



DNA

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# Introduction

DNA makes us who we are. Biologically speaking, DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid. It is a double-stranded molecule in the shape of a double helix or a twisted ladder. DNA matters because it holds the code for every cell in the body. DNA is a record of instructions encoded in each cell that tells it what it is supposed to be and do.

We want Bethlehem's DNA—our Biblical Essentials and Bethlehem Priorities—to serve as a controlling code that defines all we are and all we do as a spiritual body. We are fully aware that we don't control or cause any growth in the body. We do not have the authority to define our church, because it belongs to Christ. He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Documenting these biblical essentials and Bethlehem priorities is not an expression of our autonomy—quite the opposite. Documenting who we are as a church is an exercise in asking, seeking, and knocking, and we believe we have heard from Christ.

Therefore, this document is an expression of our controlling conviction that we are under the authority of Christ. We believe that Christ is calling us to be this type of church. We must listen to the Chief Shepherd and follow his leadership. We look to Christ, because he is the Head of the body. As we hold fast to him, the whole body “grows with a growth that is from God” (Colossians 2:19).

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Branches blindly boast when they boast in what branches can do. Branches can only boast in the Vine and can only bear fruit by abiding in the Vine. May it be so of Bethlehem.

*Council of Elders  
Bethlehem Baptist Church*

## Upreach, Inreach & Outreach

Upreach, Inreach, and Outreach are three useful categories for giving a greater degree of organizational clarity to the 10 Biblical Essentials of the church and the 14 Priorities of Bethlehem.

**Upreach** refers to the act of *reaching up* to God in worship, which is the very reason for our existence. We were created to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7), and God seeks worshipers to worship him in Spirit and truth (John 4:22–23). We exist to see and savor the surpassing worth of God in Christ by the Spirit.

*[We] worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.*—Philippians 3:3

**Inreach** refers to the act of *reaching into* the community of worshipers with the aim of bringing every disciple of Christ to the place of maturity in Christ.

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*—Colossians 1:28

**Outreach** refers to the act of *reaching out* to those who are outside of the family of God with the aim of bringing them to the place where they joyfully confess Jesus as Lord by faith and thus receive the right to be called the children of God and join the family of God.

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*—Matthew 28:19–20

## 10 Biblical Essentials

Bethlehem’s Biblical Essentials cover basic biblical doctrines for the church. They sketch the profile of what the Bible defines as a biblical church.

### 1. BIBLICAL DOCTRINE AND TEACHING (HOLDING FAST TO WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES)

We recognize that the Bible is the final arbiter on all matters of faith. A church does not get to define itself; it must hold fast to what the Bible teaches. The church is the “household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). God alone can define his house. The Bible is filled with the call to hold fast to “sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:8–11, 2 Timothy 1:13–14).

God entrusts his word to the church so that biblical doctrine will be heralded and taught (2 Corinthians 4:1–2, Titus 2:1), not merely so that it will be identified and catalogued. This teaching also includes defending the church against false teaching. False teachers and false teaching must be swiftly identified and corrected for the health of the body (1 Timothy 6:3–5, Titus 1:9).

### 2. BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

If biblical doctrine is to be taught and defended, the church needs teachers and guardians of healthy doctrine. Elders are God’s stewards (Titus 1:7). The Holy Spirit made them overseers over the flock (Acts 20:28), and they are called to feed them the truth and guard them from what is false (Acts 20:28–31).

In Acts 6, a necessary division of labor occurs in the life of the early church. Caring for the all the needs of the flock could make devotion to the Word and prayer virtually impossible. Deacons come into existence to help care for the practical needs of the flock as they come up. Elders serve the body by

devoting themselves to the ministry of the Word (1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:1–4). Deacons serve the body by meeting practical needs. This service frees up the elders so that they can fulfill their service to the body. Both offices are necessary for the health of the body and are an assumed part of a healthy church (Philippians 1:1). Both offices have clear character requirements (Titus 1:5–9, 1 Timothy 3:1–13).

The rest of the Biblical Essentials can be identified in terms of what Christ calls leaders to oversee in the church. Biblical leaders must lead in such a way that a church will stay focused on three areas: Upreach, Inreach, and Outreach.

## Upreach

### 3. WORSHIP

The church came into existence by the grace of God through the gospel. This fact means that the church exists to the praise of his glorious grace (Ephesians 1:6). We exist to declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9–10). The Father has sought out worshipers (John 4:23–24) who worship by the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3). Leaders must ensure orderly worship (1 Corinthians 14:40) for the sake of building up (1 Corinthians 14:26), because God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

### 4. PRAYER

The church is also an assembly of those who constantly seek the Lord in prayer. Jesus taught the disciples that they ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). It would not be a matter of if they would pray, but when and how they pray (Matthew 6:5–13). Part of the church's warfare is to pray at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). This dependence glorifies God as we get the help and he gets the glory (Psalm 50:15).

## InReach

### 5. CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Church leaders must pay careful attention to the flock and care for the church of God (Acts 20:28). They provide this care by admonishing the idle, encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak, and being patient with all (1 Thessalonians 5:14). They are to cultivate biblical fellowship and unity so that there are no divisions in the body and so that the members may have the same care for one another—suffering and rejoicing together (1 Corinthians 12:25–26).

### 6. EDIFYING AND EQUIPPING

Church leaders must provide formative instruction in which the body grows up in every way into Christ as the head of the body (Ephesians 4:15). Part of Christlikeness is teaching believers to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19). The process of forgiven sinners growing in Christlikeness will include not only formative discipline but also corrective discipline, in which a person is nurtured in a life of ongoing correction and repentance.

Biblical leaders also exist to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12). Leaders focus on building the body up to attain to the unity of the faith and maturity (Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:28). Just like a healthy body grows, so also a healthy spiritual body will grow when joined together and connected to Christ as the head (Ephesians 4:16).

### 7. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE

Membership, discipleship, and discipline are connected together. The Lord adds to the number of the church those who are being saved (Acts 2:47). This is a beautiful picture of church membership because there were no isolated Christians (the Lord added the believers to the number of the church), and there were no nominal Christians (those added to the number of the church

were those who were being saved). Members covenant to watch over one another in love so that believers keep their singular confidence in Christ. They exhort one another lest they be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and have an evil, unbelieving heart, leading some to make shipwreck of their profession and fall away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12–14).

Church discipline protects the purity of the body and guards against the reproach that comes on the name of Christ when professing Christians fail to represent Christ rightly to a watching world (1 Corinthians 5:1–11). Failure on the part of a professing Christian to respond to corrective discipline requires the redemptive removal of a person from church membership (1 Corinthians 5:12–13, 1 Timothy 1:19–20). Church discipline is a public statement on the part of the church that it can no longer affirm a person's profession as a follower and representative of Christ. Thus, church discipline protects the name and reputation of Jesus on earth by ensuring that people who claim to represent Jesus represent him rightly.

#### **8. ORDINANCES FAITHFULLY ADMINISTERED**

Obedying all that Jesus commanded includes rightly practicing the ordinances that Jesus gave to the Church: baptism (Matthew 28:19, Acts 10:47–48) and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17–34).

#### **9. STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES**

The church is instructed to steward God's resources for the care of widows and orphans (James 1:27, 1 Timothy 5:3–16), the relief of the poor (1 Corinthians 16:1–2, 2 Corinthians 8–9), and the spread of the gospel (Philippians 4:10–20).

## **Outreach**

#### **10. GREAT COMMISSION COMMITMENT**

The church of Jesus Christ also advances as followers of Jesus make disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:19). Jesus sovereignly promises to build his church (Matthew 16:18). Adding to the church may mean local evangelism (Colossians 4:5–6, Jude 23) or frontier evangelism in places where Christ has never been named (Romans 15:20–21). The scope of discipleship in the Great Commission extends to all the nations (Matthew 28:19).

# 14 Bethlehem Priorities

Biblical Essentials are general and there may be more than one way to fulfill what the Bible prescribes for the Church. For example, Congregational Care is a biblical value; it is not optional. The Bible, however, does not specify all the ways that this value should be carried out in the church.

This realization leads us to recognize and embrace Bethlehem Priorities. These are strategic decisions that we have made in terms of philosophy of ministry. There are hundreds of good things we could potentially do, but there is no way that we could actually do them all. These priorities provide rationale for saying “yes” to some things, while saying “no” to other good things. These Bethlehem *emphases* help create a Bethlehem *ethos*.

For example, we noted above that Congregational Care is a core biblical value. Moving from the “essential” to the “priority” category means we must decide what our strategy will be for carrying out the core value of Congregational Care. The “one another” commands of biblical fellowship permeate Scripture, but they do not spell out the specifics of how small groups operate in a church. Bethlehem has made small groups a key way that we carry out Congregational Care and obey the one-another commands.

The elders have identified 14 priorities for Bethlehem Baptist Church. We have organized them according to our concepts of upreach, inreach, and outreach. The interrelationship between Upreach, Inreach, and Outreach must be kept in view at all times. Worship is both the goal and the fuel of missions. Upreach fuels outreach. Inreach further fuels outreach because we will not spread a flame abroad unless we are first aflame at home. The goal of all of our inreach and outreach ministries is upreach (the praise of God’s glory). What follows below is an attempt to identify some key Bethlehem emphases in each of the three areas of upreach, inreach, and outreach. They are distinct values that can be studied individually, but they all must shape each aspect of our ministry.

## Upreach

### 1. ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

The *Bethlehem Elder Affirmation of Faith* is a human attempt to summarize biblical doctrine. This document contains the core of our doctrinal convictions. These robust doctrinal commitments formally define what it means to be “Bethlehem.” Therefore, pastoral staff and elders must embrace this affirmation of faith and agree to teach in hearty accord with it.

We must be quick to acknowledge that the *Elder Affirmation of Faith* is a fallible, human document. The Bible invites further study and elders must push themselves to pursue greater familiarity and clarity in the Scriptures. Therefore, the *Elder Affirmation of Faith* is subject to revision based on the ongoing study of the Council of Elders. Revisions can be made only with the consent of the Council of Elders.

### 2. GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

Worship services at Bethlehem are characterized by intentional God-centeredness (vertical orientation) and gospel saturation. The services celebrate a focus on congregational songs of praise and prayers. We also view preaching as worship because we are committed to expository exultation. We direct our hearts to God in worship to receive grace upon grace from him through Christ (John 1:16), earnestly expecting the powerful presence of God’s Spirit to convict and edify all in attendance (1 Corinthians 12:7). We will seek to welcome people different from ourselves by blending historic, contemporary, and multiethnic expressions of worship, all aiming to display gospel unity amid the diversity of our urban/suburban settings for the glory of God (Romans 15:7). We will intentionally seek to engage the minds of those in attendance with biblical truths, calling for authentic heartfelt response to these truths and savoring the glory of God and his gospel together (Psalm 95:1–3).

### 3. CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

Christ's glory shines best when savored most. "Christian hedonism" is a deliberately provocative phrase that exults in the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. This pursuit of joy in Christ is not optional. On the contrary, God commands it: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). It is impossible to please God without this quest for joy, because faith believes that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6). We believe that there is no conflict between our desire to be happy and God's desire to be glorified. On the contrary, those twin truths are inseparably linked together in both Holy Scripture and human experience. God's glory is the greatest gift in the universe, because his glory is the greatest treasure in the universe. Christian hedonism is also a corporate quest for joy in Christ. It cannot be reduced to a private pursuit of pleasure that does not care about the joy of others (2 Corinthians 1:24, Philippians 1:25). Christian hedonism is an ever-expanding, passionate pursuit of the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

This teaching protects people from the flawed idea that God is unloving when he pursues his own praise and glory. Quite the opposite! The everlasting joy of all peoples hinges upon God revealing and magnifying himself because only God can eternally satisfy. Sin promises pleasures that are only partial and passing. They cannot compare to the full and forever pleasures that are found in God's presence (Psalm 16:11). We desire that this corporate and expansive pursuit of joy in the triune God will be the grand theme of our church that unifies all that we do until the day when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

## Inreach

### 4. SMALL GROUPS

Corporate worship is the main expression of the church "gathered." Small groups are the main expression of the church "scattered." The metaphors used in Scripture to describe the church include a building (1 Peter 2:4–8, Ephesians 2:20–22), a body (1 Corinthians 12:12–31, Romans 12:4–8), and a family (Romans 9:25–26, 1 John 4:21). In each case, there is a perspective on the whole (one building, one body, one family) and the individual (stones, body members, family members). The individuals cannot be separated from the whole or vice versa. Smaller units are the natural pathway for working out the commands in the Bible for growth, care, accountability, equipping, and so on. Because small groups are crucial for the growth and well-being of individuals and the church as a whole, small groups are a high priority at Bethlehem.

The key issue is striving toward maturity in Christ, not merely participation in a particular program. Participation in a program does not automatically achieve the aim of the program. Small groups aim at a discipleship dynamic that can flourish among a smaller group of believers who are committed to growing together in Christ. We encourage all the expressions of spiritual gifts in the context of small groups and expect that small groups will be a place for upreach, inreach, and outreach. In the small group setting, upreach is the pursuit of God himself through his word, prayer, and worship. Inreach is the mutual care found in Scripture that includes gracious accountability toward growing in Christlikeness. Outreach is the pursuit of the unbelieving in our neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth. Specific small groups will go through seasons of different respective emphases. The commitment to teaching doctrine in accordance with the *Elder Affirmation of Faith* as well as accountability to the Council of Elders unites the small groups of Bethlehem.

The oversight of the church is given to the elders of the church (1 Peter 5:1–3). Most directly, Bethlehem’s Council of Elders provides oversight to the leaders of the small groups. This takes place as elders personally participate in small groups and also provide shepherding and equipping to the small group leaders of the church.

#### **5. ADULT EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Adult education springs from a delight in the word of God and a desire to meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). This delight in the Word and desire for study leads to an experience of growth like a tree planted by streams of water which bears its fruit in its season (Psalm 1:3). A love for the Word will result in a thirst for lifelong learning. All Christians should have this thirst (1 Peter 2:2) because they have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:3). All Christians will seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18), and all Christians must be taught to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22, 1 Timothy 1:5).

God has given the gift of teachers to build up the body (Ephesians 4:11–12). Teachers must be faithful to God’s inerrant word as summarized in the *Elder Affirmation of Faith*. They should also be men and women of character who study and apply the truth before they teach (Ezra 7:9–10). Teachers and students must prayerfully rely on God in the ministry of the Word (1 Peter 4:11, Psalm 119:18), aiming to transform the heart as well as behavior (John 15:11).

We seek to teach not only content, but also methodology. As it has been said, “Give someone a fish, and he can eat for a day. Teach him how to fish, and he can eat for a lifetime.” In classes at Bethlehem, the teaching will center on understanding the biblical author’s intended meaning (Ephesians 3:4). Therefore, teachers must welcome the questions of students and encourage them to “examine the Scriptures daily” to see if what is taught from Scripture is found in Scripture (Acts 17:11). Teaching

(like preaching, counseling, and other ministries of the Word) presents truth through the personality of the teacher, and we welcome varieties of methods, illustrations, and length of teaching sessions. Some teaching will be weighted toward imparting doctrinal understanding, and some will be weighted toward instilling skills, but both aims will be present in all teaching. Teaching will look different in different contexts, such as Sunday School classes, seminars, small groups, and college and seminary courses.

The Bible also calls for developing and equipping leaders who will be mighty in the Scriptures. These leaders may serve the flock at Bethlehem in leadership positions, or they may serve beyond Bethlehem in the Church, the academy, the home, the marketplace, or in cross-cultural ministry anywhere in the world. Leadership development is an essential calling in the life of an elder. Elders are to take what they have heard and learned and entrust these things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). Some elders will labor more directly in the ministry of the Word than others (1 Timothy 5:17).

#### **6. ETHNIC HARMONY**

Bethlehem aims to display gospel unity in a context of ethnic diversity. God ordained the existence of ethnic diversity through creation (Acts 17:26). He also ordained the redemption of people from every tribe, language, people, and nation through the cross of Christ (Colossians 1:20). The church can experience gospel peace and harmony because Christ has torn down the dividing wall, killed the hostility, and created one new man that celebrates and guards the unity accomplished by the blood of Christ and produced by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:14–18, 4:1–6).

Therefore, Bethlehem believes that this unity accomplished by the blood of Christ can also be applied in greater measure in our context of ethnic diversity through intentional efforts to

display love across racial and cultural lines and to be a church that models the fruit of that love. We also look forward to the day when that ethnic diversity will be expressed in the context of perfect God-centered worship and gospel unity in the new heavens and earth (Revelation 5:9–10).

We want to carefully define the term “race,” because in creation we see that there is only one race of human beings—all descendants of Adam. *God’s love for all the peoples is evident in both creation and redemption.* In terms of creation, we boldly acknowledge and teach that all human beings of every ethnicity have been created by God, in his image, from one man, Adam, and are of great worth (Genesis 1:27, 9:6; Acts 17:26). In terms of redemption, the great goal and purpose of all of life is to worship God for his glory displayed in ransoming and making disciples from all nations (Revelation 5:9, Matthew 28:18–20).

Therefore, we aim to be a church that models the fruit of God’s love in creation and redemption for the glory of Christ, the joy of the church, and the advance of the gospel. A passion for the gospel guides our intentional efforts to display love across ethnic and cultural lines.

Therefore, we aim to be diligent to preserve the profound unity we have in the gospel of Christ, as fellow children of God and partakers of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:1–3) and count our identity in Christ as more significant than every other self-defining characteristic (Ephesians 4:4–6, 1 Peter 2:9). We want to show these biblical principles as real and important by having corporate worship gatherings, friendships, marriages, adoptions, evangelism, staffing, and other actions that practically reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of our church and community. In all these contexts, we seek to display the profound oneness, identity, and unity in Christ. We will celebrate the aspects of our particular subcultures that accord with the gospel, and we will challenge the aspects that contradict the gospel.

## 7. MERCY AND JUSTICE MINISTRIES

We care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering. Therefore, we engage in personal and corporate expressions of compassion to relieve human suffering both near and far. We support short-term relief and long-term development efforts in our pursuit of showing the justice, mercy, and soul-satisfying beauty of Christ.

God is both merciful and just, and as his blood-bought people, he calls us to love mercy and do justice.

God is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4). Therefore, our calling to show mercy to those who are suffering is a reflection of God’s mercy. We aim to be merciful to those who are suffering, because God has been merciful to us, in that, Christ died for our sins while we were yet sinners. As his forgiven children, we are called not merely to *do* mercy, but to *love* mercy (Micah 6:8). Mercy is one of the beatitude blessings for a disciple: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

As the church, we are called to both personal and corporate expressions of compassion to relieve human suffering both near and far. The rallying cry for our mercy ministries is “We care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering.”

Our predisposition will be to love others (Matthew 22:39), and yet we admit that sometimes the most loving thing is not to simply help the needy with immediate relief (2 Thessalonians 3:10) but to help in more strategic ways. While some forms of human suffering call for immediate relief, some call for rehabilitation, and some call for long-term development efforts. We will seek wisdom to act in love and avoid forms of “helping” that actually hurt people. We will aim to avoid paternalism and unhealthy dependence on the Church, while promoting utter dependence on God.

God is also a God of justice. Therefore, we ascribe praise to him and proclaim the greatness of his name (Deuteronomy 32:3)

when we say, “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Our calling to seek justice for the oppressed is a reflection of God’s passion for justice. Therefore, the people of God join God in his passion for justice. “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). We work for justice on behalf of the oppressed, because we are the beneficiaries of God demonstrating his justice in the death of Christ for our salvation.

Justice cannot simply be reduced to an individual endeavor. We recognize that sin and evil are historical realities in a fallen world and that their historical impact leads to injustice even at structural levels. These structural forms of injustice cannot be addressed merely at an individual level; structural injustices require systemic structural change.

All our efforts for mercy and justice cannot be reduced to man-centered humanitarian endeavors; they are designed to show the justice, mercy, and soul-satisfying beauty of Christ—the justice and mercy of God that came together in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21–26).

The scope of our concern is all people. We aim to do good to all people, with a special concern for other believers. We have a particular concern for the poor, for the marginalized, and for the most vulnerable, such as widows, orphans, and the unborn.

The attitude with which we engage the suffering, the oppressed, and the oppressors is to be one of humility, not pride, knowing that we are redeemed sinners who once were under the just condemnation of God. We will aim to treat all people with dignity and as bearers of the image of God.

Our prayer for justice and mercy is that the will of God might be done on earth as it is done in heaven. As we labor to relieve suffering and bring peace on earth, we long for the day when Christ will return to reign over all peoples and bring eternal

peace and establish justice on the earth forever. We believe that Christ will wipe away every tear and right every wrong as he metes out perfect justice at the final judgment.

## **8. BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD**

Gender is God’s good design and gift. He created man male and female in his own image (Genesis 1:27) to share together in his calling to multiply, subdue the earth, and exercise dominion (Genesis 1:28). Men and women are of equal dignity and worth, made to flourish in differing (yet also complementary and mutually beneficial) roles. God created man first, then woman, to make a point—not about value or competency, but vocation (1 Timothy 2:13). God looks to the man as “head,” as the leader with final accountability for the spiritual and physical well-being of his family (Genesis 3:9; Ephesians 5:23, 6:4; Colossians 3:21). The woman is “a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18).

The entrance of sin and evil into the world, through the transgression of the first man and woman, brought special distress and disarray to the husband-wife relationship. In our sin, men and women both are inclined toward passivity or aggression, causing the relationships between genders to be often fraught with difficulty. In human history, this has too often produced a tragic collective mistreatment and degradation of women. The presence of sins (including polygamy and male domination) in the Old Testament does not sanction such practices as righteous then or permissible today.

Into such a broken world of men and women came the Son of God in full humanity. Jesus treated women differently. He didn’t shun, degrade, or abuse them, but pursued and engaged them for their spiritual good. In his life, he put in motion a reversal of the fallen pattern of male-female passivity and aggression. He died and rose again to pay the penalty for the sins of his Church, including our gender sins, and he reigns over a new order in the Church.

In Jesus, men and women are together fellow heirs of God's eternal grace (1 Peter 3:7). In the lives of redeemed men and women in the Christian family, community, and church, God is restoring the created equality of worth and complementarity of roles. Here gender distinctions are not suppressed but given encouragement and space to flourish. Being male or female provides no inside track, or barrier, to acceptance with God, but we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Now, redemption of God-created gender leads to not merely a restoration of the original creation, but something better. A wife reverses the curse as she submits to her own husband (Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18) and respects him (Ephesians 5:33) with a disposition to yield to his leadership. Husbands echo the gospel by loving their wives, as Christ loved the church, and by not being harsh with them (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19). Together they fulfill God's calling (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20) in the church, the community, the home, the neighborhood, and among the nations.

We believe that God calls men to lead in the home as husbands and that a plurality from among the church's mature men are to serve in leadership as elders (1 Timothy 3:2). We believe that marriage is a covenant union between one man and one woman, until death parts them (Mark 10:9). Furthermore, we believe singles are integral members of our church and community. We rejoice in the unique way that singleness celebrates the sufficiency of Christ. Unmarried Christians strengthen the church with their gifts and callings and have a greater availability to focus on the Great Commission. The church also has a calling to welcome and love those seeking to walk in faith and obedience to Jesus while struggling with same-sex attraction and other disordered sexual desires.

We acknowledge that the Christian vision of manhood and womanhood is threatened by worldly thinking from many directions and that fidelity to the Scriptures means taking care to steer clear of all unbiblical errors including feminism, egalitarianism, misogyny, chauvinism, and harshness.

## 9. BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Biblical counseling is an expression of our conviction that God often brings profound healing and help to the body of Christ through fellow believers speaking the truth in love to one another (Ephesians 4:15). Our endorsement of biblical counseling is not meant to communicate that we do not believe that great benefit can be found in medical intervention; we do. Nor is it meant to communicate that we are not helped by nor benefit from secular psychology; we are and we do. Rather, it is an expression of our conviction that our biggest problem is that we are sinful people who stand before a just and holy God. Our only hope is the gospel. Any solution to life's problems that does not include this reality is ultimately harmful.

Biblical counseling puts emphasis on the sufficiency of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, and the ability of believers to instruct others in the word (Romans 15:14). This personal ministry of the word, centered on Jesus, powered by the gospel, and shaped by the Scriptures, offers real hope and loving help to a fallen and broken world. We are committed to promoting excellence and unity in counseling that glorifies Jesus—our Redeemer and greatest Treasure—by practicing effective discipleship and compassionate outreach. Therefore, biblical counseling aims to train and deploy people to provide biblical counsel and intensive discipleship under the supervision and authority of the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Our "Guiding Philosophy for Counseling" (2010) document provides more detail concerning our perspective on biblical counseling. It says that the ground of all counseling is the glory of God and the good of people, and it is motivated by joy in Jesus. It is centered on Jesus, rooted in the Scriptures, grounded in theology, dependent upon the Holy Spirit, focused on sanctification, embedded in the church, founded in love, attentive to the issues of the heart, comprehensive in understanding, thorough in care, relevant in methodology, and missional in orientation.

## 10. DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION

God is central in all that relates to children. Made in God's image, children from the earliest moment of conception are more valuable than many sparrows (Luke 12:7) and are to be welcomed and loved for the sake of Christ. Born sinful and immature, children are to be directed, trained, and encouraged from their earliest days to repent and believe in the gospel, and to think, feel, and act in accord with the God it gloriously reflects. We do not despise children singing praise (Matthew 21:15–16), nor do we try to hinder them from coming to Jesus (Matthew 19:13). We long to have the heart of Jesus who loves it when children come to him (Matthew 19:14–15) and sing his praises (Matthew 21:16).

We recognize God-given jurisdictions in the church, the home, and government. To this end, the organized church joins with fathers and mothers (especially fathers) in nurturing, teaching, correcting, and, as appropriate, gradually deploying succeeding generations according to their God-given strengths, for the glory of God, the good of the children, the joy of the parents, the strengthening of the church, and the well-being of society.

Noting the Bible's consistent expectation that parents teach and model love for God, we do not usurp parental responsibility, but seek to equip parents to love and teach the whole word of God to their children. We encourage consistent, persistent, constant, firm, decisive, and tender discipline of children—commending in them the commendable, and wisely and judiciously correcting them with the rod of discipline—prayerfully developing boys and girls into wholehearted practitioners of biblical manhood and womanhood.

We recognize that at different paces and sequences, individual children eventually come to a place where their articulated faith must be their own and not mere rote repetition of what they have heard from adults and others around them. We dedicate ourselves to pray for, strive toward, teach toward, and watch for evidences of genuine God-given faith received by children, in the hope that they will belong wholly to Jesus, treasuring him forever.

In this pursuit we value the joys of Christian fellowship within and across generational lines, fostering opportunities for the younger to learn from the older (without excluding the reverse).

We affirm those methods that best nurture and protect the physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of children, whether public or private, formal or informal. According to Scripture, a stable Christian home is God's primary context for discipling children. Therefore, we aim to deepen and sweeten strong marriages and provide nurturing support for broken homes.

## 11. CARING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

We live in a culture that denigrates the value of life by defining personhood in terms of a person's potential or actual contribution to society. The world values self-sufficiency and thus despises the dependency of the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly. The church cherishes the truth that all people have value because they are made in the image of God. The world uses a sliding scale that esteems the strong and scorns the weak, but the church values the weak because the church consists of the weak made strong. We are not a gathering of the self-sufficient. We find that we are insufficient, but God's grace is sufficient for us in our weakness and spiritual disability. The church of Jesus Christ testifies to the counter-cultural truth that God loves those who desperately need him because God delights in being desperately needed and in meeting the needs of desperately needy people (Psalm 50:15). Therefore, in our desperate need, we exult in the truth that he is rich in mercy to meet our needs (Ephesians 2:4).

Expressions of our care for the most vulnerable include Bethlehem's strong stand for the unborn, the disabled, the elderly, and the orphaned. The gospel of life stands against the culture of death and the horrific holocaust of the unborn. We believe that the unborn are fearfully and wonderfully made because God knit all children together in their mother's womb (Psalm 139:13–14).

Those children knit together in the womb by God are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3). They are gifts no matter how they come. They are gifts when they come with all their fingers and toes or when they come with infantile seizures, cerebral palsy, or chromosomal irregularities. Our ministry to the disabled testifies to this truth in powerful and practical ways. Disability makes dependence a very visible and visceral reality. Those who have a disability desperately need God's help. Parents of a disabled child live with the disability and desperately need God's help. The church that lives with disabled members needs mercy in a multiplied way. Thus, we all testify to the treasure of grace. Our ministry to the disabled proclaims that life with a disability and with Jesus is infinitely better than living with a healthy body without him. Our Disability Ministry is a trumpet blast that testifies to our trust in the sovereignty of God; even the most profound disability is part of God's good design.

Widows and orphans are also a major concern of Bethlehem because of God's great care for them. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). We welcome orphans into our families because we believe that all Christians once were children of wrath, but have been adopted by God. God paid the purchase price to redeem us and bring us into his family so that believers are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Scripture is also filled with calls to care for the elderly. We must view them not as a burden or bother, but as a treasure to whom is due great respect and love (Leviticus 19:32).

Additionally, while the elderly are growing in weakness and vulnerability, they also have the opportunity to join the Psalmist in saying, "So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation" (Psalm 71:18). So, love to the elderly is also expressed in creating ministry contexts in which they can finish by bringing glory to God with his help, proclaiming his might to others (particularly to the next generation), and doing so in Jesus' name.

## 12. GOD-CENTERED ENJOYMENT AND WARTIME LIFESTYLE

Bethlehem emphasizes both God-centered enjoyment and wartime living in order to avoid the ugly ditches of materialism and asceticism with respect to creation. Materialism is a great danger in valuing the gifts of God more than God himself (Luke 12:15, 16:13). Asceticism is also at serious odds with Scripture in casting doubt upon the goodness of God's world (1 Timothy 4:3). It can lead to a self-righteous mindset that believes abstaining is a way of earning God's favor. This can lead people to believe that they are better than those who do not abstain.

Both God-centered enjoyment and wartime living are rooted in a quest for joy. God-centered enjoyment rejoices that God made all things to be richly enjoyed (1 Timothy 6:17). A wartime lifestyle celebrates the blessedness that comes from giving our resources instead of hoarding our resources, because Jesus taught us it is *more blessed* to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Godward enjoyment of all that God made rests on the distinction between structure and direction. All created structures are good (1 Timothy 4:4). These good things (e.g., food, sex, music) can be taken in Godward directions that bring glory to God and joy to people, or they can be taken in godless directions that dishonor God and hurt people. Christians should lead the way in showing how to delight in all that God has made.

Wartime living recognizes that the way people live in wartime is fundamentally different than the way people live in the prosperity of peace. We are not warring against having possessions but against wasting the possessions we have. The goal is not a simple life that puts emphasis on a joy-squelching self-denial, but a strategic life that puts emphasis on the joy-inducing spread of the gospel (Acts 8:8). We must see ourselves as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) under the High King of heaven's empowering commission to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18–20).

## Outreach

### 13. GLOBAL OUTREACH

Missions exists because worship doesn't. At Bethlehem, our aim is to align ourselves with God's purpose of winning worshipers to himself from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9). This can only be done through the Spirit-powered proclamation of the gospel to make disciples who live transformed lives of obedience to Christ (Matthew 28:18–20, Luke 24:47).

While enthusiastically affirming the strategic deployment of our members in short-term cross-cultural ministry, Bethlehem has a history of recruiting, training, and sending its own members as long-term missionaries in coordination with trusted mission agencies. We send our people to the nations with authority from the Holy Spirit who gives the local church the task to send its members to cross-cultural gospel ministry (Acts 13:1–4). Therefore, we place a high value on our responsibility to equip and evaluate our members who sense a call to missions.

God has shown favor to Bethlehem by giving us a particular burden for ministry among those who have little or no access to the gospel. We will continue to ask God to use the resources he has entrusted to us to pursue strategic opportunities among the unengaged and unreached peoples of the world.

The members we send out are not forgotten once they arrive on the mission field. We have the responsibility to provide care and support for these ambassadors. We want to send these dear ones in a manner worthy of God (3 John 5–8), which involves support through prayer, sacrificial giving, and pastoral care.

We believe that God has called us as part of the universal church to a particular work of stewardship in the effort to reach all peoples with the gospel. Evaluating and engaging theological issues in the sphere of missiology is part of this

stewardship. We will endeavor to lower cultural and linguistic barriers to gospel proclamation while maintaining vigilant attention to faithfulness to the message (2 Corinthians 4:2–3). We will not engage in practices that confuse the clarity of the gospel message for the sake of relevance or any other motive. We understand that to love our neighbors near and far we must preach and teach the unaltered message of the unique hope of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

### 14. LOCAL OUTREACH

True Christian faith and community is evidenced by love for one's neighbor. We believe that this love can be expressed in countless ways, but the heart of this love is the proclamation of the hope of the gospel. Who is my neighbor? We believe that proximity implies responsibility. We have a mandate to evangelize and disciple those God has put closest within our reach, in every sphere of life. Additionally, we believe the call of Christ to make disciples by "baptizing ... [and] teaching" (Matthew 28:18–19) includes a call to gather all who believe into baptized membership in our church or another suitable local church.

After Jesus delivered the man from the legion of demons, the man desired to stay with Jesus. Instead, Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5:19). We are similarly called to those we know well, share affinity with, and come into contact with daily. This type of evangelism can be difficult because of our ongoing relationships with these individuals, yet these encounters can yield some of the most strategic, winsome, and effective gospel opportunities.

What if all believers told others how much the Lord has done for them in salvation? The message of salvation should be shared with geographic neighbors and with those whom believers come into contact with at work and at school and in the marketplace. This type of evangelism is the very mandate of Acts 1:8, which

also testifies to the promise of the Holy Spirit's power to witness for Christ.

The Twin Cities' neighborhoods, university student communities, ethnic concentrations, and varied religious groupings are our neighborhood. When Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), he is telling us to speak the gospel to those who are different from us on many levels, but who are living in our midst. Jesus' aim is not to make decisions, but to make disciples. We are called to continue discipleship efforts with new believers until "Christ is formed" in them (Galatians 4:19).

For this reason, we will continue to offer training for evangelism and discipleship that equips the flock for this varied local outreach. We will also seek to provide real opportunities and tools to assist the flock in engaging the lost all around them. Some of these opportunities should help the flock to "go" together and partner in the mission of local evangelism and discipleship for joy and mutual encouragement. Christian hedonism is at the heart of our evangelism because great joy abounds in a city when Christ is received (Acts 8:8).

We believe that Christ has many people in the Twin Cities (Acts 18:10), and we acknowledge the limits of our own local church outreach efforts in contrast to the massive need for the gospel of Christ. Therefore, we aim to aggressively plant new churches because (a) we believe it accords with the apostolic teaching and practice in fulfillment of the Great Commission, (b) it is the most crucial strategy for exponential growth of new believers in a city or region, (c) it reaches peoples and neighborhoods that are beyond the reach of our church, and (d) it simultaneously works for the revitalization of existing local churches. In the planting of new churches, we aim not for unhealthy competition but to cultivate partnerships with existing churches for the advance of the gospel and their own revitalization.

## Bethlehem: One Church on Three Campuses

Our Biblical Essentials and Bethlehem Priorities are a vital part of preserving the unity of our one church on multiple locations. Below are several more expressions of what makes Bethlehem one church on three campuses.

### 1. ONE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

The *Elder Affirmation of Faith* expresses our core doctrinal convictions. These convictions attempt to summarize biblical teaching and always are subject to biblical authority as the final court of appeal.

### 2. ONE CONSTITUTION AND SET OF BYLAWS

We are governed by one Constitution and one set of Bylaws. The elders are free to structure themselves as needed to govern the church accordingly, but no subgroup of elders at any campus will have the right to change or amend these documents by any other means than that outlined in the documents themselves.

### 3. ONE ELDER COUNCIL

Campuses will be led by elder teams that are a subset of the Council of Elders. This wider Council will be appointed by the congregation and will be, under Christ, the highest leadership level of the church. According to Scripture, the Council of Elders will consist of a plurality of men.

### 4. ONE MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Members will be members of Bethlehem and not specifically any campus of Bethlehem. However, we would hope that our members would feel a certain accountability according

to proximity that would encourage them to focus on the part of Bethlehem that is closest to their own neighborhood. All members at all campuses will be governed by the same Relational Commitments and Membership Covenant. Discipline of any member will be recognized at all campuses.

#### **5. ONE MISSION STATEMENT**

“We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.” We will be guided by this mission statement, and all campuses will seek to carry it out within their local neighborhood context.

#### **6. ONE BUDGET**

There is advantage to an “economy of scale” that includes central support in things like finances, communication, integrated technology, buildings & grounds, media, and human resources.

#### **7. ONE VISION CAST FROM THE PULPIT (VIDEO AND LIVE PREACHING)**

We have one *Pastor for Preaching & Vision* who trumpets the same message for the entire flock. There is an advantage in people hearing the same message most of the time. This all-church preaching is helpfully supplemented by campus-specific preaching. Campus-specific preaching can take different forms, but on occasion it offers a venue for contextualized vision-casting for a specific campus.



## Accelerating Bethlehem's Next Decade of Spreading

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