

Why Do We Do What We Do

Part One

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This morning we are starting a two-part series called *Why We Do What We Do*.

Sometimes in life we do things without thinking about why we do them. We just do things a certain way because we have always done it that way.

You may have heard the story of a woman who always cut the ends off the ham before cooking it. *When her young daughter asked why she did that, she said it was because her mom always did it. Curious, the woman then asked her mom, who said it was because her mom always did it. When the woman asked her grandmother why she always cut the ends off her ham, she said 'it was because that was the only way I could get it to fit in the pan I had.'*

There are multitudes of things that maybe we started for a good reason but just become habits we no longer think about. We just do it a certain way because that's how our mom or dad did it or that's all we know.

The same thing can be true in the church. When we no longer give thought to why we do something it can lose its meaning and value.

So why do we do some of the things we do at Petra? Why do we spend 20 minutes of worship and then another 40 minutes teaching from the Bible? Why do we raise our hands in worship, stand to sing, provide a ministry team after each service, have a children's church, a café, elders? Why do we invest in missions and in buildings and programs?

- We can't address all of these in these two messages, but it is good to ask "why" occasionally.

We need to also ask, is it biblical? Is it still the most effective way? Or has it just become empty tradition?

The seven words of a dying church are – “We have always done it this way.”

Now, tradition in itself is not bad. I think tradition has got a bad rap.

- In the movie Fiddler on the Roof. The Jewish papa had a hard time with his children who wanted to break some of the family traditions. TRADITION

The fact is, there is empty tradition and there is meaningful tradition.

Every church and every family have meaningful traditions that help express certain values. How we celebrate birthdays, the tradition of family vacations. How we celebrate Easter or Christmas as a family.

So, some traditions are very good and meaningful. It is when we become legalistic about them, worship them, or think we are more righteous than others because of our traditions that the traditions become more of a bondage than a blessing.

I believe it is especially important to teach the values behind our traditions and practices to the generations coming behind us. The way we worship and do church life at Petra can be very meaningful or fade in empty tradition if we are not careful to keep teaching and explaining the value behind our practices.

We want what we do at Petra to be connected and flowing out of our values and a living encounter with Jesus in our lives. **Let me give a few examples of how our values effects how we do church here at Petra.....**

1. We value God's presence above performance, personality or program.

At Petra we are blessed with great worship teams, a great preaching team, great leaders, and many great programs. All this is wonderful but this in itself is not what changes lives. **It is God's presence and transforming power that makes the difference.**

Our number one pursuit must be his living presence, manifesting in and through our worship, our leaders, preaching and programs.

God's presence sometimes manifest itself in quietness and deep peace, sometimes in boisterous praise and celebration, sometimes as a wind, angelic activity, times of repentance, renewal, supernatural healings, chains breaking off...

Moses understood how important God's presence was as he was faced with the challenge of leading the Children of Israel into the promised land.

Ex 33:14-16 The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

What distinguishes us from secular programs and groups that are also doing good things? **It is God’s presence among us! It his Spirit at work through us.**

- We value God’s presence and God’s word as high priorities, and this effects why we do what we do.

This is why we take a good portion of our morning to sing because God presence invades honest heartfelt worship. Each Sunday we have the opportunity to interact and soak in his presence. This is a gift we value and protect.

I believe when we as a people come with a heart desiring to worship and the worship team and pastor have pure hearts to see Jesus exalted and not themselves God’s manifest presence comes in a powerful way.

We work hard to keep our worship team and worship times focused on God’s presence and not performance. We are not here to entertain. We want the fire of God, not entertainment.

- Thank you Crystal and Caleb and the teams that lead us in worship.

God’s presence releases God’s healing grace so we try to create opportunities for people to receive prayer each Sunday. When there is a strong manifestation of his presence people are often touched in a powerful way, sometimes right in their seats.

Because of our hunger for more of his presence we encourage people to gather for prayer – God responds to the prayers of his children.

- It’s more than a nice spiritual thing to do. When we pray, we see God move in greater ways in our lives and the church.

Because of our high value on God’s presence we work hard to nurture and guard our unity – God’s presence dwells in places of unity.

- Unity is the welcome mat for the Holy Spirit. It is why we choose not to argue over secondary matters of the faith. We allow room for differing personal convictions.
- At the same time, we will not tolerate a divisive person who destroy unity.

Another value that guides us is.....

- 2. We value each person having a personal relationship with Jesus and a personal infilling of the Holy Spirit.**

Because of this we regularly give invitations to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. God does not have any grandchildren, only sons and daughters. In other words, once we grow up we need our own faith, our own encounter with Jesus, our own salvation experience.

John 1:12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. NLT

Some of our worship expressions and practice of the gifts here at Petra come out of a personal infilling of the Holy Spirit. My concern here at Petra is that we not just pass a tradition or charismatic form of worship onto our children but that each of our children have their own personal Pentecost.

- They each need their own encounter and infilling of the Holy Spirit so that their expressions of worship and the gifts flow out of their own experience and not a handed down traditional form.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This same Spirit infilling is for every believer today as well. All of them/all of us

That's why we teach about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. That's why we lay our hands on people and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill them. We want our expressions of worship to flow out of our inner most being, not just tradition.

- We want the gifts of the Spirit to enhance our walk with God.

Another important value that effects why we do what we do is.....

- 3. We value reaching out to and connecting with the seeker in our Sunday services.**

Sunday mornings is the primary on ramp for seekers and new people coming into our services. They either get turned off or turned on to Jesus. They either feel included or excluded. They are either drawn a step closer or take a step back because of what they experience.

That's why we take a few minutes to greet each other each Sunday. We want every person to be welcomed and personally greeted each week. We don't want any person to say I visited Petra, and no one greeted me or talked to me. They were all in their own cliques and ignored me.

I know sometimes it's awkward going up to someone you don't know because you don't know if they are new or not. So, here is what you can say. **Hi my name is _____ . What is your name? How long have you been attending Petra?**

We want every guest to experience the loving presence of Jesus and not stumble over unnecessary obstacles that turn them away. The Apostle Paul was concerned about the seeker coming into his services.

1 Cor. 14: 23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

So, on a Sunday morning we choose to limit some of our personal expressions of worship and how we do things, so people are not turned off. In doing this we are not trying to be people pleasers but God pleasers and what pleases God more than anything else is when our heart is toward the lost. This does not limit us pursuing God's presence because God cares more about that seeker coming to faith than our worship or anything else. In fact, a heart for the lost increases God's presence in a group.

We just find other times to enjoy some of our uninhibited personal expressions that might otherwise be misunderstood or a distraction to the seeker.

We try to limit our Christianese in our preaching and use words that our unchurched person or new believers understand.

We do all this out of a heart of love for those seeking to understand and to find Jesus. The Apostle Paul in Romans 14 says it is an act of love on our part to limit our freedom in order not to cause someone else to stumble over what we enjoy doing.

Romans 14: 1, 13, 19 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.... make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister..... Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

We have other places and times for our more charismatic expressions of the gifts.

In our Belong Journey group each Sunday – we begin to explain our values and help people understand why we do what we do. We begin to introduce people to the things of the Spirit in a non-threatening and loving way.

We do what we do because our primary mission and value is to reach the lost.

Another value that guides us in what we do is.....

4. We value doing life together as a faith community.

We live in a time where individualism is the way of our culture. We like to do our own thing and not be answerable to other people.

But God calls us to a higher standard. He calls us to do life together as his children. He calls us to be a family together. To stay connected and involved in each other's lives.

I Cor 12:24-27 But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

God calls us to be committed to one another and to be an active part of the church.

One way we and many other churches express this commitment is through church membership. We also call it Partnership. Through partnership we say you can count on me.

So, the reason we do what we do in having church membership is to help us define our commitment and to help us move beyond individualism into a healthy place of accountability and spiritual growth in our lives. It strengthens our faith community.

Here is the commitment we make to each other here at Petra in becoming a partner. Let's see how we are doing.....

We commit to protect the unity of our church family.

- a. By acting in love towards others.
- b. By refusing to gossip and following biblical guidelines on conflict which is to go directly to the person you have an issue with instead of talking to others.
- c. By following the vision and the counsel of the leaders.
- d. By walking in forgiveness when offended.

We commit to share in the responsibility of our church family.

- a. By praying for its growth and health.
- b. By inviting the unchurched to attend.
- c. By welcoming and caring for those who come.
- d. By discovering and using my gifts and talents.

We commit to grow spiritually by developing habits of:

- a. Regular time with God's Word.
- b. Regular times of prayer.
- c. Regular tithing.
- d. Regular fellowship in church and small groups.

Conclusion:

These are just a few of the reasons we do what we do. **Next week Pastor Brian Coles** is going to talk about why we practice certain things in our worship like lifting up our hands and other expressions. Is it just a Petra tradition or are there deeper values in why we do what we do.

In closing let me say this – In all that we do - God is more concerned about our hearts than anything else.

He is interested in - why I do what I do. Is my heart fully committed and fixed on him and his will and not my own preferences and desires? Are my motives pure?

A lot of these things are not matters of **right or wrong** but **issues of our heart** in how we approach them.

When our heart is right God's presence comes in greater measure in grace and transforming power. We want Petra to be known for God's abiding presence.

Because in his presence our lives are changed and transformed. Our lives are healed and set free and the seeker is saved.