

# How to Discover and Develop Core Values

Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry  
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A church's values answer the fundamental ministry question: Why do we do what we do?  
2 Proper core values are foundational; they are the essence of what makes a great church.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CORE VALUES

Why are an organization's core values important?

- 1. Values determine a church's ministry distinctive.** No two ministries are alike. Some churches focus on biblical preaching and teaching, others on evangelism, and still others on counseling or the family. This is why it is acceptable to start churches even when there are other churches nearby. Different churches reach different people. The determiner is the essential values.
- 2. Values dictate people's personal involvement in the church.** Church planters can spare themselves and their churches grief by communicating their values to all who are considering becoming a part of the church. Communicate the values early in the life of the church and repeatedly throughout the life of the church. Encourage those with similar values to join. (I call this values alignment or a ministry match.) Encourage those with different values to look for a church that is more in line with their values.
- 3. Values communicate what's important.** Values signal your ministry's bottom line and make it clear what you believe is God's heart for your church. If a core value is evangelism, make it known.
- 4. Values help people embrace positive change.** Changes in American society are having an impact on churches. Some of the changes have been good and some bad. The key question is: Does this change agree with or contradict the ministry's core values? Reject that which contradicts, and accept that which agrees.
- 5. Values affect the church's overall behavior.** Values shape the entire organization, determine the ministry's direction, and dictate every decision you make and every dollar you spend.
- 6. Values inspire people to action.** The shared beliefs of leaders and followers are the motivators that energize people to take action. Values infuse ministry with meaning. They touch people at a deeper level that provides a sense of cause and brings significance to their lives.
- 7. Values enhance credible leadership.** Many leaders, as well as their churches, are values-driven and the ministries they build reflect those values. As go the leaders, so goes the church. Leaders with good values build ministries of integrity.
- 8. Values shape a ministry's character.** Values are the qualities that make up an organization's character. This character determines how an organization conducts its ministry.
- 9. Values contribute to ministry success.** An organization's ingrained ownership and understanding of its core beliefs make it possible for its people to be successful in ministry.

## DEFINING CORE VALUES

A church's primary values are defined as its constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive its ministry. This definition has five key elements.

**1. Core values are constant.** Core values change very slowly. Change usually takes from 2 to 4 years. This is why it is hard to revitalize an established church. It takes time to change people's values. Consequently, it's critical that you begin with the right values.

**2. Core values are passionate.** Vision is a seeing word; passion is a feeling word. Core values touch the heart and elicit strong emotions. They stir feelings that can move people to biblical, Christ-honouring ministry.

**3. Core values are biblical.** The true test of a credo or values statement is: Does it square with Scripture? The statement doesn't have to be found in the Bible, but it shouldn't contradict the Bible.

**4. Core values are core beliefs.** People use various synonyms for values: precepts, principles, tenets, standards, or assumptions. (Some of these terms may not equate with values.) Values are your primary or core beliefs. A belief is a conviction or opinion you hold to be true based on limited evidence or proof.

**5. Values drive the ministry.** Values are the deeply ingrained drivers behind the behavior of a church. This includes the decisions made, money spent, risks taken, problems solved, goals set, and priorities determined.

## KINDS OF VALUES

We can refine the definition of values by analysing five different kinds of values a church may hold.

**1. Conscious versus unconscious values.** Most credo or values fall under the latter. Leaders must discover and articulate the church's primary values so members may know why they're doing what they're doing. This begins with leaders discovering their own values, because their values will shape the values of the emerging church. Leaders must move their own values from an unconscious to a conscious state.

**2. Shared versus unshared values.** The degree to which leaders experience success or failure in church planting depends on whether their core people share the same values. Shared values foster high levels of loyalty, provide a consensus over key decisions, promote a strong work ethic, and reduce levels of stress. Make sure people who join your team have the same values.

**3. Personal versus organizational values.** I ask my pastoral students to discover their organizational beliefs before they join a ministry. Those who take an established church must discover that church's credo and make sure their values reasonably align with that church's values. Otherwise, the honeymoon will be short-lived. Church planters, on the other hand, bring their personal values to the planted church. Their values will become the church's organizational values. That's one of the advantages of church planting.

**4. Actual versus aspirational values.** Actual values are the beliefs that a church or church planter owns and acts on regularly. Aspirational values are not presently owned, but the church or church planter desires to attain to those values. It is important that a leader distinguish between the two because a leader risks losing credibility when drafting a values statement. For example, to state that a church values evangelism, but no one is being saved, hurts the church's integrity. Does this mean that a church can't include aspirational values in their values statement? (See sidebar for answer.)

**5. Good versus bad values.** Every ministry will have good and bad values. Bad values are beliefs such as compromise, prejudice, intolerance, or the abuse of power. It is important for the church to become aware of bad values and change them.

## **Identification of Values – Three Distinctive**

### **Functions – Not Forms**

Determine the Value itself, not the form it will take. The form is the means by which the value is realised. Eg. Small Groups may exist for many reasons, a church may say “we value small groups” but usually small groups exist to accomplish something – evangelism, bible study, authentic community, worship. Dwelling on the form may result in missing the essence of the value.

### **Ends – Not Means to an End**

Ask; Is the concept or action an end in itself or is it a means to an end? If the concept or action is an end in itself, it is most likely a core value. If it's a means to accomplish something else, it is not the value. Find the end purpose to the concept or activity and you find the Value. Evangelism is an end – doorknocking, building relationships, outreach events are means not values.

### **The Explanation for What We Do**

The reason you do something, not what you are doing identifies the core value. Gathering together as a small group is not as important as the reason you are gathered.

The answer to what should and should not change lies in an organization's core ministry values.

The immediate question is not, What values or beliefs should we adopt? The important question is, What values or beliefs have we adopted?

If the church is not involved in evangelism, evangelism cannot be a core value. If the church isn't engaged in prayer, prayer is not a core value. They may be an aspirational values, but not core values. By discovering the church's real/core values, you will gain much insight into its crippling problems.

You should ask, What should be this church's values? What key value ingredients are missing in the church's ministry menu? And most important, Can I lead this church to adopt a new set of biblical values? You should be aware that the latter is a very difficult, process. Most churches that are in trouble will resist what they need most—a complete or partial transition from one set of values to another.

#### Brief Exercise

Read Acts 2:42-47 and list the values Luke mentions.

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

How where these values demonstrated in the NT & Acts?

How might they be demonstrated in the church today?