

Last week, I laid out the plan for this series and the fact that the culmination of this series is to bring our offering to the Lord for the remodeling of our Building in Wellsville.

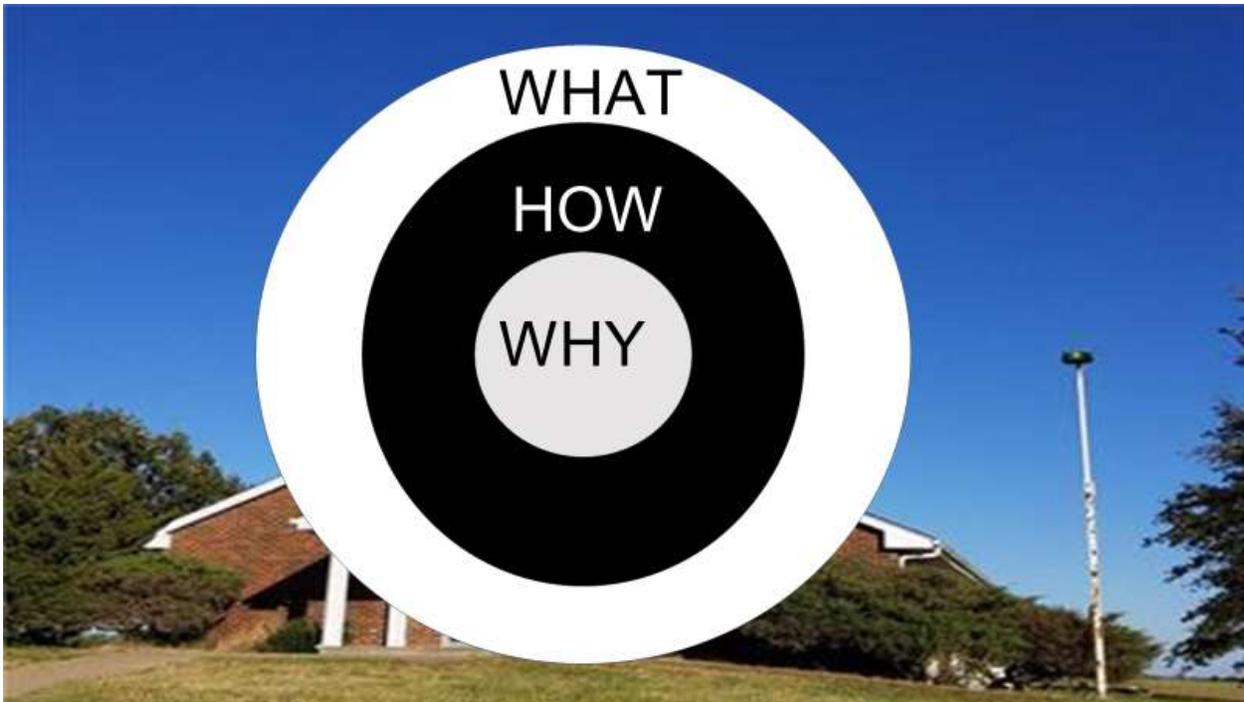
The reason we began to discuss this offering with so much notice instead of just springing it on us and pressing the hard sell is because the most important part of this and every offering is the relationship that it fosters between us and God. The real purpose for this month is for you to experience the deep and contemplative process of going to God with all that you have and all you don't have and saying, "God, this is all yours, how do you want me to steward it." So all month, work hard to keep your heart bent toward God, expecting Him to speak to you about your part in finishing our building.

The second reason we laid this out ahead of time is the MANNA. Who has their MANNA word? I explained last week that while Moses was calling on the people to bring an offering for the completion of the Tabernacle, they were living in such a barren place that God was having to hand feed them with Manna. So the story of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness is much more than a story of an offering, it's the story of a relationship between God

and His people. It's this reciprocal dynamic of God providing for the Israelites and the Israelites giving of themselves to create and advance the Kingdom of God. So, part of the dynamic of the next two months is for us to identify and be open about what we need from God, both as a church and as individuals. What do you need to rain from Heaven like MANNA, even as you bring your gifts to God? And if you haven't identified that thing yet, then start to pray for "MANNA". The Hebrew word MANNA actually means, "What is it?". So if you don't know what to pray for right now, then ask God to provide whatever that need is that you can't yet identify; that "What is it?"

Finally, did everyone pray for the church at least once per day this week. If you forgot, no shame but seriously, set an alarm in your phone. It's a great practice to have an alarm that reminds you to pray periodically throughout the day anyway, but this month especially, be praying for Open Table.

In our teaching last week, we started with a look at our vision statement. We learned that no one had previously read it, so that was comforting, but we spent the majority of our time breaking down the first half of the statement. We did this to extract our "WHY".



We discussed that we want to always work from our WHY to our WHAT, not the other way around. We want our Core Value to drive everything else we do. So last week our desire was to boil OTCC down to our essential core value which is to build and be a Kingdom Community.

The first half of our vision statement says it like this.



Open Table Community Church is a community organized by and around the Word of God, to cooperate in the Mission of God of furthering the Kingdom of God.

So first and foremost, we are a community; a kingdom community. Our very first priority is to be a People. At our roots, we are not a list of Doctrines and Beliefs. We are not a Theology. We are not an Orthodoxy. We are not a list of Truth Statements than must be agreed to in order to be on the “inside”. Real Life is too complicated for that, faith is far too complex for that, so our community has to be much deeper than that.

We have no desire to boil life down to a list of Christian Clichés. We simply desire to do this life of faith together. We are committed to the reality that it is “not good for man to be alone”, that as we fumble our way through this Kingdom life, it is better to fumble through it together.

That's our "Why"! That's Nonnegotiable. That's the motivation for everything we do. The "HOW", which is what we're going to be talking about tonight, can and may change. How we accomplish becoming a Kingdom Community is a little more flexible. As we go through some of it tonight, I think you'll find that we do what we do out of conviction and out of an obedience to Scripture, but if we in the future find that our "HOW" is not servicing our "WHY", then we will discuss how to change our "HOW"; but never our "WHY".

So right off the bat, you must ask yourself, "Am I committed to the WHY?" Because if you have some other agenda, even if it's a perfectly valid and Biblical agenda, if you have a different agenda than to do life with other people who are doing their best to keep their lives on a course whose trajectory is towards Jesus, from wherever they are currently standing, if you don't buy that Why, then Open Table will never be a fit for you.

And please know that you might not even realize that you are after a different "WHY", which is the reason I felt that a Vision Series was important right now. It is absolutely possible to think we're on board with the WHY when in truth we just mixed our agenda up with the agenda of the church.

For instance, you might think that because I'm a fairly conservative person that this church is a great place to advance conservatism. And underneath everything else, you feel like the world needs more conservatives. If that's WHY you're here, you will be frustrated.

You may feel that because I'm a fairly liberal preacher, this would be a great place to advance progressive politics. You will be frustrated.

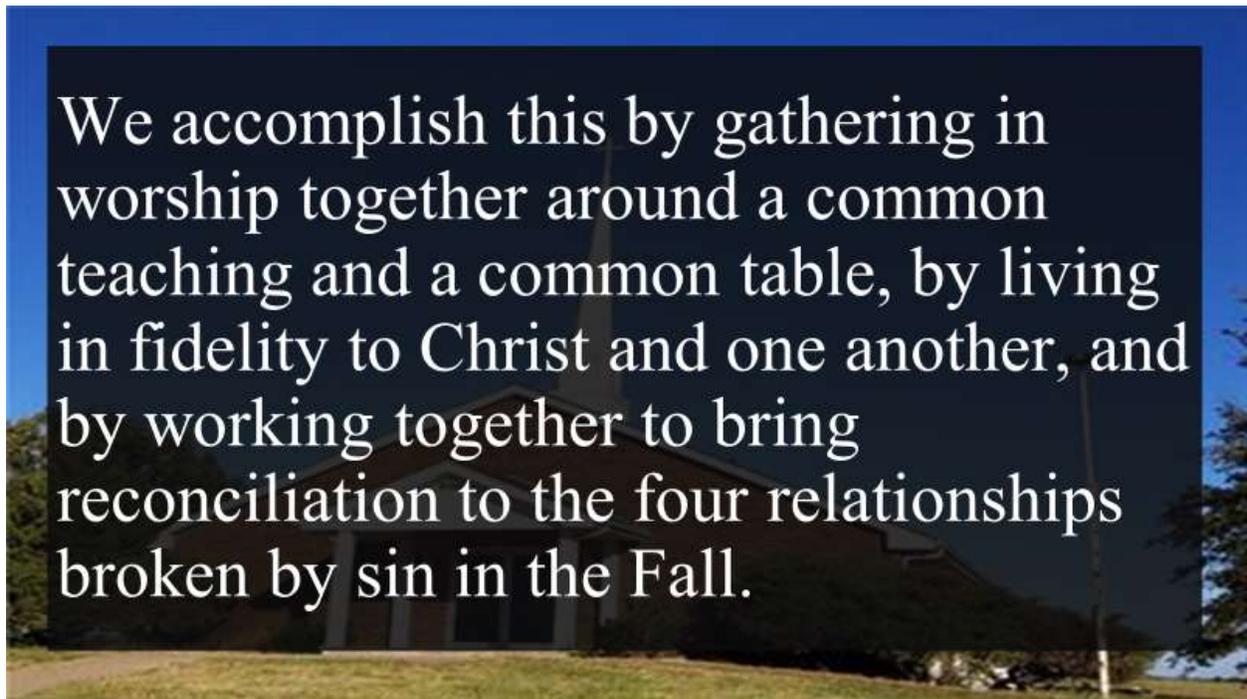
If you want to belong to a church where the "WHY" is to get as many people to pray a sinner's prayer as possible; to cross some salvation finish line. If that's really the only thing that matters to you in the end, that would be a perfectly valid WHY, but Open Table will never feel like home for you.

Only if you get that our aim will always be to be a people who live this life of faith and doubt and glory and failure and falling and getting back up and seeing miracles and holding each other when the miracles don't come; only when you get that **the community** is the goal, will OTCC feel like home.

So don't get sold on the How or the What if you don't feel the WHY in your guts.

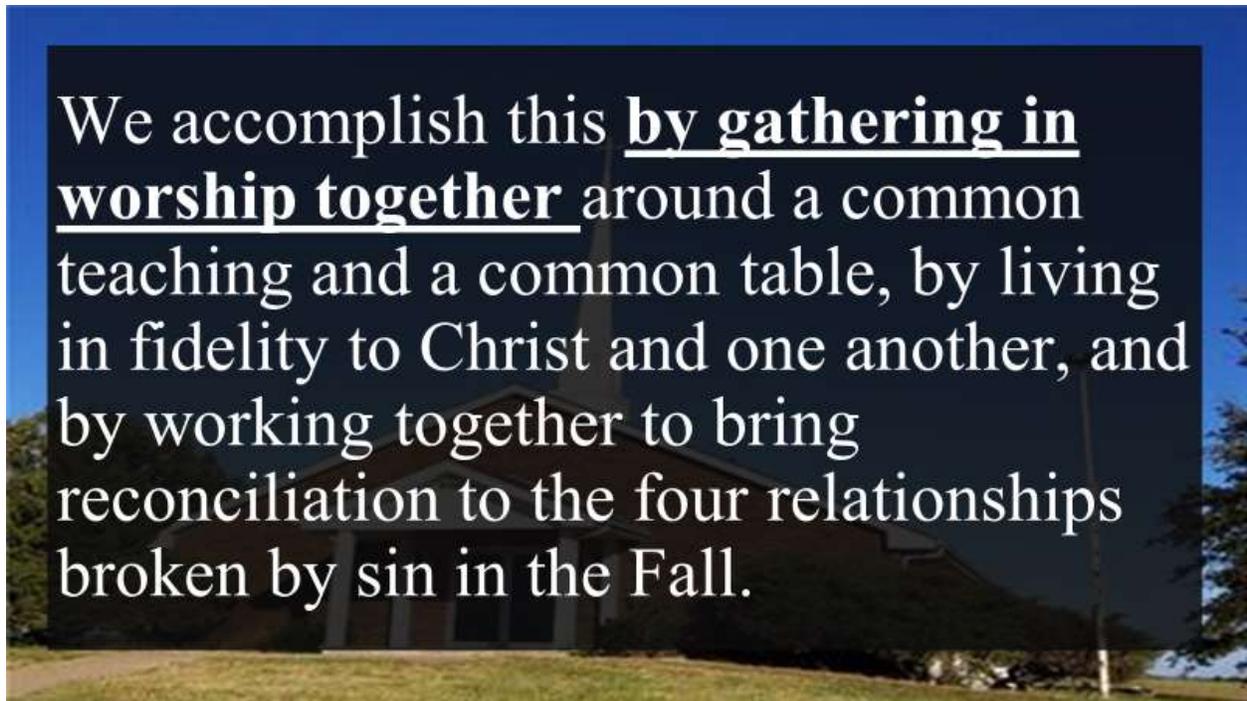
Tonight, as we dig into the "HOW", let's start by looking back to our Vision Statement.

Open Table Community Church is a community organized by and around the Word of God, to cooperate in the Mission of God of furthering the Kingdom of God.



This second half will be the focus of our study tonight.

Much of our “HOW” is right here in this statement. And I think what we’ll do is just work through it piece by piece and hopefully uncover How we intend to become a Kingdom Community.



We desire to be a worshipping people. As I’m sure you can tell, we put a big emphasis on our music. We practice a lot, we sacrifice time, we stretch ourselves and take it very seriously. But this is actually much deeper than just worship. Worship is in and of itself a very private and individual thing.

Some people worship well in an arena with a bunch of other people and loud music and lasers and smoke and all the big drama.

I’m one of those people.

Some worship in nature. A hike in the mountains or time on a beach or even a walk in a park Some people find God much more accessible in these moments.

Some worship in silence where they can hear the voice God more easily.

Some worship as they behold beautiful art.

Some worship as they watch their children play.

Really, anything that magnifies God in your vision and turns your heart toward Him in gratitude, is Worship. If as you do something, God just gets bigger, than that is how you worship.

We in no way put a ton of time into our Music here at OTCC because we believe that our worship will be everyone's individual cup of Worship Tea.

In fact, you've probably heard me make fun of K-Love. I can't help it but I personally don't like K-Love. I don't even really like Christian music. It tends to frustrate me because it seems like Christians should have all the same stuff to put into their art as the World only we have the added ingredient of God. So our art should be able to capture all of the elements of a full human life (love and hate and pain and lust and addiction and fear

and loneliness and glory and everything else) and we can add God to our artistic expression. Instead we tend to only talk about God. And that feels too thin to me. But, despite my frustration with Christian music, I love worship Music. I generally prefer to listen to live recordings but I love worship music and I don't mind if it's overly simplistic, single faceted, repetitive and overplayed. Because the reason I love worship music isn't really because I feel it makes for great worship.

The reason I love worship music is because of Open Table's "WHY". Music is instrumental in making us a people. The very first thing that the Israelites did upon crossing the Red Sea and essentially becoming a People, was to sing. Actually, they sang and danced. Moses sang a song, Merriam sang a song. The Nation sang together. This set off a tradition in the Jewish people that exists to this day. In fact, the Jews revered their songs so much that they canonized them as Scripture.

Therefore, it was natural as a group of Jews began to recognize Jesus as the culmination of their faith, that they would sing. The book of Acts has many references to the early church singing hymn. Paul references and quotes several of them in his letters. He instructs the Corinthians to sing Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs.

Music has been a unifying element of the People of God forever, and it's no different today. This is actually true even outside the church. Go to a concert. It's amazing how fast 20,000 people feel unified as they sing the same song together at the top of their lungs. This is why we have genres of music. People don't just listen for the melody and harmony and instrumentation and rhythm. They identify with the entire culture behind the music. This is why there's music that you just don't get despite that fact that there are real, sincere people who love it. (Country Music). This is what I love about Church Music. It's not that the art is necessarily the best, it's that this is our music. It shapes our culture and it comes loaded with the ethos of our rich history and the themes that shapes us.

This is why something happens when you sing Amazing Grace. The entire atmosphere changes. No one even considers arguing the process and means of salvation as they sing "Saved a Wretch Like Me". They just sing in unity with everyone else. It's like we all say, "This song, whether it's modernized, played on a piano, plunked out on a guitar, or sung accapello, this song is who we are. This song maybe defines us better than any theological treatise ever could".

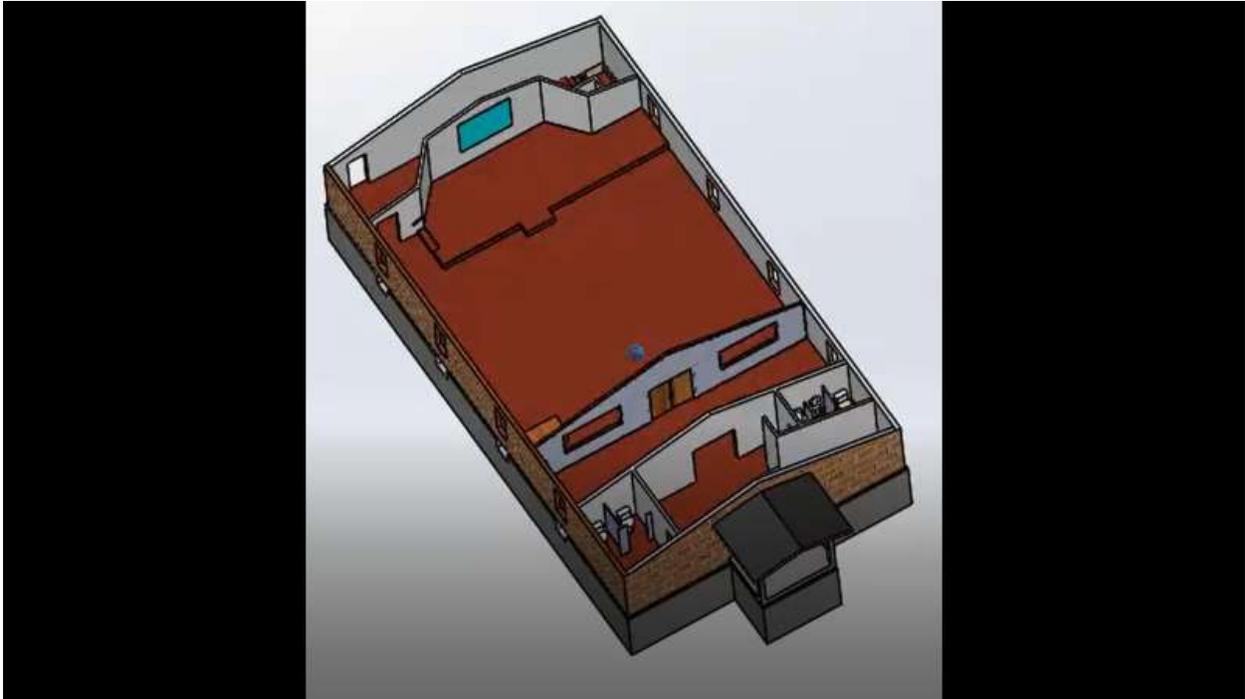
You'd be amazed to know how many times themes arise in our little church in worship that become the focus of prayers and even major points

of emphasis in our studies just because of the response and feedback we get as we sing certain songs together. Judy and I will talk and one of us will say, “have you noticed how much we seem to be drawing to songs that focus on _____?” Our music shapes us even as it reflects who we are.

So in short, if you worship well in church, if as we sing together, God gets bigger in our eyes and you feel closer to Him, Great!!! That’s amazing. But if that’s not you, if you don’t really feel connected to God through corporate church worship, it still has huge value because there is something bonding about us all gathering together and all singing the same words and all allowing ourselves to be shaped but the five songs on any given Sunday.

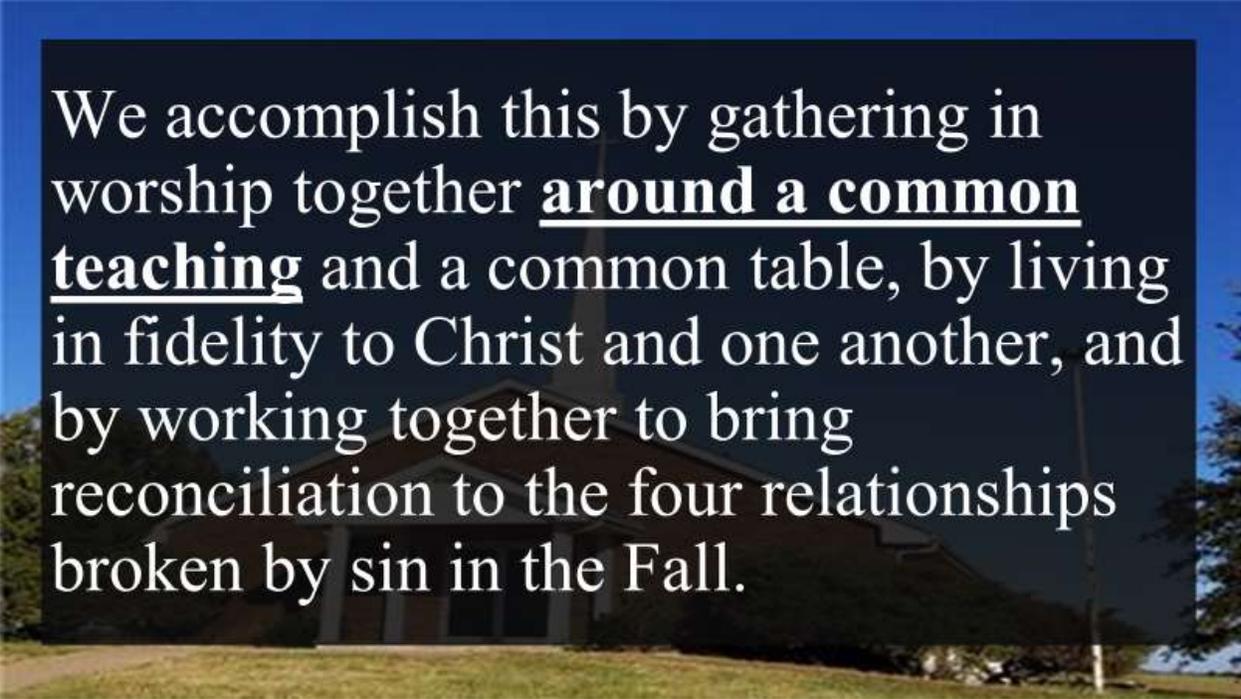
Our music at Open Table is not a performance. We never want it to be about putting on a show. We want this to be about all of us singing together because that’s “HOW” we become a people.

So this is reflected in our Space.



We will have a simple low stage. We never want it to feel like those on stage are separate and distinct from the people. We all worship together. We never come to watch those on stage worship.

OK, back to our Vision Statement



We accomplish this by gathering in worship together around a common teaching and a common table, by living in fidelity to Christ and one another, and by working together to bring reconciliation to the four relationships broken by sin in the Fall.

We chose the word “Common” intentionally because this serves our WHY. It’s more than just that we all study the Bible. That serves the purpose of Valuing Scripture, but we choose the word Common Teaching because we believe that only by studying Scripture together do we become a community.

Now, this idea of gathering around a common teaching has been at the core of the Vision for OTCC for years. I believe the power of the Word of God is in the studying of it. Not in being able to quote little pieces of it, though I think memorization of Scripture is a great thing. I don’t think the power is in breaking it into a clean rational system, though I love theology.

I don't even think the power of the Bible is in defining right from wrong and learning how to direct a society according to the will of God, though I believe all the secrets to living right and well are in there. I honestly believe the real power of the Word is found in simply staying in it. I don't think there is any substitute for good old time, real time, spent in the Word. This is not a text book. These are not facts to be memorized.

The writer of Hebrews explains the Word this way...

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

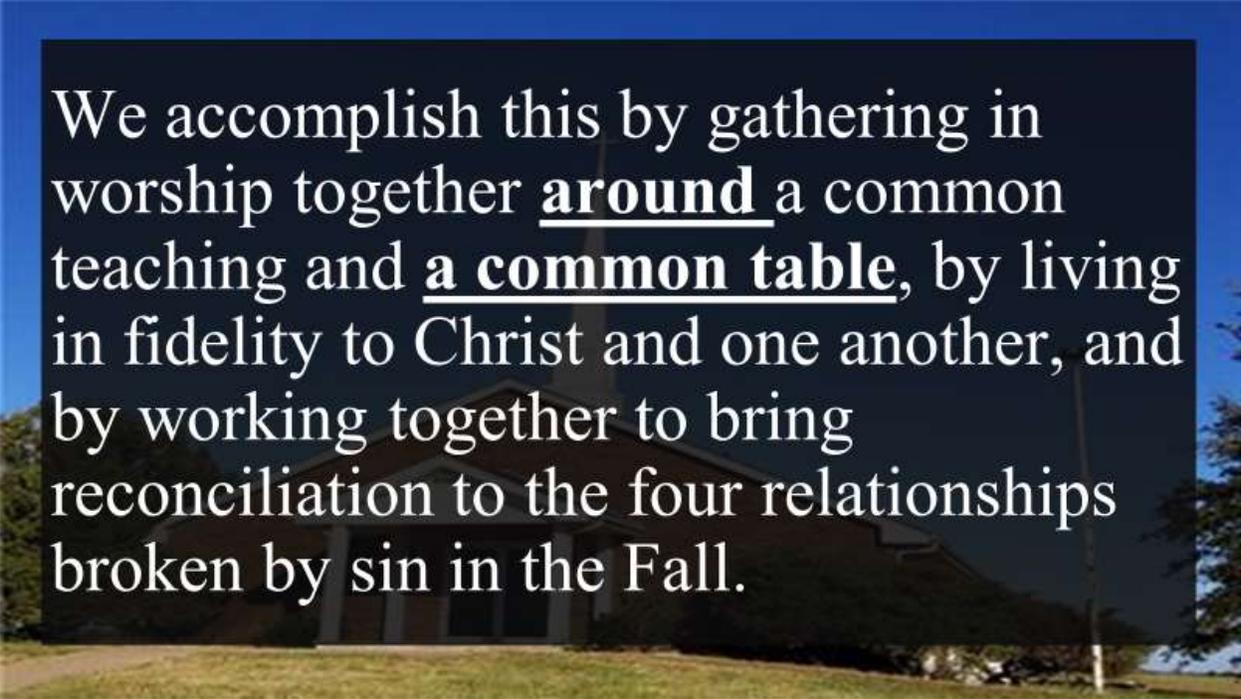
At the root of our desire to create Open Table as a Come As You Are community, whether you believe the claims of Scripture that we generally consider "orthodox" or whether you don't buy it all, whether you live a Biblical lifestyle or you don't, whatever denomination you consider yourself to be a part of, whatever political party you sympathize with, whatever worship style you prefer...

The real reason we desire to be open to everyone and especially to never try to force people into our "box" isn't because none of that stuff is

important to us. Actually, orthodoxy, holy living, politics, worship style, all of that stuff is a very important to us. The reason we choose not to discriminate on any of that stuff is because we believe in the Word of God and in the Spirit of God. We believe that if we stay in the Scripture together, the Holy Spirit will lead us to what matters. The Word of God will deal with our thoughts and desires. We don't have to pick on that stuff. If God wants to pick on us and deal with us and we are in the Word, He'll work on our hearts. It's not that we don't care what people believe and we don't care how people live, it's just that we actually do believe in the Word of God as a living and active Word.

So we sit under a common teaching...

But also...



We accomplish this by gathering in worship together around a common teaching and a common table, by living in fidelity to Christ and one another, and by working together to bring reconciliation to the four relationships broken by sin in the Fall.

Now, this one gets pretty broad so I'll try to break it down fairly quickly...

First, this means is that we are Sacramental.

The sacraments are deeply contested in the Church.

Catholics recognize seven

Lutherans recognize three

Most of the rest of the church say they recognize two

Most Evangelicals only recognize one, the sinners prayer.

But I tend to line up with Saint Augustine who listed over 600 sacraments.

The standard definition of a Sacrament is an act that serves as a vehicle for grace. So it's not like a good deed you have to do in order to get grace, but instead, it's the means by which God gets you the grace that is free for the taking.

So it's like if you were dying of thirst and God provided you with water and you took the freely given water and you did nothing for it and it was a gift you gladly accepted, you are no less thirsty until you actually drink. A sacramentalist would say, the drinking isn't something you do to earn the grace, it's just how you apply it.

So we put our hands on our kids and we declare a blessing over them. We don't do this because we believe that some weird energy or power flows out of our hands and into our kids. We just lay on hands or stretch out hands because it's a sacrament. The Bible tells us that Timothy received an impartation through the laying on of hands. It tells us that when we are sick, have a believer lay hands on you and pray for you. We do it because the Bible tells us to and we believe that that means something.

But this goes deeper than just ritual observances. We believe that we become a people, we become Open Table Community Church by what we do. This goes back to our WHY. Our Connectedness is not automatic. We are part of the Body of Christ proper by our faith in Jesus but WE become a community by eating together and by praying for one another and by getting together so our kids can hang out, by helping each other when we're in a jam, by sharing our life with each other. We become a community not just because of what we believe. Being a sacramentalist means that you believe that that shared belief takes root in real time together and in real experiences shared with each other.

The other reason that we feel a common table is essential in HOW we accomplish our WHY, is because the Table is the great equalizer.

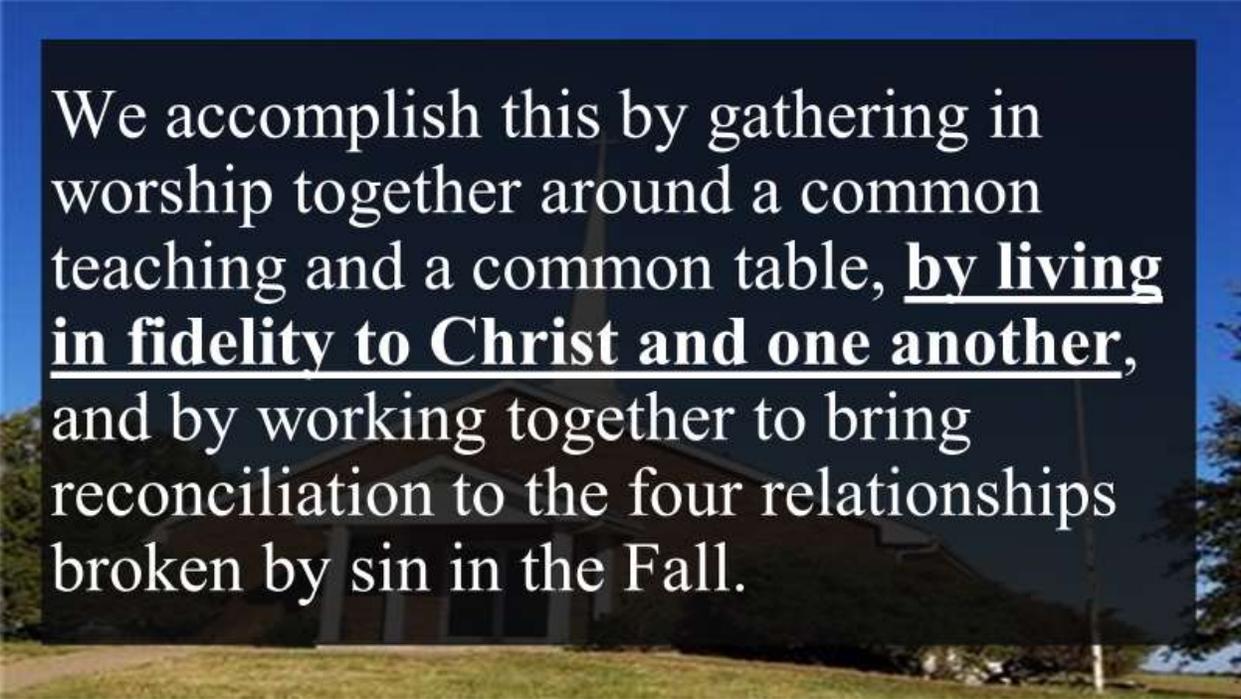
Everyone eats. It doesn't matter how rich or poor you are, whether you are a man or woman, what race you are, what political party you vote for, how educated you are, what kinds of hang up you have, or how long you've been a Christian. No matter who you are, you need to eat and when you sit down at a Table, you take nourishment the same way everyone else does. You put it in your mouth, you chew it and you swallow it. Just like everyone else.

And finally, the Table is Cruciocentric. No matter where we are in Scripture, no matter how off track I get, no matter how many far I dive off into philosophy or Neuro biology or Literature, I'm going to stand before you and tell you how Jesus' body was broken for you and how His blood was spilled for you. Wherever we go, together we will orient ourselves back to the cross. Because that has to be the center of everything.

So we gather in Worship around a Common Teaching and a Common Table...

This is HOW we accomplish our WHY on Sundays. This is who we become a people when we gather for a church service.

The next two are more about Monday to Saturday...



We accomplish this by gathering in worship together around a common teaching and a common table, by living in fidelity to Christ and one another, and by working together to bring reconciliation to the four relationships broken by sin in the Fall.

faithful living. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where theories and philosophies and theoreticals are pretty meaningless. Can you imagine how thin it would feel for your spouse to tell you they love you and break it down rationally as they were repeatedly unfaithful to you? You might get to where you say, “you know what, I’d take faithfulness over love right now, if you don’t mind”.

But I feel like we do that to God all the time. But here’s the caveat. We have a tendency to think that living faithful to Christ means that we never mess up. This may be goal, but when I think of it in the context of a marriage, I can honestly say that I don’t expect Esther to never mess up. I

don't expect her to be perfect. I don't expect her to never make me angry. I know she's going to make me crazy sometimes. I know she's not always going to be as perfect as me (kidding). I don't expect perfection, but I do expect her to be faithful.

For me, this is a helpful way to think about my relationship with Jesus. It's not about keeping a list of rules perfectly. It's about having no other God before Him. It's about saying, "you are the one and only" and meaning it. Faithfulness is not perfection.

Likewise, in our community, we are going to upset each other. We are going to disagree. We're going to make each other uncomfortable with some of our theological interpretations. We are going to fail each other at times. We will get frustrated with one another. Living in fidelity to each other isn't about perfection it's about saying, "these are my people and even when they frustrated me, I stay in it and I stay committed". It means that I show up. When my people need me, I come running.

So basically, this is the communal side of Love God and Love People. Loving God and Loving People is what you are called to do wherever you

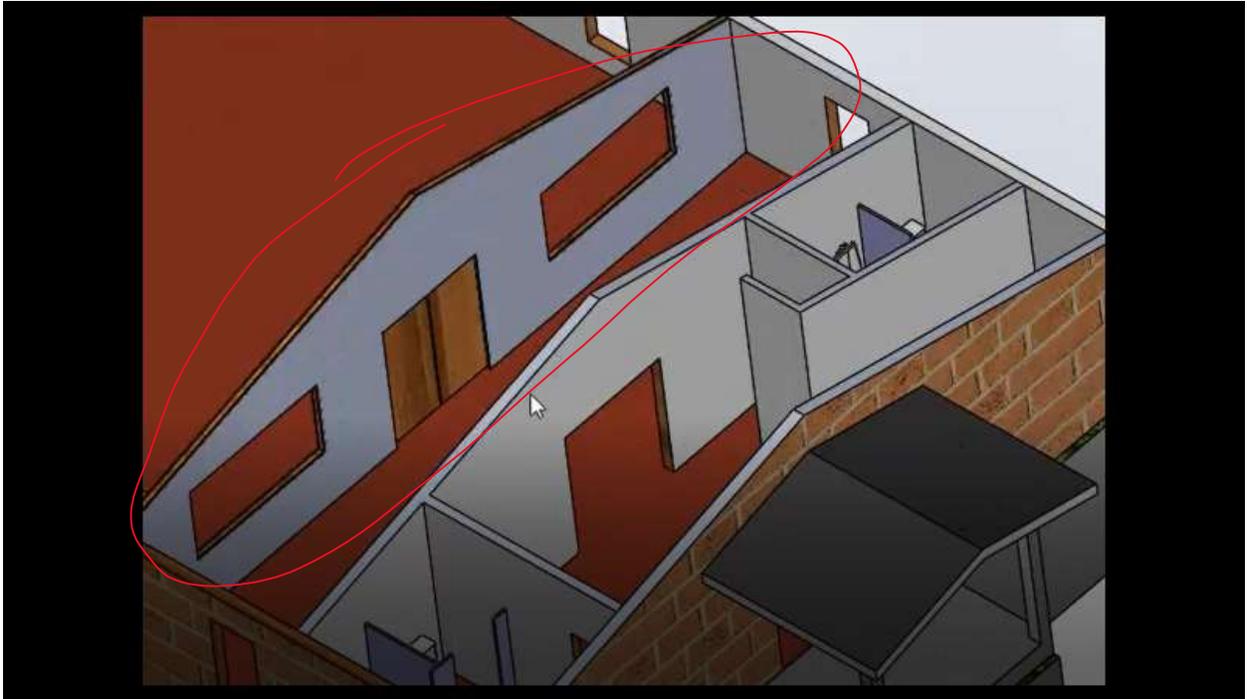
are. Each of us should Love God and Love all People. But at OTCC, we build a Kingdom Community by expressing that Love as Fidelity; faithfulness.

So HOW do we become a Kingdom Community? How do we Accomplish our WHY? By doing the church stuff, The Worship, the living teaching and the always meaningful table, and by living real-people lives Monday to Saturday, keeping Christ in the center when we do well and when we blow it. All the while, living faithfully with one another.

This is our HOW.

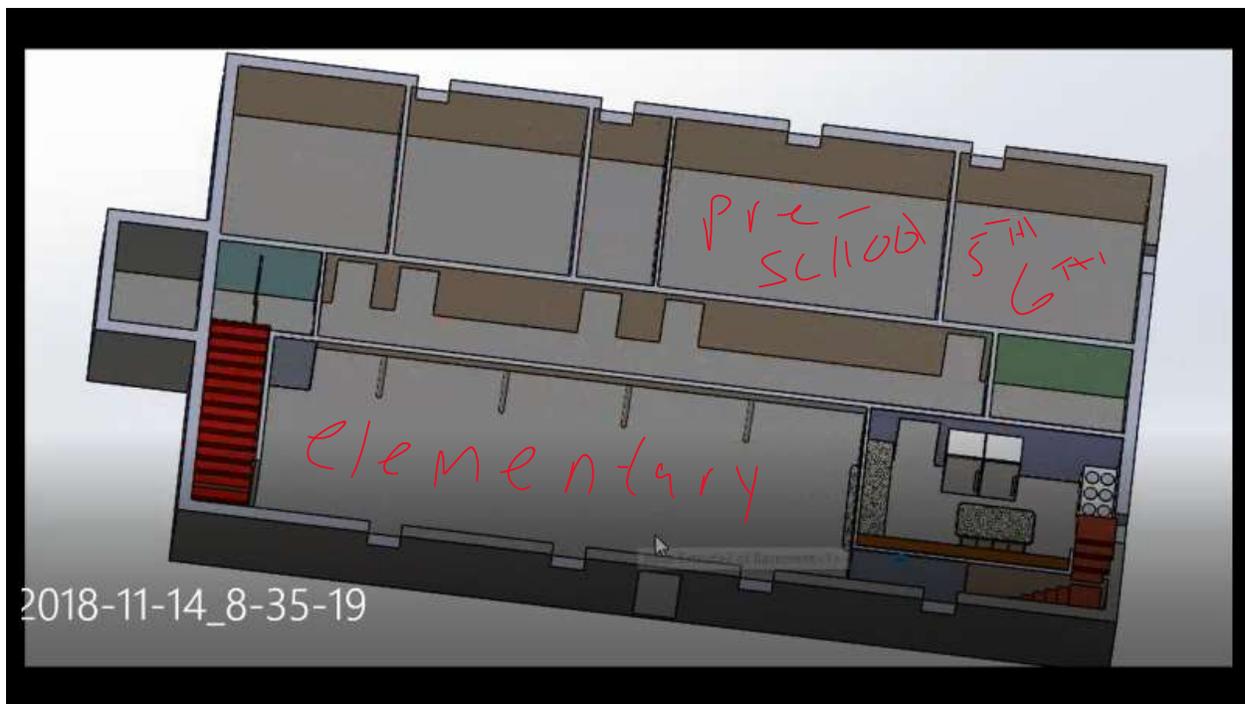
Our final piece of the Vision Statement, the WHAT we plan to do, we'll cover Next week.

But with the rest of our time tonight, I want to look at one piece of our Church that I don't really get to talk about as much as I would like; Our Kids.



One of our reasons for adding the extra wall in our sanctuary is our commitment to worshipping with our Kids. It would be easier for parents if we put the kids in the Kids Ministry at the very beginning of the service. It would probably even make our worship seem more passionate. But our kids wouldn't be shaped by our worship the way we are. We believe that they are shaped by that music too. We sing one hymn per week and that's as much about them as us. It's sad that kids aren't learning the Old Stuff. So we don't want to remove our kids from worship because they are part of the same WHY so they need to experience the same HOW. But when they do go to their space...





Our elementary kids will be shaped by the same HOW. Worship, (with us)

Common teaching (Great teachers)

Common Table (Esther teaches Sacred Space first Sunday of each month

to teach the kids sacramental living. Prayer/journaling/worshipful

art/meditation/etc)

Preschool

Amazing Curriculum Where the teacher tells the story with physical elements then takes them apart and lets the kids put it back together while they try to repeat the story.



Amazing Liturgy, including a sacred moment before “The Feast”
(snack time)

But more than any of this, as we pray every week, we want our kids to be a part of the people of God.

Last year, when we canceled church on Super Bowl Sunday, Liam who was not even two years old, walked into his living room, looked confusedly at his dad and while raising his shoulders interrogatively asked, “Church?” This is absolutely beautiful. This is the goal. That a child who doesn’t know what a calendar is and doesn’t know what a clock is, can

know that it's Sunday and we go to church on Sunday. That's what the People of God do. This is the heart of our children's ministry.

So How Do We Respond to This?

First, I want you to grasp the difference between our WHY and our HOW.

Worship isn't WHY we are here. Worship is majorly important. But, I hope you worship more than just here.

Scripture isn't WHY we're here. I live for the Scripture and I want you in Scripture, but more than just when you are here.

The sacraments are not WHY we're here. I want you to live as though what you do matters, no matter where you are.

Fidelity isn't WHY we're here. You need to live faithfully wherever you are.

Community is WHY we're here, and Worship, and the Study of Scripture, and the Sacraments, and Faithfulness is HOW we will build that community.

The second thing I'd love for us to do in Response is a repeat of last week.

1. Keep praying about what God wants you to do to help with our Building project.
2. Keep praying for your MANNA. Give us this day our daily bread.
3. Keep praying for Open Table Community Church. At least once per day.