

## BECOMING A GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH

As 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders, we're flooded with so many resources on how to 'do church'. It seems, depending on preference, a church could be centred around just about anything - from Spirit outpourings, to building families, to a strong personality. But we've become convinced there's only one centre worthy of the church: the gospel. *So what does it mean to be a gospel-centred church?* For us, it boils down to three things ...

### 1) An endless exploration of the gospel's lengths and breadths.

In our devotions and conversations, prayer meetings, Bible studies, leadership times and sermons, we need to tirelessly reaffirm and uncover the stunning dimensions of the gospel, never straying far from it. But what is the gospel? Here's a broad definition that captures some of its multi-faceted depth...

*The gospel is the almost-too-good-to-be-true news that your Creator has made it possible, through Jesus Christ, for your life to be radically changed for good. This 'change' includes an instant and eternal change of your spiritual status (a.k.a. 'reconciliation with God') and of your spiritual state (a.k.a. 'rebirth'). It also includes a progressive, experiential entry into such privileges as perceiving God's glory, a cleansed conscience, an intimate walk with God, transforming power at work in our lives, and vital participation in a spiritual community that is on a world-changing mission. Most importantly, this change happens, though entirely undeserved on your part, when you trust in Christ. Christ is the gospel's essence. Trusting in him includes trusting in the saving work of his cross and resurrection, as well as trusting in his remarkable identity, character, words, reign and return.*

Once we hear enough of the gospel to believe and be saved, we then need more and more of the gospel to make progress. Compare the gospel to an ocean. We're saved as we go waist-deep into its waves. Then, as the gospel becomes our life's new passion, we swim further and deeper out, exploring its ever-expanding meaning for our lives. There's much more to the gospel than we've perceived or experienced.

### 2) Applying the gospel to every aspect of our lives and church.

With regard to 'doing life', we're in danger of *moralism*. This is the tendency to live by principles and rules, rather than by the gospel. The gospel has a unique way of energizing, informing and guiding every aspect of our lives. This includes our finances, marriages, parenting, use of time, response to crisis, work-life, recreation, priorities and more. The question we should incessantly ask ourselves of each aspect of life is: 'In what ways does the gospel energize, inform or guide this?'

With regard to 'doing church', we're in danger of *pragmatism*. This is the tendency to ask, 'What works?' instead of, 'What's true to the gospel?' The

gospel has a one-of-a-kind way of enthusing, enlightening and shaping every aspect of the way we do church. This includes our approach to worship and the use of spiritual gifts, prayer and leaders meetings, preaching and counselling, the stewardship of budgets and buildings, ministry to the poor and more. As leaders, we should tirelessly ask ourselves, 'In what ways does the gospel enthuse, enlighten and shape the way we do all these things?'

In our elders meetings at the moment, we're busy reviewing many dimensions of life and church-life through a gospel-lens. What insights have emerged!

### **3) A commitment to meaningfully expose as many not-yet Christians as possible to the gospel message.**

The more we experience the joy the gospel brings, the more we long for people everywhere to hear it. The gospel is contagious. Once a church catches the passion to reach their town or city with the gospel, it'll tend to re-invent itself around a simple mission: 'What can we do to meaningfully expose as many people as possible to the gospel message?' Although every church will come up with its own approach, let me share three ways that this question has led our church to engage our city with the gospel...

- a) We try to mobilize our people to attractively live out the gospel in their daily lives, to build relationships with unsaved people, grabbing chances to share their faith with them, and invite them to Sunday meetings and other events.
- b) We created, and regularly run, a five-session looking-into-faith course, called God Sessions that has enabled hundreds of unsaved people to explore the gospel in a non-threatening way.
- c) Since meetings provide a major opportunity to reach the lost (see Acts 2:47 and 1 Cor 14:23-25), we try to *make every Sunday meeting suitable for non-Christians*. We don't embarrass visitors. We encourage them to relax. We do our best to host them well. We choose songs that proclaim the gospel in non-religious language. We often include well-prepared testimonies of salvation. We avoid jargon as best we can. Although we don't water down the God-focus of worship, or the discipleship potency of our preaching, we're highly thoughtful about what will help, rather than hinder, non-Christians in making movements toward Christ. We're respectful towards people who don't yet believe in Jesus. We assure them that this is a church for both the convinced and the unconvinced. We invite them to journey with us in the hope they find what they're looking for. We try to preach excellently, engaging both Christians and non-Christians in the same message. We preach series-es of several weeks long, so that people are more likely to come back to hear more on the theme next week. We choose series themes that will likely attract non-Christians, and advertise these series-es well. Whatever theme we're addressing, somewhere in the message we try look at it through the lens of the gospel.

We're only in the shallow end. But since starting to become a gospel-centred church, we're seeing more and more not-yet-Christians find Christ. We're sensing God's smile, and we're smiling too. We've no intention of putting anything else at the centre. Not now. Not ever. For us, the gospel is 'it'!