

Village Church **Membership** Handbook



 **THE VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 **Go** therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 **teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age.”



Welcome to the Village!

We are thrilled you have chosen to consider membership at the Village Church! We take membership very seriously as God has called each and every believer to be fully engaged in a local community of Christ-followers. This course will dig deeper into the meaning of what it means to be a member of this local church.

It is our desire that this course would not only teach you God's expectations for your personal and privileged role in the local church, but also that God would increase your love for Him, His people, and His world! Our desire is that this course would bring a deeper sense of unity to the Village Church.

There is much confusion as to what it means to be a "member", or "body part", of both the local and global church of Jesus Christ. This course seeks to bring clarity to Jesus' expectations as revealed through Scripture and give you an opportunity to live out these expectations.

The membership process at the Village Church is simple and purposeful. There are five easy steps:

1. *Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone by faith for the forgiveness of sins, for peace with God, and a confident eternity with Him forever! Rom 3:23, Rom 6:23, and Rom 10:8-12.*
2. *Be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:18-20*
3. *Faithfully attend & participate in each session of our 6-week membership class.*
4. *Turn in to your teacher or the church office for Elder review the following:*
 1. *signed "Session Checklist" on pg. 8*
 2. *"Membership Requirements Checklist" on pg. 9*
 3. *signed "Membership Covenant" on pg. 10-11.*
5. *Pending no hesitations by your membership class facilitator or the Elders, your Village Church membership will be officially validated by a letter from the Elders and through an announcement during a Sunday morning worship service!*

Being a member of the Village Church is a great joy that will afford you and your family a Christ-Centered community that seeks to see lives redeemed and transformed. This is a community that seeks to exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ in all we do as this is the heartbeat of every true Christian filled with the Spirit of God.

Get ready to engage in the mission and values of this community. May God use the this course to further fulfill His mission for His Church in Bartlett and beyond!

**Serving In and for Christ,
The Village Church Leadership**

How to Take This Course - READ THIS!

By taking this course you commit to three things:

1. Reading each assigned chapter **BEFORE** every class (*this will take about 10-20 minutes per week*)
2. Answering the questions at the end of the chapter **BEFORE** class in preparation for class discussion.
3. Attending consistently and participating fully in each membership class. You are permitted **one** missed class, but the homework must still be completed.

Your facilitator will email you most weeks reminding you to have your chapter read. Thanks in advance for engaging in this class at the Village Church!



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*“We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually **members** one of another.”*

- Romans 12:5

Your Next Steps at the Village Church!

Everybody comes to the Village Church with a different background and level of spiritual maturity. Our desire is to make sure you know exactly how and where to connect so you can be fully engaged in this community.

- 1. Trust Christ as your Savior and be baptized.** If you would like more information on this, please talk to your membership class teacher or any one of the staff. We would love to talk with you!
- 2. Attend Sunday morning worship services.**
- 3. Join a Community Group.** Pick up a pamphlet in the church foyer for Community Groups times and locations.
- 4. Become a member of the Village Church.** Pick up a pamphlet in the foyer for class dates and more information.
- 5. Serve using your spiritual gift.** Your membership class will deal with this subject in chapters 4 and 5.

Session Completion Checklist

Put your initials after each chapter of this membership book to signify that you have read & completed the discussion questions BEFORE CLASS:

Chapter 1: Introduction, Purpose of Membership, & Village Church Mission & Values:

X _____

Chapter 2: Core Value # 1 - Christ-Centered - *The Foundation of the Church* - **Centered**

X _____

Chapter 3: Core Value # 2 - Word - *The Doctrine of the Church* - **Grounded**

X _____

Chapter 4: Core Value # 3 - Spirit - *The Energy of the Church* - **Powerful**

X _____

Chapter 5: Core Value # 4 Community - *The Life of the Church* - **Communal & Serving**

X _____

Chapter 6: Core Value # 4 Community - *The Life of the Church* - **Accountable & Sacrificial**

X _____

Chapter 7: Core Value # 5 - Discipleship - *The Mission of the Church* - **Being**

X _____

Chapter 8: Core Value # 5 - Discipleship - *The Mission of the Church* - **Going**

X _____

Put your initials after each session of this membership class you have attended:

Session 1

Chapter 1: Introduction, Purpose of Membership, & Village Church Mission & Values

X _____

Session 2

Chapter 2: Core Value # 1 - Christ-Centered

X _____

Session 3

Chapter 3: Core Value # 2 - Word

X _____

Session 4

Chapter 4: Core Value # 3 - Spirit

X _____

Session 5

Chapter 5-6: Core Value # 4 Community

X _____

Session 6

Chapter 7-8: Core Value # 5 - Discipleship

X _____

Your Signature: X_____ Class Facilitator Signature: X_____

Upon completion of this course, make a copy of this "Session Completion Checklist" and turn it into your teacher along with a copy of the Membership Requirement Checklist on pg. 9 and a copy of your signed "Membership Commitment" on pg.. 10-11.

Membership Requirements Checklist

The membership process at the Village Church is simple and purposeful. There are five easy steps. This document will be reviewed by the Elders prior to confirmation of membership.

1. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone by faith for the forgiveness of sins, for peace with God, and a confident eternity with Him forever! Rom 3:23, Rom 6:23, and Rom 10:8-12.

Have you trusted in Christ alone by faith?

YES _____ NO _____

If yes, When and where? Include timeframe if possible. We also understand that some do not know the answer to this question as it was process over time. That is fine. Explain the process briefly.

2. Be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:18-20

Have you been baptized in an evangelical Christian church after having trusted in Jesus Christ by faith alone?

YES _____ NO _____

If yes, When and where? Include date, church, and person who baptized you if possible.

Date: _____ Location: _____ Who Baptized You: _____

3. Faithfully attend & participate in each session of our 6-week Village Church membership class.

Have you done this?

YES _____ NO _____

4. Turn in to your teacher or the church office for Elder review your 1. signed "Session Checklist" on pg. 8, 2. your "Membership Requirement Checklist" on pg. 9, and 3. your signed "Membership Covenant" on pg. 10-11.

Have you done this?

YES _____ NO _____

5. Pending no hesitations by your membership class facilitator or the Elders, your Village Church membership will be officially validated by a letter from the Elders and through an announcement during a Sunday morning worship service!

Upon completion of this course, make a copy of this "Membership Requirement Checklist" & turn it into your teacher along with a copy of the "Session Completion Checklist" on pg. 8 and a copy of your signed "Membership Commitment" on pg..

Village Church Membership Commitment

Purpose

When anyone enters into relationship with God by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ they are entering into two commitments. The first is to journey with God for the rest of their lives and love Him fully. The second is to journey with His other children as you invest yourself in the community of the local church. Your membership in the Village Church is an official recognition of this commitment on your part. The purposes of the Village Church Membership Commitment are:

- 1. To join the Spirit in forming authentic community that reflects the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit.*
- 2. To clarify the ongoing blessings, expectations and responsibilities of each member.*
- 3. To encourage consistency, accountability and loving unity within the church family.*
- 4. To accomplish God's call for the Village Church family to make disciples who go, grow, and overcome.*

This commitment does not imply that you will never fall short of the goals, but that the desire of your heart is to fulfill each of the responsibilities stated to the best of your ability by God's grace. We trust that your commitment will be a personal blessing to your own journey in Christ, as well a blessing to the Village Church.

With the guiding help of the Holy Spirit, I, the undersigned, commit the following:

- 1.** I am a Christian who has been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith alone. I have been or desire to be baptized to give testimony of my identification with Jesus and His body, the church, in obedience to the Scriptures.
- 2.** I have read and understood The Village Church's doctrinal statement and agree not to be divisive to its teaching. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Hebrews 13:7; Ephesians 4: 1-3).
- 3.** I will endeavor to maintain my devotion to the Lord through regular personal Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of the other spiritual disciplines. I desire my journey in Christ to be evident through my regular participation in corporate worship and in community with the Body here (Psalms 119:97, 105; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25).

4. I will strive to be a wise steward of the resources God has given me, including my time, body, gifts and talents, attitudes, finances and possessions (Eph. 5:15-18; Romans 12:1-2; Eph. 4:1-16; Gal. 5:22-26; Proverbs 3:9-10). This includes regular giving to The Village Church that is regular, sacrificial and cheerful (2 Corinthians 8 and 9).
5. I commit myself to the Village Church family and agree to aid in fulfilling its mission to “make disciples who go, grow, and overcome” in Bartlett and beyond. I recognize that this will be accomplished by actively upholding the Village Church’s core values in my life, church, and family.
6. I commit to not only understanding what spiritual gift(s) God has given me, but also using it for the building up of this church (1 Peter. 4:10-11; Romans 12:108; 1 Cor. 12: 7-13).
7. I covenant to practice the humility and sacrificial attitude of Christ by not thinking more highly of myself than I ought to, considering others and their needs as more important than myself, (Philippians 2:1-11), not gossiping (Proverbs 16:28; Matt. 18:15-17), and seeking spiritual friendships (Proverbs 17:17).
8. I covenant to follow the biblical procedures of church discipline and willingly submit myself to discipline if the need should ever arise (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-5).
10. I covenant to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues. (Psalm 119: Tim. 3:16-17).

God enabling me, I will strive to consider my commitment to the Membership Covenant on a yearly basis. I understand that it is an evaluative tool, as well as an affirmation of my continuing conviction and purpose. My responsibility will be to notify the Village Church leadership if at any time I can no longer commit to this covenant, or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The Village Church.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Upon completion of this course, make a copy of this “Membership Commitment” and turn it into your teacher along with a copy of the “Session Completion Checklist” on pg. 8 and the “Membership Requirement Checklist” on pg. 9.

Chapter 1

Introduction, Purpose of Membership, & VC Mission



Go. Grow. Overcome.



A Brief History of the Village Church

In 1973, seven like-minded families began to meet in homes for Bible study. After meeting for 3-4 months, the group felt called by God to plant an official church with the mission of being an Evangelical witness to the Bartlett community. The bible study grew as other families began to attend and catch the vision. There were 12 families attending the Bible study when they were chartered as a church through the Evangelical Free Church of America. For the next 3 years the Village Church of Bartlett held Sunday services at the local elementary and middle schools as home bible studies continued. During this time, the church hired its first full time pastor who served the church for 3 years. Since the church had more youth than parents, they hired a full time youth pastor that same year. When the church was formed, Bartlett had a population of under ten thousand.

When it was time for the church to start thinking about a building, they held their first fundraising dinner called the Harvest Dinner. The funds raised at the dinner were used to buy five acres of land along West Bartlett road. The land was purchased from the Sisters at the convent on the adjoining property. The church applied for a loan from Bartlett State Bank (now Harris Bank), and began clearing the land. The banker asked what they were doing. The answer: building on faith. The bank approved the loan with the thought that the building could be used as the public library if the church failed. During these years attendance was consistent: 60 people in the morning service, 60 people in the evening service, and 60 people on Wednesday evening.

Many of the materials used to construct the first building were donated or provided at cost. Members and friends of the church also donated much of the labor. The building was completed in 1976 with a large multi-purpose room surrounded by small classrooms. During this time, the church hired a young pastor, Jim Mooberry, who shepherded the church for almost 25 years as he faithfully taught the Word of God. The church continued to grow both physically and numerically under his leadership.

In 1988 the cornerstone was laid for the next church expansion. The project included a new sanctuary, offices, classrooms, and remodeling of the existing space. Again, volunteers supplied much of the labor for the building.

In the early 90s, Jim began to teach the "five solas" which are five Latin phrases that emerged during the Protestant Reformation. Not only did these summarize the Reformers' basic theological beliefs, but they also became the very DNA of the Village Church. The Latin word sola means "alone" or "only" in English. The five solas are Sola scriptura ("by Scripture alone"), Sola fide ("by faith alone"), Sola gratia ("by grace alone"), Solus Christus or Solo Christo ("Christ alone" or "through Christ alone"), and Soli Deo gloria ("glory to God alone").

In the late 90s, the Village Church clarified the distinctives that would guide its ministry into the new century. We would be Word-centered, develop Worshipers, Evangelistic in focus, a Spiritual family, and would seek to be a “Member-active ministry” with everyone using their spiritual gifts.

In 2001, the Village Church hired its next Teaching Pastor, Don Yates. Under Don’s leadership along with a growing staff and leadership, the Gospel and Word of God were protected and preserved for another generation. It was about this time that the Village Church further refined who we were as a church. We wanted to exalt God by equipping believers to employ their spiritual gifts and thereby both edify the body and evangelize the lost.

In 2005, the Village Church made the decision to disaffiliate with the Evangelical Free Church of America and become an independent, non-denominational church.

2008 began another revamping and refocusing of the Village Church’s mission, values, and ministries. God has used this most recent season of transition to unify and strengthen our body by His grace. With a renewed focus, God called Michael Fuelling to serve as our Lead Pastor in 2010. Michael had served as Youth Pastor since 2003.

As the Village Church continues to grow in grace and unity, it is our deepest desire to see lives transformed by the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples who go, grow, and overcome! We desire to be a church of broken and humble people wholly reliant on the grace of Jesus Christ and living out His mission as the local church He created us to be. We desire to accomplish this mission in each of our ministries by building everything on our five core values: 1. in all things **Christ-centered**, 2. Upholding the the **Word**, 3. pursuing **discipleship**, 4. being led by and motivated by the **Spirit** and 5. building **community**.

The rest of this course will look at membership in the Village Church through the lens of our mission and values as they guide and determine everything we do and don’t do as a local church. May God use you to further see our mission come to fruition and our values upheld in each life and ministry in our church.

The Gospel:

The word gospel means "good news." It comes from the Greek word *euangelion* ("eu" meaning good; and "angelion" meaning news/message). The word "evangelical" is derived from this word. In the Gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ we see that we are saved from sin by God, for God, and to God. So what is this good news about God? A helpful way to summarize the gospel is with these four points:

1. Creation: God created the whole world for His glory, purpose, and fame. The hallmark of His creation was mankind who, unlike the rest of creation, was created in His image and likeness. Mankind was created sinless to be in loving, intimate, and genuine relationship with God, one another, and the earth in the Garden of Eden.

2. Fall: Adam and Eve were given one law: They were not allowed to eat from one specific tree in the garden. If they ate they would suffer the penalty of separation from God and certain death. Adam and Eve disobeyed God, ate from the tree, and thus sinned. Sin is anything that is not done for God's glory or in God's way. The eating of the fruit of this tree is known as "the fall". With the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, all of humanity and creation were completely infected with sin. Because of this sin, God in His righteous anger expelled mankind and their offspring out of the garden, the place of His presence. This sin separated all of humanity from fellowship with God, severely wounded their relationship with each other and the planet, and destined all of creation for certain death and Hell.

3. Redemption: But God, out of the great love He had for humanity, became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He did this to live a perfect life & to suffer the punishment of death (*atonement*) and separation from God for our sins in our place. He was indeed our substitute sacrifice for our sins.

4. Response: God saw fit that if anyone would genuinely trust in Jesus Christ as God and Savior, He would forgive their sins. God poured out the fullness of His anger at our sin on Jesus Christ on the cross as a legitimate substitute sacrifice. Only through trust in Christ can we be saved from our rightful punishment of eternal separation from God in Hell. No amount of good works or intentions can make us right with God. The only work capable of saving us is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The "so what" of the Gospel Life: For those who have genuinely trusted in Jesus Christ, God promises the following things:

- He will fill us with His Spirit to conform us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13)
- He will never leave nor forsake us because we are His children and He is our Father (Rm 8:37-39)
- We have a confident hope of eternal life and eternal peace with God (Titus 3:4-7)

Mission: God has not just redeemed us for Heaven, but has given us a mission to accomplish together: we are to GO and make disciples of all nations for Jesus; GROW with Jesus, & OVERCOME through Jesus. We are to do this in Christ, according to the Word, by the Spirit, and with God and one another.

What is the Church and Why is It Important?

Many people today understand the church as a building. This is not a biblical understanding of the church. The word church comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* which simply means “an assembly,” or “called out ones.” When you ask people what church they attend, they usually identify a building or a denomination when in fact the church is a group of people. Romans 16:5 states: “...also greet the church that is in their house...”. Here Paul refers to the church specifically as a group of people who meet in a house.

The Local Church:

The local church is any communion of believers in Jesus Christ at a specific location or region that confess Christ as Lord and God by faith alone, practice the ordinances of baptism and communion, and uphold the Scriptures as the Word of God. Many New Testament letters are addressed to local churches as these are smaller, tangible representations of the universal church. Each believer is called to be a part of and fully engage in a local church.

The Universal Church:

The universal church is composed of all past, present, and future believers in Jesus Christ regenerated by the Holy Spirit through faith alone. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” We see that anyone who believes is part of the body of Christ. The universal and true church is not just one particular church body or denomination. The universal church is all those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The church will never cease to exist but will indeed attack and overcome evil. The church is a multi-ethnic community of believers with Christ as their head: “you (Jesus) were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” - Revelation 5:9-10

Both the local and universal churches are the Body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” The church is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ, from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) until Christ’s return. Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that Jesus is...“the head of the body, the church.” He is our Senior Pastor and Chief Shepherd. We are to look to Him first for our provision and protection. He alone is the supreme Head over the church.

Is Local Church Membership Biblical?

The Body of Christ is composed of all true believers in Christ by faith alone. Scripture says that believes in Jesus are “*members one of another*” (Romans 12:5). The Biblical word “member” literally means “body part”. We are each body parts composing the “body of Christ”. When we speak of “becoming a member” in a local church, it is important to communicate what we are **not** talking about. Here is one important fact to remember about membership:

- Local church membership is **NOT** a requirement for salvation. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

As we look to Scripture for clarity on how a local church understands its members, a few important texts are worth noting. While we do not find texts of Scripture that lay out how one joins a local assembly and remains in good standing with that assembly, we do find sufficient biblical support that implies some kind of formal membership in the early church was in place. The following passages uphold the biblical value of lists of people in good standing within local church assemblies:

- a. **In 1 Corinthians 5:11-13** Paul is calling for the exclusion of an immoral brother. This man would lose the privileges of “good standing”, or “membership”, which he previously held. Formal exclusion presupposes formal inclusion.
- b. **Paul's reference to "the majority"** in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 seems to refer to a group commonly recognized as the church's members, or those in good standing with the church.
- c. **The early church kept a list of widows.** We know this from the widow list in 1 Tim 5:9 which implied that lists of people were kept and tracked. If widows were listed, it stands to reason that a list of current members was kept and updated as well.
- d. **God Himself keeps a list of true believers (Revelation 13:8; 20:15)**

This supports a primary, but not sole, purpose of membership at the Village Church of Bartlett: *to keep a clear and communicated record of those in good standing with the Village Church both doctrinally and in lifestyle.* As there are no biblical texts or principles that discourage membership (*but in fact there are principles that uphold the value of local church membership*) we encourage all people committed to the Village Church to engage in the process and make a formal commitment to this local church, its people, and its leadership.

Four Compelling Reasons to Become a Member of a Local Church

1. Church membership signifies a church's corporate endorsement of a person's good standing with God's people.

2. Church membership helps leadership know specifically who is under their charge to shepherd and helps fellow members know to whom they are accountable.

- By identifying ourselves with a particular church we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We can therefore be held accountable to fulfill these Biblical commitments.
- If regular attenders don't eventually make themselves known to the Elders as members of the church, the Elders will have a harder time taking responsibility for them as part of their particular flock. Pastors need to know which sheep God will hold them accountable for so they can tend to them responsibly and effectively (Heb. 13:17).

3. Church membership signifies a regular responsibility that involves people in each other's lives for the purposes of the gospel.

- Church membership should not be viewed as a loose affiliation useful to members only occasionally. This is a self-centered way of looking at membership. It says, "I want to join this club for the benefits that it can offer me. But as soon as it starts demanding more than I feel I'm receiving, I think I'll start looking around for a new one."
- Church membership is not a set of rights that are purchased with a tithe. It is a set of responsibilities that are joyfully fulfilled.

4. Church membership makes the gospel clearer to non-Christians.

- Church membership helps make the gospel clearer to non-Christians by providing a unified witness of the Gospel and the Christ-like life God call us to live together. Jesus said it well in John 13:35: *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

The Six Basic Responsibilities of a Member

1. **Attend regularly.** Members commit to attending consistently Sunday Worship for corporate worship, Community Groups for building relationship, and the Sunday morning Equip Hour for training. Also, our regular attendance lets pastors get to know us in a way that meaningfully informs their shepherding care of us.
2. **Give regularly.** When we give, our pastors can fully devote themselves to preaching and teaching, our missionaries can stay on the field, and the lights will not have to be turned off in the building.
3. **Pray regularly.** One of the most basic ways we can edify and encourage one another towards greater obedience, holiness, and joy is through prayer. Pray through our church's directory consistently. Also, the church office puts out a weekly Prayer and Praise email. Make sure you are on the email list!
4. **Attend communion & baptism services.** These are ordinances commanded by the Lord for our joy in and remembrance of Him and the Gospel. They bind us together as a believing community and remind us of the significance of Christ's death and resurrection.
5. **Attend congregational meetings.** We should care enough about the life of our local church to attend congregational meetings and to contribute to them in helpful ways. We should listen carefully and be gentle in speech as some of the most important decisions are made during these critical times.
6. **Serve regularly.** *The Christian life is about giving not just our money, but our time for the encouragement of the body. Seek to serve in either Sunday worship services, your weekly Community Group, or in ministries like AWANA, Women's Ministry, or Student Ministries.*

Village Church Mission

Our Mission: “to make disciples *who go, grow, & overcome*” – Matt 28:18-20

Go

Jesus’ first command to his disciples before ascending into Heaven was simple: “**Go** make disciples of all the nations...”. At the Village Church we take this command seriously. A going church is a growing church. A staying church is a dying church. Every ministry in our church is continually seeking to wisely, lovingly, and effectively bring the soul-saving gospel of Jesus to our friends, family, neighbors, city, and world. This is our mission because it is Jesus’ mission.

We use three verbs to talk about “going” at the Village Church.

1. **Pray:** Individuals and ministries should spend time praying for the lost specifically by name, generally for groups of people. We pray for things out of our jurisdiction. Since the heart of man is God’s jurisdiction, we pray to God to save a human heart.
2. **Pursue:** Individuals and ministries should strategically pursue opportunities to share discuss Jesus with those who don’t know Him.
3. **Persuade:** When opportunities to talk about Jesus present themselves, we wisely, lovingly, and effectively talk about Jesus.

Grow

Jesus’ next command is to baptize & train new believers to obey Jesus. Jesus says, “baptize them” & “teach them to obey all that I have commanded you.” Growing is all about what we do to enhance our relationship with God. We talk about growth in two ways at the Village Church.

1. **Growing Deep:** Our mission is to help God’s people **grow deep** roots of faith in their relationship with God through five key disciplines: **prayer, study, giving, connecting, and serving**. When done for Jesus, these will necessarily & measurably grow our faith.
2. **Growing Wide:** Our mission is to also **grow wide** by seeing people come to faith Jesus and for the church to grow numerically. God celebrated numerical growth all throughout the book of Acts, rejoices over every soul who trusts in him, and counts each soul won. So do we! Whether or not the Village Church grows numerically is out of our control as God does the growing, but we seek to see the local and global church grow numerically in souls saved to and for Jesus.

Overcome

When a follower of Jesus wants to grow, we are faced with the reality of the **world**, our **flesh**, and the **devil**. These three forces seek to prevent our going and our growing. Jesus said “*I am with you wherever you go...*”. This is the most repeated promise of God to His people in Scripture. With God inside of us, we have the power of God to be unstained by the world, to control and crucify our flesh, and to resist the devil.

Village Church Core Values

Our core values are the central and most essential qualities of our being as a local church. They embody who we are as these few words represent powerful convictions that permeate everything we do as a church. If the Mission is a skeleton of what we want to look like (*"disciples who are going, growing, and overcoming"*), the core values are the internal tissues, muscles, and organs that make the mission come to life. More than hollow words, these phrases define what is most important in guiding our behavior as we actively pursue our mission for the church and accomplish our mission in Bartlett and beyond. We desire to be a church with the single-minded mission to make disciples who go, grow, and overcome.

Jesus says that what we do is the overflow of who we are on the inside. What we do is a barometer of whether our heart is genuinely valuing, or putting worth, into the things that are most important to Jesus. Our core values are exactly that: ***the things we value that drive everything we do and don't do.***

The rest of this course will probe deeper into what it means to be a church that is built on the following core values:

1. **Christ-Centered:** *Jesus Christ and His Gospel are the foundation of all we do and are at the Village Church. We are committed to ensuring that the person and work of Jesus are clearly and explicitly at the center of each person and ministry. Colossians 1:18 says that Jesus created everything so that "He might come to have first place in everything."*
2. **Word:** *Since the 66 books of the Old and New Testament are the written words of God, at the Village Church we seek to uphold and obey every aspect of the Bible both individually and corporately. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)*
3. **Discipleship:** *Every ministry of the Village Church will have as its goal moving each person further toward completion, or full maturity, in Christ. This is called "discipleship". Discipleship is at the very heart of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 where Jesus commissions His present disciples to make new disciples from all nations. Disciple-making includes evangelism, baptizing new believers, life-on-life training from God's Word, and application of this teaching.*
4. **Spirit:** *Every member and ministry of our church will seek to be Spirit-led as the Spirit of God is the source of all genuine heart change and movement toward completion in Christ and genuine discipleship. Without Him all our efforts are merely temporal. (Col 1:29)*
5. **Community:** *Jesus Christ instituted the local church as the extension of Himself to His people and the world. Jesus has appointed Elders and Deacons to humbly lead His Church and Jesus has equipped each believer with a spiritual gift to humbly serve His Church. It is in the context of this community of submission to leadership and submission to one another that completion/maturity in Christ occurs. (Acts 2:42)*

Chapter One Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What year did the Village Church begin? (pg. 13)
2. What are the four points of the Gospel? (pg. 15)

1.	2.	3.	4
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3. What is the:
 - **“Local Church”** (pg. 16):

 - **“Universal Church”** (pg. 16):
4. What are the six basic responsibilities of a member of a local church? (pg. 19)

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
5. What is the mission of the Village Church? (pg. 20)
6. What are each of our core values: (pg. 21)
 - **Core Value 1:**

 - **Core Value 2:**

 - **Core Value 3:**

 - **Core Value 4:**

 - **Core Value 5:**

Application Questions:

1. Come to class ready to share the Gospel...
 2. Which of the six Biblical responsibilities of a member on page 19 am I neglecting?
-
3. Knowing it's God's will that that I am fully committed to and serving in a local church, do I want to commit myself to the Village Church of Bartlett as a member?
-

Chapter 2

Core Value # 1: Christ-Centered



Centered



**THE VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Imagine a church where the people were so enamored with Jesus Christ that they could not stop talking about him to the unchurched and to each other. Imagine a worship service that is not about self-help, self-righteousness, or self-discipline, but is about humility, brokenness, and the exaltation of Jesus. Imagine a church where the people were more concerned about Jesus' reputation than they were their own. Imagine a church where people forgave because of the overwhelming reality of what Christ did for them on the cross.

The Implication of the Gospel:

Our core values are the central and most essential qualities of our being. They embody who we are; these few words represent powerful convictions that permeate everything we do as a church. If the mission is a skeleton of what we want to look like (*"disciples who are going, growing, and overcoming"*), the core values are the internal tissues, muscles, and organs that make the mission come to life. More than hollow words, these phrases define what is most important in guiding our behavior as we actively pursue our mission for the church, Bartlett and beyond.

Christ-Centered: *Jesus Christ and His Gospel are the foundation of all we do and are at the Village Church. We are committed to ensuring that the person and work of Jesus are clearly and explicitly at the center of each person and ministry. Colossians 1:18 says that Jesus created everything so that "He might come to have first place in everything."*

*"²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."
- 1 Corinthians 1:22-24*

Six Amazing Facts about the Gospel:

1. The gospel is the good news of the person and work of Jesus in saving sinners to God. Christ took our sin upon himself and died as our substitute so we would be forgiven and accepted by God.
2. God's plan of redemption in Christ (the gospel) is the central message of the Bible and thus must be the central message of our life.
3. The gospel is the power of God for salvation for all non-Christians. Apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no hope for the salvation of non-Christians.
4. The Gospel is the power of God for the sanctification of followers of Jesus. A healthy Christian should have an increasing and deepening knowledge of and appreciation for the gospel.
5. Every area of the Christian life must be rooted in the gospel. We must apply the gospel to every single area of our life.
6. The gospel will be the center of our worship in eternity (Revelation 5) and should be the center of our individual and corporate worship now.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Read Through the following passages of Scripture and consider the massive personal and communal implications for yourself and the Village Church.

Romans 1:15 - *“So I am **eager** to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”*

- The Gospel should compel us to eagerly want to preach it!
- The Gospel is meant to be preached to both believers in Jesus and to unbelievers. The recipients of Paul’s letter to Rome were indeed believers and His strong intention is to preach the Gospel to them. In fact, before he arrived he wrote the letter of Romans to expound upon the deep theological realities of the Gospel (Rom 1-11) and the deep practical implications of the Gospel (Rom 12-16).

Romans 1:16 - *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel”*

- Jesus made is clear that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before His Father. For the believer there is no shame in the gospel, but to the contrary, there is pride in our identification with Jesus Christ, His righteousness, His sufferings and death and His resurrection!

Romans 1:16 - *“for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - *“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”*

- The Gospel is “God’s power” to save unregenerate sinners from their sins and effect profound spiritual realities! There are no other means by which someone can be regenerated except through belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Rom 10).
- When the Gospel is preached the Spirit chooses to move His own people to salvation. Without the Gospel, the Spirit does not move people toward salvation.
- We know that when God brings the Gospel to a people-group there are some He intends to save!

Romans 1:17 - *“For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,*

- The message of the Gospel is one of a perfect and righteous God! As we proclaim the Gospel, we are continually reminded of the character and nature of the holy God who redeems unholy sinners.
- Our Gospel messages must include a discussion of holiness: God is perfectly holy and righteous; man is completely unholy and deserves to be punished for sin; and Jesus is our perfect and holy atonement for our sins.

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

- The Gospel strengthens believers in their spirit. There is power in the message where as we meditate on the glorious message of our holy God redeeming unholy and rebellious people, our souls are both encouraged and empowered!
- the Gospel is the preaching of Jesus Christ - His deity, His perfect life, His atoning death, and His victorious resurrection.
- The Gospel was a message kept secret that has now been revealed for all people and nations!
- The Gospel brings about obedience in both the saved and lost!
- The sinful mind sees the Gospel as foolishness.
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed a stumbling block for the unregenerate mind!

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

- The unregenerate mind cannot see as wise, true, or right the Gospel of Jesus Christ because they are blinded by idolatry.
- Only God can remove the veil causing blindness through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- In the Gospel we see the glory and majesty of Jesus, who is the image of God! Truth about Jesus' nature and character are revealed to our souls by faith which is only imparted by God through the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 - *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved...”*

- Believers need to be reminded of the Gospel consistently as it is the reason we can stand righteous before God and even continue in our sanctification.
- The gospel is the primary means by which we are being saved, or sanctified. Salvation here is not referring to justification and regeneration, but our progressive sanctification as we are molded more and more into the image of Christ in our inner person.

Galatians 1:8 - *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”*

- God will not stand by as the most powerful and glorious message of all time is perverted in any way. Anyone that preaches another Gospel than Paul's Gospel will be cursed by God and damned to Hell.

Galatians 1:11-12 - *“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

- The Gospel is not another man-made religion. In fact, it is counter the rituals, law, and economy of religion. The Gospel proclaims the reconciliation of an eternal and broken relationship with the only God that exists.
- The Gospel was given by Jesus Christ Himself!

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

- The Gospel is for the salvation of people’s from all nations & socio-economic classes; not just Jews, the rich, the godly, and the wealthy. For the Jews, this statement has profound implications as the Gentiles were considered second-class spiritual citizens and often times not even worthy of association. Contrary to their thinking, God has made into one body people from all languages, races and nationalities who are Christ.

Ephesians 3:7 - *“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...”*

- In the Gospel we find the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. In Christ and the Gospel are treasures beyond any earthly wealth.
- At God’s right hand truly are “pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Ephesians 6:14-15 - *“Stand therefore...having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”*

- We must stand ready to give the Gospel at any moment as it is the power of God for salvation.
- As Paul is writing about defending ourselves during spiritual warfare, one of our primary defenses is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. In the gospel is power against evil, strength to persevere, and hope for sanctification. Not only does God effect spiritual change in those who hear the Gospel, but he also changes those who preach it!

Philippians 1:15-18 - *“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice...”*

- The proclamation of the Gospel, whether by those with insincere or with sincere motives, should well up joy inside of us! The Gospel ministry is not one of competition, but one of collaboration. We can celebrate as large church’s and small churches alike see the conversion of lost sinners through the Gospel since we are all on the same team.

Philippians 1:27 - *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel”*

- The Gospel is something we are to strive with other believers to see proclaimed. We are mutually responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel as the Church.
- The Gospel is the message of a holy God and should create in us desire for deeper holiness.

Colossians 1:21-23 - *“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”*

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is first and foremost a message of hope, not of condemnation. We have a message of good news for those who do not know Jesus Christ. Our discussions of Hell and sin must be followed by messages of hope, redemption, forgiveness, and peace with God.

2 Timothy 1:8-10 - *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*

- We are called to suffer for the Gospel because the proclamation of the Gospel is more valuable than our physical well-being.
- Because of the spiritual friction that the Gospel creates with the world's system of thought, we should expect trials and suffering to varying degrees.
- Through the Gospel Jesus completely destroyed the power of death!
- Through the Gospel Jesus can offer those who trust in Him alone salvation from sin and peace with God.

The Gospel in Our Worship Services

Jesus understood our daily and weekly need to be reminded of the eternal truths of the gospel.

- Jesus knew that we would be prone to think we are better than we actually are. The gospel reminds us we are sinners in desperate and daily need of God.
- Jesus knew that in our increased intimacy and friendship with God that we would tend to forget His holiness and perfection. The gospel reminds us that no matter how intimate we are with God, He is *“holy, holy, holy”*.
- Jesus knew that in our adoption as sons and daughters we would be tempted toward entitlement. The gospel reminds us to be humble, servant-hearted, and lowly.

- Jesus knew that as we grew in Christ-likeness, we would become puffed up and conceited with self-righteousness. The gospel keeps us in our place and reminds us that all our righteousness is in Christ.
- Jesus knew the attacks of sin, Satan and the world telling us we are unforgiven, ugly, and unsavable. The Gospel reminds us we are God's, forgiven, and clean in Christ!
- Our flesh seeks to condemn of us. The gospel reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

Since Jesus knew our daily and weekly need to be reminded of the Gospel, He ensured that the Gospel would be preached in each worship service through at least one or more of the following four primary avenues:

- 1. Communion:** Jesus instituted the Lord's supper to be taken when God's people gather. Communion reminds believers that apart from the Gospel we are nothing. Communion sets our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.
- 2. Baptism:** Jesus ensured that when someone trusts Him as their Lord and Savior that they would be baptized in water. This baptism is a symbol of their new life in Him as well as a first act of obedience. Baptism is an outward sign and ceremony of the inward realities produced by God through the Gospel.
- 3. Preaching:** Paul himself said, "*I preach Christ and Him crucified.*" Any preaching that is not explicitly Christ-centered is off-centered. Proverbs without Christ is simply moralisms. Old Testament narratives without Christ are simply stories about God that cannot lead to salvation in Christ. Creation without understanding Christ as creator is missing an essential piece of the story. Christ is the mystery hidden throughout the ages and explicitly communicated in the New Testament. He is the filter and hope of the Old Testament, the subject of the New Testament, and therefore the center of the preaching of God's Word.
- 4. Music:** Worship music is music sung to God because of who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Worship songs that omits Jesus and the cross are simply just missing the point.

Chapter Two Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

- What are the six amazing facts about the Gospel? (pg. 25)
 - *It is the good news of the _____ and _____ of Christ*
 - *It is the _____ of the Bible and must be of our lives also*
 - *It is the _____ of _____ to saves sinners*
 - *It is the power of God to _____*
 - *It has _____ to every area of our lives*
 - *It will be the _____ of our _____ in eternity (Revelation 5) and must be the center of our _____ and _____ worship now*

2. What are the four primary ways the gospel is preached during a Village Church worship service? (pg. 30)

Chapter 3

Core Value # 2: Word - *The Doctrine of the Church*



Grounded



**THE VILLAGE
CHURCH**

What We Believe

Statement of Faith from Article IV of the Village Church Constitution

THE SCRIPTURES

1. We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be: the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings (yet preserved and protected for reliable translation throughout the ages), the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 28:19).

GOD THE TRINITY

2. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 17:3; Revelation 4:11; Matthew 28:19).
3. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into Heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He is now our High Priest and Advocate (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Matthew 1:18; Hebrews 1:3, 9:24).
4. We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and, during this age, to convict men, regenerate the believing sinner through the baptism and sealing work of the Holy Spirit, and indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:30; John 14:17, 26, 16:7-11).

HUMANITY

5. We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is, therefore, lost, and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained. (Genesis 1:26; Romans 5:12; Titus 3:3-7; 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, 22-23).

SALVATION

6. We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and only such as receive Jesus Christ are born of the Holy Spirit and thus become children of God (Acts 4:12; Colossians).

BAPTISM & LORD'S SUPPER

7. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during this present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation (Matthew 28:13; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 16:31-33; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Acts 22:16).

THE CHURCH

8. We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the Body of Christ of which He is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).
9. We believe that only those who are members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church (Acts 2:41-47).
10. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).

THE END TIMES

11. We believe in the personal, premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this "Blessed Hope" has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer (Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Titus 2:13-14; Zechariah 12, 14; Matthew 24).
12. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord; of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:6; John 5:28, 29).

Imagine a church where the Words of God, not the wisdom or philosophy of men, determined how we worship, spend money, and make decisions. Imagine a church that taught God's Word so that people were not just smarter, but more holy. Imagine a church that lived out God's Word together and with passion. Imagine a church that relentlessly sought to conform itself to God's Word and perfect standard. Imagine a church that didn't make the Bible an idol, but used it as a tool to grow in love for God and one another.

The Word of God

Because of sin, we all come into this world with a veil over our eyes clouding our ability to know, understand, love, or serve God. Because of the plight that sin has reeked on all humanity, people for all time and everywhere have pursued truth either through General Revelation or Mysticism. General Revelation is the clear knowledge of God's existence, character, and moral law that is communicated through creation to all humanity. It is "discovered" truth that causes a person to look to creation, providence and/or conscience for the answers to life. Mysticism, or "relative" truth, is looking within or inside one's self for the same (II Corinthians 10:12). Because of this God intervened in history to reveal Himself. He revealed Himself through His Word but has most recently and explicitly spoken to us through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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

General revelation refers to the general truths that can be known about God through nature. **Special revelation** refers to the more specific truths that can be known about God through supernatural communication like the Bible.

The Bible contains information and answers about God that are not otherwise able to be known without His revealing them to us. Some examples of this might be the Triune nature of God (the Trinity), the deity of Jesus Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the fall and depravity of man, salvation by grace, understanding where we came from, why we are here, what is right or wrong, solutions for life's situations, future prophecy, etc...

At the Village Church of Bartlett, we believe God when He says that in the Word of God we can find *"everything we need for life and for becoming more like Him"* (2 Peter 1:2-3) and that through *"His precious and magnificent promises"* we can *"escape the corruption that is in the world by lust"* (2 Peter 1:4). As a result, we hold the Scriptures in high regard and they play an integral part of all our ministries and lives as members.

In this chapter we will explore why God's Word is trustworthy, what the Scriptures claim about themselves, the resources at our disposal because to better understand them, how to study them personally, and why we should be in the daily process of studying and knowing the Word of God.

Why God's Word is Trustworthy

The Scriptures are comprised of 66 books which were written by more than 40 authors. These authors were kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, scholars, historians, prophets, tax collectors, tent makers, military leaders, prime ministers, and doctors. They wrote from dungeons, palaces, roads, islands, hillsides, and deserts across Africa, Asia, and Europe. These authors wrote these books in their original languages which included Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Their literary styles included poetry, history, letters, prophecy, proverbs, and biographies.

The timeframe and messages of its writing and the messages occurred over 1500+ years with NO material inconsistencies or contradictions. The Bible remains one unified book from beginning to end. These "golden threads" scream of a divine Architect who purposefully and seamlessly moved men to record His Words. Because God's Word is all true, it hangs together flawlessly, majestically and uniquely. It is set apart from all other books ever written.

Prophetic fulfillment is one of the most powerful reasons we can completely trust the Bible. It says that God both knows, decides (Isaiah 46:8-11) and also declares the future (Isaiah 42:8-9). 30% of Scripture is prophecy and there are >300 prophecies about the first coming of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. What is even more startling is that they were 100% accurate! They were written at least 400 years before Jesus and over a period of 1000 years. The scientific probability of only 48 out of these more than 300 prophecies being fulfilled in just ONE person is 10^{157} ! Only 8 out of these more than 300 prophecies being fulfilled in just ONE person has the probability of 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (10^{17}) as opposed to the 10^{157} !!!! If that was true, how confident do you think we can be as we wait for the >400 prophecies that exist about His Second Coming?

What the the Bible Claims About Itself

It's Authorship

"Thus says the Lord" is used over 2000 times in the Bible. It is clear that the entire Bible is inspired, or "God-breathed" (II Timothy 3:16a). God revealed His Word through His Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10). Jesus Christ said these are "My" words (Luke 24:44-45). The overwhelmingly clear teaching of the Bible is that God is its source of content.

Inspiration is a term referring to the fact that every word of the Bible originates from God. The Biblical term is “God-breathed”. The implication is that every word is given by God and through specific men of God’s choosing who were moved by the Holy Spirit at the right time, in the right way, and to the right people to communicate the right words.

The process of inspiration is that...

“...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Peter 1:20-21).

- “Prophecy” here speaks of God’s Words, Scriptures, and the Bible.
- “Spoke” is a method of communication focusing mainly on the fact that God intends His Words to be communicated in understandable language.
- When we say “from God” it means that God is the source of these prophecies and thus they are His Words.
- “Moved” means that God worked in men to ensure his Words were being communicated in the correct time, mean, and fashion.
- Every word in the Bible is inspired (John 10:34-36).

It's Authority

The Scriptures are called the Word “of God.” Matthew said that all authority has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Every portion of Scripture will come to pass and therefore has power (Matthew 5:18).

Since the Bible is God’s special revelation, inspired, and inerrant, this means the entire Bible, Old and New Testament, has:

- *Immediacy*: the Bible has immediate and final authority as the Word of God on every issue about which it speaks
- *Catholicity*: the Bible has universal authority, not just temporary and/or local authority
- *Durability*: because it is preserved in written words the Bible continues throughout time to exercise authority over all who hear it

It's Historicity

The Bible is truly the Word of God. Because the Bible details historical events its truthfulness and accuracy are subject to verification like any other historical document. Through both archaeological evidences and other writings, the historical accounts of the Bible have been proven time and time again to be accurate and true. In fact, all the archaeological and manuscript evidence supporting the Bible makes it the best documented book in either the ancient or the new world. The fact that the Bible accurately and truthfully records historically verifiable events is a great indication of its truthfulness when dealing with religious subjects and doctrines and helps substantiate its claim to be the very Word of God.

Its Eternality

God's Word is more permanent than that of both the heavens and the earth (Matthew 24:35). It is eternal, abiding, enduring, and consistent (Psalm 119:89). The Word of the Lord will abide or last forever (I Peter 1:24-25).

A Summary of What the Word of God Claims About Itself...

- God is both its author and its authority
- It has been fully tested, without error and trustworthy enough to stake our very lives and destinies upon it
- God has completed His revelation to mankind in it
- Understanding and obeying it provides living proof you are His child
- In this created universe, beyond human souls, it is the only thing which will last for eternity... BANK on it!
- Because of its intrinsic value, knowing and obeying it should become our passionate pursuit!!!

The Word of God is our Source for Eight Spiritual Needs:

1. Our Source of Truth

John says that the truth shall set you free (John 8:31-32). Jesus Christ said "I am THE way, THE truth and THE life" (John 14:6). John continue that God's word is THE standard (truth) (John 17:17b).

2. Our Source for Wisdom as to Salvation

Hearing and believing in Jesus Christ provides eternal life (John 5:24-25). The Scriptures provide the wisdom that leads to salvation by faith which is in Christ (II Timothy 3:14-15). We have been born again through the living and abiding word of God (I Peter 1:22-23).

3. Our Source for Wisdom as to Sanctification

When the Word of God is treasured in our hearts it will keep us from sin (Psalm 119:9-11). It transforms us (Psalm 19:7-14) and trains us in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16b-17). By it we become partakers of the divine nature by becoming more like Jesus (II Peter 1:3-4).

4. Our Source for Spiritual Growth

Peter commands us to learn to long for the pure milk of the Word in order to grow (I Peter 2:2-3). Through it we are being transformed into His image (II Corinthians 3:18) and through practicing it we train our senses to discern good versus evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

5. Our Source for Power

The Word of God pierces our soul and spirit and judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12-13). It is the very power of God (I Corinthians 1:18, 23-24) and is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16).

6. Our Source for Guidance

It is a lamp to our feet and light to our path (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23).

7. Our Source for Hope and Comfort

The Scriptures provide hope (Romans 15:4). Paul reminds us that having Christ in us is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). They are an anchor of the soul and one which enters within the veil (Hebrews 6:19).

8. Our Source for Complete Satisfaction and Joy

The Word of God is our delight, our joy and our spoil (Psalm 19:10b, 119:162, 174b). He who finds the instruction of the Lord finds life (Proverbs 8:34-36). Blessed are those who both hear and obey it (Luke 11:28). The purpose of the Word is that God's joy would be in us and that our joy would be made full, complete or brought to full maturity (John 15:11).

Three Keys to Personal Study of God's Word

1. Observation

This phase answers the question: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE SAY?

"A text without a context is a pretext". Context is the words, phrases, and sentences surrounding a particular word, phrase or sentence. This gives meaning to a word, phrase or sentence. It can also be expanded to paragraphs, chapters, books, and eventually the whole Bible.

Identify the Type of Literature

- Historical/Biographical/Poetic/Proverbial/Prophetic/Epistle/Combo

Ask questions like a journalist, ask the 5Ws and an H

- WHO – wrote it, said it, to whom written, about whom is speaking?
- WHAT- are main events - major ideas - people like - talking about most?
- WHEN – was it written - when did he say it - when will it happen?
- WHERE – was this done - where was this said?
- WHY – why was there a need for this to be written - why should they do such and such?
- HOW – is it done - how did it happen - how is this truth illustrated?

2. Interpretation

This phase answers the question: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE MEAN?

Determine the historical or cultural setting and what is the “authorial intent” (reason why the author wrote this down)?

3. Application

This phase answers the question: HOW DOES THE MEANING OF THIS PASSAGE APPLY TO ME?

Once you know what a passage means, you are responsible for putting it into practice in your own life and also accountable if you don't. Application takes place as you are confronted with truth and decide to respond in obedience to truth.

The basis for applying the Scriptures is that...

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Ti 3:16-17)

Always remember the reason for application of the Word of God is...

- To establish a deep and abiding relationship with Christ
- To develop a Biblical worldview which produces supernatural results
- To realize a transformed life – the process of “becoming complete in Christ”

Why We Should Want to Know God's Word?

The Bible's authority is unlike any other book ever written. This authority and power are best seen in the way countless lives have been transformed by the supernatural power of God's Word. Drug addicts have been cured by it, homosexuals set free by it, derelicts and deadbeats transformed by it, hardened criminals reformed by it, sinners rebuked by it, and hate turned to love by it. The Bible does possess a dynamic and transforming power that is only possible because it is truly God's Word. If the Bible is truly God's Word, then we should cherish it, study it, obey it, and fully trust it. If the Bible is the Word of God, then to dismiss it is to dismiss God Himself.

God's people have always sought to study, apply, defend, and preserve God's written Word. It has been the standard for God's people and inspired and transformed countries, communities, and individuals for four + millennia.

Some key reasons we should want to know God's Word are...

- To know God and worship Him more fully

- To know God's will to be able to pray effectively and be confident that He will hear and answer us (John 14:14; 15:4; 16:23-24; I John 5:14-15)
- To assist us in developing a biblical worldview which will enable us to:
 - develop discernment and perspectives in order to make biblical decisions
 - develop biblical attitudes in order to ensure our responses are a testimony to others
 - develop godly actions which will please God

Being a member of the Village Church is a willful decision to submit to the truth of God's Word in all circumstances and value God's Word as more precious than any physical treasure.

"The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver." (Psalm 119:72)

"Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!" (Psalm 119:127)

This means that...

- We seek to align our actions, thoughts, and intentions in accord with God's Word
- All our actions, thoughts, and intentions are judged as right or wrong according to the standards in God's Word
- We commit to regular studying, meditating upon, praying over, applying, and memorizing God's Word

The Bible is our source book for living. If the world is our stage for living, the Bible is our script. It gives us our roles so that we can live as faithful followers of Jesus and be complete in Him (Colossians 1:28). May God's Words captivate, enthrall, and draw you to a deeper love and knowledge of God in Christ, and utterly transform your life so that you reflect the glory of God!

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
 The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
 The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
 More to be desired are they than gold,
 yes, than much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (Psalm 19:7-10)

Chapter Three Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What is:
 - **General Revelation: (pg. 34)**
 - **Special Revelation: (pg. 34)**
2. The Bible is “inspired by God”. What does the word “inspiration” mean when referring to the Bible? (pg. 36)
3. What are the eight spiritual needs that the Bible provides for us? (pg. 37-38)

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
4. What are the three keys to personal study of God’s Word?

1. (pg. 38)	2. (pg. 39)	3. (pg. 39)
-------------	-------------	-------------
5. What are three key reasons we should want to know God’s Word (pg. 38-39):
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Personal & Ministry Application Questions:

1. Do I study God’s Word on a very consistent basis? If so, when and where? If not, are you willing to start today?

2. If you would like help in getting started, talk to your class facilitator and he will connect you with someone who can help you get going!

Chapter Three Group Discussion Questions Cont.

3. What might some implications be within the Church if the Word of God is not taken seriously?

Chapter 4

Core Value # 3: Spirit - *The Energy of the Church*



Powerful



Imagine a church where God's Spirit was measurably working in the hearts of unbelievers and drawing them to salvation. Imagine a church where believers were continually being convicted of sin and repenting with a genuine desire to be more like Jesus. Imagine a church where our worship, prayer, and study are each filled with and led by God's Spirit. Imagine a place where people come and genuinely experience God giving glory to Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit

The trajectory of our life and ministry is motivated and energized either by the Spirit of God or the flesh. The latter will inevitably create death and decay; the former abundant life and spiritual fruit. In this chapter we will explore some key passages on the Holy Spirit's role in our life and ministry and how we as members of the Village Church can be people who experience and manifest the mighty power of God by the Spirit of God.

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

When we talk about the Holy Spirit it can be very elusive and ethereal, mostly because that is the nature of the Holy Spirit. You cannot touch, taste, see, smell, or hear the Holy Spirit. Unlike Jesus, the Spirit has never been tactile. The Holy Spirit is wholly spiritual working in the spiritual realm, while having serious and measurable consequences ("manifestations") in the physical realm. Much like the elusiveness and invisibility of gravity, one can witness the Holy Spirit's effects all around them.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for *spirit* is ***ruah***, which denotes the dynamic movement of air. The thought implicit in *ruah* is that of breathing, the outward expression of the life-force inherent in all humans. The air that men breathe was considered to be the bearer of life (thus to discontinue breath means to die). It also becomes evident that the concept of *ruah* is a deeply spiritual term. At its heart is the experience of a mysterious, awesome power - the mighty invisible force of the wind, the mystery of life, the transcendent power that transforms – all these are *ruah*, manifestations of the divine energy and power of God.

The New Testament word for *spirit* is ***pneuma***. It carries similar connotations as the Old Testament word *ruah*. It can be translated as "***breath, wind, or spirit***". Just as the wind and our breath are ethereal, so also is the Holy Spirit of God. Where He goes and how He moves cannot be predicted.

Facts about the Holy Spirit:

1. He is the third person of the Trinity and fully God
2. He is the activating agent of New Covenant regeneration and sanctification for all believers (Titus 3:5, Jer. 31:31-33)
3. He seals and indwells every single believer (Eph. 1:13)
4. He grants every believer a spiritual gift for service in the local church (1 Cor. 12:7)
5. He convicts of sin (John 16:8)
6. He guides the believer to truth (John 14:17)

7. He instructs the believer (John 14:26).
8. He helps us in our weakness (Rom 8:26).
9. He bears witness to and glorifies Christ (John 15:26-27, 16:14).
10. He transforms our inner man (2 Cor. 3:18, Titus 3:5).
11. By our obedience and submission to God we enable the Spirit to work freely through and in us (1 Thess. 5:19).
12. By our disobedience and spiritual laziness, we quench the Spirit's freedom to work through and in us (Col 1:29).
13. Our power for ministry, obedience, and walking in the Spirit is dependent upon our being filled with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:18).
14. Genuine prayer is the primary means of activating the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministry (James 5:16, Jude 1:20, Eph. 6:18).

Lessons from Paul on Life and Ministry in the Power of the Spirit

1. Colossians 1:29

For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He mightily works within me."

The goal of Paul's toiling in the church at Colossae, and everywhere else, is to see all people redeemed and transformed so they are complete and mature in Jesus Christ. We see from the rest of Colossians 1 that Paul's ministry was explicitly Christ-centered. Paul ensured his ministry was Christ-centered by ministering in the energy and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul goes out of his way to make a clear point about this power: it is "*mighty*". This implies that the power which the Holy Spirit intends to impart to the believer for life and ministry is not weak or ineffective, but strong and measurable in both the physical and spiritual realm.

Paul describes his Christ-centered ministry as a "*struggle*". The Greek word "*to struggle*" is the word "*agonizomai*" where we derive our word "*to agonize*". Literally, Paul agonizes and toils for his ministry to be both Christ-centered and mightily powerful.

What is clear: it is hard work and spiritual agony to do ministry in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. Daily we are given the option of either being **filled** with the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:) or **quenching** the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Any seasoned believer will confess that it is indeed toil and an agonizing task to be filled with the Spirit and to quench the flesh on a daily basis. Contrary to some who claim that at salvation spiritual perfection is possible, the Bible overwhelmingly tells us that anyone who says they are without sin is a liar and the truth of God is not in them (1 Jn. 1:9-10). Paul himself testifies to his lifelong struggle with the flesh even after his conversion in Romans 7.

The imagery of "being filled" pertains to that of a cup of water. An empty cup of water is useless. A dirty cup of water is dangerous. A half-glass of water is useful, but not as

God intends us not to just be full and clean like a pool filled with water but to be overflowing and mighty like the powerful current of a dangerous river. The imagery of “quenching” pertains to that of a fire, a common description of the Holy Spirit in the Bible because fire is powerful, beneficial, and dangerous.

We are called to fan the flame of the Spirit in us through prayer, the Word of God, and obedience, not to douse the fire with the water of apathy, worldliness, and disobedience. We see that the flame of those who practice disobedience, love the world, and are cold to Christ and His mission is but a spark at best.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

We see in this passage written by Paul that as he is laboring and agonizing in the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s Spirit is working in and through him with mighty power (“the grace of God” in 1 Corinthians 15:10). The “grace of God” in this passage is God’s generous and merciful provision of mighty power by the Spirit of God for those who are in Christ. God through His Spirit is pouring out grace to Paul by providing the necessary power and energy to labor in the ministry.

The 3 Effects of the Mighty Power of the Spirit

Often when we think of the power of the Holy Spirit we think of awesome displays of God’s greatness in miracles, signs, and wonders. But the mighty power of the spirit-filled Christian life does not typically look that way.

Paul’s says in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 concerning his power: *“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

The Christian life that is filled with the Spirit and mighty power of God will do three things:

1. SPIRITUAL PERSEVERANCE: The Christian filled with the Spirit and mighty power of God will: persevere in holiness.

In theology this doctrine is called either the **“Perseverance of the Saints”** or the **“Preservation of the Saints”**. This doctrine teaches that every true believer filled with the Spirit of God will persevere in faith in Christ and will increase in holiness to varying degrees and in varying ways until death. Those who reject Christ after accepting salvation prove themselves to never have been true believers in the first place (1 John 2:19). True believers are given the Spirit of God who personally testifies with our spirit to Jesus Christ and personally preserves us in

faith in Christ as we increase in holiness. Though the believer's life is filled with struggles, sin, and the decay of our bodies, inwardly every believer should experience an overall positive trajectory to varying degrees based on God's grace and our obedience.

Consider the following passages that speak of God's preservation of believers to the end of their lives by the Spirit of God:

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

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

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 *...you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

2. SPIRITUAL GROWTH: The Christian filled with the spirit and mighty power of God will:
produce spiritual fruit in themselves through practice of the spiritual disciplines.

In church tradition, “**spiritual disciplines**” are defined as: *actions commanded in Scripture that when done with the right motive cause spiritual transformation and growth.* Though there are various lists of spiritual disciplines, the following spiritual disciplines would be considered essential habits that every Christian and member of the Village Church should be engaged in to experience spiritual growth and to walk in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. If any of these spiritual disciplines are lacking in the consistent practice of the believer, a corresponding weakness will develop in their soul and ministry.

The commonly accepted spiritual disciplines are: *Bible study, meditation, prayer, fasting, service, worship, confession, giving, and fellowship.* Though there are other spiritual disciplines that the Church has acknowledged, these are the primary. Each of these disciplines will be dealt with directly in this or another chapter of this membership class.

1. SPIRITUAL: GIFTS: The Christian filled with the spirit and mighty power of God will:
produce spiritual fruit in others through use of spiritual gifts.

A “spiritual gift” is: *A supernatural, God-given ability to each believer at salvation to fulfill a need in the local body of Christ so that the body would be built up and be made complete/mature in Christ.*

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that *“to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* In short, this means that each person is given a “spiritual gift” at conversion by God for the building up of the local church. Spiritual gifts are called a *“manifestation of the Spirit”*, meaning that they are physical actions through which the Spirit of God reveals Himself and produces spiritual change.

Some Facts about Spiritual Gifts:

1. Genuine believers in Jesus Christ are ALWAYS given the Holy Spirit and are ALWAYS given a spiritual gift.
2. There are numerous different gifts and expressions of gifts, but only one and the same Spirit working in all of them.
3. The gifts are always cooperative, and never competitive.
4. Spiritual gifts are fundamentally active, not passive. (activities, services)
5. The Holy Spirit is the real source of power, change, and effectiveness, not us.
6. The Lord will give us exactly what we need to accomplish His will for His church.
7. “God has given the right gift along with the right resources in the right person in the right Body of Christ at the right physical location at the right time for the right reason to be utilized as our only right response (obedience), and to be deployed with the only right attitude (humility/selflessness).”

1 Peter 4:10-11 says regarding spiritual gifts: *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

John Piper says of this passage: *“‘Grace’ can be disbursed through gifts which are word-oriented or deed-oriented. ‘Whoever speaks (let him do it) as one who utters oracles of God.’ If your gift involves speaking do not rely on your own insight, but look to God to give His words through you. We impart grace to our listener only if we give them a word of God. It may not be an exact word of Scripture, but a word prompted and guided by God so that attention is directed to him, not us. Our aim is to strengthen faith and He is the infinitely trustworthy hope-giver, not us.”*

Read below in 1 Corinthians 2:1-4 where Paul gives a wonderful example of how Spiritual gifts work. Paul labors and toils in a physical ministry, and the Spirit of God uses that ministry, also called a gift, and produces spiritual realities in the people Paul ministers to for building up of the local church.

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-4

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...

For further teaching, lists, and definitions of Spiritual Gifts, see Chapter 5, pg. 59-62.

Prayer and the Spirit of God:

James 5:16 is a powerful example of the connection between prayer and the unleashing of the power of the Holy Spirit. James says, *"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."* The implications of this one statement are astronomical for our prayer life. Here are a few profound observations about our prayer life from this passage:

1. God has chosen to use the means of prayer as a primary activating agent of change in this world (*"prayer...has great power"*). Said backwards, without prayer, little spiritual or physical change will most likely happen through us.
2. The effectiveness of our prayers and the extent of our power are mutually magnified by our obedient lives to Jesus Christ. Said backwards, our prayers and our power are mutually hindered, possibly left impotent, by unrepentance and disobedience in our lives (*"prayer of a righteous person"*). 1 Peter 3:7 tells husbands to love and honor their wives *"so that your prayers may not be hindered"*! There is a profound connection between our obedience and the effectiveness of our prayer life.
3. Where there is much prayer, there is much power. Where there is no prayer, there is no power.

Philippians 1:19 is another powerful example of Paul's understanding of the connection between prayer and the mighty power it can unleash. He says, *"for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance..."*. For Paul, his physical deliverance would be attributed to God working mightily through the prayers of the Philippian church! What an amazing thought that God can use our prayers in mighty power to effect not just spiritual change but our physical circumstances if we will come to Him and learn to pray according to His will.

Being a member at the Village Church is a great privilege and responsibility. Our expectation is that members would agonize in ministry, grow through practice of spiritual disciplines and use of spiritual gifts, and serve in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit effecting profound and eternal change. For the believer, it should be evident to those around them that the Spirit is working mightily in their life and ministry.

God will give you the energy and power you need to overcome sin, to serve with power, and to persevere! Will you tap into it? Will you plug in? Will you fill up?

“Where there is no prayer; there is no power! Where there is much prayer; there is much power!”

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, **but by my Spirit**, says the LORD - **Zechariah 4:6**

Chapter Four Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What is the New Testament Greek word for “spirit” and what does it mean? (pg. 45)

2. Of the 14 facts about the Holy Spirit on pages 45-46, list three that are the most meaningful to you.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

3. The Christian life that is filled with the Spirit and mighty power of God will do three things:
 1. Persevere in _____ (pg. 47)
 2. Produce spiritual fruit in _____ through practice of the spiritual _____ (pg. 48)
 3. Produce spiritual fruit in _____ through use of spiritual _____ (pg. 49)

4. Explain the doctrine of “Perseverance of the Saints” (pg. 47-48)

5. Define what a “spiritual discipline” is (pg. 48)

Personal & Ministry Application Questions:

1. Do I pray regularly? If not, am I willing to start? _____

2. What are some biblical prerequisites for a powerful and effective prayer life?

3. What are some of the signs that your ministry is empowered by the Spirit of God?

Chapter Four Group Discussion Questions Cont.

4. What are some warning signs that your ministry might not be empowered by the Spirit of God?

*For next week's session, complete the “**Spiritual Gift Inventory**” on pg. 113 and come prepared to share your findings.*

Chapter 5

Core Value # 4: Community - *The Life of the Church*



Communal & Serving



Imagine a church that loved one another to such an extent they could not wait to spend time together. Imagine a church that prayed, studied, and served together on a weekly basis and experienced God together in profound ways. Imagine a church filled with intimate friendships that always had room for newcomers. Imagine a church that is not just a growing church, but a sending church. Imagine a church where you are not only challenged by the preaching but also by the people who know and love you for who you really are.

Connect and Commune @ the Village Church

At the Village Church we have two primary avenues of connection. Both are considered essential for living out our mission and values.

1. Sunday morning worship services

2. Community Groups

Both are considered essential for two reasons. First, there is a comprehensive pattern of both home and corporate worship with God's people presented in the Bible. Second, by God's great design we are created to be not just Sunday worshippers, but to daily seek and worship Him with His people.

Sunday Worship Services

Hebrews 10:24-25 says:

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

Because of fear, laziness, or idolatry many begin to neglect the weekly gathering of God's people. As a result, they are unable to pray, study, worship, and fellowship as needed. As Christians we need to be sensitive to the powerful pullings of our flesh away from real relationships toward isolation.

Neglecting corporate worship will take a measurable and drastic toll on our spiritual lives. It is a myth that one can live in isolation from other believers and be conformed to the image of Christ, be pleasing to God, and be following God's Word. Satan's agenda is to steal, kill, and destroy. This is the nature of the sin with which he is filled. One way that sin creates death in believers is by isolating them from other Christians.

Here are some common ways Christians become isolated from one another:

- By only going to church on Sunday mornings.
- By leaving church immediately without connecting with and/or serving anybody.
- By not serving using their spiritual gift.
- By developing a critical spirit during the worship service toward music, teaching, leadership, and/or other people.
- By divisively arguing with other believers over trivial doctrinal matters.
- By demanding preference rather than worshipping in Spirit and truth.
- By surrounding oneself with others who are not worshippers, but are critical and isolated.

Sunday morning worship services should include:

1. Christ-Centered Worship:

- *should include worship songs, lyrics, preaching, communion, and general program style should keep all focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ.*
- *should be a Christ-centered atmosphere where the Holy Spirit loves to move and work out His goal to exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

2. Celebratory Worship:

- *Sunday morning worship should be a joyful response to what God has done for us in Christ!*

3. Cross-Generational Worship

- *The body of Christ is made up of believers from all generations. Though generations each respond and worship in various ways, more mature Christians are expected to be the most flexible as mature Christians can worship “anytime, anywhere”.*
- *Less mature Christians are to seek to serve and honor those who are older in the faith.*

4. Corporate Worship

- *Though it may seem slightly redundant, corporate worship is about “we”, not “me”. The primary emphasis of corporate worship is the body focused on Christ, not Christ focused on the individual.*
- *Part of the “we” is serving one another with our spiritual gifts. Building one another up using these gifts must be a primary motive for coming to Sunday morning corporate worship.*
 - *Generally speaking, Village Church corporate worship style will gravitate more toward what is contemporary in worship while seeking to uphold our rich Christian heritage of songs handed down over the centuries.*

5. Culturally-Relevant Worship.

- *Our musical genre, preaching, style, and flow of service should take into consideration all ages and cultures represented in the Bartlett area. As culture shifts, so must our style. Principles are timeless, culture is transient. By and large our musical and cultural expression of worship should not polarize the primary demographic our community.*

The implications of the statements above on how we perceive corporate worship are staggering! These values give us both focus and boundaries for our time of corporate worship.

Whenever you come to church, ask yourself these two questions to help you enter into an attitude of Christians fellowship:

1. *Am I ready to focus my mind, soul, and emotions on Christ with my brothers and sisters in Christ?*
2. *Who can I serve this morning using my spiritual gifts?*

Community Groups

To further cultivate a Christ-centered community for the Village Church where the mission, values, and goals of our church are lived out in a way Sunday mornings alone cannot.

Community Groups are a weekly gathering with our friends and neighbors from the Village Church where we share life together, experiencing the Gospel in ways we simply cannot on our own. They are a place to wrestle with the truths of the Bible, pray fervently together, love one another sacrificially, serve our community generously, and participate in the mission God has for the Village Church.

It is amazing to see in the book of Acts that Biblical community and fellowship are not complicated concepts, but rather quite simple. If we engage with passion and dedication, we should expect that our community will start to bear fruit, attract unbelievers, and deepen the spiritual walks of current believers. At the Village Church, our two-fold focus of Sunday worship and weekly Community Groups is structured to uphold our mission and values, bring glory to God, and bless those who participate as we uphold the various aspects of Biblical Community seen in Scripture, particularly in the books of Acts.

So what does a Community Group look like? Here are the four main components of our weekly Community Groups adapted from Acts 2:42:

- “Breaking Bread”

- Food & Fellowship. You may bring dinner, appetizers, or just dessert.

- “Fellowship”

- Group Worship, testimonies, and celebration of God’s work!

- “Apostles Teaching”

- Interactive, in-depth, and substantive Bible studies as well as a discussion and application of Sunday morning sermons.

- Sermons or discussion topics chosen by CG leader.

- “Prayer & Fellowship”

- We break up into men’s & women’s groups to share life, pray, encourage, & counsel.

Each group’s commitments to Acts 2:42 disciplines will generally develop the following characteristics from Acts 2:43-47 organically:

1. an awesome reverence for God (vs.43a)
2. an atmosphere where God does great things in His people for the world to see (vs. 43b)
3. self-caring & generous communities (vs. 44-45)
4. corporate worship at church (vs. 46a)
5. joyful Christ-Centered home fellowship (vs. 46b)
6. a fervent and fruitful evangelistic spirit (vs. 47)

Community Groups Vision

The vision for Community Groups is to further cultivate a Christ-centered community for the Village Church where the Gospel is lived out. At the heart of the Village Church Community Groups is the desire to see a community of believers who worship Jesus, love one another, and embody the mission of the Village Church - *to make disciples who go, grow, and overcome*. God has called us to a lifestyle of continuous worship and relationship with Him. This lifestyle is cultivated and nurtured within the local church. Sunday morning worship alone cannot accomplish the entirety of Biblical community the Bible calls us to and that the local church should provide. The Village Church Community Groups address this void by being the primary place where discipleship, care, corporate prayer, & community service take place.

- **Discipleship & Care:** This aspect of community groups occurs as we encourage one another to be worshipers of our Lord. It is the primary place where individuals become the body of Jesus Christ — loving, caring and challenging one another.
- **Community Service:** Within Christian community we engage culture and demonstrate the love of Christ to our city and neighbors. We were created in the image of our Creator, who Himself exists in triune community. As a result, we also have within us a need to serve the community in which we live. We were created for the express purpose of worshipping Jesus in community with other believers. Joyful community service is a great way to do this.
- **Prayer:** As you read in our section on prayer, prayer is a vital aspect of the life, health, and growth of our church. Our desire is to weekly uphold the needs of our church together before the Lord through the discipline of prayer. Community groups provide a great avenue in which to do this.

It is our desire to see every member and regular attender of the Village Church loved, cared for, prayed for, and challenged within a thriving and Christ-centered community. We also hope that our neighbors are blessed and touched by the love of Jesus through the lives of our members. We believe that Community Groups will help us to more adequately carry out this mission.

What Should I Expect When I Join a Community Group?

Each Group is unique and will reflect the people and locale in which it exists. However, you can expect a weekly gathering that involves food, conversation, group prayer, in-depth teaching and discussion focused on applying the Bible to practical living, gender-specific breakout sessions focused on prayer and sharing, and opportunities for service in our city and church. Community Groups are an environment for building relationships with one another.

Many groups will follow the Sunday sermon series in their teaching times, although some may choose to work through another book of the Bible, DVD book or Bible study, or other small group teaching resources. Community Groups are much more than a Bible study, however, they are *community*! They are a place where we can laugh, cry, work and play together for the glory of Christ. This means you can expect BBQ's, yard work for an an Elderly or disabled neighbor, bowling, visiting people in the hospital, birthday parties, and many other activities.

Community Group Details

- **Groups meet weekly except for the 1st week of the month**
- **Groups will meet for two semesters**
 - Fall semester extends from Labor Day through Thanksgiving
 - Spring semester extends from the second week of January through May.
 - Groups are encouraged to focus on church-wide events in the summer such as picnics, mission trips, etc...
- **Groups are the primary implementers & promoters of the Village Church's mission & ministry goals**
- **Groups are ideally multi-generational**
- **Groups will take a few weeks off from meeting per year to do a service project in the community and/or in the church**

Spiritual Gifts @ The Village Church

A Spiritual Gift is: *A supernatural, God-given ability to each believer at salvation to fulfill a need in the local body of Christ. This gift is given so that the body will be built up and made more complete/mature in Christ.*

At the Village Church our desire is to not quench the Holy Spirit, but to be as Biblical as possible as we prayerfully discern God's will in defining and applying each gift. God gave spiritual gifts to EVERY believer for a purpose: to serve! To be a member of the Village Church is to serve. At the Village Church we encourage the primary avenues of service to be our Sunday morning worship or Community Groups. It is in these communal places that most gifts can be used consistently and fully.

Spiritual Gifts and Their Definitions

The following gifts due to their definitions, purpose, and Biblical use, are considered to be "ceased gifts" and as such are not practiced at the Village Church. We do, however, understand that among our members there are a variety of perspectives on these gifts. We encourage dialogue as many wrestle with these, but the Village Church's stance is that some gifts have ceased with the close of the Apostolic age and canon of Scripture.

This does **not** mean, however, that miracles, signs, wonders, and healing can't and don't happen today. In fact, they do occur, and we are to pray for them! We serve a God who is engaged and active in our world in profound and measurable ways, and He often chooses to work through such avenues. To say that these gifts have "ceased" simply means that God does not give them as "spiritual gifts" to individuals to use within the local church.

It is important to note that one can still be a member if they disagree with the Village Church's stance on sign gifts. We only ask that disagreement and dialogue be loving and marked by humility. For the sake of clarity, here is a listing of gifts that we believe to have ceased followed by a list of gifts that are still active in the church body:

Ceased Gifts:

1. **Apostleship:** *The spiritual ability and calling by God in the early church to establish the Word and Church of God. Apostles were sent forth to represent Jesus after his ascension. The calling of an apostle is to be a special witness of Jesus Christ to all the world. Specifically an apostle must be a first-hand witness of Jesus as God in the flesh, of Jesus' earthly ministry, and of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. (Eph. 4:11, Acts 1:21-22, 1 Cor. 12, 2 Peter 3:2, Eph. 3:5)*
2. **Healing:** *The spiritual ability to physically heal people from illness, pain, or disease. (1 Cor. 12)*
3. **Signs & Miracles:** *The spiritual ability to perform supernatural acts and mighty deeds that witnesses acknowledge to be of supernatural origin and means. (1 Cor. 12, Heb. 2:2-4, Mark 16:20)*
4. **Tongues:** *The spiritual ability to speak God's Word to unbelievers in one language and for the listeners to hear in another language, or the special ability to speak an unknown language. (Mark 16:17, Acts 2:1-12, 1 Cor. 12-14, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6)*
5. **Interpretation of Tongues:** *The spiritual ability to interpret tongues. (Acts 2:1-12, 1 Cor. 12, 14)*
6. **Prophecy:** *The spiritual ability to speak forth God's Words in a revelatory manner. (Eph. 4:11, Eph. 3:5, Eph. 2:20, 1 Cor. 12-14, 1 Pet 1:19-20)*

Current Gifts

1. **Teaching:** *The spiritual ability to interpret and systematically present, explain, instruct and apply the truths of the Word of God in an understandable way. (Rom. 12:7, Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor. 12, 14, 1 Peter 4:11)*
2. **Leadership/Administration:** *The spiritual ability to direct, guide and navigate the Body of Christ through effective oversight, governance and servant leadership. (Rom. 12:8, 1 Cor. 12:28)*
3. **Mercy/Compassion:** *The spiritual ability to graciously sympathize with others and to bring comfort, cheer, and hope to those who are afflicted, sorrowful, suffering, miserable, and under duress. (Rom. 12:8)*
4. **Giving:** *The spiritual ability to recognize God's blessings and to respond to those blessings by generously, sacrificially, and cheerfully giving of one's resources (time, talent, and treasure) without thought of return. (Rom. 12:8)*
5. **Evangelism:** *The spiritual ability to proclaim the Gospel of salvation effectively so that people respond in saving faith. (Eph. 4:11)*
6. **Pastor/Teacher:** *The spiritual ability to shepherd, proclaim and make the Word of God relevant to the local church. (Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Peter 4:11)*
7. **Helps/Service** *The spiritual ability to work gladly behind the scenes in order that God's work is fulfilled. The special ability God gives to some to serve the church in a supporting roll or to invest their talents in the life and ministry of other members of the body enabling them to increase their effectiveness. (Rom 12:7, 1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Peter 4:11)*

- a. **Helps/Service through Hospitality:** *An expression of the gift of Helps/Service whereby one provides an open home and warm welcome to those in need of food, lodging, and fellowship. It involves a readiness to invite strangers to your home (or church) for the sake of the Gospel. (1 Peter 4:9)*
- 8. **Exhortation:** *The spiritual ability to encourage and motivate believers to both decisions and actions. (Rom. 12:8, 1 Peter 4:11)*
- 9. **Wisdom:** 1 Cor. 12
 - a. *The spiritual ability to have insight into people and situations that is not obvious to the average person, combined with an understanding of what to do and how to do it. It is the ability to not only see, but also apply the principles of God's Word to the practical matters of life.*
- 10. **Knowledge:** 1 Cor. 12
 - a. *The spiritual ability to research, remember, and make effective use of a variety of information on a number of diverse subjects.*
- 11. **Discernment of Spirits:** 1 Cor. 12, 1 John 4:1
 - a. *The spiritual ability to know with assurance whether certain behavior or teaching is from God, Satan, human error, or human power.*
- 12. **Faith:** 1 Cor. 12
 - a. *The spiritual ability to envision what needs to be done and to trust God to accomplish it, even though it seems impossible to most people.*

Chapter Five Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. The two primary avenues of connection at the Village Church are: (pg. 55)
 - 1.
 - 2.
2. List two of the six common ways people become isolated from one another: (pg. 55)
 - 1.
 - 2.
3. What are the five descriptions of a Sunday corporate worship service? (pg. 56)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
4. What are the four main components of a Village Church Community Group from Acts 2:42? (pg. 57)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
5. What are the six characteristics of a community that lives out the four components listed above? (pg. 57)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
6. What is the definition of a spiritual gift? (pg. 59)

Personal & Ministry Application Questions:

1. Why is consistent Sunday corporate worship so important to the spiritual life and vibrancy of a Christian?

2. Am I committed to worshipping in the same local church on a weekly basis? For how long? Where?

Chapter Five Group Discussion Questions Cont.

3. Do you have any specific questions about Community Groups?

4. Do you have any specific questions about spiritual gifts?

Chapter 6

Core Value # 4: Community - *The Life of the Church*



Sacrificial & Accountable



Chapter 6 is combination of two very different topics. Part 1 deals with money, possessions, and giving, while part 2 deals with accountability for members and leaders at the Village Church.

Giving & Money

Imagine a church that gave so generously there was not one person in need in the entire church. Imagine a church with a local and global missions budget so large that it was 75% of its budget or greater. Imagine a church that had no debt whatsoever as an organization. Imagine a church that had a reputation in the community for sacrificial generosity. As Dave Ramsey says: “Imagine what the people of God could do for the Kingdom of God if they were debt free?”

There are around 500 verses in the Bible on prayer, yet there are over 2,350 verses about money and possessions. Does that mean that money and possessions are more important than prayer? Not likely. What it does mean is that God is keenly aware of our struggle with possessions, idolatry, and giving. God knows all too well that our hearts are intimately tied to our pocket books. His desire is that we would be freed from idolatry so that we might use God’s resources in God’s way and in God’s timing.

The first part of this chapter will deal with four spiritual laws of money, possessions, and giving.

Four Spiritual Laws of Giving

LAW 1: God Owns the Whole World, I am Managing His Assets for His Purposes in His Way.

Scripture is clear in its opening words: God made the world, therefore, God owns the world. God does whatever He wants whenever He wants with His possession. This is one of the privileges of ownership. Consider the following passages:

- **Genesis 14:22** “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, **Possessor of heaven and earth.**
- **Exodus 9:29** I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that **the earth is the LORD’s.**
- **Deuteronomy 10:14** ¹⁴ Behold, **to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth** with all that is in it.
- **Job 41:11** ¹ Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? **Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.**
- **Psalms 50:10** ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest **is mine**, the cattle on a thousand hills.
- **Colossians 1:16** ⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--**all things were created through him and for him.**

Idolatry causes us to view our money as OUR money as opposed to the fact that our money is actually HIS money on loan to us. When we do this, money becomes our:

- **security** (*if I have enough I will be fine - we worship our source of security*)
- **opportunity** (*it takes money to make money*)
- **status** (*look what I have and can do*)
- **identity** (*look who I am!*)

If God 1. knows our tendency to idolatry, 2. knows that our hearts are tied to our pocketbooks, 3. has as His greatest desire to conform you into the image of Christ (not to make your life easy), and 4. owns everything, *then what is God trying to do in your life through your present financial circumstances?*

If God Owns Everything Then...

1. Giving is never a sacrifice. Giving is only a sacrifice if you think that what you are giving away is yours.

- When God instructs us to tithe, He is not asking you to give up anything at all. In fact, he is simply instructing you on how He wants His money spent.
- When God says to give generously to those in need, He is not asking you to give up anything at all. In fact, he is simply instructing you on how He wants His money spent.

2. Giving is a joyful responsibility we have as managers of God's assets.

3. Simply recognizing God's ownership isn't enough; we still have to be good managers.

4. If we are not faithful managers of the owner's money, it will not be there when the owner tells us to give some away!

Five Characteristics of Churches and Christians Who are Good Managers

We'll see that a person and a church operating with goof financial management:

- Trust God completely
- Recognize God's ownership
- Embrace the church's God-given mission
- Save money consistently for the sake of this mission
- Commit to lifelong generosity for the sake of this mission

Examples of Irresponsible Management:

- **Impulse Buying:** when you buy without seeking the Lord's approval, without first checking quality, and without first conducting a price comparison.
- **Neglect of Property:** not exercising preventative maintenance on the possessions God has entrusted to you. For example: disregarding building repairs or not taking care of your body through diet, exercise, or proper medical attention.
- **Carelessness in Details.** This involves an inattention to where money goes, not balancing your checkbook, or living beyond your means.

LAW 2: Since God is Our Provider, I Can Be Content in Any Circumstance.

Paul clearly understood both God's ownership and control over all things. In light of this, read what Paul wrote to the Philippians while he was in prison:

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. - Phil 4:11-13

Five Characteristics of Contentment According to Dave Ramsey

1. Contentment means trusting God, not Visa.
2. Contentment means being thankful for what you have, despite the fact that others have more.
3. Contentment means giving generously in all circumstances as God directs.
4. Contentment is an attitude of "soul rest" for the long term.
5. Contentment is an active choice.

Jesus summed up contentment well when he so profoundly said:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. - Matthew 6:33-34

A truly content Christian will be so satisfied in God's present provision and confident in God's future provision that their greatest emotional concern is God's kingdom and not present or future needs.

LAW 3: When God withholds financially, I still give generously knowing this is His will.

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul illustrates this principle with the sacrificial and generous Macedonian church. He says of this church in 8:1-4:

*We want you to know, brothers, about the **grace** of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints...*

The entirety of 2 Corinthians chapter 8 is a profound application of how God's people should give even in times of poverty. A key word here is "grace". Grace in this context is God's enabling power to do His will no matter how difficult it may be. We see that God gave these Christ-followers the grace to give generously, to be content, and to trust God's future provision despite present poverty.

Here are a few implications of the Macedonians grace-motivated giving in 2 Cor. 8:

1. Both the ability and desire to give generously is a **grace given by God**. (vs. 1-6)
 - *Biblical giving differs in percentage and quantity from person to person as each desires and is led by God (vs.3)*
 - *Biblical giving is specifically directed to “the ministry of the saints” (vs. 4)*
 - *Biblical giving is both financial and practical (vs. 5-6)*
2. Christians should seek to excel in the **grace** of generous giving, especially those who are presently struggling financially. (vs. 7-8)
3. To the extent that we excel in the **grace** of generous giving, we show God’s generous grace to us in Jesus Christ. (vs. 9)
4. God grants believers the **grace** to generously give so that His entire church is provided for in times of need. (vs. 10-15)
5. The **grace** of God will lead us to generously support accountable, Christ-centered ministries even in times of financial need. (vs. 16-23)

God has made us, like Himself, to be generous givers going about the work of the ministry of the saints for the glory of Christ by the grace of God.

LAW 4: When God Provides Financially, I Give Generously Knowing This is His Will.

In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul is exhorting a more financially stable Corinthian church on how and why to give. Consider the following from 2 Cor. 9:6-8:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

What Can We Learn from Paul’s Teaching to the Corinthian church on Giving:

1. We give by faith
2. We give generously by prayer
3. We give generously like God the Father gave His Son, Jesus Christ
3. We should not give hesitantly or in grief
4. We should give joyfully because this:
 - *pleases God*
 - *reflects God’s generous character*
 - *shows our trust in God*
 - *causes us to grow spiritually*

In 2 Corinthians 9:8-15 Paul gives nine more reasons to give cheerfully. When you GENEROUSLY give to the “Ministry of the Saints” (vs. 1) by God’s grace (8:1, 9:14) you and the church will reap a harvest of:

1. Money & resources (vs. 8a)
2. Good works (vs. 8b)
3. Relief for the poor and needy (vs. 9)
4. Righteousness (vs. 10)
5. More money and resources (vs. 11)
6. Joy & Thanksgiving (vs. 12)
7. Bringing God glory through the Gospel (vs. 13)
8. Increased love and unity in the Church (vs. 14)
9. Joy in the Gospel! (vs. 15)

When Not To Give

- *“What if I’m in debt and every dollar I give is actually increasing my debt?”*
 - PRAY, talk to a pastor or financial counselor, and re-evaluate your budget so that a set percentage goes to God. This might mean cutting out something fun for the sake of the ministry of the saints and your increased righteousness.
- *“What if I can’t give 10%?”*
 - There is no New Testament requirement for giving. There is Christian freedom to give as you desire and God leads. That said, consider the following:
 - In Old testament giving, 10% was the floor, not the ceiling.
 - The average American gives 2-3%, the average Christian 3-4%, but the average Hebrew gave roughly 27% of their income as mandated under Law.
- *“Is it ok if I give my time and service rather than my money?”*
 - Usually not, but this depends on your motives and context. Talk to a pastor or financial counselor to help you discern how God would have you give. The expectation is that each person would give his time, talent, and treasure to the local church for the ministry of the saints.

Summary Statement for Christians and Giving: *Christian Giving is cheerful (emotions), regular (lifestyle), and generous (reflects God).*

Accountability

Imagine a place where grace, truth, and love abound in supernatural ways. Imagine a place where Christians feel safe and are compelled to confess their sins to both God and fellow brothers and sisters. Imagine a place where people see one another in light of the cross of Jesus Christ - without condemnation or bitterness. Imagine a place where broken Christians are gently, Biblically, and lovingly addressed and brought to full restoration.

No Church is perfect. As long as people are involved, sin will rear its ugly head. Our mission is that each member of the Village Church would be going, growing, and overcoming.

Biblical accountability is not simply about prevention, but about setting the context of our lives for Biblical success. If we build our house on the sand, we will regret it. However, if we surround our lives with Godly believers in the local church, seek to live as God calls us to, and open our lives to both rebuke and encouragement, we will find we are becoming more mature in Christ with each passing season of life.

In the second part of this chapter we will look at the various aspects of accountability for both leadership and the body.

Accountability for Leaders

Leaders are Accountable to Jesus Christ, Our Great Shepherd

In case you missed it, Jesus is our Senior Pastor! The ultimate authority for governing the Church lies with the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Head (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18a, 2:10).

Jesus Christ entrusted the oversight of His Church to a plurality of Elders (1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5b; Acts 14:23), whose purpose is to carry out His will as under-shepherds in whom He has placed His authority (Acts 20:28-31). As Christ's under-shepherds the Elders are under the strict authority of Jesus Christ and His Word. These Elders carry out His will relying on the Holy Spirit's direction through both the Scriptures and the community of believers. Elders are to follow the model of Jesus as servant leaders (Matthew 10:35-42, 23:1-12; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:3-17, 34-35). The responsibility for shepherding the local Church lies with these men who are accountable before God for the welfare of the flock (Hebrews 13:17).

Leaders are Accountable One-to-Another (Mutual Submission)

The Village Church of Bartlett has chosen to govern its affairs through a plurality of Elders. It is the desire of the Council of Elders to reach consensus on all decisions. The Elders willingly agree to give the primary responsibility for vision and leadership to one who has been gifted and called by God to play the role as a "leader among leaders", or Lead Pastor. Currently at the Village Church Michael Fuelling serves as Lead Pastor and though he does not have more authority, he has the primary responsibility to lead the council of Elders.

Each Elder also willingly agrees to submit himself to the rest of the Council of Elders to live in mutual accountability and to walk in humility.

Leaders are Accountable to the Body

The Elders are responsible for the shepherding work of the ministry at Village Church. This shepherding involves the processes of feeding, leading, caring, and protecting the Body (1 Peter 5:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:1, 5).

The points below further clarify the roles, duties, and responsibilities of Elders as they relate to their accountability to the Body.

- God's Word does not make a distinction between "Pastors" and "lay Elders." The two are considered as Elders, Pastors, or overseers, equal in authority as members of the Council of Elders (Ephesians 4:11).
- The Council has oversight of both the Deacons and the Ministry Directors.
- The primary duties of the Pastors/Elders are to care for the spiritual condition of the Village Church, to guard the purity of doctrine and life of The Village Church, and when needed to discipline individuals in accordance with the Word of God.
- The primary responsibilities of Elders are prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:4) in order to present every person complete in Christ (Col 1:28) so that each person may be fully equipped for every good work (2 Ti 3:17).

Here are some specific guidelines by which the Elders desire to preserve their accountability to the Body:

- The Elders are most assuredly answerable to the congregation.
- As the church looks to the Elders for wise leadership, the Elders will also look to the members for wisdom, counsel, inspiration, creative ideas, help and prayer.
- The Elders understand the sacred nature and dynamic energy of the Spirit-empowered body and will endeavor to seek congregational input in all major decisions.
- As servant leaders the Elders also believe that overbearing & controlling leadership practices are unacceptable (1 Peter 5:3).
- There must be a tightly knit, cherished & trusting relationship between the Elders and the congregation. Our collective goal is to speak and act as a united community (Ephesians 4:1-3).

In addition to Elders, the Village Church recognizes the office of Deacons and Ministry Directors as part of our leadership team. The points below further clarify their roles, duties, and responsibilities in relation to their accountability to the Body.

- **The Office of Deacon**

- Deacons are those who serve the Body through tasks delegated by Elders having been given the authority they need to complete the tasks. Here is the primary difference between Elders and Deacons: an Elder has broad authority over the congregation while the Deacon has delegated authority to serve in areas determined by the Elders.
- As a function of their office (implied by Acts 6:1-6) the Deacons will primarily, but not exclusively, assist the Elders by working to meet the practical needs of individuals within the Body.

- **Ministry Directors**
 - Ministry Directors have oversight of major areas of ministry and are accountable to both the Lead Pastor and those in the ministry they serve.
 - Ministry Directors are commissioned to ensure the Village Church's mission and core values are clearly and explicitly reflected in their ministries.
 - Ministry Directors are also responsible to shepherd and develop those leaders who serve in their ministry.
- **Community Group Leaders**
 - Community group leaders are responsible for care of those in their respective group.
 - As CG's are the primary avenue of community at the Village Church, CG leaders have joyful responsibility of facilitating weekly times of personal, emotional, and spiritual connections.

4 Accountability Declarations for Members

1. Membership Declares Your Accountability to this Body

By becoming a member of the Village Church, you will be making a public & explicit pledge that you...

- Believe God has directed your path to become fully devoted to this local church
- Desire to fellowship and worship within this body.
- Are committed to identifying and employing your spiritual gift for the purpose of building up His Kingdom and church.
- Commit to walking in humility, being honest, vulnerable, accountable and teachable.
- Support the ministries of this church financially as the Lord prospers you.
- Pursue a life of personal and corporate prayer.
- Will pursue truth in your own heart and seek for Christ to sanctify all parts of you.
- Pursue relationships with other members that seek to share your deepest joys and struggles.

2. Membership Declares Your Accountability to God

Paul discloses to us that *"All things have been created by Jesus Christ and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything"* (Col 1:16-18). At the Village Church Jesus is indeed our Senior Pastor. Each of us will give an accounting to Him who is the Judge of the living and the dead. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:24 that the church is to be *"subject to Christ"* and therefore have the privilege to submit to Him in all things. James promises that when we *"submit ourselves to God we will be resisting the devil, and he will flee from us"* (James 4:7).

3. Membership Declares Your Accountability to Leadership

Some specific guidelines by which the the Village Church body desires to preserve their accountability to the Elders:

- It is incumbent on each member to seek the Lord's leading in all things (Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23; Colossians 1:18) and to exercise a Spirit-led voice in assuring that what is done in the church family coincides with Scripture.

- It is incumbent on each member to make his or her questions or concerns known to the Elders. It is also incumbent on each member to exhort others to do the same in order to preserve unity.
- The congregation is responsible to lovingly hold its spiritual leaders accountable to faithful adherence to the truth of the Word of God (Colossians 3:14-16).
- Because the Elders bear greater responsibility for the spiritual care of the congregation than other members, each member is to honor them (1 Timothy 5:17) and submit to them as they keep watch over their souls as those who will give an account to God. Members should do all in their power to enable leadership to serve with joy and not with grief (Hebrews 13:17). Members should take every opportunity to encourage and spur on the Elders.

4. Membership Declares Your Accountability to One Another (Mutual Submission)

Accountability is one of those eyebrow-raising words. It runs against the grain of a self-sufficient & individualistic society. We like to be our own person, do our own thing, and not have someone else tell us what to do or believe.

In contrast, God, says the following: *“So, in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others”* (Rom. 12:5). Our connectedness means we must lay aside the “island mentality”. We are not independent of one another. In the church there are many parts, but one body. *“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it* (1 Cor. 12:20-21, 26).

Because such interdependency exists within the Body of Christ, we are responsible to one another to do our part and to help others do theirs. Solomon said, *“If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up”* (Eccl. 4:10). We are our brother’s keeper! He continues when he says, *“Though one may be overpowered, and two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”* (Eccl. 4:12).

A Commitment to Biblical accountability results when we live in submission to one another and willingly desire transparent and mutual relationships. Scripture supports this when it calls us to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), confess our sins to each other, pray for each other (James 5:16) and not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9).

There are Clear, Specific Benefits when Accountability is Practiced:

- **Personal** - James 5:16 seems to indicate that healing is in store for the person who puts himself in a place of accountability.
- **Public** - Colossians 3:9-10 says that accountability is a reflection of the new life we have in Christ, which is a wonderful testimony to the world around us.
- **Praise** - Ephesians 5:21 lets us know that God is honored through accountability because it is the backbone of unity. God designed the Body of Christ to function best when its members are there for each other in ways that spur them on and hold themselves mutually responsible and accountable to the commitment they have made to follow Christ.

Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ every child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6), is placed in living union with Christ (Romans 6:5; Galatians 2:20), is made an heir with Christ (Galatians 4:7), is gifted for ministry in the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-6; 1 Peter 4:10), is constituted a priest to God and holy saint of God (1 Peter 2:9), and is a blood-bought child of God (Galatians 4:4-6).

Because of this every member has a unique high standing and must share in the responsibilities, privileges, ownership, obligations, and building up of the local church (Ephesians 4:15-16). All members are equally brothers and sisters in the church family and should mutually submit one to another (Ephesians 5:21). Therefore members will engage in one another's lives deeply. Members will seek the glory of God in all things. Members will follow the biblical principles of confrontation as outlined in Matthew 18 and seek to confront and enter into one another's lives when their behaviors, speech or thought patterns do not bring God glory.

The Process of Restoration

Discipline in His Church

"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:10-11).

God has entrusted Elders with the authority and responsibility to discipline in the local church. Discipline includes loving confrontation with the purpose of revealing the heart of those living in sin. It may include an exclusion from fellowship should a member remain unrepentant.

The author of Hebrews commands Elders to *"Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed"* (Heb. 12:12-13).

The key imperatives Elders have for carrying this responsibility out are:

- To protect God's reputation (II Timothy 2:19; Ephesians 5:31-32; Leviticus 22:2; I Peter 2:9)
- To protect the sinning brother/sister from greater discipline by the Lord (I Corinthians 5:1-5; Proverbs 13:15; Psalm 32:10)
- To protect the purity of the church (I Corinthians 5:6-7).

God has given the church precise instructions regarding matters that require discipline. A person is **not** disciplined for the following sins, **but** for a refusal to repent from them and demonstrate the fruit of repentance:

- Sexual immorality (I Corinthians 5:11)
- Greedy covetousness (I Corinthians 5:11)
- Idolatry (I Corinthians 5:11)
- Slander (I Corinthians 5:11)
- Drunkenness (I Corinthians 5:11)

- Thievery (I Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:25)
- Unruliness + Laziness (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 10-12, 14-15)
- False doctrine (Galatians 1:8-9; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17)
- Divisiveness (Matthew 18:15-18; I Thessalonians 5:14; Titus 3:10)

Discipline of Members

The process that God lays out in Scripture for discipline of members is as follows (adapted primarily from Matthew 18:15-20):

- **Step #1** - If any member shall conduct himself in a manner which is not in harmony with the Scriptural principles (e.g., living in a sinful lifestyle or sinning against his brother or sister) and for which he does not show evidence of repentance, the offended brother or sister shall approach this individual (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1) with the hope of restoring the broken relationship. The Elders will not enter into matters until this step has been attempted.
- **Step #2** - If the offending brother or sister refuses to hear them or refuses to acknowledge his sinful behavior and repent, then the offended shall take two or three others along as witnesses to again confront the offender.
- **Step #3** - If the brother or sister still refuses to respond in repentance, then the matter shall be brought before the Elders. The Elders' hope in discipline is to restore the unrepentant member to usefulness again in the body of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2; Matthew 18:15). This shall all be done in a spirit of love. Should repentance still not be realized, the issue shall be publicly brought before the full congregation in the hopes that additional prayer and accountability may cause the individual to repent and be restored.
- **Step #4** – If, however, the member should choose to continue in his unrepentant condition, it is incumbent upon the Elders based on the Scriptures to remove the individual from both membership and fellowship with the Body.
 - God's method of treating an excluded brother/sister is that while they are excluded (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:11; II Thessalonians 3:15), their interactions with the body will be altered. From this point onward the local church should not associate or fellowship with them. They should be polite, but use all opportunities to admonish them as a brother/sister to repent.
 - Persons who have been so disciplined but demonstrate repentance may be restored to fellowship by the Elders.
 - Persons attending church must understand that The Village Church membership is not a requirement for the Elders to discipline. It remains the responsibility of the Elders to protect the flock from doctrines and behaviors that are a threat to its purity whether from members or non-members. The issue in church discipline is not membership but fellowship and applies to all believers.
 - When discipline reaches step #4 it is the responsibility of each member of the Village Church to personally be involved in the discipline process leading towards restoration and to submit themselves to the disciplinary decision of the Elders.

Discipline of Elders

A charge or accusation brought against an Elder is considered a serious matter and must be made privately to the Elders by at least two or three primary witnesses (1 Tim 5:19-20). Any rebuke of an Elder from the Council of Elders is subject to the other members of the Council of Elders. In the event an accusation is validated by the Council of Elders and an Elder is disqualified, his removal as an Elder will be enforced by the Council of Elders. In this situation, assuming he repents, he would then be asked to submit to a process of personal counseling and accountability with one or more of the Elders. The Elders will seek to restore him to usefulness again in the body of Christ and this shall all be done in the spirit of love. Whether he could again be restored to the position of Elder is at the discretion of the Council with the full support of the Body.

If a disqualified Elder *“continues in sin, he should be rebuked in the presence of the entire Body, so that they also may be fearful of sinning”* (1 Ti 5:20). At this point, if he still does not repent, the process of removing him from both membership and fellowship will be pursued.

Ways to Enhance Your Accountability at the Village Church

1. **Community Group:** It is desired that each member would join a Community Group, which provides a great avenue for mutual accountability. Through times of prayer, sharing, and exhortation great opportunities are provided for continued encouragement and accountability.
2. **Accountability:** Our Men's and Women's ministries can connect you with other men and women who desire deeper accountability. Find the right Ministry Director and he or she would love to help you connect. This may be in the form of an accountability group, one-on-one mentoring and/or counseling.
3. **Serve in Ministries:** As we serve we commit ourselves to a specific ministry using our spiritual gifts and talents. Serving side-by-side with other believers helps develop close and intimate friendships that naturally lend to accountability for believers.
4. **Pursue Leadership:** For those who are qualified for church offices or leadership there is a higher level of accountability that accompanies these positions.
5. **Engage in The Village Church Fellowship Activities:** Throughout the year many opportunities are presented to members to build relationships with other members in the congregation & strengthen ties. By engaging in these fellowship activities you will have the opportunity to let others into your life.

Chapter Six Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What are the four spiritual laws of giving?
 1. (pg. 65)
 2. (pg. 67)
 3. (pg. 67)
 4. (pg. 68)
2. What are the five characteristics of churches and people who are good financial managers? (pg. 66)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
3. What is the summary statement for Christian giving? (pg. 69)
4. What are the four declarations of membership? (pg. 72-73)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
5. What are the five primary ways to enhance accountability at the Village Church? (pg. 77)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

Personal & Ministry Application Questions:

1. Are you in debt? If so, what steps are you taking to get out of debt? Are you interested in attending Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University?

Chapter Six Group Discussion Questions Cont.

2. What might be the heart condition of a Christian who could tithe but chooses not to?

3. Do you tithe “generously” to your local church? If not, are you willing to prayerfully go before the Lord and commit to start giving?

4. How much should I tithe? Read pg. 69 under “When Not To Give”

Chapter 7

Core Value # 5: Discipleship - *The Mission of the Church*



Being



Imagine a church where the daily goal of its members is to imitate Jesus throughout their day. Imagine a church with husbands seeking to sacrificially love their wives because in imitation of their master, Jesus. Imagine a church full of wives seeking to submit to their husbands because they know this would please Jesus the most. Imagine a church where people are actually growing in measurable ways - overcoming sin, experiencing healing and resembling Jesus more and more. Imagine a church so committed to personal Bible study and prayer that they were being transformed by the Holy Spirit in ways obvious to others in and outside of the church.

What is a Disciple?

At the Village Church we understand that to truly follow Jesus is to be willing to sacrifice everything for His sake. To follow Jesus is more than just being part of a club or organization; it is fully identifying yourself with His perfect life, death, resurrection, teaching, and transformational power. The Bible uses a specific word to describe these sold-out and passionate followers of Jesus Christ: “**disciples**.”

The term “disciple” comes from the Greek word *mathetes* meaning simply: “one who follows another’s teaching.” The word disciple conveys the idea of an apprentice or student listening and learning avidly at the feet of their teacher. Though this Greek word is simple it has enormous cultural ramifications when used to speak of the unique and intimate relationship between a rabbi (a first century religious teacher like Jesus) and his disciples (the teacher’s followers like the 12 Disciples). The idea of Biblical discipleship conveys that the student would study, imitate, and take on the attributes of his teacher. The goal in discipleship is complete mimicry of the Rabbi in every way. As Disciples of Jesus Christ Scripture is clear that we are to be growing in our resemblance to our Master and Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, as we sit at His feet.

Discipleship is not just something we do, **it is who we are**. To be a disciple means that our entire identity is bound up in our relationship with our Master. The primary obsession of any first-century Jewish disciple was an obsession first to love God and second to imitate their Master. In the case of Christ-followers, Jesus is both God and our Rabbi thus our entire identity is bound up in our love for and imitation of Him.

Seven Essential Aspects of Being a Disciple of Jesus Pt. 1

In Chapter Seven we deal with the first six essential aspects of being a disciple of Jesus. Chapter 8 will deal with the seventh aspect.

1. Disciples of Jesus are Chosen and Called by their Master

Jesus told his disciples, *“You did not choose me, I chose you” (John 15:16)*. The Bible is clear that it is God, not man, who initiates our relationship with Jesus as His disciple. It is God Himself who initiates a relationship with us as we are called into intimate fellowship with Him through the Gospel. Apart from God’s calling and spiritual awakening no human would follow after Him of their own accord. In 1 John 4:19 John says it clearly: *“We love because He first loved us.”* Every disciple of Jesus Christ must understand this massive truth: *I am not a disciple based on any merit, good works, good will, good choice, or unique abilities of my own, but simply because God in His mercy and grace has called and summoned me to Himself.*

The reason God had to choose and then subsequently call us is because in our sin we could not and would not run after God (Rom. 3:10-18, Rom. 8:7-8). In fact, the first requirement of being a disciple of Jesus is recognizing the reality of our sin and depravity by faith (faith is the gift of God given to those whom He has chosen and called - Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 12:3).

2. Disciples of Jesus Imitate Their Master’s Lifestyle through Spiritual Transformation

Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:18 says: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* Simply put, only as we spend intimate time in the presence of the *“glory of the Lord,”* who is Jesus Christ, are we transformed spiritually from one degree of maturity to another. This inner spiritual transformation happens by the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in every believer.

Notice the stipulation for being transformed. Paul says that transformation is for those who *“behold...the Lord.”* Common wisdom would tell you that inner heart and soul transformation happens through hard work and effort. The Bible says that our spiritual transformation comes by God’s Spirit as we behold the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is out of this Spirit-induced inner-transformation that we are able to obey the commands of our teacher, Jesus. For example, Jesus told His disciples in **John 13:14-15**: *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you...”* This command is good and right, but we are unable to be the kind of person Jesus is asking us to be unless He first produces in us the heart that can bear the fruit He requires. When we do bear good fruit it is not because of our own initiative or innate goodness, it is the result of the supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives.

As has been explored we will not fully resemble Christ until our life on this earth is complete. This being said, all who are disciples of Jesus Christ should in varying degrees be progressing in putting aside worldliness and clinging to that which is good. In theological terms this is called *“Progressive Sanctification.”* To sanctify something literally means *“to make holy”* or *“to set apart.”*

Since Jesus is the pinnacle of holiness, to be sanctified is to undergo *the process of God the Father by the power of God the Holy Spirit making us more like God the Son, Jesus*. Paul in Romans 8:29 states that it is our destiny to be conformed to the image of Jesus by the Spirit of God. God the Holy Spirit will accomplish this in those who are disciples of Jesus.

“Progressive Sanctification” therefore is: *the process of God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us more like Jesus **over the course of our lives***. When you trusted in Jesus Christ, though you were saved, forgiven, and given the Holy Spirit at that moment, you were not made immediately perfect and sinless. In fact as long as you are alive you will struggle with sin. But God will continue to transform you from the inside out *progressively* as you grow in your faith and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

3. Disciples of Jesus Study & Live Out Their Master’s Teaching

John 8:31-32: *“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”*

Because the goal of a disciple is to be like his teacher in every way, the disciple is to submit himself under the training and authority of the teacher. This is the immediate application of “*beholding the Lord*” from 1 Corinthians 3:18. Submitting is an active choice made by the disciple. In our day because we are not in the physical presence of Jesus we must submit ourselves to His training as contained for us in the Word of God through study and prayer.

As already examined in Chapter 4 we are empowered by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to understand the Biblical text. This occurs so that we may learn all that is necessary to know Jesus intimately and live the life He desires us to live. It is the Spirit who empowers us to be able to live lives that resemble Jesus. By beholding the Lord through the Word and in prayer by the power of the Spirit we begin to resemble our Master and Rabbi Jesus Christ. Without this intimate fellowship with Him we cannot hope to imitate him. By its very nature the principal of being a disciple demands intimation through extensive and purposeful time spent with the Master.

One of the primary attributes that Jesus’ disciples will mimic is love. Jesus said it well in **John 13:34-35:** *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Jesus commands this to the twelve disciples in the final hours of His life. The message is simple: we should display evidence that we are growing in passionate love for God and for others in the church. Part and parcel of following Jesus is a commitment to sacrificial and altruistic love. The greatest example of love in all human history is God’s love for us as demonstrated in the willing sacrifice of His Son Jesus on the cross.

Any act of love is defined first and foremost by its resemblance to this sacrificial event. For this reason Biblical love is not simply an emotion or something done out of affection for another but a lifestyle of sacrifice and humility that resembles Christ. We are to put the needs of others, even our enemies, before our own. Without Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, real love is impossible. Thankfully God is transforming us more and more into the image of Christ, into a people who are learning to love sacrificially and obey His Word.

4. Disciples of Jesus Bear Fruit

As a disciple of Jesus it is critical that we are growing in good and righteous conduct that is motivated by Christ-like sacrificial love and is in accord with the Bible. This is called “fruit.” Jesus said in **John 15:8**: *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”*

It is clear in this verse that one proof of our discipleship is that we bear fruit. However, it is important to remember that fruit does not make you a disciple of Jesus; it is merely a *sign* of a true disciple who is being transformed by God’s Spirit. Paul says in **Ephesians 2:8-10** that we were *“saved by grace through faith, not by works.”* We were not saved BY good works but FOR good works. This distinction is essential as the Bible teaches that anyone who tries to earn salvation and forgiveness by working for it will never find it.

In bearing fruit God receives glory because our lives resemble Jesus. When people see our lives, whether in the world or in the church, they should have a better opinion and/or more clear picture of God. One clear example of fruit in Scripture can be found in **Galatians 5:22-24**. This is called the “fruit of the Spirit”. Paul says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

A synonym for “fruit” in the Bible is “good works”. **Colossians 1:9-10** says, *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, **bearing fruit in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* As Jesus’ disciples it is expected that we would not just be bearing fruit, but that as we grow in our relationship with God over time, we would continually bear larger amounts of and better quality fruit. This of course is the result of our efforts to *“behold the Lord.”*

5. Disciples of Jesus Have an Intimate Relationship with their Master

In John 15 Jesus says *“Abide in me”*. This literally means *“live with me”*, or *“let my life live through you”*. It is a phenomenal privilege not just to be considered God’s son or daughter and adopted into His family but to be called to live a life of nearness and intimacy with God on a daily basis. The twelve disciples experienced an intimacy with Jesus unmatched by other disciple/rabbi relationships.

Our intimacy with God as sons and daughters is to be modeled after Jesus' intimacy with the Father while He was on earth. He called the Father "Abba," a term translated into English as "Daddy!" It is profound to think of Jesus referring to God in this way. This gives a great insight into the intimate relationship they share with one another in the Godhead as Father and Son.

Following the example of Jesus, we are intimate with God in four major, but specific ways:

1. Through corporate and individual prayer as we talk with God,
2. Through the studying and reading of Scripture as we hear God speak to us,
3. Through living in community within the local church, the body of Christ, as God ministers to us through His people,
4. Through God the Holy Spirit who dwells in, teaches, convicts and changes us.

To the extent that any of the above are missing in our lives, our intimacy with God will be severely diminished.

6. Disciples of Jesus are Willing to Both Live and Die for their Master

We would be missing a key component of following Christ if we did not examine the cost of being a disciple. The Scriptures are clear that being a disciple of Jesus is not a casual endeavor, but an all-or-nothing proposition. Christ is not interested in casual Christianity-He demands the whole of our hearts, lives and possessions. We should be seeking in every aspect of our lives to bring Him glory as we seek to leave no room for compromise. Consider the cost of being a disciple of Jesus in the following passage:

Luke 9:23-26 - *"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."*

It is clear that Christ demands our all. He asks full submission from us when it comes to our possessions, family and even our life. Being a disciple means that we should be fully submitted to the kingship of our Master Jesus. Ten of the twelve disciples died for Him. What about the other two? Rome tried to kill John but could not. John was exiled to the island of Patmos as an old man where he wrote the book of Revelation and most likely the books of 1, 2 and 3 John as well as the Gospel of John. Judas Iscariot committed suicide for betraying his Rabbi.

Chapter Seven Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What does the word “disciple” mean? (pg. 83)
2. What are the first six aspects of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 1. (pg. 82)
 2. (pg. 82)
 3. (pg. 83)
 4. (pg. 84)
 5. (pg. 84)
 6. (pg. 85)

Personal & Ministry Application Questions

1. As you look through the first six aspects of being a disciple, which aspect are you the strongest in and which are you weakest in?

2. As you look over the past year of your life, how has God transformed you more and more into the image of Jesus Christ? A growing Christian should be able to give some clear and measurable examples of growth.

3. Why do some Christians seem to grow more quickly as disciples of Jesus than others?

Chapter Seven Group Discussion Questions Cont.

4. Many in Christian churches have stopped growing. What are some topics that should be addressed more from the pulpit or in Community Groups to help address this problem?

5. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is a very serious calling. How have you seen believers in your life *really* seek to be like Jesus? Share some personal stories of people you respect and admire.

Chapter 8

Core Value # 5: Discipleship - *The Mission of the Church*



Going



Imagine a church where every member is prepared to clearly, accurately and succinctly share the good news of Jesus Christ with a non-Christian. Imagine a church that is growing weekly because they are committed to sharing the gospel with everyone they know. Imagine a church that was so unashamed and passionate about Jesus Christ that they could not help but share the gospel with those in their lives. Imagine a church that experienced not just the power of the Gospel for sanctification in their own lives, but experienced the power of the Gospel for salvation in the lives of non-Christians. Imagine a church that had baptisms weekly because people were hearing the Gospel and were granted faith by God through its powerful proclamation.

In chapter 7 we talked through the first six of seven essential aspects of being a disciple of Jesus. In this chapter we will focus solely on Jesus' call for His disciples to be *"disciples who make disciples who make disciples..."*

Seven Essential Aspects of Being a Disciple of Jesus Pt. 2

7. Disciples of Jesus Make Disciples Who Make Disciples Who Make...

Often called the "Great Commission" or the "Great Cause", Matthew 28:18-20 has become the call-to-action for disciples of Jesus Christ for the last 2000 years. This text is Jesus' final earthly teaching before He leaves His disciples and ascends into Heaven. Jesus wants His disciples to clearly understand that they have a mission to fulfill that will define their lives from this point forward. Jesus' commission and cause is simple and clear: *disciples of Jesus will be known because they will make disciples who make disciples who make....* Both the quality and the quantity of Jesus' disciples should not be growing linearly, but growing exponentially. He said:

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

Being a disciple of Jesus means you have a purpose and an expectation: *make disciples who make disciples*. Even though the Christian faith is largely passed down by Christian families through their children, another vital aspect of the exponential growth of the Christian church for 2000 years has been the unashamed proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by His disciples. Think about how you came to faith in Jesus Christ. For many of us it was probably through someone sharing the gospel. Somebody right now is waiting to hear the gospel from you! You just might be the person God has chosen to share the Gospel that will finally lead them to believe just like somebody did for you!

In Romans 10:14-15, Paul speaks of the need for Christians to bring the gospel to non-Christians. He says: *“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”*

Could God save someone without our proclamation of the Gospel? He is certainly capable of doing so. However, this is not how He normally functions. We have the great privilege of co-laboring and co-operating with God in the proclamation of the Gospel to non-believers. Consider carefully the full implications of this passage:

*“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**. Therefore, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as God makes His appeal through us.”* (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

Our Biblical Motivation to Preach the Gospel

What should motivate you and I to preach the gospel to non-Christians? The Bible gives at least two answers: **1. God’s love for us, and 2. God’s love for people.**

As disciples of Jesus our goal is imitation of his behavior. Jesus loved both His friends and His enemies sacrificially and therefore we should seek to understand what motivated Jesus and make these our motives as well.

Motivation # 1: God’s Love for Us

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: *“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”*

Paul says here that he is controlled and motivated not to live for himself but to live for the God who died and rose for him. He says he is “controlled” by this love. To be “controlled” here means to be “gripped, seized, or deeply moved by something leading to necessary action. Specifically, Paul is “controlled” by God’s love for humanity in the Gospel - the life-changing message that God sacrificed His Son to die for our sins.

What action did this “controlling” lead Paul to? Passionate proclamation of the Gospel (he says he is “beside himself” about this message in vs. 13). As he ponders God’s love for him as seen in the Gospel he is compelled to passionately proclaim it to others! Paul goes on to say a few verses later that the Gospel controls him to such a point that he is now an “ambassador for Jesus Christ.” He says: *“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and*

gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

The point is this: If we are gripped and controlled by God's love for us as seen in the Gospel, we will be necessarily compelled to proclaim to others this astounding message. ***A failure on our part to be passionate about sharing the Gospel with non-Christians is a failure to be gripped personally and intimately by God's love for us in Gospel.***

Motivation # 2: God's Love for People, Including His Enemies

The Bible is clear that God sacrificially loves people, including His enemies. This is shown clearly in the message of the Gospel. Since Jesus is God and Jesus also sacrificially loved all people, we as His disciples should seek to love others in the same manner.

God's love has limits, though. In Hell, no one experiences God's love, but rather the fullness of His wrath and fury toward sin and sinners. Consider carefully this brief description of Hell: *"And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.'"* (Revelation 14:9-11)

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should be moved to gratitude when we read about what God saved us from, namely Hell and an eternity separated from His love under the full weight of His righteous wrath. Ponder a few of these facts about Hell as presented in the passage below:

- *Hell is eternal; it has no end. No one will be eliminated or annihilated in Hell, but will suffer eternally (2 Thess. 1:9, Rev. 14:11).*
- *Hell is torment inflicted by God as a necessary punishment for sin (Rev. 14:10-11).*
- *Hell is isolation from people and from God's love in eternal darkness (1 Thess. 1:9).*
- *There are no second chances in Hell to repent (Heb. 9:27).*
- *Nobody in Hell wants to go to Heaven, but are "gnashing their teeth" in anger at God (Matt. 8:12).*
- *God does not love anyone who is in Hell as it goes against both His holiness and justice to do so. In Hell, God hates both sin and sinners (Rev. 14:10-11).*

As God loved His enemies by dying for them, disciples of Jesus should be moved to love our enemies in imitation of Him. As we ponder both the reality of an eternity in Hell as well as Jesus' love for His enemies (each seen clearly in the Gospel), we should be motivated to be ambassadors for Christ pleading with non-believers to trust Christ, their only hope for

salvation from this coming terror. It is our divine privilege and calling to plead with non-Christians to repent of their sin, trust in Christ, be saved from God's wrath in Hell and be restored to eternal love and fellowship with God!

As you ponder God's love for you and others, including His enemies, are you motivated to share the Gospel with non-Christians? As you consider that anyone who rejects Jesus will abide in Hell forever, is your motivation increased?

Questions and Comments You Might Voice or Hear

1. ***"What if I don't share my faith? Will someone go to Hell because I didn't tell them about Jesus?"*** The answer to this question is simple: No. God will always find someone bold enough to bring the Gospel to those whom He has chosen and called. Their blood will not be on your hands if they perish apart from Christ. However, when we shrink back from boldly and lovingly sharing the gospel we forsake two amazing opportunities. First, we fail to obey our Rabbi Jesus, and second, we fail to experience the power of the Gospel working anew in someone's life as God grants faith and renews their soul! How sad would it be to fail in either regard!
2. ***"I'm not very articulate and have a hard time getting my point across. I think I will let someone more eloquent do the talking."*** God LOVES to use people with weaknesses to proclaim the gospel. He does this because the power of the Gospel is not in the person but in rather in Himself. Romans 1:16 says ***"the Gospel is God's power for salvation to anyone who believes"***. Where is the power? In words? In the person? In the hearer? No! The power is God's and He exercises His power when the gospel is preached. Paul the great evangelist and church planter said this of himself: ***"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."*** (1 Cor. 1:17) ***"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified..."*** (1 Cor 1:22-23). When imperfect believers proclaim the gospel message with power and boldness, the glory is all God's, not their own.
3. ***"I'll let my pastor do the preaching. I don't want people to think I am weird or in a cult."*** Again, it is a privilege to be associated with Jesus and the good news of salvation. Disciples of Jesus are indeed transformed by God's power through hearing this message and there is absolutely no shame in it. Paul says in Romans 1:16 that ***"I am not ashamed of the Gospel."*** As this great leader of the faith was not ashamed neither should we be. On the contrary, we should be proud of our God and all that He has done for us! Whatever strange looks, comments or thoughts we receive because of our association with Jesus and the Gospel, the reward of an eternity with God will make it all seem ludicrously insignificant.

4. ***“My friend would never be a Christian. It’s no use telling him about Jesus because he is one of those really smart guys who knows what he believes.”*** Never say never! God is infinitely powerful and can save anyone. He is able to overcome even the hardest of hearts. In addition, who are you to decide what someone will or will not believe? Give them the chance to accept or reject Jesus Christ for themselves rather than making their decision with your own hesitation. Many people have rejected Christianity as an idea or religion often based upon false perceptions. Many people may have never been asked to personally trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Be the one who finally asks them and gives them the opportunity to accept or reject Jesus personally through the Gospel rather than their perception of what Christianity is or is not.
5. ***“My friend is already an avid follower of another faith. I don’t want to offend them by telling them their faith is wrong or that they are going to Hell. That feels so judgmental.”*** It is judgmental, but not in a bad way. Every person on the planet is judgmental because that is simply the way that God made us. We were created with the ability to discern, think and make conclusions based upon evidence. The conclusions and opinions we form are the basis for what we believe; i.e., judgments. If a Christian has concluded and judged that anyone who does not trust in Jesus for salvation will go to Hell, it would be fully appropriate and loving to warn people! In fact, we should be criticized if we do not warn others about their false ideas that will lead them to Hell. If someone unknowingly gets in a car with a bomb and you warn them, that is not a negative thing but the right thing. That person has the right and freedom to reject you, mock you, ignore you or listen to you. The same is true in regard to the gospel. At the very least you can stand in good conscience before God knowing you did everything you could - you enacted God’s power by proclaiming the Gospel.
6. ***“I hate that person. Why would I want them to be in Heaven? They deserve to go to Hell for what they have done!”*** Believe it or not this is how many think and feel. Some don’t even know they are thinking like this. Consider this next statement carefully if you find yourself thinking these kinds of thoughts: **You deserve to go to Hell just as much as that person for what you have done to God in your sin!** You also are a sinner and this selfish, unloving and unChrist-like attitude is clear evidence of that fact. Jesus Himself came to die for His enemies making them His brothers and God’s children. You were that enemy who by faith has been adopted into God’s family as the Father’s child and Jesus’ brother or sister. Read these two passages carefully:

*“...but God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if **while we were enemies** we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Rom. 5:8-10)*

We need to remember that we were once sinners and God’s enemies! We should approach our enemies with the same mercy and grace with which God has approached us. The same transforming power we have personally experienced is available for them as well!

Evangelism at the Village Church

At the Village Church, here are a few of the major venues of Gospel proclamation and evangelization:

Personal Evangelism: The Bible teaches that disciples of Jesus will boldly, appropriately and lovingly share the Gospel with unbelievers. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:16, *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...”*

Sunday Worship: Many unbelievers come to our Sunday worship service. Since we are a Christ-centered church we proclaim the gospel every Sunday. Many have come to saving faith through this venue.

Global Missions: The Village Church supports missionaries all over the world who are spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. We happily support the worldwide cause of the Gospel to ensure that every person has the opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ. John said in Revelation 5:9: *“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...”*. Jesus is the King and savior of the whole world and it is our unparalleled privilege to proclaim His gospel through our many missionaries!

Community Groups: It is our desire that you would consider bringing an unbeliever to a Community Group to hear the Gospel, learn from the Word, receive prayer and experience fellowship with other believers. Many non-Christians have never experienced a community of genuine sacrificial love that seeks to emulate the cross. This can be a deeply influential experience and may draw them to saving faith in Jesus.

VBS & Awana: VBS and Awana are extensions of our children's ministry and are explicitly focused on bringing the Gospel and God's Word to unchurched kids in the Bartlett community. Literally thousands of unchurched children have heard the Gospel through these powerful ministries!

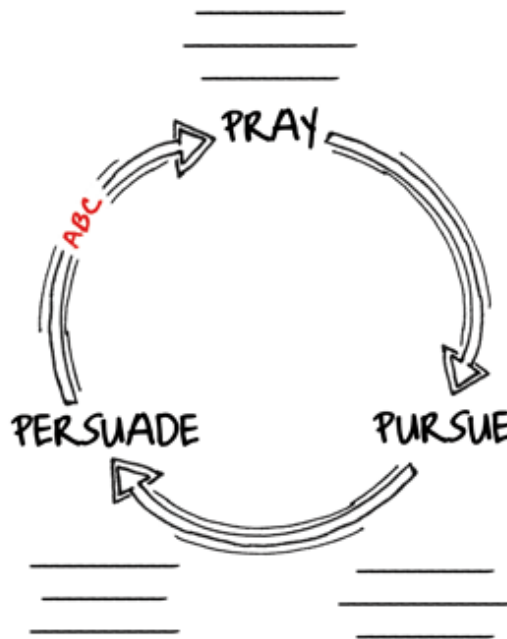
Having Children: God is pro-family and pro-kids. In fact, one of the greatest tools we have to spread the gospel is having and raising children who fear God by faith in Jesus Christ. Homes that model Christlike marriages and God the Father's heart for His children are powerful forces of evangelism. Faith is often passed down from one generation to another (consider the example of Timothy in 2 Tim. 1:5). The book of Malachi teaches that one of the primary reasons God made marriage was to produce *“Godly offspring”* (Mal. 2:15), or better said, *“Children who fear God.”* The probability of a child who grows up in a Christian home trusting in Christ is MUCH greater than that of a child growing up in a non-Christian home.

How to Share Your Faith

To close this chapter, we will focus a bit on personal evangelism. A great way to be strategic about personal evangelism is the following:

1. **PRAY:** Have a list of unbelievers that you are praying for daily. Since it is God who saves and regenerates the unbelieving soul pray that God would use you to bring the Gospel to someone in your life. Pray for receptiveness to the gospel, for saving faith and for wisdom regarding how to present the Gospel to them.
2. **PURSUE:** Initiate discussions about Jesus and the Gospel with those on your prayer list. This is usually the most difficult step for people, but how can they ever believe in God if they don't hear? Pray that God gives you boldness and opportunities.
3. **PERSUADE:** Have a short list of people you are currently in ongoing and purposeful discussions with about the Gospel. Many of the people on this list will be people who were on your "pray" list. When this list gets empty, seek to fill it! At the appropriate time, call those you are in discussion with to a decision to personally trust in Jesus Christ.

The following chart is a great tool to get started. Write down three people you are or need to be praying for concerning their salvation. At the right time move them to the pursue line. Ask God to provide clear opportunities to initiate a discussion on the Gospel. Ask God to give you confidence, clarity, and power through the Gospel! Finally, at the right time, ask the person you have been praying for and pursuing to personally trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior for the forgiveness of their sins against God and the hope of eternal life!



Chapter Eight Group Discussion Questions:

Content Questions:

1. What is the seventh aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ? (pg. 92)
2. What are our two primary motivations to preach the Gospel?
 1. (pg. 90)
 2. (pg. 91)
3. What are the seven primary avenues of evangelism at the Village Church? (pg. 94)

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	
4. What are the three “P’s” of sharing your faith? (pg. 95)

1.	2.	3.
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Personal & Ministry Application Questions

1. Consider the following statement from chapter 8: *“A failure on our part to be passionate about sharing the Gospel with non-Christians is a failure to be gripped personally and intimately by God’s love.”* Explain why this statement is true.

2. Who in your life are you praying for that they might be saved? Who are you seeking to pursue a conversation about the gospel with? Who are you presently persuading to trust in Christ for salvation?

Praying:

Pursuing:

Persuading:
3. As you ponder God’s love for you and others, including His enemies, are you motivated to share the Gospel with non-Christians? As you consider that anyone who rejects Jesus will be in hell forever, are you further motivated to share the Gospel with them? Why or why not?

Chapter Eight Group Discussion Questions Cont.

4. What are some of the best outreaches we have done as a church or that you have seen other churches do?

5. When disciples of Jesus stop sharing their faith, what happens in their lives and in their church?

Appendix

Resources & Information on the Village Church



THE VILLAGE CHURCH OF BARTLETT CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

We, the members of The Village Church of Bartlett, in order to carry out more efficiently the purpose given by Jesus Christ to His Church, do ordain and establish the following Constitution to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this organization shall be The Village Church of Bartlett (VCOB).

ARTICLE II – PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE

The ultimate authority for governing the Church lies with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Head as stated in the Scriptures (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18a, 2:10).

Jesus Christ entrusted the oversight of His Church to a plurality of Elders (1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5b; Acts 14:23), whose purpose is to carry out His will as under-shepherds in whom He has placed His authority (Acts 20:28-31). As Christ's under-shepherds, the Elders are under the strict authority of Jesus Christ and His Holy Word. These Elders carry out His will, relying on the Holy Spirit's direction through the Scriptures, and following the model of Jesus as servant leaders (Matthew 10:35-42, 23:1-12; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:3-17, 34-35). The responsibility for shepherding the local Church lies with these men, who are accountable before God for the welfare of the flock (Hebrews 13:17).

In accordance with the Scriptures, we shall govern our affairs through a plurality of Elders, who function under the guidelines and practices of the New Testament local church.

Such governance is not devoid of involvement by the resident body of believers. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, every child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6), is placed in living union with Christ (Romans 6:5; Galatians 2:20), is made an heir with Christ (Galatians 4:7), is gifted for ministry in the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-6; 1 Peter 4:10), is constituted a priest to God and holy saint of God (1 Peter 2:9), and is a blood-bought son or daughter of God (Galatians 4:4-6). Thus, every member has a unique high standing and must share in the responsibilities, privileges, ownership, obligations, and building up of the local church (Ephesians 4:15-16). All members are equally brothers and sisters in the church family; although some function as Spirit-placed overseers and thereby have the authority to guide and shepherd the local church body (Ephesians 5:21).

Further principles of Elder leadership and congregational involvement in this regard are delineated in the By-Laws. by Jesus Christ to His Church, do ordain and establish the following Constitution to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:

ARTICLE III - PURPOSE

The purpose of this organization shall be to exalt God (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 4:11b) by using His Word to equip believers (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 12:1-2) to employ their spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11a), edify the Body (Colossians 1:28; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 4:11-18) and evangelize the lost (Matthew 28:19-20).

ARTICLE IV - STATEMENT OF FAITH

1. We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be: the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings (yet preserved and protected for reliable translation throughout the ages), the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 28:19).
2. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 17:3; Revelation 4:11; Matthew 28:19).
3. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into Heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He is now our High Priest and Advocate (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Matthew 1:18; Hebrews 1:3, 9:24).
4. We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and, during this age, to convict men, regenerate the believing sinner through the baptism and sealing work of the Holy Spirit, and indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:30; John 14:17, 26, 16:7-11).
5. We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is, therefore, lost, and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained. (Genesis 1:26; Romans 5:12; Titus 3:3-7; 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, 22-23).
6. We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and only such as receive Jesus Christ are born of the Holy Spirit and thus become children of God (Acts 4:12; Colossians 1:20; Romans 6:5-6; Titus 3:5-7).
7. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during this present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation (Matthew 28:13; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 16:31-33; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Acts 22:16).
8. We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the Body of Christ of which He is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).
9. We believe that only those who are members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church (Acts 2:41-47).
10. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).
11. We believe in the personal, premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this "Blessed Hope" has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer (Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Titus 2:13-14; Zechariah 12, 14; Matthew 24).
12. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord; of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:6; John 5:28, 29).

ARTICLE V - AMENDMENTS

Amendments to this Constitution must be approved by a unanimous decision of the Council of Elders and presented in writing to members for ratification. The presentation to members must be made at least sixty days prior to the congregational meeting at which adoption of the amendment is being sought, in order to allow adequate time for discussion, feedback and teaching.

A congregational meeting where approval of a Constitutional amendment is sought must have a quorum of at least thirty percent of the current membership. In order for an amendment to be ratified, it must be affirmed by at least eighty percent of the membership present at the congregational meeting.

A revised Constitution shall be published and made available to all members.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I – MEMBERSHIP

Consistent with our Statement of Faith, we acknowledge that the universal Church is comprised of all true believers in Jesus Christ. We further believe the Scriptures mandate that every believer be deeply involved in the lives of other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Section 1 – QUALIFICATIONS FOR VCOB MEMBERSHIP

Membership in VCOB represents a commitment to active and intimate involvement in this fellowship of believers. For these reasons, we encourage all believers to become members. The membership of this local church shall be composed of individuals who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), and who are willing to submit to the Scriptures “in everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Section 2 – ADMISSION PROCESS

Admission to membership in VCOB shall be as follows:

- A. Any believer desiring to place membership in VCOB shall submit an application form for consideration by the Elders. Applicants shall be given a copy of VCOB's Constitution and By-Laws.
- B. Applicants shall meet with the Elders to give personal testimony of their salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and evidence of their understanding and submission to the Constitution and By-Laws.
- C. A list of all applicants' names shall be publicized.
- D. All satisfactory candidates shall be approved for admission by the Elders prior to the scheduled date for welcoming the applicant as a new member.
- E. The accepted applicants shall be publicly welcomed into the membership at a subsequent Sunday morning worship service of VCOB.

Section 3 - CONDUCT

- A. Regular attendance at the services of VCOB, daily reading of the Bible, private and family devotions, personal and public testimony and personal evangelism are expected of every member. It shall be the sacred duty of parents to provide Biblical instruction for their children. Each member shall consider it his sacred duty and privilege to make full use of his spiritual gift(s) for the Lord's service whenever opportunity affords (Hebrews 10:24-25; Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11, 6:1-4).
- B. All members are encouraged to remember each other in prayer, aid each other in sickness and distress; be courteous in speech and slow to anger, and to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:29-32). As believers we are commanded, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).
- C. Each member is urged to pledge himself to a systematic contribution of a portion of his income for the support of VCOB according to the principles (sacrificially and from a right heart as he is prospered) laid down in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and 1 Corinthians 16:2-3.
- D. Each member is called upon to heed the admonition of the Lord: "Do not love the world or the things of the world," and, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" and be an "example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 John 2:15; Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 4:12). He is expected to abstain from any act or practice that may be harmful in its influence or a stumbling block to the weak (Romans 14:13, 21).

Section 4 – ABSENCE, WITHDRAWAL, OR REVOCATION OF MEMBERSHIP

- A. Any member who has been absent more than twelve months with no reason given may have his membership withdrawn by the Elders.
- B. Any member who wishes to withdraw his VCOB membership shall advise one or more Elders of such.
- C. Membership may be withdrawn by the Elders for reasons of discipline (see Article II of these By-Laws).
- D. All former members seeking reinstatement to membership shall apply for such in accordance with this Article.
- E. Any member who has withdrawn or who has been excluded from VCOB loses all rights of VCOB membership.

Section 5 - PROPERTY RIGHT

The private property of the individual members of VCOB shall be exempt from corporate debt.

ARTICLE II – CONFRONTATION OF SIN; RESTORATION

- A. If any member shall conduct himself in a manner which is not in harmony with the Scriptural principles (e.g., living in a sinful lifestyle or has sinned against his brother or sister) and for which he does not show evidence of repentance, the offended brother or sister shall approach this individual as stated in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1) with the goal of restoring this broken relationship. If the offending brother or sister refuses to hear them or refuses to acknowledge his sinful behavior and repent, then the offended shall take one or two others along as witnesses to again confront the offender. If the brother or sister still refuses to respond in repentance, then the matter shall be brought before the Elders. The Elders' goal in handling this matter shall be to seek restoration of the unrepentant member. This shall all be done in the spirit of love.
- B. If, however, the member should choose to continue in his unrepentant condition, it is incumbent upon the Elders, based on the Scriptures, that the individual shall be removed from membership and fellowship. The issue shall be publicly brought before the congregation in the hopes that additional prayer may cause the individual to repent and be restored.
- C. Persons who have been so disciplined but demonstrate repentance may be restored to fellowship by the Elders.
- D. Persons attending this assembly must understand that VCOB membership is not a requirement for the Elders to discipline. Regardless of the status of VCOB membership of the individual(s) involved, it remains the responsibility of the Elders to protect the flock from doctrines and behaviors that are a threat to its purity. (Local church membership, as stated, is predicated upon membership in the universal Church through profession of faith in Christ. Any implications of membership beyond this are based on consistent biblical principles and practical measures consistent with stated church polity. In other words, we have defined church membership in the context of our practices. However, discipline and restoration processes and principles transcend these defining lines of membership and are obviously applicable to any believer with whom we are in fellowship. As is stated, the issue in church discipline is not membership but fellowship and applies to all believers and is the responsibility of all believers.)

- E. It is the responsibility of each individual member of VCOB to personally be involved with this process leading towards restoration.

ARTICLE III - CALL TO SERVICE

Section 1 – MEMBERS

- A. It is our spiritual duty as Christians to employ our spiritual gifts in service to the Lord within the body of this local church (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12 - 14).
- B. Only VCOB members (or others exempted from meeting such qualifications by the Elders pursuant to Section 2, which follows) shall be allowed to serve in VCOB ministries.
- C. Any individual wishing to serve on a regular basis at VCOB shall submit a ministry application prior to serving.

Section 2 – NON-MEMBERS

- A. Non-members seeking to serve in VCOB ministries or utilize VCOB facilities / property shall be approved by the Elders. Such non-members shall, unless otherwise approved by the Elders:*
1. Submit an application to the head of the ministry in which they wish to serve;
 2. Concur with the VCOB Statement of Faith;
 3. Agree to submit to the authority of the Elders and ministry head;
 4. Agree to be subject to Biblical shepherding and to conduct themselves in accordance with Article I, Section 3 of the By-Laws; and
 5. Agree to be subject to the disciplinary measures stipulated under Article II of the By-Laws.
- B. The Elders, in their sole discretion, may revoke such approval at any time.

ARTICLE IV - CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Section 1 – GOVERNANCE MODEL

In addition to the principles of governance stated under Article II of the Constitution, the following basic guidelines are established to assist the Elders in the governing process:

- As the church looks to the Elders for wise leadership, the Elders will also look to the members for wisdom, counsel, inspiration, creative ideas, help and prayer.
- The Elders understand the sacred nature and dynamic energy of the Spirit-empowered body and will endeavor to seek congregational input in all major decisions (e.g., Acts 6).
- It is incumbent on each member to seek the Lord's leading in all things (Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23; Colossians 1:18) and to exercise a Spirit-led voice in assuring that what is done in the church family coincides with Scripture.

- It is incumbent on each member to make his questions or concerns known to the Elders. It is also incumbent on each one to exhort others to do the same in order to preserve unity.
- As servant leaders, the Elders believe that overbearing, controlling leadership practices are unacceptable (1 Peter 5:3).
- Because the Elders bear greater responsibility for the spiritual care of the congregation than other members, all members are to esteem, love and honor them (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; 1 Timothy 5:17) and to submit to them (Hebrews 13:17).
- The Elders are most assuredly answerable to the congregation, and the congregation is responsible to hold its spiritual leaders accountable to faithful adherence to the truth of the Word of God.
- All members have a voice in assuring that what is done in the church family is done both in accordance with Scripture and in love (Colossians 3:14-16).
- There must be a tightly knit, cherished, trusting and trustworthy relationship between the Elders and the congregation. Their collective goal is to speak and act as a united community (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- All shall seek to “make our joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose ...” (Philippians 2:2-8).

Section 2 - COUNCIL OF Elders

A. *Authority and Responsibilities* – The Council of Elders (also herein referred to as the “Elders”) shall be responsible for the shepherding work of the ministry. Shepherding involves feeding, leading, caring, and protecting (1 Peter 5:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:1, 5).

1. God’s Word does not make a distinction between “pastors” and “lay Elders.” The two are considered as Elders and pastors, equal in authority and responsibility as members of the Council of Elders (Ephesians 4:11).
2. It shall be the duty of the Elders: to care for the spiritual condition of VCOB; to guard the purity of doctrine and life of VCOB; and to discipline the congregation in accordance with the Word of God with the primary objective being restoration. Their primary responsibilities are prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).
3. The Elders shall also administer the property of VCOB, both real and personal, and shall transact all business pertaining to the affairs of VCOB. The Elders shall act as trustees for VCOB, holding title to the properties, conveying the same, and representing VCOB in all matters pertaining to civil law. They shall oversee the disbursement of VCOB funds to pay all operating costs and shall accept or reject all gifts of monies or properties contributed to VCOB. The Elders may at their discretion delegate some of the administrative duties to individuals within the congregation who display the necessary skills to conduct such duties on a day-to-day basis; however, the responsibility of oversight of said duties remains with the Elders.

B. *Calling of an Elder* – We believe that God ultimately places His calling on an individual and raises up men within the congregation to serve Him in this calling. Elder candidates shall complete a written examination. The Elders shall enter a period of time in prayer to seek the Lord’s guidance with respect to this calling. They shall conduct an extensive interview to determine the individual’s qualifications. This shall include this individual’s knowledge of Scriptural positions, theological beliefs, character, ministry experience and desire to serve. If the Elders affirm this calling, they shall then present the candidate to the congregation for public examination, publishing his qualifications as they were determined in the interview process. If any member has any concerns as to the qualifications of this candidate, they shall bring those concerns before the Elders. If no valid Biblical objection is brought forth, then the Elders are empowered to call and recognize this man to this position in the presence of the congregation.

C. *Qualifications* – The moral and spiritual qualifications of an Elder are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Members are encouraged to propose potential candidates for Eldership.

D. *Number and Term*

1. The number of Elders shall be according to the number who have been commissioned by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) and who are Biblically qualified and recognized. An Elder shall serve for as long as he feels he is called by the Lord to serve, or until he is no longer qualified to serve based on the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

2. An Elder may at his discretion step down or take a sabbatical from office by personal request under the provisions of Article IV, Section 2, Part E of these By-Laws.

E. *Sabbaticals for Elders* – Sabbaticals for Elders are not mandatory, but strongly encouraged. Paid Staff Elders will continue to receive their salary during such sabbaticals. Sabbaticals should reflect a balance of physical rest, educational development and personal/spiritual renewal. The amounts of such payments, their duration, and reimbursement for educational expenses shall be subject to the approval of the Elders.

F. *Rebuke and Removal of Elders* – The rebuke of Elders shall be done as follows. It shall be borne in mind that a charge or accusation brought against an Elder is considered a serious matter and shall be made privately, by two or three primary witnesses, to the Elders in accordance with 1 Timothy 5:19-20. Rebuke of an Elder from the Council of Elders is subject to the other members of the Council of Elders. In the event an accusation is validated by the Council of Elders to the extent that an Elder is disqualified, removal shall be enforced by the Council of Elders.

G. *Staff Elder* – A “Staff Elder” is defined as an Elder receiving remuneration for his services. In the event of a vacancy or addition of a Staff Elder position, and in the event the Elders fail to identify a suitable candidate from among VCOB members, the Elders shall appoint a search committee to assist in the interviewing of prospective candidates for the position. Upon identification of a suitable candidate, the Elders shall make available to the congregation a list of the candidate’s qualifications for feedback and further discussions. With positive feedback from the congregation as to his qualifications, the Elders shall provide ample opportunity for the congregation to meet personally with the candidate, both on a congregational and smaller group level to provide additional feedback as to the candidate’s qualifications and fit with the congregation. Upon completion of the above provisions, if all Biblical objections have been addressed and answered, the Elders are empowered to call and recognize the candidate to the position of Staff Elder. He shall be called for an indefinite period of time.

H. *Meetings* – Regular meetings of the Elders shall be held at the discretion of the Elders.

I. *Decisions* – The acts of the majority of the entire Council of Elders shall be the acts of the Elders. It is the desire of the Council of Elders to reach consensus on all decisions.

J. *Ordination* – Through procedures established by the Council of Elders, VCOB shall have the authority to ordain men for purposes of Christian ministry. It likewise carries the authority to revoke such ordination when the Elders deem such to be necessary.

K. *Actions by the Elders* – Wherever in these By-Laws the words “approved by the Elders,” “by any Elder,” or any similar words or phrases are used, it shall be understood such rights and actions are those belonging to the Council of Elders.

Section 3 - DEACONS

- A. *Definition* – The word deacon means “servant” (Acts 6:1-6; Romans 16:1).
- B. *Authority* – The office of deacon appears to be both an office of service and an office of leadership. It is an official position in the church which is spoken of in close connection with the Elders (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Thus, they are those who serve the Body in support of delegated tasks by Elders, giving them the authority they need to complete the tasks. This is a primary difference between Elders (or overseers) and deacons. An overseer has broad authority over the congregation while the deacon has delegated authority to serve in areas determined by the Elders..
- C. *Responsibilities* – As officially recognized servant leaders (under submission to the Elders) deacons must lead lives that exemplify the qualities that are specified in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. As a function of their office (implied by Acts 6:1-6) the deacons will first of all assist the Elders by working to meet the practical needs of individuals within the Body (e.g., render assistance with physical needs and counseling). Deacons will also partner with a specific Elder over a more “global” area of ministry within the church (e.g., worship, evangelism, assimilation, etc., based upon their individual giftedness), and render assistance as requested by the Elder.
- D. *Accountability* – The deacons will meet with the Elders on a regular basis for the purpose of information exchange, prayer, and accountability.
- E. *Term of Service* – The number of deacons shall be according to the number who have been commissioned by the Holy Spirit and who are Biblically qualified and recognized. A deacon shall serve for as long as he feels he is called by the Lord to serve, or until he is no longer qualified to serve, as determined by the Elders, based on the moral qualifications set forth in Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:8-13). In conjunction with the Elders, deacons will determine their need to plan a sabbatical.
- F. *Calling of Deacons* – The procedure for the installation of deacons shall follow the same process as that stated for Elders in Article IV, Section 2, Part B of these By-Laws.

Section 4 – MINISTRY HEADS/DIRECTORS, COMMITTEES, ORGANIZATIONS AND MISSIONARIES

- A. *Ministry Heads/Directors* – Those individuals who aid in administering VCOB affairs shall be appointed by the Elders. Their duties shall be outlined/listed/explained in a job description. Their activities shall be under the supervision and approval of the Elders. Ministry heads and directors who are paid staff shall be selected and appointed in accordance with the process outlined for Staff Elders under Article IV, Section 2, Part G of these By-Laws. The duration of such positions shall be as determined by the Elders.
- B. *Committees* – The Elders may designate or appoint committees for such purposes as are appropriate to administer VCOB affairs. The chairmen and members of such committees shall be chosen from among the members of the body and be approved by the Elders. Their function and purpose are subject to Elder approval.
- C. *New Ministries* – No ministry shall be formed or considered a part of VCOB’s ministries before its sponsors have submitted their purpose and plan in writing to the Elders for approval as to how it supports VCOB’s purpose, vision and mission.

- D. *Para-Church Ministries* – All para-church ministries (including missions organizations) financially supported by the church or using church property shall concur with VCOB Statement of Faith and / or receive approval from the Elders. When church property is used by such organizations, they shall further submit to the 108 of the Elders.
- E. *Missionaries* – All missionaries supported by VCOB shall be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and shall concur with VCOB's Statement of Faith and/or receive approval from the Elders.

Section 5 – PAID POSITIONS & PERSONNEL

- A. *General* – The number of paid positions, and the job descriptions and duties assigned to paid personnel are at the discretion of the Elders. Paid positions may be terminated by the Elders.
- B. *"For Cause" Terminations* – Beyond those reasons of termination for cause commonly understood in employer/employee relations, VCOB reserves the right to terminate paid personnel based upon any of the following: actions taken under Article II of these By-Laws; failure to meet qualifications established under Articles I, II, or IV of these By-Laws; or failure to meet duties established under Articles I, III, or IV of these By-Laws.

Section 6 - FINANCES

- A. *General* – The primary support for VCOB's ministries shall be through voluntary offerings. From time to time, fees may be charged to participants to offset expenses for authorized events. Undesignated monies shall be disbursed according to budget and/or authorized expenditures. Designated funds must be approved by the Elders. Designated gifts shall be disbursed according to the intent of the donor or returned.
- B. *Financial Records* – The financial records of VCOB shall be prepared as determined by the Elders and be presented to the congregation.
- C. *Budget* – The Elders shall oversee the budget of VCOB. They shall provide the proposed new annual budget at a congregational meeting toward the end of the fiscal year. A copy of the proposed budget is to be made available to the congregation before the congregational meeting.
- D. *Fund Raising Policy* – Ministries of VCOB are not allowed to conduct fundraising activities without approval by the Elders, in order to maintain financial accountability and protect the integrity of VCOB.

ARTICLE V - MEETINGS

- A. Congregational meetings shall normally be held three times a year. Other meetings may be called at the discretion of the Elders. A record of minutes of these meetings and decisions will be maintained.
- B. The fiscal year shall end on December 31st.

ARTICLE VI - PROPERTY

- A. VCOB shall have the power to receive, either by gift or purchase, and to hold such real, personal or mixed property as is authorized by the laws of the State of Illinois and as is deemed necessary for the business of VCOB, and shall have the power to dispose of such property by mortgage, deed or otherwise. All such property shall be held in the name of VCOB.

B. In the event this church is dissolved (from which we pray God by His mercy to preserve us), all assets of VCOB remaining after obligations of VCOB are met shall be given to an organization or to organizations devoted to church-planting or other organizations which adhere to the principles established in the Statement of Faith. Members of the assembly shall not personally profit from any such dissolution of VCOB.

ARTICLE VII - AMENDMENTS

These By-Laws may be amended solely by a unified decision of the Council of Elders. The amendment(s) shall be published and made available to all members.



What We Believe

Statement of Faith from Article IV of the Village Church Constitution

THE SCRIPTURES

1. We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be: the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings (yet preserved and protected for reliable translation throughout the ages), the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 28:19).

GOD THE TRINITY

2. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 17:3; Revelation 4:11; Matthew 28:19).
3. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into Heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He is now our High Priest and Advocate (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Matthew 1:18; Hebrews 1:3, 9:24).
4. We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and, during this age, to convict men, regenerate the believing sinner through the baptism and sealing work of the Holy Spirit, and indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:30; John 14:17, 26, 16:7-11).

HUMANITY

5. We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is, therefore, lost, and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained. (Genesis 1:26; Romans 5:12; Titus 3:3-7; 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, 22-23).

SALVATION

6. We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and only such as receive Jesus Christ are born of the Holy Spirit and thus become children of God (Acts 4:12; Colossians).

BAPTISM & LORD'S SUPPER

7. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during this present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation (Matthew 28:13; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 16:31-33; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Acts 22:16).

THE CHURCH

8. We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the Body of Christ of which He is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).
9. We believe that only those who are members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church (Acts 2:41-47).
10. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18).

THE END TIMES

11. We believe in the personal, premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this "Blessed Hope" has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer (Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Titus 2:13-14; Zechariah 12, 14; Matthew 24).
12. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord; of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:6; John 5:28, 29).

THE VILLAGE CHURCH OF BARTLETT

Expanded Teaching Distinctives & Practices

The purpose of this document is to clarify specific theological & practical issues beyond what our “Statement of Faith”, as found in the Village Church Constitution, addresses. Together these two documents reflect the present teaching distinctives & supported practices for all teachers at the Village Church. Membership at the Village Church simply requires adherence to the Statement of Faith as found in our Constitution, but membership does not require adherence to these Expanded Teaching Distinctives and Practices. These Expanded Teaching Distinctives & Practices are subject to change by a unanimous decision of the Elder council at any time. Any change in this document will immediately be made public to members of the Village Church.

Tier 1 Doctrinal Position: Tier 1 doctrines are essential Biblical doctrines one must hold to be a Christian.

- Teachers at the Village Church **MUST** agree with all statements labeled Tier 1.

Tier 2 Doctrinal Issues: Tier 2 doctrines are not essential for salvation but very important Biblical doctrines to the life of the believer. Genuine Christians have disagreed on Tier 2 doctrines.

- Teachers at the Village Church **MAY** not see eye-to-eye on issues labeled Tier 2, but **CAN NOT** teach anything contrary to our position.

Practices: Practices refer to particular activities the Village Church does or does not engage in as a local church.

- Teachers may have varying views and preference on these issues, but we ask that all teachers adhere to and support our practices.

ARTICLE I - DEPRAVITY & ELECTION

TIER 1 - We believe that man is totally depraved, dead in trespasses and sin, and, if up to him alone, is unwilling to initiate a response toward God for salvation. Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom 3:10-12, 8:6-8

TIER 2 - Therefore, those individuals who will be saved have been unconditionally elected for salvation by God in eternity past. Unconditional emphasizes that election is not conditioned on God's foreknowledge that certain ones will believe in Christ. Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29 – 30; 9:11, 20 – 30; Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11; II Timothy 1:9; I Peter 1:3

ARTICLE II - ETERNAL SECURITY

TIER 1 - We believe that once a person has been converted by faith in Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross, that they will not and cannot lose their salvation, but will be kept by God for the day of redemption. John 5:24; Romans 8:28 - 30; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 3:21.

ARTICLE III - THE HOLY SPIRIT

TIER 2 - We believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion and is the placing of the believer into the Body of Christ. We also believe that particular spiritual gift(s) are neither essential, nor prove the presence of the Holy Spirit, nor are an indication of deep spiritual experience. 1 Cor 12:7, 11, 13; Eph 4:7-8

ARTICLE IV - CREATION

TIER 1 - We believe that God created the Universe, including all beings in it, out of nothing, instantaneously, by His Word. Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6; Jn. 1:3; Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 1:28; Heb. 11:3

TIER 2 - He finished His creation work in six literal days. Gen. 1:1 - 2:25; John 1:1 - 5; Col 1:16.

ARTICLE V - WOMEN Elders/PASTORS & TEACHERS

TIER 2 - We believe that women should not function in the office of Elder/Pastor. 1 Tim. 2:9-14, 3:2; Tit. 1:5-7

PRACTICE - At the Village Church women do not function in an authoritative Bible-teaching role over men especially during corporate worship. 1 Tim. 2:9-14

ARTICLE VI - SPIRITUAL GIFTS

TIER 2 - We believe that some gifts of the Holy Spirit - at the least apostleship, healing, signs, and/or miracles - were meant to be temporary. These gifts accompanied the foundational ministry of the Apostles, and with the Apostles purpose accomplished and their subsequent death, these gifts ceased. God still does heal and perform miracles through His people by His Spirit, but generally speaking no single person is granted the spiritual gift of apostleship, healing, signs, and/or miracles since the Apostolic age. I Corinthians 13:8; II Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:20; Hebrews 2:3 - 4; ; Eph. 4:11, Acts 1:21-22, 1 Cor. 12, 2 Peter 3:2, Eph. 3:5, James 5:16.

PRACTICE - At the Village Church we do not practice the spiritual gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, and/or interpretation of tongues.

ARTICLE VII - ETERNITY

TIER 1 - We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead and future judgments from which those covered by the blood of Jesus Christ will experience eternal life with God and all others will be destined to experience God's wrath through eternal, conscious punishment in hell. Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:26-27

Spiritual Gifts INVENTORY

A SPIRITUAL GIFT IS: A supernatural, God-given ability to each believer at salvation to fulfill a need in the local body of Christ so that the body would be built up and be made mature in Christ.

Adapted from a test donated by:

ElevenTalents.com and SpiritualGiftsTest.com. Used with permission.

This survey has 96 questions. Each question is very important, so do not skip any. Respond to each statement below according to who you are, not who you would like to be or think you ought to be. To what degree are these statements true? What has been your experience? To what degree do these statements reflect your usual tendencies? When you're finished use the scoring sheet to see what your gifts are.

Respond to each statement according to the following scale:

0 = Not at all; never true

1 = Some of the time; occasionally true

2 = Most of the time; usually true

3 = Consistently; definitely true

1. ____ I like to organize people, tasks, and events and, if I have done this before, I have done a good job at it.
2. ____ I can readily distinguish between spiritual truth and error, good and evil
3. ____ I communicate the gospel to others frequently, with clarity, and with effectiveness.
4. ____ I tend to see the potential in people rather than their shortcomings.
5. ____ I find it natural and easy to trust God to answer my prayers, even when they are big requests.
6. ____ I give liberally and joyfully to people in financial need or to projects requiring support.
7. ____ I genuinely enjoy working behind the scenes to support the work of others.
8. ____ I am approached by people who want to know my perspective on a particular passage or biblical truth.
9. ____ I empathize with hurting people and desire to help in their healing process.
10. ____ I enjoy spending time nurturing and caring for others.

11. ____ I am able to communicate God's Word clearly and effectively so that people respond with a changed mind and/or action.
12. ____ I am often sought out by others for advice about spiritual or personal matters.
13. ____ I am careful, thorough, and skilled at managing details and people.
14. ____ I frequently am able to judge a person's character based upon first impressions.
15. ____ I consistently look for opportunities to build relationships with non-Christians so I might share the Gospel with them.
16. ____ I enjoy reassuring and strengthening those who are discouraged.
17. ____ I have confidence in God's continuing provision and help, even in difficult times.
18. ____ I happily give more than a tithe so that kingdom work can be accomplished.
19. ____ I enjoy doing routine tasks that support the ministry, but may not be up front tasks.
20. ____ I consistently receive insight during my study of Scripture from the Spirit that I did not acquire through natural means.
21. ____ I can patiently support those going through painful experiences as they try to stabilize their lives.
22. ____ I have compassion for wandering believers and want to protect them.
23. ____ I can spend time in study knowing that presenting truth will make a difference in the lives of people.
24. ____ I can often find simple, practical solutions in the midst of conflict or confusion.
25. ____ I can clarify goals and develop strategies or plans to accomplish them.
26. ____ I can see through phoniness or deceit before it is evident to others.
27. ____ I am effective at adapting the gospel message so that it connects with an individual's felt need.
28. ____ I find myself consistently giving hope to others by directing them to the promises of God.
29. ____ I believe that God will help me to accomplish great things.
30. ____ I manage my money well in order to be free to give more of it away.

31. ____ I willingly take on a variety of odd jobs around the church to serve the body.
32. ____ I am committed to reading and studying scripture, and schedule blocks of time for it, to understand biblical truth fully and accurately.
33. ____ I enjoy helping people sometimes regarded as undeserving or beyond help.
34. ____ I like to provide guidance for the whole person - relationally, emotionally, spiritually, etc.
35. ____ I pay close attention to the meaning of words and phrases used by teachers.
36. ____ I can easily select the most effective course of action from among several alternatives.
37. ____ I can identify and effectively use the resources needed to accomplish tasks.
38. ____ I tend to see rightness or wrongness in situations quickly.
39. ____ I consistently invite unbelievers to accept Christ as their Savior.
40. ____ I reassure those who need to take courageous action in their faith, family, or life.
41. ____ I trust God in circumstances where success cannot be guaranteed by human effort alone.
42. ____ I am challenged to limit my lifestyle in order to give away a higher percentage of my income.
43. ____ I see spiritual significance in doing practical tasks.
44. ____ I find great joy in working hard to find truth from Scripture through study, discipline, and prayer.
45. ____ I have great compassion for people who are hurting.
46. ____ I can faithfully provide long-term support and concern for others.
47. ____ I like to take a systematic approach to my study of the Bible.
48. ____ I can anticipate the likely consequences of an individual's or a group's action.
49. ____ I like to help organizations or groups become more efficient. My personal life is efficient as well.
50. ____ I receive affirmation from others concerning the reliability of my insights or perceptions.
51. ____ I openly tell people that I am a Christian and want them to ask me about my faith.

52. ____ I strengthen those who are wavering in their faith. I either seek them out or they seek me out.
53. ____ I am convinced of God's daily presence and action in my life.
54. ____ I like knowing that my financial support makes a real difference in the lives and ministries of God's people.
55. ____ I like to find small things that need to be done and often do them without being asked.
56. ____ I find that when I study Scripture, I remember the details of my study for a long time and when asked can share the details on the spot.
57. ____ I can look beyond a person's handicaps or problems to see a life that matters to God.
58. ____ I enjoy giving guidance and practical support to a small group of people.
59. ____ I can communicate scripture in ways that motivate others to study and desire to learn more.
60. ____ I give practical and Biblical advice to help others through complicated situations.
61. ____ I enjoy learning how organizations function and get excited about applying what I learn to the church.
62. ____ I can identify preaching, teaching, or communication which is not true to the Bible.
63. ____ I openly and confidently tell others what Christ has done for me.
64. ____ I find myself motivating others to take steps for spiritual growth and find people growing spiritually because of that.
65. ____ I am regularly challenging others to trust God.
66. ____ I give generously due to my commitment to stewardship.
67. ____ I feel comfortable being a helper or assisting others to do their job more effectively.
68. ____ I discover important biblical truths when reading or studying scripture which benefit others in the body of Christ.
69. ____ I enjoy bringing hope and joy to people living in difficult circumstances.
70. ____ I can gently restore wandering believers to faith and fellowship.

71. ____ I can present information and skills to others at a level that makes it easy for them to grasp and apply to their lives.
72. ____ I can apply scriptural truth that others regard as practical and helpful.
73. ____ I can visualize a coming event, anticipate potential problems, and develop backup plans.
74. ____ I can sense when demonic forces are at work in a person or situation.
75. ____ When I share the Gospel with people, it is not uncommon to have someone accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
76. ____ I am able to challenge or rebuke others in order to foster spiritual growth.
77. ____ I can move forward in spite of opposition or lack of support when I sense God's blessing on an undertaking.
78. ____ I believe I have been given an abundance of resources so that I may give more to the Lord's work.
79. ____ I readily and happily use my natural or learned skills to help wherever needed.
80. ____ I confidently share my knowledge and insights with others.
81. ____ I enjoy doing practical things for others who are in need.
82. ____ I enjoy patiently but firmly nurturing others in their development as believers.
83. ____ I enjoy explaining things to people so that they can grow spiritually and personally.
84. ____ I have insights into how to solve problems that others do not see right away.
85. ____ I set goals and manage people and resources effectively to accomplish them.
86. ____ I see most actions as right or wrong, and feel the need to correct the wrong.
87. ____ My conversations with non-believers usually leads to me telling them about my faith.
88. ____ I enjoy practical or topical teaching that I can apply to everyday life.
89. ____ I live with confidence because I know that God works daily in my life.
90. ____ I feel compelled to support missions with my money and time.
91. ____ I am excited and willing to serve others when I am needed to do so.
92. ____ I recognize cultural trends, teachings, or events which contradict biblical principles.

93. ____ I try to have a loving attitude and let others know that I care about them.
94. ____ I feel the need to protect others from doing the wrong things so they can grow stronger in their faith.
95. ____ When others misuse or misinterpret Scripture, I get upset.
96. ____ I find others seeking my council frequently, and am humbled when they do so.

Directions:

Write each of your answers in the table below. Each number in the table corresponds to the above question of the same number (so, the answer to question 1 goes in box 1, answer 2 in box 2, and so on). Add up each column and write your score next to the letter below that column. Once you have done this you can check the key below to see what gift each letter represents.

Scoring Matrix

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72
73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96

A____ B____ C____ D____ E____ F____ G____ H____ I____ J____ K____ L____

A. Leadership/Administration

B. Discernment of Spirits

C. Evangelism

D. Exhortation

E. Faith

F. Giving

G. Helps/Service

H. Knowledge

I. Mercy/Compassion

J. Pastor/Teacher

K. Teaching

L. Wisdom



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