

“What Do We Value?”

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Healthy churches have a clear sense of identity, mission, purpose, uniqueness and methodology. These guideposts provide clarity as members make decisions about how money will be allocated, what curriculum will be used, which ministries will be offered, what programs will be put in place and who will be hired to work on staff.

In my opinion, this journey of self-discovery, which is an integral part of our spiritual formation, begins by identifying what disciples of Jesus value and what is most important to them as they work together to be the presence of Christ in their community. Articulating these values will provide everyone on this faith journey a deeper understanding of what our mission and purpose are.

For this reason, I would like to identify what I feel we consider important at First Baptist Church and what we have been called by God to do as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ on mission with God. Clearly, this is my perspective, conceived out of seven years of discussions in a variety of settings with the staff and members of our church. I present this list to you as a means of encouraging reflection and discussion as you move into a time of transition and prepare to call your next pastor.

At First Baptist, we value...

1. Our relationship with God through faith in Jesus and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is more important to us than our relationship with God. We look to God for wisdom, guidance, courage, strength, forgiveness, salvation, hope and love.

We believe God was at work in Jesus to reveal God’s nature, to fulfill God’s dreams for the world and to draw all people to God. When we put our faith in Jesus and become his disciple by following in his footsteps, we believe we honor and please the One who gave us life and wants the best for us.

We also believe the Holy Spirit plays an active role in helping us to follow Jesus and walk in his footsteps. The Spirit transforms us into Christlikeness throughout our lives. This spiritual formation is for the sake of others so that we might serve them and point them to Christ.

2. The Worship of God. The call to follow Jesus is a call to worship God in spirit and truth.

Our goal is to provide worship services where people encounter God's presence and respond to God's grace. In worship, we glorify God and offer God praise, thanksgiving, prayers and ourselves to God's service.

We come to worship in a spirit of humility and gratitude seeking truth, mercy, hope, salvation, guidance and encouragement. We leave worship with a renewed dependence upon the Holy Spirit to be the presence of Christ everywhere we go and with a fresh commitment to reflect God's glory in all we say and do throughout the coming week.

3. **Learning.** The call to follow Jesus is a call to study scripture and discern God's will for our lives.

At First Baptist, we value exploration over indoctrination. Our goal is to provide a safe environment for people to ask questions and to explore the mysteries of life and faith with fellow seekers.

The study of scripture is vital to our ability to be the presence of Christ in a world searching for guidance and direction. We believe the Bible invites us to look at God, the world and even ourselves in ways that make it possible for us to reflect upon the meaning of life and our role in it. The testimonies of those who have gone before can be used by the Holy Spirit to provide wisdom and guidance for our journeys, helping us to be faithful disciples.

Each time we study scripture, alone or with others, the Holy Spirit draws near to open our eyes, hearts and minds to new and fresh ways of thinking, believing and behaving. Each change we make transforms us more and more into the likeness of Christ so we may reflect the goodness of God and serve others.

We recognize we are at different stages on this faith journey. All are welcome to join us as we study scripture and will be treated with respect. The goal is for each of us to grow and mature in our faith, becoming more like Jesus in our daily walk.

4. **Relationships.** The call to follow Christ is a call to be a good neighbor.

Our relationship with God is inherently connected to our relationship with others. We believe Jesus taught his disciples to make circles of friends everywhere they went by building bridges of goodwill, understanding, hope and reconciliation.

This is why we strive to build community by meeting everyone at their point of need with compassion and grace. At all times and in all places, we seek the delicate balance of the need for each other's help and the opportunity to be helpful.

Authenticity is the bedrock of developing meaningful relationships. Accepting people as they are and where they are in their search for meaning and purpose is crucial.

Providing a loving and encouraging community for seekers on their quest to know God is one way we share our faith. Honest and transformative dialogue begins by extending the hand of friendship and providing all people a chair at the table where the mysteries of life and faith are discussed.

As good neighbors, our doors are open to all people in our community so they can worship God, grow spiritually and join other disciples on mission with God. Like Jesus, we value everyone's story and seek to learn from one another's experiences in our pursuit of justice and peace, the essence of the kingdom of God on earth.

This is why we value unity more than uniformity. Uniformity demands that all people look, think, believe and behave like everyone else, which does away with our natural and enriching diversity. Unity embraces diversity as a means of reflecting the Kingdom of God and providing evidence of the community-building work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

5. **Being missional.** The call to follow Jesus is a call to serve others in Christ's name.

Being missional is a way of life for a follower of Jesus. We do not do missions, we are always on mission with God following the Holy Spirit's lead to respond to someone in need.

Jesus made hope visible everywhere he went and encouraged his disciples to follow his example. This is why Jesus invited the disciples to walk alongside him on those dusty Palestinian roads as he listened to people's stories and responded to their needs with kind words and helpful deeds.

It is also why Jesus became an advocate for victims of oppression and those struggling to survive. He chose to tell their stories to those in positions of power who ignored them, and he demanded justice and mercy on their behalf.

At First Baptist, we believe every member is a minister, and all of us have gifts to share. This is why we challenge every person to seize opportunities to be the presence of Christ everyday by using their time, talents, resources and influence to meet the needs of people or to be their voice where decisions are made. No one needs permission to be kind or helpful.

There are times our church provides opportunities for members to work with others, but these projects are not meant to substitute for what each of us is called to do every day. It is important to us that, at all times, we do what Jesus would do if he were here in the flesh. We have no higher calling as Jesus' disciples than making hope visible everywhere we go.

This includes telling others about Jesus. Everyone needs to hear the good news of the gospel. We must never assume everybody knows his story.

6. **Our Baptist Heritage.** The call to follow Jesus is a call to learn from our ancestors and build upon their good work.

We cherish our Baptist roots and are grateful for those who paved the path we now travel. Like many who have gone before us in the Baptist tradition, we believe strongly in the priesthood of the believer, the authority of the Bible, the autonomy of the local church and the separation of church and state.

Baptists love freedom, and it is for this reason we refer to First Baptist as a free and faithful Baptist church. This freedom allows us to follow where the Holy Spirit leads and to carry out God's dreams of making hope visible in our community and world.

This freedom also allows us to work with others to do together what none of us can do alone. At Frist Baptist, we partner with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Kentucky and the National Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to make hope visible in our state, nation and world.

7. **Stewardship.** The call to follow Jesus is a call to give ourselves away in service to others.

We give because we are recipients of God's astounding generosity. Gratitude and humility motivate us to share our time, talents and resources as we do God's work each day and to give our tithes and offerings to the church to advance the Kingdom of God locally and globally.

We believe wealth, at any level, is a great responsibility. It is to be managed wisely to meet our families' needs. It is also to be used to provide other people access to food, clothing, shelter, education, employment, decent housing and healthcare.

For this reason, we give our tithes and offerings sacrificially and cheerfully to our church. We choose to invest our lives, including our money, in our life-changing ministries.

8. **Faithfulness.** The call to follow Jesus is a lifelong commitment to live like Christ at all times and in all places.

Jesus is our Savior and Lord, symbolized by our baptism. By God's grace, Jesus' sacrifices and the Holy Spirit's leadership, our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God. For this reason, we make a commitment to live as Jesus did, sharing the gospel in word and deed.

For us, this means we are to choose love over hate, kindness over cruelty, compassion over coldness, truth over deception, integrity over expediency, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting, discipline over irresponsibility, maturity over carelessness, sacrifice over self-indulgence and peace over violence.

Like Jesus, we are to be passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, finding the forgotten, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, loving the unlovely, encouraging people to achieve their potential, forgiving people who make mistakes, giving people another chance and teaching people how to live peaceably with one another.

Following Jesus will require that we, like our Lord, must be bold and courageous. Reflecting the nature of God and living as Jesus did will demand that we embrace kingdom values over those drafted and promoted by the world. When being faithful to Jesus puts us at odds with the culture's prevailing values, we must choose Jesus.

At First Baptist, our message and mission are rooted in God's love for all people, God's vision of a just and peaceful world, Jesus' efforts to advance the kingdom of God and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to serve others and point them to Christ.

Our goal is to be faithful disciples who share the gospel with others, encourage them to accept Jesus' invitation to follow him, welcome them into our fellowship and reflect the heart and nature of Jesus in our community.

We welcome all who wish to join us on this journey of faith, hope and love.