

Look to the Rock
What Makes Covenant Covenant
Part Three: Vital Values

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Walking through a series on what makes Covenant Covenant.

We've talked about our beliefs and our calling and this morning we'll be talking about our values.

Really hope this doesn't just start feeling like one list after another. I hope you see they way they all interrelate.

We began with our

Our Essential Beliefs

We believe Jesus Christ alone is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We believe the Bible is trustworthy and authoritative.

We believe the Church exists to proclaim and live out the love of God.

The way we articulate and affirm our beliefs as a church is informed by the spirit of our denominational motto

In essentials, unity.

In non-essentials, liberty.

In all things, charity.

What you do with a belief? Believe it. Put the weight of your life on it.

Then we spent some time exploring

Our Calling

Jesus is king.

Our identity and purpose: We are his people who exist for his Kingdom and his glory.

Our call: know Jesus, grow with His people, and go to the world.

And God's invitation to us in this season is to become a church known for our love.

What do you do with a calling? Say yes to it. Commit to it. Obey it.

Up to this point, between our beliefs and our calling, probably what we've affirmed most other Christ centered and biblically based churches would affirm as well.

Our Values

Now we come to our values.

The word “value” communicates two things, doesn’t it? It gets at what we consider valuable or worthwhile, what matters to us. And it gets at the way we do things around here, our approach to things we aspire to.

What we’re trying to capture with these words is what makes us distinctive,

We certainly don’t mean to communicate that these are things we value and other churches don’t. Not at all.

What we’re saying is the beliefs that most define us, that we most emphasize around here, conspire together to lead us to live life together in a certain way, with a cluster of values that, when lived alongside one another, make us unique.

Many of you have heard this story, but I think it helps clarify what we’re focusing on this morning.

As our kids were growing up we had some pretty specific values that we upheld as a family: the priority of family time, on a regular basis, even if that meant our kids couldn’t get together with their friends on a particular night; showing affection openly instead of doing the eye roll thing when parents were around; one activity per kid per season; limited technology and screen time; family dinners around the table with no phones; regular hospitality that our kids were part of, that sort of thing.

One day when she was in high school, our daughter Molly said

“You know what, Dad? Our family is really weird.”

She paused. And then she said: “But I like how we’re weird.”

Values are what make you . . . weird. Distinctive. Unlike others.

So let’s talk about what makes us distinctive as a church.

But before we do . . . let me tell you what we’re *not* talking about. We’re not talking about *style*.

We live in a world of surface impressions with little real substance and depth. In our one-inch-deep world, style is surfacey. It’s a “look,” a carefully curated impression that is meant to send a message. Here’s how I want you to think of me. Here’s what makes me unique. Here’s what makes me attractive. This is my look, my style. Whether it be . . .

grunge
vintage

outdoors
classic

nerdy/geeky

Fashion Styles - Women



business casual
boho
sportswear
loungewear
casual chic

goth
punk
world/ethnic
traditional
military

biker
kawaii
lagenlook
garconne

Fashion Styles - Men



modern urban
hip hop
western
surf skate

artsy
hunter camo
rocker
fifties

seventies
preppy
streetwear
Euro/metro

Did I get everyone? We all wear clothes, but we each wear them in a unique way. Those ways we try to express our individuality through our outward appearance are our styles. Carefully fashioned appearances.

That's NOT what we're talking about. When we talk about values we're not talking about a niche we are trying to occupy to appeal to customers in the church shopping market.

In economics and marketing, product differentiation is distinguishing one product or service from others to make it more attractive to a particular target market.

We're not about that. At all. At Covenant we don't accept a consumer approach to church or the Christian life. It's not about shopping for our preferences to meet our needs.

We're talking about something on the opposite end from style. When we talk about our values we point to things that run deep in us, that are connected directly to and are the direct outworking of our essential beliefs and our calling. Our values are the ***lived implications*** of our belief and calling

To put it in another way, our values are the way we do things in our family. Other families do things in a different way. In our family, this is how we do things.

Because they are connected to our beliefs and our calling, our values are both aspirational and descriptive. They are things we want to be true of us and, because we have aspired to them for a long time, they are things that are increasingly true of us/

Covenant's Values

Toward God

Expectant and Yielded

Toward Scripture

Thoughtful

Toward others

Intentional and Gracious

As we'll see, each one of these can be traced back directly to our calling.

What do you do with a value? Be informed by it. Be shaped by it. Aspire to it. Cultivate it. Embody it. Live it out.

I want to try something with you. As I walk through these five values I want you to participate in this message with me. Here's how.

Normally I'd encourage you to put your phones away during worship, unless you're using them to access the Bible or take notes.

Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value?

Text their first name to our
Covenant screen text number
765-237-9202

But this morning I want to encourage you to get out your phones. If you haven't already put this number into your phone as a contact, go ahead and do that now.

765-237-9202

That's the Covenant screen text number

As we go through this message I'm going to be highlighting our five values.

As I do, if you've been part of the Covenant family for any time at all, I'm guessing people will begin to come to mind as we begin to talk about each value. While I'm preaching, if someone comes to mind, I just want you to text that person's name to this number - just the first name – and we'll pop it up here.

So let's walk through these.

* * *

Our first value:

toward God we desire to be

Expectant

Specifically, we want to be expectant related to the presence and involvement of God in every part of life.

I told you that every one of our values traces back to our beliefs and our calling.

That's certainly true for this one.

At the end of Matthew, just before his ascension, Jesus says,

Matthew 28.20

And look: I am with you, every single day, to the very end of the age.

[see also Psalm 139.7-10, Acts 17.28, Romans 8.28]

Because we deeply believe that Jesus is not just the savior who died for us but the risen and present Lord, we believe that God is alive and involved in every part of life. He is in every conversation, every decision, every moment.

As we walk through the day, Jesus walks with us. Whatever we are about, alone or together, God is in what we are doing, so we expect to encounter him, to be met by him, led by him, encouraged by him, strengthened by him.

So we walk through life asking: "What is He doing in our midst? How is He working? How does He desire to meet me? To meet us?"

Can you think of someone who embodies that quality? Text that person's name now.

- For us as expectant people, prayer is never perfunctory. It's never just a way we open or close a meeting, or walk through a list of needs. Prayer is conversation with the Loving God, acknowledging the presence of the king and inviting his full participation whatever we are doing.
- For us as expectant people, worship is never a mere recital of qualities that are true about God, as though God were not in the room with us; worship is an *encounter* with the living God. Around here we talk about coming to a place in every worship service where we shift from "He is" to "You are." In worship we expect to encounter the living God . . . and to be changed by that encounter.
- And as expectant people, when we come together for whatever reason, not just for worship but for meetings or studies or meals or to serve, we believe God is in our midst, and he will use that time in each of our lives, In Matthew 18.20, Jesus says, "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them." The expectant person expects to meet him.

As with all of these values, there are many in the Covenant family who embody this value, but I think especially of my wife Sharon.

What about you? Who comes to your mind? Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value? Text their first name now.

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Our second value also has to do with how we relate to God.

We are not just expectant. We are

Yielded

Other ways of saying yielded – surrendered, fully available, saying yes to God, giving him our total allegiance.

This is the quality that Mary showed so beautifully when she was told that she would carry God's son. She said,

Luke 1.36

I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to do whatever he wants.

[see also Colossians 1.15, II Corinthians 5.15, Matthew 16.25, Hebrews 13.21, Philipians 1, Colossians 1]

We believe that Jesus not only walks in this world but that he reigns over it. He is the king, which means we who are his followers are also his subjects. He not only walks

beside us, he rules over us. He is not only in every conversation, every decision, every moment – he is *over* every conversation, every decision, every moment.

Because we deeply believe that Jesus’s rightful place in our lives is to rule over us as King of Kings, we don’t just focus on his saving work, or his triumph over sin and death, or his securing eternal life for us, crucial as those are. We emphasize his kingship as well. After Jesus rose from the dead he ascended to heaven and was seated on the throne.

Can you think of someone in the Covenant family who embodies this quality of being yielded to God?

- So as yielded people we begin each day by offering ourselves back to God: I belong to you, Lord. What are you calling me to today? What would You have of me? How would You lead me? And we surrender to his loving rule. As Jeremiah 10.17 says, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own. It is not for a man to direct his steps.”
- And as yielded people those of us who are in positions of leadership, believing that Jesus is the living head of this church, understand that it is Jesus’s work to lead the church, and it is our work to lead as we are led. Rather than deciding out of our own power and wisdom, we see our role as *discerning* God’s will, as He directs us by His Spirit. That means that prayerful listening is not an afterthought to our leadership, but stands at the center of our leadership. We spend time in prayer and scripture study each time the elders gather, and any elder at any time can call us to pause and pray. And our goal is unity, not uniformity.

Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value?
Text their first name

Again, there are many who embody this quality in the Covenant family, but Joshua and Susan Hyde with Zach’s House and Daniel and Emily Sampson with Isaiah 1.17 House are some who come immediately to mind.

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As we come to our third value, we shift from how we relate to God to how we relate to the Scriptures and how we think about the Christian life.

In our approach to the faith and our study of Scripture we desire to be

Thoughtful

One of our essentials is the belief that God has revealed himself to us in his word, so the Bible is fully trustworthy and authoritative, making known all we need to know about God and the life he has for us.

But that authoritative word comes to us not in a tidy encyclopedic compendium of information about God, but in sixty six books written by forty authors over more than a thousand years in at least ten different literary genres in five different cultures. That makes the study of Scripture imperative, and not always easy.

Rather than talking about taking the Bible literally, we talk about taking the Bible seriously.

We believe that part of what it means for us to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds is that we would use those minds of ours to be thoughtful in our approach to the faith and the study of Scripture.

There's a big difference between being thoughtful and being intellectual.

We're not interested in just acquiring more information about the Bible, and we're even less interested in putting our bible knowledge on display. Our desire is to understand the Bible and submit to it, integrating its truth into our lives.

Paul describes the goal in II Corinthians 10.5: that we would be able to "take every thought captive for Christ." And we believe thoughtful study and faithful interpretation of the Bible is key to that.

It's the sort of quality we see in the Berean Christians. We're told in

Acts 17.11 that

They eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.

[see Matthew 22.37-38, II Corinthians 10.5, Deuteronomy 6.4-10]

Can you think of someone in the Covenant family who embodies that quality?

- As thoughtful Christians, we believe that knowing the Scriptures thoroughly, studying the Scriptures carefully, and applying the Bible faithfully is the responsibility of every follower of Christ. We are committed to reading the Bible for transformation, not merely for information, not only studying it but also reading it devotionally, memorizing it, reflecting on its truths, praying it. The more we immerse ourselves in Scripture, the more God by His Spirit is able to use it in his transforming work in our lives.

- As thoughtful Christians, we are committed to using our minds to understand the Bible and stand under its authority, not to determine which parts remain authoritative and which are no longer relevant. We join with the church worldwide in affirming the Lordship of Jesus, the authority of Scripture, and the missional nature of the church as essentials of the faith for which we want to live, and for which we would want to be

willing to suffer and even to die.

- As thoughtful Christians, we are committed to the idea of theological modesty in nonessential areas of faith where there are different views within the church, including not only theological areas such as church governance, the work of the spirit today, or the end times, but also such complex areas as politics, economics, and other societal issues, none of which the Bible addresses directly. Theological modesty acknowledges that there are others who love Jesus more than we do and have studied the issue more than we have and have come out in a different place than we have. We may well be wrong.

- And as thoughtful Christians, we are committed to thoughtful engagement with nonChristians who don't acknowledge the Bible's universal authority. We affirm without qualification that the Bible is fully true and authoritative – but you won't hear us saying, "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it," because too often that ends conversations about what the Bible teaches rather than beginning them. We want to approach conversations with those with whom we disagree with grace and honor, practicing curiosity and inviting discussion rather than shutting conversations down.

Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value?

Text their first name

Among the many who come to my mind are David Iles, Anne Spath, and Mike Zientara.

What about you?

* * *

Our last two values have to do with how we relate to others.

In our dealings with others, we believe God desire for us to be

Intentional

One of the richest theological terms is the idea of "prevenient grace." It means "grace that goes before." It refers to the way that God always takes the first step. He pursued us before we ever thought to pursue him, and he loved us before we were ever capable of loving him.

As his people God calls us to imitate his pursuing love in our interactions with others.

Ephesians 5.1-2

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love.

[see also Matthew 22.39. I John 4.19, Romans 13.8, I John 4]

Can you think of someone who exemplifies that quality who is part of the Covenant family?

We live in a world of cautious and hesitant people, each one waiting for the next one to take the first step, to absorb the risk. God calls us to mirror his initiative and move toward one another, showing regard, reflecting interest, asking questions, following up with more questions.

- As intentional people we take responsibility for our own spiritual growth. We are committed to getting ourselves involved in the life and ministry of the church and building relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ rather than waiting for someone else to invite us in.
- As intentional people we are committed to risking moving toward those people God places around us rather than holding back, hesitant and waiting. Initiative shows love. But initiative opens us up to risk. What if I'm rejected or hurt? But that is a risk we are willing to take in order to imitate God and put his love on display.
- And as intentional people we are committed to taking the first step with our neighbors as well, regardless of whether or not they share our beliefs or convictions. In a world that has an increasingly negative view of the church, our taking the initiative to show love and concern for our neighbor will go a long way to overcoming barriers to faith among those God has placed around us in this world.

In the past month we had two new families move into the neighborhood. I updated the neighborhood directory and took a new version around yesterday. As I walked up to the house of one neighbor, she walked out of the house to greet me, saying, "I know what you're doing! They haven't even unpacked and you're helping the rest of us get to know them!"

Every one on the street knew it would be helpful to have a directory. Me included. We all waited for someone else to do it.

Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value?

Text their first name

Among the many who model this quality of intentionality Joe Ely and Dulcy Abraham stand out in my mind. So too do Franki Kung, Sang Woo and Louis Tay.

* * *

Our final value is another way we believe God would have us deal with one another.

Gracious

Grace is giving love that is undeserved.

It's easy to show love to those who love us well. But love becomes difficult when we've been hurt, or missed, or slighted, or neglected.

God's way of relating to us is to be gracious. Even while we were undeserving sinners Christ died for us.

If we are followers of Christ, we have all been on the receiving end of grace. God calls us to turn, then, and extend to others the same sort of grace we've received.

As Jesus says in **Luke 6.32**

If you love only those who love you, what sort of grace is that?

[see also Ephesians 2.8-9, Romans 5.23-34, Colossians 3.13]

Who in the Covenant family demonstrates this quality of graciousness?

One of the ways the truth of the Christian faith is best demonstrated is when followers of Christ are marked by qualities for which there is no good earthly explanation. Grace is one of those qualities.

When the Muslim Brotherhood began to burn down churches in Egypt during the Arab Spring, Christians painted on the sides of their burned buildings words that said, "We forgive you." It led to hundreds of Muslims becoming followers of Christ.

- As gracious people we understand that we are called to mirror the heart of Jesus in this world. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you," Paul writes in Ephesians 4.32.
- As gracious people we believe that wrongs and hurts don't need to have the last word. When we are hurt, it is so tempting to harbor that hurt, reciting wrongs and pulling back in self protection. But when we are wronged, God calls us to move forward in grace and forgiveness, seeking reconciliation. In the family of faith, only our refusing to forgive is fatal to relationship.
- As gracious people we understand that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us is perfect. Each of us is doing the best we know how. Living in community means we will inevitably experience conflict and hurt. We cannot escape it until we go to heaven. So when we are wronged by our brothers and sisters, which we will be, we forgive and we bless. Extending grace becomes one of the most important practices there is for preserving the peace and unity of the church until he returns or we go be with him.
- As gracious people we understand that, when we are gracious to our nonChristian neighbors, we are not the innocent forgiving the guilty or the pure forgiving the impure, we are fellow sinners extending undeserved grace just as it has been extended to us.

“Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” the king asks in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18.21-35).

Who is someone in the Covenant family who embodies this value?
Text their first name

I think of recently departed saints Carolyn Moses, Charlotte Walker, and Margie Hiestand. I also think of Daniel Pierce and Alan Sutton.

Who comes to your mind?

Next Sunday

We will wrap up by looking at the posture we believe God calls us to and then we’ll have a chance to celebrate our church family

We’ll end the service with an open opportunity to thank God for the covenant family and celebrate the things we love about Covenant

