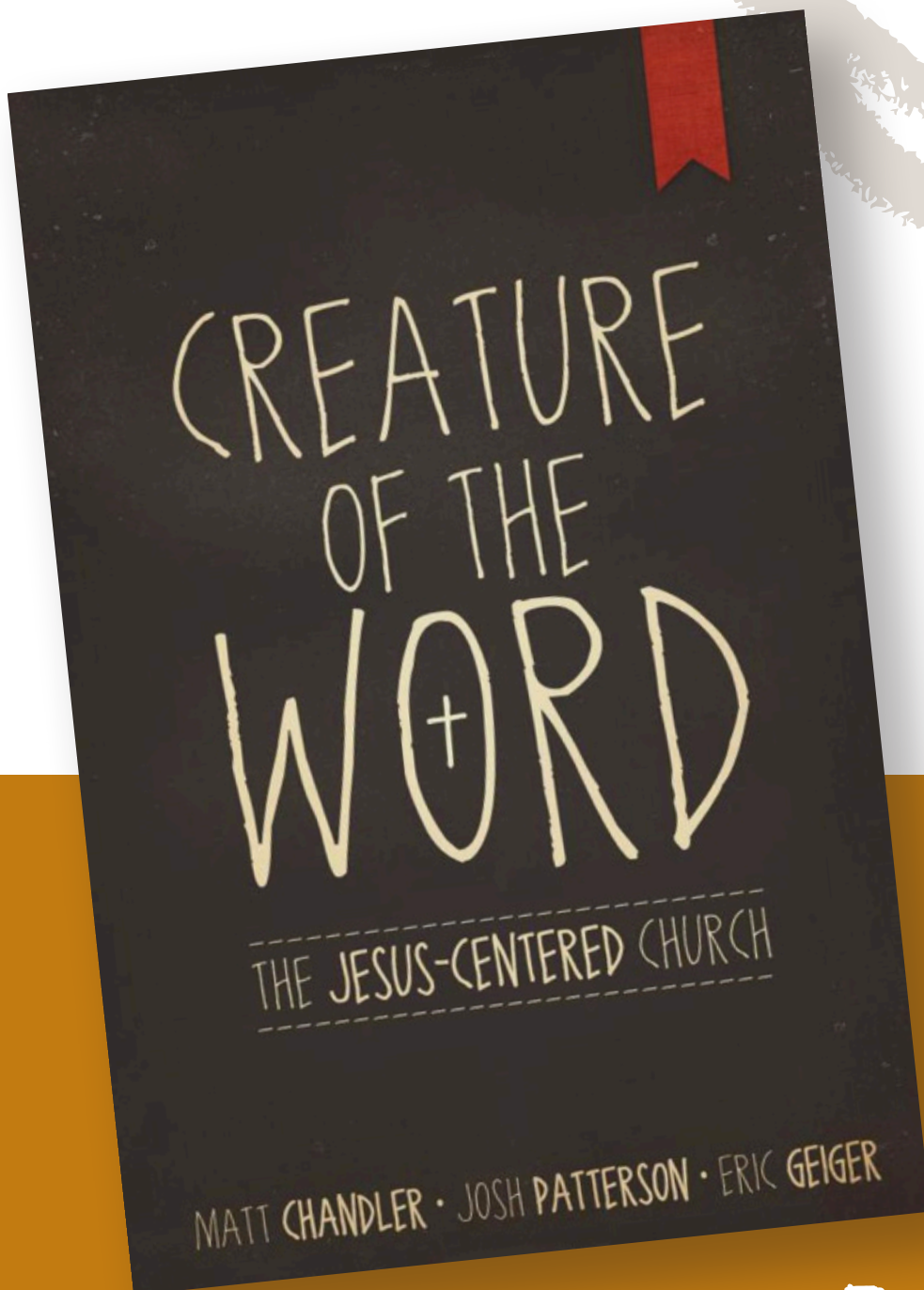


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Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger*

Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church
B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, TN, 2012. 242 pages.

The Reformers viewed the gospel as not merely one thing among many in the life of a church but rather the means by which the church exists. When the gospel is rightly declared and applied to God's people, the church becomes "a creature of the Word." She understands, embraces, and lives out the reality of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection in more than her doctrinal statement. The gospel impacts all the church is and does.

In twelve chapters, the authors provide practical steps toward forming a Jesus-centered church whose goal is to have its theology, culture, and practice completely saturated in the gospel.

1

A People Formed

There's a huge difference between knowing the gospel and being consumed by the gospel, being defined by the gospel, being driven by the gospel.

God spoke and through His Word formed a "nation" – a people! – not just individuals but an entire community of faith.

Without the Word of God, we don't have a covenant community of faith. The gospel precedes the Church, informs the life of the Church, and sustains the growth of the Church.

A church is a place where individuals are transformed and empowered to join God's corporate family and participate in God's plan to reconcile all things to Himself.

2

The Creature Worships

Every single person, whether religious or irreligious, actively worships. They have identified something bigger than themselves that they believe is worthy of their money, time, and the meditations of their hearts. In our sinfulness, this tendency to worship things other than God is an exercise in disappointment.

Simply put, we prefer creation to the Creator.

Only the gospel can grip our hearts with an ongoing, unending awe. Our gatherings must be soaked in the gospel. Everything from the music, to the teaching, to the observance of the ordinances – all of it must unashamedly and explicitly point people to Jesus and what He has done.



Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

3

The Creature in Community

God has always been building a people for Himself – a family of faith that unites across the dividing lines of race, nationality, politics, and economics. God Himself exists in community as Father, Son, and Spirit. And out of that divine community flows His design for humans to be involved in relationship with each other.

True friendship calls you out of the darkness of personal privacy into the loving candor of mutual concern. It moves you from being a sealed envelope to being a letter opener. – Paul Tripp

There is nothing stronger, nothing deeper, than the gospel on which to build community. Is the gospel what your church proclaims and practices as the foundation for community? It must be. Because community is only as strong as what it's built upon.

4

The Creature Serves

The foundation of our service is built upon Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection for us. It begins and ends with Jesus – *begins* there because He is our original motivation and *ends* there because only in Him are we empowered to serve others.

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one. – Martin Luther

Jesus was saying that His followers are to serve others not because it's the right thing to do, not because we'd feel guilty if we didn't, not because somebody else suggested it, and not because "causes" are the vogue thing of the day. *We serve because Jesus has served us.* That's the appropriate response to His loving service of us. This is the one, the only, the supreme impetus for serving others.

5

The Creature Multiplies

The essence of gospel multiplication is how God calls people to Himself, one person at a time, growing His body today in what is becoming an eternal adventure and romance with Him.

Everyone in your church should be invited to join in.

Regardless of where each of us are in spiritual maturity, we are instruments in the hand of God to see all things reconciled to God through Christ.

Adding. Multiplying.
Exponentially growing.
All the time.
And we all get to
be a part of it.

A church consumed with Jesus will be driven to rally people around focused multiplication.



Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

6

Jesus-Centered Culture

Your church needs a culture immersed in the gospel of Jesus, a culture that is centered on and fueled by the reality of His birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection. If your church is to live as a healthy, vibrant Creature of the Word today, you must be concerned with its culture –and willing to change, if necessary.

While every church has a culture, not every church possesses a healthy culture.

Without Jesus, your church culture is useless. But because of Jesus, your church culture can be transformed – and become transformational.

7

Preaching the Word

The gospel *must* be preached from all of Scripture. It not only provides the hearer with a better understanding of the continuity of the Bible, it also enlightens them to the wonder of God’s redemptive plan from the beginning.

God’s Word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s Word. –Martin Luther

The preacher has the opportunity to create in the culture of a church the importance of the Word of God. If the Word is central in preaching, teaching, music, and the ordinances, then the church’s culture will flow from this. The church must hear from the pulpit the gospel of God from the Word of God preached week after week.

8

Pulpit to Preschool (and Puberty Too)

Even in churches where the gospel is heralded as the essential message of the Christian faith from the pulpit, children and students are often pummeled with curriculum designed for behavioral modification rather than gospel transformation.

Children and student ministries are often a wasteland for well-intentioned morality training.

To form a church centered on the gospel, the church must strategically and seamlessly pass the message of the gospel on from generation to generation. The church must be united from the preschool ministry to the pulpit around one central understanding: *the gospel transforms.*

Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

9

The Jesus-Centered Leader

Culture depends on leadership. This is true in any organization, group, or family. Culture and ethos is a reflection of leadership. Your church culture – over time, at least – is a reflection of the leadership of the church. In many ways, the culture serves as a diagnostic mirror that reveals the implications of our leadership.

It's time we stopped complaining about the culture of our churches and started leading within them.

If a local church corporately bears the fruit of the Spirit, you can be confident individuals who have been marked by the gospel of Jesus Christ lead it. There is a direct correlation between the personal impact of the gospel on a leader's heart and the way he leads – the gospel is good news of sweeping transformation.

10

Jesus-Centered Flower Committee

If a church member does not see how the details of church ministry are impacted by the gospel, how would she ever see how the gospel applies to the mundane aspects of her day?

Not everything is the gospel, but the gospel is for everything.

If you want to know how centered your church really is on the gospel, don't just examine your messages for gospel-centered content. Check and see if people leave the budget meeting room with the gospel in their hearts. Check and see if the hospitality team is dripping with the kindness shown to us in Christ. Examine the motivation for facility and communication decisions.

The gospel frees us to honestly evaluate ourselves, as church leaders, at the level of the heart.

11

Jesus-Centered Contextualization

The Church has been given a mission, not to save the world, but to announce the saving work of Christ for the salvation of the world. In order to achieve this mission, the Church must make decisions about what it will affirm from its surrounding culture and what it will not.

Contextualization is about much more than wearing the same clothes as the surrounding culture; it's about entering their stories.

Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

Wherever your church is, you will need to understand how to exegete your ministry and your surrounding culture in order to faithfully and effectively contextualize like Jesus. The mission of the Jesus-centered church depends upon faithful and effective contextualization.



Jesus-Centered Ministry

The call to take up our cross and follow Jesus is actually a loving invitation to experience the fullness of life – and it is a mark of gospel-centered ministry.

Think of how many churches merely exist rather than live, survive rather than thrive. The call to life for a church is a radical call of faith. It is a call for a church to believe God when He says the crown of glory comes through the cross. Jesus says life only comes through death, and that gain only comes through loss.

As much as we plan and prepare and strategize and implement, ministry will always be inefficient.

At the heart of our ministry we must be convinced that our best practices can only take us so far. As we recognize the limitation of best practices, we begin to reprioritize our approach to ministry.

The Creature thrives because the gospel is sufficient. Just as the gospel is sufficient for both an individual's justification and maturation, the gospel is sufficient for the Church's birth and sustenance.

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Creature of the Word | *Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Eric Geiger (cont'd)*

Recommended Resources

1. **Watch** a brief video as authors Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, and Eric Geiger discuss the central thoughts behind Creature of the Word.
2. **Read** a conversation by Trevin Wax, Managing Editor of The Gospel Project, with the authors as they discuss how Creature of the Word goes beyond the teaching ministry and instructs church leaders on creating a gospel-centered culture in the church, a *culture* that shapes all levels and areas of ministry.
3. **Follow** Creature of the Word on Facebook for regular updates, examples, and contributions by churches working through the Creature of the Word campaign.
4. **Read** a short article by Clarity Evangelist Will Mancini reminding us of one of the central truths of the gospel that shapes everything: the death of Jesus brought a dramatic multiplication of the Body of Christ on earth.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

Vision Clarity Connection

In one of his discourses, Benjamin Franklin remarked: “Nothing preaches better than the act.” At first glance, this simple reminder may seem somewhat obvious to ministry leaders. However, the statement has greater significance when we explore its implications for church leadership at a deeper level.

In *Creature of the Word*, Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, and Eric Geiger boldly delve into common patterns of practice that divert focus off the gospel of Christ—the stated foundation of the Church. In doing so, the authors pay particular attention to distractions that lead pastors, and the people they shepherd, to subtly form church culture around what we do for Christ, rather than the transformative work He has done for us. We say we’re centered on Him, but without constant attention, our well-meaning actions can sometimes misrepresent this. As the authors exhort, “Whenever we attempt to supplement the gospel with something else, we unintentionally supplant it.” (p. 105)

Avoiding this requires a framework of clarity through which church leaders filter their decision-making and contextualization of ministry. The degree of intentionality suggested by the authors is rare, but the results can be exhilarating. A healthy, clearly-defined, gospel-centered culture creates unparalleled momentum, synergy, and redemptive passion—both for leaders and for those they serve.

How to Go Ahead

Here are three steps to take away immediately from *Creature of the Word*:

1. The authors describe how easy it is to talk about practice in church leadership meetings without first stating the “theology” and “philosophy” that should undergird each practice.

On a whiteboard, list five ministries at your church that your leaders often discuss. Ask them to think about your team discussions on those ministries and score each on a scale from 1-10 (1=we always start with ministry practice; 10=we always start with specific theology and philosophy). Evaluate the scores and identify specific ways you can incorporate both the practice and theology in your ministry discussions.

2. The authors discuss that the gospel applies not only to individual transformation but also to cosmic transformation as God redeems the culture, creation, and even His church.

In your leadership meeting, write on a whiteboard: “What is the gospel?” Ask your team to write their own definitions and hand them to you when done. After all are turned in, write each of the definitions on the board. Discuss observations and the degree to which your team views the gospel individually and corporately. Talk about how focusing on the bigger picture of the gospel can significantly change church culture and strategies.

3. Do you have a framework that ties your church’s mission to clearly stated strategies, values, measures, and gospel-centered ministry integration? If not crystal clear, consider how you will build this filter for decision-making and communication for your church overall as well as for specific processes and systems. Send me an email and I’d be happy to explore ways to focus your approach through a free one-hour clarity assessment.



More About Clint Grider

Highly regarded as a “vision optimizer,” Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization’s culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through a vision process that results in meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending this ability with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

Clint has served in leadership and campaign roles for over twenty years in a wide range of non-profit organizations and ministries including the local church, major universities, and national parachurch organizations. He received his bachelor’s in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master’s in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

Email: clint@auxano.com

Twitter: [@clintgrider](https://twitter.com/clintgrider)

Phone: 214.412.4828

Bio: [Read More](#)



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