

THE CHURCH:

IDENTITY, MISSION, & CULTIVATION

REVIEW

Identity –

We are a local church. We are a local expression of that larger people that God has rescued through the saving work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

But we are not merely recipients of the Gospel. God has appointed us to spread that very same gospel by which we ourselves have been saved. We are God’s vehicle for advancing his gospel to the world.

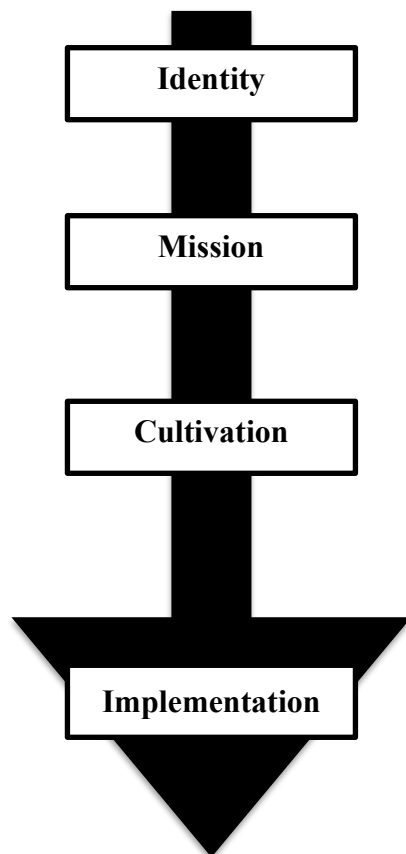
Mission –

To glorify God by advancing the Gospel, which transforms people into fully devoted follows of Jesus.

Cultivation –

Here we consider how we are shaped into community *in whom* our mission is fulfilled and equipped as a people *by whom* our mission is fulfilled. Scripture provides the following principles, practices, and values as those things which foster and cultivate a healthy, mission-fulfilling church.

“MINISTRY MAP”



We begin with what God has done and who we are as a result of it. Out of this identity (who we are) flows our mission (why we exist).

Because of who we are (our identity), this is what we are called to do. This is our mission, our purpose—why we exist as an organized community.

These are the principles we believe scripture identifies as those things that build up and equip our community for its mission. As such, these serve as our ministry values. They are vital for our church’s health and the fulfillment of its mission.

This is how we put those ministry values into practice in our specific church context. When you experience “life as CrossWay,” this is what you see. But these are not accidental activities, structures, and programs. These are intentional practices, built on our values, which seek to build up our church towards health and mission. In this way, everything we do is oriented towards our mission.

CULTIVATION

- **Biblical church organization and government—the facilitator of discipleship**

Question: Why is a Biblical form of church government important for our health as a church? Our mission?

We believe that the Biblical model of (1) church organization—namely, an understood membership—and (2) church government—namely, that the local church be served by deacons and led by a plurality of qualified elders—is incredibly significant to the maturation and healthy functioning of the local church. For example, when the offices are functioning as they should, this helps ensure that the church’s needs are accounted for and addressed. Or again, a church’s government—particularly its elders—serves as something like the rudder for its ministry decisions. As such, a healthy polity and healthy leadership significantly contribute to the cultivation of a healthy church.¹

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16.

Question: What are some aspects of a Biblically organized and governed church that are important for our health?

A healthy, Biblical polity and leadership has several dimensions or features worth noting:

Church membership. The Bible assumes and expects that all believers join and submit themselves to a local church with whom they will regularly gather and to whom they faithfully serve and are accountable (e.g., church discipline).² Church membership then is a necessary contemporary application of this Biblical principle of being able to identify who is a part of the church.³

Scripture: Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 16:5; 1 Cor 12:12, 27; cf. 1 Cor 5:1-13; Heb 13:17.

Question: Why is practicing membership important for our health as a church?

We believe it is vital for the health and well-being of our church that our church be able to identify its boundaries and constituencies. First, this identifies those for whom the church—and particularly its leaders—have formal responsibility to watch over. Second, it maintains clarity—and avoids a dangerous ambiguity—regarding whom the church has publically recognized as believers. And, third, it guards the testimony of the church by specifying who actually constitutes the church.

As such, we should be committed to seeing this vision of the normal (healthy) Christian life realized in our community by (1) fostering a culture and (2) observing a practice of membership that expects this of all believers in our midst.

¹ Acts 6:1-6; 20:28; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 5:2-3.

² Mt 18:15-17; Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Heb 13:17; 1 Jn 2:19.

³ Mt 18:15-17; Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:1-3; 16:5; 20:28; 1 Cor 5:4, 11; 11:18, 20, 33; 14:23; 1 Thes 5:12; 1 Tim 5:9; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3.

A properly functioning deaconate. The deaconate is responsible for serving the church community by caring for its various temporal and physical needs.⁴

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7; cf. 1 Tim 3:8-13.

Because of these important responsibilities, it is vital to our church's health that its deacons reasonably meet the Biblical qualifications given for their office.⁵

A healthy pastorate. The elders' responsibilities in shepherding the church towards health and maturity involve leading the church by example, with gentleness and not compulsion, caring for the saints and equipping them for ministry, preaching and teaching the word, guarding the church from error, devoting themselves to prayer, overseeing the well-being and activity of the church, raising up leaders, and attending to their own spiritual condition.⁶

Scripture: Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; cf. 1 Tim 4:16.

Because of these important responsibilities, it is vital to our church's health that its elders reasonably meet the Biblical qualifications given for their office.⁷

A plurality of elders. We believe the Bible presents the church as being governed by a plurality of elders (i.e., a group of elders, as opposed to one individual). This form of polity is important for the healthy governing of our church.

Scripture: Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 6, 22; 16:4; 20:17; cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5; Heb 13:7, 17; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-5.

Question: Why is this important? What are the benefits of having a plurality of elders?

Not only do we believe that this plurality-of-elder led polity—as opposed to a single-elder led or lead-pastor model—is Biblical,⁸ but we believe there is incredible wisdom in it. For example, a plurality of elders provides the following benefits: (1) it provides a fuller vision to the overseeing office of the church, ideally covering the blind spots of each individual elder; (2) it supplies more gifting to the overseeing office, covering each individual elder's weaknesses; (3) by recruiting more to pastoral care, it better—and less strenuously/more sustainably—ensures the fulfillment of pastoral responsibilities; and (4) it provides a network of accountability for the pastorate.

⁴ Acts 6:1-6; Rom 16:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13.

⁵ 1 Tim 3:8-13.

⁶ Acts 15:2, 6, 22-29; 16:4; 20:17; 28-31, 35; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 4:16; 5:17; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:5-9; Heb 13:7; 17; Js 5:14; 1 Pet 5:2-3.

Although not specifically responsibilities of the pastoral office, it is important to include here that it is our pastors' responsibility (and pleasure) to maintain a healthy ministry-work-life balance and to attend to their spouse and children (if they have any). As a church, we must commit to facilitating, encouraging, and supporting this lifestyle among our elders.

⁷ 1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:24-25; Tit 1:6-9.

⁸ Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 6, 22; 16:4; 20:17; 28-31, 35; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:5; Heb 13:7, 17; Js 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-5.

Financial support. Scripture teaches us that the church is to provide financial support to those elders who labor in primary teaching roles within the church.

Scripture: 1 Cor 9:6-18; 1 Tim 5:17-18.

Question: What does this have to do with our mission? How does supporting certain elders financially help us in fulfilling in mission? (See Phil 1:3-5; 4:15-16.)

This practice allows these elders to dedicate themselves further to the work of the ministry, and, as such, promotes the health and maturation of the church.⁹

Question: Why is all of this important for our mission as a church? How do these things equip us for mission and serve our ultimate purpose?

- **Every-member ministry; multiplying ministers—the unleashing of discipleship**

Question: In the church, whose job is it to minister to others?

We believe the mature and healthy church is best cultivated (1) when it is the expectation that all members engage in ministering to others¹⁰ and (2) when the church, particularly its leaders, are intentional about equipping its members for ministry.

Question: Why is “every-member ministry” important to our health as a church? How does it help us realize our mission?

Mobilization. It is the Biblical expectation that every believer is to use his or her God-given gifts to minister to others in the local church.

Correspondingly, we do not view our elders as the select individuals tasked with doing the ministry, but as mobilizers—those with unique ministry responsibilities, which include training and equipping all members of the church to engage in ministry themselves. This vision involves the decentralization and delegation of ministry.¹¹

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Pet 4:10-11.

Raising leaders. In particular, we believe it is the local church’s task to raise up new leaders and elders. Specifically, it is the responsibility of our current elders to identify and train

⁹ 1 Cor 9:6-14; Phil 4:15-16; 1 Tim 5:17-18.

¹⁰ In some churches, “getting everyone involved in ministry” may mean nothing more than plugging individuals into certain committees or tasks that do not involve directly ministering God’s word to others. Without diminishing the importance of these sorts of activities often referred to by churches as “ministries,” for our purposes here in this section, by “ministry” we are deliberately including the activity of engaging others with God’s word—encouraging, rebuking, equipping, challenging, exhorting, evangelizing, or counseling another by prayerfully applying the truth of God’s word to someone’s life. We believe it is the responsibility of every Christian to engage in this sort of ministry in the context of the local church. This is an essential dimension of the sort of ministry to which we refer when we say “every-member ministry.”

¹¹ Joel 2:28-29; Acts 4:31; Rom 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Cor 12-13; 15:58; Eph 4:11-16, 25; 6:4; Phil 1:7, 14; 4:3; Col 3:16; 4:6; 2 Thes 1:11-12; Heb 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 1 Pet 2:9; 3:15; 4:10-11.

qualified individuals—entrusting to them the Gospel and the Christian faith—that they too may serve and equip our church community for ministry.¹²

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:2.

Question: How is raising up new leaders a function of our mission as a church? (Or, to put it differently, what does raising up new leaders have to do with our mission?)

- **Community & relationship—the context of discipleship**

Question: What does community have to do with discipleship?

Our maturation as Christians is inescapably relational. In God’s wisdom, he saves us as part of a community—the church. And the relationships that make up this community are the God-appointed context and means by which he nurtures and preserves his people. They are the incubator and catalyst of our discipleship.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thes 5:14; Rom 15:5-6; cf. John 13:34-45.

Modeling relationships. In particular, scripture depicts Christian discipleship occurring in the context of intentional modeling, mentoring, and imitation relationships in which the Christian life is more ‘caught’ than ‘taught,’ in which the Christian life is ‘learned’ by following the examples of mature Christians and observing their way of life.¹³

Scripture: 1 Cor 4:15-16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; cf. 1 Thes 1:6-7; 2 Thes 3:7, 9; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3.

As such, our church must value, pursue, and foster the Biblical traits of Christian community: unity, care, support, intimacy, involvement, friendship, encouragement, accountability, confession, and mentorship.¹⁴

Question: Why is having a strong community important for our mission?

Scripture: Phil 4:2-3.

- **Church discipline—the guardrails of discipleship**

In its broadest sense, church discipline involves all that the church does to disciple its members, and is thus proactive, preventative, and formative. But, in particular incidences, church discipline is intervening, responsive, and corrective, i.e., when the church intervenes to seek to

¹² 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5.

¹³ Mk 3:14; 1 Cor 4:15-16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thes 1:6-7; 2 Thes 3:9; 1 Tim 4:11, 15; Tit 2:3-5, 7-8; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3.

This would seem to be a significant reason why most of the requirements laid down for elders pertain to character and lifestyle—traits elsewhere expected of all believers (1 Tim 4:15; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3).

¹⁴ Ps 133:1; Jn 13:34-35; 15:12; Acts 2:42, 44-46; Rom 12:4-5, 10, 13, 15-16, 18; 14:1-4, 10, 13, 15, 19-21; 15:5; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 12:12-31; 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:2-6, 15, 25; Phil 2:3-4; Col 3:14; 1 Thes 4:9; 5:14; Heb 6:10; 10:24-25; 13:1, 3, 16; Js 5:16; 1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 1 Jn 1:7; 3:14; 4:11, 20.

deliver particular members from unrepentant sin.

Question: Why is practicing church discipline important for our health as a church? For our safety as individual Christians?

Church discipline is the church's wonderful and gracious responsibility of guarding its members from unrepentant sin and steering them towards maturity in Christ. It is a means by which the church protects itself from the polluting effect of sin as well as a marred testimony to the outside world. As such, church discipline is not to be neglected, but valued and practiced with wisdom.¹⁵

Scripture: Gal 6:1-2; James 5:19-20.

Question: How does this change the way you view the purpose of church discipline?

CONCLUSION

The church exists for a reason. The mission of the church is the continuation of God's mission in this world to redeem a people for himself. We have been caught up in God's mission – he has saved us. But not only so, now God has commissioned us with the task of advancing the very gospel by which we ourselves have been saved.

Scripture gives us instructions for how we are to exist as a church on mission. These instructions for “church life” are vital for our health as community, and thus have everything to do with our mission – they root us in the gospel; and they equip us for our task of spreading that gospel.

How we “do church” is not accidental, random, or “just because.” We are to be intentional and deliberate with our mission always as our aim.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Question: How does the material in this course change the way you view church?

Question: How might you live differently because of our time in this course? What specific, concrete things do you intend to put into practice or do differently?

¹⁵ Mt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1-2; 1 Tim 5:19-21; 2 Thes 3:14-15; Tit 1:13; Js 5:19-20.