

**Toward a biblical STATEMENT OF VISION and a PLAN OF ACTION
for Living Word Bible Church**

I. The Purpose of the Church

The ultimate goal and end of every created thing is to bring glory to the Creator (Psalm 100:1-3). We exist for the glory of God (Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36; Revelation 5). We conclude that, broadly stated, the **vision** of our church must be to “magnify the excellency of a great and marvelous God” (Ephesians 3:10, 21). Every other goal or activity of the church is subservient to the furtherance of this great vision. This principle must not only guide *what* we do, but also *why* we do it.

**Living Word Bible Church exists for the glory of God.
This is to be the *reason* for all that we *do*.**

II. The Nature of the Church

If the church is to bring glory to God, then it must faithfully fulfill the role(s) for which it has been created. We may better understand the role(s) of the church when we understand the nature of the church. The Bible employs seven important metaphors for the church and each one is instructive for an understanding of the true nature of the Church.

- A. **The Body of Christ** (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 12:12-31; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:1-6, 11-16; 5:23, 29-30; Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:18-19; 3:12-15). As the body of Christ, the church is made up of many members. Each of the individual members is to **humbly** work towards the **edification** and **growth** of the body with the result that the body will function in **unity** and **love** as it reaches maturity and “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” A properly functioning body is a powerful testimony to a watching world (1 Corinthians 14:23-25; John 13:34-35).
- B. **The Bride of Christ** (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-2, 9-10). As the bride of Christ, the church is called to **purity and holiness in life and doctrine**. The bride is to be clothed in righteousness and sanctified by the washing of water with the word. The bride has been bought and sanctified through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The bride is to reflect the glory of her husband to a watching world (Revelation 21:9-11, 23-24; Proverbs 31:11, 23). It is only natural that she should never cease to **proclaim** the infinite love of her husband.
- C. **The Temple of God** (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5). As the temple of God, the church is a **holy dwelling** of God in the Spirit. This temple is living, growing and ever-changing as it is made fit to be the place of God’s dwelling.
- D. **The Flock of God** (John 10:1-16; 21:16-17; Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-3). As the flock of God, the church requires the spiritual **protection** and **nourishment** of elders/shepherds who will lead the flock in precept and example to **obediently follow** the Chief Shepherd.

- E. **The Branches** (John 15:1-11). As branches find their fruit-bearing life through a vital union with the vine, so also the church must continue in **intimate union** with Jesus Christ so that it may **bear fruit** (obey the commandments of Jesus).
- F. **The Household of God** (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17; the address – “brother”). As the household of God, the church is truly a family where **intimate relationships** can be developed, where there are special **rules of family conduct** and where there is always the expectation of **giving account** to the Father. As the household of God, the church is also the **guardian of true doctrine** – the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- G. **A Holy Priesthood** (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; Revelation 1:6). As a holy priesthood, the church is to **offer spiritual sacrifices** that are acceptable to God (praising God – Hebrews 13:15; doing good – Philippians 4:18, Hebrews 13:16), and it is to **proclaim the excellencies** of Him who has called it out of darkness and into His marvelous light (both believers and unbelievers need to hear God’s excellencies proclaimed – 1 Peter 2:9).

III. The Roles of the Church

We see from the above that the church has been created to fulfill two major roles or functions – though they cannot ultimately be separated. One role is **in relation to itself** while the other is **in relation to the world**.

- A. With respect to itself, the church functions to promote growth in brotherly **love** and **holiness** so that it may reach the “measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13) – to the glory of God.
- B. With respect to the world, the church functions as **Christ’s witnesses** in the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20) – to the glory of God.

IV. The Strategy of the Church

In discussing the biblical strategy of the church, we must recognize that in this world the church exists in two different forms and that the forms of the church provide the appropriate contexts in which the church can most effectively fulfill its God-given roles.

- The church **assembled together** is an environment that is specifically suited for the building up of the body of Christ in true love and holiness. The church assembled enables the church to fulfill its role in relation to itself.
- The church **dispersed in the world** is the ideal and primary context for evangelism. The church dispersed is God’s appointed setting for the fulfillment of the church’s role in relation to the world.

The forms and roles of the church combine to give us our basic strategy:

- A. **Living Word Bible Church assembles together to promote growth in *brotherly love* and *holiness* so that the church may reach the “measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ” – TO THE GLORY OF GOD.**

KEY INGREDIENTS¹ IN THE LORD'S DAY² ASSEMBLY³

1. Prayer (Matthew 21:13; Acts 2:42; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25; 1 Timothy 2:1, 8).
2. "One-anothering" / fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 10:24-25; all "one-anothering" commands)
3. Singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
4. Reading, teaching and exhortation from the Word (Acts 2:42; 11:26; 1 Timothy 4:13; 5:17; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
5. The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-33).
6. Evangelism may happen as the unbeliever observes the reality of God in the midst of the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:23-25). God's presence is especially evidenced as the assembly demonstrates a genuine love for God, for one another (John 13:34-35) *and* for the unbeliever who is present.

NOTE

In our day, the assembly is often incorrectly viewed as the church's "public" meeting and as such it may be expected to...

- build up and edify the believer who is actively seeking to follow Christ
- be palatable and acceptable to the "professors"
- evangelize the lost

But this is not in harmony with the biblical model and the inherent nature of the assembly. The biblical assembly is a group of believers getting together to do things that only believers can do! An unbeliever cannot worship the Lord in song, he cannot participate in true fellowship or "one-anothering" with the body of Christ, he cannot engage in prayer, and he cannot understand or appreciate the truths of God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:14). We may especially note that the Lord's Supper is an extremely sacred ordinance that is allowed only to true believers who are serious about following after Jesus Christ. Not only is the unbeliever unable to meaningfully participate in the biblical assembly, but he will likely find the assembly to be distasteful or at the very least uninteresting. This is not to say that we should make it our goal to be repulsive to the unbeliever! In fact, we should seek to be as attractive as possible to the unbeliever (through authentic community, etc.) without sacrificing the biblical nature of the assembly. The assembly is not so much the place to bring an unbeliever to hear the gospel and get saved as it is the place to bring the unbeliever to see and experience the sincere love that Christians have for one another

¹ **Worship** of God is at the heart of each ingredient of the assembly. This is why the assembly may legitimately be called a "worship service." However, we also affirm the importance of a time of "focused" worship where we specifically acknowledge the character and attributes of God whether through silent or spoken prayers or through songs that extol the excellencies of God (2 Chronicles 29:28-30; Psalm 66:4; 86:9; 95:6; 111:1; 149:1; Revelation 4:10-11; 7:9-10; 15:3-4). Such worship will naturally be accompanied by praise (2 Chronicles 7:3; Psalm 66:4), thanksgiving, adoration and confession.

² Here we focus specifically on the Lord's Day Assembly because biblically and historically it has always been the primary assembly of the Church. There are many other legitimate and important contexts for additional assembly.

³ This list is intended to reflect only those ingredients with explicit biblical precedent or mandate for inclusion in the assembly. However, it is not intended to exclude other legitimate practices in the assembly time (i.e. baptism and giving/offering).

and for God. We must be careful not to sacrifice the biblical nature of the assembly in order to be more attractive and/or comfortable for the unsaved. For example, here are some specific pitfalls to avoid:

- Worldly music
- No “one-anothering” or open opportunities to edify the body.
- Failure to teach the full counsel of God’s Word
- Less prayer
- Celebrating the Lord’s Supper less often and in ways that are not appropriate
- In general, an assembly that demands no *participation or contribution from the assembly* – rather, it is *entertainment for the crowd*.

Indeed, the nature of the biblical assembly assumes active participation from those assembled (1 Corinthians 11-14; 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 10:23-25) and though it is to be orderly and carried out in the pursuit of excellence, it is highly unlikely that it will entertain; rather, it will be real and authentic. The size of our assemblies may prevent us from having as much participation as is desirable; however, if one does not participate in word or action, he may still participate in mind and in spirit. The assembly “works” the best when people come asking “what can I contribute (for the edification of the body and the glory of God)?” rather than “what can I get for me?” This philosophy of the assembly must be the death of even our most subtle forms of entertainment and it will eliminate the “status quo” comfort zones of believer and unbeliever alike.

B. Living Word Bible Church disperses in the world as Christ’s witnesses and God’s appointed agents in the proclamation of the gospel – TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

KEY – Active and purposeful outreach to family, neighbors, co-workers, etc. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 8:1-4).

NOTE

The church may certainly implement evangelistic programs with truly positive results, but these should not be necessary in order for a church to fulfill the great commission and they should not be the first or even the main context for evangelism. We also note again that the New Testament assembly was never for the purpose of evangelism and neither was it generally assumed that unbelievers would be present (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:23-24 and the inherent nature of the assembly – 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:26). In the NT, evangelism took place in everyday life as believers interacted with the world around them. It was the natural outworking of the believers’ life in Christ. There was no need for the corporate church to “organize” evangelism. Indeed, it is entirely possible (though not necessary) that a church may be the most evangelistic church in the world and have not a single evangelistic program. If the people of Living Word are actively seeking opportunities to be a witness for Christ in everyday life, then Living Word is truly an “evangelistically minded” church. On the other hand, a church may have evangelistic programs, but if the people are not practicing personal evangelism, then the church is still not “evangelistically minded.” In our day we may want the “church” to implement more evangelistic programs because it will assuage our own guilt at our lack of *personal* evangelism. It may give me an opportunity to “do outreach” once a week/month and feel better about my continued lack of lifestyle. We may deceive ourselves into thinking that we are fulfilling our role as Christ’s witnesses by simply inviting the unsaved to attend a meeting of the church.

Again, this is not to say that an evangelistic program is bad or that it is not even potentially desirable, however, it is not *necessary* to an evangelistic church.

Some conclusions:

- We must promote assembly times that build the church up in brotherly love and holiness to the end that God might be exalted and glorified.
- We must fulfill our roles as witnesses of Christ to a lost and dying world and so bring glory to God.

But how are these strategies to be effectively implemented? How can our assemblies be more authentic and real? How can we insure that the church dispersed will be faithful in its witness for Christ? It is here that we turn briefly to the biblical nature of elders and of heads-of-households.

The Elders exist to protect and nourish the flock through both precept and example (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Much of the Elder's work is to be accomplished in the various assembly times. However, the true work of shepherding will also involve one-on-one discipleship and instruction in the Word. We may immediately recognize the impossibility for the Elders to effectively shepherd every single individual in the flock. We may also recognize that this is not even desirable. God did not intend for the Elders to spend their energies in the "direct" shepherding of wives and children when there are husbands and parents who have been divinely appointed to this very task (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4)! God created the family unit as one of the most effective ways to perpetuate the people of God and to populate His kingdom (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:7; 11:19-20; 32:45-47; Psalm 78:1-8; Malachi 2:14-15). When the family is in order, the church will be built up and strengthened. When the family is in order, then the result can only be a *lifestyle* of Christianity (love, holiness and outreach). Simply put, the most effective way to the family is through the head-of-household, so it naturally follows that the Elders of the church should spend much of their energies in discipling heads-of-households. We should desire to *be* as well as to *raise up* heads-of-households who will lead their families in prayer, in worship and in the Word. We must have a vision for our families of love for one another and for the body of Christ, of practical growth in holiness and of outreach to the lost. We see that building Christian families is essential to the fulfillment of the church's roles and this has never been more important than in today's world of broken and dysfunctional families. This leads us to the statement of our third strategic initiative – which really just serves to reinforce the first two:

C. Living Word Bible Church desires to build Christian families to strengthen the body of Christ and to impact generations FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

KEY – The elders must engage in active and purposeful discipleship of the heads-of-households (2 Timothy 2:2; 3:16).

NOTE – A church may bill itself as "family friendly" because it offers a program for every age group. We believe, however, that too much of this can actually be detrimental as it takes time away from the family and from the family's witness to the world. To be "family friendly" is to encourage and enable families to function according to the Biblical model (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7) and this ultimately starts with the head-of-

household. For example, in many cases, parents have abandoned their God-ordained responsibility as the spiritual teachers of their children and the church has assumed this responsibility. Many parents now believe that the key to their child's spiritual welfare is a good youth program. We believe that the church should be proactively engaged in training the true pastors of the youth – their fathers. Where a Christian father and/or mother are not in the picture, the families of the church must reach out and embrace such a child with genuine love. Where there is a single man or woman, he or she must be encouraged to devote more time to God and His work (1 Corinthians 7). Where there are widows or orphans, the church must demonstrate genuine love and provide for their physical and spiritual needs (1 Timothy 5:3-10; James 1:27).

Summary and Conclusion

Living Word Bible Church seeks to **glorify God** through the building up of the body in **love** and **holiness** and by **proclaiming the gospel** to the world.

1. Living Word Bible Church **assembles** together in order to build up the body in brotherly love and holiness TO THE GLORY OF GOD.
2. Living Word Bible Church **disperses** in the world in order to be faithful, loving and holy witnesses for Christ in a lost and dying world – TO THE GLORY OF GOD.
3. Living Word Bible Church actively **disciples** heads-of-households in order to build Christian families because Christian families are the bedrock of authentic assemblies and of faithful outreach to the world – TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

As we mature in Christ, we should desire to “excel still more”. If we are stagnant in our faith, then we must examine ourselves to see what sin is holding us back. There are an infinite number of ways to glorify God. If we are not active in the assembly, if we are not salt and light to a dying world, if we are not discipling and being disciplined, then what are we doing? Mere attendance at the Sunday assembly is not enough – we were “created in Christ Jesus unto **good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). By God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, let's go for a walk!

Addendum: A Portrait of the Christian family.⁴

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul “begins with the loftiest counsel concerning God and the Church... [and] then proceeds to the ordering of family life, for it is in the family life of Christians that the increase of the Church, and its approach to perfection, must be found” (11). “In the Christian family, on a small scale, should be seen the wisdom and gentleness of command, the willingness of obedience, the unity and firmness of mutual confidence which will characterize the perfected kingdom of God. In an exact sense, this can be said only of the Christian Church; the Church is above the family. **Yet there is no building up of the Church without the building up of family life... In Christian families... should the strength of the Church consist**” (10-11).

However, the Christian Family “does not exist for its own benefit. It is created to bring glory and honor to God... The family belongs to God” (11). So as we promote the family, we must be careful not to elevate it above God. We must remember that “it is not our marriage, but His marriage; not our home, but His home; not our children, but His children; not our family, but His family” (11-12).

What is a Christian family? “A Christian family is a family that lives together with Jesus Christ. The secret of good family life is disarmingly simple: Cultivate the family’s relationship with Jesus Christ... [by] establishing divine order in the home... [and by] practicing the presence of Jesus” (14).

The beginning point for the Christian family is that “each member, at his own level of understanding and appropriation, needs to experience the forgiveness, love, and acceptance which God offers us in Christ. Each one must know Jesus as the *Savior* [and Lord] of this family” (149). As each member experiences this, he can be an effective witness for Jesus Christ.

“It is families which are ready to become His *witnesses* that Jesus is looking for today. Around us we see the wholesale breakdown of family life. People are looking for help, desperately... A befuddled society staggers under first one blow and then another struck at the very foundation of its structure... What [our world] needs is not words, merely. It needs lived-out examples of good family life... The masses will only be reached by us – Christian fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters – who quietly begin to live out the kind of family life which God calls us to. In and through these lived out examples, Jesus will find access into many a heart and home” (198-199). “This is the opportunity which lies before us as Christian families – to so experience the reality and power of Christ in our homes, to so live according to His Divine Order, that those around us can *see* that [we are different]. Then, when the opportunity to speak a word comes up, when we are able to tell something of our life in Christ, it will fall on ears that are ready to hear” (200).

“In our families, no less than in our individual lives, God’s rule is, ‘according to your faith be it done to you’ (Matthew 9:29)” (200). May we have the faith to bring God the Glory of which He alone is worthy.

⁴ This addendum is essentially a compilation of excerpts from Larry Christenson’s The Christian Family. Bethany Fellowship; Minneapolis, 1970.