

OUR SHARED VALUES AND THE PASTOR

JOEL CARLSON

With a transcript of average high school grades and with no hope of a scholarship (and frankly, with nothing else to do), I flew out of Butte, Montana, in the summer of 2006 with Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois, as my destination. I was joining the US Navy.

Most young men and women, myself included, join the military with very individualistic goals in mind. The purpose might be to gain life experience, see the world, earn an education, or serve their country in time of need. Many of these young people are shocked when they arrive at their training command and quickly realize that the Department of Defense does not prioritize aiding them in expressing their individualism. The Navy purposes to purge any individualism out of young men like I was.

By joining the armed forces, I was signing up to become a representative of something larger than myself. This is why service manuals, codes of conduct, and adherence to the rules given to me by my superiors mattered tremendously. Everywhere I went, and in everything I said, I represented an organization, and I was obligated to represent it well.

Four years after exiting the Navy, I led a church plant in the city of Bozeman in

my home state of Montana. Not long after planting, we discussed joining Sovereign Grace Churches, and that conversation eventuated in formal adoption in July 2018. I am still thrilled to say that we love this family. There is no place we would rather be.

While joining Sovereign Grace Churches is not quite like joining the US Navy, there is one striking similarity: an awareness of representation. I learned quickly upon adoption that so much of what I appreciated about Sovereign Grace was captured in our seven shared values. It quickly became clear that it took effort and intentionality to implement and maintain them. I had admired what SGC stood for from a distance, but now that I was leading a SGC church, I felt the burden to cultivate these biblical values on a daily basis.

Pastors, you know the challenge I am describing. Our church bodies do not come to us neatly packaged, filled with only joyful and understanding saints who agree with our doctrine and practice without exception. It just does not work that way. We have people in our churches who join the body with various stories as their backdrop. How am I going to promote continuationism to those raised to believe the gifts of the Spirit are antithetical to Scriptural authority? How might I teach biblical complementarianism to a young lady raised without a father? Or, largely applicable to my context, how do I show people that it is good to belong to a union of churches when all they have known is staunch independence?

I am still trying to find answers to these questions, and I know I have a long way to go. I have been grateful to my fellow pastors who have guided me along the way in my efforts to build the SGC culture into my local church. I am humbled to offer these four suggestions that I have gleaned from my brief time in pastoral ministry. I hope they serve you as you seek to build a healthy, biblical culture in your church.

1. Share the Load

The Seven Shared Values will be tough to implement if you are the only one trying to uphold them. Pastor, you need others to share that load. Who can help? As an eldership, work to identify people in the church who are already leaning toward the values. Let them know how grateful you are for their dedication to represent our values well, and make sure you give them avenues to continue practicing and modeling the values for the church body. Rallying more people to shoulder this load is a good first step in creating a healthy culture around our values.

Practical Suggestion: Go through your roster and consider who is already promoting these values in their words and lives. Move toward those people and equip them to keep going!

2. Don't Fear the Classroom

Consider taking the Seven Shared Values into the classroom. Might it serve people in your church to sit down outside of the Sunday gathering and learn about the biblical and historical warrant for our Shared Values? "You mean, just like in a school setting?" Yes, like a school setting: pencils and all! You may be surprised by how helpful it is to engage your people in this way. Texts can be considered. Questions can be answered. Church members can hear from their elders and hear from each other in a fresh setting. We want our members to embrace these values, not as arbitrary marks of our choosing but as realities rooted in Scripture and given for our good.

Practical Suggestion: Consider planning a seven-week course to teach your church about our Seven Shared Values outside of Sunday.

3. Find Simple Avenues for Expression

There is no need to overthink when and how these Shared Values can be expressed regularly. And remember - each value might find expression in different ways. For example, living out our value of *Elder-governed* and *Elder-led* Churches can start as simply by creating space for all your elders to have a visible role in the Sunday gathering. On the other hand, our commitment to *National and International Outreach and Church Planting* may come through making people aware of faraway church plants or praying corporately in response to our newest news from Emerging Nations. Our Continuationist Pneumatology should not be restricted to approaching a microphone during musical worship on Sunday. How about encouraging our people to pray and pursue the Spirit's gifts throughout the week and in their various small groups? At Emmaus Road Church, for example, we often have more expressions of speech gifts during the week than at our Sunday gathering. What a change it makes when our pastors and members seek out simple and consistent avenues to live out our values!

Practical Suggestion: Develop a plan with your leaders. Itemize the different ways each

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Shared Value can find expression in your church body, both on Sunday and during the week.

4. Enjoy the Journey

I am aware of the temptation to discouragement, especially when I am not detecting the momentum I desire for my church body. I tend to think of Emmaus Road Church in terms of where I believe the church should be, often at the expense of seeing the tremendous fruit in the church *right now*. This frustration can undoubtedly pertain to our desire to see the Seven Shared Values embraced and lived out in our church bodies. I need the constant reminder that God is often pleased to work gradually. The Messiah did not come immediately after the fall but came after centuries of anticipation (Gal. 4:4). The Kingdom of Heaven did not arrive in its total and finished form but is being built by God over time (Matt.

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13:31-32). Even our sanctification is a lifelong trek, marked by our dependence upon God for growth in holiness (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Why would we expect anything different within the churches? I want to find joy in the journey of leading and serving in the church, not constant despair and anxiety. I want to celebrate every small expression of our values instead of longing for only the

“big ones.” I want to walk alongside members eagerly as they and I grow together in our understanding of how God would have us live and serve as part of Sovereign Grace Churches.

Practical Suggestion: Take time regularly to consider and thank God for how he is already working out the Seven Shared Values in your church body.

JOEL CARLSON

Joel Carlson is the senior pastor at [Emmaus Road Church](#) (Bozeman, MT).