

Who We Are

Refuge Essentials



Objectives:

1. Understand the identity of Refuge as a local church
2. Identify the key values that Refuge holds
3. Know how Refuge ties into the greater Church

The Church's Identity

Every organization has an identity. Whether you look at Fortune 500 companies or small non-profits, each organization has distinctive values, a mission, and a purpose that forms the identity of the organization.

Local churches also have identities. While each local church has unique characteristics or qualities that make them unique and distinctive, the central identity of all churches is our understanding of who God is, who we are, and what God has done throughout history.

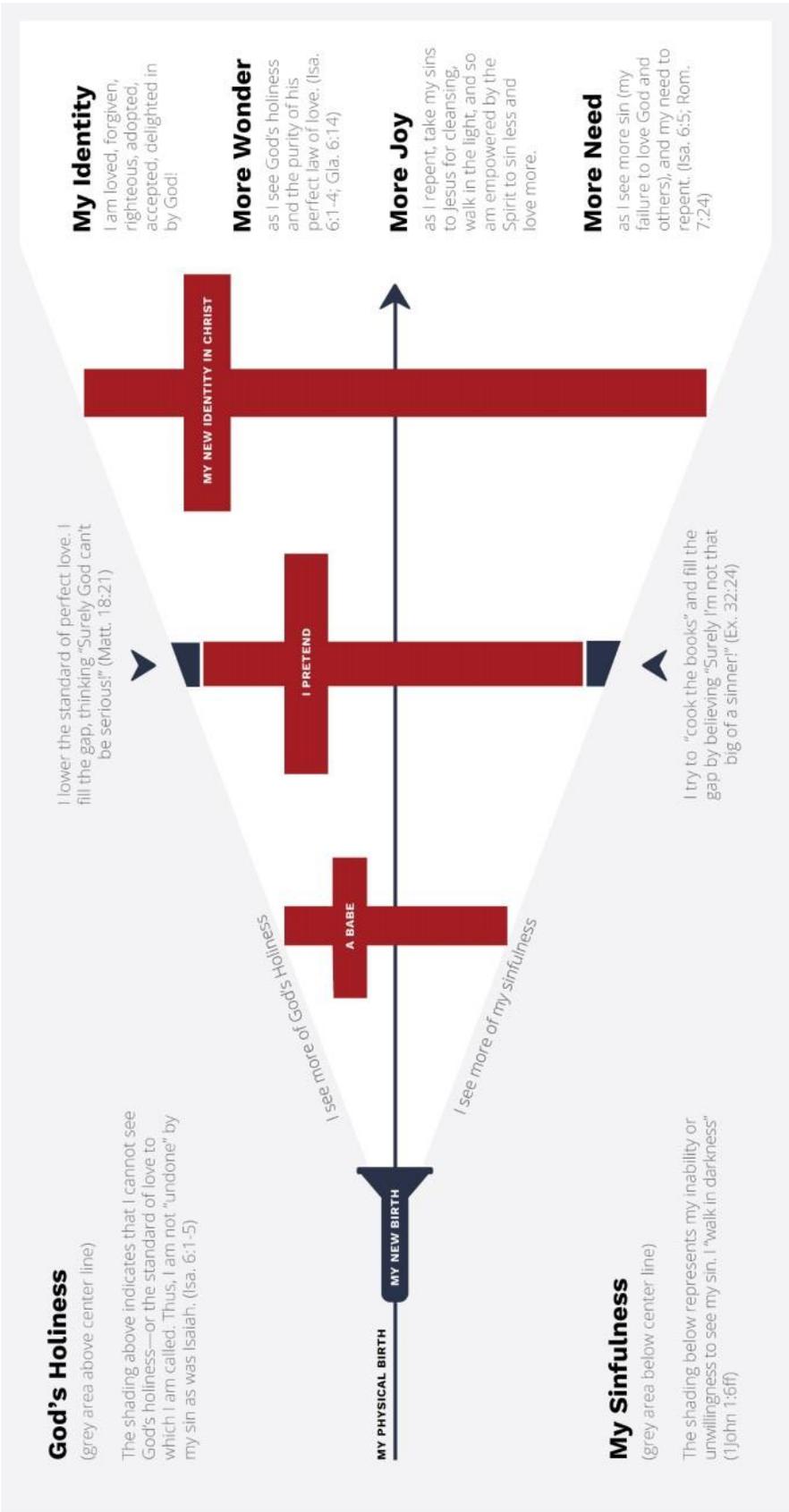
This core identity of all churches, including Refuge, hinges on what Christians call “the gospel.”

The Gospel

At Refuge, we believe that God's gospel (or good news) is the focal point of all that we do as a local church. This is because the gospel is not simply the entry into the Christian life; it is what we cling to daily as our only hope in life and death.

When we speak of the gospel, we are referring to God's invitation to us – wayward, rebellious, sinners – to be made right with him by trusting Jesus' perfectly obedient life, substitutionary death on the cross, and life-giving resurrection from the dead. We trust in this gospel, the finished work of Jesus on our behalf, as the only means of reconciliation to God and adoption into his family.

Through the gospel, God continues to show us the depths of our rebellion and the greatness of his mercy and grace. Our deep need for God's continued forgiveness is shown in the following Cross Chart.



The Effects of God's Gospel

As we grow in our understanding of God's saving work on our behalf and trust continually in his gospel, we experience three relational transformations:

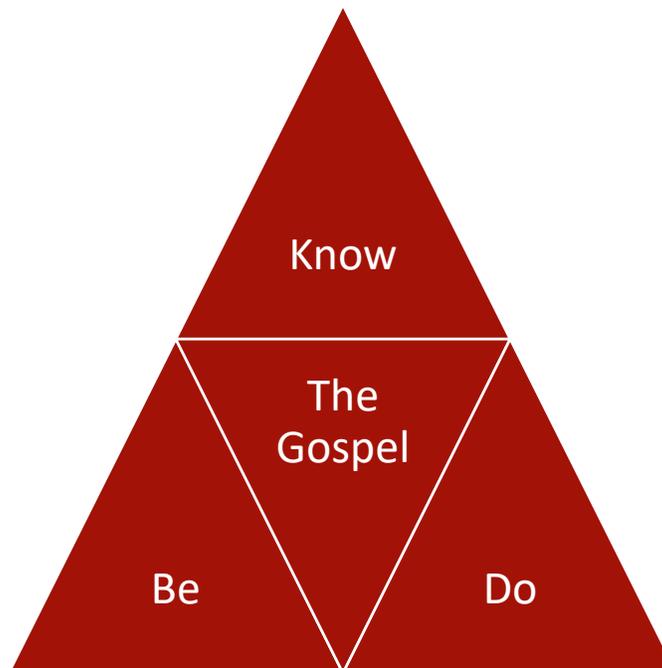
- Our relationship with God is transformed from one of rebellion to one of worship.
- Our relationship with God's people is transformed from one of estrangement to one of community.
- Our relationship with ourselves is transformed from one of denial and protection to one of honest reflection.

These transformations then lead us into taking part in God's mission of redeeming and restoring the world that he created.

The Mission of Refuge

At Refuge, we are ***building our identity in Christ for the sake of the world***. We want to be a gospel-centered community where we are being transformed in our beliefs, our identities, and our actions by the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on our behalf.

We often say that this transformation is a logical progression of what we know, that then transforms who we are, which then transforms what we do.



The Values of Refuge

This transformation of know-be-do is exemplified in the five core values that we hold at Refuge:

Truth – Who God Is

The Bible points us to the full revelation of God through Jesus. His person and work represent the gospel (Good News) that though we were once enemies of God, he has made us new and restored our relationship.

Worship – Transforming Our Relationship with God

This truth reveals to us our wickedness, but also God's absolute greatness. As God's truth is unfolded more and more in our lives, our proper response is one of complete awe.

Community – Transforming Our Relationship with each Other

The revelation that God himself became nothing so that we could become rich transforms the way we view other people. One who is transformed by the gospel can no longer look away in shame or down in pride upon anyone. Because we have been loved, we can love and consider others more significant than ourselves.

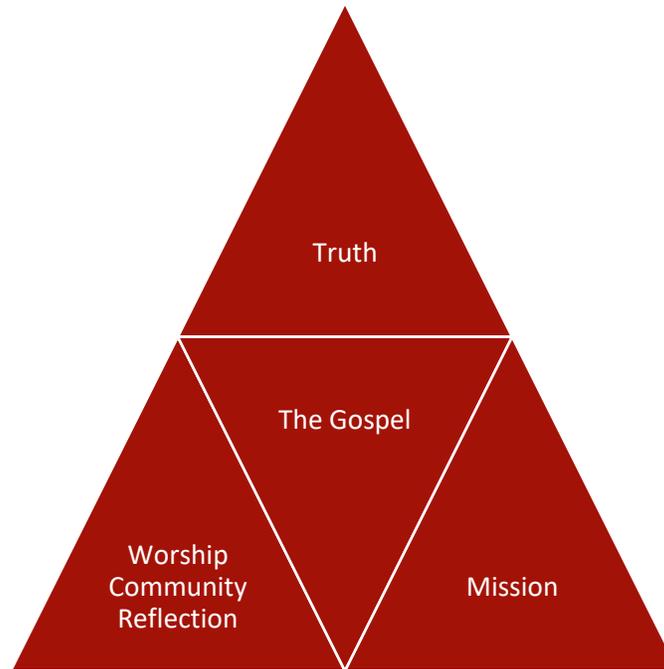
Reflection – Transforming Our Relationship with Ourselves

Because God created you, you have been designed in a unique way, which specifically reflects God's goodness in and to this world. Understanding our gifts and strengths plays a vital part in understanding our value as God's unique creatures.

Mission – Joining God in his Work

Creation – Rebellion – Redemption – Restoration

This is the grand story of God's mission in the world, and we have received the privilege and invitation of joining with God in his work of restoring all creation – spiritually, socially and culturally. When we join him in His mission, we begin to see the importance of our smaller stories within his big story.



The Grand Story

The truth that we cling to is primarily communicated through the Bible. Often we can see the Bible as a loose collection of teachings that simply tell us to do certain things and avoid doing other things. Instead, the Bible reveals God's character by telling the story that of what he has been doing since the beginning of time. This story is foundational in understanding the truths that God is conveying.

To summarize the biblical story, we generally break it into four parts:

Creation

When God created the world, he declared it to be good, and created us, humankind, as the pinnacle of his creation to care for and steward all that he had made. Adam and Eve were in a perfect relationship with God, trusting him as the source of goodness, purpose, direction, wisdom, and truth.

Rebellion

In the Garden, Adam and Eve, our original parents and the representatives of humankind, listened to the lies of the serpent and believed that God was holding back wisdom and knowledge from them. In rebellion, they ate of the fruit of the tree that God commanded them not to eat of, and God's curse came upon them. We, as their children, inherit the guilt of Adam and Eve's original rebellion and a nature that is rebellious towards God and his reign over us. In this rebellion against God's creational order, we deserve his wrath and his punishment of death, both physically and spiritually.

Redemption

God, desiring to call a rebellious people back to himself and put them back into right relationship with himself, pursued a plan to redeem (buy back) his people from their slavery to sin and death. This was ultimately shown through the work of God the Son, the second person of our triune God. He came to earth as a man, Jesus Christ, lived rightly before God as we were created to live, died on the cross to take God's wrath for our sin, and rose again on the third day conquering death for us. All who trust in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on their behalf are now sons and daughters of God through our union with Christ. This good news – gospel – is the core truth that God reveals to us through the Bible.

Restoration

One day, Jesus will return to set all things right. When that happens all of the pain, sickness, death, and brokenness that our rebellion caused in creation will be no more. Jesus will rightly judge all people, both living and dead, and those that trusted in the gospel will live forever in the restored creation with our God.

Living as Transformed People

Community is more than just a value at Refuge, it is a vital part of our identity as a local church. This call to community is at odds with our societal values.

The American ideal is built around autonomy and individualism. We want to call the shots, do what we want, engage when we wish, withdraw when we feel like it, and generally keep a safe distance away from everyone else.

In contrast to this American mindset, God calls us into close, intimate, familial community as Christians. When we become Christians, we repent of our pursuit of autonomy and replace it with deep dependence on God and his leading. Likewise, when we place our trust in Jesus' finished work, we are called to lay aside our individualism and seek after close, familial community through the local church.

When God saves us through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, he does not save us to be individuals who worship God on our own. Instead, he saves us to be part of his family: the Church. There are no do-it-yourself Christians or take-Christ-but-not-his-Church Christians. Such beliefs have no basis within Christian thought or practice.

One of the most striking images that God gives us to understand the gospel in scripture is the picture of a husband and his bride. The bible declares that Jesus is the bridegroom who gave up his life for his bride. That means we, as Christians, must be united with Jesus through participation in his bride to experience the vast benefits of his saving work and the Spirit's gracious transformation in our lives.