

GBC Core Commitments

Core Commitment #1 – Expository Preaching and Teaching

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2)

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)

By “expository” we mean that it is our goal to “expose” what is there already in Scripture. It’s God’s Word itself, not our own ideas, that is inspired and authoritative over our lives! The main theme of any given text of Scripture becomes the main theme of our sermons. So, we are careful to study any given text of Scripture in its context – both historically and in relation to its place in the larger biblical context -- and then seek to apply it appropriately and enthusiastically to our lives today. Because of this core commitment, our preaching and teaching is:

- Mostly consecutive through given books of the Bible

It’s easiest to understand and appreciate the biblical context of a given passage when one is in the same biblical book for weeks (or months) at a time. Each book of the Bible has an overall theme or thrust, which each component part of the book relating to and contributing to that theme in some way. As we preach or teach our way through a book (including in our youth groups), we “live there,” i.e., we get used to its theme, characters, author’s point of view, plot (if narrative), etc. Thus, any given text can have a fuller and more potent impact on us as preachers, teachers, and hearers.

Because we believe that the whole Bible is inspired by God, and “profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training for righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16), we spend balanced time preaching and teaching through books in both the Old and New Testaments. Often, if we are studying a book in Sunday School from the Old Testament, we’ll be preaching through a book in the New Testament in our worship services (and vice versa).

Our commitment to expository preaching and teaching through individual books of the Bible does not mean that we don’t see the value of topical preaching at times. Topical preaching takes a topic and then investigates what the whole Bible might say about it. For example, not long ago we did a sermon series called *The Genius of Gender*, where we addressed issues of sexuality and gender from a biblical perspective. We’ve also had many small groups read through and discuss particular books by Christian authors, like *Don’t Waste Your Life*, by John Piper, or *Lies Women Believe*, by Nancy Leigh DeMoss.

- Always ultimately pointed to the gospel of Christ and life in him

The Bible really is one glorious story – a story of our Creator God creating mankind in his image, but then our rebellion against him and our fall into sin, thus creating a great spiritual separation between us and the holy God. God then takes the initiative to redeem this lost humanity by choosing to bring his reconciling blessing to the whole world through Abraham and his offspring -- first, the nation of Israel, but ultimately through Israel’s Messiah and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ and his work on the cross and the empty tomb, sinners receive not only forgiveness but a whole new righteous status before God. The Old Testament thus points ahead to the coming of Christ, and the New Testament reflects back on the person and work of Christ, and also anticipates his glorious return at the end of the age. Given this redemptive story as an overlay of the whole Bible, any given passage ultimately will in some way point to the gospel – this good news of salvation through Christ. So, our preaching and teaching will always end in proclaiming Christ! The Bible itself leads us to this practice (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

Core Commitment #2 – Christ-Exalting Congregational Worship

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13)

At Galena Bible Church, we are committed to worshipping God in accordance with His Word and in a corporate fashion. Sunday mornings are the most important gathering of our church body. We see these times of coming under God’s Word together and having this fellowship of the Spirit together as absolutely essential for the life of any individual believer. As the body gathers together, our desire is to see each member of the body recognize, revel in, and respond rightly to the glory of God in Christ Jesus through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (taken from Bob Kauflin’s definition of worship). To this end we have these further commitments:

- To plan services that fan into flame our affections for God and one another

Jesus says in Mark 12 that the first of the two greatest commandments is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:29-30). As we come before God corporately, we are expressing our love for Him. We want all elements of our services (the singing, the preaching, the praying, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper) to stir up love for God. As we gather in His name, we are proclaiming His excellencies back to Him (1 Pet 2:9). This is the vertical dimension to worship. Thus, one implication of this is that our worship services are designed with the believer in mind, rather than specifically for reaching unbelievers. However, of course, we regularly invite unbelievers to come to our services. We believe that as they witness authentic Christian worship and hear

God's Word taught, that the Lord may convict their own hearts of their need for salvation and draw them in (1 Cor 14:24-25; Jn 13:35).

The second commandment in Mark 12 is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mk 12:31). We seek to obey this commandment, as well, as we gather to worship. This is the horizontal dimension to worship. We love one another as we humbly employ our spiritual gifts to edify one another (1 Cor 14:26). Some will sing or play an instrument, others will teach, others will care for the little ones in the nursery, others will serve as ushers and greeters, others will testify during our "words of encouragement," etc. All the gifts come together to foster an atmosphere of unity and sincere love. We recognize the miracle that each member of the body of Christ is, as God has given them spiritual life in Christ. We celebrate this mutual salvation together as we love one another.

A word here also on children in our worship services: though we do think it's a helpful ministry to provide child-care (and teaching) for the littlest children, after kindergarten we have children remain with their families throughout the service. This is intentional. We believe that children greatly benefit from seeing mom or dad engaged with the worship of God. That inspires them to also engage in worship and try to take in what is being taught from God's Word. Having them in the service also sets a healthy pattern for their lives, as they would become adults and have children themselves. We want love for God and God's people to be cultivated from the earliest years.

- To plan services based around the theme of the morning's sermon

We view the sermon as the centerpiece of our worship services. Together, preacher included, we are under the Word of God. We want to hear from Him and then respond to Him in joyful obedience and faith. To enhance our focus on the theme of the passage preached on, on any given Sunday morning, we seek to choose songs that relate to that theme. Prayers offered that morning will relate to that theme. We would strive to have other elements (like testimonies) likewise relate to that theme.

- To plan services with excellent and appropriate songs

As we put together sets of songs for our worship services, we ask these questions in the selection of songs: (1) Are the lyrics clear? That is, do we truly understand what they're saying and what they mean? Or, are they open to multiple interpretations (perhaps even interpretations that would not fit with sound doctrine)? (2) Is there significant theological depth? Some songs may be quite simple and lack detailed depth, and yet are treasured songs (e.g., a simple hymn like "My Jesus, I Love Thee"). When singing such songs, we group them with other songs that have more depth (e.g., a song like "In Christ Alone"). We recognize that songs are an important part of the teaching ministry in our corporate worship. We read in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (3) Is the song not too difficult to sing? Some songs are more conducive for solo voices, rather than singing

as a congregation. Other songs may be too complicated to easily learn. We want our people to be able to go home humming the songs they've sung to the Lord that morning!

We also strive to have a balance of time-tested hymns of faith, loved and sung by many past generations, and also newer songs that God has given His Church through those He has gifted in our day. We also value having a variety of musical styles. And varying how we incorporate songs and prayers and testimonies and other elements of worship helps keep our services engaging and fresh.

Finally, we strive for excellence in our musical presentation (Ps 33:3, 1 Chr 15:22). Our God is worthy of our best efforts in our worship of Him. We recognize that we are not professional musicians (or sound operators), but we strive to grow in our abilities, to the glory of God.

- To plan services that engage the whole congregation

If we are going to live out Col 3:16 (cited in the last bullet point), we need to be able to hear each other singing! There are few things more encouraging than hearing the praises of our fellow brothers and sisters as we come together in corporate worship. This means we keep the volume of the worship team leading us at a moderate level. As we strive to emphasize this congregational dimension to worship, we also want to be able to see one another clearly, and thus not have the lights set too low, steering away from a concert/performance atmosphere.

Core Commitment #3 – Meaningful Membership

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5)

GBC sees formal membership as something deep and meaningful and clearly rooted in God's Word. The local church is a covenant community, committed to loving one another, and spurring one another on to loving, serving, and honoring God. The local church is a family in the best sense of the word. Members are those who have been recognized and received into membership as having been adopted into God's family through saving faith in Christ. Each member, as part of this family, is committed to Christ, one another, and to sound doctrine.

- As members, we desire that all we do is rooted in sincere love for one another, and in accountability toward one another.

The Scriptures couldn't be clearer that life in Christ's Church needs to be governed by love. Statements like these abound: “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1

Pet 1:22); “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:9-10). The grace that we have received from God through Christ should overflow to one another. This should result in honest, transparent, trusting relationships, as well as in ministries of practical, compassionate care to one another.

Such loving care should also be expressed in how we hold one another accountable to living holy lives, honoring to Christ. In becoming members of the church, men and women state that they give permission to be lovingly confronted if they wander away from the truth or fall into obvious, habitual sin. This is called church discipline. God’s Word tells us: “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Heb 12:6a). He really cares about how we live, and how our lives reflect His character. He has ordained that His loving discipline be carried out through His people, within the covenant community of the local church. Restoration – both to God and to fellow believers who have been sinned against – is always the goal in the church discipline process. We also remember that any discipline be carried out with great humility, knowing that all of us are redeemed sinners and in need of God’s continual grace to live a life worthy of the gospel (Gal 6:1).

- As members, we strive to disciple one another in our walks with Christ.

To be a disciple is to be a follower. Christians are disciples – followers – of Christ. But we don’t do this alone. We need one another! God has put us together that we might learn, grow, and be equipped to serve Him. We dedicate ourselves to proclaiming God’s excellencies to one another. We are sanctified (set apart for God’s good purposes) by the renewing of our minds as we hear God’s Word and walk more and more in step with the Spirit (Rom 12:1-2, Gal 5:25). We encourage one another in this sanctification process as we commit to regular worship together, to other times of Bible study together, and to “doing life” together, which involves forgiving one another, confronting one another when needed, bearing one another’s burdens and sharing one another’s joys.

- As members, we are committed to following God’s Word in how we operate our ministries.

We strive to look to God’s Word in all things. This includes how we set up our church organizational structure. We believe that a congregational system of church government with biblically-qualified male elders, affirmed by the congregation, who provide spiritual leadership and oversight, is most consistent with the New Testament pattern (Titus 1:5, 1 Tim 3:1-7, Acts 20:28). We also look to God’s Word for direction in how we plan our worship services, being committed to the preaching of God’s Word, corporate praise and prayer, the reading of Scripture, the celebration of the ordinances, and opportunities given for members to edify one another (1 Tim 4:13, Col 3:16, 1 Cor 11:20, 1 Cor 14:26).

- As members, we seek to help one another find fruitful places of service in the church.

Every believer is equipped by the Spirit for the building up of the body through using their gifts in the church (1 Cor 12:4-7, Rom 12:4-8). Christianity is not meant to be a “spectator sport,” but a lifestyle of service to God and others. In the life of the local church, every believer should be able to point to something he or she does, in deliberate service to the body. Some of these gifts and activities are more public and done in an organized fashion (e.g., teaching a Bible study, serving on a worship team), whereas other gifts function more behind-the-scenes, and in more personal, incidental ways (e.g., ministries of personal encouragement and prayer). In the exercise of all of our gifts, our goal is to glorify God.

Core Commitment #4 – Engaged Local Evangelism and World Missions

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

We use simple definitions. Evangelism is simply teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade. The gospel is the message of Jesus, God’s Son, living, dying, and rising again to redeem a sinful and lost humanity. Discipleship is simply helping others to trust in, and follow Jesus. This starts with introducing people to the message about Jesus, which is evangelism. Missions is crossing cultural barriers to bring the gospel to others, particularly to others who have yet to have the opportunity to hear it. We speak of “engaged” evangelism and missions to emphasize these are things that we, as a church body, don’t just talk about as being good things to do, but actually strive to do them. And we group local evangelism and world missions together in this core commitment because we see them as one piece. What we do locally we want to see “exported” to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

With regard to local evangelism, we are further committed to:

- Building intentional personal relationships with not-yet believers

It’s very easy for Christians to be content only in socializing with fellow believers. And of course, we need to be with fellow believers to mutually encourage one another in our like precious faith (Rom 1:12). But such interaction should empower and equip us to warmly reach out to others who don’t yet know the Lord. So many people in our world are lonely and looking for good friends who will sincerely care for them. As believers, we need to be those type of people. As trust is gained, we will be in a position to effectively proclaim to them life’s greatest treasure: being forgiven of our sins and knowing God personally. So, we as believers encourage one another to let our lights shine (Matt 5:14-16)! We strive to be involved in our communities, volunteering in this and that community organization, hoping to befriend those who need Jesus.

- Providing training for personal evangelism

As we befriend people for the sake of sharing Christ's love in word and deed, we want to be ready to clearly present the gospel. There are many excellent tools to help in this pursuit that are out there. One that our church has used in training folks in our congregation (and plan on continuing to do so, in various venues) is called *Two Ways to Live*, put out by Matthias Media.

- Working together as a whole church body

Personal evangelism isn't the work of Christian "Lone Rangers" (though, of course, we often befriend others on our own); it's an enterprise we all, as a whole church body, engage in. As friends are introduced to others in the church, in social settings, more connections are made. As friends are warmly greeted on Sunday mornings, and experience an atmosphere of love and devotion to the Lord and to one another, our prayer is that the Lord will use this to draw them in (1 Cor 14:24-25, John 13:35). We endeavor to regularly publicly celebrate opportunities the Lord gives us to proclaim his gospel to others. We pray for one another's witnessing. As the Lord brings individuals to himself, it's something that we, as a whole body working together, can rejoice in. In short, we want to see the Lord create at our church a *culture of evangelism*.

- Leaving the results to God

Success in evangelism doesn't mean making new converts (though, of course, when this happens, it's a tremendous joy); it means faithfully teaching the gospel to others. God is the one who must open people's eyes and soften people's hearts (John 6:44, Acts 16:14). He is sovereign in bringing salvation; it is not up to us to save, but to bear witness. Having this realization, we recognize the critical importance of prayer. Like Paul, we pray that those we proclaim the gospel to would in fact be saved (Rom 10:1).

With regard to world missions, we are further committed to:

- Focusing on church-planting among unreached people groups

The thrust of the New Testament, particularly the ministry of the Apostle Paul, was to bring the gospel to ever-expanding cultural and geographical frontiers (Rom 15:20-21). This gospel was for all people. From the beginning of God's redemptive story, his intention was to bless the nations through allowing them to share in his glory (Gen 12:3, Ps 67:1-7). As souls from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7:9) are brought to faith, God gathers them into local churches, where leaders and teachers are raised up and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are practiced (Titus 1:5). It is in and through the life of the local church that God's Word is taught and disciples are made and grown. Those doing this work of evangelism and church-planting can be indigenous missionaries (our church supports many) or those who leave their home and cross major cultural and geographical barriers. Though our focus is supporting those directly involved with church-planting in places where there is presently little or no gospel witness, we also recognize the importance of those serving in supporting roles to the

global missions enterprise (such as pastoral training, missions aviation, evangelism through the internet, and caring for the poor).

- Engaging our whole church body in this noblest of tasks

In the course of our regular preaching and teaching ministry, we expose our congregation to God's heart for the nations, as it's revealed in his Word. In our corporate worship services we also pray regularly for the gospel's advance in the hardest places in the world, particularly where believers are experiencing severe persecution. In terms of our support for our own GBC-supported missionaries, we recognize that their lives can be lonely and hard and oftentimes discouraging. So, aside from financial support, we seek to regularly communicate with and pray for the needs of those on the mission field. Our Missions Team spearheads these efforts and seeks to mobilize all the members of the congregation to be involved in this work of encouragement. As missionaries visit, the Missions Team connects them and their ministries with as many folks as possible. We regularly pray for the specific needs of our missionaries during our worship services and prayer meetings. We also occasionally send short-term missions teams to come alongside our missionaries on the field and try to help them in their ministry, as they have requested. It is also our joy to see the Lord call young people from our own body to serve him cross-culturally on the mission field. We pray that with a commitment to world missions being part of our church's DNA, that several will be called and sent out from our body.