

Core: Guiding Principles that Make Us Distinct!
Week 1: We Clear the Path to Jesus

I. Not only is it July 4th, but we're also starting a new series of messages today called, Core: Guiding Principles that Make Us Distinct! If you've been around Tab over the last few years, you've likely heard someone at some point say something about our Core Values. If you're new to Tab, we're so glad to have you with us! You've probably not heard about our Core Values, but I believe this to be a great opportunity for all of us to have clarity around who we aspire to be as Tab Church. If you're new this could be a great series to learn more about Tab and where we're going as a church!

A. Most of the series we won't have to unpack quite as much. But since it's the first message let's go really high level for just a minute.

Proverbs 29:18 (CSB) [Slide]: Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy.

1. Most translations will say, "Without vision the people perish."

First and foremost, through God's revealed word, he's given us revelation or vision which is outside of ourselves and serves as the standard by which we live our lives.

That's why one of our Core Values is: We Bend to the Book! We believe that God's inspired word is authoritative and without error and we bend our lives to it not the other way around.

Before we get into the Core Values we'll discuss this series, and the one we'll focus on today, let's back up a bit and answer the question, why do we have Core Values anyway?

a. Last year when the pandemic set in and all our lives were disrupted, the elder team, which is Tab's governing board, sensed that God had given us a unique season to step back and consider Tab Church from a 50,000 feet view. Big picture! Not only did we look at the current scope of ministry and did our best to define reality, we also looked back over the history of Tab Church and we studied it for major themes. We asked ourselves this question:

[Slide]: What is distinct about God's work through Tab?

(1) In 1935, Tabernacle Church of Norfolk was launched and there have been many ups and downs that come along with a church that's almost 100 years old. Many times, it did not look like the church would make it and yet God would provide and see the church through. There is a reason why Tabernacle Church is gathering this very day at 7000 Granby St in Norfolk, Va. It's not that we're better than any other church, it simply means that God is doing a distinct work through the people of Tab Church and his work isn't finished with us yet. As we prayed, it became clear to us that the primary task at hand was to seek the Lord's direction for what God wants Tab Church to be like in the year 2035. Her 100-year birthday. We asked the Lord to give us a fresh vision for this unique season of Tab Church that continues the rich legacy already laid forth, but makes Tab Church a force to be reckoned with in the culture today. We want Tab Church to honor God and horrify Satan. Sadly, in our city and world, many churches do neither maybe because they've become a country club catering to the internal desires of members rather than moving out on mission for the sake of the good news of Jesus Christ. The day we start pampering to preferences will be the day of our demise. I'm not trying to be mean, but I'm trying to define reality like we did as an elder team.

b. By studying our rich history, looking at the world today, and prayerfully seeking God's wisdom for the Tab Church of tomorrow, we as a team developed a common language for Tab Church that is Christ centered and grounded in Scripture to express our:

[Slide]: Vision, Mission, and Core Values

These don't make us superior as a church, but they do help define the distinct work of God through Tab.

(1) Our vision seeks to answer the question, why we exist?

[Slide]: We exist to help the 1.7 million people in Hampton Roads discover their story in the context of God's global purpose.

(a) The great commission in Matthew 28 is to, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Everyone of our lives fits into God's vision for the world. Some of us might be called into the workplace and some might be called to West Africa, but we're all called to discover and help others discover their story and how we fit into God's heart for the world. That sounds great, but what are we doing?

(2) Our mission seeks to answer the question what?

[Slide]: Pushing through boundaries to share God's story from Norfolk to the nations!

(a) Whether the boundary is a perceived boundary between your driveway and that of your neighbor or the boundary of an unreached, unengaged people group, we want to be a church that doesn't sit around talking about making disciples in a classroom, but a church that's engaging people wherever we are with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the impact it has on our lives. We've discussed the why and the what.

(3) Over the course of this series, we're going to discuss 5 out of the 10 Core Value statements that again simply serve to provide us common language to help define what makes Tab Church distinct. What kind of culture do we want to have here at Tab? If we don't have language to help us clarify what it is we hope to achieve, we'll never hit the mark. Here's the reality: we're going to have a culture at Tab. Culture is simply the prevailing customs, traditions, practices, values that define a people. So, let's look at the word of God and our history to define those values that make us distinct.

(a) If you go to:

[Slide:] tabchurch.org/about

you can view all 10 Core Value statements and I would invite you to do so. We're only covering 5 in this series and we'll come around soon to the other 5. The 5 that we're talking about this time are 5 that we don't seem to cover as often so that's how we chose the 5 in case you're wondering.

B. Here's the Core Value we'll discuss today:

[Slide]: We Clear the Path to Jesus (Acts 15:19)

1. [Slide]: We believe it is our responsibility and privilege to introduce people to Jesus. We refuse to allow secondary issues to impede the path to Jesus and divide us as a church body. We seek to be a church growing in our commitment to Christ and love for others. While remaining steadfast in our core beliefs we willingly lay aside our preferences to preserve internal unity and external relevance.

2. Let's jump into Acts 15. I would like to expand out from 15:19 which is the basis of our Core Value statement to get the context for what's taking place in chapter 15. Chapter 15 is often referred to as the "Jerusalem Council" and it's an interesting spot to find it because it's right in the middle of Acts. Christianity starts as a Jewish movement in Jerusalem but toward the middle of Acts is experiencing a contentious state as the movement expands out and more Gentiles (non-Jews) are coming to faith in Jesus. There's a new church plant in a city called Antioch which is in modern day Turkey today. This church, like most churches that are growing and reaching people, was a hot mess. There were Jews and Gentiles who had trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, and this was new territory for them all. The

implications of salvation by grace through faith were being worked out by the apostles throughout the New Testament.

3. At Antioch we see Jews and Gentiles and amongst those gathered there are Paul and Barnabas (the Apostle Paul and his companion Barnabas). Some men came from the Jewish region of Judea and started teaching that to be saved, the Gentiles in the group needed to first be circumcised. Circumcision was in essence the linchpin of the Mosaic Law and because that was their experience, these men felt compelled that everyone who becomes a Christ-follower must come through first becoming a Jew. The thought was that while faith in Jesus was what made someone a Christian, to be eligible to make that decision, one must first be a Jew. Paul and Barnabas felt strongly that this wasn't the case. For Paul, Jesus had fulfilled the Law, making salvation accessible to anyone simply by placing their faith in him. Jesus, period!

Acts 15:4-5 (CSB) [Slide]: 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

4. Does anyone else just find this verse shocking? I do! There were some Pharisees that got SAVED!! Praise God! The Lord works in mysterious ways indeed! It's difficult, but even unsaved religious folk get saved and that's a testament to the power of God's Spirit. Good theology (what the bible reveals about God) is so important, but we don't have to have all our theology right to be saved. Isn't that a blessing!! God, through Christ Jesus, will work with those who have a rowdy side or those who have a self-righteous side.

Acts 15:6-11 (CSB) [Slide]: 6 The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: "Brothers and sisters, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."

5. The apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem and had a lengthy elder meeting. Elder meetings have been long winded since the first one! In that meeting Peter, the disciple that was always speaking out of turn while Jesus was on the earth, had started to mature, listen, and seek understanding from others. He listened to the lengthy debate and then the disciple who Jesus said would be the rock of his Church stood up to proclaim that God made a choice and by his mouth the Gentiles would: "hear the gospel message and believe."
6. God is the One who perceives the decisions of the heart and bears witness to Gentiles by GIVING the gift of the Holy Spirit! He cleanses the heart by faith! Peter gives a warning to all that day to take heed against becoming the salvation police. Let God be God and stop interfering with his work of salvation. Think about what those believing Pharisees were doing that day. They were putting up obstacles in the pathway to Jesus to make sure the conversions of the Gentiles were legitimate. I'm sure their intentions were likely good! Have we ever been guilty of such? Has anyone ever walked into Tab with a certain look or a certain smell, maybe a certain demeanor, and we make a quick judgement call on 1) what's that person doing here? And 2) God couldn't save that person surely? I believe so much pent-up revival is waiting to be unleashed simply because we (I) are quick to make judgement calls based on the external of a person when God always looks at the heart. God is always looking into the depths of the human soul and we in our limited view don't know what resides there in another.

Let's continue reading in Acts 15:19. These are the words of Jesus's half-brother James:

Acts 15:19-21 (CSB) [Slide]: 19 Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues."

7. James is saying that God is more than capable of determining someone's heart and salvation.

Transformation in someone's life happens when a person accepts Jesus Christ in faith and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. None of us are capable of pleasing God apart from his Spirit! Why would we set up a boundary in the path to Jesus that's really more about someone proving themselves to us, not God? We know that apart from God's grace we're incapable of transformation, and yet we so often put expectations on people just like the group of Pharisees to show they are really serious before we let them in. James would say to get busy clearing the path to Jesus!

8. These were some serious obstacles that the apostles and elders were clearing out of the pathway to Jesus, and it makes our generational, racial, and socioeconomic boundaries of today look weak in comparison. There should be nothing we allow to serve as a boundary between anyone and Jesus. Period!

9. If we clear the path to Jesus, does that mean anything goes? No, it doesn't. Because of our relationship with Jesus, and only through our relationship with Jesus, are we able to:
[Slide]: Lean into the law of love!

10. As a Christ follower who is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit something remarkable begins to take place. God begins softening my heart to the best interests of others. This goes beyond church, but one real way we demonstrate this tangibly to the world is by promoting unity amongst the body of Christ. We consciously consider the desires and interests of others, and we make it our aim to outdo one another in showing honor. That's what James and the apostles are getting at with this list of restrictions. Here's what's important to know coming out of the Jerusalem Council:
[Slide]: The starting point is salvation!

11. When people meet Jesus, good things happen! Lives are transformed! But a relationship with God through his son Jesus is the start. A relationship with Jesus is by grace through faith with no prerequisite involved!
[Slide]: Both sides compromised!

12. As a result of their new connection in Jesus Christ, both the Jews and Gentiles were charged to give up a significant number of preferences in order to make this new thing called the Church function. The starting point would be salvation in Jesus which would then be expressed in relationship with others. Jews and Gentiles gave up substantial cultural preferences for the Church to work. And I think that's an important point. The way we express our concern for one another is to be a tangible expression of God's concern for the world. Sometimes we're so focused on fighting for our preferences that we don't have the main task anywhere on our radar:
[Slide]: To clear the path to Jesus!

C. I want us to have a culture that believes in the transforming power of Jesus and that no life is written off by God. We then ask ourselves the question, "is there anything I've been holding on to that might be serving as a boundary blocking the path the Jesus?" We want to be a people that clears the path to Jesus!