



REDEEMER

MEMBERSHIP COURSE

CITY

MEMBERSHIP COURSE

PART ONE

GOSPEL

PART TWO

CITY

PART THREE

MOVEMENT

PART FOUR

MEMBERSHIP

All media can be found on our app and website or at:

redeemerwh.org/city

INTRODUCTION

THEOLOGICAL VISION

"Between one's doctrinal beliefs and ministry practices should be a well-conceived vision for how to bring the gospel to bear on the particular cultural setting and historical moment...This explains how churches can be deeply divided over ministry expressions and methods, such as music, preaching style, approach to organization and leadership, forms of outreach, and so on." — Tim Keller

Typically, in a membership class like this, we would spend time talking about what we believe and what we do. Both are important. However, it is the step in between doctrine and practice that we are going to focus on – what Dr. Timothy Keller, in his book *Center Church*, referred to as **theological vision**. A church's theological vision is more practical than doctrinal beliefs and more theological than an action plan for doing ministry. It is a faithful restatement of the gospel with implications for life, ministry, and mission in a distinct cultural time and setting, with a particularly local emphasis.

At Redeemer, there are three core principles of our vision. We are seeking to be a people who are:

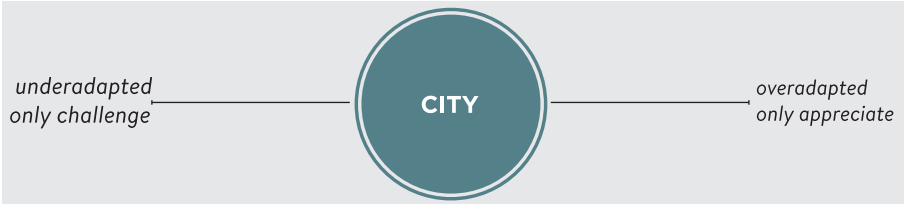
Fluent in the **gospel**, and
For the **city**;
Igniting and cultivating a gospel **movement** of churches and ministries that renew Winter Haven and Polk County.

Each of those core principles – gospel, city, and movement – exist along an axis. In each case, there is a danger of losing the center and drifting to one extreme or the other.



1. The Gospel Axis. At one end of the Gospel Axis is **legalism** – the belief that we can save ourselves by how we live. At the other end is **relativism** – the view that it doesn't matter how we live, because, God, if he even exists, loves everyone the same.

The gospel is neither legalism nor relativism. We are saved by grace alone, through faith. Not our works. But that faith is never alone. Grace results in a changed life. The power of the gospel can be lost to either error. Therefore, we must be constantly recalibrating our theology towards that center by repenting of our sin and also our righteousness.



2. The City Axis. At the one end of the City Axis is **under-contextualization** or **under-adaptation** – not holding to doctrinal and moral distinctives, but relativizing truth and doctrine, and, thus, becoming of the world. At the other end is over-contextualization or over-adaptation – the church becoming irrelevant and inward-facing, and, thus, not being in the world. The way of faithful missionary engagement is to be in the world but not of it. To be faithful and to be present. We must constantly be reorienting our mission towards that center by intentionally living, working, and playing in the city, while at the same time respectfully resisting the idols of the city.



3. The Movement Axis. At one end of the Movement Axis is structure or **institutionalism** – a strong emphasis on theological tradition and organization that makes a church resistant to change and makes it hard to find common ground with other churches and ministries. At the other end is **anti-institutionalism** – no identification with theological or organization structure. Every movement must eventually institutionalize or it will die. But if it succumbs to institutional-ism, it will quickly become off-mission. Biblically, the church is both an organism and an organization. We must constantly be reorganizing the church towards that center by maintaining institutional integrity while also being careful not to quench the spirit.

Redeemer's membership course is divided into four parts, corresponding to the three parts of our theological vision – Gospel, City, Movement – and our membership vows. For each part, there is material we ask you to first engage with personally. Once you have done so, we then ask you to attend a 1-2 hour group module that is designed to allow for conversation and Q&A. Each group module is offered 1-2 times per year.

If, for some reason, you are not able to attend one of the GOSPEL group modules, you may also arrange to have a “gospel conversation” with one of our pastors or leaders. If you miss the CITY group module, you can schedule a meeting with Drew Bennett to discuss the mission and vision of Redeemer. If you miss the MOVEMENT group module, you can schedule a meeting with Drew Bennett to discuss the multiplication strategy of Redeemer. In the place of the DISTINCTIVES group module, you can schedule a meeting with Jonathan Winfree to discuss the distinctive beliefs and values of Redeemer, and responsibilities of church membership. Once you have completed all of those steps, you will be interviewed for membership by the elders of the church.

INTRODUCTION

A CITY LOVING CHURCH

“As a rule, indifference to the world is quite rare in the history of God’s people. The passion to engage the world, to shape it and finally change it for the better, would seem to be an enduring mark of Christians on the world in which they live. To be a Christian is to be obliged to engage the world, pursuing God’s restorative purposes over all of life, individual and corporate, public and private. This is the mandate of creation.” – James Davison Hunter

Before our first worship service (in 2008), we made postcards for our core group to pass out to friends and family, inviting them to worship with us. On those postcards, we declared our intentions. “We want a great city, not just a great church.” Redeemer was birthed out of a vision and desire for the flourishing of Winter Haven, and all of Polk County. We wanted to see the invisible kingdom of Jesus made visible – changing our city into something more beautiful because of our presence and work.

Tim Keller carefully distinguishes the gospel and the results of the gospel. The gospel is not about something we do. It is something that has been done for us – by God. Yet, the gospel results in a whole new way of life. A new world, in fact. Martin Luther famously said, we are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone. Believing the gospel leads to becoming the gospel.

A church **for the city** focuses its ministry on both *what the gospel is* and *what the gospel does*. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. It solves the problem of man’s broken relationship with his Maker. However, from the spring of our healed relationship with God comes healing for all else that is wrong in the world. The prophet Micah said, “(God) has told, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). That is a call to action.

Core Ministry Strategy:

We will develop city-loving models of ministry – in word and deed.

The church exists for the city, not the city for the church. Too often, churches do ministry in ways that are hostile or indifferent to the flourishing of the city.

The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15) – the present power and grace of God in the world, already making all things new. The kingdom has come! It is here! Eternal life is now! However, the kingdom is not-yet here in all its fullness. It is that already but not-yet reality that determines our mission and work. As citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we are called by God to bring real and effective signs of God’s renewed creation to birth in the midst of this present evil age. Failure to do so is to collude with the forces of sin and death. That means:

- Announcing the beginning of God’s new world in Jesus and calling people everywhere to repentance and faith;
- Embodying together the reality of the new creation;
- Working for justice in the real world;
- Creating beautiful things that will continue on, even after Jesus returns.

The following workbook is designed to encourage you towards joining us as we seek to be a church **for the city**. In each lesson you will listen to a sermon preached at Redeemer, then engage personally with it. Once you have completed all four sections, we ask that you attend a CITY group conversation (1 hour) that is designed to allow for conversation and Q&A about the topics covered here. If, for some reason, you are not able to attend one of the CITY group conversations, you may also arrange to meet with Drew Bennett to cover the same material individually.

We are honored that you would take the time to digest this material. These things matter greatly to us. We hope that they will come to matter greatly to you, too.

ONE

THE STORY OF GOD

“The Gospel was a message about the one true God, the God of Israel, and his victory over the world... A story – a true story – about a human life, death, and resurrection through which the living God becomes the king of the world.” – N.T. Wright

The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). It is the “good news” that God has broken into the world in Jesus Christ. The old way of things is passing away. All things are being made new!

Tim Keller has rightly distinguished between the gospel and the results of the gospel – or what the gospel *is* and what the gospel *does*. The gospel is the good news that we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ by faith alone. But this good news also *does* something. It results in what the Bible means by the word kingdom. As man’s relationship with God is healed, the whole world begins to heal.

However, it is important to note that there is an already and a not-yet component to the kingdom. It is already here. But it is not all the way here – not yet. It is often said that WWII was won the moment American troops set foot on the beaches of Normandy. But, of course, there were still many months of fighting before the Nazi’s surrendered. In the same way, Jesus’ first coming was our D-Day. His second coming will be V-Day. We live in the “in-between.” To do that well, you must have the right set of expectations. The right mental map of the world.

The kingdom has come. It is already here. However, if you focus solely on the kingdom’s presence and not its future, you can become overly optimistic and easily discouraged when you face hard things. There is a brewery in town that has a mural which says, “Optimism will save the world.” But that is not true. It is out of touch with reality. The world is being redeemed, but not fully. Not yet. In the same way, the kingdom is coming. Soon it will fully be here. All the sad things will come untrue. But if you focus solely on the kingdom’s future and not its presence here and now, you can become overly pessimistic and lose hope. Cynicism is also out of touch with reality. It forgets that the kingdom has, in fact, already come. It is taking root. Soon, it would burst through the soil of the world and be ready for harvest.

Naïve optimism expects too much. Cynicism expects too little. There is another option – **hope**. Hope avoids the unrealities of naïve optimism and cynicism. Hope is honest about the hard things that still remain in the world until Jesus comes again. But it looks to that ultimate future, not some immediate solution.

“The kingdom did indeed come with Jesus; but it will fully come when the world is healed, when the whole creation finally joins the song. But it must be Jesus’ medicine; it must be Jesus’ music. And the only way to be sure of that is to pray his prayer, ‘Your kingdom come.’” – N.T. Wright

This is where the church finds its mission. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come!” and then to work to make it happen. So, Redeemer’s mission statement is “to make Jesus’ invisible kingdom visible.” In other words, we are committed to go to all the places where Jesus’ kingdom is not yet pushing up out of the ground. We cultivate the ground. We sow the seed. We water and fertilize and weed. Until what is hidden in the earth begins to push up through the ground for all to see.

Listen to the sermon ***“The Story of God”*** from August 6, 2023, based on Revelation 21:1-5. Then answer the following questions. You can also take notes in the space provided.

1. Read Revelation 21:1-5 and write the verses in the space below. What stands out to you as you read?

2. What is the Story of God? (The Story of the gospel.) Use your own words.

3. How is the kingdom of heaven *ALREADY* breaking in? Where do you see the fruits of the kingdom?

4. How is the kingdom of heaven still *NOT-YET*? Give some practical examples of places, situations, etc. where sin and death are still present and operating.

5. What is the one thing that you most want to remember and apply to your life?

6. What questions did the sermon(s) raise?

Other resources on **The Story of God**:

Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality*

Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*

Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*

Frank Thielman, *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture*

N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*

TWO

KING AND KINGDOM

“The Gospel was a message about the one true God, the God of Israel, and his victory over the world... A story – a true story – about a human life, death, and resurrection through which the living God becomes the king of the world.” – N.T. Wright

Modern secularism wants the kingdom without the king. It seeks the world the gospel makes but without the gospel itself. A kingdom of justice and peace and equality – but all without Jesus at the center. But modern evangelicalism has its own imbalance. It can, at times, be guilty of the opposite - embracing the king, but not His kingdom. The gospel is the good news of God, the King, and His kingdom.

Larry Hurtado, a noted historian of early Christianity, wrote a book to answer the question, how did the early Christians win over the Roman culture? His thesis was that it wasn't the church's relevance, but its distinctiveness and difference that made it so compelling. The early Christian community affirmed a Biblical sexual ethic and a pro-life agenda. Early Christians, also, were committed to social justice and racial reconciliation. They embraced the kind of political activism you would normally find coming from the political Right today. At the same time, they also embraced many of the priorities of the political Left. Their ethics transcended the political divisions of their day, and ours. That is what made them different.

In Acts 6, the early Christian movement was faced with a hard decision. The Jerusalem church had experienced enormous success and growth. The apostles were busy preaching and teaching the gospel. However, the gospel culture was lagging behind. There was a group of Jewish widows who were cared for by the rest of the church. But there was another group of Greek widows that were being neglected. It was an act of racial discrimination. In response, the church leaders made a key decision. They established the office of deacon in the church. This allowed two things to happen. First, it ensured that gospel preaching and teaching was not neglected. The apostles continued to busy themselves with the work of gospel proclamation. But, secondly, by making structural changes to the church, they also ensured that the gospel culture was being properly implemented. The apostles strategically decided to equally emphasize gospel doctrine and gospel culture.

Redeemer is committed to both word and deed ministry. Evangelism and social activism. Preaching the gospel and demonstrating the gospel in acts of generosity and mercy, towards the poor, the needy, and the most vulnerable. This is one reason why we started *Heart For Winter Haven (H4WH)* – a non-profit in the city of Winter Haven committed to the spiritual, social, and economic flourishing of those in our city. They do this by building community between the churches, non-profits, business, and city leadership.

Jesus, in his earthly ministry, went throughout Israel teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom *and* healing every disease and every affliction among the people (Mathew 4:23). There are churches that emphasize gospel preaching and teaching. They prioritize discipleship for believers and evangelism to unbelievers. Then there are churches that emphasize gospel results. They prioritize social justice. They start homeless shelters and soup kitchens. However, too often, these churches so emphasize one that they begin to neglect the other. There is a need to embrace both the King and his Kingdom.

Listen to the sermon *“King and Kingdom”* from August 13, 2023 based on Luke 4:18-19. Then answer the following questions. You can also take notes in the space provided.

1. Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and write the verses in the space below. What stands out to you as you read?

2. Describe (in your own words) the temptation to embrace the King but not His kingdom. Give a practical example.

3. Describe (in your own words) the temptation to embrace the kingdom but not the King. Give a practical example.

4. What is the one thing that you most want to remember and apply to your life?

5. What questions did the sermon(s) raise?

Other resources on **King and Kingdom**:

Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church*

John Mark Comer and Mark Sayers, *This Cultural Moment* podcast

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

THREE

FOR THE CITY

“The citizens of the city of God are called to be the very best residents of (any) particular city of man. God commands (his people) not to attack, despise, or flee the city – but to seek its peace, to love the city.” – Tim Keller

In the weeks leading up to our first worship services at Redeemer, we sent invitations to all of our friends that said, “Our goal is not a great church, but a great city!” We wanted to plant a church with a city vision because we believe that ***the church exists for the city; not the city for the church***. The church should be a blessing. It should give itself away to contribute to the flourishing of the city (and not just spiritually). Too often the church is a parasite, trying to suck resources out of its “host” to increase its own life and vigor. We wanted to plant a church that had the spiritual, economic, social, civic flourishing of Winter Haven as its goal. To be the kind of church that if we were to close our doors, the city would weep because we had become so important, so central and strategic to its life.

In Jeremiah 29, vs. 7, God tells his exiled people to seek the welfare of Babylon and to pray for its peace. It would have been easy for the exiled Israelites to stay cloistered on the outskirts of Babylon. However, God told them to move in, settle down, and engage the life of that great city. To build homes and plant gardens. To use their resources to benefit the common good. They were not to hate the pagan city as they bided their time, waiting for God to take them back home. They were to be fully involved in its life, working in it and praying for it. At the same time, however, they were not to adopt its culture or lose their distinctive identity as God’s holy people. They were to accept and embrace the tension of living in the city as “resident aliens.”

Our goal is to be faithfully present in Winter Haven. That is, to be active in the life of the city, working together with other churches, non-profits, businesses and civic leaders, to see God’s invisible kingdom made visible. That’s what it means to be present. But we also strive to be faithful. That is, present but different. Present, but with unique vision, character, and goals shaped by the gospel.

Listen to the sermon ***“A City-Loving Church”*** from August 20, 2023. Then, answer the following questions. You can also take notes in the space provided.

1. Read Jeremiah 29:7 and write the verses in the space below. What stands out to you as you read?

2. In your own words, what does it mean to intentionally live in/ towards the city? Can you give an example from your own life?

3. In your own words, what does it mean to respectfully resist the idolatries and ideologies of the city? Can you give an example from your own life?

4. What is the one thing that you most want to remember and apply to your life?

5. What questions did the sermon(s) raise?

Notes:

Other resources on **For the City:**

Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*

James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World*

Tim Keller, *Loving the City*

Tim Keller, *“How Does the Church Love the City”*

Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People*

FOUR

A CHURCH FOR SINNERS

“The deal breaker in a gospel culture is not sin, failure, or weakness, but words and behavior making the church unsafe for other sinners. – Ray Ortlund

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, drew up guidelines for their small groups. One of those guidelines was as follows: “10. That everyone in order to speak freely, plainly, and concisely as he can the real state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances, since the last time of meeting.” One major key to spiritual progress is to not worry about saying or doing things right, but finding the courage and freedom to be real. To be honest about your struggles. Church should be the one place where you don’t have to pretend, but, instead, are free to talk about your sins and struggles, without fear of being condemned.

Jesus was explicit. He said, “I came to invite outsiders, not to coddle insiders.” The church, then, should be a place that is hospitable and welcoming to outsiders and sinners. This gets harder as churches age. There are enormous pressures to focus time, money, and man-power on the insiders, instead of remaining outward-facing. A missional church, on the other hand, is one where missions is not just one program in the church. All the different parts of the church’s ministry are focused on mission. The worship services. Small groups. Communications. Everything is thoughtfully designed to be accessible and inviting to non-Christians. At Redeemer, we expect our unbelieving friends and neighbors to be among us. For that reason, we strive to make the church a place where it is okay to struggle, because admitting that is the first step towards change.

Listen to the sermon ***“A Church For Sinners”*** from August 27, 2023. Then, answer the following questions. You can also take notes in the space provided.

1. Read Matthew 9:13 and write the verses in the space below. What stands out to you as you read?

2. In your mind, what is the most important thing our church could do to be welcoming to outsiders, skeptics and sinners?

3. What is the one thing that you most want to remember and apply to your life?

4. What questions did the sermon(s) raise?

Notes:

Other resources on **A Church for Sinners:**

Tim Keller, *Prodigal God*
Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*
Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel*

WRAP-UP

CITY CONVERSATION

Now that you have, on your own, interacted with some of the ideas that have shaped Redeemer's city focus, you should attend the CITY group conversation – a 1.5-hr group discussion on how Redeemer's mission, vision, and strategies are shaped by our love for the city. If you are not able to attend the class, you can arrange to have a conversation with Drew Bennett covering the same material.

Joining Question

If you were the king of Winter Haven, what would your top priorities be? What would you change?

Key Question

What makes you sigh? What makes God sigh?

Discussion Questions

1. Read Isaiah 40:9; Isaiah 52:7; and Luke 2:10-11. What is the “gospel?”
2. The kingdom of heaven is both already and the not-yet. What are the implications of this truth?
3. Redeemer's mission statement is to “make Jesus' invisible kingdom visible in Winter Haven.” How does Jesus invisible kingdom become visible?
4. Larry Hurtado argued that early Christians won over the Roman empire by a) affirming a Biblical sexual ethic and a pro-life agenda, and also by b) being committed to social justice and racial reconciliation. What makes this challenging in our day and time? What does it mean to be committed to the King and his kingdom?

5. The first indication of being for the city is intentionally living, working and playing in the city. How are you being intentional where you live, work, and play?

6. The second indication of being for the city is respectfully resisting the idolatries and ideologies of the city. How are you respectfully resisting?

7. The third indication of being for the city is sacrificially loving. How are you sacrificially loving the city? Are you involved in volunteerism in the city?

8. Jesus came to invite outsiders, not to coddle insiders. Redeemer is seeking to follow his example. How should that change your expectations as you consider joining the church? What is one way that our church could become better at welcoming outsiders, sinners, and skeptics?

9. What is the one thing that was most impactful to you?

10. What is the one thing area where you most need to change? How can our pastors and elders be praying for you?



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WINTER HAVEN