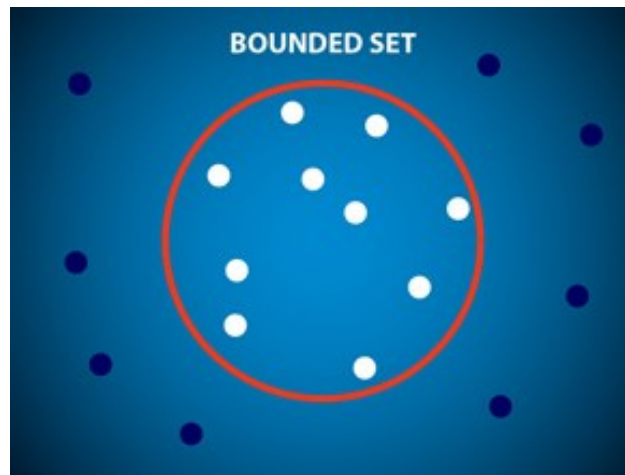


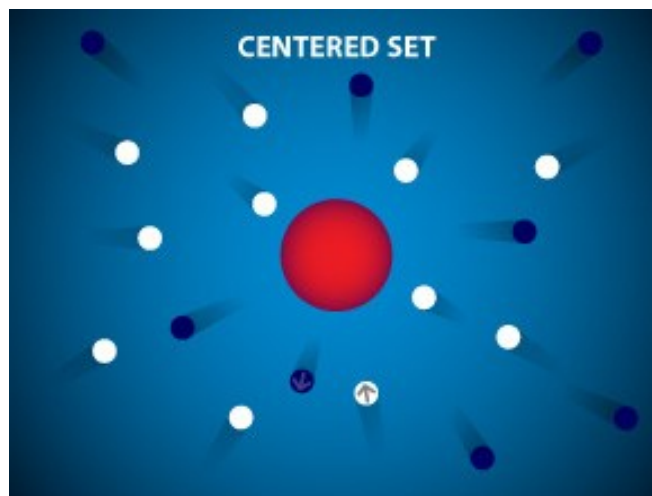
The Vineyard Centered Set Church Model

The Dothan Vineyard Church does church a little differently, and these graphics explain the difference.



Bounded Set Church Approach

Many churches could be described as “bounded sets.” Belonging to the church community is defined by where one is in relation to a clear boundary. Typically the boundary is composed of highly defined beliefs and behaviors. Those who adopt the beliefs and behaviors are considered “inside” and those who do not are considered “outside.”



Centered Set Church Approach

In the centered set approach, participation in the church community is defined differently. In our church the center is understood to be Jesus. Those who are “in” are not defined in relation to a boundary, but by facing and moving toward the center.

In a centered set approach, a person might be quite a distance from the center, but so long as they are facing the center and moving toward it, they belong. By the same token, a person might be close to the center, but if they are not facing the center and moving toward it, they don't belong. In both graphics, those who belong to the group are represented by white dots; those who do not belong are represented by blue dots.

In a centered set model the individual is the one who decides whether they are in or out by moving towards a living relationship with Jesus or moving away from Jesus.

Advantages

Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. We think the advantages of the centered set approach outweigh the disadvantages, and fit our vision to reach those who don't often find a home in other church communities. The centered set approach is like gathering cats rather than herding cattle (the center is the pail of milk that draws the cats.) It emphasizes the power of Jesus to attract us—as he said, "I will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). The centered set approach is in keeping with the biblical metaphor of pilgrimage: the followers of Jesus are travelers coming from many different points of origin to a common destination.

The centered set approach requires a greater dependence on the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual and in the life of the church. It requires faith that the Holy Spirit will do His work of transformation in the lives of those who are pursuing a relationship with Him. This approach requires a lot of mercy, grace and patience.

Implications

The centered set fits what C.S. Lewis called "Mere Christianity" emphasizing the main and plain elements of faith (expressed, for example, in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds—ancient summaries of faith). We're excited by the core of our faith and want to shout it from the rooftops. This allows us to provide breathing room for diverse perspectives beyond the core. For example, we practice baptism and communion according to Biblical teaching without emphasizing the doctrinal formulations that have separated Christians on these matters. To be effective, the centered set approach requires a powerful and attractive center, kept in clear view. In the Gospels, the center was Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, which remains a powerful and attracting force today.

Recommended Spiritual Practices

These practices are practical ways for us to move toward the center—to connect with the transformative power of a crucified, risen and ascended Lord.

- Intentionally surrender to Jesus, expressed initially in water baptism.
- Participate in the worship life of the church community.
- Develop a daily God-connection through reflection on Scripture and prayer.
- Nurture a network of relationships to support spiritual growth (through small groups and other means).
- Commit to some form of ministry, defined as "giving away however much or little of God we have."
- Honoring God with our financial giving to His work and understanding that this is a part of the worship life of the believer.