Catch the Vision

Discipleship 102

An informative look inside our church to see what it believes and how it functions.

Roger N. McNamara

Teacher's Edition
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Introduction

Welcome to discipleship class 102. We call it . . . "CATCH THE VISION."

This is a get-acquainted class for those who want to know more about our church or who may be considering partnering with our church family. It is also the second series of classes that make up Level One of our discipleship paradigm.

Our purpose is that you might understand who we are, how we function, and what makes our church unique. Every church is different from every other church. No two congregations are alike. Each has its own personality, its own methodology, and its own peculiarities.

We believe it is important for you to understand our philosophy of ministry and what makes us tick BEFORE you make any commitments to us or our ministry.

Many people join churches only to drop out a few months later. There are two primary reasons for this: 1) their expectations were not met, and . . . 2) they did not buy into the philosophy of ministry of the church because they never knew what it was.

We want you to be an informed believer. We want you to know the biblical basis upon which our church is founded, and we want you to understand our unique view of the church, its people, and its ministry.

We believe Ephesians 4:11,12 lay out the basic function and form of the church. We view the church as a Body rather than a building, and as a divinely-created organism rather than a man-made organization. Our goal is to glorify God by becoming an "Ephesians Four Church."

We believe every believer has been gifted by God for ministry, and that the primary responsibility of a pastor is to equip or help people to discover and develop their area of giftedness so they can minister effectively. This has some far-reaching ramifications that we will explore during the course of this study.

We do not expect everyone who takes this class to unite with our church. Some will conclude they do not want to be part of a ministry such as ours. That is fine. We would rather have you reach that conclusion BEFORE joining rather than later.

Others, however, will catch the vision and will be committed to membership, and will become enthusiastic participants in our ministry.

Either way, we're glad you are here and trust you will enjoy our study together.
Lesson # 1

A Look Inside
(Exploring Our Philosophy of Ministry)

Welcome to our class today. This is the second series of classes in our discipleship paradigm. Over the next eight weeks we’ll be taking a look inside our church, how it functions, and what makes it unique. I’m talking about our philosophy of ministry, and what it is that distinguishes us from other churches.

Every church is different. No two are alike. Each is unique in and of itself. You'll never find a church like the "one back home” or the one you used to attend. They may be similar, but they’ll not be alike.

Let me pause here to explain to you what I mean by our "philosophy of ministry." Every church has one, although in many cases it has never been written out nor clearly articulated. As a consequence, people often don't know what it is.

A “philosophy of ministry” is those beliefs and values that govern your behavior, standards and ministry activities. It describes the purpose, priorities, emphasis, and style that identify how one church is unique and different from others.

It is reflected in our buildings, programs, music, budget, and people. It explains who we are, what is important to us, where we are going, and how we plan to get there.

Let’s begin by looking at why a church’s philosophy of ministry is often . . .

The Determining Factor

There are many factors that go into developing a healthy, growing church. One of the least understood and most overlooked of these is this area of philosophy of ministry. It influences everything we do and colors everything we see, and yet most people are unaware of it. For example, consider the following three questions:

To Stay or to Go?

Have you ever noticed that the “back door” of most churches is as wide open as their front door? Why is it that so many people join a church and then end up leaving it within twelve to eighteen months? Why does the average pastor change churches every three to four years? In Acts 15:39, why did Paul and Barnabas’ highly successful team ministry break up after just one term of service on the mission field?
In each case, the underlying cause was a difference in the philosophy of ministry. When people come to a church, they have a preconceived idea of how that church should function, what it should do for them, and what their responsibility to the church is. That will vary from person to person, but each one expects that church to be what they think it should be and to function the way they think it should function.

When the church fails to live up to one’s expectations, when the two philosophies of ministry do not coincide, the person becomes unhappy and often leaves in search of another church that fits his philosophy of ministry. Most church problems do not result from differences over doctrine or even personalities, but rather from differences in philosophy of ministry.

The same thing is true of pastors. The pastor sees himself and what he wants to accomplish one way, and the church people have a different set of expectations. Unless they can identify and harmonize these philosophical differences, he will move on in search of a church that fits his philosophy of ministry.

The same thing happens with ministry teams on the mission field, in schools, and in churches. It was a philosophical disagreement about ministry that destroyed Paul and Barnabas’ missionary team. Paul thought quitters like John Mark should not be given a second chance whereas Barnabas saw the potential in the young man and wanted to give him another opportunity to prove himself.

The decision to stay or go seldom has anything to do with wrong theology, sinful behavior or even the Lord’s leading. More often than not, it is disagreement over church’s philosophy of ministry that results in people leaving although they often are unaware of it.

It is for this reason we want you to understand up front who we are and where we are going. We want you to understand our philosophy of ministry so you can examine it, evaluate it, and hopefully, buy into it. That is the only way we can be successful as a church and that is the only way you are going to be happy here.

**Building or Body?**

When I use the term "church," what do you think of? Is it a place or is it people? Is it a building or a body? Is it constructed of concrete and steel or is it composed of Christians and believers?

All too often people think of the church as a man-made institution or organization rather than a divinely created, living organism. We tend to think of the church as a group of isolated individuals who congregate for an hour on Sunday morning rather than related family members who interact with each other throughout the week.

The word "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia." "Ek" means "out of" and "klesia" is a form of the word "to call." It refers to a group of people who have been called out of their normal activities and have assembled together for a common purpose.

A church is a group of people whom God has called out from their sin and who have been placed together in an assembly of baptized believers, for instruction, for fellowship and for propagation of the gospel.
The church is described in a variety of ways in Scripture. In Ephesians 3:15 it is described as a "family" in which the various members are referred to as "brothers" and "sisters." In Acts 20:28,29 and I Peter 5:2,3 it is referred to as the "flock of God." The most prevalent view of the church in Scripture is that of a living, thriving, dynamic body known as the "Body of Christ."

In Scripture the church is seen as a divinely created, living organism belonging to Jesus Christ. Jesus referred to it as "MY church" (Matthew 16:18). In Ephesians 5:23 we're told "Christ is the head of the church” and in Ephesians 5:25 we read that Christ "loved the church and gave himself for it."

We do not see the church as a man-made organization, but as a vital, living, dynamic organism which Jesus Christ created, loves and died for. It is God's vehicle for nurturing spiritual growth among believers and for carrying out God's program of evangelism in this age.

**Player or Spectator?**

Someone has described a football game as eleven men who are desperately in need of a rest and a hundred thousand fans in the stands are desperately in need of exercise. That is also a vivid description of many churches. Far too many people in the pews see themselves as spectators rather than players – all because of their philosophy of ministry.

There are some dynamic ramifications involved in viewing the church as the Body of Christ. First of all, every believer (including you and me) is seen as being uniquely gifted by God (I Corinthians 12:7,11). God has given each of us special insights and abilities which are designed to enable us to see and perform some specific ministry function within the church body. These special insights and abilities are called "spiritual gifts" and are described in Romans 12 as well as in I Corinthians 12.

God places each believer in a local church where he can exercise his spiritual gifts and thereby minister to the needs of the other members of the church family (I Corinthians 12:24). Since every believer is so gifted, the church becomes essential to the spiritual well-being of that individual.

Failure to attend and participate in the ministry of the local church on a regular basis weakens the entire church as well as undermines the spiritual development of the individual believer. In Hebrews 10:25, the Apostle Paul specifically warned us as believers not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to meet regularly for mutual encouragement. Nothing undermines the work of God and spiritual growth like an empty pew.

So you see, a person’s philosophical view of the church and of ministry is going to have a significant impact on whether they go or stay, and on whether they become players or spectators in the church.

Not only is a church’s philosophy of ministry a determining factor in its health and growth, but it is also . . .
The Directional Factor

A church’s philosophy of ministry gives it direction. It guides what we do, how we do it, when we do it, where we do it, and with whom we do it. There are seven basic questions that are influenced by our philosophy of ministry.

Why do we exist? (Our Purpose)

This has to do with our purpose. Purpose gives meaning to life. It explains the rationale for being and for doing. Why is our church here? What is it supposed to be doing? What are we ultimately trying to achieve? The answers to those questions are of paramount importance because they give our church direction.

Many churches, pastors, and people don’t know why their churches exist. Various reasons are suggested such as to serve the community, to teach the Word of God, to spread the gospel to the ends of the world or to win precious souls to Christ. All of those are commendable, but none of them reflect the primary reason for which God established his church.

It is God, and God alone, who determines why the church exists. If you are to have a biblical purpose that explains why your church exists, you must go to the Word of God for the answer. As you seek God’s face in prayer and search the Scriptures you will discover there is only one purpose for which the church exists. It exists to honor and glorify God.

Everything that is done in the church or under the auspices of the church should be done for the purpose of bringing glory to God. The Apostle Paul reminded the church in Ephesus that God had chosen them and predestinated them “unto the adoption of children” to the “praise of the GLORY of his grace” (Ephesians 1:4-6). This theme is repeated again and again throughout Scripture. (see Ephesians 1:11,12; 3:21; I Corinthians 10:31)

We want everything we do in this church to glorify God. That is our purpose. That is why we exist as a church. Our philosophy of ministry is designed with that goal in mind. If we were to have a “purpose statement” it would simply say . . .

Our church exists for the glory of God!

Who are we trying to reach? (Our Focus Group)

Jesus said the field is the world (Matthew 13:38). He also commanded his followers to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The reality, however, is that no one person and no single church can carry out our Lord’s commands alone. It takes all kinds of people and all kinds of churches to reach the world or even our own community.

Churches should be constantly sharing the gospel and teaching the Word of God to everyone who is willing to listen. Numerous barriers, however, keep many people from listening. There are cultural, racial, linguistic, vocational, educational, economical, physical, religious, and spiritual barriers that segment our communities making it virtually impossible to reach everyone. Churches which try to be everything to everyone often end up reaching very few.
Jesus focused primarily on reaching Jewish people initially (Matthew 10:5,6). They were his target group, not because he didn’t care about other people, but that he might build a strong church of like-minded people that would be able to expand and reach out to other people from other cultures and other backgrounds. He knew he needed to build a solid core group that would have the skills, talents, and gifted people to reach across the many cultural, linguistic and other barriers that separate people from each other and from God.

The same is true today. Rather than trying to be a church that is “all things to all people,” we are focused on reaching the unchurched and the under-churched in our community. At the same time, we welcome anyone to our church regardless of their racial, cultural or linguistic background. As our church grows, we plan to develop additional ministries aimed at reaching other segments of our society.

What are we going to do? (Our Mission)

Churches are busy places. Most have a full schedule of ministries and activities designed to meet the needs of their members and those they are trying to reach. Classes, seminars, retreats, outings, and meetings are readily available in many churches. No one can say churches are idle or lack something to do.

The question our church would ask is, “Are we doing what we are supposed to be doing?” We want to be sure we are fulfilling the mission God has given us. It would be a tragedy to be caught up in a flurry of ministry activities while at the same time leaving undone the work God gave us to do. We want to be what God wants us to be and we want to do what God wants us to do.

The decision concerning what the church should be doing is not left up to us. God has already told us what the church is supposed to do. He outlined the mission of the church in five broad strokes in Scripture. These are capsulated in two passages spoken by the Lord Jesus commonly known as the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The first is found in Matthew 22:37-39 and the second is located in Matthew 28:18-20. Together, they form the marching orders of the church and define its mission. The five-fold mission of our church outlined in these passages is as follows:

**Worship** – “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” (Matthew 22:37)

**Ministry** – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Matthew 22:39)

**Evangelism** – “Go ye therefore and teach (disciple) all nations.” (Matthew 28:19)

**Fellowship** – “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Matthew 28:19)

**Discipleship** – “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20)
This biblical mission philosophy provides a grid for everything we do. We celebrate God's presence through worship. We communicate God's Word through evangelism. We congregate with God’s family for fellowship. We educate God’s people through discipleship, and we demonstrate God’s love through ministry. We try to maintain a balance between these five aspects of our mission. Everything we do has to contribute to one of these categories or we don’t do it. We are not interested in simply being busy. We want to be effective in doing what God has called us to do. If we were to express the five-fold mission of our church in a single statement it would read like this:

*Our mission is to love God with all our hearts, while bringing people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, incorporating them into the fellowship of the local church, teaching them to live in obedience to God’s Word, and equipping them to use their spiritual gifts in service to others.*

**Why are we doing what we do? (Our Core Values)**

There are some underlying core values that drive our ministry and explain why we do what we do. These are passionate beliefs we hold dear that motivate and guide our ministry. They are the ministry distinctives that distinguish our church from other churches. They communicate what is important to us as a congregation.

Every church has a different set of core values although there may be some common factors expressed. Joshua expressed one of his core values when he said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

While there are many things we value and are passionate about, we have chosen five as our base core values.* We express them this way:

*We value the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.*
*We value effective outreach and discipleship.*
*We value marriage and the family.*
*We value lay ministry and servanthood.*
*We value excellence in all we do.*

Core values always carry implications. If a belief is really a core value, then it will influence what you do. If it doesn’t influence what you do, then it is not a core value. If something is true, then it will have a corresponding response. Many believers and churches claim to value certain things, but their actions indicate that they really don’t.

The implications stemming from core values will vary from person to person and from church to church. They are usually introduced by the word “therefore.”

For example, if we say we value the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, then the implication of that might be - “therefore, we will expose ourselves to its teaching on a regular basis” or “therefore, we will spend time studying, memorizing, and sharing it with others.”

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* Each church will have a different set of core values. Teachers will need to insert the core values of their own church here if they are different than those expressed on this page.
If we say we value effective outreach and discipleship, the corresponding implication might be, “therefore, we will agree to be discipled by another mature believer” or “therefore, we will seek to share our faith with our unchurched friends and neighbors.”

Core values are the bedrock beliefs that stimulate us to action and influence our behavior. Their implications are widespread and multiple. They provide an anchor that keeps our church steady in the storms of time.

**Where are we going? (Our Vision)**

It is always important to ask where a train is going before getting aboard. If you don’t know where it is headed, you may end up somewhere other than your planned destination. Both churches and people need to have a clear vision of where their church is going and what it will look like when it gets there. Without vision people and organizations become disoriented and tend to wander in circles without accomplishing much.

Vision can be defined as a clear mental image of a preferable future as it can and must be. It describes what the church will look like if it accomplishes the God-given mission we outlined earlier. It looks into the future and says, “This is what it will be like when we get there.”

Moses used the vision of a “land flowing with milk and honey” to motivate the children of Israel to rise up and throw off the shackles of slavery. For forty years, that vision guided them through the wilderness until they finally arrived in the Promised Land.

A church’s vision is a mental image, a word picture in the minds of people as they look into the future. It is their dream of what their church will be like in three, five, ten or twenty years in the future. Every church planter can see in his mind’s eye a church where there is none today. Every pastor can see the church and its members functioning in a particular way. Every church member can visualize certain ministries taking place at some point in the future. It is the job of the pastor and church leadership to create a common vision of where the church is headed in the next few years and what it will look like when it gets there. Without that vision, the church will lose its orientation, stagnate, decline, and eventually die. A loss of vision among both pastors and people is a major factor for eighty-five percent of churches being in decline today.

Our church envisions the day when we will have a growing congregation built around the five-fold mission outlined in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission . . .

- One where worship is done with excellence, and with majestic, God-honoring music that encourages people to meet with God;
- One where the programs and ministries are geared to moving people progressively through the various levels of spiritual growth from conversion to maturity to ministry and on into leadership;
- One where people are trained to recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts, talents, and skills in servant ministry to others;
- One where believers have a passion for sharing the gospel with the unchurched and those outside of Christ;
- One where the Word of God is held in high regard and taught with such authority that marriages and families are strengthened, homes are restored, and children learn to obey.
**How will we get there? (Our Strategy)**

Planning and evaluation are critical components of our philosophy of ministry. Jesus taught that before starting a project it is always wise to “count the cost” and evaluate how you plan to reach your objectives (Luke 14:28). It does little good to establish goals and to create dreams unless you have an implementation plan to go with them. Action steps are required to get from where you are to where you want to be. While faith is an important part of all we do, faith without action is dead. Faith is intentional. It seeks the face of God to determine what he wants done, decides how best to do it, and then goes out and attempts to do it in dependence on God.

We try to be intentional in what we do. Just as a traveler maps out his journey marking key points along the way, so our pastor and church leaders meet regularly to pray, plan, and evaluate our progress. Our ministry plan is built around the five-fold mission outlined earlier and founded on the core values we just examined.

Our strategy calls for God’s people to be equipped and trained by the pastor and other spiritual leaders of the church to do the work of the ministry. Servant ministry and biblical stewardship are taught. Ministries and programming are developed, implemented, evaluated and adjusted according to their effectiveness in moving us toward our goals. An outward focus is maintained and multiplication is sought even while providing maintenance ministry to our people. We are constantly examining, evaluating, and adjusting what we do so that we can be more effective, more efficient, and more Christ-centered. We would rather do a few things well than many things poorly.

**When will we get there? (Our Timeline)**

Galatians 4:4,5 tells us that “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” Timing is important. God had a chronology he followed when he sent the Lord Jesus to earth. Certain events had to occur before the time was right for him to come.

If timelines were important to God, then they should be to us as well. For this reason we set one-year, three-year, five-year, and ten-year goals. We start by asking the question, “Where do we want to be and what do we want our ministry to look like in ten years?” Once that is decided, we then break those objectives down into smaller, time-sensitive segments called action steps. Some things have to be done before other parts of the plan can be implemented. Some aspects will take longer to accomplish than others, and some will take longer than anticipated.

There are a number of advantages to attaching time markers to key components of our vision and strategic plan. Timelines help us measure progress, set priorities, provide motivation, and stimulate involvement. We recognize that our times are in the Lord’s hands (Psalm 31:15). We can plan and set all the dates we want, but it is the Lord that directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9). We may not always accomplish things within the timeframes we establish, but we do believe these time markers help us evaluate our effectiveness in carrying out the Great Commission in our community.

Our spiritual leaders periodically review our strategic plan with its time markers to evaluate whether or not we are on target and to make adjustments when necessary. We try to be fluid
rather than rigid because spiritual growth and ministry development tend to come in spurts rather than in a smooth straight line.

Well, there you have it – a broad outline of our church’s philosophy of ministry. This is who we are and this is how we function. Over the next few weeks we are going to delve into some of the other specifics that were barely touched on today – things like our view of pastoral and deacon ministry, spiritual gifts, evangelism and discipleship, membership, and things of that sort.

We really do want you to know who we are and how we function because we believe informed people make better decisions and are more likely to get involved than those who are kept in the dark.

I hope you’ll be back next week as we take a look at our view of pastoral ministry – Is he to be an equipper or an enabler? Come and find out what the Word of God has to say about it.
Lesson # 2

Enabler or Equipper?
(Exploring Our View of Pastoral Ministry)

Welcome back to the second session of Class 102 in our discipleship process. We're talking about the church and what makes our church unique or different from all others. Every church has its own personality and philosophy of ministry.

It is seen in their values, programs, music, buildings, and ministries. A church's philosophy of ministry describes who it is and why it exists, what its values are, what it is supposed to be doing, who it is trying to reach, where it is going, and how it is going to get there.

A church’s view of ministry is colored by its understanding of the church. We see the church as a divinely created, living organism rather than a man-made organization. We view it as a Body rather than a building. It is composed of believers who have been placed in a mutually interdependent relationship for the purpose of ministering to and caring for each other, and for sharing the gospel with those who do not know Christ.

This view of the church has some dynamic ramifications, especially when it comes to the leadership of the church. The spiritual leader in most Baptist churches is a man known as the “pastor.” He is both the spiritual and administrative leader of the church.

Our view of the pastor is one of our distinguishing characteristics. When people visit a church, they come with certain preconceived ideas of what a pastor is and what he should do. Unfortunately, these expectations are often based on tradition and past experience rather than Scripture, and may be unrealistic or even unbiblical. The result is frustration for both pastor and people. Growth is hindered, ministry doesn't take place, and the average pastor ends up changing churches every 3-4 years.

That is not the biblical model. There has to be a better way, and we believe there is. It is found in Ephesians 4:11,12. Traditionally, most churches view the pastor as an enabler whereas the biblical model views him as an equipper.

Let me explain by looking at . . .

The Pastor as an ENABLER

An “enabler” is someone whose actions excuse or perpetuate the unhealthy behavior of another. For example, the wife of an alcoholic may call his boss and make an excuse for her husband’s tardiness. In some cases, she may take a job to supplement the family income and to put food on the table since so much of her husband’s income goes for alcohol. Her actions enable him to
continue drinking without facing the consequences of his behavior. She has become an enabler rather than a helper.

In a similar way, pastors unwittingly become enablers by stepping in and fulfilling many of the responsibilities that should be cared for by the people. Many pastors seek to carry out the “work of the ministry” themselves, and thereby enable their people to avoid their ministry obligations. Rather than helping the church, they are actually hindering the development of the church and the growth of their people.

**The Responsibilities of the Enabling Pastor**

Traditionally, churches that embrace the “enabling pastor” model list six major things for which pastors are responsible. Several of these are identical to the “equipping pastor” model we will examine shortly. The six responsibilities expected of “enabling pastors” are:

1) In I Peter 5:2 we are told pastors or “elders” are to feed the flock of God through consistent, solid biblical teaching of God's Word so as to nourish believers and stimulate spiritual growth among them. One of the qualifications for being a pastor is to be “apt to teach” (I Timothy 3:2). He is to be diligent in searching the Scripture so he can “rightly divide the Word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). Like the Apostles in Acts 6:4, he is to give himself primarily to the “ministry of the Word.”

2) In Acts 20:28a the pastor/elder is told to “take heed,” to watch over, to guard or to protect the flock of God by warning them of self-destructive behavior and/or doctrinal dangers that abound. Just as a shepherd guarded his sheep against predators that would harm them, so the pastor is to warn, inform, and alert his people of anything that might lead them astray from Christ or hurt the church.

3) In Acts 20:28b and in I Peter 5:2 pastors are to “take the oversight” or management of the church. They are to lead the flock of God serving as the chief administrative officer of the church. They are to be at the helm leading the way and directing the affairs of the church. This is to be done through loving servant leadership rather than in a harsh, dictatorial manner.

4) In Ephesians 4:12 the pastor/teacher is to “perfect the saints.” Traditionally, this has been interpreted to mean that the pastor, through his teaching and preaching, is to help people grow into spiritually mature individuals. According to this view, the pastor is seen as the main discipler in the church.

5) In addition to “perfecting the saints,” adherents of the “enabling pastor” model say verse 12 also makes the pastor/teacher responsible for doing “the work of the ministry.” This is a comprehensive phrase that includes just about everything that goes on in the church. Whatever needs to be done, it is the pastor’s job to do it or at least see that it gets done. Many pastors wear themselves out trying to fulfill this responsibility that has been placed upon them.

6) Finally in verse 12, pastor/teachers are expected to “edify the body of Christ.” The “body of Christ” is correctly understood to be the local church, and “edifying” is interpreted to
mean growing, strengthening, expanding or building up the church. The pastor is seen as being responsible for the growth of the church. If the church is not growing, it is the pastor’s fault. He’s not doing his job.

We'll come back to this crucial verse in a few minutes because it is the misinterpretation of this passage that has resulted in pastors becoming enablers rather than equippers. It also contributes to much of the frustration and dissatisfaction associated with pastoral ministry in many churches.

Right now, let's move from the responsibilities to the roles found in the enabling pastor model.

**The Roles of the Enabling Pastor**

There is a difference between responsibilities and roles. A responsibility is what the pastor is supposed to do while a role is what he actually does and how he is seen by the people. Ideally, there shouldn't be a conflict between the two, but in reality there often is.

All too often the pastor ends up trying to fill all the roles expected of him rather than carrying out the responsibilities given him in Scripture. In many churches the roles and responsibilities of pastor and people have been reversed with devastating results. Eighty-five percent of churches in America today have stagnated or are in decline, partially as a result of this role reversal.

Stop and think. What are some of the roles a pastor is traditionally expected to fill? What do people think he should do? Here’s a partial list.

- Preacher
- Teacher
- Primary Soul Winner
- Visitor of the Sick and Shut-ins
- School Administrator
- Conference Planner
- Fund Raiser
- Youth Director
- Marriage Counselor
- Financial Advisor
- Problem-Solver
- Janitor/Repairman

Tom Rainer says pastors are expected to be omni-competent.

*He is the scholar who studies; the counselor who listens and advises, the shepherd who visits; the orator who speaks; the teacher who teaches; the businessman who administers; the fund-raiser who pleads; the encourager who comforts; and the evangelist who witnesses.*

In addition to meeting the church members' multifaceted needs, he is expected to care for his own family and to be exemplary in every aspect of life. The enabling pastoral model is sometimes known as the “dependency model” because everything depends on the pastor.
We don't think this traditional model works very well because of . . .

The Restrictions of the Enabling Pastor Model

Pastoral ministry, as it has evolved in the past hundred years, all but guarantees frustration and failure. Few pastors have the time, skills, and talents needed to fulfill all the responsibilities and all the roles expected of them. Regardless of how gifted and competent they may be, they don't possess all the spiritual gifts required to meet all the needs of the congregation.

While the average pastor puts in 60-80 hours a week, there simply are not enough hours in the day for one man to do everything that needs to be done. The traditional model for pastors restricts growth and undermines the potential of the church.

There is a reason why half of all churches in America have less than 75 people in them, and three-quarters of churches have less than 100 people in attendance. A pastor can only minister to the needs of a limited number of people regardless of how hard he tries.

Moses attempted to “pastor” the children of Israel using the enabling pastor model. From early morning to late at night he sat, listened, and counseled people who came to him to enquire of God. He loved them. He helped them. He gave of himself freely to his people, but when his father-in-law Jethro saw what he was doing he told him, “the thing that thou doest is not good” (Exodus 18:17).

Moses was on the verge of burnout, his ministry was about to collapse because he had become an enabler by doing for the people what they should have been doing for themselves. He had fallen into the very snare in which many modern pastors find themselves trapped – unrealistic expectations and role reversals.

In Acts 6, a number of church members came to the Apostles who pastored the church in Jerusalem and expressed their desire to have the Apostles (pastors) assume responsibility for the care of the widows in the church. They wanted the pastors to take responsibility for a ministry that belonged to the people.

This is not unusual. After all, the pastor is often the most knowledgeable and best trained individual in the church when it comes to ministry. He has the training, the experience, and the time (or so it is thought) to carry out that ministry better than anyone else in the church. While there may be some truth to this, such situations often result in the pastor becoming an enabler while undermining his biblical role of equipper.

The Apostles recognized the inherent danger of the people’s proposal and refused to allow themselves to become entrapped in a good ministry that would undermine their effectiveness. Instead, they proposed a solution that met the needs of the widows while returning responsibility for that ministry to the people where it belonged. Rather than becoming enablers, they functioned as equippers just as God’s Word teaches they should.

The traditional model of pastors as enablers results in the needs of people going largely unmet while reinforcing negative behavior. This leads to frustration and anger. In addition, the majority of Christians experience limited spiritual growth, and often fail to develop their ministry
gifts.

By trying to be all things to all people and by trying to do everything that needs to be done, the traditional pastor is depriving his people of their God-given responsibilities and opportunities for ministry. By trying to do their job for them, he ensures his own frustration and failure while enabling the congregation to continue its non-productive behavior.

We reject the traditional role model of the pastor as an enabler. Instead, we see . . .

The Pastor as an EQUIPPER

An “equipper” is someone who trains another person to do a job. He provides him with the skills and coaching needed to be effective and fulfilled. In many cases, the equipper could do the job quicker, easier, and better than the trainee. He knows, however, that he only has limited time and skills himself. He can only do so much. By training someone else to do what he does, he can multiply himself, enhance his ministry, and start someone else on the road to a fulfilling ministry. He also knows that in time the person he trains can become just as effective as he is, if not more effective.

Jethro’s counsel to Moses was that he become an equipper rather than an enabler by training other people to do many of the tasks he was doing. That would allow him to focus on the really important things while ensuring that the needs of the people were met. The Apostles in Acts 6 followed the same course of action in dealing with the needs of the widows in the church.

The Equipper Model views the role of Pastor Correctly.

The equipper model of the pastor is based on a proper understanding of Ephesians 4:12. Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted in such a way that the pastor ended up with three jobs:

- He is to perfect the saints;
- He is to do the work of the ministry
- He is to edify the church or Body of Christ.

There are two problems with this approach. First, it doesn't work, and second, it is based on a misunderstanding of the Greek text. Let’s go back and look at the text again. It says pastor/teachers (and other gifted people) were given to the church . . .

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

There are two differences between the Greek text and the English translation. Neither of the commas found in the English translation are found in the Greek text. In biblical times, the Greek language had no punctuation marks. There were no commas, no periods, no exclamation marks, no question marks. Punctuation didn’t come until much later.
All the punctuation marks in this text and other texts were inserted by the translators when they translated the New Testament from Greek to English. By and large, they did a great job. Punctuation makes it more readable for us. But, by inserting the two commas in verse 12, the translators inadvertently changed the meaning of the verse and created an unworkable situation. The commas turned the verse into a list of things the pastor/teacher was expected to do and took the focus off of what the people are supposed to do. It transferred the “work of the ministry” from the people to the pastor. It changed the pastor from an equipper into an enabler.

Our job as pastors, teachers, and Christians is to “rightly divide the Word of truth” – to interpret it correctly, to literally “cut it straight” (II Timothy 2:15). So, let’s look at the verse the way it was written in the Greek text before the punctuation was added. In other words, simply remove the commas and this is what it says . . .

“For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

You say, “I don’t see any difference. The words are the same.” That is true, but when we return to the Greek text (before modern punctuation was added), the pastor/teacher has only ONE responsibility rather than three. He is to “perfect the saints” for the work of the ministry with the result that the church or Body of Christ is edified and built up both spiritually and numerically.

Now, it is the saints who are to do the work of the ministry, not the pastor. The edifying (growth) is the natural consequence that occurs when the saints have been adequately trained to do the work of the ministry. The saints, rather than sitting, listening, and watching are now involved in ministry, and as a result they grow spiritually, the church is strengthened, and people are saved.

You have a wonderful example of this in Acts 6 where the Apostles refused to become enablers by accepting responsibility for the widows’ ministry. Instead, they functioned as equippers by instructing the congregation that the care of the widows was the people’s responsibility, and then implemented a plan to equip the people to carry out that ministry. The result is seen in verse 7 where we are told . . .

“The Word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Christians are not saved to be spectators, but participants in the Lord’s work. We believe every believer is to be a minister and that there is a ministry for every believer. The whole church functions better when God’s people are equipped to carry out the work of the ministry. That is the way God intended it to be. He never intended for the pastor to do the work of the ministry. That is the people’s job, not his.

What role, then, does the pastor play in all this?

**The Equipper Model views the role of Pastor as Coach**

The key to understanding the biblical role of the pastor is found in the word "perfecting” in
Ephesians 4:12. It is sometimes translated as “equipping.” It means to repair, to fix, to mend, to outfit, to train or to bring to a state of usefulness. It was used of a fisherman who mended his net and restored it to a state of usefulness. It was used of a doctor who set a broken bone and restored it to a state of health. It was used of a military trainer who drilled his troops and taught them the skills they would need to be effective soldiers. And it was used of an athletic director who oversaw the training of his athletes and honed their talents so they could compete successfully in the Olympic games.

In each case, the equipper did not run the race, fight the war or do the fishing. Rather he made it possible for others to do those things, and to do them successfully. The Ephesian Four pastor doesn't do the work of the ministry for the people. Rather, he helps the people discover and develop the skills, talents, gifts, and expertise they need to do the work of the ministry themselves.

Let me illustrate this from the world of soccer. There are 5 key components that make little league soccer work:

- The players who do the playing;
- The coaches who instruct and train the players;
- The whistle-blowing referees who enforce the rules;
- The parents who cheer and supply the soft drinks;
- The director who coordinates the whole thing.

Each person has a distinctive role to play. The coach knows how to play and has played before, but no one expects him to play in place of his players. His job is to instruct his players, to teach them what he knows so they can go out and play. In the same way, the Ephesian Four pastor serves as the coach who equips the saints, teaching them what he knows so they can go out and do the work of the ministry.

He serves as a trainer telling them what to do and how to do it. He teaches and corrects. He demonstrates and explains. He reviews and encourages. He guides and directs. He lets the trainee try, then critiques his efforts, and gives additional instruction until the person is able to do the job effectively and efficiently on his own.

When the pastor tries to do the work of the ministry for the saints, he ceases to be an equipper and becomes an enabler. The result will be failure for him and frustration for the people. But when each assumes their proper roles, both find joy and fulfillment.

**The Three Levels of Leadership**

There are three levels of leadership in the business world: owner/operators, managers, and CEO’s (chief executive officer). The owner/operator does all the work himself. He orders the goods, puts them on the shelves, sells them to the customers, and pays the bills.

The manager hires and trains other people to order the goods, put them on the shelves, sell them to the customers, and pay the bills. Because he has trained others to do what he used to do, he is able to grow the business bigger, sell more goods, and attract more customers. Both he and the people are happier, and better off than before.
The CEO sets policy and hires managers who hire and train people to order the goods, put them on the shelves, sell them to the customers, and pay the bills. This results in greater expansion, more people are trained to serve, more goods are sold, more customers are attracted, and the company continues to prosper, all because the leader chose to be an equipper rather than an enabler.

The same levels of leadership exist in the church, only we would call them the enabling pastor, the equipping pastor, and the multi-staff pastor. The enabler is the owner/operator. He does all the work himself. He produces the bulletin, leads the song service, teaches the class, preaches the sermon, does the visitation, makes the reports, plans the meetings, leads the youth meetings, directs the choir, picks up the supplies for the banquet, performs the weddings, does the counseling, etc. Everything flows through him while most of the people sit on the sideline watching.

At some point, the work load exceeds his ability to get everything done and he becomes overwhelmed with all the roles and tasks involved in the work of the ministry. He then either resigns in frustration and goes somewhere else to do it all over again or he becomes a proprietor. A proprietor hires someone to work with him rather than training them to work for him. He still does most of the work himself, but now he has someone to watch him as he does it. He still orders the goods and stocks the shelves, but now he has someone to hold the ladder while he stocks the shelves. He still sells the goods to his customers, but now has someone to bag them for him. He is still on owner/operator even though he has someone else to help him. The pastor becomes a proprietor when he recruits others to help him, but continues to do most of the work of the ministry himself.

In contrast, the equipper functions as a manager. He recruits and trains people to do the work of the ministry. He gives them responsibility and holds them accountable. He provides training and counseling as needed, but trusts his people to do the work without him being there to watch over them. He provides leadership and direction as needed, but focuses primarily on helping others acquire the skills they need in order to be effective in ministry.

The multi-staff pastor serves as a CEO. He defines the vision and direction of the church while a staff of assistants oversees the training and implementation of the ministry.

Only by giving away ministry and training believers (“the saints”) to do the work of the ministry can the enabler become the equipper God intended him to be. Once released from the unrealistic expectations of doing the work of the ministry by himself, the pastor is then free to do what God intended him to do – to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. He will prosper. His people will prosper, and his ministry will prosper.

We see our pastor as our spiritual and administrative leader. He is here to teach us, to warn us, and to equip us for ministry. As we serve in ministry, both we and the church are made stronger and bigger as we grow spiritually and numerically.

In our next session, we're going to look at that other group of leaders in the church known as "deacons."
Lesson # 3

Men with Servant Hearts
(Exploring Our View of Deacon Ministry)

Thank you for being present today. It is always a joy to have people who want to explore Scripture and to learn more about our church, its philosophy of ministry, and the things that make our church unique. We want you to know who we are and how we function.

This second series of classes in our discipleship paradigm is designed to give people an opportunity to get acquainted with us, and us with them, without any obligation on anyone’s part. People can come, look, ask questions, and explore without feeling pressured into doing anything.

Some of you will like what you see and will decide to join our church. Others will need more time before making any decisions. A few may decide that this isn’t where God wants them and will move on. That’s o.k.

While we would love to have you all here, we recognize that it takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. Our main concern is that you make an informed decision when you decide if you want to be a part of this ministry.

We don't want you to come in with unrealistic expectations, because we know if you do, it's only a matter of time before you will become disillusioned and will leave. We don't want that to happen, and so we are trying to be open and up-front with you from the beginning.

Last week, we talked about the pastor and his ministry as an equiper. Today, I want to look at the important ministry role played by those people we refer to as “deacons.”

We do not have the traditional "deacon board" here. Rather, our deacons are referred to as an "advisory council" that functions within the biblical guidelines we find in God's Word.

Let's begin by looking at . . .

The ACTIONS of Deacons  (What are deacons expected to do?)

The ministry of deacons is one of the most important ministries in the church. They play a vital role in helping a church fulfill its God-given responsibilities to its people and to the community.

When asked what a deacon does or what the word "deacon" means, people often say the word refers to a leader, an administrator or the person in charge. That is not the case, however, in Scripture.
The words "deacon" and "deacons" appear only five times in our English Bibles (Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8,10,12,13). They appear more frequently, however, in the Greek text in which the New Testament was written. The word translated as "deacon" is "diakonos." It and its derivatives appear no less that 68 times in the Greek text and are variously translated by the words "minister, ministry, servant, serve and deacon."

The biblical word "diakonos" refers to a servant, an attendant or a domestic slave. It was a person who waited on tables, one who ministered or served others. It comes from the verb "diako" which means to "hasten" or "pursue" and refers to one who runs errands on behalf of another. A "diakonos" was an errand boy, someone who executed or carried out the instructions of another person. The word “diakonos” describes both who the person is and what he does. He helps and serves others.

**Deacon ministry is to be one of SERVICE**

It is a great honor and privilege to be able to serve Jesus Christ. One way we can do that is by serving others. In Matthew 23:11 Jesus said, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” He exemplified this in his own life. We are told that he came to minister (serve) rather than to be ministered unto (Mark 10:45) and took upon himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Thus, to be a servant is to emulate the Lord Jesus. There is no greater honor than to be a servant in the work of God. Who among us doesn’t want to hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful SERVANT,” when we stand before the Lord (Matthew 25:21)?

Acts 6:1-7 is a key passage for understanding the role and ministry of deacons. Some people object to using these verses saying that the word "deacon" doesn't appear here. While it is true the English word “deacon” does not appear here, the Greek word "diakonos" from which it is translated is found in verse 1 (“ministration”), verse 2 (“serve”) and again in verse 4 (“ministry”). This entire passage is talking about the work of the “diakonos” or deacons.

A problem had developed in the church that needed immediate attention. The church had grown rapidly to several thousand people and included a number of widow ladies for whom the church had accepted responsibility. They supplied them with the basic necessities of life and saw that their needs were met. Some of these elderly ladies, however, were not receiving the food, clothing and shelter they had been promised. They were being overlooked in the daily distribution of goods and services (6:1). Sadly, there were racial undertones that threatened the very existence of the church.

Some of the people came to the pastoral leaders (the apostles) and informed them of the situation. Apparently they wanted the pastors to assume responsibility for distributing food and clothing to the needy widows. They basically said, "Pastor, you do it. You fix the problem."

While it is commendable that they had such confidence in their spiritual leaders, the people apparently did not understand the role of a pastor nor their own responsibilities as lay people in the church. Like many people today, they thought the pastor should do the work of the ministry, including caring for the widows. If a widow lady was sick, then the pastor should visit her. If she needed food, the pastor should deliver it or give her money with which to buy food. If she needed a place to live, the pastor was the one to find housing for her and to deliver the rent money to the landlord.
In verse 2, the pastoral staff (the apostles) pointed out that it was unreasonable to expect them to carry out the task of caring for these women. They were certainly capable of doing so, but this added responsibility was time consuming and would take them away from their primary ministry which was prayer and the preaching of the Word (vs. 4). Pastors are wonderful men of God who give sacrificially of themselves in ministry. Many of these men labor fifty, sixty, and seventy hours a week to fulfill their biblical roles of leading, feeding, equipping, and watching over the flock of God.

If you keep adding more and more expectations upon pastors and require them to carry ever larger responsibilities for the work of the ministry, something has to give. More often than not, it will be the two things cited by the apostles – prayer and the ministry of the Word. Inadequate time for prayer and the study of the Word undermines a pastor’s spiritual effectiveness and the entire ministry of the church.

Realizing this, the apostles offered a better alternative plan for this aspect of the work of the ministry. Instead, they suggested the church select seven spiritually qualified men whom they would appoint to carry out this ministry of “serving tables” for the widow ladies (6:3).

The seven men chosen were assigned a compassionate, loving ministry. It put feet to their profession of faith. The ministry of these "diakonos" was one of service, one of helping, one of ministering to the physical, emotional, economic, and spiritual needs of the church family.

Deacons are not the leaders of the church. The pastor is the servant leader of the church and serves as the under-shepherd of Christ. Deacons are not the administrators of the church, although they may do some administrating in the course of carrying out their responsibilities. Deacons are not the decision makers in the church, although they will need to make decisions as they seek to meet the needs of others.

Above all else, deacons are servants. They are helpers. They are people who have a burden and a heart to meet the needs of others and do so by carrying out the instructions and responsibilities they receive.

**Deacon ministry is one of SHARING**

Most churches view deacons as leaders in the church, and that is generally true. The position of deacon elevates a person to a place of prominence and leadership. Deacons form part of the leadership team. They oversee certain aspects of ministry that are delegated to them by the pastoral leader(s) and the church constitution. They get to participate in ministry on a level not generally available to other people in the church. There are two primary areas in which this is true.

First, deacons get to share in ministry by assisting the pastor. Theirs is a helping ministry, a ministry of assistance. They help carry his load. They lend a helping hand. They care for some of the needs of the people so the pastor can have adequate time for prayer, study, and the ministry of the Word.

The people had asked the pastoral staff (the apostles) to oversee the ministry to the widow ladies in the church. This would involve a great deal of visitation, collecting information, gathering
goods, purchasing of supplies, and then delivering them to those in need. It was a time consuming job. There was no way the apostles could care for that ministry and still carry on their primary ministry of prayer and preaching. Thus, they (the apostles) delegated the responsibility of caring for this important ministry to the seven laymen (deacons) chosen by the church. These seven men lightened the load on their pastors’ shoulders and freed them to concentrate on other important aspects of ministry.

Tremendous demands are placed on pastors today. They are expected to do all the preaching, a lot of the teaching, and most of the visiting. They are to visit the sick, bury the dead and baptize the new believers. They are to comfort and counsel the troubled and grieving, fix broken marriages, give financial advice, pick up kids for Sunday School, mow the lawn, paint the building, sweep the floor, and fix whatever is broken. So many demands are placed upon the pastor he is forced to "leave the Word of God and to serve tables." (2)

This is where deacons come in. They can assist their pastor and help lift his load by accepting whatever responsibilities are delegated to them. A deacon with a servant's heart will say, "Pastor, let me teach that class for you." "Let me visit those folks for you." "Let me fix the broken pipe or paint the auditorium for you." That is what deacon ministry is all about. It is running errands for someone else. It is doing a job for another person so he can do something that is more important.

A second way deacons get to share in ministry is by advising the pastor. The Bible lays out strict standards for deacons. Only those who are spiritually mature and godly are to be afforded the opportunity to serve as deacons. For this reason, wise pastors will seek godly counsel from their deacons. They will use them as a sounding board for new ideas. They may look to them for advice concerning how best to handle problems. Some of these men will have expertise in areas in which the pastor is lacking. The Bible says “in multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 24:6). These godly men will serve as advisors, counselors, and confidantes to their pastor. That does not mean the pastor will always follow their advice, but he will be wise to at least listen to what they say. It is because of the nature and function of the deacons that we refer to them as the Advisory Council.

Deacon ministry is one of SUPPORTING

Deacon ministry is a team ministry. The pastor and deacons form the leadership team of the church. The pastor is the God-appointed leader of the church. He is the team leader, and the deacons are part of his leadership team. They are there to assist, to give advice, and to help him carry out the ministry of the church. As team players, deacons are to be supportive and loyal to their pastor so long as he remains faithful and true to the Scriptures and to the Lord. They should never have hidden agendas nor harbor secret disagreements. They must view the pastor as God’s man and their spiritual leader, and seek to cooperate with him in carrying out the vision and ministries God has laid upon his heart.

While the position of deacon is a New Testament phenomena, there is a beautiful picture in the Old Testament that illustrates the relationship between pastors and deacons. It is found in Exodus 17:12, where Israel was engaged in battle with the Amalekites. Moses stood on a hill overlooking the battlefield. As long as he held his hands aloft in prayer and supplication to God, Joshua and the Israelites won. But when his arms grew heavy and dropped to his sides, the
Amalekites began to win the fight. Seeing that Moses needed help, Aaron and Hur stood on each side of Moses, lifted his arms to heaven and supported him until Joshua and the people of Israel had won the victory.

Deacons can do the same thing for their pastor. They should be there to uplift, to encourage, to strengthen, and to stand with their pastor when he becomes weary or discouraged. They should be sensitive to his needs and seek to strengthen him with words of support, encouragement, and offers of help. Godly men like that perform a valuable service to God and the church as well as to the pastor.

**The ACCOUNTABILITY of Deacons**

Some churches are known for changing pastors every few years. One of the reasons for this stems from conflict over who is accountable to whom. Are deacons accountable to pastors or are pastors accountable to deacons? Do deacons work under the pastor’s supervision or do pastors work under the deacons’ supervision? One can see how disagreement over these issues can lead to a parting of the way. On the other hand, agreement can lead to harmony and mutual respect.

**The APPOINTMENT of deacons**

The selection of deacons is a congregational matter. In Acts 6:3, the apostles instructed the church to "look ye out among you seven men" and in verse 5 we read, “the saying please the whole multitude and THEY CHOSE . . ."

It was the church, and not the pastors (the apostles) who decided which men had servant hearts. We are not told how the selection was made, but seven godly men were soon chosen for the task of caring for “serving tables” by ministering to the needs of the widows in the church. Most churches today, including our church, choose their deacons during the annual meeting in January. This is done by means of a ballot vote and is so arranged that one-third of the deacons are chosen each year to serve three-year terms.

Because they are elected by the members of the church, these men are ultimately accountable to the church and must function within the guidelines set forth in the church’s constitution. But please also notice in Acts 6:3, that while the deacons were chosen by the congregation, their ministry assignments were given to them by the pastoral leaders. It says, "YOU CHOOSE them . . . and WE will APPOINT them over this business."

The church selected the deacons, but the pastoral leadership decided what they would do, what roles they would fulfill, and what functions they would carry out. The pastors were the spiritual and administrative leaders of the church. The deacons worked under the supervision of these pastors and were accountable to them for the ministry assignments they received from them. They considered it a great honor and privilege to be part of their team and gladly accepted the tasks assigned to them. Their job was to serve, to carry out instructions, to meet needs, to free up the pastoral staff so they had more time for prayer, study, and the ministry of the Word. That is what deacons are supposed to do. Remember, the word "diakonos" refers to a person who carries out the instructions of another.
There should never be any conflict over who is in charge or who works for whom. In Scripture, deacons always work under the supervision of the pastor and are accountable to him as well as to the church. The pastor is also accountable. His accountability is to the church and to the Lord who placed him in that church.

**The AUTHORITY of deacons**

Although being a deacon is a servant ministry, it often carries a great deal of authority. The seven men in Acts 6 were given the responsibility of caring for the widows in the church and seeing that their needs were met in a loving, equitable manner. Whenever an assignment is given, authority must also be granted in order to carry out the assigned task. These men had authority to gather funds, make purchases, and decide which needs should be met. They oversaw the distribution of large sums of money. They had the power to decide who got food, clothing, and shelter, and who didn’t.

It should be remembered, however, that the only authority they possessed was delegated to them. They have no authority in and of themselves. The only authority the church delegated to them was the authority to serve in the position of a servant. Any other authority they had was delegated to them by the pastoral leaders when they gave them their ministry assignments.

In Acts 6:6, we see the pastoral leaders laying their hands upon these seven men with servant hearts and praying for them. The act of laying their hands on them symbolically delegated whatever authority they would exercise in their ministry to the widows. It also served as a reminder that deacons function under the authority and supervision of the pastor and not the other way around.

Deacons are accountable to the pastor (and the church) since he is the one who gives them their ministry assignments. If a man chafes under that accountability structure, then he either does not understand the biblical role of a deacon or does not have a servant's heart. Either way, he is not ready to assume the ministry responsibilities of a deacon and should not be elevated to that position.

**The ASSETS of Deacons** (What are the qualifications for being a deacon?)

The selection of deacons is critical to the health and welfare of every church. Deacons can make or break a church just as a pastor can make or break a church. For this reason it is vitally important that only men who meet the Scriptural qualifications be chosen to serve as deacons. The qualifications for deacons are listed in Acts 6:3-5 and I Timothy 3:8-12.

*A deacon must have a SERVANT’S heart*

The primary qualification of deacons is found in the meaning of the word "diakonos.” A “diakonos” was a servant. He was a slave, someone who ran errands and carried out assignments given to him by another person. His only job was to please his master by doing whatever he was assigned to do. He had to have a servant’s heart.
Only men who exhibit a servant heart should be considered for the position of deacon because that is what deacons do – they serve others. One of the qualifications for being a deacon in Acts 6 is to be “full of the Holy Ghost.” But how do you know when a man is “full of the Holy Ghost”? Just watch what he does and how he acts around people. If he is full of the Holy Spirit he will have a servant heart and will be constantly serving people.

People with servant hearts willingly accept and carry out whatever ministry assignments they are given. They serve under the direction and supervision of those in spiritual leadership over them without complaining. They are teachable and supportive of their pastor. They exhibit a concern and a compassion for those to whom they minister. Ideally, they are already involved in some area of ministry.

We look for men who see themselves as servants rather than as rulers. Otherwise they will chafe when asked to perform the ministries for which they have been chosen. We require anyone who is being considered for the position of deacon to first complete a deacon-training seminar entitled "Ministers of Mercy." It sets forth many of the same biblical principles we are sharing with you today, only in greater detail.

**A deacon must be SPIRITUALLY mature**

Deacons should be men of highest integrity and morality. They are going to have access to church funds, and may at times need to deal with issues relating to the women of the church. Only godly, spiritually mature men should be trusted with this vital ministry. One inappropriate act can ruin people’s lives, their marriage, and the testimony of the church.

Acts 6:3 gives us a short list of four qualifications for deacons. They are to be Spirit-filled, honest, wise, and full of faith. An expanded list of qualifications is found in I Timothy 3:8-10 where we find deacons are also to be serious minded (grave), truthful (not double-tongued), sober (not given to wine), and should hold “the faith” with a pure conscience.

These eight qualifications deal with these men’s testimony, truthfulness, temperance, trustworthiness, and theology. Verse 10 tells us they are to be *proved* before being allowed the privilege of being a deacon. In other words, over a period of time they must demonstrate through their attitudes, aptitudes, and actions that they are spiritually mature and will do a good job in this important ministry position.

There is one more requirement deacons must meet . . .

**A deacon’s SPOUSE must also be godly**

Scripture focuses attention on the wives of deacons. They play a vital role in the servant ministry of their husbands. Like their husbands, they need to meet certain spiritual qualifications before their husbands are eligible to serve as deacons. It is very important that churches take a close look at the woman a man is married to when considering him for deacon ministry.

Her husband will be involved in a ministry of service to others and may be away from home more than other husbands. Can she willingly accept his absence without feeling resentment?
She may have access to private information. Can she keep it confidential? Can she be satisfied with not knowing what went on in the deacons’ meeting? Is she willing to go with her husband as he visits the widows in the church? Does she have the same servant heart he has?

First Timothy 3:11 tells us the wives of deacons are to be dignified (grave), discreet (not a slanderer), disciplined (sober), and dependable (faithful). In addition, she is to be his only wife (12). If either he or she has been divorced, he is not qualified to be a deacon. Their home must be exemplary including their children.

A deacon ought to have a strong marriage and a godly home life. He should be the spiritual leader in his home. His wife and children should willingly follow his servant leadership. Whether we like it or not, deacons live in glass houses just like pastors do. People are watching to see how he and his family live the Christian life. This is what gives him credibility as he counsels those to whom he ministers. This will be lacking if either he or his family fail to demonstrate the spiritual maturity and/or the servant heart that is needed to be an effective deacon.

In God’s plan, being a servant, an errand runner or one who lifts the loads of others is the greatest and highest privilege a person can have. In Matthew 12:11 Jesus said, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant."

So, that gives you a quick overview of our view of deacon ministry. We value and highly prize these men and their servant ministry to our church. They enable our pastor to be the man of God the Lord intended him to be. He would never be able to accomplish all that he does without the help of these godly men that work as part of his ministry team.

Next week, we are going to take a look at the “Heartbeat of God” and our view of evangelism and discipleship.
Lesson # 4

The Heartbeat of God
(Exploring Our View of Outreach and Discipleship)

I want to thank you all for being present for this fourth session in our discipleship program as we get better acquainted with our church, what it believes, and how it functions. Our goal is to help you understand our church and what makes it unique.

In our first lesson we said there are five primary purposes for which our church exists. These are:

1) We exist to celebrate God's presence. We refer to this as worship.
2) We exist to communicate God's Word. This is known as evangelism.
3) We exist to congregate with God's family. That's fellowship.
4) We exist to educate God's people. That's discipleship.
5) We exist to demonstrate God's love. That's ministry.

Today I want to focus on the areas of outreach and discipleship. It is important for you to understand our philosophy of ministry when it comes to these important areas.

We have adopted a policy that says... "The philosophy of this church shall be one of multiplication rather than maintenance. Disciple-making and spiritual growth shall be primary goals."

These ideals are the driving forces within our ministry. We believe outreach and discipleship are the very heartbeat of God. He sent his Son, the Lord Jesus, into the world “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). God loves lost people and he wants them to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and into a personal relationship with him.

Before returning to heaven, the Lord Jesus issued the marching orders of the church. He laid out the goals for the church and the process for achieving those goals. This is commonly known as the Great Commission.


The key passage to understanding the Great Commission is Matthew 28:19 where it says... "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The word "teach" is the Greek work "matheteusate." It refers to a disciple, a student, a learner or a person who patterns his life after that of his teacher. In other words, he becomes like his teacher.
The idea is that we are to make disciples by bringing people into such an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that they begin to think, act, and respond the way Jesus Christ would in the same situation. It is not enough for a person to make a decision for Christ or a mere profession of faith. We want them to go on to spiritual maturity and true biblical discipleship.

Our focus is on disciple-making rather than mere decision-making. It all begins with . . .

**Our Church’s Philosophy of OUTREACH**

Viewpoints are critical. The way we see things determines what we will do and how we will respond in particular situations. Belief always governs behavior. This is true of organizations, governments, businesses, families, individuals, and churches. Our perspective of what is important motivates us to do the things we do. A church’s focus will be on the things it values and will influence the ministries it emphasizes. This is especially true in the area of outreach, evangelism, and discipleship.

**Our focus is on Multiplication**

There are basically two kinds of churches in the world. *Maintenance churches* focus most of their time and energy on ministering to the people who already attend their services and are members of their congregations. The emphasis is usually on programs rather than people, and on conserving what they already have rather than on expansion and outreach to new people in the community.

The average church loses approximately ten percent of its congregation every year (2% to death, 3% to job transfer and 6% to reversions). Thus, these churches are frequently part of the 85% of churches which are not growing in America. More often than not, they tend to decline regardless of what they do because they are focused on maintenance rather than growth.

*Multiplication churches*, on the other hand, focus a significant portion of their time and energy on ministering to the people who are not yet part of their present congregations. Their goal is to bring as many people as possible into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and into responsible membership with their churches.

Approximately 30-40% of the people, ministries, and resources of these multiplication churches will be focused on reaching new people for Christ in their community. Multiplication churches believe there must be a balance between harvesting and reaping on the one hand, and plowing and sowing on the other. They believe the biblical emphasis, however, is on harvesting rather than sowing.

For example, in Matthew 9:37 Jesus said, "the HARVEST truly is plenteous, but the labourers [or reapers] are few." He then went on and asked us to pray to “the Lord of the HARVEST, that he will send forth labourers into his HARVEST.” (38)

Farmers don't go into the harvest fields to plow and plant. They go to reap and gather that which has already been planted. Many churches are focused on “sowing the seed” when they should be
engaged in reaping the harvest. While it is important to minister to the needs of the people we already have, we must catch a vision of the harvest and feel the heartbeat of God for lost souls. According to Scripture, the Lord is not pleased with sowing without reaping (Matthew 13:3-9), fishing without catching (Luke 5:4-11), a banquet table without guests (Luke 14:15-23), a tree without fruit (Luke 13:6-9), lost sheep that are not found (Matthew 18:11-14), ripe harvests that are not gathered (Matthew 9:36-38), and proclamation without response (Matthew 10:14).

While there are a number of Scripture passages that deal with sowing seed (Matthew 13:3; 1 Corinthians 9:11, etc.), it must be remembered that sowing eventually leads to a harvest (John 4:37). The whole purpose of sowing is to gather the bounty resulting from the planting. Sadly, many “maintenance churches” have stopped sowing and thus have no harvest to reap. At our church we seek to do both, for without sowing there is no reaping, and without reaping there is no harvest, and without harvesting there is no growth and no life.

You cannot have a healthy church without maintaining a balance between multiplication and maintenance. You have to care for the people you already have (maintenance) while continuing to reach out to those who are unchurched and unsaved in the community (multiplication). A multiplication ministry will focus about sixty percent of its energies on caring for its present congregation and about forty percent on outreach and evangelism.

Our focus is on reaching our Target Audience

One of the basic questions our philosophy of ministry forces us to ask is, “Who are we trying to reach?” “Who are we trying to win?” “Who makes up our target audience?” Are we here simply to minister to ourselves and to serve Christians only? While that may be true of some churches, it does not meet the biblical criteria.

In the Great Commission, Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Then in Matthew 28:19 he commanded us to "teach (or make disciples) of all nations" or “people groups.”

The Great Commission requires us to have a target audience or focus group, and that target audience is the unsaved and unchurched people of the world. The church does not exist for itself. It is not a fortress in which Christians can hide from the world. Rather, it is to be a training center where reapers can be taught to harvest the souls of men.

No one church can possibly reach everyone in the entire world by itself, but the combined efforts of many churches have the potential for doing so. The same is true of a community. No one church can reach everyone in a given community. The needs are too great and too varied for a single church to meet by itself. Thus a church must focus on reaching specific groups of people within its ministry area.

A church in a major metropolitan area would be expected to focus its attention on reaching the people who live within a 5-mile radius rather than everyone in the city. A Spanish-speaking church would be expected to focus on reaching people in its area who speak Spanish. A congregation near a college campus would be expected to focus on reaching students as well as town folks.
Without a clearly defined target audience and ministries designed to address their particular needs, a church will try to reach everybody and will end up reaching almost no one. While the doors of the church should be open to anyone who wants to attend regardless of their skin color, language, culture or race, no single church can meet the tastes and needs of everyone in the community. So, the question remains – “Who are we trying to reach?”

Every church has to answer that question for itself. Different churches will have different answers and different target audiences. God uniquely shapes people and churches to reach different types of people. In most cases, the easiest people to reach are people who are most like the people who already attend the church. They are people who match the existing culture of that congregation. Unless they have significant cross-cultural gifts, pastors and churches tend to attract who they are rather than who they want.

The purpose of targeting is not to be exclusive, but to be effective. Just as a fisherman uses different lures and baits depending on the type of fish he is trying to catch, so a church must tailor its programs and ministry to attract different audiences. If you try to attract everyone, you will end up with a hodge-podge of ministries that are unattractive to almost everyone. You don’t have to change your message or water it down, but you do have to show how it is relevant to the people you are trying to reach, and translate it into terms they can understand.

Our focus is on workable Methods

Methodologies are constantly changing as society changes. While our message never changes, the way we communicate that message is constantly undergoing review to see if we can be more effective in sharing the Good News with people.

In the past, the primary method of outreach was through door-to-door visitation and special meetings such as revival services and Bible conferences. Today, those methods are among the least effective means of communicating the gospel in some communities, and impossible in other areas. Only about one percent of people who start attending a church do so because a stranger knocked on their door and invited them to come to a church service.

In the past, the pastor was the primary contact person and main soul-winner in the church. Today, only about six percent of people attend church because of the pastor while eighty-seven percent of people begin attending because a friend, relative, associate or neighbor invited them to come with them.

We use a variety of methods to contact people including direct mail, phone ministries, radio and television spots, newspaper advertisements, web sites, e-mail, evangelistic Bible studies, door-to-door visitation, and other outreach events.

Networking (sometimes called “web evangelism”) is one of the most effective means for reaching our target audience of unchurched people. The average Christian has at least twelve unchurched (and possibly unsaved) people in his/her web of friends and acquaintances. We usually have greater influence with these people than we do with strangers. By sharing our faith and inviting these people to our church, some of these people can be won to Christ and brought into the church.
Each time a person professes faith in Christ, it opens up a whole new web of unchurched people that we can reach. Networking might look something like this:

![Networking in Action Diagram]

**Networking in Action**

Every believer who attends our church is encouraged to participate in one or more of our outreach ministries and share their “story” (testimony) with the people in their web of influence.

The goal of our outreach ministry is to bring unchurched people to the point where they will make a decision for Christ and receive him as their personal Savior. That, however, is only the FIRST step in a two-step process.

**Our Church’s Philosophy of DISCIPLESHIP**

Discipleship can be defined as one believer helping another believer make biblical change toward Christ-likeness. According to Romans 8:29, God’s ultimate goal is to conform every believer to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus. He wants us to think, act, and behave the way Jesus Christ would in similar situations. He wants us to have the same values as he has. He wants us to be like him. The discipleship plan we are about to discuss is designed to start that process.

*The goal of Christian discipleship is Maturity*

In the Great Commission, Jesus did not command us to make decisions, but to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Some form of the word “disciple” appears 260 times in the New Testament. As was pointed out earlier, a “disciple” is a student, a learner, a follower or an imitator of his teacher. He takes on the characteristics, values, and lifestyle of his master.
A disciple is not just someone who makes a profession of faith in Christ, but rather it is a person who goes on to embody the biblical values and lifestyle taught by Jesus in the Scriptures.

Instead of staying spiritually immature, he/she grows to spiritual maturity. It is not enough to make a profession of faith and to get baptized. Discipleship goes a step further in Matthew 28:20 where Jesus said, "teaching them to observe [or do] all things whatsoever I have commanded them." Discipleship involves the living out of the principles and teachings of Jesus Christ in our daily relationships with other people.

One of the evidences of spiritual maturity is responsible involvement in the membership of a local church. While we rejoice every time a person gets saved, baptized, and joins our church, we want them to grow spiritually to the point where they are actively using their spiritual gifts in ministry to others both inside and outside the church. We want them to become reproducing members of the Body of Christ.

The question is, “How do you do that?” The answer is found in our discipleship strategy.

**Our strategy for Christian discipleship is our Methodology**

It takes time for people to grow to spiritual maturity. Discipleship and growth are processes rather than events. They are sequential and ongoing. Each step is built upon another. Isaiah 28:10 says, “Precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.”

As you learn one biblical truth, you will be able to put that together with another truth as you continue to expose yourself to God’s Word and to his people. The Apostle Paul spoke of “milk,” “bread,” and “meat” issues with “milk” being easily understood truths, “bread” being those things that are little more difficult to understand, and the “meat” being the deeper things that require a fuller knowledge of what the Bible teaches.

Our discipleship program is intentional in nature. Rather than relying on people sitting in church and picking up pointers here and there, we have developed a four-level discipleship process designed to help them progressively move through the various stages of spiritual growth from conversion to maturity to ministry to discovering their life mission. You might think of it as an ascending stairway taking you to progressively higher floors in a building.

We like to think of it in terms of a campus curriculum in which people move through several levels of spiritual development until they become fully functioning followers of Christ. We refer to these as our 100, 200, 300, and 400 level classes. Each level has one or more series of classes designed to provide people with the spiritual nourishment that will help them grow stronger in their faith in Christ.

**100 Level Classes**

The 100 Level of classes is the starting point in our discipleship paradigm. Everyone who comes to our church is plugged in at this starting point. We want people to know who Jesus Christ is, how they can have a personal relationship to him, and who we are as a church.
There are two series of classes on this elementary level of discipleship. The first is called “Starting the Journey” and consists of six sessions that explain how a person can have his sins forgiven and be in right relationship with God. It then provides some basic orientation to the Christian life so a person can begin to understand what he has done in accepting Christ as Savior.

The second series of classes is the one you are in right now. It is called, “Catch the Vision” and basically lays out our church’s beliefs, practices, and philosophy of ministry. It is designed to help you become better acquainted with our church with the hope that you will like what you see and will want to partner with us.

There are several things we are trying to accomplish on these series of classes. First and foremost, we want to bring people to a saving faith in Christ and help them gain assurance of their salvation. We want to see them take the first step of obedience for believers (baptism), and become active members of our church. We want to enroll them in a small group ministry where they can develop friendships and find encouragement. We want to see people begin to get involved in some entry-level ministry. We want them to begin developing a biblical value system, and to lay the foundation for future leadership development.

Our focus in this first level is on gathering – Thus, the emphasis is on evangelism and transparency. That is why I just laid out for you what we want to accomplish in this class. There are four things which tell us when we have reached our goal: the person is attending one or more of our Sunday services, he has trusted Christ as his Savior, he has been baptized and added to our membership, he is engaged in some type of preliminary ministry, and is eager to learn more about Christ and the Bible. We’ll talk more about this in coming weeks.

200 Level Classes

Each level of our discipleship paradigm is designed to produce certain characteristics in people’s lives. If the focus of our 100 Level classes is on gathering, the focus of the second level of our discipleship paradigm is on growing. We want to help you move forward in your relationship with Jesus Christ and God by providing you with the biblical guidance you will need. Here the emphasis is on building you up spiritually (edification), and helping you to reach godly maturity. The Bible says that we are to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). This series of classes are designed to help you do just that.

There are three sets of classes on the 200 Level. The 201 classes (“Growing through Godly Habits”) deal with seven habits every believer needs to develop in order to grow spiritually. The 202 classes (“Getting the Big Picture”) are a survey of five key books in the Bible that help us get a grasp on the Word of God and its overall teachings. The 203 classes (“Seeing Life from God’s Perspective”) look at nine areas of life from God’s vantage point and provide us with a clearer understanding of how God sees our lives and the world around us.

People are also encouraged to move beyond the entry-level ministries they may have become engaged in at Level One. We want to see people growing, maturing, and expanding their ministry skills as they move through the various levels of discipleship.

We know people are buying into this second level when we see certain things happening in their lives. They are acquiring a basic understanding of the Bible. They are beginning to participate
in one of the small group ministries of our church. They enjoy being around other believers. They are spending time in prayer and Bible reading. They may be starting to give a tenth of their income to the Lord’s work. Each of these is a sign of life and growth that will promote spiritual maturity if they continue doing it.

300 Level Classes

The 100 Level classes focus on gathering. The 200 Level classes focus on growing, and our 300 Level classes focus on giving of ourselves in ministry to others. There are four things we want to accomplish at this level. We want to help people develop a servant heart and a teachable spirit. We want them to understand how God has shaped them for ministry. We want to provide them with training for specific ministry tasks, and we want to plug them into ministry that is consistent with how God has gifted them.

To do this there will be a series of interactive classes in which people explore what the Bible says about ministry, and how God creates, saves, calls, gifts, authorizes, commands, prepares, rewards, and holds them accountable for ministry. Then they will learn how God has uniquely designed them for ministry. No two people are exactly alike. Each has different gifts, passions, skills, personalities, and life experiences that God uses to mold them for a particular ministry. In the course of that study they will come to understand their unique ministry shape or design.

The 300 Level classes provide opportunities for people to explore ministry possibilities that are open to them in our church. They can sit in on various ministries to observe, and can even experiment with different ministries until they find the one that fits them. Ongoing training is available to help people hone their ministry skills.

By the time people complete the 300 Level classes, they will know how God has shaped them for ministry. They will have a particular ministry in view, and will be eager to get going. Not only will the church have a team of willing workers, but there will be several people who are ready to lead in a variety of ways.

400 Level Classes

The fourth level in our discipleship paradigm focuses on going. Mission (not missions), lies at the heart of discipleship and leadership. God is on a mission of calling a people out of the world unto himself. You and this church are part of that mission. God’s mission should be your mission as well. Level Four classes are designed to help people understand what God is doing in the world, how they fit into it, and how they can be a part of it both locally and globally.

There are several things we want to accomplish on this fourth level of discipleship. We want to help people solidify the Christian worldview that they have been developing throughout the course of this discipleship ministry. We want to train them to share their testimony more effectively. We want to prepare them to coach others through the four levels of this discipleship paradigm. We want to prepare them to serve at the highest levels of leadership in the church. We want them to have a heart for missions at home and abroad, and we want to help them surrender to full-time Christian service. We understand that everyone isn’t going to reach this level of commitment, but some will – You may be one of those people.
Much of the training on this level focuses on providing people with the skills they need to communicate the gospel effectively with non-Christians in our society and even in other places. We want them to see how they fit into God’s redemptive plan, how to approach people with the gospel, and how people come to Christ. They will learn how people grow spiritually and how they can help them do that. They will learn to survey the spiritual needs in the United States and around the world. In essence, they will learn to become world-class citizens.

Well, there you have it – our view of outreach and discipleship. It may sound a little scary to you at this point, but don’t let that bother you. God is at work in your life and he will help you become the person he wants you to be.

Our invitation to you is simply this – Come and join us as we journey through the four levels of our discipleship paradigm. The whole thing can be summed up in four words:

- **Gathering** – Level One
- **Growing** – Level Two
- **Giving** – Level Three
- **Going** – Level Four

I hope you’ll come back next week as we explore what our church believes. This is perhaps the most important class in this series because it looks at our understanding of the Bible and what it teaches. I hope you’ll be here for it.
Lesson # 5

This We Believe
(Exploring Our Church’s Teachings and Beliefs)
Acts 2:42

Welcome to this fifth session of Catch the Vision. I hope you are beginning to understand who we are and how we function. We want to be transparent and open with you so you can make an informed decision about whether you want to unite with us or not.

When looking for a church home, it is important to check out the beliefs, doctrines, and teachings of the churches under consideration. All churches are not the same. There are tremendous differences among congregations.

Is the church a Bible-teaching church? Does it believe the Bible is inspired of God? That is, does the church believe the Bible was given by God or that it is merely a collection of ancient writings? Is the Bible used regularly when the pastor preaches and when the teachers lead their classes? Does it serve as a guide for the daily lives of the people in that church or is it largely ignored?

What does the church believe about God, about Christ, about sin and salvation, about eternal life, and about the church itself? Are the teachings of the church clearly based on the Bible? Are they willing to give you a doctrinal statement that outlines their beliefs?

These are important questions to ask when seeking a church home. In Acts 2:42 we read these words about the 1st century Christians . . .

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

The word "doctrine" appears at least fifty-six times in the Bible. It simply means "teaching" or "belief." When we use the word "doctrine," we are referring to what a person or church believes and teaches. The early church was known for its “doctrine” or teaching. It is referred to here as “the apostles’ doctrine” because the apostles were the ones who taught God’s truth to the newly-established church.

We want you to know what we believe. We want you to be familiar with what we teach. That's why we print and distribute our Articles of Faith to anyone who wants a copy. Anyone can either request a copy or just stop by the information table and pick up a copy.

There are three areas I want to cover with you today: our doctrine, our distinctives and our denomination (association).

Let's begin by looking at what we believe concerning . . .
Our DOCTRINE as Baptists

Bible doctrine is extremely important because beliefs govern both behavior and destiny. What you believe determines where you end up. The person who honestly believes the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, and that he died on the cross of Calvary as our sin substitute, was buried, and rose again to new life will go to heaven whereas a person who does not agree with that teaching will die and go into a Christless eternity in hell. It is not the intensity of one’s belief that counts. You can be deeply sincere, and yet be sincerely wrong. It is content rather than sincerely that charts our course through life, and governs the shore upon which we land.

Our Doctrine is Bible-based

By that I simply mean that the Bible is foundational to everything we believe. It is the source for every thing we teach. Every sermon, every Sunday School lesson, every young people’s message is taken from the Bible. We are here to teach what the Bible says on the various issues of life and faith.

Baptists have historically been known as "people of the Book" - that is of the Bible. Our views of God, of man, and of the church are rooted in what this book teaches. We see the Bible as the ultimate authority and final court of appeal for determining both our beliefs and practices.

The teachings of the Bible are fundamental to our faith. The word "fundamental" means basic or essential. In church circles the word "fundamentalist" is used to refer to those churches and Christians who embrace the basic teachings of the Word of God. While everything taught in the Bible is important, there are five fundamental doctrinal truths that are considered absolutely essential. These include . . .

- The inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Word of God.
- The deity of Jesus Christ, that he is God.
- The death, burial, and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Salvation through faith alone in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ
- The imminent rapture of the church and the return of Christ to set up his kingdom on earth.

Because we believe these fundamental biblical teachings, we are sometimes referred to as “fundamentalists.” The term "fundamentalist," however, has become warped and its meaning twisted in recent years so that it now refers to anyone who holds a radical position. It is often associated with being an extremist or even a terrorist. Because of this many fundamentalists now prefer the more accurate term "biblicist."
Our Doctrines in Brief

Our beliefs are outlined in our church constitution under the section labeled, “Articles of Faith.” We sometimes refer to it as a “Statement of Faith” or as our “Doctrinal Statement.” I brought along a copy for each of you to look at today. These are yours to keep. We want you to know what we believe.

The “Articles of Faith” or the “Statement of Faith” is a brief summary of what a church believes the Bible teaches. It doesn’t cover everything, but it usually gives enough detail that a person can discern what that church believes and where it stands on many important issues. If a church is reluctant to give you a copy of its constitution and/or Articles of Faith, it may be because they either don’t want you to know what they believe or because they do not embrace the teachings of the Word of God. In either case, you need to look for a different church.

Doctrinal statements vary in length and detail. Some will be quite brief while others will contain considerable information. Some include multiple scriptural proofs upon which individual beliefs are based, and others will have just a few Bible references. Our doctrinal statement covers twenty-one subjects taught in the Bible and includes the Scriptural backing for each. Let’s take a moment to look through the list of subjects below.

- The Scriptures
- God
- Jesus Christ
- The Holy Spirit
- Creation
- Satan
- The Fall of Man
- Salvation
- The Security of the Saints
- The Local Church
- Biblical Separation
- Civil Government and Religious Liberty
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Progressive Sanctification and Christian Living
- Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage
- Human Sexuality
- Lawsuits between Believers
- The Destiny of the Righteous and the Wicked
- The Resurrection, Ascension, and Related Future Events
- Israel and the Church

A copy of our doctrinal statement can be found at the end of this chapter on pages 47-54. You can read through each statement at your leisure. I’d be happy to answer any questions you might have. (Teachers in each church will need to insert information about their particular doctrinal statements rather than using the one at the end of the chapter.)

Obviously we could have gone into much greater detail and covered many other subjects, but that would have require literally volumes of paper and few people would take the time to read it.
Let's move along to some other areas which help to define our church. I'm referring to what we call . . .

Our DISTINCTIVES as Baptists

There are many things that make our church unique and distinctive. One of our distinguishing features is the fact that our church is Baptist in name and practice.

At a time when some churches are changing their names to hide their identities, we are quite comfortable to be a Baptist church. Research indicates that the vast majority of unchurched people are not turned off by the name of a church, but rather by the failure of believers to live what they profess. Eighty percent of the formerly unchurched said the church name had little or no influence upon their joining a particular church. Only four percent indicated that a denominational name had a negative influence on them.

There are more than 90,000 Baptist churches in the United States. They are the largest non-Catholic group in America with over 50,000,000 members and have more than twice as many attendees on any given weekend as any other identifiable Protestant group.

Being a Baptist church distinguishes us from churches in other denominations. What makes us different, however, is not our name, but the beliefs we embrace.

What is a “Distinctive”?

A “distinctive” is that which sets you apart or makes you different from others. Baptists hold certain doctrines, beliefs, and practices that are not embraced by some other groups of churches. For example, Baptists believe in the biblical practice of baptizing only those who have personally accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, and that immersion is the only form of biblical baptism. In contrast, many non-Baptist churches baptize infants and other individuals without requiring them to be saved, and they use a variety of methods for doing this including sprinkling and pouring. That difference is one of the things that sets us apart and make us distinctive from those other churches.

These distinctive or unique beliefs and practices are known as "Baptist Distinctives" because they tend to be embraced primarily by Baptist churches. Some churches embrace some of these same positions, but are not considered to be Baptists because they reject others. There are also some churches that still have the word “Baptist” in their name even though they have changed their positions and practices and are not really Baptist churches. These churches should remove the word “Baptist” from their names to avoid confusion.

What are the Baptist Distinctives?

There are eight major Baptist distinctives. The acrostic B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S makes them easy to remember.
"B" stands for biblical authority.

As already stated, we accept the Bible as the inspired, authoritative, and sufficient guide in all matters relating to our beliefs and practices. Everything needed for life and godliness can be found in its pages. While many churches base their practices on past tradition or human reasoning, Baptists rely on the Scriptures as their final authority in matters of church and life.

"A" stands for the autonomy of the local church.

We believe each local church is autonomous and self-governing, and that it is accountable directly to God and its own membership. We do not recognize the authority of any individual, group or denomination to control or direct the affairs of individual churches. Each church is free to draw up its own constitution, select its own pastor and officers, regulate its own membership, choose its own missionaries and conduct its own affairs.

"P" stands for the priesthood of all believers.

We believe there is only one mediator between God and man – the man Christ Jesus. This is clearly stated in I Timothy 2:5 where we are told, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." A "mediator" is a go-between, someone who represents another. We believe that every Christian has direct access to God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:16). We don't need a pastor or priest to pray for us. Each one of us are priests and we can go directly to God with our needs (Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

"T" stands for the two ordinances - Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Table.

An "ordinance" is something done as an act of identification and obedience. It is not a means of grace nor a way to curry favor with God. It is done simply because Christ instructed us to do it and as a way of identifying ourselves as his followers.

We believe there are only two ordinances: The first is believer's baptism, which is to be administered only to those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. The mode or form of baptism is immersion (submersion) because it pictures our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The other ordinance is known as "The Lord's Supper" or communion. This is a memorial observance or a way of reminding ourselves that Jesus Christ died for our sins. Again, it conveys no special merit on those who participate in it.

"I" stands for individual soul liberty.

This simply means that each individual is free to interpret the Bible for himself. He cannot be forced to accept or believe something against his will. No individual, church or government can impose its views on its people. While every person can interpret the Bible for themselves, only those who are in agreement with the teachings of a particular
church should be received into membership. If an individual is in agreement with us, we encourage that person to unite with us. If they are not in agreement with us, we encourage them to seek out a church with which they are in agreement.

"S" stands for saved church membership.

As a Baptist church, we believe in a regenerated or saved membership. Just as the Lord added to the church such as were being saved (Acts 2:47), so we accept into membership only those people who make a public profession of having been born again through faith in Jesus Christ.

Infants, children, and those who have not yet been saved are encouraged to attend the services of the church, but may not unite with it until such time as they put their faith and trust for salvation in Jesus Christ alone. Membership is a privilege rather than a right.

"T" stands for the two biblical offices in the church - pastor and deacon.

We believe there are only two primary biblical positions of leadership in the church, those of pastor and deacons. The pastor is the spiritual and administrative leader of the church, overseeing, directing, managing, teaching, and protecting the flock. He is also known in Scripture as a "bishop" or an "elder."

Deacons are godly men who are chosen from among the membership of the local church to serve as assistants and advisors to the pastor. Theirs is a ministry of serving and helping the pastor carry out the functions of the ministry. Both the pastors and deacons are chosen by the members of each local congregation.

"S" stands for separation of church and state.

We believe God established both the church and the civil authority of the State. The State is God's representative in civil matters, and the church is God’s representative in moral and spiritual matters. We believe that the church is responsible to support, honor, pray for, and submit to government authority.

But we also believe that state's authority ends at the church door and that the government has no more right to control the affairs of the church than the church has to control the government. While we recognize the government’s vested interest in health and safety issues, we believe that interest should be reasonable rather than restrictive or detrimental to the work of the church.

It should be recognized that there are some Bible-teaching churches that embrace all of the above positions, but prefer not to use the name "Baptist." Many “Bible churches” would fall into this category as well as some churches that see the name “Baptist” as a hindrance to their ministries. While we would disagree with their decision, we recognize their prerogative to take that position.
Our DENOMINATION as Baptists

Baptists believe there is strength in numbers and unity. Individuals, pastors, and churches may choose to come together periodically for encouragement, training, and the furtherance of the gospel around the world. It is not unusual for groups of churches to band together in local, state, regional, and national fellowships, associations, and even denominations.

It is our belief that these relationships should always be voluntary in nature, and should never exercise authority over any local church. This has not always been the case, especially in regard to denominational bodies such as the American Baptists Convention, the National Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, and other groups.

Our church is an independent Baptist church

We are not part of any denomination. History demonstrates that denominations often seek to control the church and to impose their authority over local churches. In some cases, the denomination owns the church property and even chooses the pastor for individual churches. This violates the autonomy of the local church.

Our church is totally independent and autonomous. Our congregation decides what it believes, what ministries it will have, how its funds are spent, who its pastor and deacons will be, and who can be a member. We are accountable to God, and not to some hierarchal board in another city.

Our church cooperates with other independent Baptist churches

Being an independent Baptist church does not mean that we are isolated from all other churches, nor that we think that we are better than other churches. We believe that it is important to identify with other groups of believers who believe as we do. Affiliation with other groups of like-minded Christians provides opportunities for mutual encouragement, fellowship, and participation in joint ministries which they would not be able to undertake alone.

From time to time, pastors and people from various independent Baptist churches in the area get together for prayer, Bible study, and outreach ministries such as camps, youth activities, and revival meetings. Each church, pastor, and individual decides for himself whether or not to participate. No one is obligated to do any thing he does not want to do. These gatherings are entirely voluntary in nature.

Similar opportunities to partner with other independent Baptist churches exist on state, regional, and national levels as churches come together in loose affiliation with other independent churches. The Baptist Bible Fellowship, the Southwide Baptist Fellowship, and the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC) are examples of this. Each has hundreds of independent Baptist churches which fellowship together in a loose confederation.

We do not believe we are the only church that has the truth. There are many other fine churches across the country, but there are also many that have abandoned the truth and are no longer functioning within the parameters of Scripture. Our goal is simply to acquaint you with who we are and what we believe. We want you to be informed believers, Christians who understand what their church teaches and why.
I hope you will be back next week as we take a look at spiritual gifts and our view of “God’s Gifted People.”
Sample Doctrinal Statement

1. Concerning the Scriptures

We believe in the authority and sufficiency of the Holy Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, and that it is inspired by God, both verbally (every word) and in its entirety, in its original writings (Second Timothy 3:16-17), and is therefore infallible and inerrant in all matters to which it speaks (Proverbs 30:5-6; John 17:17; Revelation 22:18-19). It was communicated through Spirit-controlled men (Second Peter 1:19-21; Acts 3:21; Hebrews 1:1-3), and is preserved in the totality of the existent manuscripts.

We believe the Bible is the complete revelation of God’s will for mankind and is sufficient for all matters pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4) with salvation being its chief end (Second Timothy 3:15; First Peter 1:10-12; John 5:38-39). We believe the Holy Scriptures are the true center of Christian unity and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creed and opinions shall be tried, and therefore it should serve as the Christian’s supreme and final authority in faith and practice.

2. Concerning the True God

We believe that there is only one true and living God (Deuteronomy 6:4,5; Jeremiah 10:10), infinite (Psalms 147:5), eternal (Isaiah 57:15), self-existent (Exodus 3:14), holy (Isaiah 6:1-5), perfect (Matthew 5:48), and spirit (John 4:24). He is a personal being, the creator, sustainer and ruler of the universe (Genesis 1-3; Psalms 2). God is a "Tri-unity", three persons in one Godhead. There is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Matthew 3:16-17; Second Corinthians 3:14; John 1:1; John 5:18; Acts 5:3,4). Each is equal in essence, power, glory, and every divine attribute (John 10:30; John 17:5; Philippians 2:5-6; First Corinthians 8:6), while executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption (John 3:16; John 15:26).

3. Concerning Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. He existed from all eternity, and is co-equal with the Father and the Spirit (John 1:1,14; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17). He took upon himself the form of man when conceived in a miraculous manner by the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-38). From conception, he was one person, possessing two distinct natures: divine and human. He is true God and true man (Matthew 22:23). In his earthly ministry he never ceased to be God. He laid aside the independent use of his divine attributes, yet he did not give up these attributes (Philippians 2:5-7; John 20:28; John 1:48; John 2:9).

He lived a sinless life that was not tainted with human depravity (Second Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 1:19), and then died, shedding his blood on the cross, and thus making a vicarious atonement for our sins, and fully satisfying the just demands of a holy and righteous God (First John 2:2). He arose bodily from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven (Acts 10:38-40; First Corinthians 15:4; Acts 1:9-11) where he now sits at the right hand of the
Father, interceding as our High Priest (Hebrews 12:2; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 3:1), and preparing a place for us. We believe there is a future visible, personal, bodily return of Christ when he will come to rapture those who have trusted in him for their salvation, set up the throne of David, and establish his kingdom on earth (Acts 1:11; First Thessalonians 4:13-18). Jesus Christ is in every way qualified to be a suitable, compassionate, and an all-sufficient Savior.

4. Concerning the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God, equal with the Father and the Son, and, therefore, of the same substance and nature (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 13:14; Acts 5:3-4; Hebrews 9:14; Luke 1:35), and that he was active in the creation of the universe. We believe that He convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-9), bears witness to Christ, and to the truth of the gospel in preaching and testimony (John 15:26; John 16:13), and is the supernatural agent of the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (First Corinthians 12:13). He seals (Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30), fills (Acts 4:31), guides (Romans 8:14), teaches (John 14:26), witnesses to (John 14:17), sanctifies (John 16:13; John 17:17), aids the believer (Romans 8:26; First Corinthians 12:4-11), and indwells every true child of God empowering them to do the will of God for the glory of God (John 14:17; Ephesians 5:18).

We believe the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows spiritual gifts on every believer at the time of conversion (Romans 12:3-8; First Corinthians 12:4-13, 28-31), and that these gifts are to be used to serve others through the Body of Christ (First Peter 4:10). God uniquely uses evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip believers in the local church so that they can do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11,16).

We believe that the sign gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing were temporary in nature and ceased with the completion of the Scriptures. We believe that the ultimate deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection, although God frequently chooses to answer the prayers of believers for physical healing (First Corinthians 1:22; 13:8-10; 14:21-22; Hebrews 2:3-4; James 5:14-15; First John 5:14-15).

5. Concerning Creation

We believe the Genesis account of creation is a literal, historical account and is not to be understood figuratively nor as an allegory or myth (Genesis 1:1, 2:25; Hebrews 11:3; John 1:3 Colossians 1:16-17; Psalms 33:6-9; Nehemiah 9:6; Revelation 4:11); that the six days of creation in Genesis chapter one, were twenty-four hour solar days (Exodus 20:11; Exodus 31:17); that all animal and vegetable life was made by the direct creative act of God and that they bring forth only "after their kind" in accordance with God's established law, (Genesis 1:11,12,21,24). Man was created in God's image by the direct act of God without any evolutionary process and did not evolve from any previous or lower forms of life (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 19:4). All men are descended from the historical Adam and Eve, first parents of the entire human race. (Genesis1, 2; Colossians 1:16-17; John 1:3)
6. Concerning Satan

We believe that Satan (the devil) is a literal and personal individual created by God as an angelic being who through pride and rebellion fell from his original estate and became the enemy of God (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:14-17). He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), man’s great tempter, the unholy god of this age, the ruler of all the powers of darkness, and the author of sin. He is a murderer from the beginning, the father of lies, and the accuser of the brethren (John 8:44; Revelation 12:10). There is absolutely no truth in him. He is a deceiver and blinds the minds of men to the end that the light of the gospel and glory of Christ may not dawn upon them (Second Corinthians 4:4). Demons are other angels who sinned and are now Satan’s helpers. These evil spirits have the ability to make people sick and try to cause them to disobey God. Christians cannot be possessed by demons but they can be influenced by them. Satan was defeated by Christ on the cross and is destined to an everlasting punishment in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

7. Concerning the Fall of Man

We believe that man was originally created in the image of God in innocence and without sin (Genesis 1:27, 31; Ecclesiastes 7:29). The first man, Adam, voluntarily chose to disobey God and thereby sinned, incurring a curse upon himself and the whole of his posterity (Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 5:12,15-19; First Corinthians 15:22) so that all humanity is now sinful by state, disposition, and willful act (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-18; John 3:5; Galatians 3:22). Each is born with a sinful nature and is thoroughly a sinner in thought, word, and deed. Having sinned, man incurred the punishment of both physical death and spiritual separation from God. He is alienated from God and is utterly unable to remedy his lost condition being totally depraved and spiritually dead (Ephesians 4:18; 2:1,5). He can only obtain salvation and spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. (Acts 16:31; Titus 3:5).

8. Concerning the way of Salvation

We believe that man, because of his sin and lost condition, needs a Savior and cannot get to heaven on his own. Therefore, the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated, wholly of grace, and is made possible only by the substitutionary, atoning death of God’s son, Jesus Christ, who having fulfilled all the righteousness of the Law died in the sinner's place (Romans 3:21-26; First Peter 1:18-19; 2:22-24). Only his shed blood and resurrection can provide the ground for our justification before God. This salvation is wholly apart from any works or good deeds performed by man, and is received through genuine repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23) with both repentance and faith being gifts of God extended to the sinner in grace (Acts 5:31; Ephesians 2:8,9). Those who trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross are born again into the family of God by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, and become the recipients of a new divine nature. They are declared righteous before God on the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them (Second Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:17,19; Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:24-26; 4:22-25; First Corinthians 1:30). Because his salvation is dependent upon God and his promises, the believer's salvation is secure, he himself being sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. He can never be separated from God (Philippians 1:6; Ephesians 4:30; John 10:27-28; First John 2:19; Jude 24-25).
9. Concerning the Blessings of Salvation

We believe that each who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ inherits all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:32). He has a righteous standing before God (Romans 3:24-26; 4:22-25; 5:17-19; Colossians 1:13); forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14), adoption into God's family having been reconciled to God (Galatians 4:5,6; Ephesians 1:5). He is baptized into the universal Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), and awaits to reign with him in his millennia kingdom, being a joint-heir of the Father's riches (Galatians 4:7; Colossians 1:12; Ephesians 2:7). He is in-dwelt presently by the Holy Spirit who acts as teacher, guide, and intercessor (John 14:16,17; Romans 8:26), and is thereby a partaker of the divine nature (Second Peter 1:4; Romans 8:9), and has access to commune with God through his only High Priest, Jesus Christ (First Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15-16).

10. Concerning the Security of the Saints

We believe that every true believer at conversion enters the protective graces of his heavenly Father. His salvation is made eternally secure by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13,14; 4:30), and the joint efforts of the Father and the Son (John 10:28,29; First Peter 1:5; Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:35-39). The quality of salvation being eternal, and immediately received at the time of conversion argues against the view that a believer can lose his salvation. It is the privilege of believers to have a present and continuing assurance through the testimony of God's Word that they possess salvation (First John 5:10-13; John 5:24). Scripture clearly forbids the use of this assurance as a license to sin (Romans 6:1-23; 13:13-14; Galatians 5:13; Titus 2:11-14).

11. Concerning the Local Church

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head, and all regenerated persons are members. We also believe the Scriptures teach that the visible representation of this Body of Christ is a local church (Matthew 18:17; Acts 5:11) with an organized congregation of believers who have been immersed upon a credible confession of faith in Jesus Christ, having two offices (pastor and deacon), sovereign in polity, and banded together for work, worship, the observance of the ordinances, and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel; governed by God's laws (Ephesians 4:22,23); and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by the Word (Ephesians 4:11; First Corinthians 12:4). The Holy Scriptures clearly outline the qualifications, claims, and duties of pastors and deacons, and teach that these officers are limited to men only (Acts 6:1-6; First Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

We believe the local church has the power and right within itself to confess its own faith in accordance with the New Testament (First Timothy 3:15; Revelation 2,3); and that each congregation recognizes its own democratic, self-governing structure as its highest authority for carrying out the will of the Lord Jesus Christ (First Timothy 3:1; Matthew 18:15-18; Acts 6:3-5; First Corinthians 5:4,5,13).

We believe the true mission of the local church is to glorify God through fulfilling Christ's Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39) and Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20) in each part, no part being less important than any other in doing so.
We believe the Scriptures teach the following distinctives: the sole authority of the Bible for faith and practice (Second Timothy 3:16,17), the autonomy of the local church (Colossians 1:18), the individual priesthood of every believer (First Peter 2:5,9), two symbolic ordinances – baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:41,42), individual sole liberty to determine one’s beliefs (Acts 5:29), a saved church membership (Acts 2:47), two offices – pastor and deacon (Philippians 1:1), and the separation of church and state (Mark 12:17).

12. Concerning Ecclesiastical Separation

We believe the Scriptures teach the Christian should be separated from all forms of apostasy, heresy, and theological compromise as exemplified in ecclesiastical organizations such as the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the charismatic movement, and those who teach contrary to the Word of God and this statement of faith.

We believe Scripture teaches that true believers are to: evaluate all teachings of men to determine their compliance with Scripture, to identify those whose teachings do not conform to the Word of God, to rebuke those who embrace such false teaching, to have no fellowship with them, to withdraw from them, to receive them not, and to separate ourselves from them. We believe ecumenical evangelism which involves apostates violates the principles taught in God’s Word (First John 4:1; Romans 16:17; Titus 1:13; Ephesians 5:11; Second Thessalonians 3:6; Second John 10, 11; Second Thessalonians 3:14; Second Corinthians 6:17).

13. Concerning Civil Government and Religious Liberty

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment for the interests and good order of society (Romans 13:1-7); and that those in authority are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored, and obeyed (Matthew 22:21; Titus 3:1; First Peter 2:13,14; First Timothy 2:1-3).

We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to him alone in all matters of faith. Each local church is to be an independent entity that is autonomous in nature, and able to decide and govern its own affairs, free from interference by any denominational or political authority. Yet, it is also proper for biblical churches to partner and work together in order to promote the cause of Christ.

Disobedience to civil authority should only come when the civil authority demands action in opposition to the revealed will of God (Acts 4:18-20; 5:29), as the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Lord of the conscience, and the coming King of kings and Lord of lords on the earth (Matthew 23:10; Psalm 2:1-12; 72:11; Romans 14:9-14).

Also, that church and state should be separate (Matthew 22:21); having no ecclesiastical group or denomination being preferred above another by the state; nor imposing taxation for the support of any form of religion; having a free church in a free state being the Christian ideal; each has different functions and is to fulfill its own duties, free from dictation or patronage of the other. (Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 5:28-29; Acts 15:1-35)
14. Concerning Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe in two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, also known as communion. We believe that Christian baptism is the single immersion of the believer in water (Acts 8:36-39; Matthew 28:19), done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism follows conversion and has no atoning merit (Acts 10:47,48). It is a picture identifying the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12,13). Baptism is an act of obedience to Christ’s command and is a prerequisite to church membership. It is denied to infants who can neither repent nor believe in Christ (Matthew 28:19,20).

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a divinely ordained memorial, void of atoning merit, commemorating the substitutionary death of Christ, whose body and blood are symbolized by the bread and fruit of the vine (First Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20). The Lord's Supper is extended to all Christians who have solemnly examined themselves for known sin prior to partaking according to the scriptural instructions (First Corinthians 11:23-34).

These ordinances should be observed under the authority of the local church and are only symbolic memorials, and are not to be regarded as a means of salvation.

15. Concerning Progressive Sanctification and Christian Living

We believe that sanctification is progressive having its past, present and future aspects (Ephesians 5:26-27). There is the past aspect which was accomplished by the blood of Christ, and frees the believer from the penalty of sin (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:1:10). There is the present aspect which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God which frees the believer from the power of sin (John 14:26; 17:17; First Peter 1:22; Psalms 119:11, 133). There is the future aspect of sanctification which is realized at the believer's glorification which frees him from the presence of sin (Second Peter 3:13; Revelation 19:8,9). Then and only then does the believer lay aside his Adamic nature (Philippians 3:21; First Corinthians 15:42-54).

We believe the Scriptures teach that every believer should be separated unto God from sin, striving at all times for holiness of life and good works which are the proof and result of genuine saving faith (Ephesians 2:10), and by the aid of the Holy Spirit should walk in Christian love exhibiting qualities such as honesty, integrity, kindness and forgiveness.

We also believe the believer’s body is “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” and therefore should be used to glorify God (First Corinthians 6:19-20); furthermore believers are not to love the world nor the things of the world (First John 2:15, but are to flee sinful desires, avoid every kind of evil, and refrain from questionable practices which would harm one’s testimony, offend one’s brother, or fail to glorify God.

Believers in Christ are to “grow in grace” (Second Peter 3:18) through prayer, Bible reading, and by “putting off” the “old man” with its sinful desires and habits while “putting on” the “new man” with its God-centered focus, and by renewing their minds through the application of biblical truths to their daily lives (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:8-10).
16. Concerning Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

We believe men and women are spiritually equal in position before God; yet He has ordained distinct and separate functions for each in the home and church.

We believe God ordained marriage and the family as the foundational institution of human society, and that the only legitimate marriage is a sacred and permanent covenant relationship between one man and one woman, symbolizing the union of Christ and His Church. The husband is to be the servant leader in the home and is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, and the wife is to submit herself to the Scriptural leadership of her husband as the church submits to the headship of Christ (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-25).

We believe God hates divorce and intends a marriage to last until the death of one spouse (Malachi 2:14-16). Divorce is due to the hardness of individual hearts and has no biblical grounds except in cases of sexual infidelity or abandonment (Matthew 5:32; 19:8,9; First Corinthians 7:15). Remarriage is permissible when there is genuine repentance and every effort to reconcile has been exhausted or when one spouse dies or remarries. Both divorced, and divorced and remarried persons may hold positions of service in the church, but shall be ineligible for the offices of pastor and deacon (First Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6).

17. Concerning Human Sexuality

We believe God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity is to be engaged in outside of the marriage of a man and a woman. Any form of child molestation, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, bisexuality, incest, pedophilia, or pornography is a sinful perversion of God’s gift of sex. We believe God disapproves of and forbids any attempt to alter one’s gender by surgery or appearance. (Genesis 2:22-24; 19:5,13; Leviticus 18:1-30; Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 1:26-29; 7:2; First Corinthians 5:1; 6:9; Gal. 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-23; First Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4)

We believe children are a heritage from the Lord, and that human life begins at conception, and that the unborn child is a living human being. Abortion constitutes the unjustified, unexcused taking of unborn human life. We reject any teaching that abortions of pregnancies due to rape, incest, birth defects, gender selection, birth or population control, or the physical or mental well being of the mother are acceptable (Psalm 127:3; 139:14-16; Isaiah 44:24; 49:1,5; Jeremiah 1:5; Exodus 21:22,23; Luke 1:44).

18. Concerning Lawsuits between Believers

We believe Christians are prohibited from bringing civil lawsuits against other Christians or the church to resolve personal disputes since it is better to suffer wrong than to harm the name of Christ. Disputes and disagreements should be submitted to the spiritual leaders of the church for resolution through binding arbitration in accord with the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and the guidelines of this church’s policies and procedures manual. We do believe, however, that a Christian may seek compensation for injuries from another Christian’s insurance company as long as the claim is pursued without malice or slander (First Corinthians 6:1-8; Ephesians 4:31,32).
19. Concerning the Righteous and the Wicked

We believe that there is a radical and essential difference between the righteous and the wicked (Malachi 3:18; Genesis 18:23; Proverbs 12:26; Romans 6:15-18); that only those who are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are truly righteous in God’s sight (Romans 1:17; 6:16; First John 2:29); while all who continue in impenitence and unbelief are in his sight wicked and under the curse of sin (Isaiah 55:5,6; John 3:36; Romans 6:23); this distinction holds among men both in life and after death, and results in the everlasting happiness of the saved and the everlasting conscious suffering of the lost in the lake of fire (Proverbs. 14:32; Matthew 25:34,41; John 8:21; Revelation 20:11-15).

20. Concerning the Resurrection, Ascension, and Related Future Events

We believe that Christ arose bodily from the grave (Matthew 28:6,7; John 20:27; First Corinthians 15:4); that He ascended bodily to the Father's right hand (Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 3:21); that he is our great High Priest (Hebrews 12:17; 4: 14-18; 5:9,10); that he is coming again (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; James 5:8); and that when he comes, he will come to rapture his church before the "tribulation period" (First Thessalonians 4:13-5:11).

We believe in the resurrection of the righteous dead at the time of his coming (First Corinthians 15:42-44, 51,54; First Thessalonians 4:15-18); and that those living in Christ will be transformed (First Corinthians 15:51-53; Philippians 3:20,21; First Thessalonians 4:13-18). Furthermore, we believe that Christ will reign on earth upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:29,30; Isaiah 9:6,7) for a thousand years (First Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 20:1-4; Isaiah 11:1-5), after which the wicked will be forever punished in hell (Revelation 20:11-15).

21. Concerning Israel and the Church

We believe that Old Testament Israel is to be distinguished from the New Testament Church. Yet both Jews and Gentiles must be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. We believe in the literal fulfillment of the Scriptural prophecies and promises that foretell and assure the future restoration of Israel as a nation. God in His sovereign selection has chosen Israel as his eternal covenant people, though they are now dispersed because of their disobedience and rejection of Christ. They will be regathered in the Holy Land and, after the completion of the Church, will be saved as a nation at the Second Coming of Christ. (Genesis 13:14-17; Jeremiah 16:14-15; Ezekiel 37; Romans 11:1-32; 10:12-13)

This Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself is the sole and final source of all that we believe. We do believe, however, that the foregoing Statement of Faith accurately represents the teaching of the Bible and, therefore, is binding upon all members. All literature used in this church and its related ministries shall be in agreement with this Statement of Faith.
Lesson # 6

God’s Gifted People
(Exploring Our View of Spiritual Gifts)

Welcome back. It is a joy to have you with us in this sixth session of Catch the Vision as we continue examining our church and how it functions. I want to begin this session by asking you to complete two sentences any way you would like. There are no wrong answers. Here they are:

*If no restrictions were placed upon me, and I were free to get involved in any type if spiritual activity in a church I wanted to, I would choose to . . .*

*What we need in churches today is . . .*

As soon as everyone is finished, let’s take a moment to see how you answered. (Allow time for people to share their responses.)

Do you know what you just did? You just described your spiritual gift! The way you answered the questions above is a strong indication of the gifts God has given you. Each of us sees particular needs based upon the spiritual gifts God has given us. One person sees one thing while someone else sees something entirely different. That is because they are looking through the lens of their particular spiritual gift.

At our church we believe God has provided every believer with one or more spiritual gifts. We also believe those gifts are designed to enable that person to fulfill the ministry function God has for him/her within the Body of Christ. God did not save us to be spectators, but participants in the work of the ministry. The work of the ministry is not something that is done TO the saints or FOR the saints. Rather, the work of the ministry is done BY the saints.

People often view ministry as something we hire a pastor or church leaders to do. Other times, ministry is viewed simply as serving on committees, taking up the offering or baby-sitting in the nursery. While these things are important in and of themselves, ministry involves much more. We’re talking about laymen being the primary care givers in the church. We believe God has summoned every believer to involvement in a ministry function within a local church.

Ministry, however, can be one of the most frustrating things in the world unless you are plugged into a role for which you have been gifted by God. Then it becomes the most exciting, the most thrilling, and the most satisfying thing you can imagine. Many of the problems and much of the frustration people experience in churches results from not knowing what their spiritual gifts are or from not being involved in the area of ministry for which their gifts are designed.

We want to help you find your ministry gift and then plug you into that area of ministry God has designed for you.
The DEFINITION of Spiritual Gifts  (What is a "spiritual gift?")

When discussing spiritual gifts or any other biblical subject, it is important to pay close attention to the scriptural text and to engage in careful exegesis so as to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretation of this vital subject. Taking passages out of context or ignoring the rules of grammatical interpretation can lead to unfounded conclusions and false teaching.

Our goal is to set forth a balanced, biblical position on this issue. Spiritual gifts are crucial to developing a healthy, growing, biblically functioning church. They provide us with the insights and the enablement needed to carry on the work of the ministry the way God intended.

Spiritual gifts considered Negatively

Sometimes it is easier to understand a subject by identifying what it isn’t than what it is. Doing so removes extraneous material from consideration that might otherwise clutter the landscape and cause confusion. By removing the “brush” we can focus more clearly on what is left.

Spiritual gifts are not the same as the "gift of the Spirit." The "gift of the Spirit" deals with the indwelling presence and person of the Holy Spirit whereas spiritual gifts deal with the perceptions and power the Holy Spirit bestows upon believers. All believers have the same Holy Spirit living within them from the moment they trust Christ as Savior, but their spiritual gifts will vary from person to person.

Spiritual gifts are not the same as the "fruit of the Spirit" mentioned in Galatians 5:22,23. The "fruit of the Spirit" is character traits or virtues produced in the lives of believers by the Holy Spirit as they yield control of their lives to him. They include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. Natural talents are aptitudes and abilities people are born with that make certain tasks easy for them to do. We talk about a person being a "natural leader," a "born teacher" or a "gifted singer." Talents are natural abilities whereas spiritual gifts are spiritual abilities. Talents are received at the time of physical birth, spiritual gifts are received at the time of your spiritual rebirth.

Spiritual gifts considered Positively

If spiritual gifts are not the same as the “gift of the Spirit,” the “fruit of the Spirit” or as natural talents, then what are they? The answer is found in the Word of God. The phrase "spiritual gifts" is found in I Corinthians 12:1 and in 14:1,12. In many Bibles, the word "gifts" is in italics showing that the word does not appear in the original Greek text but was inserted by the translators.

The phrase, "spiritual gifts" is a translation of the Greek word "pneumatikon." It is composed of the word "pneuma" or "Spirit" and the ending "ikon" which means "to be controlled or characterized by.” The verse could be translated this way . . .
Now concerning spiritual things . . .

or

Now concerning the things controlled or characterized by the Spirit.

This verse tells us the source and the quality of spiritual gifts. They come from God through His Holy Spirit and are to be exercised under his control.

In I Corinthians 12:4, the word "gifts" appears again. This time the word translated "gifts" is the Greek word "charismaton." We get our English words, "charisma" and "charismatic" from this word. It comes from the root word "charis" which means "grace."

A "spiritual gift" then is a special gift of God's grace (a "grace gift") bestowed on the believer by the Holy Spirit to enable him to see specific needs and empower him to meet those needs effectively and efficiently. These gifts of God’s grace provide individuals with insights and abilities to help others and to fulfill ministry roles within the context of the local church. They are supernatural aptitudes bestowed on a person for the specific purpose of enabling them to carry on the work of the ministry.

"Spiritual gifts" involve both the "ability" to do something and the "capability" to do it as well. We might define "ability" as the skill required to do a particular task such as playing a musical instrument or using a computer. A "capability," on the other hand, refers to the capacity needed to develop the skills required to do a particular task. You may lack the "ability" to teach just now, but you may have the "capability" to develop effective teaching skills. Spiritual gifts often need development as we learn to use them effectively.

A "spiritual gift" results in special insights. Your spiritual gift colors everything you see. The way you look at things and the needs you perceive are influenced by your particular spiritual gift. It creates a special sensitivity to a given need that others may not even see, and then motivates you to do something about that need.

The reason other Christians don't seem to be concerned about the same needs as you is because they have gifts that are different from yours, and their gifts cause them to see needs that you may not see. We believe God bestows these “charismatons” (gifts of his grace) on his children as he sees fit, and then places those individuals in local churches where their gifts are needed.

It should be noted that while we believe in spiritual gifts, we are NOT part of the charismatic movement and would not want to be identified with it or its teachings in any way.

The DESIGN for Spiritual Gifts

God is the giver of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:11 tells us he divides them “to every man SEVERALLY has he will.” The word “severally” means “individually” or “uniquely.” In other words, God uniquely designed you and your gifts with a specific purpose in mind. There is a job he wants you to do, and he has equipped you with the insights, abilities, and capacity to do it.
Scripture teaches us that there are four reasons for which God gives these gifts of his grace:

**Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of Manifestation.**

In Mark 16:17,18, Jesus referred to a number of supernatural "signs" or supernatural displays of his power that would be manifested following his ascension to heaven. These included, but were not limited to, the casting out of demons, speaking with new tongues, taking up serpents, drinking poison and healing the sick. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 adds such things as the working of miracles, and the interpretation of tongues. These are part of what are known as the "sign gifts" or the "manifestation gifts."

The manifestation gifts were supernatural or miraculous displays of God's power. They were given to verify or prove something. According to Mark 16:20 their purpose was to confirm the ministry and the message of the apostles. Christianity was a radical departure from Judaism and in order to validate its authenticity, God bestowed the manifestation gifts to prove that both the men and their message were from God (Hebrews 2:3,4). There are numerous examples in Scripture of these “sign gifts” being used, such as when Paul called down God’s wrath upon Elymas the sorcerer in Acts 13:11,12.

We believe the manifestation gifts were temporal in nature and ceased to exist with the completion of the writing of God's Word. These gifts were necessary prior to the completion of Scripture to prove that the message was really from God. Once the Bible was finished, it became the standard by which we validate a man and his message. The purpose for which these manifestation gifts were given was fulfilled, and they ceased to be given.

**Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of Ministry.**

First Peter 4:10 says, “as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

Notice first of all, that every believer is a gifted individual. Each believer has received one or more spiritual gifts from God. Peter used the term “every man” to designate the universality of giftedness among those who profess to know Christ as Savior. Paul tells us the same thing in First Corinthians 12:7 where he said "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to EVERY man to profit withal." Again in verse 11 he said, "the selfsame Spirit dividing to EVERY man severally [or individually] as he will." No one was left out. No one was overlooked. ALL believers, including each one of us, have received one or more spiritual gifts from God. You are one of God's gifted people.

The second thing to notice is the purpose for which God bestows these “charismatons” (gifts of his grace) upon people. Peter says, "as every man hath received the gift, even so MINISTER the same one to another." Spiritual gifts are designed to enable you to carry out the work of the ministry God has given you. Gifts provide us with the insight to see a need. They then motivate us to action to do something to meet that need. In other words, spiritual gifts enlighten us, energize us, and enable us to get involved in various ministries that will meet specific needs in the lives of people and of the church. Ministry and service lie at the heart of the gifts God gives.

The third thing to be noticed is our obligation to use the gifts God gives us. He says we are
"stewards of the manifold grace of God." We are responsible to use the grace gifts God entrusts to us. We are not to ignore them, let them lie dormant or refuse to use them. We are to develop them to the fullest and to use them to achieve the purpose for which they are given. God’s purpose in giving these gifts to us is to involve us in ministry and service to others. Gifts are never to be used for personal benefit or for selfish purposes.

Romans 12:6-8 lists some of the "ministry gifts" God gives today. These are sometimes referred to as “motivational gifts” since they spur us to action. They are different than the “manifestation gifts” mentioned above. They include the gifts of prophecy, ministry [or helps], teaching, exhortation [or encouragement], giving, ruling [or administration] and mercy-showing. We'll talk more about these later. The thing to be understood here is that spiritual gifts are given to enable us to minister to each other effectively.

**Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of Maturity.**

Ephesians 4:12 tells us the pastor/teacher is to "perfect the saints for the work of the ministry." The word “perfect” means to equip, outfit, train, and prepare people to do a particular task. It describes a fisherman mending a net, a doctor setting a broken bone or a coach training an athlete. The idea is to return something to a state of usefulness or to hone a person’s skills for maximum effectiveness. It carries the idea of fully developing or bringing a person to the place of maturity so they can perform a task well. You do this by helping them grow in their faith and Christian walk, and by helping them to discover, develop, and deploy their spiritual gifts so they can fulfill the ministry role for which they are gifted.

The task for which people are to be equipped is referred to in verse 12 as the “work of the ministry.” This phrase can be translated as “works of service,” “the work of ministering,” “equipped for service,” or “their appointed service.” Ministry and serving lie at the heart of Christianity. God has gifted his people to do the “work of the ministry,” and all that this entails in a local church. The people are the ministers of the church while the pastor is the administrator of the church. He leads and teaches the people what to do and how to do it. They then exercise their spiritual gifts, skills, and natural talents to carry out the various tasks and assignments that are given. There is great joy and satisfaction in doing so when you are doing what God gifted you to do.

One of the results of people exercising their gifts in ministry is "the edifying of the Body of Christ" (verse12c). The word “edify” means to strengthen, to build up or to grow to maturity. As the individual believer exercises his or her spiritual gift in ministry to others, he or she grows spiritually and becomes more spiritually mature. As he/she exercises his/her gift in ministry to others, their needs are met and they grow spiritually as well. As more and more members of the church begin to exercise their gifts in ministry, the entire church matures and grows spiritually. Healthy churches and healthy believers exercise their gifts in ministry to one another.

**Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of Multiplication.**

Edification includes not only the idea of spiritual growth, but of numerical growth as well. As people in a congregation exercise their gifts in ministry, it (the church) becomes stronger and healthier. Hurting people are attracted to healthy churches that have caring ministries. Some of those people will come to know Christ as Savior as their needs become known and are met
through the exercise of other people’s gifts. This in turn, attracts more hurting people with the result the church grows numerically. You see, reproduction is a function of a healthy body.

Throughout the book of Acts, the church expanded rapidly as people exercised their gifts in service to others and fulfilled the ministry roles God gave them. An example of this is found in Acts 6:7 following the appointment of seven men to oversee the care of the widows in the church. We’re told, “and the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

God uses spiritual gifts to multiply his church. Thus, our philosophy of ministry calls upon every believer and every member to discover, develop, and deploy his/her gift(s) in ministry to others within the context of our local church.

Opportunities abound because hurting people are everywhere. We want to reach out to those individuals so we may minister to them and help them to heal, grow, and become spiritually mature. Our goal is to bring them to the point of maturity where they will be able to use their gifts in ministry to others, and thus enable us to reach out to more and more people in our community. We don't want people to be spectators. We want them to be participants who are involved in the work of the ministry.

The DESCRIPTION of Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12:6-8 lists seven ministry or motivational gifts. Every believer (including you) has one or more of these gifts of God’s grace.

Motivational gifts DESCRIBED

The first gift mentioned is the gift of prophecy (6). This involves the strong proclamation and application of God’s Word to the current situation. It includes both forth-telling (preaching, proclamation) and foretelling (prediction). The emphasis in Scripture is primarily on the proclamation of God’s message rather than on the prediction of future events. With the completion of Scripture, the predictive element of this gift ceased entirely.

The second gift listed is the gift of service (ministry, helps) (7a). This is a unique ability to provide support and assistance whenever and wherever needed to further the work of God and to increase the effectiveness of others. This is one of the most useful gifts of all and manifests itself in a multiplicity of ways. It is displayed in a willingness to help in practical ways to alleviate the burdens of others and ensure that things get done.

The third gift is the gift of teaching (7b). This is the special ability to search out, analyze, systematize, and explain the Word of God clearly. People with this gift are effective communicators who can explain biblical concepts in terms people understand with the result that they embrace what is being taught.

The fourth ministry gift is the gift of exhortation (8a). This is the ability to encourage, comfort, console, uplift, counsel, and provide positive reinforcement to others. People with this gift
provide a shoulder for others to lean on and seek to lift their spirits by reminding them of the promises of God. They have a unique ability to point out areas in which people need to change and provide specific steps for doing so.

The fifth gift is the gift of giving (8b). This is a God-given ability to share one's material resources generously and cheerfully in support of the Lord's work and for the benefit of others. These people see themselves as conduits through which God channels his resources to meet the needs of his work and those who are less fortunate than themselves.

The sixth gift is the gift of administration (ruling, governments) (8c). This is the Spirit-produced ability to see what needs to be done and to plan, organize, and motivate people to be involved in carrying out the task at hand. This is sometimes referred to as the gift of leadership.

The seventh ministry gift mentioned is the gift of mercy (8d). This is the unique ability to feel empathy and compassion for people who are hurting, and to share their pain while taking steps to alleviate their suffering. Their love and support help people get through the tough times in life.

Obviously, there is much more to understanding spiritual gifts than this. We have an eight-week course on these motivational gifts we would like to teach you when you reach the third level of our discipleship paradigm. We’ll go into much greater detail on each gift at that time so you can better understand what they are and how they function.

**Motivational gifts DISCERNED**

We know from the Word of God that every believer (including us) is the recipient of a special gift of God’s grace known as a “charismaton” or a spiritual gift. The perplexing question, however, is – “How do we know which gift or gifts we have?” There are at least six steps involved in discerning which gifts God has given us.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves *study*. Everything we know about spiritual gifts is found in the Word of God. As a believer, you need to read, study, and learn as much as you can about spiritual gifts from God's Word. Look up each passage in which spiritual gifts are mentioned. How are they described? How were they used? What was their purpose? What is the context in which they are found? You can also read various books on the subject, although you need to be careful because some books contain false and misleading information. The more you know about spiritual gifts, the easier it will be to recognize your gift.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves *sensitivity*. One of the purposes of spiritual gifts is to make us sensitive to particular needs in the church and in the lives of other people. Not everyone will see the same needs, even when looking at the same situation. The needs you see will be seen through the lens of your spiritual gifts. For example:

If a hostess trips and drops the cake on the floor as she carries it from the kitchen to the dining room, a person with the gift of mercy will hug her and seek to console her. The person with the gift of helps will rush to get a broom and mop to clean up the mess. A person with the gift of giving will run down to the store to buy a replacement cake. A person with the gift of teaching might analyze the situation and seek to explain what caused her to slip, and so on.
They all looked at the same situation, but they each saw a different need, and responded accordingly. How do you respond to people and their needs? What do you see when you walk into church or become aware of a particular situation? Are you primarily concerned with . . .

Right and wrong?
Helping people behind the scenes?
Accuracy and truthfulness?
Giving practical advice and finding practical answers?
Sharing what you have with others?
Effectiveness and efficiency?
Healing hurts?

Every believer looks through the prism of the spiritual gifts he has and sees something different. The needs you see and the way you respond to them are strong indicators of the gifts God has given you.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves service. Gifts are service oriented. They are designed to enable us not only to see needs, but to meet the needs we see. They motivate us to get involved and empower us to undertake tasks and ministries we otherwise would be unable or unwilling to do. One way believers can discern their area of giftedness is to participate in different ministries until they find one in which they are effective and that “fits them.”

At our church, we encourage people to experiment with different ministries for three to six months. There is often a learning curve that accompanies most ministries, but if God has gifted a person for a particular area of ministry, he will soon become effective and efficient in carrying out the responsibilities that go with that ministry. How did you complete the two sentences at the beginning of this lesson? Are you meeting a need through your service? Is the work you are doing being done efficiently? Do people respond well to your efforts to serve them? If the answer is “yes,” then this is a strong indicator that you have found your spiritual gift.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves satisfaction. Exercising one’s spiritual gifts brings a deep sense of satisfaction and joy. There will be a feeling of fulfillment. What areas of ministry or service do you find appealing? What do you enjoy doing? Where are you most effective? Ministry almost always requires time, effort, and sacrifice, but it brings with it a feeling that the investment we made was worth the sacrifice. It may take the form of knowing we have done what God gifted us to do or it may be expressed in a word of gratitude from a student or person we have helped. Contentment and progress are two signs that we are working in the area for which God has prepared us.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves the sense of others. Sometimes we stand so close to the trees we can’t see the forest. Other people will often recognize our area of giftedness before we do. This would seem to be the case with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. The church recognized that the Holy Spirit had gifted these two men for church planting and missionary service. They then commissioned them for that ministry. A pastor, a deacon or some godly person in the church may see something in you that suggests God has gifted you for a particular area of ministry. At times, they may also discern that you are not gifted in a certain area. Be open to the input from godly people in your church when they ask you to be involved in a particular ministry. They are not just looking for helpers. They are looking for people God has gifted for
that job, and the fact they are asking you is an indication they see something in you that says God has bestowed a gift of his grace upon you for this purpose.

Discovering your spiritual gift involves a survey. There are several good “Spiritual Gift Inventories” that can help you discern your area of spiritual giftedness. These are somewhat subjective in nature, and yet they do reflect those areas in which people can serve most effectively. A “Spiritual Gift Inventory” should never be the sole source for determining your gift, but it can be one of a series of tools you can use in the process. We usually provide these to our people when they reach the third level of our discipleship paradigm. That is where we focus in on discovering your ministry S.H.A.P.E. (S.H.A.P.E. is an acrostic that stands for: Spiritual gifts, Heart, Aptitudes, Personality, Experiences)

The bottom line is, our philosophy of ministry is built around the belief that God has gifted his people for ministry. He has given each of us one or more "charismatons" or gifts of his grace that enable us to see particular needs. We believe these gifts are given to motivate and stimulate believers to reach out in ministry to meet those needs in accordance with their particular spiritual gifts. Since every believer is a gifted believer, we believe there is a ministry role or function for every Christian, and that every believer is to be a minister of the grace of God.
Lesson # 7

The Work of the Ministry
(Exploring Our View of Ministry)

I want to thank you for coming today. This is the seventh class in our exploration of our church and what makes it distinctive. Each church is different from every other church. No two are alike. Each has its own personality, its own peculiar way of doing things. Each has a different target or focus group. Each has a different emphasis in its ministry.

We want you to understand where we're coming from and what it is we're trying to accomplish as a local church. Although there are many things that distinguish churches from one another, there are two things in particular that set our church apart from other churches in the area. These are our view of the pastor, and our view of the ministry.

The two are interconnected. They're related to each other. You can't have one without the other. We explored our view of the pastor in the second session together. You may recall we said the pastor is to be an equiper rather than an enabler. Rather than doing the “work of the ministry” FOR the saints, he is to train them so the “work of the ministry” is done BY the saints. We view the pastor as the spiritual and administrative leader of the church. He is the administrator, teacher, and coach while the people are the workers and ministers of the church.

The objective today is simply to help you better understand our view of ministry. There are four areas we want to look at.

Definition of Ministry

The words “ministry” and “service” along with their derivatives appear over 100 times in the New Testament. The Greek word for ministry is “diakonos” which means “to serve” or to run errands for another person. We get the English word “deacon” from it. God wants his people to have servant hearts and to be involved in ministry and service to others.

The meaning of “ministry”

We define “ministry” as using whatever God has given us to serve him and the needs of others. God has uniquely designed and gifted each one of us for ministry. First Corinthians 12:18 tells us God sets “the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” He gives each one of us gifts and skills, insights and abilities, life experiences and personalities that fit us for various ministry responsibilities. He has both a primary and secondary ministry for you to do. You should spend the majority of your time in the ministry that best expresses who you are. That's your primary ministry. But in addition to your primary ministry, there are secondary ministries where you may not be as strongly gifted, but in which you should be willing to help...
Ministry is Multi-directional

People tend to view ministry too narrowly. They often think of it in terms of “helping the church.” While it is true that much ministry is done within the confines of the church building or under the auspices of the church, ministry has a much broader perspective in Scripture.

First, we are to minister to the Lord. Acts 13:2 tells us the believers in Antioch “ministered to the Lord.” Everything they did was done in service to God. All the teaching, all the preaching, all the preparation, all the effort that was expended was done with one purpose in mind – to serve the Lord. Colossians 3:23 tells us that whatever we do is to be done “heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Ministry is a great privilege when we remember who it is that we are serving.

Second, we are to minister to other believers. Hebrews 6:10 tells us “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have MINISTERED TO THE SAINTS, and do minister.” Ministry is people oriented. The objective is to help other believers in need. In Acts 6, the first deacons were given the task of caring for the needs of the widows in the church. Food, clothing, shelter, instruction, and training were provided to the members of the church. Money also was collected and sent to alleviate the hunger and suffering of believers in Judaea (Acts 11:29).

We serve because we care about our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of the same family. We are not here to serve the church, we are here to serve people. Our focus is not on helping an institution grow, but on helping individuals for whom Christ died become all that God wants them to be. Jesus taught that when we serve others, we are serving him (Matthew 25:40).

Third, we are to minister to unbelievers. Jesus healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and the dead to live. He fed the hungry, cared for the sorrowing, lifted the fallen, and touched the leper. He had compassion on people because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Most of those people were not his followers at the time he ministered to them, and yet he loved and served them. We, as believers, are to walk in his footsteps. We are to emulate him and follow his example. He said we are to be the “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).

So, ministry is multi-directional with its focus upward to God, inward toward other believers, and outward to the world around us.

Ministry is Multi-faceted

Ministry can take many different forms. The possibilities are virtually unlimited, but fall into three general categories.

There are spiritual needs we can meet. There are people everywhere we look who are unchurched and unsaved. They do not know God and are destined for an eternal hell without Christ unless someone shares the gospel with them and leads them to the Savior. Jesus told us to be witnesses unto him and to tell others about him and how they can know him (Acts 1:8). In Second Corinthians 5:18 he gives us the “ministry of reconciliation.” This is the responsibility
of bringing two opposing parties together, namely God and sinners.

In addition, there are discipling and teaching to be done. Believers need to be trained to use their gifts in ministry. People need to be taught how to grow spiritually and how to share their faith with others. God has gifted some of you to minister to the spiritual needs of others.

*There are physical needs we can meet.* The world is full of hurting people. Both believers and unbelievers get sick, lose their jobs, have their homes destroyed by floods, tornadoes, and fires. Old age robs people of their sight, strength, and income. God has gifted his people with skills, abilities, insights, and resources to meet the physical needs of those who are less fortunate than we are. It might involve preparing a meal, transporting someone to the doctor, fixing a leaky pipe or mowing a lawn. Nearly everyone here can do something to minister to the physical needs of people around us.

*There are emotional needs we can meet.* Romans 15:14 says, “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to ADMONISH one another.” The word “admonish” is the translation of “nouthetein” which comes from the Greek word for “mind.” It describes coming along side someone who isn’t functioning right as a result of wrong thinking, and restoring them to health through right thinking. A different form of the same word is found in First Thessalonians 4:14 where the Apostle Paul says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, WARN (“neutheteite”) them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” In each case, it is talking about emotional needs.

Man consists of body, soul (emotions), and spirit. Wrong thinking leads to wrong actions which lead to wrong feelings which lead to more wrong thinking. Failure to view and live life from God’s perspective can result in numerous emotional and psychological problems. As believers, we can provide biblical counsel, encouragement, and support to people going through the emotional traumas of life. Everything people need to live life successfully can be found in the Word of God (II Peter 1:3).

**Designed for Ministry**

Considerable confusion exists over who should do the “work of the ministry.” A division between “clergy” and “laity” developed in the early days of the church as power and ministry were gradually concentrated in the hands of church leaders. Ministry gradually shifted from being lay-oriented to being pastor led. Even today, pastors are commonly referred to as “ministers.” We believe these changes were unscriptural and have resulted in much of the weakness in churches today.

**Ministry belongs to the People**

The key passage on the “work of the ministry” is found in Ephesians 4:12. We briefly touched upon this verse in our second session. It tells us that gifted men (in verse 11) were given to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
At first glance it would appear that the pastor/teacher has three responsibilities: to perfect the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to edify the Body of Christ (the church). That is not the case, however. In biblical times, the Greek language had no punctuation marks. There were no commas, no periods, no exclamation marks, and no question marks. Punctuation didn’t come until much later.

All the punctuation marks in this text and other texts were inserted by the translators when they translated the New Testament from Greek to English. It makes it more readable for us. But, by inserting the two commas in verse 12, the translators inadvertently changed the meaning of the verse and created an unworkable situation. The commas turned the verse into a list of things the pastor/teacher was expected to do and took the focus off of what the people are supposed to do. It transferred the “work of the ministry” from the people to the pastor.

If, however, we remove the two commas and restore the text to its original form, then the pastor is to perfect or train the saints to do the work of the ministry with the result that the Body of Christ is edified and built up. The people are to be the ministers of the church and are to carry out the work of the ministry. This is consistent with the rest of biblical teaching.

**God Created you for Ministry**

Ephesians 2:10 tells us “we are God's workmanship, CREATED in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” God had a ministry in mind for you when he created you. He designed and shaped you for a purpose, and that purpose was to minister to others through your “good works.”

**God Saved you for Ministry**

Second Timothy 1:9 says, “Who hath SAVED us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own PURPOSE and grace.” God had a purpose in saving you, and that purpose was that you might serve him by ministering to others. This is seen in verse 11 where Paul says that he was appointed as a preacher, an apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles. God may use you in a different area of ministry than he did Paul, but his purpose was the same – that you might serve in ministry.

**God has Called you to Ministry**

This same verse tells us God not only saved us, but “called” us for the same purpose for which he saved us – namely, ministry. Galatians 1:15 says “it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and CALLED me by his grace.” To what was Paul called? The answer is found in First Timothy 1:12 where he says, “and I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the MINISTRY.” God has called you to serve him by using what he has given you in ministry to others.

**God has Gifted you for Ministry**

Every believer (including you) has one or more spiritual gifts of God’s grace (“charismatons”) to enable him to see and meet various needs in the lives of others and within the local church (I Corinthians 12:7). The purpose of these spiritual gifts is explained in First Peter 4:10 which
says, “As every man hath received the gift, even so MINISTER the same one to another.”
Spiritual gifts are given to enable us to minister to each other. God has gifted you for ministry.
You are a gifted person whether you realize it or not.

**God has Authorized you for Ministry**

Second Corinthians 5:20 tells us that as believers we are “ambassadors for Christ, as though God
did beseech you by us.” An ambassador is someone who has been authorized to act for the
person he is representing. In the case of believers, we have been authorized to represent God in
the ministry of reconciliation. In Matthew 28:18,19, Jesus said “all power is given unto me in
heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach (disciple) all nations.” When we serve in
ministry, we serve under the authority of God as his representative. God has already given you
the authority and the responsibility to serve in ministry on his behalf.

**God has Commanded you to Minister**

In Philippians 2:5 we are commanded to “let this mind (attitude) be in you which was also in
Christ Jesus.” What was Jesus’ attitude that we are to emulate? The answer is found in Matthew
20:28 where it says, “even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”
Jesus had a humble, servant attitude that expressed itself in ministry to others. We are
 commanded to have the same attitude and to do the same thing he did. Colossians 4:17 warns us
to “take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.” In other
words, we’re not to neglect or fail to carry out the ministry God has given us to do.

**God expects us to Prepare for Ministry**

This brings us back to Ephesians 4:12 where believers are to be equipped by their pastors and
teachers for the “work of the ministry.” Ministry is a team effort. Training and accountability
are important aspects of ministry. Skills need to be learned and perfected. Finding your ministry
slot will take time and some experimenting with ministries. Our goal is to help you discern how
God has shaped you for ministry, and then to give you the opportunity and support you need to
carry out the job God designed you to do.

**Diversity in Ministry**

God doesn’t clone people nor does he expect everyone to do the same thing in ministry. While
all forms of ministry are important, the gifts, the approaches, the training, the requirements, and
the visibility of each ministry are different. The needs you see, the things you are passionate
about, the ways in which you respond will differ from what others see, feel, and do. That is the
way God made us.

**There is Unity in Diversity**

First Corinthians 12:4-7 says . . . “Now there are DIVERSITIES of gifts, but the same Spirit.
And there are DIFFERENCES of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are
DIVERSITIES of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the
manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”

We don’t all have the same gifts, skills, and talents. Consequently, we’ll be concerned about different things. Our interests will be sparked by different ministries. God is a God of infinite variety and he has equipped each one of us differently so that all the varied needs of the Body of Christ can be met. Paul used the physical body to illustrate this truth. If everyone were an “eye,” we wouldn’t be able to hear. If everyone were an “ear,” we wouldn’t be able to smell. God created the human body with eyes to see, ears to hear, noses to smell, tongues to taste, feet to walk, hands to work, hearts to beat, lungs to breath, teeth to chew, etc.. Each body part is different from all the other body parts. Each is designed to fulfill a different function, and yet they all fit together to form one body (vs. 20).

In the same way, God designs each of us with different gifts and abilities so that we can see and meet the many different needs of the Body of Christ (the church). There is unity in diversity that enables the body to function the way God intended.

*There is Strength in Diversity*

Everyone looks through the rose-colored glasses of his or her own giftedness, except the color of the glass changes from person to person. Consequently, people see different needs and have different interests. Sometimes, people make the mistake of assuming that everyone should wear the same colored glasses as they do or that their glasses are the only ones that matter. That narrow focus can lead to indifference to and even disdain of other ministries in the church. Paul indicated that some people even assume an air of superiority because of the ministry God has given them. This should never be.

In First Corinthians 12:21 Paul pointed out that that the “eye” cannot say to the “hand” that it is not needed. Neither can the “head” say to the “feet” that they are unnecessary. Every gift (and the ministries that accompany them) is needed for the Body of Christ (the local church) to function the way God intended for it to function. A body that had only feet or hands or eyes would be a monstrosity that would not survive long. The greater the diversity of gifts, skills, and talents assembled together, the stronger and healthier that body will be.

Your gift and involvement in ministry is important. Just as every part of our human bodies is necessary in order for those bodies to function fully, so the local church needs every member exercising his or her gifts in ministry if that church is to be healthy and strong. There is strength in diversity.

*Discovering your Ministry*

You may be thinking, “Well, that’s all good and fine, but I don’t have the foggiest idea of how God has gifted me or what he might want me to do.” That’s normal, especially for new believers and/or new members. It takes a little while to get our feet under us and to grow to the place where we begin to see how God has prepared us for ministry.
Your Unique Shape

Whether you are aware of it or not, God has uniquely designed you for ministry. He has molded and shaped your life from birth to the present time in preparation for what he wants you to do. What he has made you to be indicates what he intends for you to do. Your ministry is largely determined by your make up.

We use three acrostics to help people understand what God wants them to do. These include S-H-A-P-E, D-E-S-I-G-N and S-E-R-V-E. All three cover the same general areas, but some people prefer one over the other. Here is what they stand for:

- **S** – Spiritual gifts
- **D** – Desires
- **H** – Heart or passion
- **E** – Experiences
- **A** – Aptitudes or skills
- **S** – Spiritual gifts
- **R** – Relational style
- **P** – Personality
- **I** – Individual style
- **E** – Life experiences
- **G** – Growth phase
- **N** – Natural abilities

My goal at this present time is simply to make you aware of the fact that God wants you to serve him in ministry to others through a local church such as this one. Level Three of our discipleship paradigm is designed to help you discover your ministry S.H.A.P.E or D.E.S.I.G.N. We’ll spend several weeks exploring the different aspects of your unique shape and provide you with the training you’ll need to exercise your gifts in ministry to others. That doesn’t mean, however, that you can’t be involved in ministry even now.

Deploying in Ministry

We believe every believer is a minister and should be involved in ministry right from the start. Obviously, not everyone is ready to be a teacher, choir director or youth leader. It takes time to develop the skills, knowledge, and maturity to be in leadership.

Experiment with Different Ministries

One of the best ways to discover how God has gifted you for ministry is to experiment with different ministries. What can you do? What skills do you have? What are you passionate about? Ministries vary widely. Some take more time than others. Some can be done whenever it is convenient for you. Some can be accomplished in a single session or take place only once a month.

The important thing is to stay with a ministry long enough to find out if you enjoy it and are effective at it. You may want to try several different ministries over a period of time to see which one fits you best. That’s o.k. with us. We want to help you find the ministry God has prepared for you, so changing jobs is permissible.

We have a Ministry Statement that we will review when we get to Level Three. It basically outlines what we have taught you here. There is one section of that Ministry Statement that says
“people must be allowed to change ministries gracefully, and without guilt.” I just wanted you to know that you have the freedom to do that so long as we are informed in advance of your desire to change to another area of ministry. We’ll work with you to make that happen, if at all possible.

**Entry Level Ministries**

Just as every ministry is different, so the gifts and requirements for those ministries differ. The requirements for teaching and being in a place of leadership are much higher than for those who are just starting out in ministry. We have developed a series of entry-level opportunities for ministry that are available to people progressing through this first level of our discipleship paradigm. These are designed to “get your feet wet,” so to speak. Some are easier than others. We want you to experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from serving the Lord and others.

Additional opportunities to serve will become available as you grow spiritually and develop your confidence and ministry skills. Jesus said, “he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10) and in Matthew 25:21 those who faithfully carried out their ministry assignments were given bigger and more important tasks to fulfill.

Here is a partial list of entry level ministries that are currently available.

- Set up chairs and equipment
- Tear down chairs and equipment
- Put out songbooks prior to service
- Collect songbooks after the service
- Hand out literature door to door
- Help run the sound equipment
- Make canvassing phone calls
- Direct traffic in parking lot
- Help clean the building
- Set up literature table
- Shovel sidewalks
- Visitation partner
- Stuff envelopes
- Fold bulletins
- Plant flowers
- Run errands
- Paint rooms
- Mow lawn
- Do repairs

These are all areas in which you can “test the waters” and gain ministry experience. A different set of ministry opportunities will become available to you as you move through our second level of discipleship. The same is true with Levels Three and Four as well.

Most of the above ministries are easy to do and don’t require a lot of time or commitment. I’d encourage you to talk with the pastor or ministry coordinator to see where you can serve. You may want to experiment with more than one ministry to see which ones you enjoy most.
Next week will be the final session in this series and will complete the First Level of our discipleship ministry. We’ll be looking at “Partnering Together” and what is involved in becoming organically involved in the ministry and membership of our church.
Lesson # 8

Partnering Together
(Exploring Our View of Membership)
Acts 2:41

One of the great tragedies of our times is that many people live increasingly isolated and lonely lives. Never before have individuals felt so alone, so alienated, so cut-off from anyone who cares.

We are reluctant to join things because we don't want to become "just another number." We don't want to be lost in the crowd or taken for granted. We don't want to be a trophy on someone's mantel.

Yet, in this age of individualism in which we live, everyone wants to "belong." We all want to be part of the "in" crowd. We want to feel accepted as full-fledged members in our own right.

We all long for companionship, for intimacy. We want to participate. We want our lives to count for something. We want to make a difference. We want to belong to something that is worthwhile and fulfilling.

That is exactly what Jesus Christ designed the church to do and be. It is to be an oasis in the desert. It is a place where you can find acceptance - a place where you will feel fulfilled, a place where what you do matters, a place where you can make a difference, and a place where you can find a sense of belonging. Merely attending a church, however, will not provide that sense of belonging most people desire.

In Scripture, the local church is described as a living organism composed of living, acting, serving Christians. It is called the "Body of Christ" and as such it describes the dynamic relationship which exists between believers. It is a relationship of mutual commitment and partnership in which believers help and encourage one another. There are two things a person must do if you are to find that acceptance, sense of belonging, and satisfaction that comes from making a difference.

You must first UNITE with a church, and then you must become actively INVOLVED in it.

Here at our church we prefer to replace the word “membership” with "partnership" and the word “member” with "participator" because they more accurately reflect the biblical concept of the church as it should be.

Let's find out what's involved.
The Five PRIVILEGES of Partnership

Belonging almost always carry with it certain rights and privileges not available to others outside the group. If there were no benefits, there would be little reason to belong. There are five major advantages to partnering with (belonging to) a local church such as ours.

**Partnership gives me the Security of a family**

The church is described in Scripture as a “family.” It is not a business, it is not a social club - it is a family composed of people who have been born into God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ.

This family concept is found in Ephesians 2:19 which says, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but FELLOW-CITIZENS with the saints, and of the HOUSEHOLD of God.” We find the same thing in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the HOUSEHOLD of faith."

The "family" is the basic building block of society. It provides us with a place to belong, a place to be a part of, a place with which to identify, a sense of security. In Romans 12:5 we read, "so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one MEMBERS one of another."

When you join a local church, you become part of something bigger than yourself, something more important than a civic club. You become part of a family with “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ. It is a place of security where you can share in family life with others.

Acts 2:44,46 describes this family relationship when it says, "and all that believed were TOGETHER, and had all things common . . . And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and SINGleness of heart."

Being a part of a loving family provides us with a sense of security and belonging. It tells we are not alone. There are other people present who care about us enough to listen to us, to encourage us, to teach us, and even to hold us accountable when we need it. Partnering with a local church provides us with a similar sense of security and provides us with many of the same benefits that a human family provides, and some that it doesn’t.

**Partnership gives me the Support to grow**

Few people develop into normal, healthy adults apart from the loving support and encouragement of a family. Both children and adults need encouragement if they are to develop into the persons God intends them to be.

Hebrews 10:24,25 points this out when it says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . but EXHORTING (encouraging) one another."

These verses tell us we are to "provoke" or stimulate each other to do the things we should be doing as Christians. To a certain extent, we are all hesitant, fearful, and forgetful. We often lack
the confidence or determination to do what we know we should do or even the things we want to
do. At times like this, we need someone to come along and put their arm around our shoulder
and encourage us to do right or to undertake the task we are contemplating. Nothing stimulates
people like encouragement.

Verse 25 tells us that we are to "exhort" or encourage each other when we see something going
wrong or when we see people struggling in their Christian life. There may be a sinful habit that
has entrapped them and they need help breaking that habit. The Lord may be leading them to
undertake some area of ministry for which they feel inadequate. The trials of life may be
weighing them down and they need a word of encouragement.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to "bear one other's burdens." We are our brother's keepers. When we see
someone who is discouraged, lonely or straying, we have the responsibility to shoulder some of
their load and to help them through their times of struggle by showing interest, listening,
speaking words of encouragement, and offering to help. Something as simple as, "I'm praying
for you" can make all the difference in the world to someone who is hurting.

Family members take care of each other and provide us with an atmosphere in which to mature
spiritually. A family relationship provides us with the stimulus we all need in order to grow.

**Partnership gives me a spiritual Shield**

In Acts 20:28 God specifically tells pastors to “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the
flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which
he hath purchased with his own blood."

To "take heed" is a shepherding term that means to be alert, to watch over or to guard the sheep
against predators that would harm them. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul warned us there would
be false teachers who would try to mislead Christian people and to draw them away from Christ.
Pastors are to stand watch over the flock of God (the local church) because of these "grievous
wolves" (false teachers).

Most Christians do not have the time or the training to evaluate all the teachings that come along.
Many lack the spiritual discernment and insights to recognize these teachings. So God gave us
spiritual leaders, men who have spent their lives studying the Bible, so that they could warn us
and protect us from things that would hurt us spiritually.

In most cases, pastors are better trained and better equipped to recognize false teaching than are
the people in their churches. It behooves believers to listen to their spiritual leaders when they
warn about some new doctrine that is being perpetrated or some televangelist that may be
misrepresenting the Word of God.

Hebrews 13:17 tells us that we are to "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit
yourselves; for they watch for your souls." Don’t get angry when the pastor warns you about
some program, some evangelist or Bible teacher or some practice he thinks is wrong. Listen to
him. Do what he says. God has put him there to shield you from harm. Thank God for him and
follow his instructions. You’ll be glad you did.
**Partnership gives me the opportunity to use my Spiritual gifts**

You are a uniquely gifted person. God has equipped you with special insights, abilities, and skills that enable you to see needs in the church and in people’s lives. He enables you to perform specific ministries which no one else can do as well as you can. These special endowments of God’s grace are referred to as “charismatons” or spiritual gifts.

In I Corinthians 12:7,11 we read, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to EVERY MAN to profit withal. But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to EVERY MAN severally as he will.” You are a gifted person. God has gifted you for ministry, to meet the needs of other people in the Body of Christ.

If you are a believer, you are part of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27). God expects you to use your gifts in ministry to others within the context of the local church. That was what he designed you for and that is why he has brought you here. Just as every part of our human bodies was designed to fulfill a particular function, so every believer is designed and equipped to fulfill a particular role within the Body of Christ.

When all the parts of the Body function well and fulfill the role for which they were designed, the Body is healthy, it grows, and it functions well. If you don't exercise your gift in ministry to others, the Body doesn't function the way God intended and people's needs go unmet (17). A sense of fulfillment and satisfaction comes as the result of exercising your spiritual gift in ministry to others.

**Partnership gives me a Say in what happens**

One difference between Baptist churches such as ours and other groups is the fact that those who partner with us have a voice in things. They have the right to be heard. They can express their views on what goes on. They have the privilege of saying what they want done, how it should be done, who their leaders are, and how the money is to be spent.

By entering into partnership with other believers you gain both the right of voice and the right to vote on all matters that come before the church. You can express your opinion and say what you think should be done. You can ask questions and make suggestions. You get to vote on issues such as choosing your pastor and deacons, financial planning, etc. This is known as "congregational rule."

Non-members and those who do not partner with us have no such privileges. Even if they are regular in attending our services, they still have no say in how the church is run or how funds are expended. You must be part of the family relationship if you are to have a say at the table. Partnering with us gives you that privilege.

**The New Testament PATTERN for Partnership**

Some folks believe the New Testament church in the book of Acts was an unstructured, decentralized group of believers with no membership, no accountability, and no organization.
Each person did whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, however they wanted. It is argued that there were no application forms, no membership interviews, no transferring of membership between congregations.

A careful study of Scripture, however, indicates something entirely different.

**Their partnership is seen in their Identification**

Jesus used the word “church” three times to identify a group of people he was calling out of the world unto him. In Matthew 16:18 he said, “I will build my CHURCH; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” A little later in Matthew 18:17 when discussing broken relationships he said, “and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the CHURCH; but if he neglect to hear the CHURCH, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ekklesia” We get the word “ecclesiastical” from it. In Jesus’ day it referred to a special assembly of citizens, a called-out group of people who had certain rights and privileges others did not have. These people belonged to an identifiable group. People didn’t just wander in and out. They were part of an identifiable “ekklesia.”

This same word was used to describe the believers who assembled together on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:47. It says, “the Lord added to the church (ekklesia) such as should be saved.” As people were saved, they were added to the group, to the called-out assembly of believers that are referred to as “the church.”

Verse 41 tells us that those who received Peter’s preaching by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior “were baptized; and the same day there were ADDED UNTO THEM about three thousand souls.” What were they added unto? Who is the “them” that they were added unto? You can’t be added unto something that doesn’t exist. Verse 47 identifies “them” as the church. When these people got saved, they got baptized, and partnered (joined) with the other believers who were part of that group.

Some form of the word “church” is found 114 times in the New Testament, and it nearly always refers to an identifiable group of believers who were partnering and laboring together to carry on the work of God in their area.

**Their partnership is seen in their Involvement**

A local church is a cohesive group in which believers function as a unit rather than as independent contractors. Even before the church was birthed on the day of Pentecost, a core group of 120 believers was meeting together for prayer, encouragement, and decision making. In discussing who should replace Judas, they chose two men “which have companied with us” (Acts 1:21). These men were identified as long-time companions of the Lord Jesus. They had been part of the group that traveled with him and participated in his ministry. Matthias was chosen to be “numbered with the eleven apostles” (1:26). Once again, there was an identifiable group of which he was a recognized part. He partnered with the other eleven men while at the same time being part of the core group that formed the first church.
Following the formation of the church on the day of Pentecost, the people who comprised that church partnered together in various ministry activities. They studied the “apostle’s doctrine” together. They “fellowshipped” together. They ate together, and they prayed together (42). They shared their food, shelter, and clothing with each other. They went to the temple together. They served and worshipped together. They took care of the widows who were part of their group. They elected deacons, chose missionaries, and appointed pastors over their churches.

The New Testament pattern was for a person to accept Christ as Savior, identify with his death, burial, and resurrection by being immersed, and added to the local assembly of believers. The person then studied, worshipped, learned, served, and supported the ministry of that local “ekklesia” (assembly). That is the pattern taught in the New Testament.

Their partnership is seen in their Instruction

Believers were taught biblical doctrine as soon as they were saved. The first thing mentioned concerning these new believers was that they “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). Part of that doctrine is outlined by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 12 where he describes the church as a body comprised of individual believers who have been gifted and put together in an interdependent relationship. Each fulfills a function that benefits the other members of the body. While the body can function without all the members in place, it will function much more effectively if all the members are in their place, performing the function for which they were designed.

Just as an eye or an ear or hand cannot function nor survive without being connected to the rest of the body, so a believer cannot survive nor fulfill his/her God-given role apart from a local Body of Christ. There are no “Lone Ranger” Christians in the Bible. Each one partners with others to the glory of God.

Participation is the key to Partnership

We are not really interested in how many people sign their names on the dotted line. Too many people "join" churches and then never do much of anything. That is not the New Testament concept of a church partnership. For that reason we prefer the word "participant" or "participator" to "member." A "participant" is someone who voluntarily unites with us and commits himself to exercising his or her spiritual gift in ministry to the Body of Christ.

What is expected of me as a "Participant?" (5 expectations of membership)

I'm expected to love the rest of the church family. In John 13:35, Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." Not everybody here will be as loving as we might want them to be, but we are each expected to set the pattern by being loving regardless of what others may or may not do.

I'm expected to accept the rest of the church family. Romans 15:7 says, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." The word “receive” means to “accept” or to “welcome” a person. Our people are at different levels of spiritual development.
Some are just new believers while others have been saved for years. Our church is made up of imperfect people. You may find someone who rubs you’re the wrong way or who hasn’t developed all the Christian qualities they need. Love and accept them anyway. We welcome anyone who wants to worship God in our services regardless of race, culture, education or social standing.

*I'm expected to forgive the rest of the church family.* Colossians 3:13 tells us, "Forbearing one another and forgiving one another . . . even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Sooner or later someone will do something that offends or hurts you. Jesus said, “it must needs be that offences come” (Matthew 18:7). He was saying they are a normal part of life. So determine right up front that you will forgive people for the things they do that hurt or irritate you because you know it is going to happen.

*I'm expected to serve the rest of the church family.* Galatians 5:13 instructs us "by love serve one another." If you become part of this fellowship, you are expected to exercise your spiritual gift in ministry to others. That is where the joy comes. That is what makes this partnership so rewarding. That is why we call our members "participators."

*I'm expected to encourage the rest of the church family.* 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.” The word “comfort” means to “support,” to “encourage” or to “lift up” someone who is discouraged or cast down. You are expected to find something good to say to others, something that will build them up and encourage them. When you see someone hurting or who needs help, do something to lift the load or to strengthen that person. We're committed to being a church based on "KOINONIA" or common caring for each other. That means being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ.

**What am I committing myself to as a "Participant?"**

We ask everyone who wants to partner with us by uniting with our church to make the following four commitments outlined in our partnership (membership) covenant.

*I am committing myself to protect the unity of my church.* First Corinthians 1:10 says, "I beseech you . . . that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you.” That means I’m going to act in love toward the other members of the church (Romans 14:19), I’m going to refuse to listen to or engage in gossip (Ephesians 4:29), and I’m going to follow and cooperate with my pastor and the spiritual leaders of this church (Hebrews 13:17). It also means I am going to fit in and work with those already here. I'm going to adopt and promote this church's goals and philosophy. There may be differences of opinion, but once a decision is made I am going to support the majority opinion.

*I am committing myself to share the responsibility of my church.* Every member is asked to share in the responsibilities of membership by praying for the spiritual and numerical growth of our church (1 Thessalonians 1:2), by inviting the unchurched and others to attend its worship (Luke 14:23), and by warmly welcoming those who visit our services (Romans 15:7). We all have a share in health and welfare of our church.

*I am committing myself to serve in the ministry of my church.* Membership and ministry go together. We expect every member to be involved in some form of ministry. We encourage
each one to discover his/her spiritual gifts and talents (I Peter 4:10), to accept training and equipping for ministry from our pastor and spiritual leaders (Ephesians 4:11,12), and to develop a servant’s heart and a teachable spirit (Philippians 2:2-7). Some of you are already involved in an entry-level ministry. There are also opportunities to serve in the fields of music, ushering, transportation, nursery, and setting up rooms and equipment. Job descriptions are available for each area of ministry in our church. We'll try to match you up with a ministry that fits your spiritual gift.

*I am committing myself to support the testimony of my church.* We support the testimony of our church attending its services faithfully (Hebrews 10:25), by living a godly life (Philippians 1:27), and by giving regularly (I Corinthians 16:2). Regular, systematic attendance and giving are marks of spiritual maturity that we encourage because it will help both the church and the individual to grow.

**The PREREQUISITES for Partnership**

Partnering often involves conditions that must be met for involvement. This is true in sports, business, education, and most social settings. A child can’t be involved in Little League until he is a certain age, has a uniform, and agrees to attend practices. Every entity has its own set of standards for inclusion in its partnering relationships. The same is true of local churches as well. There are three significant issues that are required for uniting with our church.

**First, anyone partnering with us must be BORN-AGAIN**

In Acts 2:41, those who were baptized and added to the church were the same ones who "gladly received his word." This has reference to Peter's instruction to "repent" of their sins in verse 38. In other words, they embraced his teaching by repenting of their sins and trusting Christ as their Savior. Acts 2:47 verifies that being saved is a prerequisite for membership when it says, "and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

The "new birth" is the primary prerequisite for church membership. We refer to the church as having a “regenerate” membership meaning that each member has been saved, regenerated or made alive unto God through faith in Jesus Christ. Only those people who can point to a definite time and place when they acknowledged their sinfulness to God, placed their trust in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for their sins, and received him into their hearts and lives as Lord and Savior are eligible for membership in our church.

**Second, anyone partnering with us must be BAPTIZED by immersion following their salvation**

Only those who "received his word" were baptized and added to the church in Acts 2:41,42. Baptism always follows believing in Scripture. A person must be saved BEFORE being eligible to be baptized. This is clearly illustrated in the cases of the Samaritans (Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31,33), and the Corinthian believers (Acts 18:8). We call this “believer’s baptism.” Since baptism is a picture of the believer’s union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, anyone who was baptized prior
to receiving Christ as Savior has not been Scripturally baptized. Once this person has put his faith and trust in Christ as his Savior, he should request to be baptized biblically.

Baptism does not save a person, nor can it wash away sin. It is only an outward symbol of an inward change. It is a public declaration, an act of identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. When a person gets baptized he is saying, “Christ died for me, he was buried in my place, and he rose again to give me new life and lives within me.”

The word translated “baptize” means to dip, to sink, to submerge or to cover with water. It was used to describe a ship which sank at sea. Immersion is the only form of baptism that fits both the meaning of the word and the picture of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. This is the only method of baptism that meets the biblical criteria.

Third, anyone partnering with us must be in agreement with our BELIEFS

Just as the believers in the early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," so we ask that anyone desiring to partner with us be in agreement with the Covenant, Constitution, Articles of Faith, core values, and philosophy of ministry of our church. We also ask that people sign a Partnering Agreement or Membership Covenant like the one at the end of this lesson. This simply outlines the expectations and commitments we covered just a few moments ago in this class.

The ministry of a local church or any organization, would be seriously disrupted if a person were received into membership who embraces teachings which are contrary to that organization’s beliefs and policies or who is unwilling to abide by its constitution (see Galatians 1:8,9). Thus, we ask anyone who wants to partner with us to be in basic agreement with the things we’ve just gone over.

Conclusion

We’ve tried our very best to be open and transparent with you in the course of this series of classes. We’ve sought to explain our philosophy of ministry, our view of pastoral and deacon ministry, and how our church functions. You should have received a copy of our church covenant, constitution and doctrinal statement. If you have any questions on any of these, we would be happy to answer them for you.

We want you to be informed believers. We want you to know who we are, how we function, and what is expected of those who partner with us.

Is belonging to a church important? You bet it is! A church is a Body in which each part has a place to fill and a function to perform. If separated from the Body, that individual part will never fulfill the purpose for which God designed and equipped him, and the Body will function at a much lower level than God intended. Church partnership is a mutually beneficial relationship for both the individual and the group as a whole.

I want to thank you for participating in our class for the past eight weeks and for giving us the chance to tell you who we are. I hope you have “Caught the Vision” and that you will want to
partner with us in this exciting ministry.

For those who are interested in doing that, I would encourage you to look over the Partnering Agreement on the next page, and be ready to sign it. Then, make your desire known to the pastor either by e-mail, a phone call or by responding to the public invitation in one of our services. We would love to have you as part of our fellowship.

You have now completed the first level of our discipleship process. I hope you will go on to the next level which we call Going on to Maturity. Now that you have a foundation upon which to build, we want to help you grow spiritually in your relationship with Christ. There are three series of classes designed to help you do exactly that.

The first series deals with habits we all need to develop that promote spiritual growth in our lives. The second set of lessons is an overview of five key books of the Bible that enable us to gain a better grasp of God’s Word. The third series explores God’s perspective on nine areas of life. I hope you’ll partner with us as we continue our journey toward spiritual maturity together.

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5 David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 94.
6 Ibid., p. 93.
Your Town Baptist Church

Level 1 Discipleship Covenant

Membership

Having received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and having been immersed upon my confession of faith, and being in agreement with this church’s statement of faith, constitution, and philosophy of ministry, I now choose to unite with this body of believers. In so doing, I commit myself to God and to the other members of this fellowship to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of my church
   . By acting in love toward the other members (Romans 14:19)
   . By refusing to gossip (Ephesians 4:29)
   . By following and cooperating with my pastor and the spiritual leaders of this church (Hebrews 13:17)

2. I will share the responsibility of my church
   . By praying for its spiritual and numerical growth (1 Thessalonians 1:2)
   . By inviting the unchurched and others to attend its worship (Luke 14:23)
   . By warmly welcoming those who visit our services (Romans 15:7)

3. I will serve in the ministry of my church
   . By discovering my spiritual gifts and talents (1 Peter 4:10)
   . By accepting training and equipping for ministry from my pastor (Eph. 4:11,12)
   . By developing a servant’s heart and a teachable spirit (Philippians 2:2-7)

4. I will support the testimony of my church
   . By attending its services faithfully (Hebrews 10:25)
   . By living a godly life (Philippians 1:27)
   . By giving regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Date

Signature

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved."
(Acts 2:47)