



gospel
ourDNA

discovering what makes mpc
the church we are

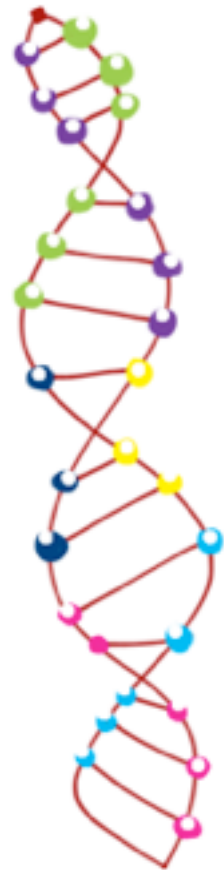


DNA is the grow-code that makes each organism what it is. Here are some of the key elements of our mpc DNA...

Back in 1953, James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the double-helix structure of Deoxyribonucleic Acid that holds the program code that uniquely shapes the development of every living organism. Blue eyes and brown hair? It's in DNA. Blue hair and brown eyes? Probably not. Human, frog, chimpanzee? It all depends on what's coded in your DNA. It's an amazing system... and a powerful metaphor for the key ideas and principles that grow and shape a church.

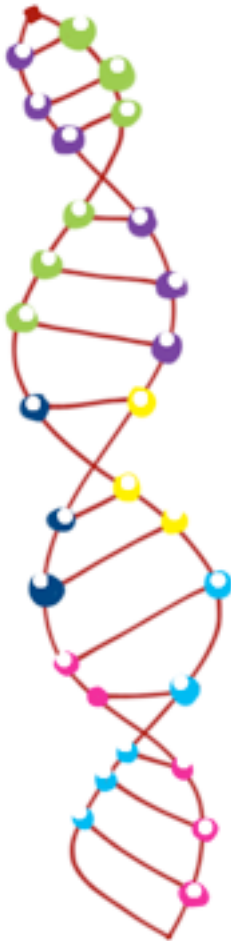
These studies are designed to introduce and explore the DNA of **our** uniquely God-made church.

You won't find **everything** about us here ... it's a focus on our distinctives, rather than the doctrines all Christian churches have in common like the Trinity, or the divinity of Jesus, or Prayer. We don't overlook those things, and we don't take them for granted. But these studies focus more on the things that make mpc a little bit different... hopefully in a good way.



gospel our heritage

1



We're Reformed - in the historic sense

Back in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his famous protest letter¹ to the door of Wittenburg Church, so launching the Protestant Reformation. Like him, and the Reformers who followed, we are convinced² that:

- 1. We are saved by Grace Alone.** It's God's generosity, and not our own pale attempts to be good or religious or impressive that bring us into his family.
- 2. We respond by faith alone.** Our response is to rely on the sacrifice of Jesus (his death on the cross), and to keep relying on him to the end. That's all. He does the saving, we do the trusting. That's faith.
- 3. Our leader and mediator is Christ alone.** No Pope, Priest, or Pastor is going to stand between us and God the Father, because Jesus is the perfect mediator, and the full and complete sacrifice for our sin. That's why we're led by ordinary people who are appointed from the church as elders, some who are well trained as Bible teachers (see below). None of our leaders are super spiritual, and none of them will ever pretend to stand between you and God. Just go straight to Jesus instead.
- 4. We are guided by Scripture alone.** Not that the Bible tells us how to fix the car or tells us what's on TV this week, but that when it comes to knowing the mind of God, we don't depend on visions or feelings or traditions or even human reason - but God's revelation of himself in his Word. That's why we keep pushing the idea of clear, Christ centred Bible teaching.
- 5. The glory belongs to God alone.** Which follows from all the above. We thank God for saving us, and live out that gratitude.

Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_solas

In this study, we'll look briefly at the history behind the Reformation movement - and why it still matters today. It's important that you do the background reading before your group meets.

¹ 'The Ninety Five Theses'

² These points are known as the "Five Solas" - sola being latin for 'alone.' Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_solas

Understanding the Reformation

Why aren't we all Roman Catholics? It's because of the historical movement called "The Protestant Reformation." Martin Luther, who sparked the start of the revolution, is said to be among the top three most influential men of last millennium. Even if you just have the Bible in your own language, then you can thank God for the Reformers. So what was the Reformation?

On October 31, 1517 an obscure German Catholic monk called Martin Luther nailed a protest letter listing 95 objections onto the door of his Roman Catholic church in Wittenberg. He was particularly offended by Johann Tetzel, a Monk sent out by the Pope to raise money for the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by selling 'indulgences', which were special blessings said to give 'time off from purgatory.' (St. Peter's Basilica is the largest church building in Christian history. It covers an area of 5.7 acres and has a capacity of more than sixty thousand people.)

In other words, in the name of the Pope, Tetzel was selling indulgences as a "get out of jail free card." His slogan was, *"As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs."* Martin



Luther, a keen student of the Bible, found the whole thing deeply offensive, as did many others who had lacked the courage to speak out previously. He found himself with many supporters. Students took Luther's '95 theses' and published them with the help of the newly invented printing press - and within a few weeks they were all over Germany.

The Pope was furious, as was the German Emperor, who called together a council meeting ("The Diet") in the city of Worms. Apart from being the most memorably named meeting in all of church history, the Diet of Worms called on Luther to apologise. He refused, and while free on bail during the final deliberations of the council, he was taken into hiding by Prince

Frederick, a sympathiser. Significantly, while the edict of the Diet of Worms called for the arrest and punishment of Luther, it was simply ignored; the power of the Roman Catholic church had been seriously undermined.

This was the start of the Reformation of the all-powerful Roman Catholic church. The flame was kindled across Europe. Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin in Switzerland, Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer in England and John Knox in Scotland were just a few of the famous names who were to follow.

The fundamental change was the recovery of the Biblical Gospel as seen in the slogan of the reformers - "After darkness light!"

The scriptures were seen as the real cause of the reformation. Was God's Word the authority in matters of faith - or the Pope?

The reformer's saw clearly that the Bible taught that our justification was by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Alone - all to the Glory of God Alone.

Discussion - Graciously Different

Back in the days of the reformation, church and government were tightly linked. The stability of the government depended on the church, and the power of the church depended on the government. Disagreeing with the church was often a capital offense. England and Scotland swung between Roman Catholic and Protestant rule, and key leaders on either side often lost their heads when their side went out of favour. Times have changed - and what a relief!

a) What connection do you think there *should be* between church and government today? (Did you know that Queen Elizabeth is *still* the head of the Church of England. What do you think of this?)

b) How do you think people of different theological views (eg non-Catholic and Catholic) should deal with each other, and with their different views, these days?

d) How can we positively express elements of our DNA, and our heritage, and Biblical Truth, without being offensive or arrogant?

What does the Bible say...

Let's take a quick look at what the Bible says about the distinctives of the reformation that are part of our mpcDNA.

a) Grace alone

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. How are we saved, and how does verse 8 define 'grace'?

b) Faith alone

According to **verse 8**, How is the *gift of God* received?

c) Christ Alone

Read Ephesians 2:13 (because it's handy to the verses we just looked at.) Who has brought us near to God, and how?

The New Testament book of Hebrews devotes almost six chapters to explaining how Jesus has replaced all human priesthood. As the God-man, He's the perfect mediator between God and man. No other priests are needed. **Read Hebrews 4:14, and then Hebrews 10:11-14.**

What was the problem with Old Testament priests and their sacrifices?

What has Jesus achieved, and how good a job did he do?

What effect does that have on your own standing before God?

What do you need to **do** to benefit from the priestly sacrifice of Jesus?

d) Scripture alone

Sola scriptura (latin for "by scripture alone") is the doctrine that the Bible contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. According to Wikipedia, "by contrast, the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox Churches teach that the Scriptures are **not** the only infallible source of Christian doctrine. For them Scripture is but **one of three equal authorities**; the other two being Sacred Tradition and the episcopacy (ie Bishops, and especially The Pope.)

These days there are many other places people look for spiritual guidance. Can you think of any?

While there may be other sources of guidance and good advice, and while your feelings or even your conscience may be a guide to the promptings of God's Spirit, and while many people might claim to give words of prophecy, **the promise** of the Scriptures is that they provide everything **necessary for knowing and serving God.**

Read 2 Tim 3:16-17. According to verse 17, what extra equipping will the man of God need?

What is 'all Scripture' useful for?

Thinking it through, what more do Christians want or need, beyond what is listed in verse 16?

Where does 'all scripture' come from?

e) To the glory of God Alone...

Head back to Ephesians 2, and **re-read verses 8 to 10.**

Who is entitled to boast?

Even when you do good things, who gets the credit and why?

Read Ephesians 3:20-21. What does 'the church' exist for?

Expressing our reformationDNA...

While we're glad that the dark days of Reformation politics are well and truly over, and while we seek to love and respect people of every faith, the theological truths rediscovered by Martin Luther and passed down the centuries in reformed churches like the Presbyterian and Baptist and Lutheran denominations are fundamental to what we as Christians believe. It's really the 'gospel' in a nutshell... the good news that Christ died in our place on the cross, taking our punishment on himself; that no more is needed, that there's no more to be done, that there's no other priest or sacrifice. That's the gospel-word that lies behind every word of Scripture, and that's why the Bible is enough for us to know God and be restored in our relationship with him, simply by resting our faith and confidence in Jesus. It's all about Grace - God's gift - and as usual, the gift giver gets all the credit and glory. It's basic Christianity - and it's at the core of our mpcDNA.

For those reasons you'll notice:

- a) We'll keep encouraging people to put their faith in Jesus, and grow as his followers.
- b) We'll keep tirelessly teaching the bible.
- c) We'll avoid making our leaders look or sound like priests. The up-front people at church won't be wearing special clothes or have special titles.

Have you spotted these things at mpc? Is there anything we're doing that gives a different message? Let the ministry team know and they'll work on it.



We Teach the Bible

Because of the ‘Scripture alone’ thing (page 6) and because Jesus says “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God,” we structure our church meetings around hearing from the Bible. We say we’re on about clear, Christ-centred Bible teaching for a reason. Unclear Bible teaching that’s just confusing, or teaching that’s centred on rules and laws and moralism and prophecies and speculations distract people from Jesus. But Jesus says bluntly in John 5:39 “You (religious people) study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Ultimately, we’re hungry for Bible teaching that digs deep into the text, analyses clearly, and engages hearts and minds and lives in a way that brings people to Jesus. Every now and then (thank God) it actually happens that way.

As you’ll notice, our second DNA statement is closely related to the first. Let’s unpack why we’re so committed to teaching and hearing God’s word from the Bible.

A word from Jesus...

Our DNA statement already quotes directly from Jesus. It’s worth taking a closer look at his words. Early in his ministry, Jesus is tempted by Satan. His testing (for 40 days) is a reminder of Israel’s 40 year testing in the wilderness long before. Satan wants Jesus to complain against God, and prove himself just as unfaithful as the rest of the Israelites.

Read Matthew 4:1-10. How does Jesus respond to each temptation? (What phrase is repeated?)

What are some implications of comparing God’s word to bread in verse 4?

Bread. These days our diet is pretty diverse, but when Jesus said those words, he was talking about the basic ingredient for life. Without daily bread on the table, they’d starve. It may not always have been an exciting meal, it may not have always been a memorable meal... but without it there’d be no life. And God’s Word is just as fundamental.

Read the words of Jesus in John 5:39. What astonishing claim is he making?

If Jesus was right, and the Old Testament scriptures all *point forward to him*, and the New Testament scriptures are all *written about him*, then he’s actually the focal point of God’s plan for the world, and of God’s word. Each time we open the Bible, we should be looking to *learn something about Jesus!*

The Word and the First Church

You can **read** about the very first Christian church meeting in **Acts 2:42-47**. It's an exciting time, with first-hand access to the apostles who had known Jesus so closely.

What was the first church devoted to?

Note that the teaching of the Apostles (as they taught how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures) forms the basis of our New Testament. They are God's authorised spokesmen, and we hear His Word through their teaching.

Paul's Mission and Method

One of the greatest apostles was Paul, the first to take the gospel outside the borders of Israel. In a world much like ours, loaded with religious ideas and persuasive orators, take a look how he describes his own approach:-

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NIV)

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Notice carefully...

- a) what will he 'not distort'?
- b) what is he setting forth, and how?
- c) what part of the listener does he appeal to?

Discussion

Can you think of examples where 'shameful or deceptive ways' might creep in to 'Christianity'?

Have you seen or experienced examples of the 'distortion of God's word'? What can happen as a result?

Paul's advice to a 'church-builder'...

Read Paul's "charge" to his apprentice Timothy in **2 Timothy :1-4**. What is Timothy to focus on as he leads the church in Ephesus?

What opposition will he face?

Have you ever been corrected, rebuked or encouraged as you've been taught the Bible? How did you feel about it at the time?

Expressing our bibleDNA

At mpc, we are committed to building our church on the clear, undistorted, undeceptive teaching of God's word. If you've been part of mpc for a while, we hope that's what you've discovered. It's a quality we're committed to locking in as we plan for the future too.

Here are some key ways you'll see this strand of our DNA in action...

- a. On every occasion, we'll be looking for what the Bible has to teach us about trusting and serving Jesus Christ, the one at the centre of all God's plans for the world.
- b. Unlike churches that say we should be guided by the authority of traditions or bishops, or churches that say we should be guided by emotions and experiences, we're guided by clear teaching from God's word... onto a path that always leads to trusting and obeying Jesus.
- c. Our teachers will work hard to make their teaching clear and straightforward to understand, whether you've been a Christian for years, or you're just starting out.

Is this true of your experience at mpc? Is there anything we're doing that gives a different message? Please let our leaders know, and they'll try to do better.

gospel our careDNA



Loving Community

has always been in the business of gathering a people of his own. The bible is full of it, from cover to cover... first the community called "Israel", and then the community called "church." A key distinctive of church is the way we'll love one another in very practical ways. A second key distinctive is meant to be the way we're always open to anyone who wants to join. It's easy to get cosy and familiar with one another and 'enjoy the love' - but we don't want to form comfortable cliques or in-groups, and we'll always be ready to say "welcome."

The way we love one another...

What's the most visible difference between Christians and everyone else? According to one old song, "All Christians Wear Sandals and Long Socks." But poor fashion sense aside, there's meant to be something obvious and striking about the disciples of Jesus. **Read the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35.**

According to Jesus, how will people know that we're Christians?

What's the model for the way we love one another? What did this look like in practice?

Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus has taken off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed and dried his disciples' feet. It's an incredible act of humility, because this was normally the role reserved for the humblest of servants. What point does Jesus make about this kind of service in **John 13:14-17?**

Practical Love

Before we go any further it's worth saying; when the Bible talks about 'love' it's not just a sentimental feeling. "Hollywood love" has poisoned our minds with romantic notions that love is all about 'the way you make me feel.' But Biblical love is about the way 'I sacrifice myself for you.' And that is necessarily practical.

Take a look at 1 John 3:16-18.

How do we know what love is?

How practical should our love be?

What good is sentiment on its own?

From your experience of mpc so far, what evidence is there of practical love at work?

How can you be involved in 'practical love'?

Loving Newcomers

Have you ever felt excluded by a 'church clique'? Or been part of the out-group? How did it make you feel?

The New Testament is full warnings about the danger of forming 'in groups' and 'out groups' within a church. In Paul's letters, the problem presented itself most forcefully in the way Jewish Christians distanced themselves from non-Jewish (or "Gentile") Christians. That means people like us! Even Paul's fellow apostle Peter was caught out for the way he played favourites with his old friends. Read Paul's passionate account of the dispute this caused in **Galatians 2:11-13**.

* What was the (previous) sign of good fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians?

* Why did Peter stop doing it?

* How would the Gentile Christians have felt?

Read **Galatians 3:26-29** aloud, emphasising the word 'all' each time it occurs. What's Paul's point?

Expressing our communityDNA

The dark side of 'loving one another' is that we can become self-absorbed, and limit ourselves to loving only those who are like us, or those we've known for years, or those with a similar background. But if we're going to be part of God's transforming vision for the world, our love needs to always be extending outwards; our friendship groups need to be open and incorporative, rather than closed and exclusive. Of course, this is an area where we'll often fail. In our enthusiasm for our own small group or cluster of friends, perhaps we'll overlook a newcomer, or leave someone feeling excluded. But as our church grows, we need to be alert to this problem, and actively work against it.

- * We try to be practical and supportive in the way we show love. Our On-Call Care Team (ph 04 009 32 009) is ready to provide help when it's needed most. Plus, our growth groups are geared to help too.
- * We love getting together for cross-generational events that bring all kinds of people together.
- * All mpc meetings and events are public, inclusive, and advertised openly.
- * Our news and announcements never assume newcomers will know who's who, or what's where. We'll explain in a way that lets everyone connect.
- * Our growth groups start afresh every year, with sign up boards inviting everyone to join in. Groups are encouraged not to stay together more than a couple of years, so the network of relationships spreads.

Has that been your experience of mpc? If not, contact our pastoral care Co-ordinator, Chris Lindsay on chris@mpc.org.au and let him know what we need to fix!

Our next DNA statement is closely connected. While our love for one another within our church family will always be shown in willing acts of service, we'll also be looking outside and beyond our church for opportunities to serve...



We serve - individually and together

Because of God's generosity to us, we want to pay it forward and be generous to others. That us to serve in all kinds of situations. As a church, we love focusing our resources to make a real difference to real needs, with strategic service projects played out around our neighbourhoods, our city and our world. Feel free to join in - generously.

There's a problem when...

There's clearly a problem when God's people fail to reflect God's compassion and justice. Through the Old Testament, the Israelites were constantly being urged to care for the needy and oppressed, and warned of the consequences if they didn't. The prophet Amos had some hard words for the chardonnay sipping social set of ancient Israel...

Read Amos 4:1-2 and Amos 5:11-13. How have the Israelites failed, and what consequences were they facing if they didn't change?

Salt and Light

Jesus arrived hundreds of years later, and brought the same warning to Israel. Nothing had changed since the days of Amos. There was no compassion for the poor; injustice was everywhere.

Read his famous challenge from the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:13-16**. God's people are meant to be visibly different. What kind of 'light' is he talking about? What effect should it have?

If you think it's tough that Christians are meant to **love one another**, we're called to be even more outrageously distinctive than that. From **Matthew 5:43-47**. what extra step does Jesus call us to take?

From the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus have been relentlessly doing good in their communities - even in an empire that persecuted them. Christians have been caring for the sick, feeding the poor, opening hospitals and schools. It wasn't motivated by self interest, or a desire for government grants... just love.

The Wisdom of Working Together

One of the great things about being a church is that we can combine and focus our efforts and resources, working together to make a significant difference.

From Ecclesiastes 4:11-12, what are some of the benefits of working together?

How is the illustration of a three stranded rope helpful in thinking about how we serve together?

In comparison with the rest of the world, and the rest of history, we're perhaps the richest Christians who have ever lived. So we take seriously the command of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17-18:-

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Expressing our serveDNA

It's up to every Christian to show compassion individually, whenever we're confronted by needs. We are, by God's Spirit, generous people. But whenever we can, you'll notice that as a church we'll do our best to combine our resources and care together. For example...

* the 2010 Orphanage Bus Appeal raised \$19,000 for a bus for New Hope Orphanage in Ulanbaataar, Mongolia.

* during the 2011 floods, we worked together to provide resources and teams to serve our community

* our On-Call Care Team provides food parcels and other assistance to members of the community, funded by special offerings in church at Christmas and Easter.

It's important to realise we can't support every good cause that comes along. Our Care Team, Management Committee and Elders work hard to focus our support in ways that are the most useful, achievable, and strategic for God's kingdom.

gospel our missionDNA

3



We're on a mission from God

Yep, seriously. We're on a mission from God. We're so pleased to be saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus that we want people to turn from their own small gods, trust Jesus, and grow as his followers. Our mission is not to be corny, or offensive, or ungracious, or arrogant - but to give Jesus the credit for the good things he's doing in us and through us. And to be about what we're on about, so we can easily explain it. And to be open and welcoming as a church community, so that anyone can join us, any time, and catch on to what we're on about. In small ways, we're all evangelists. In a good way. We're simply growing followers of Jesus who want to grow more followers of Jesus.

Think it over...

1. How did you first come to hear about the claims of Jesus? What person or people told you?
2. How have you been helped to grow as a follower of Jesus since then? What person or people have helped you most?
3. What would you have to do to BECOME one of those people you've just described? What stops you?

The Great Commission...

Being a disciple of Jesus after the resurrection could have been easy and comfortable. Jesus had defeated death, has been vindicated by God, and is the rightful ruler of heaven and earth. Maybe his disciples hoped they could just relax and enjoy the show. It's just that there's one thing he wants us to do...

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

a) When they see the risen Jesus, some disciples are doubtful. But others realise there's only one possible response to him. What is it?

b) What does the risen Jesus claim for himself? (v18)

c) According to verse 19, what mission flows from this?

Notice, the process of making disciples is now international in scope, because Jesus isn't just King of Israel (as some called him earlier.) God has raised him to rule over every nation. Everywhere.

d) What's involved in 'making a disciple', according to verses 19 and 20?

Baptism is just the beginning - a symbol of repentance and a clean start with a clean heart. True disciple-making will also involve teaching people to live under the authority of the one who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. It's a process of nurturing and growing new followers of Jesus to maturity as they learn to obey their Lord and master.

That's the mission that the eleven disciples got stuck into straight away. Soon, they were joined by the Apostle Paul - commissioned dramatically by the risen Jesus.

e) **From Acts 20:21**, how does Paul describe his mission?

f) We're not all called to be front-line preachers like Paul and the other apostles. But in **Philippians 1:4**, Paul calls the members of the Philippian church his "partners in the gospel." ('The gospel' is Paul's shorthand term for the 'good news' that people should 'turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.')

What will this 'gospel partnership' look like according to:

Philippians 1:14

Philippians 1:19

Philippians 1:27

Philippians 4:15-16

g) **From Colossians 4:3-6**, what background support should everyone give to the front-line 'evangelists' ?

h) What quality does Paul most want in his message?

i) What responsibility does every Christian have, according to verse 5?

j) What preparation is required of every Christian, according to verse 6?

Expressing our missionDNA

At mpc, we're all partners in the process of promoting Jesus. Your **gospel partnership** will be clear in your consistent Christian lifestyle, your generous financial support; the way you'll fearlessly identify as a Christian in your cynical workplace, your readiness to explain your hope in Jesus. At the same time, we're working to be a welcoming church where every opportunity is taken to **clearly** and graciously preach the gospel every Sunday and through other special events. Our regular Simply Christianity Courses are another key part of our missionDNA. Our prayer is that God will use us to grow loads of new followers of Jesus.

Expecting Change

gospel

There are two DNA strands that make up our motto, "Growing Followers of Jesus." We're not only growing new followers of Jesus by reaching out - we're growing AS followers of Jesus at the same time. The fact we're all still growing and changing as followers of Jesus is good for our humility - we're not there yet! We're all works in progress.

We Expect Change (because we're growing as followers of Jesus)



We love change. Especially when it's change that God is making in our lives by His Spirit. We expect to gradually grow more gracious, more generous, more *genuinely* good... and lots of other things that don't start with 'g' as well. In short, we expect to be always growing as followers of Jesus. We also expect change in all kinds of other ways too, and welcome it - because we don't want church to become like a museum piece. We're always keen to try new stuff.

There's nothing worse than being a stick-in-the-mud. Unyielding, unchanging, unprepared to make progress. Our DNA is all about welcoming positive change - starting with ourselves!

Show your progress...

The two new testament letters from the apostle Paul to his young apprentice Timothy are a great source of practical tips for Christians. Even though Paul had left Timothy in charge of a church, he doesn't assume Timothy will always get things right! But there's one thing he does assume...

Read 1 Timothy 4:15. What is Paul confident that Timothy will be able to show?

From verse 16, what will be involved in this?

What would you need to do to make more progress as a follower of Jesus?

Growing means **making progress**. Timothy, a leader of the church, isn't expected to be perfect, but he is expected to be constantly progressing as he grows to be more like Jesus. In fact, even Paul *himself* knows he's far from perfect.

Read **Philippians 3:12-16**. What's Paul's view of himself?

What does he still need to do?

The apostle John says the same. Take a look at **1 John 2:8-10**.

How does this passage help us deal with our own failings?

What will growing look like, according to verse 9?

If a church took these verses seriously, what evidence would you expect to see in the church 'culture'?

Growing as a follower of Jesus is all about learning, confessing, repenting, changing... and then doing it all over again. It's humbling, because we all depend constantly on God's constant supply of grace. And step by step, issue by issue, God promises to change our hearts, and produce fruit of his Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:22-23. What kind of changes should we expect as we grow?

Expressing our changeDNA

We love it when God changes us. We expect to be challenged and shaped by God's word, and by God's Spirit and our leaders and friends, all encouraging us to keep repenting and changing as we grow more like Jesus. As a consequence of that humility, we won't think that the way things have always been done will always be the best way. Because we are always changing and growing, we'll expect things in our living church to change and grow too.

gospel our connectDNA

4

We know our place (and time)



Back when people drove FJ Holdens and watched black and white TV, Christianity was a respected part of Australian culture. It was often a grudging respect, but Christian values were assumed to be right, Christian leaders were revered in the community, and people were pretty much in the church habit. At least at Christmas and Easter. Australia is no longer like that. We realise we're a minority. We realise people don't automatically endorse Christian values just because we 'say so.' We don't expect people to know much about Church. We expect to start from the ground up, and *show graciously and tell clearly* why it's still worth trusting and following Jesus - without assuming everyone else will think we're right. In other words, we realise we're living in a post-Christendom world.



This DNA statement is all about how we connect with, and engage, our community. Sometimes, it's hard to do it well... especially if we make wrong assumptions.

Discussion

Have you seen evidence and examples of these social changes at work?

Have you seen evidence of Christians who interact ungraciously in the public arena?

Take a look at Jesus

a) Right from the start, followers of Jesus have had a knack for being ungracious. Take a look at the actions of his disciples in **Mark 10:13-16**. How does Jesus contrast this?

b) According to **Mark 10:45**, what is the key strategy of Jesus?

c) How could/should our approach to the world to be shaped by his example?

Gracious Engagement

Here's the problem... we say we've got "good news of God's grace for the world"... yet so often we're not gracious in the way we deliver it. We're strident, confrontational, judgmental; or else we chicken out and say nothing at all. Can we find the sweet spot of graciously engaging with the world to make the good news attractive?

a) It's good to have the truth. But according to **Ephesians 4:15**, how should we use it? In what two ways do Christians typically get this wrong?

b) Read **Colossians 4:5-6**. List the qualities you need to work on in the way you interact with 'outsiders'...

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If you didn't fill all the dot-points, maybe you missed on that's almost assumed... 'conversation.' Paul assumes we'll be engaging in **conversations** with outsiders that open up all kinds of opportunities to be 'full of grace'. We need to be talking to people. But we need to be doing it graciously, with flavour, and well prepared with thoughtful answers.

In Titus 2, Paul instructs his pastoral apprentice to teach 'gospel living' skills to older men, older women, young men, young women and slaves. In summary, they need to be taught to be:

temperate
worthy of respect
self controlled
sound in faith, love and endurance
reverent
not slanderers
not addicted to wine
able to teach what is good

self controlled
pure and kind
in appropriate marriage and family relationships
subject to masters
respectful
honest
upright and godly

What's the desired outcome of this according to:

Titus 2:5

Titus 2:8

Titus 2:10



Meet Survivor Amazon contestant JoAnna Ward

In her official biography, JoAnna Ward describes herself as strong, courageous and independent. She considers her greatest achievement to be when she became a born-again Christian which she feels changed her into a better person. "One of my most enjoyable hobbies is lifting up the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in pure praise and worship," says JoAnna.

Yet when she appeared on Survivor, JoAnna had problems. For starters, she found herself offended by the "Immunity Idol" won by her team. Her objections to having the carved "idol" in the camp led to a bitter dispute. On camera, one team member commented, "If she really is a born again Christian, wouldn't you expect her to be a little bit kinder... or nicer?" JoAnna's determination to assert her faith were seen to be brash and ungracious by an audience of millions around the world.

What assumptions do you think were driving JoAnna's behaviour?

How would you have handled the situation (other than by avoiding the issue or being an invisible Christian)?)

American Pastor Mark Driscoll says we need to learn how to 'skillfully, artfully, tactfully call people to repent.' It's a skill worth learning - and at mpc we want to keep working on it.

Expressing our connectDNA...

Times have changed. We're no longer living in the days when we could assume we lived in 'a Christian country.' The fact is, we probably never did. So at mpc, we want to keep learning the art of **gracious engagement** with the world. Rather than presuming that the people around us, or who visit on a Sunday, 'know the basics', we'll assume nothing, and speak graciously. We won't assume that people live in ideal marriages and ideal families; we'll acknowledge that life is often messy and broken, and instead of sounding judgmental, we'll try to sound gracious. At the same time, we'll try to encourage all our church family to do

the same in countless conversations and one to one encounters through the week; in playgroup, at the school gate, in the office, or across the back fence. Our message - God's grace - has got to be matched by our medium. Gracious engagement.

For Further Reading

You can find links to two useful articles by Tim Keller at crosslink.org.au/DNA/our-place

There's another DNA statement about the way we engage with the world. It's all about breaking down the walls between church and the rest of life...



We believe everywhere is sacred

We're not dualists. Well, okay, you probably didn't think we were. But dualists like to think there's a split between 'the spiritual' and 'the earthly.' (Sometimes people call it '*the sacred* and *the secular*.) It's an attitude that creeps in everywhere. But because the Bible says 'the earth and *everything in it* belongs to the Lord,' and because Jesus *took on flesh* and became very much part of our world, and because God '*so loved the world*'... we think it's a mistake to draw a line between 'church' and 'life', or 'Sunday' and 'the rest of the week', or 'being Christian' and 'being an office worker.' When we're in church we act and talk like ordinary people who follow Jesus. In every other part of life we do the same. Our worship isn't reserved for Sunday services... God is worth serving full time, all the time. So for us, everything we do is sacred - it belongs to God.

Discussion

Have you ever been asked to remove your hat before entering a historic church building? Are some places more "holy" than others? Why, or why not?

Not on this mountain...

The Old Testament was full of rules that separated the "holy" from the "ordinary", and the "clean" from the "unclean." In fact, that's why in Jesus' time, the Jews couldn't even touch *unclean* people like us. They had their own holy city, Jerusalem, and their own holy temple set high on the holy mountain, Mount Zion.

But Jesus overturned all that.

Read his discussion about "Holy Places" with the (untouchable) Samaritan woman on Mount Gerazim (her own 'holy mountain') in John 4:19-26.

What's about to supersede "holy mountains" (and temples?)

When (and why) will that (or did that) time come?

Read Mark 7:3-4 (the Pharisee's view) and Mark 7:14-19 (Jesus' view) of the difference between "clean" and "unclean."

Which view - on the outside - looks most holy?

Which view is most challenging to live by?

In both these incidents, Jesus highlights the fact that God is interested in the state of our hearts; true holiness comes from the Spirit at work within us, in a way that frees us from sacred places and sacred washings and special foods. When he declares "all foods clean" and says there's no more need for a temple, Jesus demolishes the barriers between the sacred and the secular, the Sabbath and the rest of the week, Israel and the Gentiles. It's his sacrifice at the cross that's going to wash us clean, and the Spirit that he gives us that makes us Holy. All the time, everywhere.

Living Sacrifices

Read Romans 12:1. In the temple in Jerusalem, priests were constantly 'worshipping God' by bringing sacrifices for the sins of the people. How does the apostle Paul redefine worship?

- a) *Where* would this kind of worship take place?
- b) *When* should this kind of worship take place?
- c) What would "offering your body as a living sacrifice" look like?
- d) What motivates this kind of worship?

Read Colossians 2:16-17. What does Paul say about special "holy days" and rituals?

Expressing our everywhereDNA

If our response to God's mercy (his acceptance of us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross) is to live sacrificially, serving God and one another in real and practical and costly ways, then it's a full time occupation. An hour or so on a Sunday in a special holy place singing "worship songs" is not nearly enough! Our living sacrifice will have to be played out at home, at uni, at work... where-ever, and when-ever there's an opportunity to sacrificially serve. Maybe it's giving a colleague credit for a project; or spending time helping a fellow student understand an assignment; or helping a neighbour when you'd prefer to be watching TV. In view of God's mercy to us, our sacrificial living will spill out everywhere.

The flipside of our everywhere worship is that our church meetings won't seem that much different to everyday life. Because everywhere is sacred, that means our church buildings don't have to conform to stereotyped ideas of 'holy architecture.' And our church leaders won't speak in stereotyped ideas of holy language, or wear special priestly clothes.

gospel our hopeDNA



We Look Forward

We look forward to God's promised restoration of all creation (otherwise known as Heaven) because we know we're not there yet. Jesus gave us a glimpse of what it's going to look like when he healed the sick, raised the dead and wiped away tears. And it looks great. But we know we're not there yet, so we don't always expect things to go well here. We expect we'll need to grit our teeth and persevere as we walk through life together. But we're looking forward with confident hope.

Thinking it over

Sometimes, you'll hear of Christian preachers or authors or churches who promise you the world. Now. According to Joel Osteen, for example, you can have "Your Best Life Now." Sometimes, when things go wrong, struggling Christians are even subjected to an extra load of guilt - if you have enough faith, things are sure to go right, so if things aren't going right you obviously don't have enough faith.

Have you ever had first hand experience of this kind of teaching?

Are you ever tempted to feel 'it's your fault' when things go wrong?

The Biblical Big Picture

In a way, it's *collectively true* that it's our fault that things go wrong. Let's step back to the very beginning.

a) According to Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21,25 and 31, how did God describe the freshly made creation?

God's intention was that mankind would rule and enjoy the world under His authority. The only limitation was that they would stay clear of 'the tree of the fruit of knowing good and evil.' In the original language, 'to know' good and evil meant to 'decide it.'

b) What was the essence of the temptation in Genesis 3:5?

Being like God might have sounded like a good idea. But in the end, it's a disaster. It's a reversal of God's created order; everything is turned upside down, and soon it's every man for himself. As a consequence, God makes some re-adjustments to the originally good creation. Life is no longer lived in the perfect garden of Eden. Instead...

c) Read the terms of God's curse in Genesis 3:17-19. How will life on planet earth feel from this point onwards?

Hostile ground, painful toil, sharp thorns, tired muscles, sweaty brow... death. Dust. Does that sound like the world you live in? Why do weeds grow so much more easily than flowers and fruit? Why is it so gut wrenchingly hard to create a safe place? Why do floods wash away crops and hurricanes destroy our fruit trees? Because all creation groans in dislocation. That's life... outside the Garden of Eden.

Let's Hear from Jesus

There's an interesting side angle in the parable Jesus tells in **Matthew 7:24-27**.

d) There are two kinds of builder, and two kinds of foundation. What challenge do they both have to face?

e) Rather than promising we can avoid hard times, what does Jesus recommend we do? What would this involve?

For a time, Jesus went around healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and making the lame walk. In Matthew 11, Jesus is asked if he is the 'one to come'. In response, he quotes from Isaiah 35:4-6 "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, and those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." In other words, his signs and wonders were a sign that he, the Messiah, had finally come. God had stepped into his creation, and everything he touched was restored - a foretaste of heaven, and a promise of what lies ahead for those who trust him. That was most clearly and dramatically demonstrated in his resurrection... described as 'the first fruits' of the great restoration ahead.

But in the meantime...

Read Paul's words in Romans 8:18-27.

f) How does Paul describe our present state? (v18, 19 and 20)

g) How does Paul describe the future promise? (v18, 19, 20)

- h) What was God's intention in subjecting creation to the frustration of decay? (v20-21)
- i) How does Paul describe the condition of 'the whole of creation', and also 'we ourselves' in v22-23?
- j) What is our hope, and our present comfort, according to verses 23 to 26?

And Finally...

It's not until Revelation 21, the second last chapter of the Bible, that we finally catch a glimpse of the utopia we long for. Instead of a Garden, there's a Holy City. Read the description in Revelation 21:3-4.

- k) What will be removed when the 'old order of things' passes away?

While we wait...

What expectations should we have while we still have to live with the 'old order of things'? What will this feel like?

What happens if Christians are taught to expect their 'best life now'?

How can we best help one another in a 'groaning creation'?

Paul has some practical advice in Romans 12:15, where he tells us to "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn." In Galatians 6:2, he says "Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." Life won't always be easy; but there's a key difference...

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. What do we Christians have that marks us out as being different?

Expressing our hopeDNA

At mpc you won't be told to expect the blessings of heaven now. You won't be told that if you have enough faith you'll be healthy and wealthy. You won't be told that becoming a Christian will guarantee business success, or a cure for your illnesses.

Having said that, we'll pray for one another in hard times, and specifically pray for God's healing in times of illness. Because he can, and in remarkable ways often does. It's just that we know there's a bigger, better healing up ahead for those who continue in faith. For that reason, our pastoral care will always focus on urging one another to keep trusting Jesus in good times and bad; we'll groan together in the groaning old order, and support one another in practical ways, with our hope set on the new creation, where every tear will be wiped away.