



CORE VALUES FOR A KINGDOM PEOPLE

Values, Priorities and Practices

Vineyard churches seek to be a faithful and practical expression of the Kingdom of God. For many years, the distinctive features of the Vineyard were described by a set of values, priorities and practices published in the *Theological and Philosophical Statement* (1995).

In 2008, the Board of Vineyard USA consolidated these into a statement of Five Core Values:

1. The theology and practice of the Kingdom of God;
2. Experiencing God;
3. Reconciling community;
4. Compassionate ministry;
5. Culturally relevant mission.

This document is an Australian reflection on the five core values commissioned by the board of Vineyard Churches Australia.

1. The theology and practice of the Kingdom of God

The Vineyard movement is grounded in the theology and practice of the Kingdom of God. This is our theological foundation and centre. Not theology, but *praxis* – where theology and practice meet.

The '*Kingdom of God*' is the central message of Jesus. In biblical thought, 'Kingdom' is not a place or realm, but an activity. Kingdom is what a king does. It is the rule or reign of the king. The *Kingdom of God* is God's dynamic rule. It is *God's generous rule*.

What is the good news of the Kingdom? It is a *message* – God's generous rule has broken into this troubled age and is now available to everyone through simple confidence in Jesus. It is a *ministry* – we demonstrate the presence of God's generous rule by healing the sick, binding up broken hearts and driving out demons. We participate in the continuing mission of Jesus.

Jesus announced the *arrival and availability* of God's generous rule and demonstrated its presence by healing the sick, releasing the oppressed and doing justice for the poor, announcing in his words and works the extraordinary availability of God's favour to everyone who puts their confidence in Jesus.

The good news is that through Jesus, access to a restored relationship with God is now open to all people. Anyone who witnesses the in-breaking rule of God is invited into relationship with him.

Jesus gathered around himself a community of ordinary people and formed them into a *preview community* to show what it is like to live under God's generous rule. This community of people, gathered around Jesus to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom, is a central and intentional part of the mission of Jesus.

The kingdom community is commissioned to make disciples, winning people to Jesus and teaching them to live in the Father's love and do the works of the kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the kingdom has a specific and complex timeframe that George Ladd¹ calls *inaugurated eschatology*.² If we are to understand the mission of Jesus, we need to understand this timeframe.

Jesus inaugurated *the age to come* by his life and ministry, his death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. However, the in-breaking kingdom of God did not bring *this present evil age* to an end. Instead, this age and the age to come continue in parallel until Jesus returns. We live in *this age*, but we belong to the *age to come*. We are caught 'between the times'. God's kingdom has come, but not yet in fullness.

When Jesus returns, he will consummate the Kingdom and bring this age to an end. God restores the heavens and the earth and rules forever in righteousness, justice and peace.

In the meantime, the followers of Jesus live in the presence of the future as subjects of God's kingdom, working in partnership with God towards the new creation that began with the resurrection of Jesus.

¹ See Ladd, George E., *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1959, Wm. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI; *The Presence of the Future – The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, 1996, Revised Edition, Wm. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI; and Morphew, Derek J., *Breakthrough: Discovering the Kingdom*, 1991, Struik Books: Cape Town.

² Eschatology is the study of 'last things' (from Greek, *eschatos* 'last'). 'Inaugurated' means 'begun' or 'set in motion'.

The kingdom community is entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of continuing the mission of Jesus, *announcing* the presence of God's generous rule, *demonstrating* his rule by healing the sick, binding up the broken-hearted, driving out demons and *spreading the Father's love* to the ends of the earth.

2. Experiencing God

We believe that the presence of God is real and tangible. The New Testament often speaks in rich experiential language of God's love, mercy and grace.³ We value the powerful, personal experience of the love and grace of God made available to us through the redeeming work of Jesus and applied in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus modelled for us a life filled with God's Spirit, beginning with his baptism and explained most clearly in the fourth gospel. Jesus lived in his Father's love, only doing and saying what his Father told him to do and say.⁴

Astonishingly, Jesus declares that we can enjoy the same kind of relationship with the Father that he enjoyed.⁵ As the Spirit-baptizer, Jesus promises to give us the Spirit without measure so that we may walk in his ways and keep his commands. We seek and yearn for this kind of life. Our hearts are continually drawn towards a deeper, richer experience of the triune God.

We celebrate 'burning heart' experiences when God, in his grace, grants them. They may come in times of worship or in prayer, especially when we pray for one another with the laying on of hands. They may come in mission when we engage with the leading of the Holy Spirit and join God in his work. These experiences mark our lives with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. We are people of his presence.

Indeed, we can only continue the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit as we enter into the relationship that Jesus enjoys with his Father and prayed that we too would enjoy.

In worship, the church is invited into a powerful, on-going, intimate encounter with God. In this encounter, we receive his love and grace, we learn to discern his presence, to hear his voice and we are empowered by his Spirit to do the works of Jesus.

As we grow in grace, we learn that we can only do the works that Jesus did (John 14.12-14) as we develop the kind of Abba relationship that Jesus had, a life of dependence on and obedience to his Father, which involves paying close attention to whatever the Father is doing. This deepening personal relationship with God transforms our character, producing the fruit of the Spirit as evidence of God's presence in our lives.

Corporate worship is often the place where people experience intimacy with God for the first time. The corporate experience creates a hunger for intimacy and a desire to come into his presence again and again. However, spiritual maturity involves cultivating a personal relationship with God nourished by a range of spiritual disciplines that are suited to the season of life.

We value praise, adoration and exaltation of Jesus expressed in music and other creative media. We also recognise that we may approach God and express our worship to him in a variety of ways. We may encounter God powerfully through the reading or preaching of scripture, through silence, solitude and contemplation, and through engagement in acts of healing and justice, joining Jesus in his mission to the world.

We believe that worship involves the whole of life, including the way we treat our loved ones and the work we do with our hands. The people of Jesus bring every facet of life under the God's generous rule so that everything we do may bring glory to God.

3. Reconciling Community⁶

The church is the *community of the King*,⁷ the community of those who have brought their lives under God's generous rule by putting their confidence in Jesus. This community is called to follow Jesus into his mission.

The church, as a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God, forms a *preview community*, displaying the life of the Age to come in the midst of this present evil age. The church is an *eschatological community*, living in the presence of the future.

The church, as agent and instrument of the Kingdom of God, continues the mission of Jesus, bearing the good news of the Kingdom to all nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The King's community is a *worshipping community* sold out to passionate, personal and corporate pursuit of God. Jesus invites his followers into the same intimate experience of God that he enjoyed with his father. This intimate personal relationship with God through his Son and by the Spirit lies at the centre of the Christian experience and envisions and empowers all mission and ministry.

The King's community is a *reconciling community*, entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation and characterised by restored relationships marked by grace, humility, transparency, repentance, and integrity. A reconciling community practises, models and teaches healthy relationships in a world of relational dysfunction.

Jesus focused his ministry of reconciliation around the meal table. In the gospels, Jesus causes controversy and offence to religious people by regularly eating and drinking with socially excluded people. The poor, sinners, women, tax collectors and prostitutes are welcomed to the King's table for the messianic banquet.

³ For example, Luke 24.31-32; Ephesians 1.6-9; Romans 5.1-5; 8.12-27; 1 John 3.1.

⁴ John 5.18-20.

⁵ John 14.21; 17.

⁶ 1 Cor 12,13; John 13.34-35, Matt 22.39; Eph 1.18-19; Luke 4.18-19; Col 1.19-20; 2 Cor 5. 18-21; Eph 2.14-22; Acts 2.42; Jude 20-23.

⁷ This is the title of Howard Snyder's classic 1977 study of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God.

As followers of Jesus we practice hospitality and seek to befriend the socially excluded, engaging with them on their own turf and creating safe spaces where they can experience the open invitation of God.

The ministry of reconciliation includes the release of forgiveness to repentant sinners, but is not limited to this. The church's task is to participate as God's co-workers in the restoration and renewal of all creation in all spheres of life towards the creator's vision of the future on a renewed earth.

The King's community is a *prophetic community*, living by the word of God, listening attentively for his voice, doing justice for the poor and speaking fearlessly on behalf of those who have no voice.

The King's community is a *disciple-making community*, forming people into the likeness of Jesus and mobilizing them into his mission to the world.

4. Compassionate Ministry

Compassionate ministry is the work of the church in rebuilding broken human beings, cleansing our hands of sin and our hearts from impurity and bringing us into restored relationship with God so that we may live in his presence and join him in his work.

Compassionate ministry involves offering forgiveness of sin, healing of sickness and disease, including physical, mental and spiritual conditions, release of the oppressed, including deliverance from harassment by evil spirits and from all forms of social, economic and political enslavement.

The pre-condition for receiving God's healing and grace is recognition of personal need. Jesus said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*".⁸ Jesus was answering religious people who were offended by the company he kept.

Likewise, the church of Jesus will keep company with the broken. "The poor" for whom the message of Jesus is good news,⁹ include all those who acknowledge their need of God's help.

The church holds the keys of the kingdom, which give authority to forgive sins, to bind and release on earth as in heaven.¹⁰ Forgiveness and release from bondage to sin and guilt are powerful tools in rebuilding people's lives devastated by the effects of sin. Followers of Jesus are equipped to release forgiveness for personal sin and to help victims of sin to forgive the ones who sinned against them.

The ministry of forgiveness is a key part in the kingdom ministry of binding up the broken-hearted. Healing of the spirit involves the giving and receiving of forgiveness that addresses the emotional, psychological, relational and spiritual damage caused by sin.

Jesus gives his followers authority and power to heal every disease and sickness.¹¹ Compassionate ministry involves healing various physical and mental illnesses, diseases and injuries as a demonstration of the presence of God's generous rule. Joy and celebration accompanies every healing. Love, faithfulness, compassion and on-going prayerful support surrounds those who continue to suffer from sickness or disease, physical or mental.

Many people find themselves enslaved to destructive habits and patterns of thought and behaviour that are beyond their power to break. Followers of Jesus discern the presence of demonic bondages and know how to break these bondages by the power of the Holy Spirit. Driving out demons was Jesus' most frequent miracle in the gospels and continues to be a much-needed ministry of the church today.

The church, at times, will be required to stand against demonic powers at work in various forms of social, economic and political enslavement. For example, working against the powers of global poverty through campaigns such as Micah Challenge; confronting the pervasive, debilitating spirituality of consumer capitalism that is at work in suburbia; helping victims of long-term unemployment, homelessness and addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling.

5. Culturally relevant mission¹²

Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations. This remains our chief task. A disciple is a person who has been incorporated into God's people by baptism into the threefold name and taught to obey everything that Jesus commanded his disciples.

The first command that Jesus gives to his disciples is to follow him into his mission: "*Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men*" (Mark 1.14-20). First and foremost, disciples of Jesus are called to continue the mission of Jesus in showing the love of the Father to the world.

The mission of Jesus, as we have seen, involves *announcing* the arrival and availability of God's generous rule and *demonstrating* his rule by healing the sick, binding up the broken hearted, releasing the oppressed and keeping company with socially excluded people. Followers of Jesus will be equipped to live in God's love and to do all of the works of Jesus.¹³

A Kingdom community is committed to growth by evangelism – winning lost people to Jesus. Jesus did *power evangelism*, using the gifts of the Spirit in the mission of the Kingdom. Jesus used words of knowledge, words of wisdom, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discernment and power encounters to clear the way for a person to hear and respond to his message. We endeavour to do the same.

⁸ Mark 2.17.

⁹ Luke 4.18.

¹⁰ Matthew 16.19; John 20.22-23.

¹¹ Matthew 10.1-2, 7-8; cf. 28.20; Luke 9.1.

¹² Gen 11; Acts 1.8; 2; 10.45f; 17; 1 Cor. 9.22.

¹³ John 14.12.

Mission begins locally. Every believer is called to join in the mission of Jesus to win family and friends to the faith. This means more than inviting them to come to a church event. Effective mission to people with whom we are in close relationship requires integrity, vulnerability and faithful living, prayer and a willingness to take risks when opportunities to bear witness or to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom come our way.

Mission involves establishing new followers in the ways of Jesus. A disciple is *baptized* into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism in water symbolizes new birth and incorporates the new believer into God's family. Baptism in the Spirit empowers the new believer to live the life that Jesus has and to do his works.

A disciple is a person who has been *taught to obey* every command of Jesus.¹⁴ Disciples are formed around his first command to become fishers of men and around the great commandment,¹⁵ which sums up God's desire for his people. New followers will be quickly equipped and deployed in the mission to their friends and family.¹⁶

Jesus used a 'show and tell' method of making disciples. He showed his disciples how to do his ministry. He got them to help him while he did it. Then, he got them to do it, while he watched them. Once he was satisfied that they were ready (but probably well before *they* thought they were), he sent them out on a training run in the villages of Galilee.¹⁷ This approach to making disciples will work for us, too, teaming up new believers with experienced believers so that they learn on the job.

We believe that the most effective method of winning our nation and the world to Jesus is by planting new churches. A Kingdom community is committed to identifying, developing and sending gifted people and teams to plant new churches at home and abroad. We commit substantial amounts of time, energy, money and our best people to this task.

The commission of Jesus is to make disciples of *all nations*. We participate in Jesus' mission to the nations by praying, giving, going and sending people who are called, trained and equipped, until the task is complete.

Establishing the Values¹⁸

For each value, explore, evaluate and then employ.

1. Explore (talk about it)

Talk through the section, discussing and explaining the various concepts and ideas. Choose one person to lead this part of the session.

2. Evaluate (reflect deeper)

Reflect more deeply on the material and think critically about the concepts and ideas in the light of the scriptures and your experience as a group.

Brain storm and then prioritize options and alternatives. What habits and practices could you adopt to help express this value within your community.

Identify obstacles and areas of resistance. Figure out what is important and what is not.

3. Employ (act on it)

Develop a plan of action. Choose together one or two shared practices that you will adopt as a group to express this value.

What will you need to *stop doing* in order adopt the new shared practices? How will you keep accountable to one another for these shared practices? When and how will you evaluate the effectiveness of the new practices?

¹⁴ Matthew 28.20, John 14.21, 23-24.

¹⁵ Matthew 22.34-40.

¹⁶ Mark 5.18-19.

¹⁷ Matthew 10; Luke 9 and 10.

¹⁸ This section is adapted from Alan Hirsch and Darren Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*, (2009, Brazos Press: Grand Rapids MI), pp. 14-24.