

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED SERIES
GOSPELGRACE101

week #3

UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY

Embracing Our Ministry Culture

Every church has a ministry culture—a set of beliefs, values, and customs that characterize the way ministry is carried out in that congregation.

BELIEFS – Core biblical and moral absolutes that drive the ministry

VALUES – Strong convictions, preferences, tastes, and methodologies derived from the application of the core beliefs that flavor the ministry culture and safeguard its mission

In short, corporate culture is “the way things are done” in an organization. In church congregational life, ministry culture is the defining atmosphere in which ministry is done in a particular church. Failure to recognize and adjust to the ministry culture of a local church will make connecting difficult at best and impossible at worst!

While ministry culture should never be viewed as inspired and unchangeable, it should also not be viewed as soft, fluid, and easily adjusted. Ministry culture is a valuable asset to a local church, and as such, it should be carefully cultivated, shaped, and guarded.

All churches have a ministry culture. Ministry culture exists either **intentionally** (driven by the mission, beliefs, and values) or **unintentionally** (set by the whims of the people). Therefore, it is important to understand and intentionally cultivate the right kind of ministry culture at Gospel Grace Church.⁴

Establishing, cultivating, and maintaining a good ministry culture requires two primary components...

1. Ministry culture must be driven by a clear Mission Statement.

The NEED for a Mission Statement

- It is like a **glue** – it holds people together.
- It is like a **magnet** – it attracts like-hearted people to the ministry.
- It is like a **compass** – it provides direction for charting the course.
- It is like a **ruler** – it measures progress and forward movement.

The NATURE of a Mission Statement

- It must be **personally incorporated**.
- It must be **specific** in focus.
- It must be **pervasive** in application.
- It must be **eternal** in consequence / value.

⁴ Sam Horn, Content Adapted from “Establishing, Cultivating, and Maintaining a Good Ministry Culture”

People get involved in ministry because they want to give themselves to something bigger than themselves—to something of eternal value!

A good example of a personal life mission statement in the Bible is Paul's familiar statement: "For to me live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Paul's statement "for to me" shows that his mission was personally incorporated in his life and ministry for Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul's mission had a specific focus: "to live is Christ." Additionally, this focus was pervasive in application: "to live." It affected everything Paul did in his life. Finally, this mission had eternal consequences: "to die is gain."

We exist as a church to glorify God by making gospel-centered, grace-saturated disciples of Jesus Christ.

The OBJECTIVE of a Mission Statement

- Effective, Focused Ministry
- Years ago Warren Wiersbe observed that ministry happens when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God.
- No church or ministry can afford to be all things to all men. Rather, it must strive to direct the energies and resources provided by God through the channel of committed and loving believers in order to meet the real and legitimate needs of people for the glory of God and the good of others. And all of this must happen through opportunities provided by God, in directions guided by God, and in the ways that please God.

2. Ministry culture must be shaped and flavored by Core Values.

The following core values have been claimed as the defining characteristics that we desire to shape and flavor the culture of Gospel Grace Church. You will notice they all either flow directly out of scriptural command or naturally from biblical principle.

Authentic Worship

God made us to magnify His greatness and live for His pleasure. Therefore, the overarching goal of Gospel Grace Church is to glorify Him in word and deed. Our personal pursuit of God should overflow in joyful worship together as a church, involving the whole man—mind, emotion, and will.

Christian Community

Christians are born into a new community through the reconciling work of Christ. This new identity compels us to live in a communion of brotherly love. This is because when we are secure in God's love, we are free and responsible to radically love one another in transparency, accountability, and mutual edification.

Committed Discipleship

To be a disciple means to be a disciple-maker. From the seniors down to the children, we want to see them grow in grace. With the help of God's Spirit, we lovingly commit ourselves to helping other believers mature in Christlikeness. Through scriptural instruction and life example, we want to provoke one another to love and good works.

Intentional Evangelism

As recipients of God's grace we are motivated to be outward facing with the message of Christ. We will intentionally seek to build redemptive relationships by serving and loving others. In addition, we will strive to make purposeful life choices that maximize our opportunities to proclaim the gospel locally and afar. Ultimately, we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord.

Scriptural Truth

We want God's revealed truth to permeate all of life and ministry. To live means to consume God's Word (Matt. 4:4). Our goal is that believers would mature in Christlikeness by means of an ever-increasing knowledge of and submission to the Word (2 Tim. 3:15-16). We want to study God's Word in depth and be grounded in sound doctrine (Heb. 5:12-14). Therefore, the Bible will take priority and prominence in our worship services, for it has the power to change lives. Scripture makes it clear that our true problems are internal rather than external. Therefore, we apply the Word to the heart and not just to outward symptoms (Heb. 4:12).

Mercy and Compassion

The gospel both humbles us to our desperate need for God and moves us to meet the needs of the poor, marginalized, broken, and downcast. Therefore, we want to be known for not just speaking the gospel, but also joyfully living it out in acts of mercy for the church, our neighborhood, Salt Lake City, and the world. Our priority in ministry is to point everyone to the source of all mercy—Jesus Christ.

Evident Faith

At Gospel Grace Church, we understand that without faith it is impossible to please God. We are willing to be risk-taking, sacrificing-making, logic-breaking people because we know that the just shall live by faith. We want to obey God regardless of the cost and even if we don't know all the details. We refuse to dig our roots into that which is passing away. And we will prayerfully invest our families, our finances and our futures in the work of God because we trust the promises of God.

Commitment to Holiness

As a people called out to be God's own possession, we no longer find our identity with the world, but have been delivered by grace from a lifestyle of sin and taught to live in holiness. Therefore, we are committed to personal and corporate purity through accountability, discipline and separation from sin and false teaching.

Eternally-minded Stewardship

As people who have received everything by the grace of God, we commit both personally and corporately to wise and generous stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us. We will not hoard people or resources but will joyfully give to bless the body of Christ. In a world that values what is passing away, we will invest in eternity by valuing people over programs and facilities.

Purposeful Multiplication

By means of the church, God displays his character and declares his message to a lost and broken world. We believe that the gospel's work naturally eventuates in the formation of new churches. Therefore, we will invest in reproducing church-planting churches in strategic

communities throughout the Salt Lake valley and beyond. Such an endeavor requires leaders who will train leaders and teams who will pioneer new works (2Tim 2:2)

Embracing a Heritage: **Historic Baptist Distinctives**

People come to Gospel Grace Church from many different backgrounds and walks of life. For some, this is the first church they have experienced. Others come from churches whose faith and practice is similar to Gospel Grace. Many, however, come to Gospel Grace from churches that are in other denominations.

No matter what your background might be, we are thankful God brought you to our church, and **we think it is important for you to understand our identity.** It is evident that when you look at the name of our church that it does not immediately signal an identification with a particular church denomination. However, **we are not a non-denominational church.** So why not just include our denominational affiliation in the name of our church? Was this intentional, because we are unsure of the kind of commitments we have as a church? Let us answer these questions by making some simple observations.

First of all, in our day, **churches sometimes become known for, or are assessed by, a common knowledge about a particular denomination's characteristics,** even if that common knowledge does not accurately represent the true nature of that church. That can be positive if the common understanding in a particular community accurately reflects the nature of that church, or it can be negative if the common understanding misrepresents the commitments and beliefs of that church.

Let us give you an example of how that reality plays out in the community God has called us to plant in Gospel Grace Church. It was planted with specific commitments that have been historically identified as the “Baptist Distinctives,” which we will define for you. However, there are many different kinds of Baptist churches. You may have heard of some, such as Southern Baptists, American Baptists, General Conference Baptists, General Association of Regular Baptists, Particular Baptists, Reformed Baptists, and many others too numerous to list out here.

In light of the many perceptions that dominate one’s understanding of a church denomination (particularly the wide range of types of Baptist churches), we believe it possible to be committed and unashamed to be a Baptist church without including the name “Baptist” directly in our church name. We understand that in a community like Salt Lake City, misinformed understandings of what kind of Baptist church we desire to be are wide-spread and could potentially hinder or polarize us from the ability to proclaim our primary message (the Gospel) to the community we are trying to reach.

We believe our church name accurately reflects who we are (primary identification with the Gospel and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ) while also allowing us to teach our secondary identification as a Baptist church in a sequence that is intentional and most helpful for the people we are striving to reach for the Gospel.

So, what kind of church are we?

Gospel Grace Church is a Historic Baptist Church, and since names and labels mean something, it will be important for you to know what we mean by our name and identification. When we say that we are a Historic Baptist Church, we simply

mean that **we are not an official part of any organization or conference of churches where we would be subject to any authority outside of our own congregation.** We exist as an independent church and are led by qualified elders, served by qualified deacons, and submit ourselves to the authority of the Bible. We are free as a church to fellowship and participate with any other good church or ministry of like-faith and practice should we so desire and feel directed by God to do so.

When we say that we are a Historic Baptist Church, we are also referring to **our form of church government and practice** as derived from what we believe best reflects the New Testament's teaching. These principles have been "historically" embraced as "Baptist Distinctives." There are many ways to describe these principles, and if you are interested, we can refer you to additional resources to help you explore the long history and heritage of the Baptist movement.

For the purpose of our discussion, we need to explore eight important characteristics that historically have been held to by Baptist churches.

Biblical Authority

Autonomy of the Local Church

Priesthood of the Believer

Two Ordinances

Individual Soul Liberty

Saved & Baptized Church Membership

Two Offices

Separation of Church & State

What are the Historic Baptist Distinctives?

Biblical Authority

A Historic Baptist church accepts the Bible as the Word of God and as the only rule of faith and practice.

"[14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Autonomy of the Local Church

A Historic Baptist church is self-governing.

The local church is an independent body accountable to no one but our Lord and His Word. There is no person or organization on earth that can dictate what a local church can or should do. (Acts 15; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-5)

Priesthood of the Believer

A Historic Baptist church believes that every believer has the right and duty to approach God in prayer and praise for himself. Each believer has access to God directly without the aid of human priest, preachers, mediators, or human ceremonies or forms.

This is a very important doctrine because it helps us to understand that we may approach God personally,

pray to Him individually, and worship Him freely and fully at any time. We do not need to go through a human mediator. We have been given direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Three important biblical passages teach this wonderful truth to us.

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” (1 Timothy 2:5)

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 2:5)

“But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.”

(1 John 2:27)

Two Ordinances

A Historic Baptist church practices the two ordinances. (Baptism & the Lord’s Supper)

Neither ordinance has any saving merit, but both are taught and commanded by Jesus Himself. Both ordinances are visible pictures that represent and commemorate Christ’s death and our salvation.

Paul describes the Lord’s Supper or Communion in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:23-34). This passage teaches that one must be a believer in right standing with God in order to partake in communion.

At Gospel Grace Church, we baptize believers when one desires to take this step of obedience, and we observe the Lord’s Supper regularly during our Sunday Morning Worship services.

Baptism is to be done by immersion in water. The word “baptize” literally means to dip or dunk in water. All of the New Testament examples involve people going down into fairly large bodies of water or coming up out of large bodies of water. This same picture is seen in the Lord’s own personal baptism as recorded for us in Matthew’s gospel (Matt. 3:13-17). The idea of immersion seems to be supported in Paul’s reference to baptism in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 6:1-4).

Individual Soul Liberty

A Historic Baptist church contains believers who live their Christian lives in ultimate accountability to God through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit.

For historic Baptists, Christian faith is uniquely individual. Each person is responsible, accountable, and blessed with the individual opportunity to receive God and his Word themselves. No other entity or person can participate in this encounter with God, therefore confession by proxy and forced conversion are ruled out. People can and must respond personally to God and His Word.

“[10] Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; [11] for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ [12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”
(Romans 14:10-12)

“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” **(Acts 5:29)**

Saved & Baptized Church Membership

A Historic Baptist church is made up of born again believers who have been scripturally baptized.

In a historic Baptist church, a person becomes a member by their profession of faith in Christ rather than by being born into the church. Scriptural baptism is commanded and assumed as a step of obedience as a follower of Christ and identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is not a means of salvation (Titus 3:5). It is only for believers after they have believed (Acts 8:36-39).

Two offices

A Historic Baptist church embraces and practices biblical leadership within the church through the function of the two offices outlined in the New Testament.

"[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. [2] Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, [3] not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, [5] for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? [6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. [7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. [8] Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. [9] They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. [10] And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. [11] Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. [12] Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children

and their own households well. [13] For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 3:1-13)

Separation of Church and State

A Historic Baptist Church believes there is to be a separation of the church and the state.

The clear teaching of the New Testament is that all believers are to be subject to the governing political authorities that God has ordained over them (Rom. 13:1-7). In fact, not only are believers to obey these governors, they must pray for them faithfully (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

However, it is also clear that the governments which coexisted with early Christianity in the New Testament were both separate from and hostile to Christianity. It wasn't until almost 300 years after Christ's death that the first state government adopted a form of Christianity as the state religion. Historically, Baptists have held the conviction that there should be a separation between the State and the Church so as to avoid the danger that has historically plagued Christians in churches run by or established under the State. A historic Baptist also recognizes Jesus Christ as the true head of the Church rather than a pontiff or human hierarchy of church leadership (Ephesians 1:22).