

CORE VALUES

Discussion Guide





Core Values **INTRODUCTION**

We talk a lot about discipleship at Grace, but it's because we take Christ's commission to make disciples seriously. Making disciples is more than telling people about the gospel—it also involves helping people live lives that reflect the transformational truth they have come to believe. We call this discipleship, and the discipleship process is so foundational to who we are as a church that we have established six core values that mark the life of a mature disciple. We want to come together in community to talk through each value in more detail.

One of the central goals of this study is to help you understand and specifically apply each core value to your everyday life. This guide is designed to aid you in that process. Each week, we'll explore a different experience in the life of Jesus in which he exemplifies these values. Our hope is that by highlighting them in the life of Jesus, you will gain a vision for what it looks like to practically apply these values—and become more like Christ in the process.



BIBLICALLY ORIENTED

Conforming your life to biblical truth

The Bible is not simply a storybook, nor is it just a list of rules. As Christians, we believe it is the inspired word of God and the primary way He communicates with us. Through studying it we come to a greater understanding of who God is and our relationship with Him deepens. As we grow it becomes the filter through which we understand our existence, identity, purpose, and mission.

To be biblically oriented means that our lives should be oriented around the truth of Scripture. But for many of us, this is a struggle. We find it difficult to fit reading the Bible into our busy schedules. The solution to this is not simply reading and memorizing more Scripture, hoping that knowledge alone will keep us from sinning. Though this is vital, we can't stop there. It is in the application of Scripture—the day-to-day living it out—that we experience its transforming power to change lives. As we study and apply the truths of the Bible, our desires change—we become *biblically oriented*.

The Bible is also catalytic for repentance, because it forces us to bring our lives in line with the truth of God's word. Since Jesus lived a perfect life, we don't see the word driving him to repentance. We do, however, see how his actions demonstrate the importance of bringing lives in line with biblical truth. This value is specifically exemplified in Jesus' life during his temptation in the wilderness.

»» *Read Matthew 4:1-11*

Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness occurs at the beginning of his ministry, right after the Father has publicly affirmed him through baptism. Satan enters the scene when Jesus is at the height of his physical vulnerability, and subsequently his temptations target Jesus' physical needs as well as his legitimate desires for power and glory.

Notice that Jesus fights temptation directly with Scripture. He responds to each temptation with specific passages from Deuteronomy, part of the law given to Moses by God, which shows that Jesus had previously taken the time to study the truths of the Bible (see Luke 2:41-52). But he doesn't just know Scripture (mind), he also believes it (heart), and therefore applies it specifically in his life (actions). Jesus is able to resist temptation because he understands that God's truth not only pertains to but actually fuels his everyday actions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

»» In what ways does God's Word factor into your thoughts, actions, or decision-making process?

»» How are you putting yourself in a position to hear and respond to God's word?

»» In your life, what is the difference between knowing and applying God's word?

»» What is it about Jesus' example in Matthew 4 that inspires you in your efforts to apply Scripture in your daily life?

»» What is one practical step you can take this week to help your life become more biblically oriented as an individual? As a family? As a community group?



RELATIONALLY CONNECTED

Developing relationships of encouragement and accountability

It goes without saying that relationships are vital to human existence. We all long to be known, and we know others by relating and connecting to them. But what is so fascinating about relationships—especially in our culture—is that we can be surrounded by them and still be utterly alone. That is where the connected piece comes in. To be connected to God, we must be willing to be vulnerable. Healthy community operates best when we are vulnerable with each other, connected to others by being open about our joys, sorrows, fears, and struggles.

Being relationally connected isn't a new idea; we actually see it in the very nature of God. God exists in constant, loving relationship with Himself in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity's interdependence shows us that life is not meant to be lived in isolation. We need each other, and our relationships are the most tangible way we demonstrate the love of Christ to the world.

Healthy relationships are developed through mutual encouragement and accountability. Throughout the Gospels, we see this value exemplified in the life of Jesus through his relationships with his followers.

»» *Read Mark 3:13-19 and Mathew 17:1-13*

These two passages reveal Jesus' dedication to developing meaningful relationships with those around him. In Mark 3 we see Jesus calling a select number of men into his ministry. Verse 14 specifically says that Jesus did this so that "they might be with him (ESV)." He understands the importance of being surrounded by community, and these 12 men would share his joys and sorrows for the next three years.

Through the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17, we see this value in a more intimate light. Jesus takes three of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—to a high mountain where they witness Jesus in full glory. This passage displays several important aspects, one being that Jesus has an inner circle within his group of disciples to whom he reveals more of himself. Another is that Jesus is not afraid to be vulnerable with these three men. In the moment of his transfiguration, they see Jesus fully glorified, a presentation so spectacular they fall on their faces. And yet after this experience, Jesus encourages them not to be afraid, one of many examples found in the Gospels of Jesus encouraging and challenging those he is in relationship with.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- »» In what ways are your current relationships challenging and/or encouraging you? Who in your life knows you completely?
- »» What is it about Jesus' relationships with his disciples that inspires you to develop more intimate relationships with others?
- »» When you sense someone around you is struggling, are you more prone to challenge and encourage them, or do you let it go?
- »» What is one specific step you can take this week to becoming more relationally connected?



PRAYERFULLY DEPENDENT

Pursuing an intimate and dependent relationship with God

Let's be honest, at times prayer can be a frustrating concept to understand. We know we are supposed to do it, but often we aren't quite sure how, which sometimes causes our prayers to be varied and inconsistent. We end up saying a quick thanks before meals and pleading for divine intervention when we can't find parking spaces.

It's not that these prayers are wrong, but we miss out on the power behind prayer when our attitudes and motivations are off-center. We pray because it is the primary way we communicate with our Father, not because He is a cosmic vending machine. When our lives are anchored in prayer, we develop an intimate and dependent relationship with Him. When they are not, our lives reveal that we think we are good on our own.

Praying is not so much an event or activity as it is a lifestyle choice. Just like we must be disciplined in our exercise and eating habits in order to stay healthy, so we must be disciplined in consistent prayer in order to be spiritually healthy. Praying is intimate in that we share with God our struggles, fears, and joys. Prayer also creates dependence in that we recognize and submit to God's sovereignty over our lives. We see this value emulated in the life of Jesus when he teaches his disciples how to pray and in his own personal prayer life.

» *Read Luke 11:1-13 and Matthew 14:13-33*

Luke 11 provides us with a specific prayer Jesus teaches his disciples. After he has finished praying, Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them how to pray. He proceeds to tell them what we know as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer recognizes God's sovereignty, asking God to provide daily necessities. Through this prayer, Jesus is teaching his disciples dependence. In the following verses, he explains the intimate relationship of God as a loving Father who desires to listen to His children.

In Matthew 14 we see Jesus' dedication to spending specific time alone to communicate with his Father. Twice Jesus withdraws and leaves to pray, making time a priority even in the midst of demanding ministry.

Prayer is the communication tool through which we develop an intimate and dependent relationship with God. Through Jesus' example, we not only understand its importance, but we are encouraged to anchor our lives in prayer, establishing lifestyles dedicated to following Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- » If prayer was suddenly "deleted" from your life, what would be different?
- » When you pray, what do you pray about?
- » Is your life lived more like someone who is dependent or independent?
- » Do you see God as a loving Father who wants to listen to you?
- » What are one or two steps you can take this week to remind yourself of your dependence?



MINISTRY FOCUSED

Utilizing your gifts and abilities to serve others

When we hear the word ministry, we often think of specific work done by pastors, elders, and church staff to serve the church. But ministry is not limited to church leadership; it's an activity all God's people engage in. When the word ministry is used in the New Testament it carries the basic meaning of service. Ministry is what happens when God's people utilize their gifts and abilities to serve others in ways that bring God glory, build up His church, and reach the world. God has uniquely equipped us individually so that we can be a part of something much bigger than ourselves!

Living a ministry focused life means we understand and use the specific gifts God has entrusted to us. We often term these supernaturally given abilities spiritual gifts, and as God's children we all have them. Being focused in our ministry—our service to others—means we identify our spiritual gifts, couple them with our skills, experiences, passions, and personalities, and seek out service opportunities where we will be best utilized.

In our service and utilization of our gifts, the temptation is to make much of ourselves and the work we are doing. If we are not careful, we can easily shift into believing our service entitles us to reward. But this is not the attitude we see in Jesus. Throughout his time on earth, he humbly serves those around him, completely surrendered in selfless obedience to the Father.

» *Read Matthew 20*

Though this passage does not expound on utilizing different gifts, the entire chapter of Matthew 20 provides us with several insights into Jesus' attitude toward ministry. The first is seen in the parable he tells his disciples about the laborers in the vineyard. The master is searching for laborers, finding them at different hours of the day. In the end it doesn't matter how long the laborers have served, they all receive the same reward. Here Jesus holds a mirror to our hearts so we can see the motivations behind our actions. He wants his disciples to see that we do not serve for our own selfish gain.

Another insight is seen in the interaction between James and John. The two have asked to be seated at Jesus' right hand in the kingdom, a seemingly self-promoting request, and the other disciples are indignant. But Jesus' response to the twelve pulls them back into the weighty call that they carry as disciples—the call to a life of sacrificial service. This call is perfectly personified in the example of Jesus, as seen in his famous words, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (ESV)." Jesus is the ultimate servant, the prime example we should follow in our efforts to be ministry focused.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

» Read through 1 Peter 4:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. In what ways do you feel specifically gifted to serve the church?

» Think back to the last time you served someone. What motivated you to serve? What is keeping you from giving of your time and energy to serve the church?

» What is one step you can take this week toward being ministry focused?

» What serving opportunities within the church sound compelling to you? What opportunities align with your gifts?



CULTURALLY ENGAGED

Creating opportunities to communicate the message of salvation

As believers, it can be easy to be overwhelmed by the state of affairs in the world around us. Read any news headline and the situation is obvious—our world is broken, we as humans are broken, and we desperately need a solution. We need a salvation plan. Thanks be to God that we have a Savior, someone who answers for our brokenness and provides a way to salvation through relationship with him. This gospel is available to any who would believe and follow, but in order to do so, one must first hear and understand this message.

This is where the value of being culturally engaged comes to light. As believers, we must be sharing and communicating this good news to people who need it! This doesn't mean simply preaching on a street corner or liking certain posts on Facebook. Being engaged in our culture means we are creating opportunities and building relationships with those around us so that we can effectively communicate what it means to be followers of Christ through our character, our words, and our actions. We don't have to seek out random strangers to talk to; we have plenty of opportunities to share the gospel in relationships we've already established. Jesus displays this value clearly and confidently in his strategic interactions with people of the world.

» *Read Matthew 9:9-13*

In Matthew 9, we encounter something revolutionary about Jesus. He doesn't isolate himself by being surrounded by like-minded people. Instead he purposely makes himself accessible to the "sinners" and societal outcasts of the day—to the point it makes the societal elite uncomfortable. We see this specifically in his calling of Matthew, a tax collector guilty of public sin, to be one of his closest followers. He then dines with more of these open sinners, a clear association with people of questionable character.

Jesus could not be more direct when he responds to the Pharisees questions with, "For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." He is committed to being culturally engaged to his mission to reach those who need him. And he doesn't have to hold events or conferences so people can hear his message, he simply engages the people around him with the truth, and if they recognize their need for him, they respond in eager obedience.

Like Jesus, we are to engage the world around us with the gospel through personal relationships. We need to recognize and move into opportunities where people need to hear the truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

» Have you ever avoided spending time with certain people because you didn't want to be associated with them?

» What opportunities are already in your life where you could be communicating the gospel to someone who needs it? In what ways are you ignoring or engaging these opportunities?

» How does Jesus' example of being culturally engaged inspire you to engage those around you?

» What is one step you can take this week to becoming engaged in your neighborhood? In your workplace?



COURAGEOUSLY GENEROUS

Managing, not owning, the resources God has given us

Our culture places a high value on material goods. We are constantly updating to the newest models, gravitating toward the biggest and best—whether that be a phone, house, or the latest clothing style. We define ourselves by what we have, what we don't have, and what we really want.

But the truth is God owns everything. Our house, cars, clothes, food, even our spouse and children, all belong to Him. He has graciously given us what we have that we might manage and steward it well for the benefit of His kingdom. An attitude of entitlement over the resources He has given us robs us of the ability to be courageous in our giving, and we miss out on the joy that comes from investing in something that is greater than ourselves.

Our obedient giving shows that we trust Him, which is why generosity is a defining mark of a disciple of Jesus. Being courageously generous does not mean that we shouldn't enjoy material goods or that we should spontaneously give all our money to the poor. It means that out of love and obedience we submit everything we have to Him, managing our resources in ways that advance His kingdom. We see this value emulated in Jesus' ministry through the actions of his followers, and through his own willingness to give of himself.

» Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Luke 8:3

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul provides us with a brief glimpse of Jesus' own attitude toward giving, one that we should follow as we seek to be courageously generous. The verse explains that though Jesus was rich, "yet for your sake he become poor (ESV)." As God, Jesus had everything. And yet he gave everything—he gave himself—coming to earth as a servant in order that we might be redeemed. We too must be willing to give of ourselves, our time, energy, and resources, for the benefit of others.

Our lives should be a reflection of the generosity Jesus showed us. Pertaining to Jesus' followers, Luke 8:3 mentions several women who supported him. The author Luke takes the time to point out that these women provided for Jesus and the disciples out of their own means. Joanna, the wife of Herod's household manager, had resources that she willingly utilized, filling an absolutely necessary need! Jesus and his disciples could not have continued in ministry if their basic needs, such as food and clothing, were not met. These women courageously gave what they had, enabling the gospel to spread.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you feel a sense of entitlement or ownership over your material possessions? Would you be willing to give things up for the benefit of others and for the kingdom?

What consistently occupies your mind? Your children? Your money? Your relationships? In what ways are you submitting these to God? In what ways are you holding them too tightly?

The idea that I would provide for someone else's present rather than my future, trusting that God will provide for my future, is a foreign idea to us as a culture. Do you feel as though you are free to sacrifice and be a blessing to others through your generosity? Why or why not?

Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Based on these words alone, what does your spending reveal about your life's treasure?