

—THE—
VALUES
PROJECT

VIDEO SCRIPT

Video companion



INTRODUCTION

As Australian Baptist Churches, organisations and associations, we have a shared story that has shaped what we value and who we are. By understanding our core values, we are well positioned to respond and adapt to our ever-changing contexts.

In this series we explore these values so you can consider how they guide your ministry. They are informed by our understanding of the gospel, are resonant with our history and are shared across our national Baptist movement. They provide a framework from which we can all step into the future with confidence in who we are and in the One we follow.

VIDEO 1

JESUS-CENTRED



We start not with ourselves, but with God. We believe in the God who reveals himself through Father, Spirit, and Son. Baptists have always emphasised ***Jesus as the One that we are called to follow***, the One who reveals God to us, and the One through whom God is reconciling all things. Jesus is the head of the church, we are his body, and he is therefore the centre of who we are and all we do. ***Jesus is our ultimate authority*** and we always seek to be led by him.

This take on authority comes from the very beginning of our story in history. We were part of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century and then those who were later called “Dissenters” in England. Because while other groups appealed to Popes and Kings to set the agenda, formulate creeds and write traditions, the early Baptists were different. They focused on the fact that ***Jesus reveals himself to all people, at all times, in all settings***. They believed that *everyone* can be open to hearing him speak.

This idea has been carried through to today, as we too are invited, here and now, to listen and respond to Jesus. This means our churches and organisations don’t all look, feel and operate in the same ways. Our common core values frame all that we do, but in practice there will be some diversity, flexibility, and even sometimes messiness. But our shared goal is always to listen to Jesus and to follow his lead.

We believe that every follower of Jesus has been gifted with the Holy Spirit, enabling us all to hear the Spirit's voice. When we gather as churches and organisations, we seek to **discern the Spirit's leading together**. We do this by taking time to grow in our own faith and in our relationships so we can listen well to one another, trusting that the Spirit is at work among us.

This also means listening intently to the Scriptures. We believe they are inspired by God and through them he continues to **reveal himself to us today**. We trust the Bible as the source and authority for our faith and practice. We seek to be formed and re-formed by entering into and living out of the biblical story. We listen to the Spirit speaking to us today as we engage with the Bible and together, we interpret it as a community. We want to spend time hearing its words, reading them, reflecting on them, speaking them and sharing them as a community. As we do this, God's word transforms us.

So, we are led by the Holy Spirit, formed and re-formed by the Scriptures, and we are centered on Jesus. This the foundation we return to again and again, giving us confidence and hope. This is at the heart of our values.

VIDEO 2

COMMUNITY



We started with Jesus, the one we follow. We are reminded that all people, through all time and in all contexts can be guided by his Spirit and through his Word. As churches and organisations, our identity is found in being a **community of followers of Jesus**. This value of community shapes so much of what we do together.

We are part of a broad community made up of all the followers of Jesus throughout history and across the world who together form his body, the church. This is a **community of great diversity**, which we acknowledge and appreciate.

Within this grand movement, the Baptists emerged in England, when the church had practically become indistinguishable from the State. People became members of a particular parish church simply because they were born within the town or village where it was located. The early Baptists saw things differently - they affirmed that people become members of the church by **putting their faith in Jesus**. We continue to hold to this understanding. Of course, our communities are open to everyone, but our communal identity centres on our faith in Jesus.

Flowing from this is our **emphasis on baptism**, from which we get our name - it's important to us. Jesus was baptised and he asked his followers to go and baptise others. When people put their trust in Jesus, they demonstrate this by being immersed - going under the water and coming up - this symbolises the story of Jesus, his death and resurrection.

Another meaningful expression of identification with Jesus and with each other is **our simple meal of communion**. As we eat and drink, we remember what Jesus has done for us. We proclaim it to each another and to the world as we participate in this practice.

Within our community, we believe that each individual follower of Jesus is gifted for ministry. Ministry is not something done by professionals, or by a select few, but by all of us. Each has their part to play and **all are important**. We all need each other.

One of these gifts is leadership, and, as Baptists, we see leaders as part of the body. Leaders are identified and called by their communities to be representatives and partners. They are accountable to the members of the church, organisation or association. They are affirmed in their role as leaders through collective practices such as ordination, accreditation and recognition. Alongside these leaders, others are called and entrusted with the spiritual and practical leadership and governance in our communities.

Every follower of Jesus has direct access to the Spirit. This means that we practice shared discernment, meeting together to seek the will of Jesus and respond to him. While from the outside this might look like ‘democracy’ or ‘majority rules’, it is actually something quite different. Usually, when a group of people is undecided about an issue or idea, we encourage individuals and groups to listen for God’s leading. This is done best when we are in relationships of trust, we pray together, we dig deep into the Scriptures and we are attentive the Spirit. It can take time, but as **we discern together in community**, we move forward.

Our strong identity as a group of people following Jesus together is a key value because it distinctively shapes our practice in discipleship, discernment, decision making and community building.

VIDEO 3

MISSION



We know who we follow, and we understand who we are as a community. Now we turn our attention to the task we've been called to. As followers of Jesus, we are invited into his mission of making disciples... who make disciples, **extending God's Kingdom**. This is our core business and our reason for being.

This mission has been part of our DNA since the very beginning of our movement. The early Baptists didn't assume that people were automatically Christians by birth, and they responded to Jesus' command to be his witnesses, **extending to others the invitation** for a personal relationship with Jesus.

Historically, one of the initial reasons that Baptists worked together was the desire to coordinate and be effective in their mission efforts. In the 1700s, an impoverished English shoemaker, William Carey, inspired like-minded people to work together to establish the first Baptist Mission Society. Here in Australia, five single women, all in their 20s, banded together to go to East Bengal. This unlikely group stimulated Baptists to work together, and as a movement, our cross-cultural mission enterprise began...

This part of our story reminds us that **mission is our priority**, not just maintenance of our organisations and structures. We seek to be those who continue to work together to see the gospel proclaimed to the whole world.

We believe that the message of Jesus and his kingdom's reign is good news for everyone. We want to both speak and live out this good news. This must include love and advocacy for the marginalised and vulnerable, reflecting **God's heart for justice and mercy**. We long to see God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Baptists believe that each local church is best placed to practice mission within its local community, as it seeks to understand its context and share the good news in word and deed within that setting.

This means we practice contextualisation in our mission, demonstrated by our cross-cultural mission teams who seek to empower communities to find their own **distinctive way of following Jesus**. We can adopt a learning posture towards our own culture, seeking to understand it well so that we might share the gospel in ways that make sense within our particular context.

Because of this, we know that our expressions of mission will look different in different places and different times, but we hold fast to our core value of making Jesus known in everything we say and do, seeing **lives transformed by him**.

VIDEO 4

FREEDOM



We follow Jesus, are led by his Spirit and formed by his Word. We understand our identity as communities of his people called to make him known. Our next value refers to the way in which we work together...the posture we have towards others, both within and beyond our communities.

From the beginnings of our story through to our various contexts here and now, Baptists have valued freedom.

In the 1600s one of our early pastors, Thomas Helwys, penned one of the first books ever written advocating for religious freedom. For this, the King of the day put Thomas in prison, where he died. But the copy of the book that Thomas gave the King has been preserved at Oxford University library and the impact of his words shape the world we live in today.

Freedom is an interesting word in our culture - it could imply that there are no restraints or boundaries, 'I can do whatever I want, and it doesn't matter how it impacts anyone else'. However, our take on the value of freedom is different, and is much richer and more life-giving. Our faith gives us **healthy and helpful guidelines** to live by - guidelines that focus on loving others, being part of what God is doing in the world, demonstrating the love of Jesus, and inviting others to know him. Jesus sets us free, that we might serve him.

At the individual level, we value **freedom of conscience**, that is, the space for each person to discern, share opinions and ideas, and, disagree with others. It's OK to challenge one another and, in love, to continue to seek common understanding.

We will not shy away from controversial topics just because they might be difficult. The key is that when we disagree or offer alternative perspectives, we **remain in healthy relationships** and practice love towards one another.

This value is echoed in the way we relate as communities of faith at regional, national and international levels. We value what each part brings.

We come together in Baptist associations and unions, emphasising that we choose to be in voluntary relationships of cooperation and accountability. We work together to have a **broader reach and impact** than each one could have alone.

Freedom is practiced in what has historically been known as the separation of church and state. Others might know it as freedom of religion. Baptists have always advocated that the church be free from state control or interference. This does not mean the separation of faith from politics, because who we are as followers of Jesus will influence every aspect of our lives.

But it does mean that followers of Jesus will live out a different way of being community within our society. We do not aim to manipulate or coerce others to live according to our beliefs. Instead, we aim to show a way of living that surprises, stimulates questions and invites others to participate. Freedom also inspires us to have a **communal, prophetic voice** within our society. Our hope is that our way of life and words of truth will transform the structures and systems of our society.

As we experience freedom in Jesus, we also seek religious freedom for all, particularly in our multicultural and multi-faith context. We will advocate for the opportunity to speak into our world the hope and flourishing of the gospel, but we always seek to do so with gentleness and respect.

We might need to keep finding new words to describe what this looks like in practice, and we will always seek new ways of living this out. But we value the freedom we experience in Jesus and is demonstrated throughout our Baptist history, both of which enable us to be who we are today and to look forward to the future with confidence.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us in our faith communities. We honour the legacy they have left us and the guiding values and frameworks from the Scriptures that have been entrusted to us. And we are grateful for the freedom we have been given within this to respond to the new challenges we face, as we live out what it means to follow Jesus and lead his people where we find ourselves right now.

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