

# 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. James 1 calls us to respond in faith and be doers of the word, not hearers only. We see examples of this idea in the books of Kings and Chronicles, which are filled with accounts of wicked kings who know the Law of God but choose not to follow it. Josiah stands in contrast to these kings and gives us an example of a faithful response to God's word in obedience and repentance.

»» **Read 2 Kings 22:11-13; 23:21-27**

Josiah becomes King at a point in Judah's history when a line of wicked kings has steadily led God's people away from Him towards defeat and exile. While repairing the temple in Jerusalem, the people unexpectedly discover the Book of the Law that God had given Moses. Upon discovery of the Law, King Josiah rips his clothes in anguish at Judah's disobedience to God and begins to lead God's people towards repentance.

Following endless accounts of wicked and disobedient kings, Josiah's response to the Law is remarkable. How many of us, when confronted with our sin and disobedience to God, are quick to respond in humility and repentance? Josiah recognizes that the destruction of the rulers who came before him was a result of God's anger at their disobedience in spite of their knowledge of the Law. Notice, however, that it is the penitent, humble position of Josiah's heart in his obedient response to God's word, not his works in the keeping of the Law, that God acknowledges.

## 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 what ways are you a hearer of God's word and not a doer?
- »» What does it look like for you to be biblically oriented? How can you take steps to let the Bible connect you to the One who created you?
- »» 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. They are full of tension and are hardly ever about us. In 1 Samuel, we see this exemplified in the relationship between Jonathan and David.

»» *Read 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-10; 20*

Chapters 13-16 describe Saul's disqualification as king and the selection of his replacement. The prophet Samuel comes before Saul and tells him that his kingdom will be taken from him and given to another who is greater (1 Sam. 15:22-29). Saul is given a chance to repent and turn to God, but continues to disqualify himself by turning from God.

David is summoned by Saul to be his servant, and through this he develops a close relationship with Saul's son, Jonathan. As Saul continues to turn from the Lord and further disqualify himself as king, David's position as his replacement becomes more clear to him and he becomes jealous. As David's life is threatened by Saul's jealous rage, he turns to Jonathan for counsel. Jonathan recognizes that David is chosen by God to replace Saul, and sacrifices his own position and comforts to preserve David's life. Chapter 20 says that Jonathan, "loved him as his own soul." The relationship between Jonathan and David is an example of a relationship in which both sides are working to advance and further the other in God's plan for them.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- »» In what ways are your current relationships challenging and/or encouraging you? Who in your life knows you completely?
- »» Are there people in your life who tell you the truth and see through you? Are there people for whom you do that?
- »» Are you working to continually pave the way and empower other people to tell you the truth?
- »» 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. The story of Daniel shows what it looks like to live a life of prayer in submission to God.

» **Read Daniel 6**

The events in the book of Daniel take place during a turbulent period in Israel's history, when Israel and Judah were buffer nations between the empires of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. As Nebuchadnezzar returns from battle to take up his rule of Babylon, he besieges Jerusalem, looting the Temple and taking hostages including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, members of the royal family who are taken to be servants of the king. The Daniel we see in Babylon is a product of the spiritual revival brought on by Josiah upon his discovery of the Law, and he quickly distinguishes himself and finds favor from the king.

In Daniel 6 a decree is issued that "anyone who makes petition to any god or man for thirty days" except to king Nebuchadnezzar is to be cast into the den of lions. Daniel's response in verse 10 reveals his loyalty to God; he prays regularly and publicly as he had done previously, at great risk to his own life.

Daniel's life is an example of a life that is built on prayer. When the time came for a demonstration against the king, he did not have to change anything; his prayer life was disciplined and regular before the decree was ever issued. His prayerful response is a recognition of his helplessness and dependence on God and is a testament to prayer as the communication tool through which we develop an intimate and dependent relationship with God.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- » If prayer was suddenly "deleted" from your life, what would be different?
- » Is your life lived more like someone who is dependent or independent?
- » Is prayer a regular pattern in your life or is it a last resort in times of need?
- » What are one or two steps you can take this week to remind yourself of your dependence on God?



# 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 lives as believers, the temptation is to make much of ourselves and become a consumer and spectator of God's work rather than be a part of what He is doing. We are called as believers to give our lives away in service to God and the work He is doing on earth. Through no one is this more evident than Paul, who was redeemed from his persecution of the Church to become one of the most influential figures in Christian history.

## »» *Read Acts 9*

Before his conversion, Saul was a harsh persecutor of the Church. He was given legal authority to hunt down Jewish Christians and bring them to public trial and execution, and was responsible for the death of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. In Acts 9, he is traveling to Damascus to find and capture new Christians there when Jesus reveals himself to Saul, tells him to continue to Damascus, and uses Ananias to commission him to carry God's name "before the gentiles and the kings and children of Israel."

Upon his conversion, Saul, now Paul, immediately proclaims Jesus in the synagogue. He goes on to write almost a quarter of the New Testament and is responsible for much of the foundation of the early Church through his missionary journeys and church discipleship. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures of Christianity, second only to Jesus.

Paul is clear in his letters that God has called us to a life of service— not because of our works, but because of His purpose for us (1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 1:12-17). Our service to God is a vital part of how we come to know Him; it is essential to Him working in and through us. We are called as believers and members of the body of Christ and his Church to give our lives away in service to God in order to glorify Him and spread the Gospel. 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?
- »» Are you serving to be fulfilled or glorified, or are you serving in recognition that it is God's work through you for His glory?
- »» What is keeping you from giving 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. Andrew, a disciple of Jesus, gives us a picture of what it looks like to connect people with Jesus through personal relationships.

»» **Read John 1:35-42; 6:1-15; 12:20-26**

Andrew was one of the original twelve disciples. Before he met Jesus, Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist; however, when John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, he left John, found his brother Simon Peter, and immediately became a disciple of Jesus. Andrew and his brother returned to their fishing until they were called by Jesus to permanently follow him and become "fishers of men."

Throughout the book of John, Andrew is continually revealed as one who was bringing people to Jesus. After meeting Jesus in chapter one, he immediately finds his brother, Simon Peter, and brings him to Jesus. This is a relationship that was already established and for which he takes personal responsibility; while his relationship with Jesus is personal, it is not private, and he shares that with his brother. In chapter six, Andrew takes responsibility for those who are with Jesus by leaning in and speaking up to provide for their needs and connecting the boy to Jesus. He does this in faith and confidence that Jesus is at work and on mission; rather than moving to despair or self-reliance, he recognizes that Jesus is working through him, which allows him to move and take responsibility in confidence. In chapter twelve, a group of Greeks come to Philip and Andrew seeking to see Jesus, and the brothers connect them with him.

They had unique and personal positions in that group of people which they used to give access to Jesus and and connect them with him.

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

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- »» 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?
- »» Who is a person in your life that you have connected with and pursued? Who is a person in your life that has connected with and pursued you?
- »» In what ways are you "going on the hook" for what you believe and inviting people in to be a part of the change in your life? In what ways are you avoiding this out of fear or selfishness?
- »» How does Jesus' and his disciples' examples 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, workplace, family, etc.?



# 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 became 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 the kingdom?
- »» Do you feel as though you are free to sacrifice and be a blessing to others through your generosity? Why or why not?
- »» If you were to judge your love for God by your material generosity, what would you find?
- »» Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Based on these words, what does your spending reveal about your heart's treasure?