risk their lives, to bring hope and share truth in foreign lands and to foreign people. Christianity is not 'indigenous' to this country, we were once an 'unreached' people. Church history is full of 'heroes' who paid the ultimate price in order to obey the Great Commission and we are forever indebted to their boldness and faith.

Until Christ returns, the Church remains on mission to call men and women from every nation and people group, to discover their true purpose in life: 'To enjoy God and glorify Him forever'. Churches that have seen the 'Big Picture' vision that Jesus paints will be eager and ready to respond to every opportunity that advances His mission to the ends of the earth.

It is our aspiration that ChristCentral Church will touch the nations of the world, we are committed to obediently respond to the Commission Christ has given His disciples 'to make disciples of all nations'.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS?

We read in the Bible about a number of local churches we can learn from. One in particular is a great example to us of a church actively engaged in world mission, namely the church in Antioch.

A) Receiving from the Nations

The church in Antioch was established after the persecution of the disciples in Jerusalem and the subsequent movement of believers into the surrounding regions. As this church was formed this way, it would have been quite understandable for Antioch's believers to have become isolated and detached from the church in Jerusalem. At the very least for fear of encouraging the spread of the persecution there. According to Luke's account in Acts 11, this couldn't be further from the truth. Despite distance and its persecuted background, the Antioch church received a wide variety of input from outside ministries - not least from Barnabas and Paul who spent a year with them teaching and laying doctrinal foundations.

At ChristCentral, we are privileged to receive men and women from many different nations, who have travelled here to work and study, greatly enriching who we are as a church. Like the church

in Antioch, we hope to receive many more people over the coming years, who will bring their gifts into our church - building us up and helping in our mission. For some it may be only a brief stay of a few months, or years, but nevertheless we aspire to be a church that receives the nations of the world with open arms.

B) Sending To The Nations

In addition to Paul and Barnabas, Agabus and other prophets spent time in Antioch, significantly prophesying to the church of a coming famine across Judea. Hearing of this crisis *“the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea”* (Acts 11:28-30). This gift was taken to the church in Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas. Such was the strength of relationship between these churches that they felt compelled to act, sending provisions to ‘the brothers’. This was a family relationship.

Famine and deprivation were not confined to the first century. Through our partnership with Newfrontiers and Commission, we are privileged to be able to send gifts to the poorest regions of the world. In recent times we have had the opportunity to send gifts to India to help provide education to children in poverty. We are also in partnership with Compassion, sponsoring children in Accra, Ghana and working together with local churches to care for children in great need.

In addition to giving financially, the church in Antioch was also led by the Holy Spirit to send Paul and Barnabas who had become key leaders, *“for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13: 1-3). As hard as it must have been to part with two exceptionally gifted and loved leaders, for a church like this - committed to world mission - there was no hesitation. So the Church blessed many others.

As a local church we want to be ready to send people to be a blessing to other nations, whether through short term trips or people relocating. We recognise God will want us to be as ready to send as we are to receive.

We aspire to be a church that actively participates in planting new congregations both locally and internationally.

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C) Praying For The Nations

Luke makes a point of noting that the church gathering to pray was central to sending Paul and Barnabas on from Antioch. Reading on through chapter 14 we see why covering this apostolic work in prayer was so vital. Persecution and opposition quickly followed advance and fruitfulness.

There are many situations around the world where Christians are being persecuted for their faith. We must pray for our brothers and sisters, eagerly seeking God's grace and provision for them.

Having successfully completed the work they were sent to do, Paul and Barnabas returned to the church in Antioch, bruised and tired, but with a stunning story to tell. Luke paints a wonderful picture as he describes how they *"gathered the church together"* and *"reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples"*.

It is plain from this account that mission into new places and nations isn't something done independently by a few. It is an enterprise owned from start to finish by the many, rooted and established in the local church. Not only does this give the Antioch church an exciting global vision, it also provides those sent with a base, where their needs can be met and where they can be served.

Over the years to come, we aspire to increasingly train and send men and women to take the gospel to the nations, seeking the transformation of many communities as God is enjoyed and glorified.

WHAT IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS?

There are a number of ways that you can make a contribution to this aspiration, here are a few suggestions:

Befriend an international student; every September we have a number of students arrive from many different nations, who would appreciate an invitation to your home for a meal.

Partner with Compassion – why not sponsor a child in Accra? You can find out more about child

sponsorship here: <https://www.compassionuk.org>

Come along to our prayer meetings and join us in prayer!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

Would you consider sponsoring a child with Compassion?

Have you spent time with a person from a different nation since you joined the church?

Are there any nations God has laid on your heart to pray for?

Do you think God may be calling you to 'go to the nations'?

A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS

A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

Desiring God, John Piper

Counterfeit Gods, Timothy Keller

Knowing God, J. I. Packer

No Well Worn Paths, Terry Virgo

A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

Prodigal God, Timothy Keller

King's Cross, Timothy Keller

The Cross of Christ, John Stott

The Cross-Centered life, C J Mahaney

A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH

The Jesus Storybook Bible (For The Family), Sally Lloyd-Jones

The Big Picture Story Bible (For Children), David Helm

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, Mark Dever

Reading the Bible Supernaturally, John Piper

Straight to the Heart Commentary series, Phil Moore

Explore by the Book, The Good Book Company

Women of the World, Jen Wilkin

A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH

The Spirit Filled Church, Terry Virgo

Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit, Francis Chan

A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

The Cost Of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

What Did Jesus Really Mean When He Said Follow Me?, David Platt

Desiring God, John Piper

A UNITED AND DIVERSE CHURCH

The Living Church, John Stott

FURTHER READING

The Spirit Filled Church, Terry Virgo

Crossing the Divide, Owen Hylton

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, Mark Dever

A PRAYING CHURCH

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God, Timothy Keller

A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers, D. A. Carson

“Learning to Pray: The Lord’s Prayer.” In Growing in Christ, J.I. Packer,

A GENEROUS CHURCH

Generous Justice, Timothy Keller

Money, Possessions and Eternity, Randy Alcorn,

Money Matters A Guide To Giving, PJ Smyth

A CHURCH FOR THE CITY

Center Church, Timothy Keller

Ministries of Mercy, Timothy Keller

A CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS

Let The Nations Be Glad, John Piper

No Well Worn Paths, Terry Virgo

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