

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years or so, the evangelical church has focused on the message, each of us can have a personal relationship with God through Christ. That's a good thing. That's where spiritual life starts. But that focus has been at something of a cost, because there is another side.

There is a **collective side** to our spiritual journey. None of us **can truly experience our own spiritual journey** without **other people**. That's the way God designed it. It happens as we discover our own gifts and capacities and balance them with others. We are equipped and coordinated through the Holy Spirit and become, not simply the family, but the body of Christ on this earth.

But, once we are equipped by the Holy Spirit, **what is this body of believers supposed to do?** Does it stop with the body simply serving and sustaining itself?

(Make a margin note, "my purpose"; Acts 1:8)

### **Matt 28**

**19.** Therefore **go and make disciples in all the nations**, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

**20.** and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this--that I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

### **Acts 1**

**8.** But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, **to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**, about my death and resurrection."

God says, to find your real self, you must discover you don't exist for yourself. You exist to be part of His body, the church. And in turn; the church does not exist for itself, but for the sake of all humanity. Here is a major paradigm: **The church does not exist for itself, it exists for the world.** It is designed by God, to be a bridge between Himself and all humanity.

### **1 Peter 2**

**9.** ... for you have been chosen by God himself--you are priests of the King, you are holy and pure, you are God's very own--**all this so that you may show to others** how God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

**10.** Once you were less than nothing; now you are God's own. Once you knew very little of God's kindness; now your very lives have been changed by it.

**Once we were nothing**, now we are a nation of priests, God's very own. What is the defining point of this new existence? –**That "you may show to others."**

### ***The church is defined by two things:***

- 1) It's **connection** to Christ *which results in our transformation and unity.*
- 2) It's **call** into the world.

A church is not a social club, it is not in competition with other local churches, and no Biblical church is more important or "better." Local churches aren't meant to stand off from the world

and collect people and resources, to themselves. They are meant to flow outward into the world and open the opportunity for others to see what God has **given us to “show.”**

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH? (REFER TO THE GIVEN SCRIPTURE)

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK WE’VE STRAYED FROM THIS PURPOSE IN THE MODERN CHURCH?

### SEVEN FEATURES OF THE BIBLICAL CHURCH

That being said; **let me share seven key features** of the authentic church as God has designed it. And in fact, what we find in the example of the first churches. An authentic church is:

#### 1. Target driven

In Acts 1:8, **Christ’s command wasn’t vague**. He didn’t say go to people nearby, and then go out further and further. He gave specific names- to the people of Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and in Samaria. He named specific places within their sphere of influence. Their purpose was to open up the opportunity to hear, touch, feel, and see the Gospel to those specific people. It makes perfect sense! **If they didn’t go** to Jerusalem where they lived; who would? If they didn’t touch Samaria, who would?

Shouldn’t we be asking ourselves the same question? We sit on the doorstep of Heritage Lake and this surrounding area; if we **don’t “show to others” here, who will?**

#### 2. The church leadership is empowered through interdependency, not dictatorship

Leadership is a function in the church body far more than it is an office or role. Leadership is the eyes of the body. A first clear example of leadership is Acts 6 when the church elected the first deacons. The meeting to address the problem wasn’t called by Peter, but by the twelve. It was a council of elders. When Peter writes to the leaders of other churches, he refers to them as “fellow elders.” John refers to himself as an elder.

The bottom line is simply this; **leadership of a church doesn’t fall to one individual it is a group of individuals, who depend on each other**. Another way of saying this is: **people who are leading are not only servant leaders, but team players**. This isn’t even a New Testament concept:

#### Prov 11

**14. Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.**

The person with discernment partners with the person with vision, who partners with the person gifted in administration... between the gifts, we gain a balanced picture of what God is telling us. Why? -Because **God’s message is bigger than any one person**.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IN YOUR WORDS, WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A CHURCH TO BE “TARGET DRIVEN?”

DESCRIBE WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO HAVE CHURCH LEADERSHIP THAT IS INTERDEPENDENT?

### **3. The Biblical Church is about empowering its people**

God’s first great call is to ***be in relationship with Him***. In that relationship we cooperate with Him, obey Him, and ultimately ***represent*** Him as we live it out. ***Each and every one of us has that calling!***

Therefore, the number one task of leadership is, to do all it can to direct people toward that relationship. That means ***empowering them to live that relationship***. Help them *discover their gifts*. Direct them in *opportunities to use those gifts*. Keep the *direction of God’s heart* before them. Any activity or program of the church that isn’t moving people to develop that relationship as a ***regular part of their life*** is a dangerous deviation for the real purpose.

### **4. The spiritual life of God’s people has visible markers and values**

Solid preaching is necessary for our spiritual vitality. In fact, one scholar points out that historically; *the weakest periods of the church are linked to eras of weakest preaching*.

But let’s think about this for a moment. There are churches that have drawn huge numbers of people with a *superstar preacher*. But the spiritual experience of simply returning once a week to hear a rousing message has led to a large group of nominal Christians. ***Outside of that one hour, they are just the same as the rest of the world***. That is *not* the Scriptural church.

Let me ***summarize a few of the visible traits*** of a living church family:

- 1) The people will have a ***growing intimacy*** with the heavenly Father.
- 2) They will have a ***salvation story*** they can testify
- 3) They will understand and use their ***spiritual gifts***
- 4) There will be a “God-dimension” to their ***interpersonal relationships***

***These are all “be” qualities***, and as they *become* these things, they go out and “do” in *their* Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, wherever that may be. They will understand they are accountable for these areas.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

DESCRIBE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS THAT A CHURCH CAN “EMPOWER” ITS PEOPLE

HOW DO PEOPLE GROW IN INTIMACY WITH THE HEAVENLY FATHER?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A “SALVATION STORY”?

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES CAN PROMOTE THESE THINGS?

**6. The Biblical church is not a spiritual island**

The early church transformed most of Western Europe in 200 years. The letters of the New Testament gives us a clue on how the church, managed from scratch in a pagan world; ***everyone saw themselves as part of the same church.***

In our day, no single church, no matter how big; no single denomination, no matter how wide spread, ***is going to make the impact this culture needs to be rescued.*** The task is simply too big. It will take all of us in partnership and coordination. And God is leading more and more of His servants to see that.

Partnering and care for other parts of THE church (*even if they are not our particular area or brand*) is as old as the church itself. Here is the Apostle Paul speaking:

**Romans 15**

**25. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.**

**26. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.**

A modest church in the northern outreaches of Greece shares with the poor in a church a thousand miles away in Jerusalem. *In a day when most people walked, those people in Macedonia would never even meet a person from Jerusalem.* Unreserved giving; living with hands open, is a key feature of a Biblical church. -Because Kingdom work is bigger than just one.

Another side to this feature is; instead of gathering all the people and resources to themselves, these churches replicate more churches with those resources. ***Now, that doesn't make sense if a church group is working out of self-interest. But if we are truly all about Kingdom work, it makes all kinds of sense.***

There is a saying, "***MacDonald's didn't conquer the world by having a big restaurant in every city, but by having a small one on every corner.***"

What might happen if we were more interested in replicating Biblical churches instead of simply trying to make our own bigger and bigger?

**7. The Biblical church telescopes into other parts of the world.**

The Spirit of God isn't just coordinating people in our region, He is doing it worldwide. We have experienced some of that with our missions interests. The world is becoming smaller. With the internet and modern transportation, that is even more possible today.

And once again, it is also for ***the rounding of our own spiritual experience.*** People are going through other challenges and blessings in other parts of the world of which we have no experience. By partnering, we share that experience, and they share ours.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT CHURCHES CAN PARTNER?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN PARTNER GLOBALLY?

WHAT CAN YOU DO PERSONALLY?

### CONCLUSION

It has been engrained in us to measure success by: ***How many? How much? How happy?*** -And mainly in the context of our own little church setting.

But as we look at the Biblical model, that is not how God defines success. He asks: ***Who? What opportunity? What transformation?***

-And not simply inside our church walls; but in His Kingdom, outside these walls.

That's what it means to ***be a church***. That's what it means to be ***God's bridge***. And that's where ***our personal relationship, experience, and triumph in Christ will be found***. -For the sake of others, and in that way, for your own sake. ***It flows both ways***.

***Let me leave you with a practical challenge:***

We live in a summer community. Summer is on us. ***What ways, in this fleeting opportunity, will you use your gifts to show Christ out there?***

***As a church, and as individuals; how will you answer your call?***