



FOUNDATIONS: WEEK ONE

A CALL TO COMMITMENT



INTRODUCTION

There are two questions you could ask me and receive a near identical answer.

If you were to ask me, “How can I have a more rich and satisfying walk with Christ?” I would tell you, find a good church. Enter wholeheartedly into the worship of the church. Spend meaningful time in the word and prayer. Surround yourself with a tight knit band of brothers and sisters who are committed to kindling your affection for Christ. Give generously of the resources God has given you in order to be a blessing to your church family. Stay engaged with your friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

Do not fall into the trap of thinking the only thing you need is a deeper Bible study. Our relationship with Christ expands exponentially when we are fully engaged with his people and his mission in the world. While we all need a robust intake of God’s word, sometimes adding one more Bible study, is the most detrimental thing we can do for our progress in the faith. James K. A. Smith is fond of reminding us, “We are far more than just brains on a stick.”¹ We grow through active engagement with God, His People and Our World. Howard Hendricks adds, “Most of us are already educated well beyond our obedience, sooner or later we have to quit discussing God’s word and start doing God’s word.”²

If you were to ask me, “How can I get more out of church?” I would tell you to quit looking for a better church, and become a better church member. By all means make sure you are in a good

¹ Smith, James K. A., *You Are What You Love: The Power of Spiritual Habit*. Brazos Press, Grand Rapids Michigan 2016. Page 3

² Taken from my class notes from a “Doctor of Ministry Seminar” at Dallas Theological Seminary. So glad I got to spend time with our beloved “Prof” before he went home to be with the Lord. Will forever be indebted to his strong mind and witty turn of the phrase.

church. Enter wholeheartedly into the worship of the church. Spend meaningful time in the word and prayer. Surround yourself with a tight knit band of brothers and sisters who are committed to kindling your affection for Christ. Give generously of the resources God has given you in order to be a blessing to your church family. Stay engaged with your friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

It is no accident that the practices that lead to a vibrant walk with Christ, also lead to a rich and satisfying experience with the local church. We were created to live and thrive in biblical community. We are so tightly knit together that when we thrive, the church thrives; and when the church thrives we thrive.

Paul taught the independently minded Corinthians that no one can say, "I don't need the church," and no one can say, "The church does not need me."³

For those of you who have been around Christ Church for a while, you'll probably recognize that the advice I've just offered, closely resembles the Five Core Commitments that form the heart of Our Covenant of Fellowship. When you choose to make Christ Church your home, we will immediately challenge you to become a fully participating member by:

- **WORSHIPING** with us as your larger church family (Corporate Worship).
- **PURSUING** a vital and growing relationship with Christ through personal time in the word and prayer (Private Devotions).
- **CONNECTING** with other believers in a Community Group for mutual encouragement and accountability (Biblical Community).
- **GIVING GENEROUSLY** of your time, talent and financial resources to build the ministry of the church (Biblical Stewardship).
- **BUILDING BRIDGES** to your friends and neighbors who do not know Christ in the hope of seeing them come to know Christ (Missional Living).

In our Newcomers Coffee, we introduce you to Christ and His Church. In Foundations, we want to call you into a deep and abiding commitment to both Christ and His Church by incorporating these rhythms into your life.

I. YOU SEE THESE CORE COMMITMENTS AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

In Acts 2:42-47, Luke gave us a window into the life and practice of the early church.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with

³ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:15, 21 "Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body." "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'"

glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

A. THREE CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Before we launch into the Core Commitments, let's consider something even more foundational. From the outset, we need to understand that the church is more about relationships than practices. Our practices add vitality to our relationships, but they are never an end in and of themselves. If we master the core commitments but lose sight of the goal, they will quickly fade into a dull religious routine. The goal is for you to grow in your love and knowledge of Christ, your love and devotion to the body of Christ, and in your engagement with your friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

So the church is built around our relationship with Christ, our relationships within the body of Christ, and our relationships with our friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

1. We can see the first two relationships in Luke's opening line. Luke has crafted verse 42 to be a memorable sentence. It is as if he is saying, "Whatever else you do, don't forget to do these." He tells us,

"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer."

The line comes to us as a couplet. Repeat it quietly to yourself and you will begin to feel the rhythm. Luke is highlighting two key relationships. Our relationship with God, and our relationships within the body of Christ.

- a) He wants us to know that the church will thrive when we are meaningfully engaged with God through the word and prayer (the first and last items in Luke's couplet),⁴
- b) and when we are so deeply committed to one another, we invite each other into the intimate spaces of our lives (the second and third items in Luke's couplet).

While many see "breaking bread" as a reference to the Lord's table, I see it as a vivid metaphor for the kind of fellowship that takes place around the kitchen table. Jesus uses the same image in Revelation 3:20, as he beckons the church at Laodicea back into intimate fellowship with him. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with them and they with me."

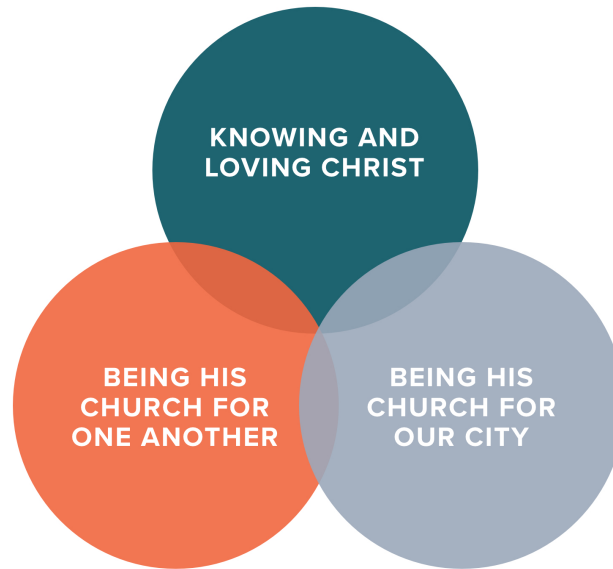
2. The third relationship is seen in the final paragraph. In verse 47, we read, "They ... [were] enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

They were living graciously among their friends and neighbors and it is no coincidence that Luke adds, "and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Our love for one another is always the foundation for our witness in the world.

3. We highlight these three relationships in our purpose statement.

"Christ Church exists to glorify God by making disciples who know and love Christ and are committed to being His Church for one another, Our City and the world.

⁴ I detect a chiasmic structure in Luke's couplet in which the first and last items are related, and the middle two items are related.



Each of these relationships are critical and they are vitally connected. The more we love Christ, the more we will love his church. When the love of Christ is on display in the church, the world will notice.

You can clearly see these relationships at play in the early church.

- a) They were committed to **growing in their love and knowledge of Christ** by sitting under the apostles' teaching, pouring their hearts out to God, and by praying, praising and glorifying God with glad and sincere hearts.
- b) They were committed to **being the church** for one another by being together, holding all things in common, selling their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need, meeting everyday in the temple courts, taking their meals together in one another's homes.
- c) They were committed to **being the church for their city** by living graciously with their friends and neighbors, with the result that the Lord was adding to their number everyday those who were being saved.

B. FIVE (OR AT LEAST FOUR) CORE COMMITMENTS

A second observation we can make from the passage is that the church was energized by several foundational practices that very closely resemble our Core Commitments. At least four of the five "Core Commitments" are already at work in the life of the early church.

1. CORPORATE WORSHIP

You see their commitment to "Corporate Worship" as all three thousand of them met everyday in the temple courts, where they no doubt sat under the Apostle's teaching and poured their hearts out to God in prayer.

2. BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

You see their commitment to "Biblical Community" in the phrases, "they devoted themselves to... fellowship... [and] all the believers were together and had everything in

common... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...

3. **BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP**

You see their commitment to Biblical Stewardship in the fact that, “They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

4. **MISSIONAL LIVING**

You can see their commitment to Missional Living in that, “They... [were] enjoying the favor of everyone. And the Lord was adding to their number everyday those who were being saved.”

5. **PRIVATE DEVOTIONS?**

The “Core Commitment” that is conspicuous by its absence is “Private Devotions.” We can assume that their devotion to the “Apostles’ teaching ...and prayer” included private moments as well as public moments, but it is the public moments that are front and center in the text. We most often think of spiritual maturity as a private endeavor, but the New Testament writers expend far more ink emphasizing our life together than they do our life apart.

II. **MANY PEOPLE REFER TO THESE “CORE COMMITMENTS” AS “SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.”**

- A. The whole idea of a disciplined life has fallen on hard times. We imagine that if anything is truly spiritual it comes to us as a gift, and if it is a gift it comes without any effort on our part. I am not sure where we got this idea, but we certainly didn’t get it from Jesus or Paul, or Peter.

Can you imagine Peter going to Jesus and saying, “You know I have been wrestling with a few issues and am feeling a bit depressed. I am not really up for the discipleship thing today. I am sure you understand my aversion to commitment”

It would be even harder to imagine Jesus responding, “That’s OK Peter, why don’t you find a safe place and grab some me time. When you’ve resolved all your issues, look me up and we’ll ease you back into the discipleship thing.”

I rather imagine Jesus saying, “Peter I understand your wounds, I understand your reservations, but this is not something you are doing by yourself, its something we are doing together. Follow me.”

Jesus does not pull his punches when it comes to commitment. In fact, his call to commitment is rather jarring. The same is true with Peter and Paul.

1. **LISTEN TO JESUS**

LUKE 9:23-24 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

2. LISTEN TO PAUL

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

1 TIMOTHY 4:7-10 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

3. LISTEN TO PETER

2 PETER 1:5-8 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- B. The biblical writers are not at all opposed to effort, even agonizing effort in the pursuit of godliness, and we should not be either. But, we should be quick to add, the blessing we receive has far more to do with God's grace than our effort.

III. THERE ARE OTHERS WHO MORE ACCURATELY DESCRIBE THESE “CORE COMMITMENTS” AS MEANS OF GRACE.

- A. While “spiritual disciplines” emphasize our effort, “means of grace” emphasizes God's blessing. We do not earn God's blessing by our effort, we simply avail ourselves of the means God has given us to kindle the flames of grace that he has already given us.

It is God who calls us. It is God who gives us the desire to know and love him. It is God who gives us the means to grow in our knowledge and love for him. It is God who makes us fruitful as we avail ourselves of the means to know and love him. It is God who fills us with his joy and his peace as we follow hard after him.

- B. These Core Commitments are the foundational practices that God has ordained to strengthen us in our faith, increase our joy, and transform our character.

He meets us in corporate worship, he meets us in our private devotions, he meets us in biblical community, he meets our generosity with his generosity, he ministers grace through us as we serve others, and fills us with joy as our friends respond to the gospel.

C. You may have been so overwhelmed by the “no holds barred” call to commitment in the passages we just read that you missed the grace. But they are so full of grace.

1. Jesus tells us, “Whoever loses their life for his sake, will find it.”
2. In Corinthians, Paul tells us athletes discipline themselves to “get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”
3. In Philippians, he tells us we are “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in us both to will and to act in order to fulfill his purposes.”

God gives us both the will and the ability to fulfill his purposes, and we will never be more personally satisfied than when we are fulfilling his purposes for our lives.

4. In Timothy, he reminds us, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

While there are a lot of studies that emphasize the dramatic impact diet and exercise will have on our quality of life, Paul tells us the benefits of physical health are not nearly dramatic as the benefits of spiritual health.

- a) Nothing will more dramatically impact your quality of life than your pursuit of godliness.
 - b) Nothing will more dramatically impact your joy in the faith than your pursuit of godliness.
 - c) Nothing will more dramatically impact your marriage than your pursuit of godliness.
 - d) Nothing will more dramatically impact the atmosphere at work than your pursuit of godliness.
 - e) Nothing will make you a better parent than your pursuit of godliness.
5. After telling us to make every effort to cultivate godly character Peter adds, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Nothing could be more scary than the thought of “being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peter tells us that the godly character we cultivate through the means of grace will guarantee that that never happens.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing more worthwhile than the wholehearted pursuit of godliness through the means of grace. The means are well within our reach and God promises to be with us every step of the way. It will not always be easy, but it will always be worthwhile, and no one is richer than the person who who has been enriched by God as they follow hard after him.

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AROUND THE TABLE

1. Christ Church is built around three vital relationships—our relationship with Christ, our relationships within the body of Christ, and our relationships with our friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

“Our purpose is to lead people to know and love Christ and to be his church for one another, our city and the world.”

- a. Where do you see these relationships at play in the early church?
 - b. How would you describe what it means to be the church for one another?
 - c. How would you describe what it means to be the church for our city (i.e. our friends and neighbors who do not know Christ)?
 - d. How does our love for Christ lead us to be more meaningfully engaged with his church?
 - e. How does being the church for one another lend itself to more effectively being the church for our city?
2. At Christ Church we describe a fully participating member as someone who knows and loves Christ and is committed to:

WORSHIPING with us as a larger church family (Corporate Worship).

PURSUING a vital a growing relationship with Christ through personal time in the word and prayer (Private Devotions).

CONNECTING with other believers in a Community Group for mutual encouragement and accountability (Biblical Community).

GIVING GENEROUSLY of their time, talent and financial resources to build the ministry of the church (Biblical Stewardship)

BUILDING BRIDGES to your friends and neighbors who do not know Christ in the hope of seeing them come to know Christ (Missional Living)

- a. Where do you see these practices at play in the life of the early church?
- b. We described these as the means to a more full and satisfying relationship with Christ, and a richer experience in the body of Christ. Why do you think “discipleship” and “active participation in a local church” go hand in hand? What happens when we pursue one without the other?
- c. What are we emphasizing when we refer to these as “spiritual disciplines?”
- d. Which of the passages under “spiritual disciplines” was most challenging to you (pages 5 and 6)? Why?
- e. What are we emphasizing when we refer to these practices as “means of grace?”
- f. Which of these practices are you most excited to learn more about over the course of our study?