



ARENACHURCH

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE AROUND HERE

HONOUR

Page 23

Everybody is somebody at Arena. We place value on everyone.

UNITY

Page 28

We seek to build relationships and teams. We model “we” and not “I.”

GENEROSITY

Page 32

We believe it is more blessed to give than to receive.

SERVING

Page 36

Serving is a joy, we are saved to serve.

PASSION

Page 39

We will bring our energy and “we get to” into every situation.

GROWTH

Page 43

We are committed, personally and corporately, to growing, dreaming big, and lifting lids.

Dear Arena

In the following pages you will read exhaustive notes that have been prepared by myself and the team, to share in depth what we both want and do not want in Arena Church. They have been adapted, changed and expanded over the past decade but they have stood us in good stead.

Culture behaviours are always present but we have to ask ourselves, are they here by design or by default?

We are intentionally designing a culture in our church. Our behaviours document is an intentional blueprint that articulates those values that are important. More than that, they are essential to us as people. Read them, digest them, ask questions in small groups, but do something with them. May we live out the disciple truths and so live the Jesus way, becoming more like Jesus.

***Your pastor and friend,
Kristian Thorpe.***

ARENA BEHAVIOURS

Our behaviours aren't to make you fall in line or fit in. Diversity and difference are a part of who we are at Arena. They don't refer to the clothes you wear or the music you listen to. Our goal isn't to get you to behave, it's to help you follow Jesus. The reality is Arena is full of imperfect people; people who were broken, people who were lost, people who were hurt, but through a relationship with Jesus have been radically changed. Our behaviours create a platform for Arena to flourish, they create freedom and protection for our community. In your house, you have certain behaviours so that the house can function.

These may be things like "everyone helps tidy the table" or "no shoes inside". Different houses have different behaviours to protect and promote the house. Our house, Arena, is no different. We have certain behaviours that we expect our community to agree to so that our house can flourish.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE AROUND HERE

Why do we behave the way we do? And why do we behave differently in different places? Every place has its own culture. Your home, your workplace, your family, sports teams, buildings, parks - everywhere has its own culture. The culture of a place is very important as it determines how people behave. If a sports team has a bad culture, it may mean that they have a poor work ethic, and they might not work well as a team, which will lead to them not winning anything. All successful ventures start with a healthy culture and a good set of shared behaviours.

Sadly, the culture of a place is often unhealthy by default. It doesn't manifest intentionally, and may have been originally caused by problems that are long in the past. Unhealthy culture often comes naturally whereas good culture only comes through design.

It takes a group of people dedicating themselves to a set of values or behaviours to foster a good culture. Our church thrives with a good culture, and that good culture comes because we all dedicate ourselves to these good behaviours, and we lock out the behaviours that can come into the church as thieves to rob us of God's purpose.

Just as we seek to create this culture, Jesus created a culture with his disciples. Matthew 10:5-16 gives us an insight into the culture he was creating:

5 Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: "Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, 6 but only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep. 7 Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!

9 "Don't take any money in your money belts—no gold, silver, or even copper coins. 10 Don't carry a traveler's bag with a change of clothes and sandals or even a walking stick. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve to be fed.

11 "Whenever you enter a city or village, search for a worthy person and stay in his home until you leave town. 12 When you enter the home, give it your blessing. 13 If it turns out to be a worthy home, let your blessing stand; if it is not, take back the blessing. 14 If any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave. 15 I tell you the truth, the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off than such a town on the judgment day.

16 "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.

Jesus gave clear direction. He told the disciples where to go, he told them to work in words and signs, he told them to leave a town when they needed to, and he was not directly involved, allowing the disciples to get on with what they knew was right.

In this booklet, we want to answer the question, “What’s it like to be around here?” - it’s a question that looks at who we are as a church. There are five things we are focused on as a church.

1. WE GIVE A WARM WELCOME

We hope that the first time you came you felt welcomed. We want everyone to feel welcome and at home as soon as they enter the building.

2. WE HAVE LIVELY WORSHIP

We are intentional about creating heartfelt times of worship in our services that touch God’s heart as explained in John 4:24 - *“For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”* - however, our worship isn’t just about Sunday but also about living out a great lifestyle that honours God.

3. WE GIVE AN INSPIRING WORD

This means a great presentation of Jesus to Christians and non-Christians alike but also that we as a church are dedicated to reading the Bible in our own time and making it the handbook of our lives.

4. WE ARE A WITNESS

We are intentional about not keeping our faith to ourselves and invite people to church so that they can know Jesus for themselves. We know that Jesus wants us to go and be an influence wherever we are.

5. WE SHOW A WILLINGNESS TO SERVE

John 13 shows us Jesus, the Son of God, washing his disciples’ feet. We’re not saying that we all have to wash each other’s feet but that we need to show the same willingness to serve just as Jesus did. We all have a part to play in the church.

John 13:14-16 - And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message.

In humility, we would like to say that the behaviours described in this booklet are very important to us as a church, and very important to what it's like to be around here. If we can all commit to the things in this booklet then we can truly start to see God move in our church. Our mission:

“To go and grow and love and serve our world”

THIEVES

The things we DON'T want.

"The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy."-John 10:10

RELIGION

‘The attitudes and practices that seek to suppress people’

Religion has nothing to do with Church or Christianity. You probably know someone who checks the football results “religiously” - but they don’t go to church. Religion suggests a particular system of procedures, with the same things happening the same way every time - even faith and worship.

On the other hand, Christianity is all about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It’s not about humans making rules and regulations to follow in order to get closer to God. Jesus reserved some of His strongest words for religion, describing it as burdensome, proud, external, powerless, critical, joyless and stubborn. Religion tends to complain, compare, and be destructive.

It is possible to find someone that sticks to the rules of religion so tightly that they even forget what the rule was there for in the first place. Jesus constantly encountered this way of thinking in the religious leaders of His day.

Arena Church is NOT a religious church as we always seek to follow the example of Jesus.

In Luke 6:1-11 we see these religious leaders furious at Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath.

A Discussion about the Sabbath

1 One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples broke off heads of grain, rubbed off the husks in their hands, and ate the grain. 2 But some Pharisees said, “Why are you breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?”

3 Jesus replied, “Haven’t you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He went into the house of God and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that

only the priests can eat. He also gave some to his companions.” 5 And Jesus added, “The Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath.”

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

6 On another Sabbath day, a man with a deformed right hand was in the synagogue while Jesus was teaching. 7 The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees watched Jesus closely. If he healed the man’s hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew their thoughts. He said to the man with the deformed hand, “Come and stand in front of everyone.” So the man came forward.

9 Then Jesus said to his critics, “I have a question for you. Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?” 10 He looked around at them one by one and then said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! 11 At this, the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage and began to discuss what to do with him.

The religious leaders had a rule in place stating that nothing could be done on the Sabbath as it was a day of rest. When Jesus healed someone on this day, they were blind to the miracle that had happened and instead focused on criticising Jesus.

God wants to bring freedom and not suppression. God is focused on having a relationship with us, whereas religion says you have to do specific things in order to be accepted. Jesus has already made the sacrifice for us and all we need to do is to just follow Jesus and live in the freedom He has given us.

In Summary:

- We are humble and not proud
- We empower each other with freedom instead of trapping people with religion
- We live a life of faith that is internal as well as external
- We are open to change instead of doing things because we have always done it this way

REJECTION

‘The attitude of constant refusal’

Jesus knew rejection well. Even people who knew him would bring rejection.

Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

Jesus never let rejection define Him, and neither should we. Rejection can come to us all, and often unexpectedly; broken relationships, redundancy, failed interviews, lost business deals, the residue of being bullied, and many other things. It can be displayed in many ways, verbally, emotionally, intentionally or unintentionally. How we handle rejection is very important. Unchecked, it expresses itself as resentment, anger, bitterness, instability and insecurity.

There are many ways to combat rejection. One of the ways is to accept the truth of what God says through the Bible. When rejection faces us it's important that we listen to what God says, and not what the world says. We need to reassure ourselves that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and that nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:38-39).

Psalm 139:14

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Romans 8:38-39

38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Another way to combat rejection is through forgiveness. In a world filled with pain and hurt, it is always important that we remember that we need to be full of forgiveness no matter what has been done to hurt us. Forgiveness isn't always easy, but it is so life-giving and empowering that it enables us to move away from bitterness into wholeness.

***At Arena we are intentional about leaving rejection at the door.
This means that***

- We live in forgiveness of others and not bitterness
- We are accepting of every person that walks through the door, no matter what background they have
- We constantly remind ourselves of the truth found in the Bible
- We combat rejection and we don't let it define us

CONTROL

‘The attitude or practice of unnatural domination or expectation.’

It has found expression in all levels of society in history and sadly in some churches. It can often reveal itself in menace, manipulation and through money. Arena Church believes in good consistent strong leadership, but we are called to submit to the lordship of Jesus, nothing can or should replace that.

Control requires two participants - one who takes control, and one that is controlled. When a person is controlled, they become like a puppet, doing whatever the puppet master desires of them. When an unhealthy control comes into our lives, we can often find that we have no life except through the control of other people.

Menace will try to control through threats, for example, “if you go to that church again then we won’t be friends anymore”. Menace can be hard to deal with, but we have to trust and follow Jesus by doing what’s right no matter what.

Manipulation is a lot more subtle. It preys on people’s emotions and reactions, sneakily managing a situation for selfish gain. This can be hard to spot but can be seen in people’s motives.

Money drives people to work harder, but also to do things they wouldn’t normally do. In a materialistic world, money can control many people. Jesus faced similar temptations, as you can see in Matthew 4:1-11. In a materialistic world, money can control many people. Jesus faced similar temptations, as you can see in Matthew 4:1-11.

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. 2 For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. 3 During that time the devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

4 But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say”, ‘People do not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, 6 and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

7 Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’” 8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 “I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”

10 “Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” 11 Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

There have been some controlling world leaders over the years that have had relative success through control. People such as dictators work very much through control. There is a danger for all of us to exert control over other people, and we have to be careful about this urge. In certain circumstances, it can be something like a husband ruling over his wife so much that he orchestrates everything she can and can’t do, who she can talk to, even what she can say.

Arena Church makes it an intent to not live under unnatural control and not to exert control over others.

In summary:

- We let people make their own decisions
- We do not allow the challenges of being a Christian make us live under control
- We do not allow control to have a place in our lives in any form

OFFENCE

‘Annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult.’

It is the attitude that seeks to find a problem for any occasion. The key to understanding offence is that it is “perceived”, and most often is not intended. Offence is always taken and never given.

Sadly some people take offence very easily and repeat this behaviour again and again. In Christian life, this can manifest in moving from one church to the next when there is no need as no offence was intended in the first place.

Jesus never took offence. Many tried to do things to offend Him, but he never took offence. In this way, the one perfect human in all of history caused offence to be taken by religious leaders (among others), as the things he did were not their ways and often seemed contrary to what they believed. But of course, Jesus never intended to cause offence, and his ways were perfect - if people can become offended by Jesus, how much easier is it to take offence at an imperfect human?

Offence impairs relationships, renewal, and the ability to reflect Christ’s example. The book of Proverbs, the biblical source of great wisdom, says, “An offended person is more unyielding than a fortified city” (Proverbs 18:19). Once offence is taken, it is hard to resolve.

Arena Church recognises that offence will almost certainly come to us all at some point in time, and we have the ability to choose how we will react to any given decision or act. To be offended isn’t unavoidable, but we are encouraged to let it fall to the ground in grace and live a life of blessings.

We can be people that are known:

- For being gracious
- For being joyful instead of always offended
- For being people of understanding
- For being people that are full of wisdom so that we can live in the fullness of God’s will.

OCCUPANTS

The things we DO want.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."-John 10:10

DISCIPLESHIP

We have made a decision to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus, to live like Jesus and become more like him. This is the foundation for the following values.

The original term in the New Testament for disciple is “mathetes”, which means “learner” or “a trained one”. There are courses that help you become a learner or a trained one, and these are to be valued, but discipleship is more than a course - it’s a lifestyle, and you will never stop learning.

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him—but some of them doubted!

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

These are some of the best-known verse in the gospels, on the ‘other side’ of the resurrection. Jesus speaks to his disciples and tells them to go out and make other people into disciples. This is often called “The Great Commission” - the journey of growing discipleship in every way is ongoing for all of us.

There are over 250 references in the gospels and the Acts of Apostles alone to disciples. The heart cry of scripture is not for believers, consumers, attenders, or joiners, but is for disciples that want to go and make a difference.

Discipleship is the soil in which the seeds of other behaviours are planted. Without good soil, the seeds will fail to grow; with the good soil of discipleship, the seeds will grow and flourish in new life with God.

Here are three aspects of response for a disciple.

1. A Calling

This being both an invitation and a challenge, every Christian carries a calling on their life.

Matthew 4:19 - Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

Matthew 9:9 - As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

John 1:43 -The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me."

The calling will show itself in different gifts and expressions, but we have all been called to obey, love, serve and sacrifice.

Obey - Matthew 7:24-27

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25 Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. 26 But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27 When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

Love - Mark 12:29-30

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. 30 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'

Serve - Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favour. 21 "What is your request?" he asked. She replied, "In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honour next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

22 But Jesus answered by saying to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?"

“Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!”

23 Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

24 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 25 But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Sacrifice - Matthew 16:24-25

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

***“A faith that costs nothing, gives nothing, suffers nothing, means nothing”
-Martin Luther***

2. A committment

‘We are committed to making Jesus the master of our lives through surrender’

A disciple of Jesus is committed to Christ, to walk in His ways, to live His life, to share His love and truth with others.

Luke 14:27 says *“And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.”* - this scripture means that we must follow in Jesus’ footsteps whatever it takes. We don’t have to live our lives in oppression seeking to tick every box as we live under rules and regulations, but we must simply let God take control of our lives, and let him make us more like Jesus. Once we start doing this we see that we are actually becoming empowered and liberated.

We can’t be disciples without first surrendering to God, we have to let God’s ways become our ways and submit to what he wants for us. This is the true meaning of

sacrificial living, by living a life of surrender that overflows to others. Sometimes we will have to do the opposite of what we want to because we are surrendered to God's ways.

Disciples have a commitment to:

The Master - Luke 5:5

"Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again."

The Word of God - John 8:31-32

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 15:9-10

"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love."

Bearing Fruit - John 15:1-8

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me."

5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father."

Others - John 13:34-35

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the

world that you are my disciples.”

The Commission - Mark 16:15-20

And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. 16 Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. 17 These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. 18 They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won’t hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed.”

3. A Challenge

The ‘upside-down’ truths of the kingdom really do work out in discipleship - “If you lose your life, you will find it”, “If you die, you will live”

The challenge is for us to live in this world as citizens of an entirely different kingdom.

It will mean:

Overcoming - The world, the flesh, and the Devil

Prioritising - Matthew 6:19-20 - *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.*

Living - John 10:10 - *The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

Yielding - *again and again to Jesus’ ways and plans as they are always the best*

And the promise to Disciples? “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”

Let nothing deter us from responding to the call, bringing our commitment and rising to the challenge that is discipleship.

Discipleship:

- is not automatic; it needs to be intentional
- is not mystical; it is to be practical
- is not instant; it involves a process
- is not just knowing; it is demonstrating
- is not private; it is relational

HONOUR

“High respect; great esteem”

Honour is a Key to Unlocking the Power of the Kingdom

Living a lifestyle of honour is one of the ways in which we become set apart from the world and move closer to God. The word “honour” means to esteem at the highest level or to add weight to. It comes from the time when people used to weigh shekels to determine their value, because the heavier the coin, the more value it had. Honour is still used in this context to this very day, for example when a bank honours a cheque. The same applies to your life - the more you put a value on something the more weight it has in your life.

Who are we meant to honour?

Honour God - Deuteronomy 6:13-14

“13 Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. 14 Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;”

Honour one another - Romans 12:10

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

Honour those in Authority - Romans 13:1

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

Honour those with Authority in the Church - Hebrews 13:17

“Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them?” (The Message)

By honouring your leaders, you put your trust in them, and therefore in God.

Why don't we honour people as default?

We won't humble ourselves -

James 4:10

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

When you look at the world, you will often see people struggling against other people in order to prove their superiority. Sometimes it's to get a promotion, sometimes it's to look better, sometimes it's for no real reason at all. A lot of people have an attitude that says, "I'm as good as them, if not better!"

We have all been blessed with different gifts, but some people are certain their gift is superior to yours. However, no gift ever supersedes God's designated authority. You may be blessed, very gifted, and naturally more talented, but whoever God has appointed as the designated authority must be honoured and respected.

You might be in a place of work and have a manager who is not as gifted as you, but it is still your job to submit and serve. Oftentimes, you may find that you don't agree with people you are placed under. In fact, you may not even like them.

"Remember your Savior suffered under Pontius Pilate, one of the worst Roman governors Judea ever had; and Paul under Nero, the worst Roman Emperor. And neither our Lord nor His Apostle denied or reviled the 'authority!'" -Newell

Whoever you are placed under, you can be sure they will not be in the same league as Pontius Pilate or Nero. But what if you can't bear for others to be blessed or elevated more than you are?

Psalms 75:7

"It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another."

Honour should be a part of our language and culture

Honour is counter culture in most places in the world, including the country where we live. It is not the "done thing" to honour other people, and at times can seem strange, but honour is truly the language of the Kingdom of God.

Practising a lifestyle of honour

An example of this is the story of King David and his mighty men.

David was a King with massive imperfections. He had problems with a beautiful woman, and he didn't bring discipline to his children when it was needed, resulting in infighting, jockeying for position and chaos. He was flawed, but his heart and his devotion were towards God.

One significant area in which David excelled was in honour. The previous King (who he served with distinction) became insecure and jealous of David. It started with a song of honour from the people, "Saul has slain thousands...but David has slain tens of thousands!" Saul burned with anger at this, and from that moment he tried to kill David. David himself had the opportunity to kill Saul but he would not lift his hand against God's ordained authority. Saul had created a culture of insecurity and fear so his men feared him, but David built a culture of security so his men loved him. David honoured King Saul, and when David became King his men honoured him.

Honour and you will be honoured

1 Chronicles 11:17-20

David remarked longingly to his men, "Oh, how I would love some of that good water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem." 18 So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David. But David refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the Lord. 19 "God forbid that I should drink this!" he exclaimed. "This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me." So David did not drink it. These are examples of the exploits of the Three.

The Three were gifted champions in their own right, but they knew they would accomplish more submitted to David than on their own. These men were more gifted, stronger, more capable, but they knew blessings flowed when they were connected to God's designated authority. They lived with honour towards David because they had been honoured by David.

They expressed their honour in how they:

1. Served - He was the King and they wanted to serve him (v17/18), they heard how he desired some water now that they were serving him.

John 13:12-15

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

2. Loved - David was thinking out loud. Yet they risked their lives out of love.

John 13:34

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

3. Exercised - Make it a daily practice to ask yourself, "Who can I honour today?"

In relationships, husbands and wives can take each other for granted. Wives might not make any effort, husbands going to bed without showering. There can be no vocalising of love, leaving the other partner wondering what is going on. Exercise honour, even if it feels unnatural, for so many people will not have experienced or seen it.

4. Preferred - "Huh! He wants water...I'd like a home, I'd like a shower and he's talking about water from Bethlehem!"

If The Three had taken this attitude, they would have been putting themselves first. They understood the principle of preferring.

Romans 12:10 (NKJV)

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another"

We express honour through putting others first

5. Praised - David was their leader and King, and they sought to bring praise to the king's name. They weren't jockeying for position and praise for themselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 MSG

So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.

What honour means:

- An appreciation of different gifts and responsibilities.
- Speaking the language of generosity
- Serving others
- Forgiving quickly
- Getting rid of cynicism and mocking

UNITY

Unity means working together as one - as a team, with everyone on the same side. Teams are seen in many aspects of life - sports, industry, education, social action, government, and many other places. Teamwork is no less vital in church.

Psalm 133

1 How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!

2 For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe.

3 Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.

Psalm 133 gives a great picture of unity, we see;

JOY – v1 – Joy, happiness, peace and a good atmosphere are resident in a house when there is unity.

OIL – v2 - Speaks symbolically of unity being seen and smelt. A 'perfume' that is unmissable, distinct and attractive. It defeats all other odours.

FRUIT – v3 - It falls on the 'common hill', Zion, and reflects 'the blessing of all blessings'

Ephesians 4:1-16

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. 4 For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

5 There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. 7 However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. 8 That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”

9 Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10 And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

There is no “I” in “TEAM”, and it is amazing how much more you can achieve when it does not matter who gets the glory.

T.E.A.M. Together Everyone Achieves More

Pastor Jonathan Edwards was a distinguished and well-known pastor and theologian in the 18th century. He led many great revivals on the east coast of the USA, and saw thousands of people come to faith in Jesus. Due to the number of people joining his church, he wrote a behaviours document that he called the “COMMUNITY COVENANT” that reflects an impassioned desire for unity amongst believers:

1. In all conversations, concerns and dealings with our neighbours, we will be honest, just and upright.

2. If we wrong others in any way we will not rest until we have made things right.
3. We promise that we will not permit ourselves to indulge in any kind of backbiting.
4. We will be careful not to do anything to others out of a spirit of revenge.
5. When there is a difference of opinion concerning another's rights, we will not allow private interest to influence us.
6. We will not tolerate the exercise of enmity or ill-will in our hearts.
7. If we find that we have a secret grudge against another we will not gratify it but root it out.
8. We will not allow over familiarity in our talk with others, or anything that might stir up unprincipled behaviour.
9. We will resolve to examine ourselves on a regular basis, knowing that the heart is very deceitful.
10. We will run with perseverance the race that is set before us working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Ephesians 4:4 MSG

*You are called to travel on the same road and in the same direction,
so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly'*

God wants His Church to be the 'A TEAM' :

ASSORTMENT – Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 – *'Allsorts come to this church!'*

ACTION – James 2:20 – *'Faith without works is useless (dead)'*

AVAILABILITY – John 13:17 – *The team ethic is not about Status, but about Servanthood.*

AUTHENTICITY – John 4:24 – *We are REAL with one another, rejoicing with those that rejoice, and 'taking the hits' where necessary together, openly and honestly*

AFFIRMATION – John 13:34-35 *'Love one another'*

But how is UNITY expressed in the life of the church?

By WELCOMING – A warm welcome extended to all

By CONNECTING – Our small groups play a vital role in enabling people to give themselves to and enjoy fellowship in the life of the church.

By INCLUDING – No schisms or cliques in the life of church, everyone belong to the whole.

We must continue to walk towards these values, and so reflect an 'Acts 2 Community', who were known for being of 'one accord.'

'Strong Teams have a strong team spirit' – Hugs, Handshakes, High 5's, 'God Bless you', 'You can do it', 'We believe in you', all give expression to this team value.

In living a life of unity this means:

- We will honour and encourage each other with our words
- We will celebrate each other's diversities
- We will be open in our relationships so that no cliques arise
- We will put aside differences to work together
- We will put the interests of the team above our own personal interests
- We will all work to a common goal set out by the leaders of the church

GENEROSITY

John 3:16

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Genesis 1:28-30

Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.” 29 Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. 30 And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

Our God is a generous God, and gives so much to us. We could have been left to perish, but God generously gave his only Son to mercifully give us eternal life. To be generous and show mercy is to be like God.

Ephesians 5:1

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.

Micah 6:8

*No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

But what should we be generous with?

Be Generous With Our Resources

Our resources are mainly made up of money: We believe in this church that committed believers ought to bring their tithe (one tenth their of regular income) to give to the storehouse (the local church).

Malachi 3:10

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!

This is could really be looked on as not being generous, but rather being obedient.

2 Corinthians 9:7

You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

Many think that generosity is only about giving money but it's a lot more than that. People that aren't generous primarily have a heart issue and not just a wallet issue. It's an attitude and a condition that lies deep within us. When we develop a generous heart we are generous in our words, time and money. We become focused on giving of ourselves to others so that they may benefit. We are intentional on living out of a generous heart. We do it because God was first generous to us and we want to show that generosity to the world.

In living a life filled with generosity and mercy this means:

- We recognise God's generosity to us and allow that to permeate our hearts, and never forget the mercy that God has shown us
- We always seek to give rather than hold back
- We don't let what we have limit how much we give
- We help others by 'doing all that we can, by all means that we can, in all the ways that we can, in all the places we can, at all times that we can, to all the people that we can, for as long as we can.' (John Wesley)
- We will remember that mercy is more important than judgement
- We will not treat anyone differently because they have a different background or status.

Be Generous With Our Time

Time can be either a friend or an enemy. We need to use it well for the glory of God, and so ensure that we make time for:

- The Lord, keeping our devotional life on track
- Our family and friends

- Ourselves, with hobbies and rest
- In service, given to the work of God

Be Generous With Our Words

Psalm 141:3

Set a watch (guard) over my mouth O Lord.

We need to be careful with what we speak over ourselves and others. We must ensure we see ourselves as God does in Psalm 139:

- 1 O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.*
- 2 You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.*
- 3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.*
- 4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.
5 You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.*
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!*
- 7 I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!*
- 8 If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.*
- 9 If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,*
- 10 even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.*
- 11 I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—*
- 12 but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.*
- 13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.*

- 14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your
workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
- 15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
- 16 You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.
- 17 How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.
They cannot be numbered!
- 18 I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up, you are still with me!
- 19 O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!
Get out of my life, you murderers!
- 20 They blaspheme you; your enemies misuse your name.
- 21 O Lord, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?
Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?
- 22 Yes, I hate them with total hatred,
for your enemies are my enemies.
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- 24 Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Speaking with an encouraging attitude, cheering others on, affirming them, will spill out into all the relational connection in our life - family, friends, workmates - and be a true blessing.

SERVING

In today's world, serving can be seen as the last thing that people want to do. Serving is not seen as glamorous and therefore is seen by some 'beneath them'. However, Jesus' example is one of service.

Matthew 20-26-28

"Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

If Jesus is called to serve, then we are all called to serve. We believe that if serving is beneath you then leadership is beyond you. Jesus compels us by his love and we are saved to serve! We serve everyone with excellence, especially the least, little, last, lost and lifeless!

2 Corinthians 5:14

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

Mark 2:1-4

'When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus.'

This story is so powerful because it speaks to so many principles of friendship, passion, determination and selfless service.

1. They served a man who could not help himself

The four men saw the need before them and acted accordingly, we should do the same. We need to:

-See the need before us on the streets and in the workplace. We can often miss what is around us but instead we should walk slowly through the crowds. This way we will see the people who are devoid of hope, lonely and need our help!

-Accept responsibility. It's easy to say it's not my problem, it doesn't affect me. We can leave the problem for others to sort out such as the local authorities and council.

2. They served and it created a mess and a stir

They made a hole in the roof, we must remember:

-Serving people is messy business.

If we wait for the perfect moment to serve, it will never come!

-Serving is dangerous (to our hearts).

It is not always easy and it takes our time, energy and emotion. It can often be thankless, inconvenient and demanding but it is still worth it!

3. They served together and it was impactful and effective

They were four men in unison. Because they were united, it enabled them to be impactful and effective. The power of synergy (and the Bible) teaches that we are so more effective when we work together.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:

*If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.*

*But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.*

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

*Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.*

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

The story of the four men with the paralysed man teaches us so much about

serving. If we commit to serving others and give our everything then God will do the rest. The story finishes with the man rolling up his mat and walking home healed!

As we commit to serving those around us, let us remember to:

Serve with love, this motivates and compels us

Serve with passion

Serve with joy

Serve with gratitude (remembering what God has done)

Serve with purpose (the opportunity of a lifetime is seized in the lifetime of the opportunity)

‘While women weep, as they do now, I’ll fight

While little children go hungry, as they do now, I’ll fight

While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I’ll fight

While there is a drunkard left,

While there is a poor lost girl upon the streets,

While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,

I’ll fight - I’ll fight to the very end!’

William Booth (from his last preached message)

PASSION

John 2:12-17

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

13 It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. 14 In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. 15 Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. 16 Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

17 Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."

People of passion are everywhere. Passionate people are in music, business, fashion, politics, education, faith, and more besides. We all have many different passions - some love to cook, some love to eat, some love to shop and some love sports.

The church has the most passionate message of hope in the whole world, and as such should contain the most fired-up and passionate people. Passionate Christ-followers are infectious, full of life, energy, and fun.

Someone once said, "Catch on fire and people will watch you burn."

The Enemy wants to rob the people of God of their passion and make them insipid, mediocre, and colourless. Arena Church is unashamedly and unapologetically given to passion in ALL it seeks to do.

One definition of passion is, "a powerful and compelling emotion", which lends itself to the word ZEAL, meaning "to boil" or "to be white-hot". In an alternative

translation of John 2:17, Jesus said *“Zeal for your house will consume me”* - what are you white-hot about?

Three things we are passionate about; our relationship with God, the church, the world

Our Relationship with God - To love God with all our heart, soul and mind.

The Church - Ephesians 5:25

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”

The World - John 3:16

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” - the world is looking for change, and we have been given the responsibility to carry the message to the world with passion and zeal.

We should be intentional about living passionately and enthusiastically in every aspect of our lives. Let's live with a passion for God, for the church of Jesus Christ and for His Word, and not settle for anything less!

At Arena, we are especially passionate about worship, lost people, serving people and excellence. We are passionate about worshipping God with everything we have, helping lost people find Jesus, serving and loving people in any way we can and doing the best with what we have. We look to go and grow, and love and serve the world.

Gathering and worshipping - Psalm 150

1 Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!

2 Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness!

3 Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn; praise him with the lyre and harp!

4 Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes!

5 Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals.

6 Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Connecting to people far from God - 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

19 Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. 20 When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the

Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. 21 When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. 22 When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.

Doing and serving - Matthew 25:34-36

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. 36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

Excelling - “Do the best you can with what you have been entrusted with” - Matthew 25:14-30

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. 15 He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

16 “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. 17 The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. 18 But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money. 19 “After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. 20 The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

21 “The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’ 22 “The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’

23 “The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have

been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' 24 "Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. 25 I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'

26 "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, 27 why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

28 "Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. 29 To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. 30 Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Growing and living - 2 Peter 1:5-8

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. 8 The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As passionate followers of Jesus, we won't only change our own lives, but will change the world we live in!

Living a life of passion means:

- We will praise and worship God in our services with an unashamed exuberance
- We will wholeheartedly serve - even when it's inconvenient
- We will pursue God with passion
- We will have a heart for lost people just as Jesus did
- We will do the best with what God entrusts us - our finances, our gifts, our talents, our calling
- We will love God and people passionately

GROWTH

We are committed to growing, dreaming big, living by faith and lifting lids.

Our final distinctive behaviour is that of Growth. So many people in life make decisions to stop growing whether this is by design or default, whether they have reached all their goals, their life gets tough or that they enjoy the season of comfort. But one thing is for sure, God's desire is that we would continue to grow in Jesus, develop as disciples and become more like Jesus in character, thoughts and actions. God's desire is also that we would grow in church; influence, impact, number, our gifts, our ministries and that our personal lives and homes would grow to leave a legacy of God in our worlds. We truly believe all healthy things grow!

Our vision as a church is to 'Go and grow and love and serve our world'.

He desires for you to grow. As a child grows from a baby to a toddler and then through the stages to adulthood, so God desires for us to grow and to mature. We should all be growing up in our faith. This means our roots go deep in him and this provides the foundation for growth. The late christian minister and author John Stott said when summing up the Christian scene, it has 'growth without depth'. This is sad but true in many contexts, but here in Arena Church we want growth and depth! It's a passion!

Here are two passages from the bible to consider when we think of growth.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 TPT

'Brothers and sisters, when I was with you I found it impossible to speak to you as those who are spiritually mature people, for you are still dominated by the mind-set of the flesh. And because you are immature infants in Christ, 2 I had to nurse you and feed you with "milk," not with the solid food of more advanced teachings, because you weren't ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready to be fed solid food, 3 for you are living your lives dominated by the mind-set of the flesh. Ask yourselves: Is there jealousy among you? Do you compare yourselves with others? Do you quarrel like children and end up taking sides? If so, this proves that you are living your lives centered on yourselves, dominated by the mind-set of the flesh, and behaving like unbelievers.'

Colossians 1:9-11 (NIV)

'For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not

stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,'

At Arena we want everyone to grow up which means to keep growing in character, faith and love as well as influence, impact and size. We can masquerade as a mature, in control, all together kind of Christian when the reality in our own hearts can be quite different. Don't kid yourself... your heart is deceitfully wicked!

Jeremiah 17:9 NIV

'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?'

Matthew 12:34 NKJV

'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.'

Hearts and mouths reveal maturity. Listen to yourself, what do you speak? What does your heart tell you? The realisation upon honest soul searching may be that I am not as mature as I thought or worse still I am stuck and not growing.

John 3:30 NIV

It has been said that 'most of us suffer from lingering immaturities. Even as a grown adult the little child is hiding somewhere!' We must address this at every turn so that we grow up to become more like Jesus - 'He must become greater; I must become less.'

What is maturity growth? 'To be mature is to have a mature relationship with Christ in which we worship, trust, love and obey him' (John Stott)

Colossians 2:7 NLT

'Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.'

Here we see the example of a tree where its roots go down into rich soil so our roots grow down into him, and then our lives are built on him! There are a few things to consider when seeking to grow - a clearer vision of Jesus, a life built on Christ and a growing faith.

A clearer vision of Jesus

We need a clearer vision of Jesus - 'let your roots go down into him' (Colossians 2:7). Jesus is our love and focus. As we surrender daily to Jesus and place him as first, front and centre then He becomes our life, passion and source. In Matthew Jesus explicitly says the way to live every day is to

Matthew 6:33-34

"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Who are you following?

There are many people who are following their own man made version of Jesus that suits them. The real Jesus is humble, holy, filled with grace and truth, He loves relentlessly and corrects carefully, He loves us as we are and loves us too much to leave us as we are! We may need a fresh vision of Jesus so that we grow and become like Him!

The real Jesus is also Lord over all creation and Lord of the church (Colossians 1:15-20) and we need to make him the Lord of our life.

Philippians 2:9-11 NIV

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

A life built on Christ

Colossians 2:7 NLT

Let your lives be built on him.'

Matthew 7:24-27 NIV

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them

into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jesus tells a story about two builders, one built on sand and the other one built on rock. This was a real example that the hearers would understand, the wind and rain always come but the house built on the rock withstands the storms! This is what happens when we build on Him and in Him! Verse 24 reminds us how we build on Him - ‘everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice’. We cannot just be hearers of the word but we must also be doers of the word.

We must grow in our reading, understanding and meditation of God’s word. Let this word be a feast for our souls. Jerome, an early church father, wrote ‘the ignorance of scripture is the ignorance of Christ’. Let us not be ignorant of the Holy Scriptures, may this be a place of daily growth!

We must maintain and increase our time with Jesus if we are to Grow. We need to get back to spending time listening, hearing and speaking to God. If you will build on Jesus then you will build on rock, a firm foundation for life!

A growing faith

Colossians 2:7 NLT
‘Then your faith will grow strong...’

Without faith it’s impossible to please God and one area where we can stop growing is in our faith. God wants us to have faith in him and for this faith to grow.

2 Corinthians 10:15 NIV
“Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand,”

The heart of the Arena Church community is to be committed to a faith walk, for as Hebrews states, ‘...it is impossible to please God without faith.’

Hebrews 11:1-6
‘Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. By faith we understand that the entire universe was

formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith. It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.'

Martin Luther King Jr explained it well when he said 'faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase'.

In living a life of faith this means:-

- We believe in the impossible. We dream Big Dreams trusting God for those impossible things. We lift up our eyes to see. We will not allow limits and lids to prevent us from taking hold of all that Christ has for us!
- We follow the Bible and what God says even when it doesn't fully make sense
- We actively take steps of faith and we are not passive
- We believe that God is working in our lives even when we cannot see it

There are times and seasons in our lives that can present huge growth opportunities. But even when you are in one or are coming out of one you must realise there is still more growth available for our faith to grow strong.

We get stronger through adversity, resistance and pressure, through change and challenge!

Growth = Change

Somebody once said 'nobody minds changing until they have to change.'

Jesus understood the growth principle when he spoke in John 15 and he uses the plant kingdom as an example, namely pruning. A huge part of growing and strengthening a tree, bush or plant is pruning! It is the same in our own lives.

John 15:1-2 NIV

"I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He lops off every

branch that doesn't produce. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops."

The areas of our lives that were once fruit bearing, now bear no fruit! They were once effective, fulfilled, thriving, healthy and reproducing but they now have no life or health. We can be tempted in these areas of our lives to hide away, masquerade and pretty it up but the point of this passage is that it needs major attention!

What areas in our own lives do we need to cut, let go of or leave? We can be tempted to stay put, procrastinate and settle for the status quo but God wants us to grow. He wants us to develop, mature, to grow in faith, grow in love and to grow in the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22).

If that wasn't enough, this passage in John 15 also shows us that He wants to prune the areas that are producing fruit for even larger crops! The Wisteria plant is a great example of this. It flowers and is full of foliage but in the autumn it needs a precise prune so that it will produce even more in the season of bloom!

Where do I need to grow?

There are many areas we can grow but here are a few suggestions:-

- Finance - lets liberally give and share
- Sharing faith - be bold and unashamedly clear
- Character - our thinking and attitude to become evermore holy like Jesus
- Relationships - spending time with God and others, making time with those we love
- Forgiveness - practice the Lord's prayer every day and forgive those who have wronged you
- Confidence - who you are, finding your voice

You get the idea. Growth is something both Jesus and we do together as we remain committed to and connected to him!

God is committed to growth - at all costs

One final place where he wants us all to grow is in our understanding that "Heaven is the prize", or said another way "Heaven is our home".

We can so often get stuck on the visible and temporal instead of living for the eternal and the invisible. We think this world is home when it is not. We are just

passing through. This truth is a major part of growth. Its so counter culture to the world in which we live. The bible encourages and exhorts us to live with our eyes on Heaven!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV

‘Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.’

Matthew 6:19-20 NIV

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

1 Peter 2:11 NIV

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.”

A missionary to China in 1900 wrote a final letter days before her execution, in it she wrote this line - ‘live near to God and cling less closely to earth’. This sums up over a century later an eternal truth that we must cling onto, hold dear, treasure and grow in... to live with eternity in our hearts!

May growth be a hallmark of our lives and in church as we keep our eyes on the prize!

Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”



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