

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH

Core Values Lessons for Neighborhood Gatherings

Mission: The mission of Crossroads Community Church is helping people on their journey back to God. We will do this by becoming a spiritually mature community of Christ-followers, equipping ourselves to impact the world as the presence of Christ, in order that lives may be transformed, God's purpose in the world fulfilled, and our Creator honored and glorified.

LESSON 8: CREATIVE EXCELLENCE

Value: CREATIVITY — We value creative, changing methods coupled to the unchanging message of the gospel.

Value: EXCELLENCE — Excellence in all we do honors God and inspires people



Breaking the Ice (10 minutes)

- Do you prefer a settled routine or are you more often on the lookout for different and unique experiences? (Heard this question before?)
 - What makes home-cooked meals preferable to McDonalds? Or pre-prepared frozen dinners? Or are they actually preferable?
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Discovering the Truth (20-25 minutes)

Genesis 1:1, 31; RSV

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . . . ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

We understand from the scriptures that before anything was, *God was*. The New Testament presents this truth in terms of the preexistence of Christ: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3; RSV). According to John, the first thing this preexistent God did was exercise his delight for creativity. Thus, in the first verse of the first chapter in the book whose name means “beginnings”, we read: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (RSV).

It is self-evident that God values being creative. The diversity of God's astounding creation gives witness to this truth. As the psalmist reminds us, the created order is an expression of God's creative powers to an infinite degree (Psalm 104:24-26).

²⁴O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

²⁶There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

God's act of creation was likewise characterized by excellence. Again, the writer of Genesis tells us that at the end of God's initial work of creating, even before resting on the seventh day, God looked around at everything he had made and saw that "it was very good." Hence, the Bible teaches us not only that God is a creative God, but also that he is a God who values excellence. As one anonymous, but insightful philosopher has put it, "God don't make no junk." We are created in *God's* image and the whole of the created order reflects *God's* glory.

Part of what all this means is that the gospel of God's love and grace — a gospel which God has brought into being through Christ and entrusted to us as the body of Christ — should likewise reflect God's glory. It should be communicated in ways which reflect God's propensity for creativity and quality. Hundreds of churches have clearly demonstrated that a creative methodology coupled with the unchanging gospel results in transformed lives.

Further, the apostle Paul tells us that everything we do should be done "for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Our goal in worship, in ministry, and in daily living, is to worship, minister, and live in a manner which "makes God look good."¹ Such excellence in all we do honors the God who gave us his best and inspires the people for whom he made that sacrifice.

For Reflection:

1. Do you understand God to be a "creative" God? Do you think creativity is something God truly values?
2. What do you think of Paul's admonition that everything we do should be done "for the glory of God"? Where in your life do you struggle with such a worthy goal?
3. Reflect on the following statement: "Creativity for creativity's sake is of no value for the mission of the church. Creativity must be coupled with a sense of urgency. There must be such a desperate awareness of the need for God to come fix things up in this broken world that we will do virtually anything not inconsistent with biblical values to make a space for people to become aware of and experience God." Is such a perspective consistent with CCC's core values? Why or why not?



Embracing the Truth (15 minutes)

Creativity at its heart means a fresh approach. Implicit in any fresh approach is *change*. Yet, many congregations steadfastly resist and even refuse to accept even minimal *change*. Anything which is different from what they have known or experienced in the past is often rejected out of hand or, if implemented, results in such conflict that it is dead on arrival.

In my library is a book given to me by an old friend from her father's collection. He served as a minister in Central

¹In an address by Leith Anderson to the Baptist General Association of Virginia in November of 2006.

Virginia until his untimely death in 1931. The book is a hardback volume containing 345 pages. It is entitled *Plain Use of the Blackboard and Slate* and was published in 1881 by Ward & Drummand of New York. In it, The Rev. W. F. Crafts, author, makes an impassioned plea for and defense of *using a blackboard in Sunday School classrooms!*

Evidently, in that era, there was no small disagreement over such practices. Why? Because using that innovative, multi-sensory approach to teaching the scriptures introduced something new and different from commonly accepted church teaching methodologies. Institutions — even the church — by their very nature feel threatened by new ideas. Institutions recognize that Innovative and creative ministries will find a way to allow their creative people to *change* the status quo.

At CCC we are been blessed with the God-given opportunity to start with a clean slate. There are no “sacred cows” to keep fed, no resource hungry structures or programs to maintain. The challenge we face is starting from scratch and doing church in a way that impacts not only our lives, but also the larger community of which we are part. In addition to the theological mandate, the culture of which we are part demands that we do it with creativity and excellence. Otherwise they vote a thumbs down and cast us aside along with other groups and institutions which are largely irrelevant to their lives.

The creativity and excellence necessary to break into the lives of those with whom we are called to share the gospel will require imagination, innovation, originality, perseverance, and risk-taking. God in Christ embodied these qualities; we as the body of Christ can do no less.

For Reflection:

1. *Where the Rubber Meets the Road* — Based on your experience of various churches, what are some general areas of church life you feel would benefit from an improvement in creativity and quality?
2. *Get Real* — What are some barriers to such creativity and quality which you have seen erected to such ventures as enumerated in question one?
3. *Tending the Vineyard* — What are some attempts at innovation and creativity in churches with which you personally are uncomfortable? Why?
4. *Dialog* — What kind of wine would you like to see in the new wineskin which is Crossroads Community Church?
5. *Truth for Life* — If time permits, have one or more group member share a *truth for life* from one of the scripture passages in **For Further Study**.



Connecting (10-15 minutes)

Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our midst in such a way that we might be creatively inspired regarding how we might most effectively share the gospel with the diverse groups of people in the Zion Crossroads area. Pray for the perseverance and commitment to do it well.

1. Praises from group members
2. Concerns from group members
3. Share these in conversation with God

For Further Study:**Mark 2:21-22; NRSV**

²¹“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

Colossians 3:23-24; NRSV (Paul is talking to slaves in these verses, but are we not bondslaves of Christ?)

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, ²⁴since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.

From a Blog by Canadian Pastor, Jordon Cooper at

<http://www.jordoncooper.com/resources/articles/creativity.htm>

1. **Understand that creativity doesn't come from creating something out of nothing.** Only God creates “ex-nihilo” something from nothing! :-) Often creativity comes from making NEW ASSOCIATIONS. It is about connecting two independent things in a new and fresh way. Creativity comes from applying ideas from other contexts and finding new ways to associate them into your context. Creativity comes from borrowing. For example, I am always borrowing ideas from culture, and making new associations within our context here at Big Creek. That's what my sermon series MythBusters was all about, you realize of course I stole the idea from a T.V. show? :-)

2. **Fill the well.** You got to be pouring fresh stuff in your life. I am a gatherer type person. I am always reading and talking to others. We should be willing to borrow from others. Reading blogs through RSS feeds exposes me to ideas from people around the world. For instance, we are trying to decode how to be missional in our suburban context, and there are men and women who are thinking through the same stuff, and I am learning from their learnings and being provoked by the questions that they are asking.

3. **Cross-training - learn and read and study other disciplines.** Often the best ideas come from adapting ideas from other places and professions. You got to get out of the church ghetto! You need to find ways that ideas in the marketplace translate into the church context. That is why books like *Good to Great* by Jim Collins have been so highly thought of within the church. I often expand my reading to history, business, biography and current affairs books. I also try to tap into the wealth of expertise that our professionals have here at Big Creek. Their professional experience makes them one of the best resources to help us innovate.

4. **Don't ask limiting questions.** Too often we are asking questions that by the very nature of the question puts parameters around the kind of answer we are going to get. For instance, the question might be, "How can we help students grow deeper in their walk with God at our mid-week Wednesday high school large group"? Within that question is the assumption that we should have a large group of students meeting weekly. And within the question we are assuming that only within the large group can effective growth and life change happen. Are large youth groups the right avenue to help teenagers to grow in their faith? Should we even have them at all? Listen, I am not here to draw any conclusions. But if you are going to be creative, you have got to be WILLING to ask those questions. Don't let the kind of question you ask box in your answer!

5. **Be willing to risk.** You gotta to be willing to risk and risk failing. If your church isn't a risk culture, you are going to be conservative and cautious in what you are willing to create and try. Failures are some of the greatest tutors and learning opportunities. Be willing to risk and risk Big!