

# MOVING TO THE CORE

## Part 1

Core. The word core has at least 14 different meanings including:

- The central portion of the earth below the mantle, beginning at a depth of about 1,800 miles and probably consisting of iron and nickel. It is made up of a liquid outer core and a solid inner core.
- A set of subjects or courses that make up a required portion of a curriculum.
- A reactor core.
- The fibrous seed-bearing part of a fruit – the core of an apple or a pear.
- When I teach on marriage, or lead a couple through pre-marital counseling, I devote one lesson to what I call core values. These are the values that a person places above all others.

A church also has a core. In this sense, the core speaks of “the central or innermost part, the essence.”

About a month ago, during our Wednesday night Bible study on the book of Philippians, I dealt with the topic of the church core briefly. I used a set of circles that reflected the various levels of one’s involvement in the church moving inward from the edge of the circles into the core or innermost circle. I don’t know how anyone else could have been as impacted by that study as I was. The teacher was the one that was being taught that night. The Lord simply would not allow me to leave the subject. I have since shared my thoughts on the core with the board in our last board meeting, then too, I have discussed the matter with my wife and my staff. As a result, I have felt led to develop this series on messages on the subject. I only trust and pray that you will be as impacted by this as I have been. We’ll see.

The real core of this series is yet a few weeks away. That will be when I talk to you about core people. At that time I will talk to you about what makes up a core Christian.

- What does he or she look like?
- How does the core saint react in times of trouble?
- What are the benefits of being a part of the core?
- How can one move from the edge to the core?

I don’t think you will want to miss any of those messages. I plan on being here for everyone of them. I believe the core saints will be here too.

This morning, though, I want to cover some basics. Nothing real deep. Nonetheless, I do think it is important to be reminded occasionally of our core values and our core beliefs. That is where we are going first.

## **THIS MORNING -- CORE VALUES**

### **1. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR FOCUS**

Jesus is first and foremost in this congregation. You and I have a place. However, we realize that it is and most always be secondary to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

- When we sing, we sing to and of Him.
- When we serve, we serve Him.

- When we give, we give first to Him and the work of His Kingdom.
- When we pray, to pray to Him and in His name.
- When we worship, we worship Jesus!
- When we baptize, we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

A key verse in this regard is found in Colossians 3:17, **“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

I have known people who wanted to affix some title to us. They wanted to know who we are over here on the corner of Highway 14 and North Wright Road. If you are watching this service by television, and that question has crossed your mind, let me fill you in:

- We are Protestants.
- We are evangelicals.
- We are members of the worldwide fellowship of the Assemblies of God.
- We are Pentecostal/Charismatics.
- However, we are first and foremost born-again blood-bought Christians – devoted followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is my message. I therefore want to take a brief detour at this point and share with you some thoughts on Jesus as borrowed from a sermon by the black Baptist pastor S. M. Lockridge. As you may remember, I like to quote Lockridge every so often. The good pastor said of our Lord:

“He supplies strength for the weak, and  
 He’s available for the tempted and the tried.  
 He’s sympathizes and He sees,  
 He guards and He guides.  
 He heals the sick, He cleansed the leper.  
 He forgives sinners.  
 He discharges debtors.  
 He delivers the captives.  
 He defends the people.  
 He blesses the young. He regards the aged.  
 He rewards the diligent.  
 He beautifies the meek.  
 He’s the key to knowledge.  
 He’s the wellspring of wisdom.  
 He’s the doorway of deliverance.  
 He’s the path of peace.  
 He’s the roadway of righteousness.  
 He’s the highway of holiness.  
 He’s the gateway to glory.

His office is manifold.  
 His promise is sure.  
 His life is matchless.  
 His goodness is limitless.  
 His mercy is everlasting.  
 His love never changes.

His word is enough.  
 His grace is sufficient.  
 His reign is righteous.  
 His yoke is easy.  
 His burden is light.  
 I wish I could describe Him to you. He's indescribable because He's incomprehensible.  
 He's irresistible because He's invincible.

You can't get Him off your hands; you can't get off your mind.  
 You can't outlive Him, and you can't live without Him.  
 Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him, and Herod couldn't kill Him.  
 Death couldn't handle Him, and thank God, the grave couldn't hold Him.  
 There was nobody before Him; there'll be nobody after Him.  
 He has no predecessor; He'll have no successor.  
 You can't impeach Him, and He's not going to resign.

He's the Alpha and the Omega.  
 The beginning and the end.  
 The first and the last.  
 He's the giver of life.  
 He's the joy out of every sorrow.  
 He's the light of every darkness.  
 He's the peace that passes all understanding.  
 He's the giver of every good and perfect gift.  
 There's no God before Him.  
 There'll be none after Him.  
 He is preeminent.  
 There is no other God."  
 What is His name? (Jesus!)

I appreciate your love and your respect this morning, but I am not your Savior, Jesus is! Keep your eyes fixed on Him! Hebrews 12:2-3 encourages us, **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”**

- Jesus paid it all.
- Jesus suffered and died.
- Jesus is the one who has redeemed us with His own precious blood!
- Look to Jesus!

We value Him above every name that has been named in heaven, on earth, or under the Earth.

## 2. PRAYER

Everything that we do is wrapped in prayer. We have prayer groups, prayer teams, a prayer chain, a deacon with a prayer portfolio, as well as a prayer room.

- We open our services with prayer.
- We close with prayer.

- We pray several times during a service.
- Our praise and worship is prayer.
- Prayer is everywhere.
- The Lord's house is meant to be a house of prayer.

Do you need prayer? Come to church.

Need healing? Call for the elders to come and what? Pray.

The Apostle Paul called us to **“pray without ceasing.”**

Again, prayer is a core value of New Life Assembly of God.

### 3. WORSHIP

Worship is a priority here! In the book, *"The Free Church Today,"* this powerful statement is found:

"In the life of the Christian church nothing is more important, in any age or at any time, than the life of its people at worship. If the church is irrelevant and meaningless here, it will be irrelevant and meaningless in the world. If it is exciting and victorious here, it will be exciting and victorious in the world. Charge the church to be active and influential in social causes, yes. Spur it on to activity in every area of life, by all means. But neglect its mission and its ministry here, and it will DIE. It will be a dead institution with nothing to say anywhere to anyone."

Isaiah the prophet noted, **“Thou shall then delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places”** Isaiah 58:14 (*King James Version*). Worship is the life of a Spirit-filled church! We make no apologies in this area-- We delight ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Listen to our songs,
- our messages,
- our praise,
- our testimonies.

It is our joy to WORSHIP Jesus!

But pastor, your worship is too loud, too soft, too formal, too wild. If you believe that, you have missed something. Those things are only expressions; our worship is who and what we are.

Romans 12:1 states, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”**

- Yes, our singing is a part of our worship -- but so is our working.
- Our prayers are a part of our worship -- but so is our recreation.
- Our reading the Bible is a part of our worship -- but so is our giving.

Everything within us declares that He is the Lord.

- We drive and worship,
- We play and worship,
- We read and worship,
- We look at a sunset and worship.
- We breath worship.

Please do not limit our worship to one time, one place, or one expression. It is more, much more. We live to worship Jesus.

#### 4. OPENNESS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

I will only say a few words here as I will deal with this again when I cover our core beliefs.

If you want to find our church in the Bible, please turn to the book of Acts. The church of the first century was a church which was Spirit-filled. We like to think that this church is Spirit-filled too. The Holy Spirit is resident and president.

As a Pentecostal church, we want to foster a climate where God regularly shows up! I have prayed, I don't know how many times, that people will sense the presence of the Lord when they drive onto our property; when they walk into our building.

We want people to be afraid to miss a service for fear they will miss something.

Our services are meant to be marked with

- Variety,
- Expectancy,
- and power!
- We want them to be alive and exciting.

Why? Simple. Because we know from Scripture that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, opened the eyes of the blind, cleansed the leper, delivered the oppressed and possessed, as well as saved the rankest sinner is here in us and with us. He is the same yesterday, today and forever!

Our prayer is, Holy Spirit, you are welcome in this place. By the way, we had a brother filled with the Holy Spirit last Wednesday night after church. It happens here, Saints!

#### 5. WE OPERATE ON A VISION

When I became your pastor, the Lord gave me a word or a "vision" for this assembly. I felt as if the Holy Spirit said that the enemy of our souls has come "**only to steal and kill and destroy.**" The Lord is now saying that it is high time for His church to rise up and take back that which has been taken from us. Again, we are to "**TAKE IT BACK!**"

While I admit that we have suffered some losses along the way, I recently told my staff that maybe we should change the statement from "**take it back**" to "**taking it back.**" It is happening!

- I could tell you stories of marriages being repaired,
- Prodigals that have come to Christ,
- Health that has been restored,
- Finances that have turned around,

And more. Here.

Then, too, the church's vision has long included raising up an army of soldiers who are willing to lay it all down on the line for Jesus.

- Many have gone before, others are now waiting in the wings ready to follow. Steve and Natalie Overturf will soon leave to serve as Missionary Associates in The Sudan.
- Last summer Andy Austin served in Bosnia.

- Sara Wolfe will be serving this summer in El Salvador as she considers a possible life of ministry.
- Look at the number of our young people who are presently involved in Masters Commission, Bible college, and Berean University.
- Joshua Post, again, one of our young people, was recently named the Assistant Youth Director for the South Texas District Assemblies of God.

These people are going to be world changers for Jesus!

As a pastor I have received a biblical mandate to “**prepare God's people for works of service.**” One minister wanted to break down these duties in the simplest possible terms. He wrote that the shepherd is to: hatch 'em, match 'em, patch 'em, and **DISPATCH 'EM.**

When Bruce Larson pastored University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, his bulletin and sign in front of the church read:

- Pastor and equipper: Bruce Larson
- Ministers: The members of the church

Rick Warren pastors one of the largest churches in America. He says, “It’s a life changing experience when someone realizes, **I AM A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST.** All believers, not just pastors, need to experience the fulfillment that comes from having God use them to change lives. It will change their whole attitude.”

Ministry also includes:

- Driving a bus for Prime Time,
- Teaching a Sunday school class,
- Helping with Royal Rangers, Missionettes, or Prime Time,
- Being a deacon,
- Being on the worship team,
- Or working as a Christian businessman, or businesswoman, a teacher, lawyer, or whatever else the Lord dictates.

To put it another way, we are working to move the church away from "Come and Sit" to "Go and Disciple" Christianity.

"Without a vision the people perish." But with a vision the people flourish!

## **6. KINGDOM GROWTH--NOT JUST CHURCH GROWTH**

I do not want to be misunderstood here. We are more interested in growing the Kingdom of God than we are in merely adding to the numbers of New Life Assembly of God. I know that I have said that before, I will no doubt say it again:

- Planting churches grows the Kingdom.
- Seeing people saved grows the Kingdom.
- Reclaiming the prodigal grows the Kingdom.

Don’t get me wrong. I enjoy seeing the church grow in numbers as much as the next person. But lets do it the right way. I know that occasionally the Lord may move someone in from another fellowship to fill an open slot in our ministries. For instance, He may send us someone from Milwaukee or Kenosha. Who knows?

However, I never want a true Bible-believing church to ever be fearful that we are striving to grow off of their sheep! Janesville and the surrounding communities have ample lost folks that need what we have to offer. Let us go after them; not after the Baptists!

Instead of being a threat to other churches, let us ever seek to bless, encourage, and help them. Let this church be their best friend.

- Are you aware of the fact that recently a Baptist church here in town used our facility for a wedding? Their sanctuary was under construction.
- The area home-schoolers presently meet here one day a week.
- Pastor Kurt has befriended pastors of many if not most of the churches here in Janesville. He has developed a bond of trust with them that has enabled a number of churches to work together in a variety of community outreaches.

We are presently working on a community outreach for this Spring or Summer that may, again, involve several Evangelical churches.

## **7. MINISTRIES NOT PROGRAMS**

Everything here is considered ministry unto the Lord and His people. This is a church, not a service agency or the Elks Club.

- When I interviewed the various applicants for the office of secretary some time back, I talked to them about praying for people, offering encouragement, as well as counseling on the phone. I stressed that the secretarial position is a ministry position. It is.
- However, serving in the kitchen is also a ministry.
- Changing diapers in the nursery is a ministry. By serving that baby, you may free up a young mother to be in church where she may receive a Word from God or even salvation.
- Recently we gave a Love Fund gift to a needy family. They told us that the gift was an answer to prayer. Someone gave an offering to the Love Fund little knowing that the Lord was going to turn that gift into a ministry of encouragement; into an answer to prayer.

Hear me, please. Anybody can put together a program--but it takes children of the King to minister.

Let me share with you a list of some of the ministries that operate here. This list, by the way, is not complete:

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Adult Choir                  | 14. Communion                                  |
| 2. Adult Missions Trips         | 15. Community Outreaches                       |
| 3. All Church Summer Picnic     | 16. Counseling Ministry                        |
| 4. Annual Children's Musical    | 17. Cult Awareness                             |
| 5. Backyard Bible Clubs         | 18. Deaf Ministry                              |
| 6. Brush Arbor Service          | 19. Deacons Ministry                           |
| 7. Bus/Van Ministry             | 20. Decorating Ministry (Building And Grounds) |
| 8. Camping Ministries           | 21. Drama                                      |
| 9. Car Winterization            | 22. Easter Candy Hunt                          |
| 10. Children's Music Ministries | 23. Fine Arts Festival                         |
| 11. Children's Puppet Ministry  | 24. Friendship Dinners                         |
| 12. Christmas Baskets           | 25. Funerals                                   |
| 13. Church Planting             |  |

26. Generation Best
27. Golf League
28. Harvest Festival
29. Hispanic Ministry
30. Honor Bound Men's Ministry
31. Hospital Visitation
32. Hospitality Ministry
33. Information Center
34. Internet Outreach
35. Jail Ministry
36. Joshua Prayer Room
37. Junior Bible Quiz
38. Kidz Zones Children's Ministries
39. Korean Church
40. Labor Day Parade Outreach
41. Ladies Bible Study
42. Library
43. Little Lambs Nursery
44. Love Fund
45. Men's Get-Away
46. Men's Saturday Morning Prayer Group
47. Ministry Meals
48. Ministry Preparation
49. Missionettes
50. Missions
51. Missions Committee
52. MOPS
53. Mother-Daughter Brunch
54. Monthly Mailer
55. Neighborhood Blitzes
56. New Directions
57. New Life Small Groups
58. Open Heart Women's Ministry
59. Pastor's Bible Study
60. Pastors Masters
61. Pine Wood Derby
62. Prayer Chain
63. Prayer For The Sick
64. Prayer Team
65. Premarital Counseling
66. Prime Time
67. Prime Time Teens
68. Prime Time Christmas Party
69. Pulpit Ministry
70. Reality Check
71. Reality Check Junior High
72. Release Time
73. Restore
74. Royal Rangers
75. Senior Bible Quiz
76. Seniors Honor Fellowship
77. Sermon Tapes And Manuscripts
78. Singles
79. Softball Teams
80. Sonshine Handicap Ministry
81. Sound And Lighting Ministries
82. Sunday School/School Of The Bible
83. Special Music
84. Street Evangelism
85. Summer Children's Outreaches
86. Sunday Worship Services
87. Superbowl Outreach
88. Telephone Ministry
89. Toddler Nursery
90. Ushers
91. VBS
92. Water Baptism
93. Weddings
94. Weekly Television Ministry
95. Women's Retreats
96. Worship Band
97. Worship Teams
98. Youth Discipleship Retreat
99. Youth Missions Trips
100. Youth on Fire

Again, these aren't programs, they're ministries. They are extensions of our love and service to Jesus! What ministry are you a part of today?

## 8. MISSIONS

I want to encourage you to go take a walk. Seriously, walk down the hall between here and the gym. Look at both sides of the wall. As you do so, you will come to sense just a little of our passion for reaching the world for Jesus.

Both local and foreign missionaries are represented on those walls. Letters, pictures, maps, and more are there to remind you to pray and to give.

You see, we believe that God blesses a missions church!

God gave His Son to be a missionary to Planet Earth. If He gave so much, how can we justify giving just a little?

## 9. HOLINESS

- 1 Timothy 2:1-3 cries, **“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior....”**
- Leviticus 11:44-45, **“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.... I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”**
- Leviticus 19:2, **“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: `Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”**
- Leviticus 20:26, **“You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy....”**
- 1 Peter 1:15-16, **“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”**

Did you get it? What did each of those passages, taken from both the Old and the New Testaments, have in common? You are right. Each passage stressed the fact that we are to be holy because God is holy.

Since you did so well with that little quiz, let's test your skills one more time. I am going to read three more verses. Again tell me what the passages have in common. Ready? This test may be a little harder:

- 1 Corinthians 1:2, **“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy....”**
- Ephesians 1:4, **“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy....”**
- Hebrews 12:14, **“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord.”**

You are right again! The common thread in each of these verses is the phrase **“be holy.”** In fact, you might be surprised to find that phrase is given some 46 different times in Scripture.

Why the emphasis on personal holiness, you ask? The Apostle Paul gives the answer in Ephesians 5:26-27. He notes that the Lord died on the cross in order to both express his love for the church and to **“make her (the church) holy... and to present her (the church) to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”**

History records that some people have gone to great lengths in an effort to be "holy." One early saint wore so many chains that he had to crawl around on his hands and knees. Another man, a monk, refused to pamper his body's desire for restful slumber. For 40 years he refused to lie down while sleeping.

Simon Stylites attained a reputation for holiness by dressing in a hair shirt and living for 37 years on different pillars, each one loftier than the last -- the last one being some 66 feet high!

A gentleman in France decided to copy Simon Stylites. Not being able to secure a pillar, he improvised one by placing a chair on the kitchen table in his home. He sat on the chair arrayed in a garment almost as uncomfortable as a hair shirt, intending to spend the rest of his life there in fasting and prayer. The cook and the rest of the family did not see eye to eye with him and altogether missed the greatness of his intentions. They succeeded in making life so miserable for him that he soon discontinued the project. Later he wrote, "Then I perceived that it is a very difficult thing to be a saint while living with your own family." I perceive that he was not the first nor will he be the last person to have such a revelation!

To be sure, holiness IS a very serious matter! Oswald Chambers, noted author of *My Utmost For His Highest*, has observed: "God has one destined end for mankind, that being holiness. His one aim is the production of saints. God is not an eternal blessing machine for men; He did not come to save man out of pity; He came to save men because He had created them to be holy."

The Lord wants us to develop into people who:

- Live like Him,
- Think like Him,
- Love like Him, and
- Care like Him.

That is holiness.

- Holiness isn't just dressing modestly, but that is a part of it.
- Holiness isn't just resisting the temptation to watch something evil on television, but that it certainly a part of it.
- Holiness isn't just keeping one's mouth clean, but that is a part of it.
- Holiness isn't just living in such a way that our lives are not an offense to the weaker brother, but indeed, that is a part of it.
- Holiness is not offending our own conscience or the Holy Spirit who lives inside of us. It is asking, "What would Jesus do?" and then doing it.

Holiness isn't something that you wear on your sleeve to show off like Simon Stylites, but in a wicked and perverse world, true holiness will stand out. People will ask you why are you different – because you will be different.

I like what Evangelist Steve Hill says, "religion is hanging around the cross; Christianity is getting up on the cross." Holiness is denying self, picking up a cross and following Jesus.

#### 10. KOINONIA

We see ourselves as family, brothers and sisters in Christ, **WOMBMATES!** Love flows.

Under the umbrella of New Life Assembly of God, we have former Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Free Methodists, United Pentecostals, Lutherans, Church of Christ, Charismatics, Non-denominational, atheists, New Agers, Pagans, Covenant, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Episcopalians, Mormons, Presbyterians, Jehovah's Witnesses and more.

We have:

- Austins and Zehners,
- Browns and Greens,
- Dosch and Touth,
- Sowatzkis and Schiefelbeins,
- Days and Weis,
- Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan

Together!

Young and old,  
 Rich and poor,  
 Democrats and Republicans,  
 Liberals and conservatives,  
 Unionists and non-unionists,  
 Catholics and Protestants,  
 Northerners and southerners.  
 Again, together!

Jesus prayed in John 17:21, "**That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**" That is happening here -- we are One in the Spirit!

**AS I CLOSE**, I want to share with you a portion of the written history of Bethel Assembly of God in Rapid City, South Dakota. I pastored there a number of years ago. A member of the congregation there wrote the following words to that wonderful church: "God doesn't ask us to consider the obstacles, rather, He calls us to seize the opportunities. May Bethel always be willing to step out in faith and allow God to accomplish through us His perfect will.

The founders of Bethel leave this challenge for coming generations. Always be ready to do God's will even though, at times, it may cost you misunderstanding and even ridicule. Remember always that which costs you nothing is truly of very little worth."

Let accept this challenge as well. As one, let us commit ourselves without reservation to the task that is before us. Let us commit ourselves to these core values.