



# Core Values

## Week 4: Creativity

Brian Mattson - 08/25/2025

There are a lot of people who think church is boring. They say it's just a bunch of old folks who do the same things every week and call it "religion." The people in the pews say the same prayers, with the same words, and sing the same songs. Even newer, younger, hipper churches, someone else might argue, all look the same, sound the same, and think the same. But here at The Downtown Church, we try to keep you on your toes. In fact, last week in worship, something happened that has never happened in the history of this congregation.

The former pastor's grandson was given a word to read at the children's moment and instead uttered the word *fart*. Yes. Yes, it's true. If you missed worship last week, we had a fart reference during the children's moment. And let me be the first to say that I am not lifting this up as an example to follow to the rest of you young'uns. I simply retell this story as a reminder of two things. First, you really don't want to miss Sundays around here, because you never know what's going to happen. And secondly, the reason we had that memorable moment is because we want to be authentic, real, and creative with our worship experience. Children are a part of our worship experience because children are a part of life.

Years ago, the professional consultants wanted churches to modernize the service. Give the kids a separate space for their own unique worship

experience. Update the look and feel of the worship space. Make the rooms darker. Turn the band louder. Keep the kids quieter. It was like the professionals saw what worked at a few churches and thought every church needed to look like that. But that wasn't us. Still isn't. When we were dreaming about what this church might look like in the future, we added creativity to our list of core values. Here's how we defined it:

**Creativity: We seek to be innovative, creative, and imaginative in the midst of history and tradition as we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in relevant and authentic ways.**

For the first six months or so of Lori and me trying to bring this church new life, we got a lot of opinions. A lot of recommendations. We heard all about the potential of this building and location. People thought we should close down for a few months, remove the pews, and cover up the paintings. Our own Bishop, Bob Farr, said that! Popular opinion said that we needed to try and be like those other churches. The newer, hipper, younger churches. But that's about the least innovative, imaginative, or creative way to be us, this community of faith called The Downtown Church right here in little ol' Springfield, Missouri. Humans, while we often fall into a pattern of emulation and mimicry, are not meant to be lemmings. We have our own quirks and likes, preferences and opinions. It's kind of ironic then, that the church consultants tried to make every new church a one-size-fits-all solution.

So if we wanted to make sure we lived into Creativity as part of our Core Values, we had to understand who we had been, who we were, and who we were becoming. And that meant we had to do things our own way. We put funny things on the sign instead of whatever the sermon title was going to be that week. People generally like it. We did once receive a highly opinionated letter from someone who was displeased with our marquee. It was unsigned, of course.

We sang old hymns with new instruments. We sang new songs, but in different ways. We didn't update a thing about the sanctuary, except when Matt Kerner put in three projectors to fill this entire wall behind me, an adept use of modern technology that helps keep the feel of this historic space. We kept the paintings because we like them. We kept the organ because we like it. The ushers who pass the plates are completely unqualified, but we like them too. Creativity means expressing ourselves in our own unique way. We are The Downtown Church. We aren't any other church. And individuality is celebrated as an important aspect in the broad patchwork of Christianity.

Last week, I offered up Romans 12:2 as a template for Spiritual Growth. Paul's words for us to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds." Just a few verses later he talks about the great quilt that is the Christian community.

**For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.**

**- Romans 12:4-8**

This verse is a beautiful reminder that we are all uniquely gifted as part of a larger body of believers. There is no single path to follow on our journeys of faith. There is no one ability or talent that defines our Christianity. We are a collection of people who uniquely express our understanding of the great big love of God.

Jesus had his own unique way of expressing universal truths about God the Father. He told stories and parables to get his points across. They weren't

boring or judgmental. They were life-giving and inspirational. So much so that we still talk about them today. And not just in churches. Jesus's stories and parables have become part of our common language and cultural references. Perhaps my favorite of his parables is the Prodigal Son from Luke 15.

You've probably heard it, it's this extraordinarily beautiful story of a father and two sons. One squanders his entire inheritance and finds himself yearning to eat the seed pods of a farmer's pigs. He decides to return home to his father, fearful of what awaits him when he gets back home. Will his dad be angry or disappointed? Will he be vengeful or spiteful? It turns out, the father is none of these things. It just so happens that the father's love is unconditional. Here's what that sounds like, and the creative way Jesus tells us exactly what God the Father is like:

**So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.**

**- Luke 15:20-24**

This parable, as well as many others, shows the beautiful way that storytelling is often a creative way to get a point across or to explain a foundational truth. If Jesus had simply told the crowd *God loves you*, his point would not have had quite the staying power. This story paints a vivid picture with words that captures our attention and sticks with us.

Reading and writing, stories, songs, poetry, visual art are some of the ways humanity has expressed our understanding of the divine. The Bible is filled with historical accounts that are probably meant to be taken literally. Other parts of it are filled with stories that may or may not be loosely based on a place or person, but the resounding truth found in the words speaks to something much deeper. There are layers and nuance, symbolism and metaphors.

Take the book of Psalms, for instance. This is the songbook of the Jewish people. The highs and lows of our shared humanity are captured in so many of these great poems and songs. The words creatively capture and give voice to the despair we sometimes feel in our souls.

**O Lord, God of my salvation, at night, when I cry out before you,  
let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.  
For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.  
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;  
I am like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the  
dead,  
like the slain that lie in the grave,  
like those whom you remember no more,  
for they are cut off from your hand.  
You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and  
deep.  
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.**

**- Psalm 88:1-7**

Sometimes life feels like that. Other times the joy that fills our entire being is hard to subdue. We just want to scream from our hearts about our happiness or love or fulfillment with life, like Psalm 100.

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.  
Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him; bless his name.  
For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever  
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

**- Psalm 100**

Then there are poems that provide such great comfort to us. The words are like a cozy blanket or conversation with an old friend. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* You have probably heard that one before, Psalm 23.

Or there is the poem at the very beginning of the book. *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.* That's Genesis 1.

The Psalms, Genesis, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes. Poetry is part of the human experience because it resonates with our souls, in the deepest parts of us. There's something uniquely human and subjective about the ways words grab us and stick in our heads. Isn't it wonderful that our Bible, God's Living Word, is written by and about God's people. Priests and poets. Saints and sinners. Kings and outcasts. Prophets and prostitutes. Men and women. Fishermen and farmers and scholars and tax collectors. In this collection of words are the ways we make sense of life. The way we understand salvation through Jesus Christ. The way we walk through life. And the beauty of life is that there are an endless number of paths to walk. Each one of our own making, because we are all unique. How beautiful it is that the palette God paints with is full of colors and personalities, traits and tendencies that we can all connect with?

Which is why there's no one way to be creative. We all get to add our own flavor to this melting pot of life, of faith. Here's the thing, though: we *must* be creative. It's really not an option. And I can't really tell you what exactly that means for you. I can't really say exactly what it means for The Downtown Church. It's something we all must discover, and hopefully together.

I stumbled across this video this week of Ethan Hawke talking about creativity. The entire ten minute video is worth the watch, but here's a clip:

### [VIDEO CLIP](#)

*Follow your love.* I love that. When we follow our love, when we follow Jesus, creativity will flow from us. How we express ourselves, our faith, will bubble up into words and actions. Then the path will become clearer. But it is up to each of us to walk our own path.

You might think you aren't the creative type. Well, you are. Maybe you are creative with your leadership. Or maybe it's how you guide and direct conversations and relationships. If you are an accountant, maybe don't get creative with your accounting, but be creative in the way you use your unique skills to help other people or organizations. Whatever it is, I know you have creative bones in your body. We all do. I know it. You know it. You just might not know what that looks like yet.

There's a great scene in the movie *Dead Poets Society*, featuring that same Ethan Hawke and Robin Williams. In it, Robin Williams is talking about the power of words, songs, and most of all poetry. He says, "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. To quote from Whitman, 'O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring; of the endless trains of the faithless... of cities filled with the foolish; what good amid these, O me, O life?' Answer. That you are here—that

life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. *That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.* What will your verse be?"

You are here, God gave you life. God knows that you have a verse to add to this mad chorus we're all a part of. Your creativity—whatever its form—is part of the mark of God upon you. Upon each of us. God the Creator created us in God's likeness to create. So what will your verse be?