

What We Believe

How We See Things:

The purpose of this document is not to be an exhaustive work on the nature and the work and the person of God. The purpose of this document is to attempt to articulate - with all diligence and precision - the central, essential truths that we hold to and build not only our church, but our lives upon. Also, God's church is a place of wild diversity and local churches also have distinct personalities, so we wanted to outline a few theological distinctives that make us unique. We don't expect every church or every Christian to adhere to these distinctives. But they're how we see things.

We believe that position papers like this can help clarify important values for communities of faith like ours. And we wrote this document for the people who call WestGate Church their home and for people who are considering joining our family.

We would love for you to join us as we build our lives and this community around these truths. And in the process, may each of us learn to love Jesus Christ more and live more like Him.

For Further Study:

Because this Doctrinal Statement could never be an exhaustive work articulating our beliefs, we recommend the following books for further study. These 16 works have been uniquely important in the theological life of WestGate Church, helping us understand and interpret the Bible (our central source of authority) and its central message more thoughtfully, with more precision, and with more historical and cultural context.¹

- ¹1. *Every Good Endeavor* by Tim Keller
2. *Making Sense of God* by Tim Keller
3. *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller
4. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Douglas Stuart and Gordon Fee
5. *The Bible Project* by Tim Mackie (a series of videos)
6. *Who Is This Man?* by John Ortberg
7. *Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg
8. *Bad Religion* by Ross Douthat
9. *Vanishing Grace* by Philip Yancey
10. *Disappointment with God* by Philip Yancey
11. *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer
12. *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard
13. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
14. *Skeletons in God's Closet* by Joshua Ryan Butler
15. *Unstoppable Force* by Erwin McManus
16. *Sticky Teams* by Larry Osborne

What We Believe

God

The Scriptures

The Gospel

Jesus

The Church

God

There is one God, who wants to be known and is knowable, who eternally exists in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is fully God, equal in divine nature and perfect in every way.² They exist in perfect love, harmony and community with one another. Furthermore, each person of the Trinity has a unique role and function in their relationship to each other and to the world:

God the Father

God the Father is the maker of heaven and earth. God is love, and in His great love toward the world, He purposed redemption by sending His Son, Jesus. God is sovereign, merciful, just, kind, patient and compassionate.³

Jesus Christ the Son

Jesus is both fully God and fully man, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died on the cross in our place to pay for our sins, rose from the grave to conquer death and is now seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for His people. The work of Jesus on the cross accomplishes the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, right standing with God and the gift of the Holy Spirit for all who trust in Him. This salvation work is a free gift, apart from any human merit and can only be received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. One day, Jesus will return again to bring the new heavens and new earth to make all things right.⁴

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in the believer who turns from their old life and places their trust and belief in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit applies the redemptive work of Jesus in the believer through the conviction of sin, new birth and the sealing of salvation. The Spirit matures, guides and empowers the believer to live a life of increasing Christ-likeness. The Holy Spirit freely bestows gifts unto believers to do the work of ministry, advancing God's Kingdom here on Earth.⁵

² Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4

³ Psalm 146:6; John 3:16-17

⁴ John 1:1-2; John 1:4; Luke 1:35; Romans 3:24-25; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Hebrews 7:25, 9:24; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12⁵ Romans 8:4; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4-5; John 16:5-11; Ephesians 1:13-14

The Scriptures

God's Word, the Bible,⁶ is the divinely inspired revelation of God, which came through the agency of man, preserving both a divine and human origin.⁷ It is fully reliable, trustworthy and without any error in the original manuscript. It records the story of God's redemptive work of humanity and the world. The Bible is fully authoritative revealing who God is and what we are called to do here in this world.

The Gospel

God made us in His image and everything He made was good but humanity chose to center our lives on ourselves and on the pursuit of things rather than on God and others. This has led to disintegration and degeneration of Creation and the loss of peace within ourselves, between ourselves and between us and God. War, hunger, poverty, injustice, racism, bitterness, meaninglessness, despair, sickness and death all are symptoms.

This grand story contained in the Bible covers:

- Creation and God's Image⁸
- Sin, Fall, Brokenness and Rebellion of Humankind⁹
- God's pursuing love as shown through the life of Abraham and the people of Israel¹⁰ ● Incarnation, life, cross, death and resurrection of Jesus¹¹
- Salvation, The Church, The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God-New Life and New Creation¹²
- Judgment and Second coming of Jesus Christ¹³
- Reconciliation and Restoration of all things-New Heavens and New Earth¹⁴

Jesus

Sin caused this great separation between God and humanity which resulted in brokenness in this world. But in His great plan towards His creation, God entered history in the person of Jesus in order to deal with the cause and all the results of our broken relationship with Him. By the sacrificial life and death of Jesus, He exemplifies the life we are called to live (but cannot without God's help) and rescues us from the life we have lived. The Resurrection of Jesus proved He is God and gave us the assurance and hope of eternity, when He will return and renew Creation and restore all things to full joy, justice, peace and glory. The Gospel is the good news that God has acted in history to save us and will make all things new. This is the climax of God's beautiful story and plan.

⁶ The Protestant version of the Bible

⁷ 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21; John 10:35

⁸ Genesis 1-2

⁹ Genesis 3 and onward

¹⁰ Genesis 12 and onward

¹¹ Recording of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)

¹² The book of Acts and the letters of Apostle Paul

¹³ 2 Peter 2-3

¹⁴ Revelation 21

The Church

Between His first coming and His second coming, we live by faith in Jesus. When we believe and rely on Jesus' work (rather than ours) for our relationship with God, His Holy Spirit comes upon us and begins to work in us. Jesus Christ gives us a radical new identity, as sons and daughters of God, and calls us to freely love and care for one another. He puts us into a new community of people and commissions us to care for His world and the people in it. We are called to make disciples and proclaim Jesus to the ends of the earth. This living out of our faith gives a partial, but real, foretaste of the healing and redemption of the world that God will accomplish when Jesus returns. We attempt to live as Jesus lived with a focus that begins with a love for God and extends itself to love and help reach our neighbors and those who are far from God and in our community.

Theological Distinctives

Our WestGate Church history is rooted in the conservative Baptist tradition, but we are currently a non-denominational church, celebrating both the diversity of denominational backgrounds and calling for unity in the essentials of our historic faith.¹⁵ We believe that our faith must be centered around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and it is by grace through faith we are saved, not by works.¹⁶ We believe that our expression of faith in Jesus should result in loving God completely, loving our neighbors sacrificially and loving one another humbly as Christ loved us. We are fully committed to the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God and all of our theology must be grounded in the Scriptures.

However, we recognize that even sincere Bible believing Jesus followers and scholars throughout history have landed on different sides of the full meaning and implications of these five theological distinctives below: *Clarity of Mission for God's Church, The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Baptism, Communion and Role of Women in Ministry*. As we humbly approach and interpret what this means for WestGate Church, we pause and reflect upon our conviction:

In essentials, unity.

In nonessentials, liberty.

In everything, love.

A) Clarity of Mission for God's Church

We define our mission with Jesus' charge to His church, which is to make *disciples*.¹⁷ We believe that this discipleship is a lifestyle committed to the three loves: love God, love our neighbor and love one another.¹⁸

¹⁵ As written in "What We Believe"

¹⁶ Ephesians 2

¹⁷ Matthew 28:28-30

¹⁸ Matthew 22:26-40 and John 13:34-35

B) The Gifts of the Holy Spirit¹⁹

We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells all believers at the moment of salvation. The Spirit equips believers with specific gifts (as recorded in the Bible) according to His sovereign plan and purpose.²⁰ These gifts are to be used in humility and love towards one another with a posture of submission. The gifts are first in submission to the WestGate Church community and the elders. The gifts are expressed in this posture with the hope that God will use them to equip and mature God's people.²¹ The gifts are *all* fully functional until Jesus returns, including tongues, healing, and prophecy.

C) Baptism

WestGate Church believes in two sacraments, Believer's Water Baptism and Communion. We are called as followers of Jesus to be baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.²² This baptism is an outward declaration and sign of the inward transformation and commitment to live for Jesus.²³ The baptism demonstrates death to self and new life with and in Jesus. Here at WestGate Church, the mode of baptism is by immersion because Jesus was baptized this way and all New Testament baptisms were done by immersion.²⁴ It's a believer's baptism, meaning we baptize those who have made a personal decision to follow Jesus.

D) Communion

Communion is the second sacrament Jesus asked His followers to regularly practice. As we partake in the bread and the cup of our Lord, we are reminded of His sacrifice and grace towards us and we proclaim His death until he comes.²⁵ We believe that communion is a symbol, pointing to a deeper spiritual reality of what Jesus has done for us and we celebrate that truth together as a community of faith. We practice an open table, meaning everyone who is a follower of Jesus is welcomed to partake in communion.²⁶

E) Role of Women in Ministry²⁷

We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers and gifts all believers, both men and women for the work of His Kingdom. We affirm these truths that women and men are equally *gifted, called* and *made in the image of God*. We believe in *shared leadership*, meaning all positions in the church including pastoral ministry, teaching and preaching, the elder board and senior pastor's role are open to godly, spiritually mature and gifted men and women.²⁸

¹⁹ We recommend reading *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* by Jack Deere.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12; Ephesians 4

²¹ 1 Corinthians 12-14 instructions an orderly worship that's mindful of one another as we seek to edify the church through our gifts

²² Matthew 28:19

²³ Therefore, baptism does not save you, only your faith in Jesus Christ's work on your behalf.

²⁴ For those who are physically unable, pour over baptism will be administered.

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

²⁶ Other churches and denominations may have various rules and policies to partake in communion: must be a member of the church and/or be baptized (this is called a closed table)

²⁷ In other words, we hold to an inclusive church polity. Here are the resources that we gleaned from: "The Future of Leadership at Bent Tree" by Bent Tree. *Discovering Biblical Equality* by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian* by Michelle Lee-Barnewal; ²⁸ For a detailed position paper on the role of women in ministry, please see "A Statement on the Role of Women in Ministry, WestGate Church.