

## Core Values: Generosity & Growing: | Luke Knight

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*...just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness... (Colossians 2.6-7)*

Someone once said that stories are verbal acts of hospitality<sup>i</sup>, so let me share a slice of my story by way of entry to our Core Values discussion today. Sarah and I met here at church, actually at the early Tuesday morning prayer meeting. I know that sounds almost sickeningly over-spiritual, but it's true. Early on we also joined a Life Group with some folks further along life than us. That was such a safe and formative time, where early in our relationship we took a break from staring longingly into each other's eyes, to contribute and receive richly in that group. I'll share more on what we *received* later, because it's a good story. But, when it came time to plan our wedding, the church community played a big part. We had seen how helpful core values had been for Living Waters, and decided to create *core values as a couple* in order to plan the wedding. So over coffee we developed five core values, and the wedding took shape from those, as did our sketch of life. Because we had discovered those values together, all of a sudden the mountain of decisions which needed making became manageable. Those values kept us on track, so when a tough call came along we trusted our values make a decision, and the wedding had real roots. Core values made our wedding **manageable and meaningful**. And it led to some good stories, like Sarah and her mother baking *one thousand cookies* for everyone who attended, and our flowers being arranged by the former butler to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. But that's another story for another time.

That's what Core Values can do in a marriage, workplace, classroom, church, among roommates – you name it. Core Values help make community life meaningful and manageable. They're not the be all and end all. For example, Living Waters' Core Values aren't *the* authoritative text, that's scripture. What values can be, however, is a way of describing how a community is distinctly gifted to express itself in a unique place and time. Values are both a *reflection of* a community, and an *invitation to* a community into something more. Everyone has values, whether we say them out loud or not. And a lot of folks find that taking the time to determine them, to name them, is powerful and productive.

### What are LWC Core Values?

*We are a community yielded to Jesus, shaped by scripture, and dependent on his Spirit to faithfully follow him. Our values remind us of what a community with Jesus at the centre looks like, and of the distinct ways in which Living Waters Church is called to be that community.*

So, we're a church like any other church. We're surrendered to Jesus, shaped by the Bible, reliant on the Holy Spirit. Our Core Values don't ask *if we are Christian*, they ask *how we're Christian*. *How is this church at this time in this place working out our devotion to Jesus and other another?* They build on the foundation of what every Christian church must do (worship Jesus, love one another), and invite us to get specific about the postures we'll take and the ways in which we'll love Jesus and one another.

Authenticity, Community, Generosity, Growing, and Recognizing & Releasing. These are our five core values. Last week Kirsten and Dave took us through the first two, so let's have a quick look at those before building further.

**AUTHENTICITY:** *We value authenticity because Jesus always draws us into truth.*

Humans tend to hide. We creep around in the darkness, and Jesus invites us into the light. We are not led in *our truth* but *the truth* of reality grounded in *Jesus*. So this value invites us to trust and be open with God, and to dare to trust and be open with one another. When we hide, we avoid the truth and one another, we isolate. So we want to build bridges and not walls. Which leads us to...

**COMMUNITY:** *We value community because belonging to Jesus means belonging with one another.* It's impossible to be Christian by yourself, or any kind of healthy human being. A prayer now and then with the odd podcast by myself doesn't cut it. It's not just me and Jesus, we're all tied up in this together. That's obvious in the Bible. In fact, Jesus says the way we love God is by sharing with and loving one another sacrificially. So community can sound like a nice idea, but it's really about rolling up our sleeves and committing to one another in love. Community life is therefore joyful, transformative, frustrating, fun, awkward, unknown!

Today we're going to build on those two values by looking at the next two. As you see our Core Values are in alphabetical order (there are no higher or lower priority values).

### **GENEROSITY**

*We value generosity because Jesus is generous. We want to be generous with one another because Jesus is generous with us. And since the good news of Jesus is for everyone, everywhere, we want to be open-hearted and open-handed, generous with our neighbours locally and globally. We're compelled by Jesus' love to serve and share with the capacity the Holy Spirit gives.*

I know I said we don't have higher and lower priority Core Values, but generosity is in so many ways quite central. This value of generosity is rooted deeply in the God's character. When we take in the rivers, the trees, a spoonful of something tasty, all that stems from God's generous provision. That's why in Colossians Paul writes to *stay rooted in Jesus* – we draw from Jesus all the plentiful nutrition we need. He's the vine, we're the branches; apart from Jesus we're completely deficient. Consider how lavish God is depicted in scripture. The opening of Genesis and creation of a world full to the brim. Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine. It all points to the benevolence of Jesus, not just in creation, but in his death, resurrection, and future hope. So many people have the wrong idea about God, a totally opposite to the Bible, which speaks again and again of the unbelievable generosity of God. Getting to know Jesus is an exercise in gift receiving– he is the immeasurable well of life.

So if we've been taken in by Jesus, if we want to follow Jesus, we'll find ourselves "rooted and built up" in him, becoming, we think, generous too. What we mean by generosity is not just what we monetarily or practically share, but a generosity of spirit back to God and one with the other. When I'm short on change with you, when I've got lack that needs making up in relationship, the generosity of Jesus can come pouring through you to me. Some of the earliest markers of Christian community in the first century was the unreserved benevolence within the Church. When the destitute widows turned up, they fed them. When famine hit a region, they donated to make sure folks were taken care of. Which is why at LWC we're unapologetic about the funds, gifts, energy and time we give together. We're compelled to help by showing the community and reminding one another that grace is a gift that can be tasted and felt. If you're new to LWC I think you'll enjoy discovering all the ways we contribute together, a few key opportunities just around the corner this fall and winter through our Local and Global Work. Now I might not be all that generous on my own accord all the time. That's also why I need this value, to be reminded that Jesus' people are generous people, and to ask for the Holy Spirit to give us a capacity for that attitude and activity. And you know what, generosity is fun. Our experience has been that when we're generous, joy follows close behind. So we want to invite you this fall, to take that value of generosity *seriously and joyfully!* Be generous with one another in spirit, in grace, in all the messy moments. Be generous with what you have, be it a little or a lot, and know that what we can do together under God's blessing does will surprise you. **How is Jesus inviting us to be generous this fall?**

### **GROWING**

*We value growing because we want to become more like Jesus. Jesus loves us enough to take us as we are, but too much to leave us as we are. We want to be rooted in Jesus, shaped by scripture, and reliant on the Holy Spirit, expecting to mature in every way as we grow together.*

When you read the New Testament, you can't escape the earth, plant, growth imagery. The Bible is full "dirty" language. We all grow, and when we don't grow, that is usually a problem. Growth is often about health. But growing as a Jesus' follower isn't like the self-help stuff we might find on a podcast or bookstore. As this value says, we're taken in by Jesus, but Jesus has designs on us. And growth with Jesus, growth into his likeness, is going to mean watering and nurturing, but also pruning and shaping. A lot of societal messaging today is that you're fine just the way you are, you don't need to change, you're perfect and if anyone says otherwise they're oppressing. But I'm not fine the way I am! I'm designed to grow, to be shaped, to be challenged, to be nurtured into maturity. There is even such a thing as *growing pains*. That's what this value

gets at. When you look at Jesus' disciples in the Gospels, these were folks who had a lot of growing up to do. They were petty and vengeful and overly self-interested. Now they had some good qualities too, but they needed growing up. So Jesus nurtured them, but he didn't treat them with kid gloves. Some of his harshest words were for his closest friends. But look at some of those same followers a few years later, not fully formed, we never get "there", but matured, resolved, self-sacrificing, gracious. They grew up to look a little more like Jesus. And so can we, no matter how old or young we are. Scripture directs us, Jesus is our example and root, and his Holy Spirit does the work to change us for the better – so we can mature in every way. I'm thirty-seven, rapidly approaching mid-life. I hope I get to sixty-seven but who knows. But I don't just want to grow in number, I want to grow in maturity, in stature with Jesus. So we share growing as core value here because Jesus takes us as we are, yes. But he loves us too much to leave us as we are.

How do we grow? Well it's not just more reading, more learning. As Rikk shared a few weeks ago, real learning is about character shaping, and that happens life to life. So we think we grow, honestly, by turning up. Keeping a steady rhythm of weekly worship together. Sunday is not the same as soccer practice or brunch. It's vital to pray, to sing, to share, to serve together in a diverse group like this. We grow also by committing to intimate relationships, our friendships in church through Life Groups and Networks, so please take the opportunities available this fall. And we grow by serving with Jesus! He didn't give his disciples homework and say to come back in a few years to begin an apprenticeship. Growth happens *alongside* Jesus, right away. Some Christians are full of head knowledge, but terribly deficient in hand knowledge. Maturing with Jesus is not an intellectual exercise alone, it's labour intensive, it's hands on. So if we want to grow this fall, let's find a way to serve. Maybe here at the church, or in the community, or even just in adopting Jesus' attitude of service in our homes or workplace. **How is Jesus inviting us to grow up this fall?** Consider taking a moment this week and write that down, and then ask him to help. As we're growing I think we'll find ourselves as Paul said "overflowing with thankfulness".

So, at the beginning I mentioned that when Sarah and I were dating and engaged we were in this Life Group together with some older folks, both couples and singles. I know marriage isn't in everyone's story, but I have to share how our Life Group made such a difference. Because it was in a group like that where we experienced the values of *generosity and growth*. A couple of weeks before our wedding, the Life Group sat us down. They put two chairs in the middle of a living room and said, we're going to pray for you. This wasn't one of those cute little formal moments, a nice prayer that everything would go smoothly. They really prayed, they took a good deal of time. And that was a growth moment for us, that stuff they prayed went deep. We got the feeling of how important, precarious and hopeful marriage could be. And to this day I could call on those same people for practical support and prayer. Once they had finished praying they took it a step further and put their money where their mouths were as our community. They didn't just invest in our spiritual growth, but they generously invested in practical needs. Someone shoved an envelope full of cash into our hands. "We all pitched in and want to make sure you were taken care of" they said, "Make sure you use this for something extravagant on the honeymoon. You need to know how much God smiles on you and wants to bless you." So there we sat, a hearts full of prayer, hands full of cash. I hope Sarah and I can do something similar for another young couple some day when we're a little further along. Maybe for someone in this room right now who's twelve or thirteen. Because belonging to this community that values *growing and generosity* is where Jesus has placed me, and where he's placed you.

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rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught,  
and overflowing with thankfulness... (Colossians 2.6-7)*

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- What about these values of growing and generosity makes them Biblical and necessary in the life of our church?
- What's an example of generosity you've experienced that's changed you?
- Why is generosity both joyful but also challenging?
- In what ways have you felt God grow you?
- How do you feel you are being invited to grow this fall?

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson