

Next Steps

The Vision of Ridgecrest is . . .

“to become followers of Jesus who under the leadership of the Spirit passionately love and serve God and also love all people as Jesus does.”

Can a church be described in just four words?

Maybe not, but we're going to try. For Ridgecrest, those four words are **Him** and **Them**, **We** and **Me**.



is about . . .

Him and Them

Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love God (Him) completely, and the second greatest is to love others (Them) as yourself. Everything else in Christianity depends on doing those two things. At Ridgecrest, we believe loving Him and loving Them should be the guiding principles for all we do individually and collectively.

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in

the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22: 35 – 40¹

We and Me

In trying to live out those guiding principles of loving Him and loving Them, there are some connecting points that unite us as a church. We call those We connections. We also have the opportunity and responsibility to grow closer in our personal journey of faith. Those are the Me steps. Together, the We connections and Me steps represent opportunities for all of us to take the Next Steps in our journey.

¹ (All Scripture references taken from New International Version---NIV---unless otherwise noted)

Some say that a picture is worth a thousand words, so we've developed a graphic to show the We connections and the Me steps that we encourage every Ridgecrest member to be involved in.



The gray circle in the center contains the three We connections. They represent the primary ways that we live out the Christian life together as a church.

The outer circle contains the Me steps that characterize growth in every individual believer. The three blue circles represent steps in our relationship with Him (God). The three black circles are steps in relating to Them (others).

*It's important to remember that these steps are not necessarily taken one-by-one, nor must you have completed all previous ones before you can move to the next one. It is possible and even encouraged to be taking some steps simultaneously. For example, we would hope that as soon as someone takes the step of Salvation through Jesus Christ that they would immediately begin to Invite their circle of friends and family to be a part of what God is doing at Ridgecrest, perhaps even before they are baptized and while they are taking initial steps of spiritual growth. **Rather than being a rigid checklist, these steps are intended to give some clarity and commonality of language for expressing the basic expectations of a follower of Christ at Ridgecrest.***

The rest of this booklet will explain the parts of this graphic in much more detail.

We Connections (Center Circle)



God's plan is for the Christian life to be experienced in a community of Christians called a church. As believers, we should be connected to one another for the purposes of learning, encouragement, fellowship, and accountability.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10: 24 – 25

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2: 42 – 47

There are three primary opportunities for these We Connections at Ridgecrest: Life Groups, Worship, and Mission.

- **Life Groups**

- These are relatively small groups (generally anywhere from 3 to 30 people) who meet together weekly for the purpose of Bible study, fellowship and ministering to one another and our community
- Life Groups are usually groups with things in common like age, life stage, particular interests or neighborhood
- Many of these groups meet on Sunday mornings at 9:00 on the Ridgecrest campus but they can meet “anytime, anywhere.” For example, some groups

meet on campus on Sunday evenings
while others meet off campus on
Tuesdays and Wednesdays

- Preschoolers, children, and students have their own Life Groups within those various ministries
- Our staff coordinates all existing Life Groups and also focuses on starting new Life Groups as needed.

- **Worship**

- While there are a multitude of ways we worship God, there is something special about a group of His followers worshipping Him together through music, praise, and prayer
 - 10:30 AM on Sunday morning is the primary time we gather together for the purpose of worshipping God together
 - Our students (6th – 12th Grade) gather on Wednesday evenings for their own unique time of worship
 - We also offer special Nights of Worship for our college students

- **Mission**

- There is a unique bond that develops when followers of Christ serve Him alongside one another. You can make a stronger connection with someone

while serving together for an hour or a week than by simply sitting next to them week after week. Opportunities to be on mission together range from one-day events across town with one of our local ministry partners to a 10-day mission trip to the other side of the world

- At Ridgecrest, we ask all of our members to be “on mission” by participating in at least one short-term mission project (local or global) each year
- Oftentimes, our Life Groups are on mission together by adopting a particular project

Me Steps (Outer Circle)



All of us have room to grow in our journey of faith. Hopefully each of us is constantly praying about how we can move forward in our relationship with God and experience more of the abundant life that Jesus brings to His followers. To help simplify that process, we have developed a series of Next Steps represented by the circles around the outer ring on the diagram, beginning with Salvation and moving clockwise. It is worth repeating that: **Rather than being a rigid checklist, these steps are intended to give some clarity and commonality of language for expressing the basic expectations of a follower of Christ at Ridgcrest.**

Please keep in mind when thinking of these next steps as they relate to your life, while they represent a general pattern of growth, some steps can be taken simultaneously and it's OK to get "out of order" so long as you are growing closer to God in relationship and obedience.

Let's look at the steps in a little more detail. Each step has a key question associated with it to help you assess what your next step might be. The first three (blue circles) are dealing with our relationship with Him (God), while the next three (black circles) are more focused on our relationship with Them (others).



God loves us --- all of us --- and wants to have a relationship with us for all eternity. The problem is that there's a barrier between us and God. It's sin. When we choose to live for ourselves instead of God and when we choose to disobey his commands for us, that's sin. We all have it. The Bible puts it this way:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
Romans 3: 23

Our sin has consequences. It separates us from God and puts us in danger of eternal punishment. But there's GOOD NEWS! The consequences of sin and God's grace are both found in another verse in Romans.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23

The Good News is that even though we earn death and punishment because of our sin, God's grace and mercy

gives us an opportunity for eternal life through Jesus. You see, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin when He died on the cross and He defeated death when He rose from the grave. All that God requires of us is to turn from our sin and put our faith in Jesus Christ to save us. This turning from sin is what the Bible refers to as repentance.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2: 8 – 9

Salvation comes when we accept God's gift by recognizing that only He can save us and by calling out in prayer, trusting in Him to forgive our sins and become our Lord and Savior.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10: 9 – 10

Has that happened for you? If not, trusting in God for Salvation is the first and most important step you can make.

**Key Question: Have I accepted Jesus Christ
as my Lord and Savior, committing to
follow Him?**



Baptism is an important part of the Christian faith and a crucial step in the growth and obedience of a Christ-follower. There are lots of ideas about what it means and doesn't mean. To describe Ridgecrest's beliefs about baptism, let's think through some basic questions: What? How? Who? When? And Why?

What is baptism?

Baptism is a public symbol of a personal decision that someone has made to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is a way of saying, "I belong to Jesus now." In baptism, a person symbolically identifies with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as they are placed under the water and then brought back up.

How is a person baptized?

We believe in baptism by immersion, which means literally being placed (immersed) in water. We believe in this mode of baptism for a couple of reasons. First, there is the visible picture of a new follower identifying with Jesus' being buried and rising again when the person is placed under water and then comes back up. This picture is not as clearly evident in other forms of baptism. Secondly, in reading the accounts of baptism in the Bible, it seems clear that baptism was by immersion (see Acts 8: 38 – 39, for example).

Who should be baptized and When?

These two questions go together. You see, we teach what is called Believer's Baptism which is just like it sounds. Baptism is for believers, those who have made a decision to place their faith (belief) in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and therefore necessarily takes place **after** salvation. While baptism is not a part of or necessary for salvation, we would hope that baptism would come soon after a person has decided to follow Christ as an act of obedience and as an affirmation of their commitment.

Why should someone be baptized?

As stated earlier, baptism is an opportunity for a believer to publicly identify with Jesus Christ and to follow His example. Jesus allowed John the Baptist to baptize Him as recorded in

Matthew 3. Also in Matthew 28: 18 – 20 in what is known as the Great Commission, Jesus includes baptism as part of what it means to be a disciple, or follower, of His.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Key Question: Have I made a public declaration of my commitment to Jesus Christ by being baptized after I’ve been saved?



Spiritual Growth is a very broad term and includes several things. We'd like to focus on just a few specific practices as being important steps in personal Spiritual Growth. There are certainly others, but these can be a starting point.

Private Prayer Time

There are countless verses in the Bible related to the importance of prayer and there are examples of both public and private prayers. In this case, we are referring to having a daily time to spend in focused, private prayer. While the length of time can vary and may not be that much to begin with, it is important to begin the practice of individually communicating with God each day. In Matthew 6: 6 Jesus instructs us this way: *"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father,*

who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Personal Bible Reading/Reflection/Memorization

Just as it is important to set aside time each day for prayer, the same can be said for reading the Bible while asking God to teach you from His Word. Christians can sometimes fall into a couple of habits as it relates to daily Bible reading: neglect or legalism. Neglect is when we fail to take the time to read the Bible at all. Legalism would occur when we read a passage of Scripture “just to say we did it” without allowing God to apply it to our individual lives. Our hope would be that all of us at Ridgecrest take the time each day to interact with God and His Word, the Bible.

There are many good reading plans to give organization to personal Bible study but the key is to just get started. Some books of the Bible that might be good starting points would be Psalms, Proverbs, or the Gospel of John. One idea would be to pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you through your Bible reading, then to read a chapter, and then to ask some simple questions like: *What does this say about God? What does it say about people? Are there any sins to avoid, promises to claim, or examples to follow? Based on this passage, what is God showing me about my own life?*

In addition to reading and reflecting on Scripture, memorization is another important part of Spiritual Growth. Psalms 119: 11 shows us one outcome of Scripture memory, avoidance of sin: *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

Having parts of the Bible memorized can also bring things like wisdom, comfort, peace and encouragement. If you are not currently memorizing Scripture, what if you started with one verse a week? By a year from now, you could have 52 verses of Scripture ready for any situation you might face.

Giving

At Ridgecrest, we believe that giving your material resources to the work of the church, to other Kingdom causes, and to those in need is a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. As human beings, when we can trust God with something as important to us as our finances, we can trust Him with anything. Not only is giving necessary from a practical standpoint to fund various ministries, the principle of generous giving is found throughout the Bible.

We teach the concept of the tithe (10%) of a believer's income being given to the local church as a starting point of giving. This is based on several passages of Scripture including Malachi 3. Jesus put money in an eternal

perspective in Matthew 6: 19 – 21 when He said,

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Giving may be your next step in trusting God with “all your heart” (Proverbs 3: 5)

If you have questions about giving or about how gifts to Ridgecrest are used, feel free to contact our Finance Office at 601-853-1090.

Key Question: Am I devoting daily time to the Lord in private prayer and personal Bible Study and giving my resources to His work?



Every believer has Spiritual gifts, talents, abilities and resources that are intended to build up the church. We believe that if God has led you to be a part of Ridgecrest, then He has equipped you to serve the ministries of Ridgecrest in some way. 1 Peter 4:10 states it this way:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

There are lots and lots of choices. Options range anywhere from caring for newborns in the Preschool area to visiting some of our older members who are no longer able to worship with us in person and everything in between. Volunteers are required to work with sound, lighting, and video during our Worship Services as well as to lead in worship by singing or by playing in our band. We have numerous

opportunities each year to be involved in construction projects on our campus or in our community. We need coaches and other volunteers for our kids' soccer and flag football leagues. The list goes on and on.

What about you? We encourage you to take your next step if you are not currently serving one of Ridgecrest's ministries. Whether you have a specific ministry in mind or just know you need to do "something," you can contact any of our staff and we'll get you pointed in the right direction. You can also fill out and turn in a Ministry Interest Survey and we'll follow up with you to give you specific information.

Key Question: Am I serving in a ministry of Ridgecrest?



Why do you think most people come to a church for the first time? It's because someone invites them. Think about your own first time to visit Ridgecrest or another church. What prompted you to visit? Was it someone inviting you? Recent studies from Lifeway and the Barna Group show that around half of Americans are open to an invitation to church from a friend, family member or neighbor and that invitation is "somewhat or very effective" in getting them to visit a church. That means the fear of rejection that many of us have may not be valid. Around half the time, the person is open to the invitation.

Whether it is family member, friend or co-worker, chances are you know someone who does not regularly attend church and may not even have a relationship with Jesus Christ. These are people in our circle of influence. They may come to a Worship Service, Life

Group, or special event if you'll just invite them. It may not happen the first time you ask, but it may happen. While our ultimate goal is not just to have more people come to church, you can be assured that if they do come they will hear the message of the Gospel and the truths of the Bible clearly presented. You can play a major role in someone's spiritual well-being by simply inviting them to church. The Bible gives an example of inviting people to come and find out about Jesus in John 1: 43 – 46,

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.

Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

While inviting your circle is not the only step, it might be your next step in allowing God to use you.

Key Question: Am I regularly inviting people in my circle of influence to take part in activities and ministries at Ridgecrest?



Now we're getting to the nitty-gritty of what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ: Reaching Your World. After His resurrection and before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He left His disciples with some clear instructions, known as the Great Commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28: 18 – 20

We have that same commission and responsibility today. As we are going about our lives, we are to be making disciples --- locally and globally. While it's great to invite people to church, we also need to take the message of the Gospel to them, wherever they might be. Many may not be interested in church, but

desperately need a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are the ones responsible for reaching them. Check out what 2 Corinthians 5: 17 - 21 tells us:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There are lots of ways to reach your world. For example, you could:

- Learn to share your story and a basic Gospel presentation so that you're prepared whenever there is an opportunity
- Facilitate a weekly Bible study for friends, neighbors or co-workers that could take place in a home, restaurant, office break room or wherever works
- Volunteer on a short-term mission trip or project anywhere from Madison to the other side of the world, from a few hours to several days

Ridgecrest wants to equip our members to reach our world. We provide regular training and individual mentoring to give some direction to God's call to reach our world. We can help answer the "OK, what now?" questions in taking your next step in reaching your world. You can contact our staff in the church office at 601-853-1090.

Key Question: Am I regularly sharing my story and the Gospel seeking to make disciples of Jesus locally and globally?

This booklet is designed to give a basic outline of who we are as a church and what we expect from members. We should all be constantly asking the Lord, “What is my next step in my faith?” Hopefully you have been challenged by this information to seek to draw closer and to be more obedient to God, wherever you might find yourself in the circle. None of us is perfectly obedient to what God has called us to, but hopefully we’re moving forward with our own next step.

Of course, if you’d like to discuss any of this information further, you can contact any of our staff.

We’re praying for you in your Next Step of faith and obedience.





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