

Doctrine, Passions, and Practices What is the Church and how does it function?

Why should the church be so important to us?

1. Jesus loved the church and gave himself up for her.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

2. Jesus obtained the church with His own blood.

^{ESV} **Acts 20:28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

3. Jesus is building His church.

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

4. Jesus nourishes and cherishes the church.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...

5. Jesus is at work cleansing the church.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:25-26** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

6. Jesus will present the church to Himself as a flawless bride.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:27** ... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

What is the church?

1. The church is made up of people who trust Jesus as Savior, Lord, and all-satisfying Treasure ...

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. who join together intentionally to be a church ...

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

3. built on and according to the Word of God ...

^{ESV} **Acts 20:26** Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

4. which means that they are led by a team of male elders ...

^{ESV} **Acts 14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

(while at the same time encouraging both women and men to pursue ministries)

^{ESV} **Acts 2:17** "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

(On eldership see also 1 Tim 2:12; Tit 1:5-9; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1.)

5. they practice water-baptism and celebrate communion together ...

^{ESV} **Acts 2:38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 11:24** "This is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me."

6. they are a Christ--centered, loving, community...

^{ESV} **Romans 12:5** ... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 12:25** ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:1** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.



7. they have regular gatherings to build each other up in faith through fellowship (Heb 3:12-14), worship (Eph 5:19), spiritual gifts (I Cor 14:12), and teaching of God's Word (1Ti 4:13).

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 14:12** So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

8. they practice biblical church discipline ...

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:1** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

(See also 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Thess 3:6,14-15.)

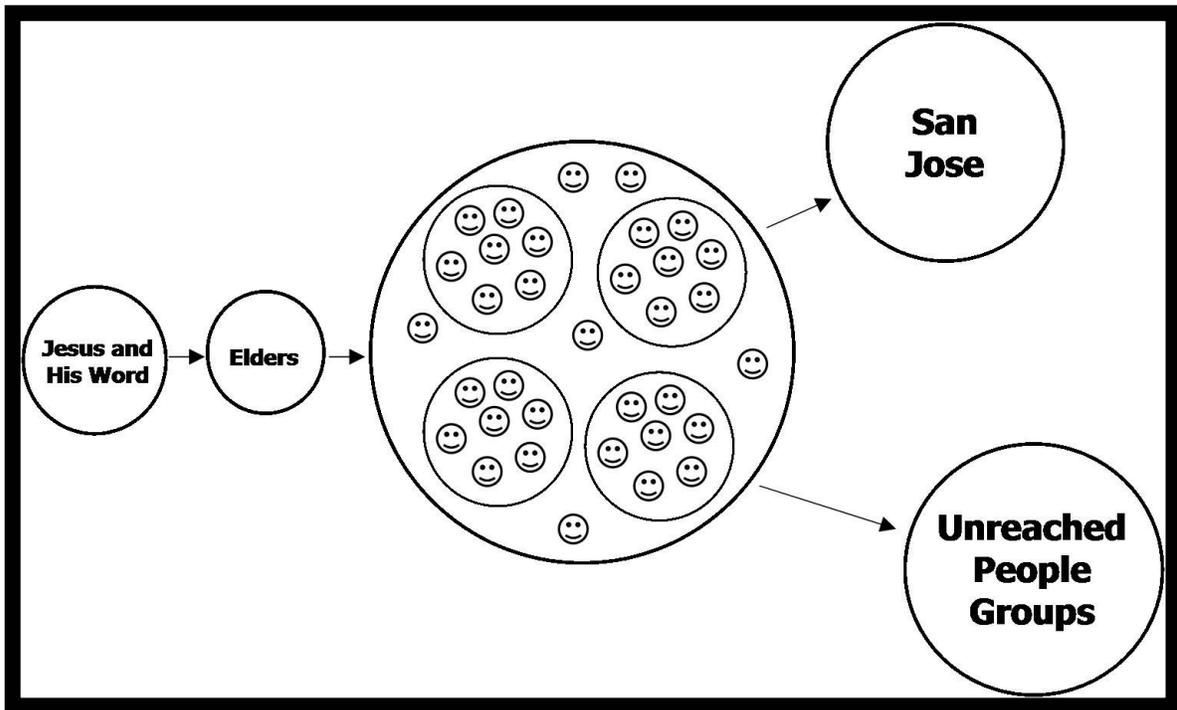
9. they show and share the good news of Jesus in their neighborhoods, cities, and world.

^{ESV} **Matthew 28:18** 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."



How will we pursue this?

1. Jesus and His Word is our authority.
2. The elders seek to submit to Jesus and His Word, and lead the church according to Jesus and His Word. (And everyone studies the word on their own.)
3. We build the church as small Christ-centered, missional communities (home groups).
4. The home groups gather weekly on their own, and Sundays with all the home groups for worship and the preaching of God's Word.
5. The home groups share Jesus with their neighborhoods, webs of relationship, city, and unreached people groups.
6. As home groups grow they can branch out new groups in their same area or send new groups to focus on another art of the city. And over time, home groups that grow might join with other home groups to start another worship service location, or plant a church.



Why is this so important?

1. Your love for brothers and sisters shows your salvation.

^{ESV} **1 John 3:14-17** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers ... By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

2. Your brothers and sisters need your encouragement if they are to avoid deception and continue in faith to the end.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

3. If you love Jesus, you will build what Jesus is building.

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

4. If you love Jesus, you will love His bride.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:34** For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

For further discussion

1. How important has the church been to you? How does it impact you to think that Jesus loves the church, gave himself up for the church, is building His church, nourishes and cherishes the church, cleansing the church, and that he will present the church to himself at the end of history?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of a church is the easiest for you to agree with? Which is the hardest for you to agree with? Why? Which is the easiest to fulfill? Which is the hardest to fulfill? Why?
3. What do you think about church discipline? Have you had good or bad experiences of this? Do you think most churches follow Jesus' teaching on this? Why is it so important?
4. Talk together about how your home group is doing in being Christ-centered, in pursuing Christ-centered community, and in advancing Jesus' mission of saving the lost. What steps can you take to do better?
5. Which of the four "why is this so important?" points was most motivating to you? Why? What will you do differently because of it?

For further study

Chester, Tim and Steve Timmis. Total Church.
Clowney, Edmund. The Church.
Dever, Mark. The Deliberate Church.
Driscoll, Mark. Confessions of a Reformissionary Rev.
Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. Chapters 44-53.
Harris, Josh. Stop Dating the Church.