



REDEEMING GRACE
CHURCH

REDEEMING GRACE 101
AN INVITATION TO COMMUNITY

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Published by Redeeming Grace Church

2307 Hwy 14

Simpsonville, SC 29681

United States of America

<http://www.rgcsc.org>

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WELCOME

We invite you to participate in community with Redeeming Grace Church!

We believe that every follower of Jesus Christ is called to community and commitment in a local church. And though we would certainly love for Redeeming Grace Church to be that place for everyone, we realize that God has other plans for many who walk through our doors.

Regardless of whether you decide Redeeming Grace Church will be your church home or not, we want to encourage and equip you in discerning whether this local body of believers is one where your relationship with Christ can flourish as you give and receive care and meaningfully contribute to the mission and values we share.

To do that, you need to be informed about who we are and what we believe and value. That way, those who are likeminded in beliefs and mission can connect and commit with confidence as they become part of our church family.

And guests who find themselves with different biblical convictions or core values don't have to spend years before discovering key differences that would lead them to pursue another congregation where they can serve and participate wholeheartedly.

At Redeeming Grace Church, we express our commitment to one another as a church family through membership. It is the main avenue by which we:

- Serve one another.
- Let one another know we are walking together in mission.
- Invite others to care for us and be cared for by us.
- Let our leaders know for whom they are primarily responsible before God.

We have put together the material in this book as an introduction to Redeeming Grace Church, a first step in getting to know us and what we believe and value so you can make your informed decision about whether this is your church home. If you aren't already doing so, we also invite you to pursue participation in one of our care groups.

These groups will give you the opportunity to connect and begin forming relationships with other members and see first-hand how we live out these beliefs and values.

Thank you for your interest in Redeeming Grace Church! May God grant you discernment to quickly identify the local community of believers where your soul can find nourishment, and your participation will help you (and the church) thrive!

Because of Jesus,
Matt Rawlings and Aaron Campbell
Pastors of Redeeming Grace Church

LESSON 1

THE CHURCH: GOD'S COMMUNITY

If you Google the term “church” the search results will tell you that a church is “a building used for public Christian worship.” This definition is the modern idea of what a church is—a physical building I go to so I can get or do something. But the Bible’s understanding of church is something far more than that.

The word church in the Bible comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which means a called out company or assembly. The use of the word "church" in the Bible refers to people. The church is the community of believers in Jesus Christ.

The term applies to all individuals who have trusted Christ through the ages (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 5:23-27). It also refers to a local assembly or community of believers.

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. - 1 Corinthians 1:2

(See also 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1-2)

Where did we get the idea of the Church?

The concept of a community of God’s people relating together with Him and one another is not a new idea. It is not a smart marketing strategy of modern day Madison Avenue or ancient Rome.

It was not developed in the last 150 years or even the last 1500 as a club for Christians or to combat some social crisis.

The idea comes from God Himself and precedes all creation. He purposed “before the foundations of the world” to expand the relationship He had within the Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to include creatures made in His image.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. - Matthew 25:34

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. - Ephesians 1:3-4

Do we see this theme other places in the Bible?

If the church as a community of God's people relating together with Him and each other is something God had in mind before He even created the world, it would only make sense that we would see evidence of this theme throughout the Bible's narrative.

Indeed we do!

Not only do we see it in individual accounts and stories, but a basic outline of the whole Bible reveals that this theme is central to understanding the Bible as one book, telling one story.

The storyline of the Bible shows this outline:

A. Creation (Genesis 1-2)

Made for a relationship with God — God created man as the pinnacle of His creation, to relate with Him and represent Him to the rest of His creation. He was to be a steward, living in obedience to God, taking care of the beautiful world God had made.

Made for a relationship with each other — God did not create man to carry out his responsibility alone or in isolation. In fact, God Himself said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." So He created a helper fit for him who would partner with him in bearing God's image and fulfilling God's call for them to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. - Genesis 2:18-19

B. Fall (Genesis 3 + Rest Of OT)

Corruption of our relationship with God — Despite being surrounded by God's good creation, and enjoying personal fellowship with Him, Adam and Eve broke that

relationship by choosing what was best in their eyes instead of heeding His loving rule.

Ever since, all of their descendants have both been born into and actively lived out the fallen condition that resulted from Adam and Eve's willful rebellion, and experienced the same broken relationship with God that their first sin initiated.

Corruption of our relationship with each other — But the relationship with God wasn't the only one broken on that day. Where harmony and cooperation had ruled human relationships in the garden, now conflict, blame shifting, and selfishness held sway.

Not only for Adam and Eve but all their descendants. Within a single generation, jealousy, selfishness, anger, hatred, and murder had marred their family, and all human relationships since have been threatened by and corrupted with sin.

C. Redemption (Gospels + NT)

Reconciliation of our relationship with God — Beginning with Adam and Eve's first act of sinful rebellion, God pursued them, making a way to restore them to Himself. God has sought a loving relationship with humanity ever since, going to shocking lengths to reconcile and win a particular people to Himself.

While many Old Testament events foreshadowed His salvation, and prophets foretold its nature, the reality of the salvation God would bring about was clouded in mystery until God Himself came in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus revealed that He alone is the way to reconcile people to God. Through His sacrificial death on behalf of humanity, Christ received the penalty our sins required from a holy and just God.

Also, His sinless life, in which He fulfilled God's Law, is credited to all who trust in Him alone for their redemption, making them righteous before God. Because sin no longer separates those in Christ from God, the relationship between God and man, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, is reconciled.

All in Him are forgiven and have been declared righteous, with no need to fear future wrath or judgment. Instead, they enjoy relating with God as their Father, confirmed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Reconciliation of our relationship with each other — Christ's redeeming work didn't just remove the dividing wall of hostility between man and God; He also abolished the same wall between man and man.

Therefore, those reconciled with God have far more in common than anything that could separate them. Additionally, they have a model for forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus and an active Helper in the person of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

Individuals transformed by God's love and forgiveness in Christ have been equipped and empowered to reflect and give His love and forgiveness to those around them. Indeed, Jesus stated that His followers would be recognized by their love for one another.

D. Restoration (Revelation 21-22)

The future hope and picture of our relationship with God — As wonderfully liberating and life-giving as reconciliation with God is, it is, at the moment, incomplete. In man's present state and condition, though forgiven, he still stumbles and sins.

Though he is counted righteous by God, he is still imperfect and consistently struggles in his attempts to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. But his current condition isn't his eternal state.

Upon passing from this life into the next, Christ will glorify those in Him: they will see Christ face to face and become like Him. Given a new undying body and uncorrupted mind, they will no longer sin or suffer the consequences of sin (such as broken relationships, sickness, pain, and death).

Instead, they will dwell forever with God, worshiping Him and delighting in Him through all they do, fulfilling what they were designed to do before being removed from the Garden of Eden.

The future hope and picture of our relationship with each other — Man's reconciliation with one another, even though often experienced wonderfully in this life, is also incomplete. But when united with Christ and made like Him in the life to come, our union with one another will also be on full display. No longer will hatred and dissension have a home. No longer will racism or abuse or factions or violence or fear threaten human relationships.

The peace that will reign will not be marked primarily by the absence of conflict, but by the presence of love—love for God and one another. United in passions and affections for their Creator and Savior, mankind will accurately reflect the image of God that He created them in, and together bring Him much glory for eternity.

So the outline of the Bible as a whole reveals God's pursuit of people who will relate to Him and reflect Him. Likewise, throughout Scripture, we see a God who pursues people for a relationship with Him.

They are always imperfect people — often forgetful, impatient, prone to wander, given to grumbling and complaining, ready to run after other gods. Even those who are most successful in their attempts to be faithful are still flawed, yet He still pursues and rescues, sometimes even when they aren't looking for Him or asking for His intervention.

Psalm 78

*10 They did not keep God's covenant,
but refused to walk according to his law.*

*11 They forgot his works
and the wonders that he had shown them...*

*17 Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellious against the Most High in the desert...*

*22 Because they did not believe in God
and did not trust his saving power.*

*23 Yet he commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven,*

*24 and he rained down on them manna to eat
and gave them the grain of heaven.*

*25 Man ate of the bread of the angels;
he sent them food in abundance...*

32 In spite of all this, they still sinned;

despite his wonders, they did not believe...

37 Their heart was not steadfast toward him;

they were not faithful to his covenant.

38 Yet he, being compassionate,

atoned for their iniquity

and did not destroy them;

he restrained his anger often

and did not stir up all his wrath...

40 How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness

and grieved him in the desert!

41 They tested God again and again

and provoked the Holy One of Israel.

42 They did not remember his power

or the day when he redeemed them from the foe...

52 Then he led out his people like sheep

and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

53 He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid,

but the sea overwhelmed their enemies...

55 And he brought them to his holy land,

to the mountain which his right hand had won.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them. - Judges 3:7, 9

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. - Isaiah 53:4-6

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. - Luke 4:18-19

And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." - Luke 5:30-32

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. - Luke 19:10

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. - John 3:16-17

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. - Ephesians 2:1-10

What are some pictures the Bible paints of God's community? God has a passion for dwelling with His people. He also cares deeply about how His people relate with one another.

Since this is such a priority for God, it is not surprising to see these relationships revealed in different ways throughout Scripture. By seeing the many pictures the Bible paints of God's community, we gain a richer understanding of all that God envisions for it.

In the Garden — In God's original design, we see the creation of man in God's image —made to relate with God and reflect Him as ambassadors to, and caretakers of, His beautiful, sinless world. God declared the result of His creative work to be very good.

There God revealed Himself not only as Creator but King, as He gave man responsibilities and told him how to represent and honor Him. Even when man rejected God's rule by eating of the one tree in the Garden he was told not to, God pursued them.

He made a way for them to relate to Him by promising a future deliverer and by sacrificing an animal to provide skins that covered their nakedness and shame. But the perfect relationship between God and man had been broken, and He removed Adam and Eve from the Garden to keep them from also eating of the Tree of Life, and living forever in their fallen state (Genesis 3:21-24).

A Nation — God makes promises to Abraham, a covenant to bless him and his offspring, to make them a great nation through which He can bless all the families of the earth.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." - Genesis 12:1-3

And God said to him, “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” Genesis 17:3-8

People of the Delivering God — Many generations after Abraham, God’s people found themselves in captivity, slaves in the foreign land of Egypt. But that did not mean God had forgotten about them or His promises. Instead, through Moses, He revealed Himself as their great Deliverer.

Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.” - Exodus 6:6-8

People of the Promise Keeper — Five hundred years after making His covenant to Abraham, God is still keeping His promises to His people, not because His people were impressive, but because He was faithful.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

but it is because The LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. - Deuteronomy 7:6-9

Ambassadors of the King — Just because they were no longer in the Garden, that did not mean man no longer had a responsibility to represent the God who had created and delivered him. God pursues, and He rescues imperfect and even rebellious people.

But His desire in redeeming sinners is that they turn away from and reject their rebellion in response to His loving and merciful rescue. In particular, you see this reaction in transformed relationships with Him and one another, with love as the defining characteristic. How do we do this?

Exodus 20 — The Ten Commandments

Notice: the context is His rescue, which has already taken place:

[1-2] And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

So what follows is not how God was going to rescue them, but how they were to represent the One who rescued them.

Commandments to Love God:

[3] “You shall have no other gods before me.

[4] “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...

[7] “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...

[8] “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Commandments to Love others:

[12] “Honor your father and your mother...

[13] “You shall not murder.

[14] *“You shall not commit adultery.*

[15] *“You shall not steal.*

[16] *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

[17] *“You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

Below is the way Jesus summed up the same priority for God’s people over fourteen centuries later:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” - Matthew 22:35-40

People Marked by the Presence of God — Even after God delivered the nation of Israel from their captivity in Egypt by His mighty hand, including ten plagues on the Egyptians and safe passage via the parting of the Red Sea, Moses recognized that unless God continued to remain with them nothing would separate them from the rest of the people on earth. To enjoy God’s favor, they must know His nearness.

Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” - Exodus 33:13-17

People of God’s favor — In Jesus Christ, God became human flesh to reveal the Father more fully to His creation—to be a light and bring life and to physically dwell among His people. He showed God’s glory, grace, and truth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. - John 1:1-5

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. - John 1:14, 16-18

Dwelling Place of God's Spirit — God's presence continued to define God's people well after Moses pleaded with God, and even after Jesus Himself ascended into Heaven. He sent His Spirit to continue to dwell with His people, to empower them and make them aware of His nearness.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. - Acts 1:8-9

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. - 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

The Flock of God — The Bible describes God's people as sheep that He cares for, protects, and nurtures. He is their Great Shepherd, and He also employs under-shepherds in the church to be physical manifestations of His care for them.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. - John 10:11, 14-15

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” - John 21:15-17

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. - Acts 20:28-29

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. - 1 Peter 5:1-4

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. - Hebrews 13:20-21

The Body of Christ — God’s people work together. They have different gifts and roles but one purpose because they have one Head—Christ. God’s people are His ambassadors in the world. They proclaim the good news of Christ and extend His love and grace through their words and actions.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. - Ephesians 1:22-23

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. - Ephesians 3:6

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. - 1 Corinthians 12:27

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
- Romans 12:3-5*

The Bride of Christ — God commits Himself to His people. So much so that He sacrificed Himself to win them as His Bride. The LORD treats them with a passionate affection and love.

He seeks their eternal good through a relationship with Him. He is faithful to them and jealous for them. There will be a grand celebration when He returns, and they are united with Him forever. He enjoys His people, and they will enjoy Him forever.

*As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.
- Isaiah 62:5*

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
- Ephesians 5:25-27*

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready. - Revelation 19:7

The New Jerusalem — God's ultimate consummation of human history, takes place when He unites His people to dwell in glory together with Him forever. This inevitable end is the prize and goal He has been working all things. To be with God is the supreme hope of His people. On that day joy will abound, and everything will be set right.

Man will dwell forever fulfilling his original design and calling. No more sin, sickness, or death. No more pain, injustice, or tears. No more separation from God or one another.

God will replace the temporary with the eternal. His relationship with His people will be the focal point of all that lasts, forever bringing glory to the God who rescues and pursues.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." - Revelation 21:1-4

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more.

They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. - Revelation 22:1-5

Some of these pictures describe the Church universal — the community of all believers past, present, and future.

Some have in mind the local church — the community of believers in a particular location, meeting regularly to make disciples, grow as disciples, and observe the Lord's commands (including loving God and others, restorative church discipline, and the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism).

Many of these pictures apply to both.

In future lessons, we will see how these different passages and images guide and inform our local practice of the church. Until then, may we marvel at God's self-sacrificing pursuit of His people and anticipate our ultimate reunion with Him!

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. - Romans 16:25-27

Suggested Resources

1. What is a Healthy Church Member? by Thabiti Anyabwile
2. I am a Church Member by Thom Rainer
3. God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts

LESSON 2

THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION IS TRUTH: THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you. - 1 John 1:1-5

The Bible's Priority

In lesson one, we looked at the church as God's community. In building the case for this, we didn't review cultural trends or statistics. We didn't get this idea from the latest church growth seminar or popular author.

Instead, we saw how the outline of the Bible as a whole book, as well as passage after passage throughout, reveals God's pursuit of people to relate together with Him and one another.

We understand that the Bible is that which should shape and inform our understanding of what the church is and how it should function. Why? Quite simply, because it is God's book.

It is His communication to the people He is pursuing and rescuing. In it, God reveals what He is like and what is important to Him. He tells His people how they are to relate to Him and one another.

The Bible's Unity

The Bible contains 66 books (39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament). It was written by approximately 40 different authors, over 1600 years, on 3 different continents, in 3 different languages, on many various topics, yet with one central theme — God's redemption of humanity from sin, accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we saw in lesson one, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, there is a consistent theme and message. Told in many ways by many different authors, but unified. It has one central theme because, though there were about 40 human writers, one divine Author was inspiring and guiding each of the human authors.

The Bible's Authority

How do we know God is the ultimate Author of the Bible? We are aware because the Bible tells us so.

All Scripture is breathed out by God. - 2 Timothy 3:16

Over 3,000 times, in some form or another, the Bible's authors claimed to be speaking for God. With phrases like "the word of God" and the "word of the Lord," they indicated that they believed their words were of divine origin.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. - 2 Peter 1:21

For someone to claim they were delivering a message from the Lord was foolish unless there was no question that what they spoke indeed was from God. (The Law called for a death penalty on anyone who spoke in God's name without having their words come true. Deuteronomy 18:20-22.) Over and over we find the authors of Scripture claiming that their words were from God.

Peter claimed divine inspiration for the entire Old Testament ("men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:21). The New Testament apostles were aware that their writings were on the same level as the Old Testament. For instance, Peter equated Paul's letters with "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Jesus Himself affirmed Scripture's divine origin. For example, in Mark 12:36 He said, "David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared," and then cited Psalm 110 which was authored by David.

Because "all Scripture is breathed out by God," all Scripture carries His authority. To disbelieve or disobey Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

It was with His words that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1, Psalm 33:6). And by His words He sustains His creation: "He upholds the universe by the word of his power," declares Hebrews 1:3.

In fact, the power and priority of His communication are so great that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is identified as the Word.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. - John 1:1-3

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14

The Bible is our authority because it is God's word. We must give attention to and obey His word.

The Bible's Truthfulness

We can trust the Bible because it is God's word, and God does not lie.

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? - Numbers 23:19

Christ quoted the Old Testament repeatedly, including its accounts of miracles and historical events. He considered its history to be true, including Noah (Luke 17:27), Moses (John 5:46), Jonah (Matthew 12:40), and all the prophets (from Abel to Zechariah—Luke 11:49–51).

Jesus spoke of the Scriptures being accurate to the smallest detail (Matthew 5:18).

Because God is trustworthy, His Word is reliable. We believe His word because we believe Him. Hebrews 6:18 "in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us."

The Bible's Sufficiency

Not only is the Bible trustworthy as our authority, God's "revealed" Word contains all we need to know for salvation and a life that honors Him. God delights in making Himself and His ways known to His people.

Lesson one showed that He created people for a relationship with Him, and to be His ambassadors to the rest of creation. He didn't just make the world and then leave His people to figure everything out on their own. He communicated to them through His prophets, by His Spirit, and ultimately through the divine Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. - Hebrews 1:1-2

The Scriptures are the record of that communication, and the same Spirit that inspired them still speaks through them to His people. God wants to be known—that's why He's given us His word.

He doesn't require us to find Him through nature or deep within ourselves or by going on a pilgrimage, or through dreams and visions. Instead, He's given us all we need for salvation and godliness in the Bible.

As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

In fact, Jesus said that He did everything according to the Scriptures to fulfill the Law. He lived and died by them, in keeping with His response to Satan's temptation in the wilderness from Matthew 4:1-11.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. - Matthew 4:4

The Bible's Clarity

With so much importance given by God to His word, it is helpful to know that the Bible's teaching can be understood by all who come to it seeking God's help and willing to follow it.

The fact that it was written thousands of years ago in cultures thousands of miles from our own can certainly add difficulty to our understanding certain parts or details of what we read. However, the essential message and teachings of Scripture are plain enough that children can understand.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. - Deuteronomy 6:4-7

The truths of God's word are accessible enough that the simple can grasp them and be made wise through them. (Psalm 19:7)

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. - Psalm 119:130

The process of understanding Scripture is not primarily an intellectual ability but a moral and spiritual one. It is God by His Spirit that imparts understanding to us.

No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. - 1 Corinthians 2:11-14

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, 6*

God provides us with the ability to understand and benefit from His word as we come willing to obey it, humbly asking for His help.

The Bible’s Central Message

In lesson one, we saw that the central theme of God’s word is His loving mission to redeem a people who can lovingly relate to Him and one another. This new relationship was only made possible by Christ’s perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection.

In them, He accomplished what we never could — In our fallen state of sin we couldn’t make ourselves right with God. But He took our punishment upon Himself and transferred His righteousness to our account. Because of Him, we can now be not only forgiven our sins but also declared righteous before God our judge.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:21

He pursues and rescues — This is great news for lost people in need of rescue. We understand this pursuit and rescue to be the heart of the biblical message, the primary theme throughout the whole biblical account. Many smaller stories and types of literature by numerous authors work together to tell this one grand story. The Bible teaches us many other things as well, but this message of a rescuing God is its beating heart.

Since this is the central message God has preserved for His people, we think it is only fitting that it be the central message that shapes how His people live and relate together in the community that He has pursued and rescued us to partake in.

Gospel-Centered

The word Gospel means “good news” and is used commonly as short-hand for this amazing rescue plan God put into motion for us through Jesus.

So when we as Redeeming Grace Church say we are seeking to be “Gospel Centered,” we simply mean we are trying to keep the Good News of His loving rescue mission

central (or of highest importance) as we live out our life with God and one another. We do this because it's what He has revealed to be central and of the highest importance in His word.

The gospel isn't just a message about how someone becomes a Christian or gets into heaven, but it reveals God's nature to us and informs how we relate to Him and one another throughout the Christian life.

He doesn't stop pursuing us once we're part of His family. His love—seen most vividly in the gospel—is the basis for all of our relating to Him, and should be reflected in all our relating with one another.

Gospel-Centered Community

That's what we mean when we say we are pursuing “Gospel-Centered Community.” We want His love and grace for us to spill over into our relationships with one another. As He has reconciled us to God, we seek reconciliation in our relationships with one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:35

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

Gospel-Centered Preaching

Because the Gospel is central in God's word and central in His plans, we seek to make it central in all of church life. In our teaching and preaching, we want His most important message to come through, not any pet agenda we may have.

This worldview affects not only our Sunday sermons but children's ministry curriculum, discussions in care groups, and teaching in venues like youth meetings, marriage workshops, parenting seminars, and one-on-one counseling.

Gospel-Centered Worship

Since there is no better news for us than God's loving rescue of us, nothing should be more prominent in our worship through song than this truth. On a given Sunday, we may sing words taken directly from Scripture, hymns that the Church has sung for

hundreds of years, or more modern songs, but the goal of all of them is to worship and exalt the One who has pursued us and made us His own.

Gospel-Centered Mission

Because God's rescue of sinners is the central message of His Word, we understand this message is the one sinners most need to hear. People apart from God don't most need better education, more money, or better self-esteem. They need a Savior!

They need to have their sins forgiven and to know the God who loves them so much He sent His Son to make them part of His family. And they need someone to tell them. God has revealed these truths to us, not just for our benefit, but so we might spread the Good News to others.

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" - Romans 10:13-15

The Bible in RGC

Because the Bible is God's primary means of communicating to His people, it must be a priority for our lives and gatherings. Here are a couple of ways we seek to keep the priority of God's word central in our life together.

A commitment to the preaching of God's word — We commit a significant portion of our regular gatherings to preaching, neither because it is tradition, nor trendy, but because the Bible is God's authoritative word on who He is and how we are to relate to Him and one another.

His word is a light for our path and nourishment for our souls, and the communicating, self-revealing God delights in speaking to His people through His word when someone preaches. By His Spirit, He uses the preached word to convict, correct, teach, train, encourage, rebuke, and illumine His people to His truth.

Set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see

your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. - 1 Timothy 4:12-13, 15-16

A commitment to applying God's Word — James 1:22 says that if we only hear God's word but don't do what it says, we will deceive ourselves. The deception is that we can hear His Word preached and think we are better off because we heard it. Yet it does us no good if we don't put it into practice.

Through our care groups, we seek to provide a regular context to gather and encourage one another to be doers of God's word. There we meet to review Sunday's message and discuss how God might be calling us to apply it. We also seek to pray and care for one another through the joy and pain of life, helping each other to connect the truths of His word and gospel with the details of our lives.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. - James 1:22

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. - Matthew 7:24-25

Beyond Gospel Centered

The core message of God's rescue through Jesus is the most important factor when it comes to how we relate together. With those who embrace this reality, we share fellowship and community (and will forever!) and partner with in our common mission to spread this good news. With those who don't know the rescuing, redeeming God revealed through Jesus, we share His good news in hopes that they too might respond to His gift of grace.

The gospel is the core reality that unites all true believers. Beyond that core biblical message, however, there are a multitude of secondary and even more minor teachings of Scripture on which genuine believers may legitimately disagree.

While such issues are not reasons to question the genuineness of someone's faith or break fellowship over, they may be sufficient reason to influence a person regarding which church they might choose to belong to. (See 1 Corinthians 8-9)

We have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. - 1 Corinthians 9:12

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. - Titus 3:4-9

Below are three secondary issues which represent our understanding of what Scripture teaches. We realize that genuine believers can have differing views on these topics. In fact, there are public leaders, teachers, and denominations that differ from us on these points whose ministries we respect and have benefitted from their work.

We welcome into our membership those who hold differing views on these topics, provided they hold to the essential message of the gospel and can participate in church life in a manner which is not divisive.

We feel it is important to make these categories known so that everyone can ask questions. We want those with differing viewpoints to be clear what we believe and teach before committing to membership so they can determine whether or not participation in this local body would present a stumbling block for them.

Baptism

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. - Matthew 28:19

Jesus' call to baptize is so clear that there is essentially a universal agreement on the practice. What sometimes differs, however, is the particular mode of baptism or qualifications of the person baptized.

It is our conviction that baptism is for all who give a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Our primary practice of this is by immersion, both because the Greek

word for baptism used in the New Testament means “to plunge, dip, immerse” something in the water, and because it seems to best fit the symbolism of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. - Romans 6:3-4

Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. - Colossians 2:12

Though immersion is our preferred practice, we certainly understand exceptional cases such as someone in a wheelchair that is physically unable to be immersed. They should not be withheld from this means of grace just because they cannot participate in our preferred method.

Our conviction that baptism is only for those making a credible profession of faith stems from the pattern given in the New Testament. We base this on the fact that baptism is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, and is, therefore, given to those who have entered the Christian life.

For this reason, we do not baptize infants. Scripture does not give an age at which baptism is permissible. However, our conviction is that baptism is for all those with a believable profession of faith. Parents should see convincing evidence of genuine spiritual life along with basic understanding of the meaning of trusting in Christ before baptism is appropriate

God’s Eternal and Effectual Grace

One of the truths that resonate throughout Scripture is the reality that God is in control. We refer to this authority and power as God’s sovereignty. He rules over all His creation and is the Author of all of history. He created it for His purposes, remains actively involved in it, and will bring all things to their perfect completion.

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. - Psalm 115:3

Joseph can look back at his wretched circumstances when his brothers sold him into slavery and say ‘God meant it for good’ (Genesis 50:20). God says through

Isaiah, 'I am...the One forming light and darkness, causing well-being and calamity, I am the Lord who does all these' (Isaiah 45:7). He works 'all things after the counsel of His will' (Ephesians 1:11). He 'causes all things to work together for good' (Romans 8:28). There are not exceptions to this. Sparrows don't fall out of trees and hairs don't fall out of heads apart from His will (Matthew 10:29, 30). —Terry Johnson, When Grace Comes Home

Another key teaching of Scripture is that man is not morally neutral. Neither is he good, simply in need of a guide or a good education. The Bible asserts that people by nature are evil (ever since Adam and Eve chose to reject God's rule in the Garden and passed their sin nature on to their children.) Not only are they evil by nature, they actively pursue their rebellion from God and have no ability within themselves by which to respond to God rightly.

God said about man in Noah's day, "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The prophet Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. - Romans 3:10-12

Jesus said it this way, "people loved the darkness rather than the light," (John 3:19-20). Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they were "dead in their trespasses and sins" and "were by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

The intersection of God's sovereign control and man's pervasive sinfulness and hopelessness requires that if salvation comes, it must come from God's initiative. Unless God acts, nothing will happen.

Indeed, this is the testimony of Scripture. Because we were dead in our sins, God needed to make us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that unless we are born of the Spirit, we are not spiritually alive (John 3:3-8).

We come to Christ because the Father draws us. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). We choose Him because He chose us (John 15:16). We love Him because He loved us (1 John 4:19). Even our faith and ability to believe in Him is a gift from Him.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9

God's gracious saving activity is not just the central message of God's word; it's His eternal mission. Redemption was His plan before He created any of us. He determined to rescue us and did everything that was required to make our salvation a reality.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. - Ephesians 1:3-10, 13-14

We use terms like predestined, election, and sovereign not because they are our ideas, but because the Bible uses these words and proclaims the truths they represent. We began this section by highlighting that God's sovereignty refers to his authority, power, and control over all things.

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them." - Acts 4:24

Predestination and election are very similar concepts whose terms are often used somewhat interchangeably. Both usually refer to God choosing people for eternal life

in Him. Predestination is a more general term referring to God determining something in advance.

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. - Ephesians 1:4-5

Election is more specifically concerned with God's choosing of individuals for salvation.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. - 2 Timothy 2:10

(See also Romans 9:11)

Through our preaching and teaching, we aim to have these themes represented in proportion to their use in Scripture. They are commonly occurring and clearly articulated realities in both Old and New Testaments.

They are not the only themes present in the Bible and therefore should not be the only themes encountered in our teaching diet. But they are prominent themes throughout Scripture, so we must not give them less attention than what we find in God's Word.

Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. - 2 Timothy 1:9-10

No matter what terminology we use, God's amazing grace in the face of our sin and utter helplessness should produce in us a profound humility and gratitude. The salvation we experience is the polar opposite of what we deserve! Such truths should cause our hearts to rejoice and fuel our worship.

Since we are so undeserving of the favor we have received, we shouldn't keep this good news from anyone else — nobody can earn salvation! We live the Christian life with the assurance that God has purposed from eternity to rescue us, has acted in history to make it happen, and will fully complete the good work which He has begun.

God's Spirit today

As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His coming death and eventual ascension, He made this shocking statement, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

He told the men that had given up everything to follow Him that it was to their advantage that He leave them...because He would send them the Holy Spirit.

In our day, the Holy Spirit is sometimes the neglected member of the Trinity. But Jesus was very clear that the Spirit's ministry was vital for His people. Just before He ascended to Heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Because His eternal mission is to get His central message out, Jesus did not leave us alone to spread His good news. He equips His people with His empowering presence, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers us for witness and the building up of the church.

He gives a broad array of gifts to His body for the edification and encouragement of His people and the spread of His gospel. He comforts and strengthens individual believers so they can in turn comfort and strengthen others (John 14-16; 1 Corinthians 12-14).

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. - 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The same Spirit which inhabited the early church still dwells within the church today. Every believer is sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit. He still empowers His people and gives them gifts with which they are to bless and build His church. Until Christ returns, the Holy Spirit will continue to accomplish God's eternal mission by empowering His people, convicting the world of sin, and revealing Christ.

With each of these issues, our goal is not to align with a particular tradition, denomination, or teacher, but rather to do our best in understanding what Scripture reveals to us.

Where we differ with others on these points, we humbly seek to extend patience and grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ and hope that they will do the same to us until we all join around God's throne.

Suggested Resources

1. God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts
2. Bible Doctrine by Wayne Grudem
3. One to One Bible Reading by David Helm

LESSON 4

PURSUING COMMUNITY: EXTERNAL

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35

As we saw in lesson one, God has placed an amazingly high priority on pursuing and rescuing people, (God the Son sacrificed Himself to accomplish it!). And though a relationship with God is the primary objective, His purpose in rescuing people isn't only so that they can relate to Him.

He also saves individuals so that they can become a community of the redeemed. A fellowship of those who have been rescued and transformed by God, relating with Him and one another in ways that bring glory to God and good to one another.

Again and again, we see that relationship with God is to be reflected and expressed through relationships with His people.

Creation

In Genesis 2:18-25 God declares that it is not good for man to be alone, followed by His provision of another perfectly suited to him. Their relationship was marked by a benevolent partnership. Through their differing roles, they pursued one purpose and together reflected the image of God without shame.

The Fall and Curse

After Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden tree, the harmony and benevolence eroded abruptly. Genesis 3 reveals Adam blaming Eve for his sin and blaming God for putting her with him. Broken relationship with God likewise resulted in and was reflected by broken relationship with one another. The Lord further affirmed this new struggle would continue in their relationship as he pronounced the curse for their fall.

Promise to Abraham

God promised to bless Abram (name later changed to Abraham) and his descendants so that they could be a blessing to the nations.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. - Genesis 12:1-3

The Ten Commandments

In Exodus 20 we see God letting the descendants of Abraham, whom He had just rescued, know how they were to reflect their salvation: God gives them four commands on how to relate with and show their love for God and six regarding how to relate with and love one another.

The Greatest Command

Jesus revealed the heart of relating with God when He summed up the Law and the Prophets in the commands to love God and love our neighbor.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. - Matthew 22:35-40

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35

The Epistles

Not only does Jesus reduce down all the sacred writings before Him into these two commands, but each of the New Testament writers essentially expounds on these two commands in relation to various practical matters and circumstances in their letters to different local congregations and leaders.

The New Testament letters frequently highlight how relating with God effects and is revealed in our relating with each other.

*Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
- Romans 12:10*

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. - Romans 12:16

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. - Romans 13:8

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. - Romans 14:13

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Romans 15:5-6

*Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.
- Romans 15:7*

*Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.
- 2 Corinthians 13:11*

*Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.
- Galatians 5:26*

*With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.
- Ephesians 4:2*

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. - Ephesians 4:25

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. - Ephesians 5:19

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. - Ephesians 5:21

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. - Colossians 3:9

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. - Colossians 3:16

Therefore encourage one another with these words. - 1 Thessalonians 4:18

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. - 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. - 1 Peter 1:22

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. - 1 John 3:23

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. - 1 John 4:19-21

The Body metaphor

One of the metaphors that the New Testament uses for God's community is the Body. This picture is used to highlight a diversity of individuals united together as one. Living for the common good, they glorify God.

Different strengths and gifts harnessed to represent the marvelous wisdom of the God who brought them together, each individual can take pleasure in the reality that they are participating in something much greater and more glorious than themselves alone.

In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. - Romans 12:5 (NIV)

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we,

though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. - Romans 12:3-13, 15-18

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. - 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-15, 18-21, 24-27

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. - Ephesians 4:15-16

Revelation

In the book of Revelation, we see the effects of the curse forever undone, as God's community enjoys everlasting union and harmony with those from every tribe, nation, and tongue together worshiping their common Savior and King.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." - Revelation 5:9

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. - Revelation 7:9

The Local Body

The testimony of Scripture is clear—we presently, and will forever, share a union with all true followers of Jesus Christ. He has saved us not just for a relationship with Him, but with one another.

And while this reality connects us to all believers throughout history and all over the globe, we are currently limited by time, location, and capacity in how we can express our union.

The context of the local church is where we can live out and practically express our commitment to God and His redeemed community. In this defined setting, we can

develop ongoing fellowship and relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and seasons of life.

In the local church, we can experience care and extend care. We can functionally live out the numerous “one another” commands given in the New Testament.

In the church, we can use our gifts and strengths to serve and minister to the needs of others. We can bear one another’s burdens and help provide for those in need. In the local church, God provides a context for equipping and building so that we might together fulfill the mission He has entrusted to us.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42-47

Pursuing Community With God And One Another During Sunday Gatherings

We gather to meet with God and one another in various settings as a local body. Sunday mornings serve as weekly opportunities to have the whole church gathered together as one. We take time to corporately worship and sing songs that focus on our great God and Savior.

We have the privilege of together being addressed by God’s Spirit as His word is read and preached. As we gather on Sundays, we also enjoy fellowship with those God has made part of our local body.

We have the opportunity to use skills and gifts that God has provided, for the benefit of the gathered church. We can serve in a variety of ways that can be a practical blessing to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In these settings, we also have the opportunity to participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper, physical representations of the spiritual reality we share. As a gathered church family, we also share and celebrate important life moments like child dedications, engagements, graduations, and membership.

Sundays are important in the life of the church because they are the primary setting where we all gather together, and they are the primary contexts for preaching and equipping.

We can certainly personally benefit as we play worship songs on our phones or listen to a sermon online, but it pleases God to multiply and amplify those benefits as we participate in these activities together as His people.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and great grace was upon them all. - Acts 4:32-33

Devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. - 1 Timothy 4:13

Pursuing Community With God And One Another In Care Group Settings

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. - Proverbs 27:17

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. - 1 Peter 4:8-10

Where Sunday gatherings involve the whole church together for worship and equipping, small group settings are designed as regular contexts for personal care and ministry to take place.

Since God has given each member of His body gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), care groups provide a context where every individual can use their gifts and ministry to bless and encourage others.

Whenever the whole church numbers more than a couple of dozen people, it grows increasingly difficult to meaningfully connect with and care for one another in large settings. The idea behind care groups is to provide a small group of individuals we can meet with regularly and put into practice the “one another” commands of.

Therefore, they offer a depth of relationship with a more manageable size group, hopefully conveniently located for maximum opportunity to share life with each other. They aren’t supposed to be a repeat of the Sunday meeting, but rather a place where Sunday’s message can be discussed and applied by each.

This is also a natural setting for individuals to share needs and concerns so that others might minister to them, pray for them, and offer practical help.

In God’s wise design, care and growth in godliness both thrive in the context of loving relationships. Therefore, care groups are meant to serve as relationships for the purpose of growth and care.

Pursuing Community With God And One Another In Everyday Life

Because the church is not a building or a meeting but people, our commitment is not to a location or schedule but relationships. We get involved and engage with other members beyond just Sunday mornings and care groups. Some of these settings are organized by the church.

Events like picnics, men’s and women’s events, classes, meetings for youth and their parents, singles, and retreats are a few examples. They can have teaching and equipping elements to them or even be solely for the purpose of enjoying and building the relationships God has provided.

But relationships aren’t only built within organized structures. Many great opportunities to pursue relationships lie outside of any formal activities.

Participating in hospitality, inviting a single or family out to a meal, talking with someone over coffee, helping a family with a project, assisting friends with a move, providing a meal, visiting someone in the hospital, calling someone to ask how they

are doing, writing a note of encouragement, sending a text or email following up from a discussion in group, being a babysitter for parents of young children, providing rides to medical appointments, cleaning the home of someone who is chronically ill, getting together to play or watch a game— through these and a thousand other ways we can show our love for God and one another.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. - Galatians 5:13

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. - Hebrews 3:13

Pursuing Community Through Attending And Participating

It should go without saying but, to benefit and be a blessing in each of the areas above, we need to actually be there. When we neglect organized church gatherings or pursuit of relationships beyond those gatherings, we not only miss the opportunities to benefit ourselves, but we also deprive those who might have otherwise been encouraged and strengthened by our participation.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. - Hebrews 10:24-25

I know there are some who say, “Well, I’ve given myself to the Lord, but I don’t intend to give myself to any church.” I say, “Now why not?” And they answer, “Because I can be just as good a Christian without it.”

I say, “Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? There’s a brick. What is the brick made for? It’s made to build a house.

It is of no use for the brick to tell you that it’s just as good a brick while it’s kicking about on the ground by itself, as it would be as part of a house. Actually, it’s a good-for-nothing brick. So, you rolling stone Christians, I don’t believe that you’re answering the purpose for which Christ saved you. You’re living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live and you are much to blame for the injury you do. - Charles H. Spurgeon

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:5

Pursuing Community Through Service

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. - Philippians 2:1-4

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” - Mark 10:43-45

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. - John 13:12-17

Christ came as a servant. His disciples are to follow His example and love others with a similar selflessness. Between the organized structures of our meetings and the ongoing pursuit of relationships, there are a multitude of ways we can serve one another.

As stated above, serving will take place in the everyday opportunities God provides as part of community life.

We also need folks to serve in all aspects of small group life, such as hosting meetings, providing snacks, doing childcare, praying for others, and coming prepared with an encouraging word or Scripture.

Community life is total member involvement. Building maintenance, improvements, cleaning, landscaping, and lawn care all require ongoing investment from the body to steward the resources that God has entrusted to our body.

Likewise, to make Sunday meetings possible, an army of volunteers contribute each week from GraceKids teachers and helpers, worship band, sound and tech team, ushers, greeters, resource center, projection, and various administrative roles. As the whole body works together, we are all strengthened and grow.

Pursuing Community Through Giving

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. - Acts 4:32-37

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. - Matthew 6:19-21

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your

love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. - 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Jesus makes the point in Matthew 6 that our hearts follow our treasures — what we invest in, we value. Scripture calls us to value and give toward His community so that individuals can receive care, meet needs, equip the saints, and the mission can advance.

Giving in the church is not to be under guilt or compulsion but according to the grace and faith of the giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

As Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 8, giving for the believer originates in the heart and overflows in response to God's gracious activity, particularly through the gospel.

A Loving Community — The Place For The Restoration Of Sinners

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. - Matthew 18:15-17

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye," when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. - Luke 6:41-42

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. - Colossians 3:12-13

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
- Galatians 6:1-2*

Though the church is a community of those God has redeemed, we have not yet been perfected and glorified. So when sin appears in our midst, we need not be shocked or disillusioned, but neither do we ignore the sin for which Christ paid with His life.

As those who have experienced the grace and forgiveness of God, we are equipped to extend that same love and forgiveness to the repentant. If someone is caught in their sin, or blinded by their sin (and therefore not yet repentant), we are to lovingly confront them and assist them in being restored and reconciled to God and His people.

This kind of community life takes humility and love on our part and an awareness that none of us merit favor with God. We, and the one we seek to restore, only enjoy a relationship with God because of His mercy and provision of righteousness through Christ.

In this context, even the difficult responsibility of caringly confronting sin is an act of kindness and love. God is not surprised at the struggles and sins of His people—He has outlined for us a process of redemptive church discipline, and a loving community for it to take place in.

Suggested Resources

1. What is a Healthy Church Member? by Thabiti Anyabwile
2. I am a Church Member by Thom Rainer
3. The Crisis of Caring: Recovering the Meaning of True Fellowship by Jerry Bridges
4. Resolving Everyday Conflict by Ken Sande

LESSON 4

PURSUING COMMUNITY: EXTERNAL

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” - Romans 10:13-15

As we have now observed in multiple lessons, God has revealed both in Scripture and history His priority to pursue and rescue people — specifically people who rejected and rebelled against Him and His rule. He determined to do this before He created the world, and He has been actively working to carry out His plans ever since.

The appearing of God the Son in the flesh as Jesus is the clearest revelation of His character and ways. Jesus not only testified and taught about God; He was God. Jesus not only told of God’s compassion and love; He demonstrated it in coming as one of us. He not only demonstrated His justice and grace, but He also subjected Himself to the justice our sins deserved so that He could righteously extend grace and forgiveness to us forever.

Because He is so committed to pursuing and rescuing people for His redeemed community, it should come as no surprise that He also enlists those currently in His community to join with Him in pursuing and rescuing those outside of it.

Since this has been both His desire and activity since the creation of the world, His people show their love for Him and others by joining Him in His pursuit.

God’s Eternal Plan

Ever since Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden, every human being has been in need of God’s loving rescue. No one since has started on the inside of God’s community. Romans 3:23 makes this plain when it declares, “for all have sinned and

fall short of the glory of God.” We all start as sinners, outsiders to the only family that matters eternally.

But as we have seen over and over again, God is not reluctant to pursue and rescue people for Himself, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

Indeed, beginning with covering Adam and Eve’s nakedness and shame with animal skins in the Garden, (a foreshadowing of the much greater sacrifice that was to come through Jesus), God has both initiated a relationship with man and accomplished all that was necessary to make that relationship possible.

Previous lessons have highlighted God’s pursuit of people. In this lesson, we want to highlight God’s involvement of His people in that pursuit.

Abram/Abraham

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” - Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham and his offspring were called by God to be a blessing to “all the families of the earth.” God intends for many to be blessed, but He reveals that blessing through His people.

Moses

Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” God said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the

God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to ...a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ - Exodus 3:7-8, 10, 15, 17

God could have sent the plagues on Egypt without Moses. He could have announced His deliverance by any means He chose.

He could have sent an angel or spoken directly to Pharaoh, but it pleased God to use Moses as His human ambassador, proclaiming God’s judgment to Egypt and salvation to Israel.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God calling numerous individuals to proclaim His judgments and blessings.

Jesus Sends His Disciples

Even when Jesus Himself was present to reveal God to the world, he enlisted others to be about this task as well. They proclaimed the judgments and blessings He came to bring:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. - Luke 10:1-3, 8-12

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to the Father for those who would represent Him and proclaim His good news after His departure. He prayed that they would reflect

God through their unity, that God would protect them from the evil one, and that their message would advance so others might also believe.

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one... But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. - John 17:11, 13-18, 20-21

Jesus Commands His Disciples

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus commands His disciples to go and make disciples. This directive isn't meant to be an optional extra added on to the Christian life — this was among Jesus' final instructions before His ascension. This was what He wanted His disciples to remember and act on after He was gone. The call of the disciple is to make more disciples.

The pattern outlined in the book of Acts, (and reinforced through the rest of the New Testament letters), was that the local church was the context for disciple-making and

teaching the Savior's commands. Whenever converts were made, they were "added" to the local fellowship. And wherever there was no local body, one was quickly formed once a small group believed in Jesus.

While the Twenty-first Century United States landscape has ministries and resources unimaginable at the time of the New Testament's writing, Scripture's primary focal point of making disciples has not changed. It is the only place for teaching, care, and discipline, which Christ established Himself.

For these reasons we as a church seek to base our outreach and evangelistic efforts in local churches or in the establishment of local churches, whether in the United States or abroad (through support of international ministries or sending short-term mission teams.)

This closing passage of Matthew's Gospel not only contains Jesus' command for His disciples to go, but it also has the greatest reassurance possible for those called to this high yet often intimidating task.

Jesus begins and ends His command with the reassurance of His power and presence for those He is sending. He has been given all authority, AND He will be with us always — His powerful presence is the confidence His disciples go forward with in their obedience.

Jesus Empowers His Disciples

Beyond just the passage in Matthew 28, we see that as Jesus prepared to depart and return to the Father, He let His disciples know that He would not leave them alone. He knew they depended on Him and would feel His loss deeply after He left. He also knew His disciples were not equal to the task in and of themselves. So He let them know He was sending the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them, and to empower them to be His witnesses.

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

- John 15:26-27

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. - John 16:4-8

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. - Acts 1:3-5, 8

All His Disciples are Ambassadors

The fact that no believer is born a follower of Jesus, or was able to reach God in their power, should make those whom He has rescued sympathetic to the plight of those who do not yet know His love and forgiveness. And as beneficiaries of His great love, we should be delighted that God would privilege us to bring that blessing to others.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." - Matthew 5:14-16

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. - 1 Peter 2:9-10

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others... For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might

no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:11, 13-15, 17-21

Jesus Ensures His Disciples' Ultimate Success

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." - Matthew 16:13-19

After Peter's confession of who Jesus truly was, Jesus declared that upon this truth His church would be built and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Meaning that the church will have success in rescuing sinners from the fiery punishment their sins have earned, because Jesus is the Son of God who came to ransom many.

It does not mean that every person who hears the gospel will be saved...but many will! Hell itself cannot prevail against the church's proclamation of the good news of Christ's rescue mission.

The reality of this present world is that it is in darkness and it hates the light (John 3:19). Because Jesus was the light, many who loved the darkness rejected Him. He lets

His disciples know that they too will often face rejection and suffering because of Him. But even the suffering and rejection are not without purpose. Many times the suffering of His saints provokes the softening of hard hearts.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. - John 12:24-26

The 2nd-century Church Father Tertullian wrote that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." While martyrdom may not be a common threat to Christians in the United States today, it has been a constant threat for many throughout history and is still prevalent around the world.

Though our message is the greatest news available to man, it is often not popular or received with gladness. Yet, Christ's disciples are still to represent Him and proclaim His good news, for some will respond and believe.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" - Romans 10:13-15

Ultimately, we see the fruit of obedience to Christ's command in the book of Revelation where every nation, language, and people group is represented around God's throne. Nations that are currently closed and hostile to the gospel message will be there.

Groups that are still unreached because of their remoteness or not having God's word available in their language yet will be there. They too will worship God and praise His salvation because they too will have someone proclaim His rescue to them, and they too will be made alive in Him.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their

hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” – Revelation 7:9-10

We Proclaim. He makes Alive.

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. - John 3:3, 6

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. - Ephesians 2:1-10

Only God can make the dead alive. Only He can save. We cannot debate someone into the kingdom of God; He must give them eyes to see and a heart to respond. The outcome is not up to us, but we must be faithful to obey our Lord's commands.

We must proclaim His good news without discrimination—everyone is a candidate for His grace! No one is so good that they have no need of His grace and forgiveness, and no one is so bad that they are beyond His ability to save and reconcile to Himself. Salvation is a gift—no one is deserving; no one can earn it. God often chooses to give it to the most unlikely individuals.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16

And because it is God who makes alive, we can have confidence in our proclaiming. We don't save any by our words or arguments, but God has determined that as His good news is proclaimed, people would savingly believe. Skeptics will believe. Rebels will believe. Prodigals will believe. Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation!

Personal Opportunities

Ephesians 4:12 states that God gave pastors and teachers to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” God never intended the advancement of His mission and the making of His disciples to fall on a few select people. The church as a whole is to be about the work of ministry.

As we seek to be used by God for the furthering of His kingdom, He will bring opportunities our way. Some will be with those we are around frequently, such as those in our home—our children are one of the greatest opportunities for disciple-making most of us will ever have! Our job doesn't stop just because they say a prayer or make a profession of faith, but we continually point them to the Savior through our life and words.

Extended family, neighbors, and co-workers are also relationships in which God will often use us as salt and light. These individuals will see how we relate to them and one another. They will look at how we relate to stress and hardship. They will know what we value most and are living for.

We must be faithful to use the opportunities God provides for His purposes. We will not be perfect in our attempts, but He has strategically placed us (including our weaknesses and sins) into their lives so that they too might hear His good news.

We can also seek to be strategic with the places we frequent such as regularly visiting the same restaurants, stores, bank, etc., in hopes of developing some level of relationship with others who are there as well. Getting involved with a sports team or neighborhood association, the local pool or club can be great introductions to the folks in our geographic community.

Taking an interest in someone's life or showing care and compassion might open the door for being an encouragement and blessing to them in multiple ways, with none being greater than sharing the best news ever with them.

Sometimes God may also have us speak hope and good news to someone during a seemingly “random” encounter. On a plane, in a line, downtown, wherever we are—God delights to use those desiring to be His instruments ministering to those in need.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. - 1 Peter 3:13-18

Several books on this topic that can help encourage your next step in this area of obedience are available at the resource center.

Congregational Opportunities

In additions to the steps of obedience that we can take individually, there are also many things we seek to partner together in as a local body. We base some of these opportunities out of our care groups, and some are activities we engage in or ministries we support on a church-wide level.

Christianity Explored is a multi-week class introducing the Christian faith. It is designed for those who have questions about Christianity and Jesus—no church background required! Participants connect in someone’s home, hear a brief teaching, and then are allowed to ask any questions that are on their mind. It is meant to be a non-threatening environment where the essentials about Jesus can be learned.

Besides proclaiming the gospel in our Sunday meetings, we also have separate environments targeted at serving singles, and youth and their parents. No matter what the environment, we never assume everyone has an adequate grasp or experience of the transforming power of the gospel.

These ministries regularly have social and activity based events, in addition to different church-wide events (such as picnics, etc.), that seek to promote relational

connections and growth. These can be great opportunities to introduce friends and neighbors to the church community in a less formal setting.

Many of our care groups have taken on a local ministry to get involved with and support. Some of these include serving a local nursing home, engaging with teens from a girl's shelter, connecting with Habitat for Humanity, performing different needed tasks for a Greenville homeless shelter, and different neighborhood projects.

We have also set aside a fund for care groups to pursue various outreach initiatives. Money from this has gone towards activities as diverse as printing tracts to hand out downtown or a care group inviting co-workers for BBQ and a skeet shoot.

Our seminary student intern, Steve Cliff, and his wife Laura coordinate sharing the gospel in downtown Greenville most Friday evenings.

They meet in front of Spill the Beans next to Falls Park and seek to share the good news about Jesus with anyone who will listen, through a mixture of open air preaching, handing out tracts, and one-on-one conversations. Anyone is welcome to participate with them.

As a church, we also partner locally with Miracle Hill Ministries (www.MiracleHill.org) and the Piedmont Women's Center (www.PiedmontWomensCenter.org).

Miracle Hill is an Upstate Christian outreach serving the community through homeless shelters, men's and women's homes, children's homes, foster care, and drug and alcohol addiction recovery facilities. We participate through food drives, financial support, and having both groups and individuals volunteer in Miracle Hill's various settings.

The Piedmont Women's Center seeks to be an oasis of hope committed to demonstrating the love of Christ to those with pregnancy-related needs. They are a trusted provider of reproductive health care serving the Upstate of South Carolina, offering free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, peer counseling and education, referrals, and post-abortion recovery.

We seek to partner with the PWC through financial support, donating supplies, and encouraging individuals to volunteer.

Other seasonal opportunities that we have encouraged include both groups and individual families participating in Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree, providing a Christmas gift and gospel opportunity for an incarcerated inmate's child (www.PrisonFellowship.org/about/Angel-Tree/) and Operation Christmas Child by Samaritan's Purse, providing a shoebox with a Christmas gift and school and hygiene supplies for children in developing nations (www.SamaritansPurse.org/what-we-do/Operation-Christmas-Child).

We also seek to partner with likeminded indigenous local churches in other nations through Short Term Mission teams. Our most recent trips have served churches in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

We hope to continue to build long-term ministry partnerships with these churches and others like them.

Since we understand church planting to be the most effective long-term strategy for making disciples and seeing them taught and cared for, we are committed to planting churches and supporting likeminded church plants.

Over the past several years we have participated in planting or supporting church plants in West Greenville, Charleston and Columbia SC; Asheville NC; Melbourne FL; and Tokyo Japan.

Suggested Resources

1. Tracts to check out:

- Two Ways to Live for adults and Who will be King? for kids, both by Matthias Media (matthiasmedia.com)
- How Good are You? tract (<http://proclaim.typepad.com/hgru/index.html>)
- The Story video and written gospel explanations (<http://viewthestory.com>)

2. Books at our Resource Center:

- Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer
- The Gospel and Personal Evangelism by Mark Dever
- Jesus: The Only Way to God by John Piper

- **Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions** by Gregory Koukl
- **Get Real: Sharing Your Every Day Faith Every Day** by John Leonard
- **Pray for the World** by Jason Mandryk
- **Dispatches from the Front** by Tim Keese

LESSON 5

THE VISION AND VALUES OF REDEEMING GRACE CHURCH

Disciples are followers. Disciples of Christ are those who believe Jesus's revelation of His divine identity and accordingly trust in His salvation and obey His commands to love God and one another. Scripture identifies three essential qualities of disciples:

They take their identity from their relationship with God above all else and live in keeping with His priority.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done." - Matthew 16:24-27

They grow more and more into the likeness of the One they follow.

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. - Ephesians 4:15-16

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. - 2 Peter 3:18

They obey Christ's command to love others by making disciples.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” - Matthew 28:18-20

Our Mission:

To Be Disciples of Christ. To Grow as Disciples of Christ. To Make Disciples of Christ.

Our mission to live as disciples, grow as disciples, and make more disciples is one that hopefully most churches are also seeking to live out. How we specifically seek to do that may differ slightly in emphasis from some. Because Scripture is our sufficient authority, and because its central message is God’s pursuit and rescue of people for relationship with Him and one another—the gospel—we want the central priority of His word to be the central priority in everything we do.

Our Vision:

Redeeming Grace Church exists to exalt God in the upstate through Gospel-Centered Community, Worship, and Mission.

Gospel-Centered

The gospel of Jesus Christ is how we receive our salvation, sanctification, and hope for living a life pleasing to God. The gospel is not only the foundation of the Christian life and the church, but it also informs, controls and energizes all of our life, relationships, and mission.

Community

Through our common faith in Jesus Christ, we have been made a spiritual family in the church. As His family, we share the deepest bond of human experience in God. We believe our life is to be lived out in loving relationships with one another and in the world around us.

Worship

We are to live all of life as worship to God, and He is to be supreme in our affections. We desire to express our passion for God, and His great salvation, in personal and corporate worship, praise and adoration, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Mission

God has radically transformed us and made us a new creation in Jesus. As such, now we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who loved us and died for us. We believe we are to live all of life on the mission that God has called us to, wherever we are and whatever we do.

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. - James 1:19-25

By the transforming power of the gospel at work within us as individuals and a community, we also seek to faithfully display God's work in our lives by living out other priorities clearly revealed in His word.

Our Core Values & Commitments:

God's Word – Our desire is to be students submitted to God's powerful and active Word in all that we believe and do.

Holy Spirit – We are committed to being people led by the Spirit of God, and we want to eagerly desire, develop, and lovingly exercise the gifts of the Spirit for the good of the church.

Christ-Like – We desire to pursue growth in being more like Jesus, both privately and together, through the various means of grace that He has provided to His body.

Dependence – Just as we depend upon God’s grace for salvation, we depend upon Him for all of our life and growth as well. We seek to be a people of prayer, who are Godward-focused and rely on the Holy Spirit.

Grace – Because we have received God’s unmerited grace, we want to cultivate a culture of rejoicing in His grace and extending God’s grace to each other, while cherishing the diversity that God has given to us.

Church – Each of us has been called to be an active member of the local body of Christ. God gave every member gifts to use, and everyone is important for the functioning of the church body.

Engaging – We believe we have a responsibility to actively be engaged with our family, with the church, and with the world we live in, to carry out the redemptive purposes of God’s kingdom.

Loving – Because God loves us, we are to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. We desire to make love our aim in the church and in the world around us so that we might glorify God.

Serving – We desire to no longer live for ourselves, but through love, to serve others as God in Christ has served us and given Himself for us. Our desire is for all members to be servants in our homes, in the church and in our communities.

Giving – Because God has given us His Son and everything we need for life and godliness, we want to be people who give of our time, our talents and our finances in worship to God.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

- 1 Peter 5:1-4

Leadership in the Church

Nowhere does Scripture command the particular structure leadership is to take in the local body. This lack of explicit direction has resulted in varied expressions of

shepherding care appropriate to the diverse contexts the church has spread into throughout the centuries.

While the Bible allows for some organizational variance from church to church, there are principles given which should guide our particular practice.

God Has Given Leaders As Gifts To The Church

Leadership in the church is not a result of a seminary degree but being called and gifted by God to serve in such a capacity.

In addition to an internal sense of God's call for this task, the local church must affirm a pastor's character and gifts to teach and lead, because they will need to follow and submit to his leadership if he is affirmed.

Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

- Ephesians 4:7, 11-12

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

He must not be a recent convert, or he may fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. - 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Leaders Lead So That Every Member Might Minister

Pastors (often translated shepherds in the New Testament) serve as under-shepherds of Christ, the Great Shepherd. As such, they are an extension of His care and leadership for His people.

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him for the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said

to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” - John 21:17

Leaders in the church are to serve from within the body, not above it. They may be shepherds, but they are also sheep. This greatly affects how they lead.

Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” - John 20:25-28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. - Acts 20:28

Because they serve as under-shepherds, leaders in the church aren't free to lead in any direction they choose. They are empowered by God to lead His people according to His word. Their authority is not their own, but that which comes from proclaiming God's authoritative Word.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. - 2 Timothy 2:15, 22-25

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. - 2 Timothy 4:1-2

Though leaders are called and gifted by God to lead, that doesn't mean they are the ones doing all the work. God gifts every believer for the common good of the body. They are equipped by God to minister for Him, and are necessary for the body to function properly and grow into maturity.

And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. - Ephesians 4:11-13, 15-16

Elders, Deacons, And Others At Redeeming Grace Church

Matt and Aaron are currently the only pastors/elders at Redeeming Grace Church. (The New Testament uses the terms pastor/shepherd, elder, and overseer interchangeably, depending on the particular aspect of the leadership role it is discussing.)

Elders/pastors/overseers are the predominant group addressed as leaders in the New Testament and serve as those bearing primary responsibility for the direction, diet, and care of the local church.

We desire to see more elders added. Though there is no command or even suggested number of elders per church in Scripture, the New Testament references them in the plural. This fact, in addition to the desirable benefits of more men, called and equipped to care for and lead the congregation, makes this an ongoing desire and prayer. Elders do not need to be full-time staff to serve in this role.

Because our eldership is currently small, Redeeming Grace Church has an advisory board which functions as an extension of our elders. This board is not permanent but instead, is meant to serve until the time that sufficient additional elders render their role unnecessary.

The men serving on this board must meet the character qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, though they are not required to “aspire to the office of overseer” or have the sufficient teaching gifts necessary for pastors to serve in this

capacity. We also have a separate financial advisory board which seeks to ensure we can carry out the decisions of the elders and advisory board by providing both financial accountability and wisdom in financial decision making.

The financial advisory board also has responsibility for setting staff salaries. Individuals on this board must meet the character qualifications of deacons from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 as well as have a proven track record of sound financial stewardship. Accountability between the two advisory boards is maintained by one advisory board member also serving on the financial advisory board.

We recognize our care group leaders and several ministry team leaders as deacons. They both meet the character qualifications of deacons given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and carry significant ministry responsibility within the life of our body. Our deacons serve as practical extensions and multipliers of pastoral care and ministry.

Our elders, deacons, and advisory boards, together with their spouses, meet monthly to stay current on ministry updates, areas in need of counsel and decisions, and ongoing equipping.

How Decisions Are Made At Redeeming Grace Church

Most decisions related to administrative tasks, normal ministry team functions, building maintenance, decorating, etc. are made on a daily and weekly basis by individuals or groups who have delegated responsibility for those areas.

Folks gifted in each area serve our body by taking on these decisions and their follow through and often do so in such a way that it frees the leaders and most of the body from having to think about these areas at all.

Any decisions concerning the direction, diet, and care of the body require that our elders be in agreement before moving forward. Decisions may also warrant differing levels of affirmation from the advisory boards and deacons to the whole congregation, depending on the significance of the issue and the impact upon the whole church—the bigger the decision, the wider the scope of affirmation that is sought.

Types of decisions that have involved the whole church over the last few years include hiring pastoral staff, formal affiliation with extra-local ministries, property sale and purchase, and a new church name.

Practically, the process involves the elders coming to an agreement and making a proposal to the advisory board. (Though the elders often engage the advisory board in discussion before the proposal stage, to seek their input and counsel.)

If the advisory board does not affirm the proposal, it is either returned to the elders with suggested modifications, tabled for a set period for future discussion, or tabled indefinitely.

If the advisory board affirms the proposal, it proceeds to the financial advisory board and/or deacons depending on the nature of the issue. We repeat the same process of proposal and affirmation or rebuttal with the financial advisory board and deacons, and when appropriate, ultimately the entire membership.

Each time, broad agreement, rather than a simple majority, is sought in affirmation before moving forward, with a higher degree of affirmation required for those decisions with the greatest impact.

Ministry Affiliations And Friendships

While Redeeming Grace Church is not formally affiliated with any denomination, we do value relationships with other likeminded leaders and churches for purposes of theological and practical training, biblical and cultural watchfulness, relational camaraderie, and partnership in mission.

Here are a few we currently relate with:

9Marks (9Marks.org)

“9Marks exists to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God’s glory to the nations through healthy churches. To that end, we affirm and seek to practice their nine marks of church health: Preaching, Biblical Theology, The Gospel, Conversion, Evangelism, Membership, Discipline, Discipleship, and Leadership.”

The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org)

“As a broadly Reformed network of churches, The Gospel Coalition encourages and educates current and next-generation Christian leaders by advocating gospel-centered principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom he shed his life’s blood.

A biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. We desire to champion the gospel of Jesus Christ with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy – gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

We invite all Christians to join us to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so that we truly speak and live for him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. We affirm the Gospel Coalition’s Confessional Statement and Theological Vision for Ministry.”

Desiring God (desiringgod.org)

“Celebrating the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, we exist to produce and distribute resources that spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

Communicating our passion in a way that convinces, convicts and energizes by way of the written and spoken word. Through education and motivation, we equip the church to reach unreached peoples and new populations of Americans, as well as awaken man-centered churches. We are grateful for a long-standing friendship with Desiring God Ministries.”

Together for the Gospel (T4G.org)

“What began as a friendship between four pastors from across denominational traditions has burgeoned into a biennial conference for thousands of pastors and church leaders who, for all their differences, are committed to standing together for the main thing – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As false gospels circulate and pastors are tempted to bow to cultural pressures, we remain convinced that the church is in a moment of spiritual crisis. Buoyed by Christ’s promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against it, we remain convinced of the need for a full and gladdening recovery of the gospel in the church. We ascribe to T4G’s affirmations and denials.”

Acts 29 (acts29.com)

“Acts 29 is a diverse, global network of church-planting churches that stands in the tradition of historic evangelical confessionalism.

While believing it is vital that the elders of each of our churches determine where they stand on doctrines of second importance, we do wish to make known our convictions on the following five theologically-driven core values:

Gospel centrality in all of life, the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, the work of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry, the equality of male and female and the principle of male servant leadership, and the local church as God's primary mission strategy.

Redeeming Grace Church is currently in the process of considering/pursuing formal affiliation and partnership with Acts29."

Peacemaker Ministries (peacemaker.net)

"Peacemaker Ministries is a non-profit, non-denominational ministry whose mission is to equip and assist Christians and their churches to respond to conflict biblically. They provide conflict coaching, mediation, and arbitration services to help resolve conflicts, disputes, and church divisions.

Our training services include seminars, conflict coaching training, mediation training, and advanced mediation and arbitration training for conciliators and church leaders working within their churches, as well as training for individuals conducting more formal and complex proceedings.

Resources like The Peacemaker and Resolving Everyday Conflict have been helpful foundations for relating together. The Relational Commitments appendix included in this binder was developed as part of our desire to highlight practical peacemaking principles at work in our church community."

CCEF (ccef.org)

"The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) works to restore Christ to counseling, and counseling to the church. We believe that the body of Christ is God's primary context for change, the community God uses to transform his people. CCEF's mission is to equip the church to be this kind of transforming community. They see themselves as an extension of the local church, and want to serve and promote its ministry.

The good news of the gospel is meant to be preached, taught, and counseled with relevance to individual people. Equipping Christians to live, love, and counsel is

their goal. We have received significant benefit from the books, resources, and training environments of CCEF.”

CBMW (cbmw.org)

“The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood exists to equip the church on the meaning of biblical sexuality. “Complementarianism” is the biblically derived view that men and women are complementary—possessing equal dignity and worth as the image of God, and called to different roles that each glorify him.

The CBMW asserts that these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the church. We affirm the CBMW’s “Danvers Statement” (<http://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>), as a helpful summation of the important issues affected by the biblical understanding of sexuality.”

Simeon Trust (<http://www.simeontrust.org>)

“It is our conviction that the health of the Church depends on the proclamation of God’s Word.

It depends on the preaching of the Scriptures through the power of the Holy Spirit by preachers and teachers who really believe the Bible to be the words of God, and the expositional ministry that flows from that preaching. While millions of men and women may have learned to subsist on something else for their spiritual sustenance, it is our belief that they are, in reality, hungry for God’s Word.

Simeon Trust hosts workshops to help pastors and Bible teachers learn methods of expositional preaching, be encouraged through sitting under God’s Word, and gather in small groups with the aim of sharpening each other’s teaching. We do everything we can to stay narrowly focused on our one goal: “to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world by training the next generation of Bible expositors.” The gospel opportunities before us are immense.”