

# WORD-CENTERED CHURCH

Conference Trip Report | First Baptist Church of Springfield, VA

NEW COVENANT BAPTIST CHURCH + 9MARKS + COVENANT LIFE CHURCH · ACME REGIONAL DAY-CONFERENCE

|          |                                                                      |                        |                                                                       |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Date     | Saturday, August 29, 2026 · 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM                        | Prepared for           | FBCS Senior Pastor, Elders, Deacons, Church Council, and Congregation |
| Location | Covenant Life Church, 7501 Muncaster Mill Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20877 | Attended & reported by | Beth Beal · Lonny Beal · Ruth Herran                                  |

## 01 · WHAT THE CONFERENCE WAS DRIVING AT

The theme was the **Word-Centered Church**, and the day rested on one conviction: Scripture is not a resource the church uses, but the Word that made the church and sustains it. **Joel Kurz** set the thesis in Session 1 from 1 Timothy 3 — behind a community’s problems lies a truth problem, and God appointed the local church as the pillar and preserver of that truth. Each element that followed pressed the claim into a different corner of church life: pastoral renewal, the ordinary member, the pastor’s own soul, pragmatism versus the sufficiency of Scripture, and the authority of the gathered congregation. **James Choi** of the host church opened the day and moderated the panel. Many attending churches belong to ACME, the Association of Churches for Missions and Evangelism.

## 02 · FOUR THEMES THAT CROSSED SESSIONS

Four convictions ran across the day. **The Word made the church, and the church does not remake it** — truth designs and creates the church, and biblical authority is supreme while the church’s is derivative (*S1, S3, S4*). **Pragmatism is the quiet rival, and attendance a deceptive metric** — it teaches leaders to work by eyes of flesh, and churches sometimes grow as slowly as a tree does (*Testimony, S3, Panel*). **Ordinary members carry the Word, not just the pulpit** — read, pray, gather around, speak, and obey it (*S2, S3, S4*). **Word-centeredness must be structural, not decorative** — many churches use the Bible as a prop (*S1, S3, Panel, S4*).

## 03 · SESSION-BY-SESSION NOTES FROM OUR ATTENDEES

Condensed from notes taken by Beth Beal, Lonnie Beal, and Ruth Herran. Reflections personal to one of them are attributed by name.

**9:00 · OPENING APPEAL** | Why Word-Centered Churches Matter · James Choi, New Covenant Baptist Church (not recorded)

*No notes submitted. This session was not recorded, so we hold no record of it.*

**9:30 · SESSION 1** | A Word-Centered Church’s Impact on the Community · Joel Kurz, The Garden Church

**Question: What does my community need from my church?** (1 Timothy 3:14–16)

**1. To be shaped by the truth.** God’s truth designs and shapes the church; the church does not shape truth, and truth depends on the church for its defense. Behind a community’s problem is a truth problem — truth has been minimized, twisted, and sunk, so communities feel unstable despite more information than ever, and people are begging for it.

**2. To uphold the truth.** The church is the pillar and buttress that holds truth up; no other organization has this

purpose, and truth is what makes us distinct. Pillars are built for structure more than beauty — a beautiful pillar that does not hold the building up is useless. The church is not disembodied; individual members are the pillars.

**3. To declare and display the truth.** We lift truth up as a pole lifts a flag. If a lighthouse keeper turned the light back on the lighthouse, ships would sink; many churches draw attention to themselves rather than to Christ. We should not care whether people remember us, only that they know our Christ — and we do not stop being the church when we leave the building.

**Fruit.** Restrains evil, reaches the vilest and those on the outside, displays unity in diversity, develops fathers and keeps families intact, serves as a network, makes peace, and proclaims the gospel rather than a brand.

**Illustrations.** The Silver Bridge over the Ohio River fell when one beam failed; the Chesapeake Bay Bridge still stands because its pillars do their job.

**Reflections.** *Do you want God's truth? What parts of his design are you tempted to minimize? Do you work with your church to protect its membership? Every time you look down, you drift. Has Springfield run out of souls to be saved? Absolutely not — the work is continuous. Why might engaging the community be difficult?*

**10:45 · A TESTIMONY** | Leading a Church Toward Word-Centered Renewal · Kevin Rogers, Covenant Life Church  
(recording incomplete)

We must experience daily renewal through God's Word, which is sufficient for the life and health of the church.

**Reflections.** *Where do I go when my soul becomes weary, dry, and parched? What does God want us to do, and how do we prioritize those things for the church?*

**11:00 · SESSION 2** | A Word-Centered Church Member · Omar Johnson, Temple Hills Baptist Church

**Thesis: a Word-centered member gives himself continually to God's Word.** (Psalm 119)

**1. Trusts what the Word is.** God's testimonies of himself. The true God makes himself known and wants us to know him; each of us has access to the very mind of God — the greatest book in the world, given by the greatest person in the universe.

**2. Embraces what the Word does.** It gives and sustains life, guards us from sin, gives good counsel, and comforts. It is the only book that tells the truth about sin and how to fight it (Matt. 5:8).

**3. Does what the Word commands.** Obey the Word rather than feelings or social norms, trusting that God knows what is best.

**Five practices — read, pray, gather around, speak, obey.** More important than the method is the practice; friends help friends read the Bible. After reading, pray what you read for members of your church, and pray a psalm a day with them, connecting personal devotion to corporate identity. You cannot be a Word-centered member without gathering; those meetings change you more than you know. We are not dead ends for the Word — speak it to members and unbelievers, to convict, correct, and encourage. Good gospel preaching equips the whole congregation to preach the gospel. A healthy church asks its pastor to bring the book, and holds itself accountable to do what the Word says.

**Reflections.** *How can I saturate myself with the Word? I need to acknowledge my daily neediness. How did the sermon convict me?*

**1:00 · SESSION 3** | A Word-Centered Pastor · Aaron Menikoff, Mount Vernon Baptist Church

**Ten marks of a Word-centered pastor.** (Ephesians 6:10–20) Your pastor is an ordinary man who goes to war with the sword of the Spirit; too often pastors do not trust the Spirit and the Word. Your church does not need an awesome pastor, just a man who wields that sword, whose central job is to proclaim the gospel.

(1) Remembers and trusts that God's Word builds his church. (2) Preaches through the Bible, letting Scripture set the agenda — all of God's Word is good for all of God's people. (3) Shares the pulpit, raising up the next

generation and freeing time for the rest of shepherding. **(4)** Serves a diverse diet of Bible study. **(5)** Always asks, “Does the Bible speak to this?” rather than pooling our own wisdom, mining the depths of Scripture before answering. **(6)** Leans into *sola scriptura* — the Bible is our authority, not tradition; we can learn from tradition without being bound by it. **(7)** Tethers every church program to Scripture, and is at ease opening the Bible before, during, and after any event. **(8)** Encourages the use of the Bible in evangelism — many are hostile to Christianity, but many are hungry for Scripture. **(9)** Protects his schedule for sermon preparation; sermon prep is hard work. **(10)** Guards his heart with the Bible, wrestling with it daily and depending on it as a drowning man depends on a raft (Heb. 4:12–13). If we trivialize our time with the Lord, we get nothing from it.

**2:00 · PANEL & Q&A** | Moderated by James Choi, with Menikoff, Rogers, Johnson, and Kurz

**Pragmatism versus contextualization.** Growth is spiritual faithfulness, discipline, and deep growth — not metrics and numbers. “What you draw people with, you draw people to.” Beware watering down the Scriptures. The kingdom of God will not be built by seed (genealogy) or sword (violence or a government agenda), but by the Word of God under the new covenant.

**Self-evaluation questions.** *What is the spiritual state of each ministry? Are the saints encouraged by the ministry, and by the leader? What are we affirming? How can the congregation as a whole spur younger generations to flourish in God’s Word?*

**3:00 · SESSION 4** | Word-Centered Authority · Jonathan Leeman, 9Marks

**What is Word-centered church authority?** (Matthew 16:13–19; 18:15–20) Jesus is head of the body and has given the local church the keys to bind matters on earth that are reflected in heaven. The church is the final authority to render judgment on the *what* (the confession) and the *who* (the confessors) of the gospel — new covenant believers agreeing together, and that binding and loosing requires agreement (Matt. 18:19). The authority is judicial and ambassadorial: the local church is the embassy for the kingdom of heaven on earth.

**Meaningful membership** requires baptism into the body of Christ, a true confession of Christ, true confessors of Christ, and the removal of the unrepentant. Each congregation determines who belongs, and may rebuke members who stray or, if necessary, remove them.

**Why it matters.** **(1)** It forms a church. **(2)** Our witness depends on it — the church is where we begin to experience the culture of heaven. **(3)** Obedience and assurance: membership is what shows I am a healthy citizen of heaven. **(4)** Discipleship — it is the primary place we practice the “one anothers” of Scripture. **(5)** Discipline (Heb. 12:7). The church is an embassy, but just an embassy; we are not in heaven yet.

**Reflections.** *Mutual agreement can end individualism and become partnership: you belong to us and we belong to you. Membership should feel like a small men’s group visiting an elderly woman at her home or in the hospital. Submit our schedules, money, and resources to God and the body of Christ. God’s Word emphasizes the church, the bride of God, rather than a nationalistic agenda.*

## 04 · ACTION ITEMS

### FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

**Joel Kurz · S1** — Prepare for the Lord’s Day and linger. Carry Sunday’s truth into your workplace and neighborhood. Build relationships that display the gospel.

**Kevin Rogers · Testimony** — When your soul is dry, drink deeply from the Word. Study a book of the Bible slowly, journaling notes and prayers.

**Omar Johnson • S2** — Read the Bible frequently; five minutes a day beats none. Pray a psalm matching the date over names in the membership directory. Discuss the sermon after the service.

**Aaron Menikoff • S3** — Trade the passive quiet time for soul work. Ask a coworker to read a book of the Bible with you. Pray for your pastors and support them financially.

**Panel & Q&A** — Keep pen and paper beside your Bible. Carry one verse in your pocket. Tell your pastor specifically how a text from his sermon met your soul.

**Jonathan Leeman • S4** — Submit your friendships, schedule, money, and child-rearing to the congregation's accountability. Confess sin to the one you sinned against; forgive members when they fail you.

#### FOR PASTORS, ELDERS, DEACONS & CHURCH COUNCIL

**Aaron Menikoff • S3** — Preach systematically through whole books. Share the pulpit so less experienced men can grow. Open Scripture in elders' meetings and before events. Let Scripture, not tradition, settle practice.

**Kevin Rogers • Testimony** — Ask first what God's Word calls the church to do, not what will work. Double down on expositional preaching. Select leaders by the 1 Timothy 3 qualifications.

**Joel Kurz • S1** — Use the Word to counsel, encourage, rebuke, and fortify. Do not hide the gospel's power inside the walls. Serve to display Christ, not a church brand.

**Panel & Q&A** — Settle the essential elements — reading, praying, preaching, singing the Bible — before deciding their cultural forms. Surround a discouraged pastor with godly elders.

**Jonathan Leeman • S4** — Gather to preach the Word, baptize, and celebrate the Lord's Supper. Practice church discipline to correct sin and preserve the church's witness.

## 05 • WHAT WE WANT TO DO DIFFERENTLY

**Beth.** I think FBCS is a Word-centered church in our preaching and in what we say we believe, and some of our weaknesses, like church-centered authority, are already being actively addressed. Our church is a family, but we could do better at specific scriptural encouragement, rebuke, and comfort, at bringing Scripture into our prayers, and at spending more time in prayer with each other rather than just talking. The step is more intentionality in bringing God's Word into every church conversation, decision, and prayer. That can be encouraged from the top down, or it can start with members as we are intentional about centering every meeting, and even personal conversations, around the Word of God. This conference is probably most useful for those leading ministries or committees, since that is where many of these principles beg to be applied — after, of course, applying them to our personal lives.