
The Biblical Model of Church

GETTING STARTED

The church is not a place; it is people. You will not find the word “church” applied to a place in the New Testament. The title is reserved for those who unite under the banner of Christ and live life in a way that celebrates His work. They are called out from the world and reconciled back to God so that they may worship Him.

When speaking of the church, it is important to see the distinction between the church *globally* and the church *locally*. The church globally is all believers everywhere, while the church locally is a specific group of believers who gather regularly in a particular location. The church’s significance, both globally and locally, cannot be ignored. It is the church who displays the truth, love, mercy, and grace of God for an unbelieving world. Christ goes as far as to call the church His “bride.” This title begins to help us see and understand the significance of the church in God’s eyes. God is committed to His people (the church) and desires for us to be as well.

BAPTIZED INTO THE CHURCH

When looking at the first century church¹, it is easy to spot the differences between their culture and our own. And this is perfectly fine. God anticipates and expects some variation concerning cultures and church life, but there are truths and practices he has commanded stay unchanged. This document will help you understand the practices God expects *every* church in *any* time period to be involved in and take serious. Our goal is to carry these practices out in a way that is relevant to the 21st century while remaining faithful to the Word of God.

Becoming a member of Jesus’ church is intended to be a *public* testimony about the God that saves. Belonging to the Christian church has *always* demanded a *public* profession of faith in Jesus’ saving work. In the first century, this public profession came in the form of baptism. After believing the gospel, repenting of ones’ sins, and turning to Christ, a person was baptized in water². This act declared they were now a part of the church of Jesus Christ. Apart from being baptized, there would have been no clear way for individuals to be recognized as a member of the church. Here at Abundant Life, we believe that God still commands us to practice baptism as a means for joining the church³. It is by this confession that you are joining your life to Christ *and* to His church.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

THE GOSPEL

Eph. 2:1-10; Romans 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:18-21

¹ The group of believers whose lives are recorded throughout the New Testament

² For more information regarding ALAG’s position on baptism, please read our position paper that corresponds to water baptism.

³ Matthew 28:18-20

Without the gospel, there would be no church. It is because of the good news of Jesus that the church has been formed; we are called out of a world separated from God and reconciled back to our Creator. Since the gospel is the driving power behind the creation and formation of the church, it is easy to see that the church of Jesus Christ should remain “gospel-centered” in their focus.

The church is called to be a “city on a hill” and a “light” in the midst of darkness⁴. This can only be done if we are raising the gospel banner high. The gospel is the only message that can truly transform one’s life- and this transformation lasts for eternity! The church that holds the gospel as their central focus is the church that the gates of hell will not prevail against. While the church may be tempted to place their focus on something other than the gospel, the church’s purpose is to know, celebrate, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

Rom. 1:16; Php. 1:27; Matt. 28:18-20

The gospel is life changing; no one can truly believe the message and stay the same. The gospel calls the church to be a gathering of people whose lives have been changed. This does not mean that the church is full of perfect people, but does mean that the church consists of people who have started the process of life-change. Our *daily* lives should reflect the power of the gospel. Our deepest joy is now found in knowing Christ rather than partaking in sin.

While it is certainly true that our lives and actions should reflect the gospel, we are also called as a people to proclaim this message using words. This is how *other* people’s lives are transformed. It is when one *hears* about the transforming work of Christ that they can place their faith in Him as Lord and Savior⁵.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

PRAYER

Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Matthew 21:13

There are specific practices and functions that Jesus wants every church to be committed to. When we participate in these practices, we are most likely to encounter the grace and power of God. In the Book of Acts, a book that records the formation and early growth of the church, we find many of those practices. They are functions that *every* New Testament church should be devoted to.

We find the early church regularly *praying* together. Prayer should be at the center of all we do as Christians and as a church. It is through prayer that God changes us, changes the world, and changes our church. It shows our dependence upon God and is a primary way we develop a relationship with God and with each other.

DOCTRINE

Acts 2:42

⁴ Matthew 5:14

⁵ Romans 10:14

When we speak of doctrine, we are speaking about beliefs concerning God, mankind, and life in general. The church is to be committed to teaching truth concerning all areas of life. This is done by teaching what the bible says as true and authoritative rather than our own ideas and cultural beliefs. It is critical to your spiritual growth that you are being “fed” biblical teaching properly and regularly.

WATER BAPTISM/COMMUNION

1 Cor. 11:23-26; Rom. 6:3-4

The church is to be the visible display of invisible truths. When the church practices the ordinances of water baptism and communion, we are providing a visual picture of the spiritual work God has done, is doing, and will do in the hearts and lives of believers. These ordinances also carry an added significance; they declare who is actually a part of that local church. God recognizes those you take communion with as one body⁶. Additionally, when you are baptized you are saying not only have you found new life in Christ, but that you are committing to live that new life out as a part of the church.

FELLOWSHIP (WEEKLY WORSHIP SERVICES)

Acts 2:46

The church of Jesus is to be committed to worshiping God together. We are called to assemble and celebrate the gospel and the work of God in our lives. It is in this gathering that we experience the presence of God like no other time. Being together in unity as believers brings a distinct work of the Holy Spirit. We need to prepare our hearts and minds for this gathering each week so we can receive and respond to all God has for us.

FELLOWSHIP (OUTSIDE OF WORSHIP SERVICES)

Acts 2:46

The bond that is shared between brothers and sisters in Christ extends past the confines of a building and service times. The gospel that unites us and brings us into the family of God, also leads us to be deeply involved in each other’s lives. A healthy local church will be full of members who are involved with each other outside of their weekly services. We are called not only to enjoy God, but to enjoy one another as well. The people we worship with are gifts from a gracious Heavenly Father. They celebrate our joyous moments with us, and walk through our suffering beside us. The family of God can enjoy each other because the gospel has given us the power to love, forgive, and embrace others.

GIVING

Acts 2:45-46

God gave His only Son—what an incredible truth. The God we worship gave *himself* to pay the price for sin. Because of all we have received from God through the gospel, our hearts are opened to be generous. Christians have the opportunity to display God’s generosity when they show generosity. Our giving shows others that we serve a God who gives and is willing to give them mercy and a new life.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11

EVANGELISM

Rom. 10:13-15

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of being in a local church is the opportunity to do evangelism alongside others. When we believe the gospel, we are saved *from* many things—the power of sin, the wrath of God, hell, and Satan. But we are also saved *to* something—God’s mission! God desires that every human bow their knee in repentance and come to know Him as Father. God is actively making this a reality through the church. We have been saved to help save others! As we join God in His mission, we enjoy the gift of others who labor beside us. We celebrate the triumphs together, and when the work is tough, look to one another for encouragement.

GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

THE TRINITY GIVES

1 Peter 4:10-11

From this text we see how each member of the Trinity deposits gifts in us (and in our church) so we can be effective in both our Christian witness and lives.

While perhaps being one of the more confusing truths concerning the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to embrace to belong to the Christian church. Within Himself God has everything He needs; yet willingly chooses to create, love, save, and include us in His work. If that is not enough, He gives us gifts so we can make a difference in the world that will bring eternal rewards for us to enjoy!

GIFTS FROM THE FATHER

Romans 12:3-8

Every person has been created uniquely by God. As our Creator, He has deposited gifts into our hearts and personalities in which we are to steward over. We are to use these gifts to serve the local church and glorify Him. The use of our gift is not a process for us to be recognized, made much of, or exalted. We are given them to encourage and serve *others*. Additionally, functioning in our gifting is not a means of earning God’s salvation and acceptance; that is done only through the gospel.

GIFTS FROM THE SON

Ephesians 4:11-12

Jesus cares for His church and is faithful to provide for it. Christ sees and intimately knows each member. He desires for them to grow, mature, and minister to others. He has given His church gifts, in the form of the five

leadership roles found in Ephesians⁷, to help each individual grow into the fullness of Christ. These leaders are subject to Christ's leadership and must recognize His ultimate authority over their own lives and the church they serve.

GIFTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 12:4-12

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are most assuredly an area of controversy and conflict within Christendom. The abuse and misuse of these gifts is well publicized. On the other hand, the outright rejection of these gifts by some leaders causes many to approach them with cynicism and doubt. It seems the focus, in one way or another, has been taken off of what the Holy Spirit wants us to focus on when His gifts are in operation; the common good of believers.

It is in the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we most clearly see God's desire for us to stay encouraged and to encourage others. The Holy Spirit intends to knit our lives together and use us in each other's spiritual development. The gifts of the Holy Spirit help us see how we cannot follow Christ alone; we need each other. In a moment of discouragement, pain, worry, or trouble, someone using a gift of the Holy Spirit can release encouragement and assurance of God's goodness into our weak hearts, minds, and bodies.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH

WHAT IS IN OUR HANDS?

Matt. 5:13-16; Duet. 6:6-9

While the church of Jesus Christ has a variety of responsibilities, we want to take this opportunity to introduce you to what God has specifically called *Abundant Life* to place focus on. In doing so, we are able to see how God has provided opportunities for us to be a part of His mission of calling people to Himself.

This list may change and expand, but for the present time there are (5) areas of focus when considering our church's responsibilities- passing the faith on to our children, the discipleship of all, caring for needs, local missions, and world missions.

Individuals who willingly join with our church to share in the fulfilling of these responsibilities are certain to find joy in doing so. A Christian who understands that their faith is to be active and committed to the growth of others, to the salvation of non-believers, and to God's name being glorified around the globe, is a Christian who is maturing and not easily shaken by the ups-and-downs of life.

LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 16:15

We are called by God to love our neighbor *and* take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Both tasks are daunting when considering what is being asked of us but, with God, nothing is impossible.

⁷ Ephesians 4:11-12

Both local and world missions call us to care for others. As those who have freely received, we are to freely give. Our lives are to be spent for the good of others and the glory of God. Scripture is clear that we are to care for physical needs, but places an even *higher priority* on people's spiritual needs. Being involved in the mission of God, both locally and throughout the world, demands we get the gospel out! When the advancement of Jesus' Kingdom becomes the priority in our lives, we are promised that God will meet all our needs⁸.

⁸ Matthew 6:33

