

## “DEVOTED”

Caleb had utter devotion to God and to God’s plans – he was in it for the long haul and in it with all his heart.

### In order for us to be devoted we need to know what is expected of us

The following is a condensed and edited version of the then Bearsted Community Church’s *“Devoted: A Blueprint for Belonging to Bearsted Community Church”* booklet, which was based on a series of sermons by the then elders of BCC from January-March 2015, then published in June 2015. The series was inspired by the *“One People”* course, authored by Paul Newberry and Andrew Parfitt and used by Manna Christian Fellowship between 1985 and 2000. I am very grateful to Paul and Andrew for the original inspiration and, for the original ministry and original authorship of the following, to Dave Thompson (2 & 3), Simon Nunn (4), Tim Gymer (5) and Steve Samson (6), the then elders of BCC. The original sermons can be found on the CCM website <http://connectchurchmaidstone.org.uk/podcasts/> and are available on CD.

### 1. JESUS

We need to know about Jesus and to know Him – we need both knowledge and relationship.

#### Knowledge:

- i. Jesus was and is God – he exactly represents God the Father (Col 1:15); he created everything (Col 1:16); whilst being fully God, he became a man (John 1:1-3); he was without sin, but identifies with us through temptation (Heb 4:15).
- ii. He died as a man – his death cancelled out every sin and the judgment a person faces, contingent on faith in Jesus (1 Peter 3:18, Col 2:14).
- iii. He rose from the dead and in doing so obtained new life for believers (1 Peter 1:3).
- iv. He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).
- v. He is alive today, he reigns in heaven and is worshipped as God (Rev 3:21).
- vi. He, as a member of the Holy Trinity (John 14:16-17), prays on our behalf to God the Father (Rom 8:34).
- vii. He is the head of the church (Col 1:18).
- viii. He will return to judge the earth and establish a new heaven and earth – believers will reign with him forever; those who have rejected him will be separated from him in hell forever (Heb 9:28 and Rev 20:11-15).

Jesus is the only way to salvation (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12). He has the very words of life (John 6:68). He is to be followed wholeheartedly.

#### Relationship:

We follow Jesus wholeheartedly because we know him, have relationship with him and love him. We believe through the Holy Spirit that Jesus is who he says he is (1 Cor 12:3).

The process of coming to know and follow Jesus is outlined in Acts 2:1-47 on the Day of Pentecost:

- i. We hear the gospel.
- ii. We are convicted by it.
- iii. We then repent (change the way we think) and choose to follow Jesus.
- iv. We are baptised in water.
- v. We receive the Holy Spirit.
- vi. We become a member of God’s family.

(Note: this order sometimes varies, but all these components are necessary for followers of Jesus and members of his church).

Jesus is the reason the church exists. Believing in him and belonging to him is motivation for all that we do for him. We must never lose the wonder of who he is and all he has done for us.

### 2. THE CHURCH’S DNA

We need to have a proper understanding of what the church is.

The “church” is all of God’s people, past, present and future. The present global church is connected and united in Jesus, though spans many nations and cultures. But the “church” is also a local body of people, such as CCM.

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The church is a family and not an institution (see Rom 8:15-16).

Our part in Jesus’s church is worked out and expressed through our commitment to Connect Church (see Acts 2:41-47; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 4:1-6).

The church honours and obeys God and is a living expression of his will and truth.

### What it means to be part of Connect Church: Relationship and Commitment

#### Relationship:

- i. Having a relationship with God and being “added” by him to the church.
- ii. Having a relationship with the church’s leaders – being committed to their teaching and oversight.
- iii. Having a relationship with the church’s members – doing life together as one people.

#### Commitment:

- i. Being committed to the person of Christ.
- ii. Being committed to the people of God.
- iii. Being committed to the programme and vision of the church.

### **3. ALL TOGETHER NOW**

We need to know what devotion looks like.

**Acts 2:42-47** provides an excellent example of a church’s devotion.

V42:

- i. *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching ...”* – they heard the teaching and applied it to their lives (James 1:22-25).
- ii. *“... and to the fellowship ...”* – they were devoted to one another (Rom 12:10-13).
- iii. *“... to the breaking of bread ...”* – this was in remembrance of Jesus, as he commanded (Luke 21:19-20).
- iv. *“... and to prayer”* – they saw an importance in corporately praying together to God.

V44-45: They generously shared their possessions to help those in need.

V46: They met together with glad and sincere hearts.

V47: As a result they grew.

We gather together to help and encourage one another, to build relationship together and to demonstrate our commitment to one another (see Hebrews 10:24-25).

#### Giving:

We support the work of the church through committed, regular giving of:

- i. Our money
- ii. Our time
- iii. Our energy.

#### Financial Giving:

Financial giving enables us to:

- i. Support those in full or part-time ministry at home and overseas
- ii. Fund the evangelism and service of our church
- iii. Help and care for those in need
- iv. Prepare for our own church building.

We are to give generously and gladly (see 1 Cor 16:2, 2 Cor 8:1-15, 2 Cor 9:6-12 and Luke 6:38).

The Biblical tithe (10% of gross income) is a good model for regular giving and the one we encourage. A study of Genesis 14:18-20 demonstrates that tithing is not a religious rule instituted in

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the Old Testament law, but rather a biblical principle, based not on regulation but honour of and reverence for God.

### **4. MINISTRY ROLES IN THE CHURCH**

We need to have a proper appreciation of the different roles in the church and why they exist.

Our roles and objectives in the church are underpinned by Jesus’s command to love one another (John 13:34-35).

Our purpose is to express love to God (worship and prayer), to one another (nurture) and the world we inhabit (evangelism and acts of kindness).

We should each engage to some degree in all of these. Using the analogy of a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) we all have a different function to play, but are reliant on one another being present and working in harmony to do so.

There are many functions to fulfil and opportunities to serve at Connect Church.

#### Spiritual gifts:

God gives spiritual gifts to the body to enable it to function effectively (see lists of gifts at Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11, 27-31). These are given to build up the church and to serve one another (1 Cor 14:12, 1 Peter 4:10).

God also grants specific ministry leadership gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church to *“prepare God’s people for works of service”* and to build up the church in unity and maturity (Ephesians 4:12-13).

#### Leaders:

##### *Elders:*

Eldership is a biblical role. Elders are the governing leaders of the church, responsible for ensuring good order, the provision of sound preaching and teaching and pastoral care (Acts 20:28). The qualifications for eldership are found in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. They need to be people who are not only gifted, but who have the right attitude (see 1 Peter 5:2-3). Elders are those who will have to give a specific account for their stewarding (see Rom 14:12, Heb 13:17).

##### *Other leaders:*

CCM recognises other leaders such as the core team and those who lead various groups and teams. These leaders are recognised and appointed, based on their commitment, willingness and desire to serve as well as gifting. CCM does not vote people into positions of eldership or other leadership.

Leaders are servants (see John 13:13-15). Leaders should have the same attitude as Jesus who took on the nature of a servant (Phil 2:1-5, 1 Peter 5:5-6). Leaders are humble, loyal and are people of integrity. Leaders should be supported by those they lead (see Heb 13:7, 1 Thess 5:12-13).

#### **The church should be known for its unity**

(see John 17:22-23, 1 Cor 1:10, Eph 4:3, Phil 2:2, Col 3:12-17)

### **5. LIFESTYLE**

We need to live lives that honour God and which reflect what we believe – to truly practice what we preach.

God calls us to be “Christ-centred”, not “self-centred”. We are to take the way we live seriously and honestly face up to God’s word. God’s word shows us that we are to live by Kingdom principles (see specifically Matt 5-7).

We are to put Christ first (Rom 12:1-2); this will not always be comfortable or convenient and may not always be what we naturally want to do. We are to be transformed, which involves a process.

God wants his church to be a living demonstration of his love at work – people seeking to live his way (Eph 3:10-11).

We will not always get it right, but through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, God empowers us to live the lives he has called us to live.

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God’s lifestyle in practice:

God desires that we commit to:

- i. Building strong and happy homes.
- ii. Valuing each individual.
- iii. Living ordered and structured lives – avoiding haphazard living.
- iv. Love and kindness.

*Acts 4:1-14 is a picture of Christian lifestyle from Peter and John of:*

- i. Courage
- ii. Counter-cultural behaviour
- iii. Suffering for what is true and right
- iv. Being open to being questioned
- v. Willingness to be directed by the Holy Spirit
- vi. Accountability to God
- vii. Performing acts of kindness
- viii. Speaking the name of Jesus and sharing the gospel boldly
- ix. Drawing people’s attention to Jesus.

A lifestyle lived unto God is possible through Christ’s life, death and resurrection. Through that, he puts his nature in us and enables us to live the new life (Heb 10:16),

We have been born again (John 3:3). We have a new nature, but retain a sinful nature – therefore, we need the Bible, the Holy Spirit and one another to help us live the life God has for us. We can be encouraged that we have the Holy Spirit both with us and within us to help us live for God (John 14:16-20).

### **6. “GO” TELL THE WORLD**

We need to remember the church exists to reach people with the good news about Jesus.

The “Great Commission” is the church’s job description (Matt 28:19-20).

We should tell everyone about Jesus because God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4, Acts 1:8).

What do we say?

- i. We each have a testimony (story) of how God has changed our lives that we can share.
- ii. We can speak about God’s nature and promises in his word.

The Holy Spirit will help us to speak God’s word boldly (Acts 4:31).

Take Action

Faith without action is dead (James 2:14-17). God’s people are to demonstrate Christ’s love to a hurting world through practical action.

We are to be responsive to the challenge of God’s word in Matt 25:35-36 – feeding the hungry, providing hospitality to strangers, clothing those who are without, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison (also see Isaiah 58:6-7).

We are also to be advocates for justice, especially for those with no voice (Prov 31:8-9).

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God has called and equipped his church to perform signs and wonders, do miracles and heal the sick in the name of Jesus (Mark 16:15-19). We are not just dependent on our own abilities/strengths. It is through God’s power and will that people believe in him (see 1 Cor 2:4, Zech 4:6). But our part is to share, to speak out and to invite. We should devote ourselves to telling people about Jesus’s amazing love and demonstrating that we are his followers by our lifestyles and through the demonstration of God’s power at work in us.

**WHO ARE YOU BRINGING WITH YOU?**