

Illustration by Oli Winward

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What is a gospel-centred church?

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Our first value, **gospel-centred**, answers the question, '*why* do you do what you do as a church?' Our second value, **disciple-making**, answers the question, '*what* do you do as a church?' And our third value, **simple**, answers the question, '*how* do you do what you do as a church?' This leaflet is all about what we mean by 'gospel-centred'.

The gospel is the centre of the Bible

In 1 Corinthians 15.3-4, the apostle Paul writes:

> *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...*

He is emphatic about three things: 1) Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was then raised to life; 2) that all this was in fulfilment of the Scriptures; and 3) that this is of 'first importance'. This is where we start, and where we never move on from.

The Bible tells one story, and Jesus is the hero (see Luke 24.26-27, 44-47). Since the Bible is the record of God acting in human history, the gospel is therefore the centre of all of history. It is the centre of the big picture – God's plans for the whole cosmos. This is a big part of Paul's emphasis in the early chapters of the book of Ephesians (for instance). The 'big picture' of the gospel tells the story of creation, decreation, recreation and new creation. As a gospel-centred church we preach the riches of the gospel of Jesus from all the Scriptures.

The gospel is the centre of salvation

The gospel is called the 'power of God for salvation for everyone who believes' (Romans 1.14). This means that what Jesus has done for me personally is the very centre of how I am saved. This is the 'small picture' of the gospel. It tells the story of a holy God, a hopeless sinner (me, personally), a perfect substitute (Jesus Christ), and personal faith.

The gospel is the centre of the Christian life

The gospel is not just something that we learn and trust once, and then move on from. Rather, it is the very air we breathe. Martin Luther said – in the first of his famous 95 theses in 1517 – that all of Christian life is of repentance from beginning to end. In other words, 'the way in is the way on'. Paul says:

> *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Colossians 2.6-7)*

On reflection, we realise that almost all of the New Testament was written to Christians (not non-Christians), and that almost all of the New Testament is teaching, reminding, and applying the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who already believe it. Thus, gospel-centred living means that we continue to repent and believe, and that by continually returning to the truth of God in the gospel we grow. The gospel is not only our core content, it is our core competency; it is not only what we know and recite best, but what we know and do best.

Gospel DNA

Thus, the gospel is like our 'DNA'; every cell in your body is characterised by the same DNA. Everything in the Christian's life is to be 'shaped' by the gospel: our attitudes, marriages, work ethic, relationships with our neighbours, and so on. The gospel is like our Christian 'control centre'. At an airport all decisions must go through the control centre and be controlled by it. For a follower of Jesus, everything is controlled and centred around the gospel: what God has done in Jesus. The gospel is not only our *message*, but also what controls our *methods* and our *manner*.

Gospel-centred is more than just gospel-based. In a gospel-based church, the gospel is the foundation. The gospel is very important and precious. The gospel is guarded and defended. But it remains in a compartment separate from everyday life and thought: people may know the gospel well and be able to articulate it in detail, but it does not control or define their daily lives. However, in a gospel-centred church, the gospel becomes the very air we breathe and the blood in our veins: the gospel is not only something that we know and love and teach, but something that we live out in our thoughts and relationships. Jesus' lordship extends over absolutely everything.

'Of first importance'

At GCG, we are explicitly gospel-centred. A church that holds the gospel — what God has done in Jesus — as 'of first importance'. We are a church that holds the gospel as utterly central to all of history and the universe. A church that holds the gospel as the only way in which anyone can be saved and put right with God. And a church that holds the gospel of Jesus as the very way in which we grow in love and obedience to him in all of life.

