CALVARY CHAPEL

Its Essence and Identity

Edited By Justin Thomas

Calvary Chapel: Its Essence and Identity

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CONTENTS

Foreword 5

Justin Thomas

Introduction: Faithfulness, Freedom, and Fellowship 9

Brian Brodersen

One: We Embrace the Exposition of the Whole Bible .. 19

Nick Cady

Two: We Rely on the Leading of the Holy Spirit 29

Brian Brodersen

Three: We Cultivate a Culture of Grace 39

Richard Cimino and Mike Neglia

Four: We Engage with Every Generation 51

Brian Kelly and Wayne Taylor

Five: We Live in Anticipation of Christ's Return 61

Justin Thomas

Six: We Promote Servant Leadership 71

Ted Leavenworth and Bruce Zachary

Afterword 81

Justin Thomas

FOREWORD

Calvary Chapel began as a move of God—an outpouring of grace, renewal, and mission that no one could have scripted or contained. It was not the product of strategic planning or institutional ambition. It was the fruit of God working through ordinary people who simply loved Jesus, trusted His Word, and followed the leading of His Spirit.

Movements like this demand regular reflection. As our Pentecostal brothers and sisters often say, *"Missions at dawn, missiology at dusk."* First comes the movement—the outpouring of God's Spirit—and then comes the need to look back, to trace His hand, and to articulate what He has done so that the work might continue with clarity and faithfulness into the future.

This book is written in that spirit. It does not aim to redefine Calvary Chapel or to add burdensome structures. Nor does it claim to say everything that could be said. Rather, it seeks to recognize and articulate the essential convictions and commitments that have shaped our life together—those core features that have consistently animated our churches, our mission, and our fellowship across decades and continents.

Whether you have been part of Calvary Chapel from the beginning or are just stepping into this family, our prayer is that you will find here a vision that feels both familiar and fresh: a call back to the heart of who we are, and a call forward into all that God still desires to do through us.

These are not exhaustive claims but core convictions: the irreducible complexity of Calvary Chapel. If any of these values are missing, something vital is missing.

We offer this book not as a final word, but as a first word—a beginning of a conversation, not a closing of it. Our desire is not control, but clarity—not to draw lines of exclusion, but to rally hearts around the fire that first warmed and animated us.

As Gustav Mahler once said, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire."

It is not enough to simply remember, or even to celebrate, what God has done through Calvary Chapel in the past. The true honor is to carry it forward—to guard the fire, to feed it, and to pass it on.

Our prayer is that the flame God kindled decades ago would continue to burn brightly—not for our name's sake, but for the glory of Jesus Christ and the good of His church around the world.

The chapters that follow were shaped by conversations among members of the Calvary Global Network (CGN) Executive Team—conversations where we simply asked one another the question: *What is Calvary Chapel?* And what emerged was not division or debate, but a beautiful, Spirit-born unity. Without coercion or coordination, the same themes rose again and again, confirming what so many of us have known instinctively for years.

Although these words have been penned by particular members of our team, they reflect the collective

heart and prayers of many leaders across the broader Calvary Chapel family. And while we serve together in CGN, we do not write here as representatives of an organization. We write as Calvary Chapel pastors—men shaped by this movement, grateful to have been part of it, and eager to see it flourish for generations to come.

For me personally, this project is more than editorial work; it is both a small act of gratitude and a larger act of hope. I came to saving faith through the ministry of a Calvary Chapel. I was discipled and equipped at Calvary Chapel Bible College. I was raised up and encouraged by first-generation Calvary Chapel pastors—men who welcomed me, showed me the ropes, believed in me, and spurred me on. Their examples still shape me today.

This book is written to honor the fire they kept burning and to entrust that flame to those who will come after us—praying that the heart, convictions, and Spirit-led values that have marked Calvary Chapel from the beginning will take deep root in the next generation so that the work God began might continue and bear much fruit long after us.

My deep conviction is that the fire of Calvary Chapel still burns. It burns for the glory of God. It burns with love for Jesus, trust in His Word, dependence on His Spirit, and a longing to reach the lost. It is my prayer that this book will help keep that flame burning brightly for many years to come.

— *Justin Thomas, Editor*

INTRODUCTION

Faithfulness, Freedom, and Fellowship

Brian Brodersen

As we think of the present and future ministry of Calvary Chapel, it is good to reflect briefly on a few of the cherished convictions among us and to commit ourselves to holding firm to them in the years ahead.

Faithfulness

One such conviction is that the church is built upon the foundation of the Word of God. The Apostle Paul said that very thing in his Letter to the Ephesians,

> You are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone.
>
> *Ephesians 2:20*

The foundation of the apostles and prophets would be a reference to their teaching, which was passed on to us in the pages of Scripture, specifically the New Testament, but includes the Old Testament as well.

From the very beginning of the ministry of Calvary Chapel, Pastor Chuck Smith modeled for all a deep and continual commitment to teaching and preaching the Word of God. In doing so, he influenced generations of men and women toward faith and

absolute confidence in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, as well as faith in its transforming power. I have talked to many Christians across the country and around the world who know very little about Calvary Chapel except that we are those people who teach the Bible. That is indeed a mark of our churches.

Whether it is going book by book, from Genesis to Revelation, or preaching expositionally through a Gospel or an Epistle, this practice is part of the DNA of Calvary Chapel and a conviction we can never lose. Of course, others throughout church history have held this conviction, and understandably so, this is what the apostles did and taught others to do.

Think of Paul's words to Timothy:

> All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. . . . Therefore, preach the word!
>
> *2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2*

> The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.
>
> *2 Timothy 2:2*

Biblical exposition is a foundational conviction that every generation of pastors and teachers must remain faithful to, for the teaching and application of God's Word is a major and essential component in bringing believers to maturity and fruitfulness. This is what Paul is saying when he writes to the Ephesians concerning those gifted persons God has given to the church:

> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
>
> *Ephesians 4:11–13*

Here we clearly see that equipping God's people for service and maturing them in their faith is directly linked to the Word of God coming through the servants of God.

It is a fact of history that where God's Word is believed, honored, and faithfully proclaimed, the church is healthy, strong, and vibrant. Conversely, where Scripture is denied, doubted, or neglected, the church is sick, weak, and powerless.

Thank God for a legacy of faithful proclamation of God's Word, a legacy that we have the privilege and responsibility to steward, and to steward well.

Freedom

Calvary Chapel was literally brought into being through a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit known today as the Jesus People Movement. One of the unique features of this outpouring of the Spirit was the freedom that everyone experienced to come just as you are and to remain just as you are. Not in a sinful sense, but in a cultural sense.

There were no external requirements one had to meet to participate in what God was doing. No dress

code; no grooming code; no social or economic standard. One of the early Jesus music groups, Love Song, expressed this in their song "Little Country Church":

> Long hair, short hair, some coats and ties / People finally comin' around / Lookin' past the hair and straight into the eyes / People finally comin' around.

If you fancied a suit and tie for church on Sundays, that was just fine. If you preferred shorts, a T-shirt, and sandals, no problem. If the ladies wanted to wear their finest skirt and top or an old pair of jeans, either one was just fine. If you pulled up at church on your Harley wearing dirty jeans and a leather vest with chains, cool, come on in. Everyone was welcome!

The wealthy were not given reserved seating, and the poor could sit anywhere they wanted. It did not matter if you were black, brown, or white; there was a place for you. There was not a list of rules, just a lot of freedom to get to know Jesus, and a lot of trust that the Holy Spirit would do the convicting and sanctifying through the faithful teaching of God's Word. It was a freedom that opened wide the door and bid all come in. It was a freedom that, if lost, would quench the Spirit and signal the imposition of human control over the work of God.

This is the ever-present danger we must recognize and resist with everything in us. This is the very type of thing the Apostle Paul spoke of when he wrote to the Galatians about the legalists who were attempting to take away their freedom in Christ: "We did not give into them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (Galatians 2:5). Legalism and the desire to exercise authority and control over

people and ministries resides in the hearts of many and must be resisted if the work of God is to continue unhindered.

One of the beautiful things in our Calvary Chapel history is the example set by Pastor Chuck Smith of a dependency on the Spirit that resulted in him always giving people space and freedom to be led by the Spirit. He never sought to control anyone else's ministry. Even when some suggested that he should set up safeguards for the future of Calvary Chapel beyond him, he refused to do it. Someone suggested that his little book, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, be the standard to which all future Calvary Chapels conform. His response was classic (I was in the room), "If I did not plan and seek to control the ministry while living, why would I try to plan and control it when I'm dead?" He believed in the autonomy of each local church and in the ability of the Spirit to instruct and guide each local pastor, elders, and congregation in the way they should go.

Having lived and ministered for many years in a legalistic system within a denomination, once he knew the freedom of the Spirit, there was no going back. His most oft-referenced Scripture passage when speaking to pastors and church leaders was from Paul's Letter to the Galatians,

> This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?
>
> *Galatians 3:2–3 NKJV*

Freedom in the Spirit is a core value of Calvary Chapel; it is where we began, and it is where we must remain.

Fellowship

One of the four foundational practices of the early church—alongside devotion to the apostles' teaching, breaking bread, and prayer—was fellowship (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is that beautiful intimacy we experience with the Lord and also with our fellow believers in Jesus. Those who serve in kingdom work know just how special it is to have brothers and sisters who share in both the blessings and challenges of life in ministry.

Although there are some who shun fellowship and feel they are doing just fine on their own, the truth is we can only become all that God wants us to be in relationship to others, for it is through those relationships with others that we grow and mature. Even someone like Paul knew the importance of fellowship for personal growth. In writing to the believers in Rome, he said:

> I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.
>
> *Romans 1:11–12*

The longer I live and the further I travel on the road of ministry, the more thankful I am for those deep relationships and the rich fellowship that comes through them. One of the most amazing things I have discovered is the unspoken bond there is for those in Christ. I have had many experiences of meeting someone for the first time—sometimes someone from an

entirely different culture and background—and yet feeling I have known them for years. It is that unity of the Spirit Paul spoke of in his Letter to the Ephesians.

As we consider Paul's words here, I want to transition from thinking of fellowship on a person-to-person level and think more in terms of fellowship with all of God's people in the universal body of Christ because this is so often where fellowship breaks down. We become tribalistic and suspicious of those who are not part of our immediate tribe. Listen to what the apostle said as he reminds us of the true basis of our fellowship— oneness in Christ. Here are his exact words:

> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
>
> *Ephesians 4:3–6*

I am reminded of Psalm 133 where we are told of the blessedness of fellowship in unity:

> How good and pleasant it is when God's people dwell together in unity. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is like the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion.

Granted, this psalm can seem a bit strange to our modern ears, but it is talking about the anointing and fruitfulness that flow from unity. God blesses unity. Jesus prayed that we all may be one even as He and the Father are one (John 17).

Now, when we think of unity, we must be careful not to think in terms of uniformity (everyone being, saying, and doing the exact same thing), but rather, we are to think of unity in diversity (having our central core the same, yet allowing for differences of perspective and expression based on different biblical insight and cultural context). Unity in diversity is surely the picture we have in the New Testament. On the one hand, in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). On the other hand, those distinctions clearly remain.

As was mentioned earlier, from the beginning, Calvary Chapel was a beautiful expression of unity in diversity—each local church an expression of the body of Christ in its cultural context. Believers are unified around essential biblical doctrine and diversified when it comes to minor doctrinal distinctions and cultural expressions of the faith.

If we understand that unity in diversity is the picture of the church in Scripture, our experience of fellowship will even be richer because we will not limit our fellowship to our own tribe only but will enjoy the richness of the other tribes in the body of Christ as well. As we look to the future and see the potential for the gospel to spread and more churches to be planted all across the globe, let us remember that unity in diversity was the way of Calvary Chapel from the beginning, but even more important, it is the way of Jesus.

Conclusion: Stewards of a Spirit-Led Legacy

As we look back with gratitude and ahead with faith, we must remember that the health and fruitfulness

of Calvary Chapel has always come from three things: faithfulness to God's Word, freedom in the Spirit, and fellowship with one another in love. These are not optional values or passing emphases—they are essential to who we are and how we minister.

Pastor Chuck Smith never sought to control a movement but to cultivate a climate where God's Word could be proclaimed, His Spirit could lead, and His people could grow together in grace. That legacy is now ours to carry forward.

ONE

We Embrace the Exposition of the Whole Bible

Nick Cady

The Power of God's Word

In the late 1960s, as the United States was experiencing cultural upheaval, a revolution began in Southern California. As young people flocked to Calvary Chapel, they not only came to faith in Jesus as their Savior, but they became rooted and grounded in Christ through the verse-by-verse teaching of the entire Bible. Under the leadership of Pastor Chuck Smith, Calvary Chapel became known for the systematic and Spirit-led exposition of Scripture. This emphasis became the keystone of a global movement. Through the clear teaching of the Bible, believers were grounded in their faith and equipped to plant churches and make disciples all around the world.

This commitment to teaching the whole counsel of God remains a defining characteristic of Calvary Chapel to this day. Calvary Chapel churches around the world share the belief that faithfully teaching the whole Bible is the most effective way to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

How Chuck Smith Became an Expositor

Calvary Chapel's emphasis on expository Bible teaching was born out of a transformation that took place in Chuck Smith's experience as a pastor. Pastor

Chuck grew up in the Foursquare denomination, a movement with a strong emphasis on evangelistic preaching. As a young pastor, this focus shaped his approach to ministry. He followed the common practice of selecting a text, developing a topical sermon around it, and supporting it with various Scripture references. While his messages were doctrinally sound, they were only *using* passages from the Bible rather than teaching "the whole counsel" of God's Word (Acts 20:27).[1]

As a Bible college graduate entering pastoral ministry, Chuck developed a catalog of about two-and-a-half years' worth of sermons. It was common for pastors in his denomination to move to a different church every couple of years, so when Chuck neared the end of his preaching catalog, he would ask the denomination to help him find a new church to lead where he would start preaching through his messages again. That worked well until Chuck arrived in Huntington Beach, where he and his family wanted to stay. Chuck was faced with a dilemma: What would he do when he ran out of sermons?[2]

During this time, Chuck came across the book *The Apostle John* by W. H. Griffith Thomas. The book contained outlines for expository studies of the entire epistle of 1 John. Chuck was intrigued and decided to use these outlines as the basis for a sermon series in which he taught through 1 John.[3] Teaching in this way helped reveal and draw out the themes in the book. This experiment turned out to be transformative, and the congregation became excited about studying the Bible.

As they approached the end of the series on 1 John, Chuck began wondering if he could do the same thing with another book of the Bible. He remembered that one of his Bible college professors had said that the Book of Romans would revolutionize any church that studies through it, so he decided to teach through Romans.[4] Like Martin Luther and John Wesley before him, Chuck experienced a personal revolution as he studied and taught through Romans. Having grown up with a "works-and-reward" understanding of the Christian life, the message of grace in Romans transformed his view of God, himself, and ministry.[5] Rather than viewing his role as primarily being to evangelize the world, he embraced the calling to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ to mature manhood (Ephesians 4:11–13).

As Chuck continued teaching through books of the Bible, he collected more resources to help himself prepare. One of his favorites was *Halley's Bible Handbook*. One day, he noticed a statement near the back of a new edition, which said that every church should have a method of systematically encouraging the congregation to read through the whole Bible. Chuck realized that, at that point, he had never actually read through the entire Bible himself. He had witnessed the benefits of teaching expositorally through books of the Bible, but now he began to consider what it would be like to take his church through the entire Bible. *Halley's Bible Handbook* recommended that, as the church reads through the Bible together, the pastor's Sunday morning sermon could come from the portion of Scripture the congregation was reading that week.[6]

This led Chuck to restructure his church's schedule altogether. He moved the adult Sunday School class to Sunday evening and turned it into a survey of the Bible, covering five to ten chapters per week. With this schedule, the church would go through the entire Bible every two years. Congregants were encouraged to read those chapters throughout the week in preparation for the Sunday evening study. The Sunday morning sermon would then be an expository message on a particular passage drawn from the chapters the congregation was reading that week.[7] This became the pattern that Pastor Chuck faithfully followed for the remainder of his ministry.

Chuck Smith's transition from a topical, evangelistic preacher to an expositor of the entire Bible may have started with a search for sermon material, but it turned into a conviction that teaching verse by verse and book by book through the whole Bible is the best way to disciple believers. This commitment has borne much fruit and is based on the belief that the Spirit of God works through the Word of God to accomplish the work of God in the hearts and minds of His people. Chuck Smith instilled confidence in the authority and power of God's Word in a generation of young people and spurred a movement that has spanned the globe and transformed countless lives.

What Is Expository Preaching?

To "exposit" is to explain. Expository teaching aims to *expose* the meaning of a biblical text by explaining its context, words, and themes. We do this by explaining it in light of the original language and historical background, and we seek to explain its practical

application and relevance to life today. John Stott describes expository preaching in this way: "The skillful expositor opens up his text, or rather permits it to open itself up before our eyes, like a rose unfolding to the morning sun and displaying its previously hidden beauty."[8] Expository preaching is text driven: Rather than beginning with an idea and looking for scriptural support for a given topic, expository preaching lets the biblical text set the agenda for the study. The goal of expository teaching is to let the Bible speak for itself.

In the majority of Calvary Chapel churches, expository preaching is done by systematic teaching through books of the Bible, verse by verse. However, we recognize that simply working through a passage verse by verse does not automatically mean that a message is expository.[9] Expository preaching is more than just a series of comments on consecutive verses in a biblical text. Rather, preaching is only expository when the structure and aim of the message reflects the structure and aim of the passage being preached. Furthermore, we recognize that it is possible to preach in an expository manner without teaching verse by verse through entire books of the Bible, as Pastor Chuck modeled for us in his Sunday morning sermons.

The Power and Benefits of Expository Teaching

We believe that the Bible is "God-breathed" —it is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. Both for the church collectively, and for every individual Christian, the Bible is the final authority in every area it addresses (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:21; John 10:35).[10] Expository preaching follows the pattern of much of the preaching seen in the New

Testament (Mark 2:2; Luke 4:16–22; Acts 8:4, 13:5, 14:25, 15:35–36, 16:6, 17:13, 20:17–31), and it puts the attention of the listeners where it belongs: on God's inspired, authoritative Word, rather than on the opinions of men.

The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, tells the story of God's saving work in the world through Jesus Christ. For this reason, we teach the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. The Old Testament is the gospel in the bud, while the New Testament reveals the gospel in full bloom.[11] Systematic, expository teaching through the entire Bible is not only helpful for the preacher, as Pastor Chuck discovered, in that the preacher will never run out of material, but it also benefits the church by protecting against doctrinal imbalance. When pastors pick topics to preach on, certain doctrines are often emphasized to the neglect of others. Whole-Bible expository teaching forces churches to address texts and topics they might otherwise be inclined to avoid.

Because we believe that God's Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:13), our goal is to expose people to the Word of God so they can experience its power in their lives. We believe in the "perspicuity" (clarity) of Scripture. *Perspicuity* is the opposite of *obscurity*. This means that we believe the average person is able to understand the central message and doctrines of the Bible without any special training because God has given us His Word in a way that is intelligible and comprehensible to attentive readers. We acknowledge that not everything in the Bible is equally perspicuous; some things in the Bible are more difficult to understand than others, and yet, those things that

are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded in Scripture that even children and the simple-minded are able to attain a sufficient understanding of them by reading the Bible for themselves.[12]

Expository teaching promotes biblical literacy, and it models good Bible reading for those who hear it. It teaches hearers how to work through passages of Scripture by showing them how to ask the right questions, consider the context, and make appropriate application. Since God's Word stands forever (Isaiah 40:6–8; 1 Peter 1:25), we believe that God speaks to people—both believers and those who do not yet believe—through His Word today. The Scriptures are perennially relevant to the needs, situations, and hearts of human beings. Therefore, one of our primary goals is to equip people to read and understand the Bible for themselves.

Hallmarks of Calvary Chapel's Approach to Expository Preaching

It is common in our churches to regularly study through books of both the Old Testament and New Testament, as we realize that they are inextricably connected and are necessary for a full understanding of God's attributes, work, and message. Furthermore, when seeking to understand particular passages, we emphasize that Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture.

Calvary Chapel's approach to expository preaching is also characterized by reliance upon the Holy Spirit. We believe that the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of prophecy, words of knowledge, and words

of wisdom, often take place as the preacher teaches from the Scriptures to the congregation. For this reason, there is a sense of expectancy in our gatherings. We believe that when we open the Bible and God's Word is taught, God speaks to those who are gathered.

Calvary Chapel churches have always aimed to teach and preach in a way that makes the Scriptures understandable and accessible to the average person, taking our inspiration from Nehemiah 8:8:

> They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

This is coupled with a focus on relevant application of the principles and teachings of Scripture to the lives of our listeners today.

The Fruit of Expository Teaching in Calvary Chapel

Our commitment to expository teaching of the whole Bible has given our churches a strong foundation in God's Word, which has provided stability and longevity in the face of an ever-changing world. Furthermore, this commitment has caused our churches to be able to plant churches and make disciples all over the world, since God's Word speaks to everyone, everywhere, at all times. Through expository teaching, many people have been equipped for the work of the ministry, and the body of Christ has been built up (Ephesians 4:12). Leaders have been raised up, missionaries sent out, and many lives changed all through the power of God's Word.

Many people, upon hearing the straightforward Bible teaching of Chuck Smith and other Calvary Chapel pastors, thought to themselves: "I could do that," and Calvary Chapel consistently told them, "Yes, you can!" and "Here's an opportunity to try!" This is my story as well.

I was born again at age 16 and joined a Calvary Chapel church in my hometown of Denver, Colorado. When I was 18, my pastor, Tom Stipe, sent me out as a missionary to Hungary. Three years later, when I was 21, Tom ordained me as a pastor, and I was sent out to plant a church. At the time, these actions did not strike me as unusual, yet now, years later, I look back on them with a sense of surprise. Why was Tom willing to take a chance on me, as young as I was? Why did he trust that I could serve the Lord in those ways without any formal training? Later on, I came to realize that the reason was because that is what Chuck Smith had done for him when Tom was a young man: In 1976, Pastor Chuck sent Tom to Colorado to start a Calvary Chapel church. In the movie *Jesus Revolution*, millions of people saw the portrayal of how Chuck Smith empowered the young Greg Laurie to plant a church in Riverside, California. The even more incredible reality is that Pastor Chuck did similar things with many young people over the years. Tom was doing for me what Chuck had modeled for him.

Tom once told me that, in his opinion, the true genius of Chuck Smith was that Chuck was willing, and even eager, to empower young people to serve the Lord in meaningful ways because he genuinely believed in the work of the Holy Spirit in and through people who were willing to make themselves available

to God. Armed with the Holy Spirit and an expository approach to Scripture, Calvary Chapel believers were equipped with the tools and principles needed to go out and make disciples by teaching others God's Word. Through their ministry, more were equipped and sent out, leading to exponential multiplication as the Word of God spread to new communities all over the world. The story of Calvary Chapel's growth mirrors the story told in the Book of Acts: "The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" (Acts 6:7 KJV).

Conclusion: A Call to Embrace the Exposition of the Entire Bible

Our commitment to expository preaching is not merely a methodology; it is a conviction rooted in the belief that God's Word is powerful, authoritative, and sufficient for equipping His people. We have witnessed how faithfully teaching through the Bible has impacted lives and communities around the world.

Since faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), and since the God-breathed Scriptures are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16–17), we encourage and invite every pastor, ministry leader, and believer to embrace the expository teaching of the whole Bible in this generation and those to come.

TWO

We Rely on the Leading of the Holy Spirit

Brian Brodersen

Expecting the Supernatural

Calvary Chapel, like other movements in history, was birthed during an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of the ministry of Calvary Chapel, there has been an expectancy and experience of God working in supernatural ways—not in overtly dramatic ways necessarily, but in quiet, subtle, and yet undeniably supernatural ways—God working supernaturally in natural ways. This makes sense when we consider that Calvary Chapel, as a fellowship of churches, has the practice of immersing themselves in the Scriptures, fully expecting God to work in ways similar to what we read about and study in the pages of the Bible. From my earliest days sitting and listening to Pastor Chuck Smith teach the Bible, I was learning to depend on the Lord first and foremost for everything, from His provision for my daily bread to His enabling power to serve Him in whatever call He had upon my life.

I think of studying the life of Elijah the Prophet and fully expecting that just as God provided for Elijah through the ravens and the widow's miraculous supply of grain and oil, He would also provide in similar ways for me. Seeing how the Spirit came upon Peter on the Day of Pentecost, anointing him to preach to the multitude, inspired me to believe God for a similar

anointing that would empower me to teach and preach His Word. Reading and studying the Bible, particularly the Book of Acts, has taught me that ministry is to be done by a proactive dependency on the Holy Spirit.

When you look at how the apostles put Jesus' command to go make disciples of all nations into action, you see them primarily praying and looking for the Holy Spirit's leading. In the Book of Acts alone, there are 55 references to the Holy Spirit's activity in the church. We see him filling, empowering, correcting, speaking, sending, directing, hindering, warning, and encouraging. We see the disciples waiting for and looking with expectancy to the Spirit, from start to finish, as the story progresses through the Book of Acts. I personally believe that Acts is the God-given template for how to be led by the Spirit in ministry and that the more we seek to emulate what we see there, the greater our experience of Spirit-empowered life and ministry will be.

The Holy Spirit and Human Wisdom

Having said all that, let me state emphatically that being led by the Spirit does not exclude us from establishing systems, structures, or strategies for ministry. We often make these issues either/or propositions when they are both/and most of the time. Recall how the Holy Spirit led the apostles to set up an organized helps ministry for the Hellenist widows who felt neglected during the daily food distribution (Acts 6). Or think of the Jerusalem Council meeting to decide the matter of the Gentile's relationship to the Law of Moses. They concluded, "It seemed good to us, and the Holy Spirit, to lay no such burden on the Gentiles" (Acts 15). Think

of Barnabas and Paul's missionary journeys. The Holy Spirit says, "Separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them to," and the church obeyed, praying for them, laying hands on them, and sending them off. Did the Holy Spirit specifically say to send them to Cyprus? Or did they develop a strategy beginning with Cyprus because Barnabas was from Cyprus and had connections there? I think it was probably the latter. After completing their first missionary journey sometime later, Paul has the idea to go back to all the places they had previously been and encourage the believers. That, of course, would have needed planning. You get the point.

Being led by the Spirit and setting up structures and systems and developing strategies are not mutually exclusive. I have heard people say we must not organize because that will quench the Spirit, implying the Spirit is somehow against organization and prefers chaos. The irony there is that the Holy Spirit is the Creator of the universe, a highly complex and organized system if there ever was one. Now granted, we can overly organize or strategize to the point that we do not leave room for the Spirit to do anything other than what we have planned. We certainly do not want to do that, but if we are committed to truly seeking to do things the Lord's way, we can be sure He will keep us from veering off into human-inspired endeavors rather than Holy Spirit-guided activity.

God Is Present and Active

In my experience, people who are led by the Spirit are those who believe the Spirit does indeed still lead us today, and they are looking to circumstances and

listening to Scripture or an inner sense that God is leading. You will oftentimes hear these people say things like "The Lord spoke to my heart," "I sensed the Lord leading me," or similar language that speaks of an expectation of God working today just as He has in the past. Now, there are lots of Christians who love Jesus and take His Word seriously but would not feel comfortable saying, with any kind of certainty, "the Lord spoke to me."

This is, for many in the church, presumptuous and even possibly dangerous. After all, if people are going around thinking God is speaking to them, they might do some crazy stuff, right? Well, that is possible, but it is also possible that God really is speaking to them, and they need to listen and obey. Is not this what we see happening in the Bible? The Lord said to Philip, "overtake this chariot." To Ananias, "arise and go to a street called straight." To the leaders gathered for worship in Antioch, "separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them to." Yes, this is what we see happening in the Bible, and there is nothing in the Bible that says this kind of activity among Christians would or should stop. We believe that the same Holy Spirit who said, "separate to me Barnabas and Saul . . ." still speaks in like manner today.

Those whom the Spirit leads are ever mindful of the supernatural origin and nature of the Christian faith and our personal relationship with God. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for they that come to Him must believe that He is . . ." Some versions read, "must believe that He exists . . ." The more literal translation is simply, "must believe that He is" (11:6). I do

not think the author is talking about belief in God's existence for the simple reason he is writing to people who have no doubt God exists. When he says, "must believe that He is," I think he is referring to the belief that God is present and is working, speaking, directing, and blessing now just as he was in the lives of those he is talking about—Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, etc.

If we lose sight that we are serving the same God as they were, who works today in different but similar ways to how He worked then, we will inevitably miss out on the leading of the Spirit and end up dependent on our own human intellect and ingenuity, potentially limiting the wisdom and power of the Spirit that is essential for the work of the ministry in all generations, right down to ours today. This kind of dependency translates practically into the kinds of things we have already mentioned seen in the Book of Acts. We plan, yes, but our plans are baptized in prayer. We strategize, yes, but we look for scriptural and prophetic confirmation over our strategies.

We use our minds and our experiences, while submitting all of that to the authority of the Spirit, giving Him permission to adjust, revise, or even scrap our plans. In a nutshell, we cultivate a life of waiting on the Lord. This is how we lead, being led by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Ministry of the Word

This dependency also works itself into the preaching and teaching ministry. Over the years, I have learned to depend on the Spirit to guide me in everything, from choosing a text to preparing the message to delivering the sermon. For years, I sensed the Lord's leading in my choice of what book of the Bible to teach

on Sunday mornings. This was unique to Sunday mornings because the evening services were dedicated to more of a through-the-Bible approach. From early on in my Sunday morning teaching/preaching ministry, I would make my way mostly through books of the New Testament and would sense the Spirit's leading from book to book. I might spend a year in the Gospel of John and then a year in Romans or Hebrews. Whatever the case, there was always a sense of direction and confirmation as to what the Spirit wanted to say to the church.

Now, of course, this is all very subjective, but that is often the way it works when being led by the Spirit. It was interesting to see the different ways the Spirit would confirm that this or that was indeed the place in Scripture He was having us camp for that season. But it was not just the particular book of the Bible I would be led to, but also the portion of Scripture for each Sunday. Sometimes it would be clear immediately; other times (actually most of the time), it would only become clear after much prayer and meditation on the text. Once that is settled, then you are left to wait on the Lord for that prophetic word from the text for His people.

The Prophetic Word

That word sometimes comes in the course of preparation where the Spirit reveals something fresh, new, and relevant for those who will hear the message. Other times, that word comes in the act of preaching. This has more often been my experience, and this is where it can get really fascinating. I have had hundreds, maybe thousands of those moments where the Spirit

has led me in preaching at places I had not planned to go, only to discover later that my unplanned foray into a story, an illustration, or even a Scripture quotation was life-altering or in some way revelatory or transforming for someone in the congregation that day. I have been told so many times how something I said in a sermon answered someone's pressing question or solved someone's seemingly unsolvable problem or was the exact word they needed to hear for their situation.

We preachers have all had these experiences, but have we realized that these are prophetic words—words of wisdom and words of knowledge? Not everyone realizes that. Years ago, I read a book on preaching by a prominent expositor who attributed those types of experiences to his broad learning, personal wisdom, and exceptional powers of recall. Unsurprisingly, he holds a theological position that sees certain gifts of the Holy Spirit as no longer operating today. This position, out of fear or ignorance, discourages people from the kind of dependence on the Spirit that I believe is exemplified and encouraged in the Scriptures. We are not cessationists but believe all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to be available to all of God's people today.

A Posture of Dependency

Now practically speaking, how do we cultivate and maintain the leading of the Spirit in regard to the ministry of teaching and preaching the Word? For me, it has been by taking to heart the words of Jesus, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b), and intentionally acting on that conviction each and every time I open my mouth to preach or teach God's Word.

Someone has said that one becomes an expert in their field after an investment of 10,000 hours, and this might be true for most, perhaps even all, vocational endeavors. One exception, I would argue, is the leading and teaching of God's people that I am talking about here.

The Christian ministry is, at its core, supernatural, and therefore does not have an exact parallel with other vocations. I have invested well over 10,000 hours but am anything but an expert. There is never a time when I am conducting the business of ministry that I am not looking for the wisdom and leading of the Holy Spirit. There is never a time that I am delivering God's Word in any context that I am not asking the Lord to empower me for the task. Although I have opened my Bible and preached from its pages tens of thousands of times, I approach it today like I did in the beginning— "Help, Lord! Give me words of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy. Speak to Your people for their good and for Your glory. Amen!"

Conclusion: A Spirit-Led Posture for a Spirit-Empowered People

If there is one thing we must never lose in Calvary Chapel, it is our expectation that God speaks, leads, and empowers today by His Spirit. From the beginning, we have been a people who not only teach the Word but rely on the Spirit—learning to hear His voice, yield to His prompting, and depend on His power.

This means cultivating a ministry posture that is humble, prayerful, and open—planning faithfully but listening carefully, teaching Scripture but leaving room

for the prophetic, organizing wisely but ready to follow the Spirit wherever He leads. May we remain not just students of the Word, but servants of the Living God. Having begun in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

THREE

We Cultivate a Culture of Grace

Richard Cimino and Mike Neglia

Introduction: The Grace That Builds Everything

The kingdom of God begins with a proclamation of grace. In His first public sermon, Jesus stood in the synagogue of His hometown, opened the scroll of Isaiah, and read:

> "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. . . . to bind up the brokenhearted . . . to proclaim freedom for the captives . . . and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
>
> *Isaiah 61; cf. Luke 4*

Then He sat down and declared, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

At first, the people marveled, but their wonder quickly turned to rage. They rose up to drive Him out of town and attempted to push Him off a cliff. Why? Because the message of grace is always unsettling: It welcomes outsiders, overturns human pride, and lifts the broken.

Jesus began His ministry with a declaration of grace—not as an ideology, but as a way of life. This grace reaches real sinners, heals real wounds, and opens the doors of the kingdom to those who could

never earn their way in. As Louis Berkhof puts it, "Grace is the free bestowal of kindness on one who has no claim to it."[13]

And this same grace is the only reason any of us stand in ministry today. Grace not only saves—it sustains. It not only forgives—it sends. It is the power by which we live, lead, and serve. Grace opens the door—and builds the house. It is the ongoing environment and foundation of every gospel-shaped church and every Spirit-led ministry.

Therefore, let this be our resolve: We who have received grace from above must proclaim it here below—not only in word, but in tone, posture, and practice. This is our calling. This is our message. And this must be the culture we cultivate in our churches and across our movement.

A Theology of Grace: God's Nature and Christ's Mission

Grace is not a peripheral doctrine. It is the very heartbeat of God's redemptive work and the foundation of Christian ministry.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord did not display raw power or dazzling light. Instead, He revealed His name and nature in words: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness . . ." (Exodus 34:6).

This is the first full self-description God gives in Scripture, and it echoes throughout the Old Testament as a kind of theological refrain. Moses appeals to it in

intercession (Numbers 14:18); David returns to it in worship (Psalm 86:15, 103:8); Nehemiah clings to it in repentance (Nehemiah 9:17); Joel calls people back to it in crisis (Joel 2:13); and Jonah begrudges it in mission (Jonah 4:2). It is not just an idea—it is Israel's hope when nothing else will do.

In Jesus, that gracious character becomes incarnate: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Grace is not God ignoring sin, it's God confronting it in love, bearing its cost Himself. Grace is receiving God's absolute best when we deserve the absolute worst. Paul says it plainly: "For by grace you have been saved through faith . . . it is the gift of God—not by works . . ." (Ephesians 2:8–9).

This grace is not only the foundation of our salvation, it is the soil in which gospel ministry takes root. Grace grows people. It nourishes healthy churches. It forms the tone of faithful leadership and the posture of Christlike service.

When Jesus read Isaiah 61, He was not just proclaiming forgiveness, He was launching a kingdom of restoration. In Him, the "year of the Lord's favor" had arrived: debts canceled, captives freed, ruins rebuilt. Grace saves, and grace sends.

Grace in the Story of Calvary Chapel

The story of Calvary Chapel began with a culture of grace.

In the late 1960s, while many churches recoiled from the counterculture, Chuck Smith opened the

doors of a small church in Costa Mesa to barefoot hippies, disillusioned dropouts, and spiritual seekers. They did not look or sound like church people, but they were welcomed.

Pastor Chuck's theology was solid, but it was his posture that shaped a movement. He did not demand people clean up first. He trusted that grace—not guilt—would do the deep work. And it did. Addicts were set free. Wanderers became worshippers. Some who had never even been to church ended up planting them.

As Chuck often said, "God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called."

That conviction ran deep. Many early Calvary pastors had no formal theological education. Some were fresh out of addiction. But they were given Bibles, training, pulpits, and trust. Chuck's confidence was not in credentials, it was in the Spirit of God working through His Word and His people. Through that simple trust, an entire generation was raised up—and the world was changed.

And that same culture continued forward. I (Mike) can personally attest to it. I will never forget how, as a very young pastor leading a very small congregation in a small European city, I found myself welcomed into the wider Calvary Chapel family. I had not earned respect or built a platform, yet I was invited to the table. Older pastors gave me their time and wisdom without demanding I prove myself.

I remember confiding in one of them that I felt completely in over my head teaching through Romans

for the first time. A few weeks later, a heavy box arrived, overflowing with hardcover commentaries on Romans. I am forever thankful for the Rob Dingmans, the David Guziks, the Nick Longs, the Joe Fochts, and the Brian Brodersens who replied to my emails, picked up the phone, prayed with me, and sent those resources across the Atlantic Ocean.

That is what grace looks like in ministry—giving rather than gatekeeping, welcoming rather than suspecting, pulling up chairs rather than drawing lines.

The Danger of Losing Grace: When Theology and Culture Drift Apart

It is possible to preach grace from the pulpit and yet create a culture of pressure, performance, and fear. When that happens, we are not just contradicting our doctrine, we are confusing people about the heart of God.

Paul confronted this very drift in Galatia. They began with grace but tried to continue by effort. He writes: "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3 ESV).

This is not just a risk for ancient churches. It is a danger for every movement—including ours. Over time, churches known for welcome and flexibility can become rigid. Conferences that once felt like family reunions can feel like insider events. Leadership pathways that once favored calling can drift toward credentialing. Slowly, subtly, we begin building the walls we were once known for tearing down.

I (Richard) know from painful personal experience how easy it is to drift from grace even in ministry. After a few years on staff at Calvary Chapel, a gulf opened between my theology of grace and the way I actually lived—as a man, husband, and pastor. Ministry had taken the place of my Redeeming King. By default, my marriage and family became collateral damage.

It was the morning of a pastors' conference on the grounds of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. Before heading out the door for the conference, I had been my usual self—ungracious, inconsiderate, and self-absorbed. My wife looked in my eyes and said, "I have learned to live alone. I have no feelings for you. I am not going to leave you because I made a promise to God, but I have nothing for you." Stunned and numb, I handed my office keys to Pastor Chuck's assistant, saying, "I cannot be a pastor." The assistant listened, handed the keys back, and quietly said, "I have seen worse."

Soon after, I traveled to Austria for a ministry trip I had no heart for. Miserable and restless, I stayed at a small bed and breakfast. One sleepless morning, I found an old hymnal on the nightstand and wandered into a nearby field. As I opened the hymnal, it fell to "My Jesus, I Love Thee."

When I reached the second stanza,

> "I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,
> And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;
> I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;
> If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now"

It was as if heaven itself opened. Grace flooded my weary heart. I realized, with new clarity, that I was

receiving God's absolute best at the very moment I deserved His absolute worst.

But that grace did not leave me where it found me. It restored my marriage. It reshaped my ministry. It changed how I counseled others, how I taught the Word, and how I lived as a follower of Christ. Grace did not give me a free pass, it gave me a new heart.

It was a rediscovery that has marked me ever since. And it served as a warning: It is dangerously easy to preach grace yet drift into a culture of pressure, performance, and fear.

J. I. Packer put it clearly: "A church's life must reflect its theology."[14] If we preach grace, we must cultivate a culture that breathes it—in how we lead, restore, disciple, and empower.

We must ask: Are we still making space for the unlikely leader? Are we still quick to restore the fallen? Are our churches places of rest for the weary or proving grounds for the gifted?

Grace in Three Directions: Proclaiming What We Have Received

The reality of grace must be continuously proclaimed. If grace does not flow continuously to the world, the church, and ourselves, it risks turning from a living stream into a stagnant pond.

Grace to the World

Our cities, towns, and villages are filled with people for whom grace is not just unfamiliar, it is almost inconceivable. We live in a culture of hostility and

high stakes where honest mistakes can cost you your job, a misstep on social media can spark outrage, and a political disagreement can sever family ties. In a world where people feel the constant gaze of an unforgiving panopticon, many live on edge, afraid of being exposed or canceled. It creates a culture of fear, not freedom—of silence, not safety.

But we get to proclaim the gospel of grace to them.

This grace is not leniency. God has standards, but they are written down, not shifting with trends or expectations. And behind those standards is a heart of deep, holy, sincere love for sinners and sufferers.

We get to tell the world that God does not look on them with disgust, but with cleansing love: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

That promise is not abstract, it is an IV drip into the dehydrated soul, an ocean of refreshment for the parched and thirsty sinner. The undeserving are offered not just a place at the table but adoption into the family and an inheritance that will never fade.

Evangelism is not a recruitment drive, it is a rescue mission. And grace is the invitation.

But grace does not stop at the doorstep of conversion. It must fill the household of faith.

Grace to the Church

It is one thing to preach salvation by grace. It is another thing to disciple people in grace. Many Christians believe the gospel but live like growth

depends on them—as if God welcomed them in with kindness but now expects perfection to keep them around.

Paul rebuked this exact mindset: "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3 ESV).

Graceless Christianity does not just miss the mark, it dehydrates and impoverishes people. It drags them down with the weight of self-reliance. It wearies the sincere and rewards the performers. But when grace truly shapes a church's culture, people begin to rest, confess, and grow—not to earn love, but because they already have it.

Discipleship becomes joy, not burden; people are known by their belovedness, not measured by usefulness. A grace-shaped church walks slowly with the weak, gives second chances, and celebrates every small step toward Jesus.

As Paul urged the believers in Pisidia to "continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43), we must do the same. We must proclaim the year of the Lord's favor—not once, but rhythmically and consistently.

And if grace is to shape our churches, it must first be rooted in the hearts of those who lead them.

Grace to Ourselves

Leaders are not immune from legalism. In fact, we often carry it most subtly—in our self-talk, our internal pressure, our burnout. We preach grace but forget to live in it. We encourage others to rest, but quietly punish ourselves for being tired.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If we do not receive grace daily, we will minister in fear or fatigue. The result will be churches shaped more by our anxiety than by God's mercy.

We are not just workers in God's house, we are His children (see 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 4:6–7). Ministry must flow from that identity, or it will grind us down. Leaders who know they are loved lead very differently from those who are trying to prove they are worthy.

Grace as a Missional Posture

Grace does not just restore, it releases. It not only saves the sinner, it sends the servant—just as Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4 where those who receive the year of the Lord's favor are commissioned as rebuilders and restorers.

In Isaiah 61, the ones who receive the year of the Lord's favor do not stay seated, they are raised up as "oaks of righteousness" and "rebuilders of ancient ruins." Those who have tasted grace become agents of restoration. That same flow runs through the gospel and the church—grace received becomes grace extended.

We have seen this before. The grace that birthed Calvary Chapel—raising up unlikely leaders and sending them into the harvest—must now propel us forward. The world does not need a more efficient church, it needs a more gracious one. And the next generation does not need to be dazzled, they need to be trusted, trained, shepherded, and sent with the same grace we have received.

Conclusion: Grace Is Our Message and Our Manner

Jesus began His public ministry with a declaration of grace.

He stood in the synagogue, opened the scroll, and proclaimed good news to the poor, liberty for captives, and the year of the Lord's favor. And now, He calls us to carry on that work—not just in word, but in tone, posture, and presence.

We who have received grace from above must proclaim it here below.

The message we preach must shape the culture we cultivate. Grace is not just a doctrine we affirm; it must be the reflex of our hearts, the rhythm of our ministries, the instinct of our lives.

And as we carry this grace forward, may we steward it well, extend it widely, and entrust it boldly to those who will take it further than we ever could.

FOUR

We Engage with Every Generation

Brian Kelly and Wayne Taylor

I (Wayne) was raised by my mother, Betty Taylor, a strong and faithful woman of God who was part of the Assemblies of God. My father, Dean, was a raging alcoholic. But despite the chaos he brought into our home, he left me one unexpected gift—he taught me to play his beautiful Gibson guitar. It was a small light in a dark space, and somehow, that guitar became part of the story God was writing.

I started a Christian rock band in the Pacific Northwest called The Brethren. Not long after, I had the chance to meet Pastor Chuck Smith personally, along with bands like Love Song, Mustard Seed Faith, and Oden Fong. That encounter only deepened my love for the Word and for the work God was doing through Calvary Chapel. Around that time, I also began leading a Bible study with a small group of friends—young people who, like me, were hungry to know God and study His Word verse by verse.

That Bible study eventually grew into a church, one that was overflowing with young people, radical converts who loved Jesus, loved the Word, and wanted to reach their generation. But to many of the established churches in the region, we looked more like a problem than a move of God. Our music, our appearance, our youth—they all raised eyebrows. We were often met with suspicion, sometimes even resistance. But when Chuck

saw what was happening, he did not critique it—he celebrated it. He recognized that the Spirit was at work, and instead of trying to rein it in, he encouraged us to keep going. That affirmation from someone older, wiser, and faithful in ministry gave us the confidence to press on. Chuck believed in what God was doing in us—and that helped us believe it too.

What began as a Bible study among friends eventually became a movement. Those same young men—and others after them—began to grow into pastors, teachers, and evangelists. They planted churches and poured into others, just as I had poured into them. They launched churches all over the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Young missionaries began sensing the call to go even further. David Barber planted a church near Boston. Juan Espinoza went down to New Mexico. Nick Long, a missionary evangelist through music, took the gospel to Siegen, Germany. Our bands followed, playing gospel music that led scores of young people to Christ. Nick began a Bible study, then Sunday services, and shortly after, Calvary Chapel Siegen had become one of the largest churches in the country.

And then came one of the most exciting opportunities of all: Russia. During the era of President Gorbachev, when new freedoms were opening up for speech and religion, we were invited to preach and plant churches. I had the privilege of traveling to Russia ten times on church-planting trips. We planted churches in Omsk, Kirov, two in Saint Petersburg, two in Moscow, and several others. Nine out of ten of those churches are still going strong today—growing, thriving, and raising up new generations of Russian believers.

After decades of fruitful ministry in Seattle, we began to see the same thing happen in our kids' generation. The passion and calling we had seen among our peers was now rising up in our sons and their friends. Young men like Mike Monjay and Justin Thomas began carrying the vision forward with fresh gifts and deep conviction—planting new churches and strengthening existing ones. They were not simply maintaining what had come before, they were reaching their generation, just as we had reached ours.

As for my own sons, Riley Taylor eventually became the lead pastor of Mountlake Church—the very first Calvary Chapel planted in Washington State. Nick Taylor took over the church he had helped plant alongside Justin Thomas: Calvary the Hill. And Jordan Taylor stepped into pastoral ministry at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, serving alongside Chuck's grandson. Watching them embrace their calling and lead others has been one of the greatest joys of my life.

The same is true for so many others we raised up—equipped by the Word, filled with the Spirit, and committed to the mission of Jesus.

Looking back, I am in awe. I never imagined God would do so much through simple obedience, a hunger for His Word, and a commitment to raising up the next generation. But that is exactly what He did.

And He is still doing it.

I (Brian) first met Pastor Wayne after a midweek church service in Seattle, Washington. It was the late 90s, and I had just graduated from Calvary Chapel Bible College. As a young man, I was passionate about

serving Christ. I wanted to see my fellow young people get saved and discipled in the same way that I had. A few key leaders were actively reaching the youth at the time, with Wayne Taylor playing a significant role in the movement. That midweek service at Calvary Fellowship (later renamed Mountlake Church) opened my eyes to the potential of churches preaching the gospel cross-generationally. God is still reaching people today like He did back then.

In this chapter, I will share a few key elements that have helped Calvary Chapel engage and reach young people with the gospel. Actively engaging with every generation has been a key component of what God is doing in our movement, and we can identify five areas of focus that have led to this success.

Sharing the Message of Jesus

The first key to engagement that has proved so effective in the Calvary Chapel Movement is the centrality of Jesus in our proclamation. "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2). This message seems like a no-brainer for biblical Christians, yet we see so many churches and ministries preaching a different gospel than the one we have received (see Galatians 1:6–8).

Take a minute to think about the youth of our generation. They are hungry for spiritual substance. They are out there looking for answers. They search through social media, entertainment outlets, education institutions, and other avenues looking for significance in our secular culture. As Christians, we know that they are looking in all the wrong places. But they do not yet

realize that what they are really searching for is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT).

When reaching youth today, we must focus on what truly matters in the long run—Jesus. We are wasting our time trying methods, programs, and practices that are humanistic or man-centered when what people need is simplicity in Christ. As one of my old college professors profoundly put it: "KISS: Keep it simple, stupid."

Simplicity in Christ is the key to unlocking the hearts and minds of our current generation. We do not need a new fad or focus; we just need to get back to the original message of the love of Jesus. Let us not sacrifice the clear presentation of the love of God in Jesus Christ for an inferior message, catering to what we think people want to hear. True and lasting change comes through Jesus.

> In Christ alone, my hope is found
> He is my light, my strength, my song
> This Cornerstone, this solid ground
> Firm through the fiercest drought and storm[15]

The timeless gospel is the essential ingredient for engaging with ***every*** generation, and none is beyond the gospel's reach. Engaging with every generation begins with believing that we have good news—the best, most important news—for them, so we proclaim it boldly.

Teaching God's Word

Calvary Chapel is expressed in many unique ways across our more than 1,500 fellowships worldwide. If

you go to ten different Calvary Chapels, you will find ten different pastors with ten different ways of doing church. What does not change, however, from church to church within Calvary Chapel is the verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word. Church growth experts cannot figure out the success of Calvary Chapel. How can a humble church movement, with common pastors, have so much impact by just teaching the Bible? And when it comes to reaching young people, these experts tell us that our "simply teach the Bible simply" approach should be the first thing to go. "When you want to grow a church or reach young people," they tell us, "a common Bible study is not going to be exciting enough to capture their hearts." But I have seen and experienced that, when taught correctly, there is nothing more exciting than God's Word.

As we look at church history, times of revival among young people begins with a return to the systematic teaching of God's Word. And we have found that what young people want is substance over sensationalism and depth over hype. Expository preaching is not a barrier to reaching young people—it is the bridge.

Meeting People Where They Are

Though I grew up in the church and was slowly finding my way back, I will never forget the day I walked into a Bible study at a local café—hoping for grace, but finding something else instead.

At the time, I was still smoking cigarettes—and I definitely smelled like it. One of the greeters who had initially welcomed me quickly pulled me aside to share his concerns. He spent a few minutes telling me how harmful cigarettes were and that I was sinning because

my body was supposed to be the temple of the Lord. He quoted Scripture and made his point within the first few minutes of my arrival. As a result, I felt judged and out of place in the group, and I never went back to that study.

I once heard a wise pastor and evangelist say that we are fishers of men, but we are called to catch the fish and then let God do the work of cleaning them. "Try cleaning a fish before catching it. It just does not work," he said. Today, through legalism and hypocrisy, we run the risk of chasing away the very people we are called to reach. In my case, this Bible study brother, though well meaning, limited his church's ability to "clean" the youth that were coming through their door. When we try to clean the fish before we catch them, we not only forget our role, we risk empty nets.

As Christians, we have biblical standards and moral expectations for godly living. But we must also give our young people time to learn and grow by meeting them where they are—sin and all. We have seen that over time, God will do His transformative work in their hearts by His grace.

Giving Them a Place to Belong

As a young pastor, I remember hearing the story of Chuck Smith and the beginning of Calvary Chapel. I was fascinated by the way he reached out to the young hippies of his day, how he welcomed them into the traditional church and even said he would rip out the carpet for them. He gave them a place to belong and was willing to take a risk on having the young people influence men and women in his congregation, and it paid off.

The movement grew because, even after the hippies were saved, Pastor Chuck continued to pour into them and believe in them. He put them in positions of leadership, sent them out to plant churches, and even entrusted them with weekly Bible study opportunities. It was not just a separate ministry for young people, it was an intentional effort to engage them and provide a place where they truly belonged.

Giving young people a place to belong looks like showing them practically that they are not just projects but partners. We encourage them to recognize that God can use them—their unique gifts and even their cultural backgrounds—to reach their peers for Christ. When they understand that they have a purpose in the church, they will make a lasting impact on those around them.

I know it can be scary to welcome people from the younger culture into our lives and churches, but this is what God has blessed in the Calvary movement and will continue to bless.

> We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.
>
> *Psalm 78:4*

Looking to the Future

At the end of the Bible study that Wednesday night at Wayne's church, I came away from the service with a couple of memorable emotions. First, I was surprised by how simple and uneventful the service was. There were no cries of revival, tears of joy, or newsworthy moments. It was just a bunch of people, young and

old, worshipping God and studying the Bible together. Second, even though the service was uneventful, I felt a sense of hope for the future. Pastor Wayne did not just teach the Bible as a collection of old stories about heroes and past miracles. He made it clear that God was not done working. He spoke with the expectation that God would use us, that we were part of His plan, and that miracles did not just happen in the past, but we could see them happen in the present.

> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.
>
> *Romans 5:5*

Conclusion: From One Generation to the Next

Young people today are desperate for real hope—something deeper than fleeting emotions or temporary solutions. We must actively engage with every generation by sharing the message of Jesus, teaching God's Word, meeting people where they are, and showing them that they have a place in the church. We cannot just preach at them, but we invest in them, disciple them, and give them opportunities to use their gifts for God's glory.

We must not miss the opportunity to equip this next generation to step into God's purpose for their lives—both in Christ and within the church. They will be the ones to reach their generation and the key to reaching every generation that follows.

FIVE

We Live in Anticipation of Christ's Return

Justin Thomas

Our church plant in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle began, as so many Calvary Chapels do, as a prayer meeting in a tiny studio apartment. Every Tuesday, a group of 20-somethings gathered to eat together and pray for the neighborhood. At some point, the Lord led us to 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, and it became a defining passage for the church we believed God wanted to establish:

> For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God . . . and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

As we continued to reflect on this verse, we shaped our prayers around becoming a church marked by testimony ("they themselves report"), transformation ("how you turned"), and anticipation ("wait for his Son"). For a time, we jokingly referred to it as "the Church of the Eschaton"—the Church of the End.

It may seem surprising that a room full of young people, with all their ambition and their whole lives ahead of them, would be so focused on the return of Christ. This was 2010—decades past the golden age of end-times enthusiasm, and right in the throes of the young, restless, and Reformed movement, when literal

readings of Revelation were often dismissed as uneducated or even embarrassing. But having grown up in Calvary Chapel, we understood that our lives—and our ministry—would be primarily defined by a future event outside of our control: the day Christ returns. Like Martin Luther, we lived with only two days on our calendar: this day and that day.

The emphasis on the return of Christ does not originate with the fads of the 1970s and '80s, or even with the Reformation—it reflects the mindset of the New Testament Church. The return of Christ is mentioned over 300 times across the New Testament's 260 chapters—an average of roughly one reference every 25 verses. For comparison, the resurrection (both Christ's and ours) is mentioned about 100 times.

The return of Christ is not an optional or secondary doctrine—it is a defining belief of orthodox Christianity. More than that, for the churches planted by Jesus' apostles, it was the lens through which they viewed their entire lives. They were a waiting church—a people who saw themselves as citizens of another kingdom, eagerly anticipating their returning King.

Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20), and he calls believers to "wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). This eager expectation shaped their worship, their mission, and their endurance through suffering.

The spirit of the early church was captured in a single Aramaic word **Maranatha:** "*Our Lord, come!*"

(1 Corinthians 16:22). It was not merely a slogan but a prayer, a heartbeat of longing that pulsed through the first generations of Christians. To live as a follower of Christ was to live with your eyes on the horizon, waiting for His promised return.

This longing was not vague or generic, it was shaped by the many facets of Christ's promised return, each stirring a distinct hope in the hearts of believers.

We long for justice, as we anticipate the Tribulation, when God's righteous judgments will finally be poured out on a rebellious world (Revelation 6–19).

We long for victory, as we await the Second Coming, when Christ will return in glory to overthrow evil and establish His reign (Revelation 19:11–16).

We long for peace, as we look forward to the Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus will rule on the earth with perfect righteousness, fulfilling His promises to Israel and the nations (Revelation 20:1–6).

We long for wholeness, as we set our hearts on the New Heaven and New Earth, when all things will be made new and we will dwell with God forever (Revelation 21–22).

And yes—the Rapture of the Church—where our longing becomes most personal. We do not merely await Christ's triumph over the world; we await His coming for us. As Jesus promised, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come back and take you to be with me" (John 14:2–3).

For us, the return of Christ is not just the conclusion of history, it is the fulfillment of every hope and

the deeply personal promise that the One who loved us will come again to bring us home.

Of course, this multi-stage view of the return of Christ is only one among many Christian perspectives on the end times, but Calvary Chapel's historic insistence on a dispensational (pre-trib, pre-mil) view flows directly from another of the values highlighted in this book: embracing the exposition of the whole Bible.

One of the members of my congregation in Seattle grew up in the Reformed tradition. He was familiar with expository teaching and had primarily experienced pastors working through books of the Bible. However, one day while driving, he saw a Calvary Chapel advertising that they were currently teaching through the Book of Revelation. He thought to himself, *My church claims to be a Bible church, but I have never heard a series through the Book of Revelation.* Curious, he visited the Calvary Chapel—and he has been with Calvary Chapels ever since.

At Calvary, we go beyond affirming that the whole Bible is Christian Scripture; we are committed to teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This commitment means we regularly work through not only apocalyptic books like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation, but also the substantial prophetic texts of the Old Testament—with all their promises of world-shaking judgment, the restoration of Israel, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the earthly reign of the Messiah.

When you couple that with our expository impulse—to explain the simple, plain meaning of the text—it naturally leads us toward embracing a pretribulational, premillennial view of the end times.

As William Newell once said, "If the Word of God does not mean what it says, then who can say what it means?"

However, the value we are exploring in this chapter—"Live in anticipation of Christ's return"—is not fulfilled simply by teaching on the Rapture or hosting endless prophecy conferences. It is not about merely believing the right things about Christ's return, but about living as if that return is definitive, royal, and imminent.

The Return of Christ Is Definitive

Whatever our ministry—whether in the local church, the mission field, or the marketplace—we serve a single Master, longing to hear only two words: *"Well done."* We know that the value of our ministry, and the very significance of our lives, will not be defined by the perceptions of the world, our church members, or even our fellow pastors, but by the King of kings when He returns.

And Jesus warned repeatedly that on that day, there would be many surprises. He spoke of servants who assumed they were faithful but were found wanting (Matthew 24:45–51), of virgins who thought they were ready but were shut out (Matthew 25:1–13), and of those who cried out, *"Lord, Lord,"* yet were unknown to Him (Matthew 7:21–23). Size does not demonstrate blessing, convention does not equate to calling, and hypocrisy and deception have a shelf life. Everything will be exposed when Christ returns.

As such, we hold both praise and criticism lightly (and honestly, I am not sure which is harder). We know

that every judgment here on earth is temporary and flawed—even our own (1 Corinthians 4:3–4). While we never forsake the wisdom found in many counselors (Proverbs 11:14) or neglect the responsibility to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), there is an appearance of rugged independence that flows from our deeper dependence on a single Judge. What we want most—for ourselves and for others—is simply that each one would do what Jesus is telling them to do.

One of the greatest dangers we face in Christian ministry is believing ourselves competent to judge another's ministry—perhaps only rivaled by the temptation to hand down the verdict ourselves. This temptation is especially strong today, where opposition and criticism often draw a crowd. It is easy to present ourselves as the true and faithful church by acting as watchdogs against others, but that posture belongs more to modern pundits—and ancient Pharisees—than to true servants of Christ.

In the end, we will not answer to critics or admirers, but to Christ Himself. Our task is not to build our reputation, defend our image, or tear others down—it is to be found faithful when the Master returns.

The Return of Christ Is Royal

When Christ comes again, it will be to establish His kingdom in full. That is not to say Christ is not already reigning, but what has been inaugurated is not yet consummated. We, the church of Christ, live between the two comings as representatives of the coming kingdom. In the language of Jonathan Leeman, the church is an **eschatological embassy**[16]—we represent a foreign power not from across the sea, but from across time.

Though we live here on earth, we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), representing the kingdom that is soon to come. We live according to the values of our homeland, and we speak as ambassadors of the King of kings and Lord of lords, calling all people to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). And although we serve the powers that be as part of our witness, we do so as free people—not slaves to the kingdoms of this world (1 Peter 2:13–16).

Because the Bible teaches that the kingdom will only come in its fullness when Christ returns, we do not see ourselves as builders of the kingdom, but as witnesses to it. Unlike other eschatological viewpoints, **Christendom**—the attempt to establish God's kingdom through political or cultural dominance—is not the church's agenda.

This is not a call to pietism or escapism. How could proclaiming Jesus as Lord be anything but political? Rather, it means that our political engagement is primarily about loving our neighbors, speaking prophetically to those in power, and embodying the humility of Christ—as servants, not lords (Matthew 20:25–28). We neither put our trust in princes, nor play the part of revolutionaries; we live as ambassadors of a kingdom that is not of this world.

The goal of our ministry is not to create heaven on earth, and our work will not usher in utopia. Until Christ returns and establishes His reign in full, we should expect to encounter brokenness, failure, and frustration—not only in the world, but even within the church. Faithfulness to Christ is no guarantee of visible success or present perfection. In fact, Scripture

prepares us for the opposite: a creation that groans (Romans 8:22–23), a church that wrestles with weakness (2 Corinthians 4:7), and a field where wheat and weeds grow side by side until the end (Matthew 13:24–30). We are not called to eliminate imperfection or usher in the kingdom ourselves—we are called to bear faithful witness until the King Himself appears.

Of course, there are other kingdoms besides nations and governments. Proclaiming Christ as King also cautions us against building our own little kingdoms. Every leadership model has its weaknesses, no matter its strengths. In Calvary Chapel, when you combine independent churches with senior-pastor leadership, one particular danger emerges: the temptation to build a personal kingdom in the name of Christ.

When a leader builds their own little kingdom, the signs are usually easy to spot—at least for those willing to look. Loyalty becomes more about the man than about Christ. Criticism is treated as betrayal rather than counsel. Success is measured by personal influence rather than by faithfulness to the Word. Structures are shaped not to serve the mission, but to protect the position of the leader. Gradually, what was once ministry in the name of Christ begins to operate more like a fiefdom, with the leader as its unchallenged lord.

But Christ will not share His glory. When He returns, He will not only topple the kingdoms of this world, He will also bring down every self-made throne within the church. He stands in opposition to all rivals, even those who have built in His name but not by His Spirit. Every leader, every ministry, every church will be weighed not by its platform, size, or following, but

by its faithfulness to the King. On that day, only one kingdom will stand—and it will not be ours, but His. In light of that coming day, we must labor not to magnify ourselves, but to proclaim and prepare for the reign of the true and only King.

The Return of Christ Is Imminent

The New Testament church lived as if Jesus could return at any moment. Their eager anticipation shaped everything they did—and at times, made them vulnerable to confusion and false teaching. Some in Thessalonica were unsettled by rumors that the day of the Lord had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2), while others needed reassurance that those who had died would not be left behind (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Peter warned believers that scoffers would come, mocking the promise of His return and insisting that all things would continue as they always had (2 Peter 3:3–4).

Their hope was not fueled by naïveté or misplaced enthusiasm, it was grounded in a doctrinal reality that remains just as true today as it was then—*Christ's return is truly imminent.* Today could be the day that Jesus calls His church and we are caught up together with Him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This imminence is not a license for passive waiting or idle cloud-gazing (Acts 1:11), but it instills a deep urgency in our work—especially in the proclamation of the gospel.

Anyone who knows me will affirm that I believe in institutions. I believe in building ministries to last for generations—ministries shaped by Spirit-filled planning and sustained by long-term vision. But like a game of musical chairs, I know that one day, suddenly,

the music will stop and the game will be over. That certainty means that woven through all our long-term faithfulness must be an urgency for today's work.

We labor with one eye on the horizon and one hand to the plow. We plan for the future, but we live ready for the trumpet today. Our ministries must be built with faithfulness that endures—but with urgency that refuses to waste a single day. Christ is coming soon, and when He appears, may He find us faithfully at work.

Conclusion: Living in Light of the End

We are not the first generation to long for His return, and we may not be the last. But we are the ones entrusted with today. We live as citizens of a coming kingdom, bearing witness in a broken world, working not for our own glory, but for the day when Christ alone will be exalted. Until then, we watch, we wait, we work—and we hold fast to the sure promise: "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20). Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

SIX

We Promote Servant Leadership

Ted Leavenworth and Bruce Zachary

The Call to a Different Kind of Leadership

Leadership in organizations takes many forms, shaped by underlying values and assumptions. Some models, like autocratic leadership, rely on control and command; others, like transformational leadership, emphasize inspiration and vision. Yet even the best of these often focus on personal charisma, organizational achievement, or hierarchical authority. In contrast, servant leadership turns the model upside down. Rather than seeking to lead through power, persuasion, or prestige, it begins by choosing to serve. Rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this radically different approach is deeply embedded in Calvary Chapel culture, which calls leaders not to elevate themselves, but to lower themselves for the good of others.

The teachings of Jesus reveal that servant leadership is not merely a leadership style but a way of life—rooted in sacrificial service, humility, and the building of true community. Promoting servant leadership means actively cultivating this way of life, not only through teaching but through consistent, visible practice. It requires more than endorsing the idea; it demands a culture where service is celebrated, modeled, and multiplied in every layer of the church.

In a church shaped by this kind of culture, leadership does not hinge on talent, charisma, or influence, as the world often measures it. Instead, leaders are recognized because they have proven themselves faithful, humble, and devoted to the good of God's people. They are not lifted up because they stand apart from the congregation, but because they have served among it. Likewise, volunteers and staff are welcomed and encouraged to exercise their gifts within this servant culture, as the whole body experiences the interdependent beauty of Christ's church—a unified community of encouragement, support, and mutual advancement.

The Foundation of Servant Leadership: Jesus Christ as the Model

The ultimate example of servant leadership is found in the life of Jesus Christ. In Mark 10:45, Jesus Himself provides the foundation for this model: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Here is the King of kings and Lord of lords—the One before whom every knee will bow—declaring that His mission was not to claim service but to offer it. The rightful Ruler of all chose to stoop low, meeting our deepest needs through sacrifice. In Jesus, true greatness is redefined: leadership is inseparable from humility, and authority is expressed through service. He is not only the model of servant leadership; He is its source.

Jesus demonstrated this priority of service when He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:13–15):

> You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

In this act of humility, Jesus embodied the essence of servant leadership—service and sacrifice.

Leadership in His kingdom is not measured by status, but by service; not by climbing higher, but by stooping lower. If Christ, the rightful King, chose to serve in the humblest way, then no act of service is beneath His followers.

Yet even among Christ's disciples, there was a constant temptation to pursue leadership the world's way—through power, position, and pride.

In Matthew 20:20–28, James and John sought prominent positions in Jesus' kingdom. Their request revealed the world's natural definition of leadership: authority, influence, and status. But Jesus corrected their understanding, declaring that greatness in His kingdom is not about ruling over others, but about becoming their servant.

The world's leaders often pursue power for personal gain, leveraging position for recognition and control. While servant leadership has become a popular concept in the marketplace, it is often used merely as a strategy to achieve organizational goals. In contrast, Jesus' model of servant leadership is not a tactic but a truth: it is about sacrificially giving one's life for the benefit of others, not manipulating service for personal success.

If we are not careful, the world's pattern of leadership will subtly seep into the church—where leaders seek prominence rather than embodying Christ's humility. True servant leadership resists this drift. It calls leaders to lower themselves, not elevate themselves; to embrace obscurity rather than celebrity; and to find greatness not in being served but in serving.

At Calvary Chapel, this principle finds tangible expression. Leaders are encouraged not only to preach about service but to model it personally—even through simple, unseen tasks like setting up chairs or emptying trash. True servant leadership is not glamorous; it is displayed in meeting needs quietly, consistently, and sacrificially—just as Jesus did.

Indeed, Ephesians 2:10 reminds believers that they are created in Christ for good works—and that serving others is not just imitating Christ's example, but fulfilling one's unique role in His body, thereby strengthening the health and growth of the community.

The message is clear: Jesus connected greatness with service, and this is the heart of leadership. It all begins with the right attitude—one of humility and service to God through serving others. Therefore, leaders must relinquish the desire for recognition and embrace a humble posture, choosing to serve rather than to seek personal glory.

The Heart of Humility and Others-Centeredness

Humility is central to promoting servant leadership. In Matthew 11:28–29, Jesus describes Himself as "gentle and humble of heart." Humility involves devotion and dependence on God, thinking less of oneself,

and esteeming others better than oneself. It is an others-centered mindset, where we seek to serve others' interests, as Paul urges in Philippians 2:3–8.

Moses' humility is highlighted in Numbers 12:3, where he is described as the humblest man on earth. Though Moses authored these words, they reflect God's assessment of him as His servant. Similarly, Jesus, being God, relinquished His divine reputation to serve humanity. The desire for reputation and status is contrary to humility and servanthood.

True humility involves decreasing so that others—and ultimately God—may increase. As the saying goes, "There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." A focus on the divine will, not personal glory, leads to a more effective and impactful ministry. When individuals prioritize serving God's purposes without seeking human praise, they cultivate a more fertile ground for God's work to flourish.

The Role of Service in Leadership

In the Gospels, especially in Mark 6, we see Jesus demonstrating service in action. When faced with a large crowd needing food, He told His disciples to feed them. Despite the logistical challenges, Jesus exhorted them to serve—not from their abundance but from their lack. Similarly, in Luke 5:1–11, Peter's obedience led to a miraculous catch of fish, showing how sacrificial service can lead to extraordinary results. Both examples underscore that servant leadership involves sacrificial participation and that faithful service often brings miraculous outcomes.

Several years ago, I (Ted) experienced firsthand the power of servant leadership.

At the time, our church was young and growing, but we had very limited resources. We had outgrown the local school where we were meeting, and we desperately needed a larger space—but we had no clear solution.

Across town, there was an older church with a large property but a dwindling congregation. Burdened for the future, we approached them with a proposal to merge and continue ministry together. After some hesitation, they agreed to meet with me and our elders.

At that meeting, I led them in a study through Luke 5:1–11—the story where Jesus got into Peter's boat, led him into deeper water, and filled the nets to overflowing. I shared that just as Peter, along with his partners in the "other boat," had worked together to bring in the catch (filling both boats in the process)—we also had an opportunity to partner together to bring in a miraculous catch.

In the end, they decided to entrust their property and ministry to the work God was doing and they merged into our church. It was not an easy decision, but it was a kingdom-minded one—choosing partnership and gospel advance over comfort or control.

Their decision had a profound impact on the future of our church, and I deeply appreciated their sacrifice. It was a meaningful example of servant leadership: setting aside personal interests to prioritize the greater mission of Christ.

In a true servant leadership model, individuals are motivated by love and a desire to contribute, not by personal gain. This is evident in the way leaders serve and empower others, rather than seeking to be served.

From Consumerism to Community

In a world saturated with consumerism, it is easy—even in the church—to slip into a transactional mindset: attending services to receive rather than to contribute, measuring value by personal benefit rather than communal growth. But the body of Christ was never meant to function like a marketplace. It was designed to operate like a family, a living organism where each member gives, serves, and builds up others in love. Moving from consumerism to community requires a recovery of servant leadership: selflessness, humility, and a commitment to the good of others.

Paul warns against this consumer mentality within the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:14–21, he stresses that no member is dispensable. The church is not meant to operate like a business transaction, where people serve to receive something in return. Instead, it is rooted in the principle that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

True servant leadership requires selflessness and a commitment to giving rather than receiving. Jesus Himself warns against performing good deeds for the sake of recognition. In Matthew 6:1–4, He emphasizes that service should not be driven by the desire for applause or accolades but motivated by the desire to please God. When recognition or praise is absent, it reveals the purity of our motives. If we serve only to be seen, we miss the very essence of servant leadership.

Serving God through serving others must come from the heart, not for external validation.

This transformation from a consumer to a contributor also involves recognizing the role of spiritual gifts within the church. Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 12:7–12 provide a deeper understanding of how each individual plays a vital role in the health of the body. Every believer is given a spiritual gift for the edification of the community, and no role is insignificant. Whether one's calling is to teach, serve, encourage, or heal, every gift matters—and every act of service builds up the whole.

Leaders, too, have a vital role in this shift. In Ephesians 4:11–16, Paul describes how leaders are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, empowering others to contribute actively to the church's maturity. This model contrasts sharply with a consumer mentality. Instead of asking, "What can I get from this?" the heart of the servant leader—and of the healthy church member—asks, "What can I give?" and "How can I build others up?"

When believers use their gifts not for personal status but for the common good, the relationships within the church are transformed. No longer transactional or self-focused, the church becomes a true community—characterized by sacrificial service, mutual encouragement, and spiritual growth. From consumerism to community, the gospel calls us to something far deeper and far more beautiful: a life given away for the good of others, just as Christ gave Himself for us.

Cultivating Servant Leadership in the Local Church

Promoting servant leadership within a church requires more than endorsing an idea—it demands building a culture where service is practiced consistently, even when no one is watching. Leaders must model servant-heartedness not only in their public actions but also in the private, unseen choices. True servant leadership is not about seeking recognition but about demonstrating a willingness to serve in every situation, trusting that God sees what others may not.

Cultivating such a culture inevitably means confronting the subtle tensions that arise when organizational needs compete with a heart to serve. It requires careful attention to the atmosphere we create.

Is leadership perceived as service rather than status? Are pastors and leaders recognized not by their prominence, but by their willingness to labor alongside the flock? Does the leadership style reflect the heart of a shepherd rather than the posture of a CEO? Is there a quiet culture of humility, where leaders are quick to decrease so that Christ might increase—or has a hunger for visibility and platform begun to erode the spirit of service? When entitlement creeps in, is it quickly repented of—or quietly excused? And most importantly, are leaders laboring to empower others, seeking to multiply ministry rather than centralize it in themselves?

Servant leadership is not simply taught, it is tasted. It is seen in the unseen tasks, heard in the tone of interactions, and felt in the way leaders lift others up instead of themselves.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, modeled by Jesus Christ, challenges every leader to adopt an attitude of service, humility, and sacrifice. It calls individuals not merely to serve personally, but to cultivate a culture where service is the highest aspiration and humility the highest honor.

Leadership in Christ's kingdom is not about personal gain or recognition; it is about giving oneself for the good of others, building up the body of Christ, and advancing the mission of the gospel. True leadership is found not in ascending higher, but in stooping lower—following the path Jesus Himself walked for us.

By embodying the principles of servant leadership and by entrusting and empowering others to do the same, we foster a culture of collaboration, growth, and Spirit-filled transformation within the church and beyond.

In a world hungry for status and power, may our legacy be different. May we be known not by how high we climbed, but by how faithfully we served.

AFTERWORD

A word as we close.

We Embrace the Exposition of the Whole Bible, confident in its authority, sufficiency, and power to transform lives.

We Rely on the Leading of the Holy Spirit, trusting His wisdom, gifting, and guidance in all things.

We Cultivate a Culture of Grace, knowing that God can use anyone—even us.

We Engage with Every Generation, believing that the gospel is as powerful today as it has ever been.

We Live in Anticipation of Christ's Return, watching and working as we await His coming.

We Promote Servant Leadership, following the example of Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve.

This is the heart God planted in Calvary Chapel from the beginning. And by His grace, may it continue for the generations to come—all for the glory of Jesus Christ and the good of His church, until He returns.

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