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Bridgeway Church  
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**Bridgeway Church:  
Why we exist, What we value, Who we are**

Today's message is going to be quite different from what you have come to expect from me. The difference isn't in the truth or focus of what I will say. I hope I always preach and teach the same truths from God's Word week in and week out. What is different today is that I won't be looking at any one passage of Scripture, but at several. My aim in looking at these biblical texts is to articulate for you our new Mission Statement here at Bridgeway.

Our previous Mission and Vision Statement that appeared each week on the front of the bulletin was excellent. It truly captured who we are as a church. So, why change it, you ask? A couple of months ago I convened a representative group of our staff to evaluate our Mission Statement. Everyone agreed that it is simply too long, too wordy. It is virtually impossible to memorize. We also examined our vision and values and it soon became clear to everyone that we needed to simplify our declaration of why we exist and what we value and who we are. So, after many, many hours of concentrated prayer and dialogue, we presented to the Elders the statement that you now see on the front of the bulletin. The Elders unanimously approved it. So, today we are going to look at it together. I won't devote equal time to each of the statements, but instead will focus on what is most important for you to understand about Bridgeway. Here is the statement:

***We exist:  
to exalt Christ in the City through joyful satisfaction in Him!***

***We value:  
Gospel Centrality & Word and Spirit***

***We are:  
a diverse spiritual family of commissioned disciples, passionate worshippers, and heartfelt lovers of God and one another.***

I'd like to spend most of our time on the first two and explain both why we exist as a church and what we value. I'm not minimizing the statement about who we are. It's simply a matter of time.

***We exist to exalt Christ in the City through joyful satisfaction in Him!***

That we exist both as individuals and a local church primarily to exalt and magnify and glory Jesus Christ should hardly need to be defended. I would simply remind you that our great Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is *the central reality in the universe*. The Bible says that "from him and through him and to him, are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). It says that he is the one "for whom and by whom all things exist" (Heb. 2:10). Human beings are not the center of all things. God is.

In Colossians 1:15-18 the apostle Paul explicitly declares that that in all things Jesus Christ is to be "preeminent." So, *to what extent does your life reflect the preeminence of the risen and living Christ?* Are the affairs of your daily existence so ordered that Jesus is seen to be preeminent? Is there any doubt in the way you use your time, your money, and your talents that Jesus is the source and center of it all? Is he your treasure, or is it found in the documents and deeds lying in a bank vault? Does he govern your life in such a way that all may know he is Lord? *How visible is the supremacy of Christ* in the way you talk and relate to others and fulfill your responsibilities at work and in the home?

Resist the temptation to restrict the preeminence of Christ to one day a week, as if he were Lord and worthy of praise for only one hour on a Sunday morning. He is to be honored as preeminent not only over all things but *at all times*, in every context, in every circumstance.

Resist the temptation to isolate the preeminence of Christ or to confine it to *religious* matters. He has been given preeminence *"in everything"* (Col. 1:18)! Everything in all of life, both inside and outside the church, exists to make

him look good. Not to make him good, for he is eternally and self-sufficiently good, but to reveal and disclose and enable all to see that he is, in fact, good and glorious and worthy of our whole-hearted and exclusive devotion.

And that is *why* Bridgeway Church exists.

We also say in our statement that we aim to exalt Christ in *“the City,”* that is to say, in this wide-ranging metropolitan area that extends north to Guthrie, west to Yukon, south to Moore and Norman, and east to Luther and Harrah. Why do we say the “City” and not the world? It isn’t because we don’t want Christ to be exalted everywhere. Of course, we do! But our primary aim is to focus on the exaltation of Jesus in your neighborhood, over the fence in your backyard, across the street, on the soccer sidelines, in the shopping mall, in your school or university, and in the workplace.

Our aim is to exalt Christ where we live and talk and interact with others. Our prayer, of course, is that in whatever way God may be pleased this would extend to the ends of the earth, but let’s begin right here in Oklahoma City.

The final phrase in our Mission Statement explains how we think this can be most effectively achieved: *“through joyful satisfaction in Him!”* Every Christian, wherever they may live, believes that our ultimate aim should be to exalt and glorify God. But not everyone agrees on the most biblical and effective way to accomplish this goal. Here at Bridgeway we believe the most biblical and effective way to exalt Christ is by finding our “joyful satisfaction in him.” In other words, we are Christian Hedonists! We believe that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. God is most highly and clearly praised when we find our greatest and most lasting pleasure in him. Our gladness in God is what shines a light most clearly on his greatness and glory.

We must never forget that the Bible commands us to pursue joy in God. I emphasize the word “commands.” The Bible doesn’t merely suggest that pursuing joy in God is a good idea or one of many options available to us. No. It commands us to find our joy in God. For example:

“Delight yourself in the Lord” (Psalm 37:4).

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Psalm 32:11).

“Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth” (Psalm 67:4).

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” (Psalm 100:1-2).

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Phil. 4:4).

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12).

“Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:12,15).

Although it isn’t explicitly a command, we must also consider what David said in Psalm 16:11.

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

This is more than a description of God. It is the primary incentive for us to pursue him. Come to God, for in doing so you will find what you cannot find anywhere else or in anyone else. And what might that be? Not merely joy, but fullness of joy; a joy that is comprehensive, complete, exhaustive, and sufficient for your soul. Come to God for pleasures. Not merely pleasure, but pleasures forevermore; pleasures that never cease or lose their capacity to enthrall, excite, and satisfy.

As you know, no one has defined Christian Hedonism as well or as accurately as John Piper. Here is what he said:

“We glorify God most when he satisfies us most. By enjoying God supremely as our supreme treasure, we glorify his worth, his beauty, his desirability. And if we don’t enjoy him, we make him look defective. This is how we glorify Christ: by treasuring him above all that life can give, and all that death can take. We glorify Christ by experiencing him as more precious, more beautiful, more satisfying than anything else.”

**But why joy?** Why do the biblical authors, such as David, make delight or joy in God so central to our relationship with him? Is it not enough simply to obey God or fear God or worship God or believe in God? Why joy? Why delight? Why does it matter so much?

Not long ago a blogger criticized Christian Hedonism for insisting that we come to God and praise God for the joy to be found in him. He said that we should worship God simply because God *deserves* to be worshiped. Well, of course he does. No one disputes that point. But Christian Hedonism directs our attention to the **how** of worship. **How** is God most glorified in his people? And I would insist that **God is most glorified in his people when they experience in themselves, by God’s saving and sanctifying grace, the affections of joy, delight, and satisfaction that God himself experiences in God himself.** So there is obviously something special about joy.

Joy in God clearly and thoroughly reveals the worth and value and splendor of whatever it is that evokes it. When you experience and express joy in God, perhaps in the midst of indescribable suffering or hardship or loss, others stop and ask: “What must this God be like that he is deemed worthy not simply of acknowledgement but delight, not simply recognition but rejoicing?” In other words, “Joy is the clearest witness to the worth of what we enjoy. It is the deepest reverberation in the heart of man of the value of God’s glory” (Piper).

So, let’s resist any temptation to relegate joy and delight to a place of secondary importance. We must also resist the tendency among many to describe joy as little more than the unintended effect or result or inadvertent fruit of some other Christian duty. Instead, let joy in God, delight in God, not in his gifts but in God himself, be the focus of our efforts through the power of the Holy Spirit. For in our delight and joy in God is God most gloriously glorified in us.

That is why we exist. We turn next to what we value. And there are two things in particular. Please understand that we value everything in God’s Word. But as we considered what God has highlighted for us and done through us at Bridgeway, and what we are most known for outside of our own circles, two things came to light.

### ***We Value Gospel Centrality***

Most Christians live in an **“if/then”** relationship with God. *If* I do what is right, *then* God will love me. *If* I give extra money to missions, *then* God will provide me with a raise at work. *If* I avoid sinful habits, *then* I will be spared suffering and humiliation, etc. It’s a *conditional* relationship that is based on the principle of *merit*.

The gospel calls us to live in a **“because / therefore”** relationship with the Lord. *Because* we have been justified by faith in Christ, therefore we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). *Because* Christ died for us, therefore we are forgiven. *Because* Christ has fulfilled the law in our place, therefore we are set free from its demands and penalty, etc. This is an *unconditional* relationship that is based on the principle of *grace*. The difference between these two perspectives is the **difference between religion (“if/then”) and the gospel (“because / therefore”).** The “religious” life is not the “gospel-centered” life.

In the religious life, acceptance is based on obedience. Our motivation is fear and insecurity. Our identity and self-worth are dependent on what we do and how well we do it. When we fail, we’re worthless. When we succeed, we’re valuable.

But in the gospel-centered life, acceptance is based on grace and the mercy of God. Our motivation is joy and gratitude. Our identity and self-worth are dependent on who God has made us to be in his image and who is transforming us to be through the power of the Spirit. When we fail, he still loves us. When we succeed, our success redounds to his praise and honor.

If you’re wondering why we aim to be “gospel” centered rather than place some social agenda or political principle as the center of our existence, the answer is found in numerous texts. Here are a few:

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35).

Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-9).

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13).

See also Colossians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philippians 1:27, among others.

So, as we think about our responsibility toward the gospel, let us never forget what it is and what it isn’t. It is the gloriously great good news of what God has done in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to satisfy his own wrath and to secure the forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness for all who trust in him by faith alone. Therefore:

**(1) The gospel is not what God requires. The gospel is what God provides!** Yes, there is an intrinsic demand built into the gospel: the good news that is proclaimed calls for a response of faith and repentance. But our faith and repentance are not themselves the gospel.

**(2) The gospel is not an imperative, demanding things you must do. The gospel is an indicative, declaring things that God has done.** Yes, of course we do things *because of* the gospel. But our doing things isn’t itself the gospel.

**(3) The gospel is not about human action. The gospel is about divine achievement.** Yes, there are multiple consequences of the gospel, implications, entailments, results, all of which call in some measure for human action: racial reconciliation, social justice, peace, love, etc. But never confuse the content of the gospel with its consequences. Never confuse the essence of the gospel with its entailments.

**(4) The gospel is not a moralistic Do! The gospel is a merciful Done!**

To be “gospel-centered” does not mean that we will consistently conduct an altar call at the close of every Sunday sermon! Gospel-centrality as we understand it, begins with the reality that the gospel is not simply the entry point into the Christian life but also the foundation and force that shapes all we do as followers of Jesus both in our daily lives and in our experience as the corporate body of Christ. The gospel informs, controls, and energizes all we do, whether that be the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, marriage, work, our use of money, speech, parenting, mission, how we suffer and respond to injustice, and all aspects of ministry in the local church and beyond.

### *We Value Word & Spirit*

Most are probably unaware of this, but I frequently speak with people who are new to Bridgeway and I hear one of three observations. Almost all of them are somewhat surprised by what they encounter and experience here. It certainly wasn’t what they expected.

First of all, there are those who have come to Bridgeway because they are desperately hungry for the truth of God's Word. They have spent considerable time in a church, or perhaps several churches, where the focus was either entirely on charismatic gifts or where Scripture was given, at best, token acknowledgment.

In these churches the Bible was read aloud by the preacher and held in high regard. It's inspiration and authority were affirmed and you knew you were in a church that wouldn't permit anything that was explicitly contrary to Scripture. But when it came down to the preaching and teaching in that church, the speaker typically used the Bible as a diving board from which to jump off into the pool of his own ideas. He would read the text and perhaps refer to it here and there during the course of his message. But no effort was made to actually explain what God was saying to us through the biblical author. The sermon eventually ended up as some version of pop psychology or relational dynamics or coping skills that sounded vaguely Christian. The bottom line is that ***the Bible simply didn't factor into the message as its controlling authority.***

Many that I've spoken with are greatly refreshed that here at Bridgeway we make it our aim that the point of every sermon is the point of whatever text we are reading. We do this because we honestly believe that God encounters us in his Word; God speaks to us in his Word; God draws near to us in his Word. God didn't simply speak 2,000 years ago. The written Word of God is still very much alive and speaks today with no less force and life-changing power than it did when it was first received.

But those who love Bridgeway for our approach to Scripture are somewhat nervous when the music begins, and they watch people freely and joyfully express their love for Jesus Christ. They're not used to such open and unashamed expressions of delight and gratitude, ***especially when those expressions become physical!*** Seeing someone ***actually move*** when they sing is unsettling. And seeing someone dance is downright traumatic!

And you wonder to yourself, and say to me, "How can you believe in the authority of Scripture and preach it with such detail and depth at the same time you permit and even encourage people to be free and expressive when they worship God? I've never seen those go hand in hand. And what makes it even more difficult for me is when you pray for the sick as if you really thought God might heal them and when you give room on occasion for prophetic words to be given. What kind of nut-house did I walk into?"

Second, there are those who come to me equally baffled by our commitment to verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word. You are the ones who've been stuck in a church that for all practical purposes reduced the Christian life to theological accuracy. Christian maturity and godliness, in such churches, is defined solely in terms of being doctrinally sound.

What drew you to Bridgeway was someone who told you that ***in this church we genuinely believe in the person and power of the Holy Spirit; that we not only affirm the validity of all spiritual gifts today but we actually do what we can to facilitate their practice; that we aren't afraid of our affections and feelings but believe that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.***

Your struggle isn't that people are openly expressive in worship or that some speak in tongues or that we pray expectantly for the sick or that we are sensitive to the spontaneous prompting of the Spirit and are willing to interrupt the order of service to follow his leading. ***What eats away in your soul is that we move so effortlessly from such vibrant charismatic expressions of spiritual life into the depths of biblical truth and challenging biblical doctrines.***

I've actually had conversations with a few who say something like: "Sam, aren't you afraid that your preaching style will quench the Holy Spirit? Aren't you concerned that people will leave with ***swelled heads and shrunken hearts?*** Do you really believe you can have a vibrant and intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit at the same time you dig so deeply and intensely into the Bible?" Well, in point of fact, I don't believe it is possible to have a vibrant relationship with the Spirit ***unless*** you dig deeply into God's Word.

Many who've come to Bridgeway fall into one of those two camps and you're still more than a little suspicious about this place. ***You still wonder whether or not it's possible to be so radically committed to both the principles of God's Word and the power of God's Spirit, to both head and heart, to both ideas and intimacy, to both facts and feelings, to both order and spontaneity, to both doctrine and experience.***

I said there were three observations I typically hear from new people here at Bridgeway. The third comes from that person who often approaches me with tears in their eyes and expressions of gratitude in their hearts that what they didn't think even existed actually does: namely, *a local church that isn't afraid of the Holy Spirit or of rigorous doctrinal dialogue; a church that refuses to let one trump the other; a church that highlights the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners and encourages its people to earnestly desire and seek after the full range of spiritual gifts.*

The honest truth is that we aren't the local church for some of you. If you are looking for a doctrinally orthodox church that is afraid of the supernatural, Bridgeway probably isn't for you. You will probably never feel comfortable here. Or if you are looking for a charismatic church that gives only token attention to the truths of God's Word, Bridgeway probably isn't for you.

There are many Christians who say that if you truly embrace the authority and finality and sufficiency of Scripture, you can't believe that the Holy Spirit still bestows gifts such as prophecy and tongues and word of knowledge and discerning of spirits. If you are the kind of Christian, so they say, who enjoys digging deeply into God's Word and thinking deeply about biblical truth, you can't be open to the possibility of miracles and healing and prophetic revelation. But what makes anyone think that God has given us the option of choosing one over the other? Where in God's Word does it ever suggest, much less teach, that Christians should ever think that being grounded in Scripture quenches the Spirit, or being open to the Spirit undermines the authority of the Bible?

Put simply, Bridgeway is wholly committed to the convergence of both Word and Spirit, not simply as a theological statement but as a way of life and ministry. Our aim in all that we do, whether in corporate assembly, community group gatherings, discipleship, or missional outreach, is to serve in accordance with the Word of God through the power of the Spirit of God."

There is something all of us need to recognize and embrace if we are going to make this work. What we are seeking to accomplish at Bridgeway runs directly counter to human nature. It is contrary to our most basic instincts and intuition to aim for a harmonious convergence of Word and Spirit. Human nature always prefers one over the other because it is easier, more comfortable, more predictable, and doesn't require much effort. That's what sin has done to us. It has caused a divorce in our thinking between the marriage of the two. Sin always leads us to embrace one virtue to the exclusion of the other. Sin always leads us to focus on one truth while demonizing another.

The fact is, it's easier and more comfortable just to abandon yourself to spiritual experience without having to worry about whether or not it's biblical. Or it's easier and more comfortable and definitely more predictable to focus exclusively on theological accuracy and shut off the possibility of an encounter with the supernatural. *But God hasn't called us to do what is easy and comfortable and predictable. He's called us to be biblical.*

We now turn, finally, from why we exist and what we value to who we are.

### *We are a Diverse Spiritual Family*

In Ephesians 3:10 the apostle Paul declared that it is "through the church [that] the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." By "rulers and authorities" he means the angelic and demonic hosts. When read in context, it isn't simply the church's existence that makes God's wisdom known. It is its *diversity*; the fact that there is in the church no distinction between Jew and Gentile, but all are one in Christ.

Here at Bridgeway we make no grandiose claims. We know we have a long way to go. But we are fully committed to being a spiritual family where old and young and middle-aged folks can flourish together; where male and female celebrate the fact that they are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28); where people from every nation and ethnicity can worship together and love one another; where the educated and uneducated can both glorify God; where rich and poor and middle class are all alike the recipients of God's grace and affection. This is what it means to be a diverse spiritual family. This is what we aim to be at Bridgeway.

### *Commissioned Disciples*

Let's be clear about one thing: *you can't be a non-commissioned disciple*. To be a disciple or learner or follower of Jesus means that you are committed to taking the gospel to your neighborhood, to the marginalized, and to the nations. When Jesus issued his Great Commission to "go" and "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), at the heart of being a disciple isn't simply observing all he has commanded. It is also *going*, taking with us the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### *Passionate Worshipers*

Why does it matter that we be "passionate" in our worship? Isn't showing up and going through the motions enough? Isn't saying and singing the right words enough? No. You could not find in the first century more theologically orthodox people than the Pharisees. They loved theology. They refused to tolerate compromise or error. And yet they dishonored God in their so-called "worship." How?

"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matt. 15:7-9).

Jesus couldn't have been clearer: to worship God without the engagement of the heart and the affections and sincere zeal for who he is dishonors him. That doesn't mean you have to worship in the same way other people do. But it does mean that however you worship, be certain that your "heart" is fully engaged and that your passions are for him and him alone.

### *Heartfelt Lovers of God and One Another*

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest of all the commandments, he replied:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

I've already said much about our heartfelt, passionate, sincere love for God. Let me close with just a brief comment on how important it is for us to love one another. Among the nearly 60 instances of what may be called the "one-anothering" commands in the NT, consider these few:

Love one another (John 13:34); be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:5); honor one another (Rom. 12:10); rejoice with one another (Rom. 12:15); serve one another (Gal. 5:13); bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2); forgive one another (Eph. 4:32); encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11); be hospitable to one another (1 Pt. 4:9); confess your sins to one another (James 5:16); and pray for one another (James 5:16)

There are several other "one-anothering" commands that are **not** found in the Bible. Nowhere are we told to humble one another, scrutinize or criticize one another, pressure one another, embarrass one another, shame one another, interrupt one another, defeat one another, disapprove of one another, run one another's lives, confess one another's sins, intensify one another's sufferings, point out one another's failings, and the list could go on forever.

It is impossible to be a Christian and to ignore these responsibilities. For anyone to think that they can be a follower of Jesus and ignore their responsibility to other believers and live in isolation from them and fail to encourage them and be accountable to them, is delusional. Living your life as a Christian in community and mutual love with others, faithfully obeying all the one-anothering commands of Scripture is not optional!

You simply can't live the kind of life God has called you to live, or grow up and mature spiritually the way God wants you to grow, or experience the multitude of blessings that are available to the people of God if you are cut off from the body of Christ. If you think you are an exception to this, you are sadly deluded. You're fooling no one but yourself.

So why does Bridgeway exist, and what do we value, and who are we? . . .