



starting point

orientation for potential members

Our vision - To live out authentic Christianity as a family of believers who passionately desire to lay down their lives for God and one another. Our hope is that the church will become all that Christ has called it to be, both in Cape Town and across the nations.

Our mission - "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2: 42-47 (ESV)



starting point

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A letter from Andrew



Hello and welcome to Starting Point. I am so excited that you are considering joining us.

When we planted the church in 1999, we couldn't have imagined where God would take us and what exciting times we would have. We have seen so many salvations, healings, miracles, signs and wonders. We have also been around the world, ministering to hundreds of churches as we seek to change the way the world sees church. Despite this, we believe that the best is yet to come, and we know that if you join with us you will be in for an awesome adventure as we serve Jesus together and see the awesome things that He is going to do in and through us.

I want to ask that you make a real commitment to this Starting Point course. Make it a priority in your life and try to make each of the sessions. If you can't make one, then please let one of your local elders know so that they don't worry about you.

I believe that your choice of church is one of the most important decisions you will make (after giving your life to Jesus and who you will marry). For this reason, it is essential that you know who we are and what we are about. You need to know our values and our way of doing church. Perhaps more importantly, you need to get to know the elders at least a little, for they are the men that will be leading you if you join with us.

If you are newly saved you may not understand everything, or realize how differently some other churches operate. Don't worry too much about that. The most important thing is that which is easiest to understand. Besides, we want you to ask if there is anything that is unclear, either during a session, or privately afterwards. Remember there are no silly questions.

If you have been involved in church for a while now, then please give these sessions your full attention anyway. You may know a great deal already, but it is always good to rework our foundations. Besides, we may do things differently or have different values to the churches in which you have previously been involved. It would be good for you to know what these differences are and why we do things the way we do. Even if you have heard this all before, I would ask you to submit yourself to the process, in all humility, for the sake of the church as a whole.

Finally we do not want anyone to feel under pressure to join us at any stage; this is not a recruitment campaign. We strongly believe that God adds people to the local church, so if you are feeling not to join us, that is fine. You may continue to visit and worship with us as you have been. Otherwise we wish you all of God's blessings as you find another church in which to give yourself.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Andrew Selley

History of Joshua Generation Church

In January 1999, Andrew and Emsie Selley, who were then on eldership at The Storehouse church in Port Elizabeth, were sent out to plant a church in Tableview, Cape Town. So started Joshua Generation Church, with four people in their lounge.

Over the next few weeks God added people to them, growing the church to the point where they started to meet at the Blouberg Life Saving Club. Again it was a matter of weeks before that was packed out and so a new venue was found. That venue was the Leibrandt Van Niekerk hall which served as the meeting place for the next few years.

Over time, that hall also became too small, and so in 2004, after many trials and tribulations, the church moved into its own beautiful building in Sunningdale. By now the church had grown to around 300 members who had really given of their lives, their time and their finances to help establish a church that could be a model or 'blueprint' that would be a part of changing how the world sees church.

The church continued to grow in numbers, in maturity and in influence as Andrew and Emsie served on an international apostolic team and many of our members traveled around South Africa and the world on outreaches, helping to establish and encourage other churches.

God then reminded Andrew of His promises from several years earlier that He had called Joshua Generation to reach not just the suburb of Tableview, but the City of Cape Town. God also provided the strategy to do just this: have one church meeting across the city in many locations. The first congregation was planted out soon after, in Durbanville, which was to become the first of many congregations that would spread across the city.

God has also added other churches to us since. Men who have led other works have realized that we can achieve more together than alone. The spiritual significance of such unions should not be underestimated. Jesus is determined to build His church and as we come together in unity He will command blessing and life. Such men have chosen to join themselves to us as they realize that 'two are better than one', and that together we can achieve so much more than we possibly could as individuals.

Many prophetic words over the years have referred to Joshua Generation as being a "blueprint church". Blueprint is a term that is used for the final drawings of a building or machine. To "blueprint" something means to build it to the original intended design. Our desire is to build a church according to God's design, that pleases Him, and which will then influence others to build accordingly. In the New Testament we read of Antioch being a 'model church', a body of believers that lived out their faith in such a way as to be worthy of imitation. This is what we aspire to be, a tool God will use to help change the way the world sees church.



Many prophetic words over the years have referred to Joshua Generation as being a 'blueprint church'

In recent times God has birthed an apostolic movement that has begun in Joshua Generation but extends far beyond. It is a network of churches, together with recognized Ephesians 4 gifted men (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) that are working together to serve the wider body of Christ. This is a vehicle that God is using to bring many churches, across the world, into greater health and a more authentic expression of His church.

If you believe that God wants to add you to us, then you are becoming part of a community of faith that is excited about living sold-out lives for our King. We want to live in an authentic expression of Christianity that will shine a light out into our city and our world. In this way, we will see His Kingdom extended, His name glorified and His church growing to be the beautiful bride for which Jesus will return. You will also become part of something so much bigger than ourselves, something that reaches the world for Jesus and will have a significant impact on this world and into eternity.

church life

What is church?

The most common understanding is that 'church' is a building where people go to worship. It may surprise you to know that it is never used this way in the Bible. In the Bible, the word church is always used of the people of God themselves.

The Greek word which we translate church (remember the New Testament was originally written in Greek) is 'ekklesia' which, roughly translated, means 'a gathering of the called out ones'; that is the coming together of those who have been called by Jesus Christ i.e. Christians.

The word can be used in one of two ways: to describe the universal church or the local church. In both cases, the idea of gathering together is involved:

- The **universal church** (i.e. that which is made up of all believers, from all places throughout history) will one day be gathered together, in eternity, to worship our Lord and Saviour. The universal church is referred to, for example, in Matthew 16:18.
- The **local church** speaks of a body of believers that meet together with a local leadership team and with a common purpose. It is common in the New Testament to refer to a church in a specific city (e.g. the church in Rome, the church in Ephesus).

The local church is referred to in Romans 16:1 as well as Acts 14:20-23 etc.

The Bible uses a number of metaphors to describe the church. These include:

- Household/Family (1 Tim. 3:15)
- Kingdom (Col. 1:13)
- Priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9)
- Temple Building (Eph. 2:19)
- Body (1 Cor. 12:12-27)
- Flock (1 Pet. 5:2-4)
- Army (2 Tim. 2:3-4)
- Bride (Eph. 5:22-32)

In each case, with the possible exception of the last, there is a picture of unity, of togetherness. It is God's desire that every one of His children be part of a local church. Being part of a church is not an obligation we need to fulfill in order to please God; rather church is a gift from God to help us to grow into unity and maturity, to become more like Him. We should see it as an immense privilege to be able to be part of a local church.

"For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

The purpose of church

Scripture tells us that church is very important to God:

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, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph. 3:8-10)

And also:

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Eph. 5:23-25)

If the church is of such importance to God that Jesus gave His life for her and He has chosen her to reveal His 'manifold wisdom' through her, then it should be of supreme importance to us too. Many people are disillusioned with church and have formed a theology that it isn't necessary to be a part of a church to serve God. Whilst we can sympathise that people may have seen or been a part of churches that did not reflect the life and love of God, the answer is not to reject church, but to be a part of a healthy church and give oneself to it. It is interesting that while in the west many people are turning away from the church whilst still professing Christ, believers in China and other persecuted nations are willing to be imprisoned or be executed for being part of a local church.

We can see from the following Scriptures that God commands our participation in the local church:

1. We must assemble together:
Acts 2:42,46; 1 Cor. 11:18; Heb. 10:25
2. We must assemble to partake of the Lord's supper:
1 Cor. 11:33; Acts 20:7
3. We must assemble to worship, teach and encourage:
1 Cor. 14:26

A healthy church has three main functions:

- To worship God
- To disciple believers
- To reach the lost

great expectations

How then shall we live?

What does it mean, then, to be a part of a local church? How do I live my life? What part do I play?

We sincerely believe that God wants us to be a church that models authentic Christianity to the world around us. In order to do so, we need to realize that every individual is important and that every life counts.

How then do we live? Do we burn ourselves out for the church, neglecting our families? Or are the church activities (fellowship, meetings, outreaches etc.), on the bottom of the pile? Do I put God first, then church, then family; or do I put God first then family then church? What about my job, career, my hobbies, my friends?

The answer lies in our heart attitudes. We have built the church on Acts 2:42-47:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."
Acts 2: 42-47 (ESV)

We believe the answer is that we put God and His kingdom at the center of our lives (as per Matt. 6:19-34). If we obey God and put Him first, then everything else will find its correct place in our lives.

It is true that some people have failed in their family obligations by placing church first, but it is also true that people have failed to serve God as He requires because they have put family, friends or job first. We do not neglect our jobs and family as a matter of course. We glorify God in doing our jobs well, and raising and caring for our families. We believe that all are important; after all, if a man neglects his family, he is not qualified for leadership. However, we must put everything in perspective, not placing anything above God. God loves us and loves our families; we trust Him to know what is best. To walk in blessing at work, to have a healthy family life, to glorify Him in all things, we must walk in obedience.

So we live a life that is balanced and healthy in spirit, body and soul.

We do not believe one should simply be involved in a local church, but that one should be committed. We do ask for certain commitments from our members, not because we require them, but because we believe that this is what God requires.

We ask that as a minimum, our members commit to at least one Sunday meeting and to one home group meeting (community) each week. We also ask that our members attend our 'Gatherings'; times when the various congregations across the city meet together. There may be other meetings from time to time that, as elders, we ask you to make a priority. These are times when the 'fathers' call the 'family' to come together. Of course, we realize that there may be times when this simply isn't possible; heart attitudes are more important than simply being present. If you cannot make a particular meeting, we simply ask that you would contact one of your leaders and communicate this.

Living for God is tremendously exciting and rewarding. We are a family that loves each other with the love that He has given us.



What is expected of, and by members?

Joining a church is the most important decision after the decision to serve Christ and who to marry.

When we come to Christ, we enter into covenant with Him. By extension we enter, therefore, into a covenant with those who are already in relationship with Him; they become our family. We believe that it is in the local church that we work out this covenant relationship that we have with other believers, where we join ourselves together as family.

A covenant is a promise by which we obligate ourselves to one another in such a way that the obligation of one party is not dependent on the faithfulness of the other (Ezek. 20:44; 36:22; Ps. 76:11; Hos. 2:19-20; 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:13). A covenant is what we would use to describe the vows between a husband and his wife, and between God and His people. The member covenant is not a legal document or some sort of cultic rite. It is an affirmation, an agreement, and a source of accountability for both the church and its individual members. Such a covenant has obligations and benefits. There are then obligations of Joshua Generation Church to its members, and the obligations of members to Joshua Generation Church. Although the covenant does define the relationship between members and the church, it is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to His glory and His bride, the church (Eph. 5:25).

My obligation to Joshua Generation Church as a member

- To read and understand the Joshua Generation doctrinal statement and not be divisive to its teaching. One must also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:7, 17). You will find our doctrinal statement near the end in this manual.
- To submit to the authority of Scripture as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- To maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines. Such a relationship will be evident through participation in weekly worship services, communion, Joshua Generation community, service, and a life that glorifies Jesus (Ps. 105:1-2; Ps. 119:97; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25; 2 Pet. 1:3).
- To steward the resources God has given, including time, talents, and treasure (Prov. 3:9-10; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 5:22-26; Eph. 4:1-16; 5:15-18). This includes regular financial giving, service, and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (Rom. 12:1-8; 2 Cor. 8-9; 12:7-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- To not function in leadership or as a member in another church family (Heb. 13:17).
- To submit to discipline by God through his Holy Spirit, to follow biblical procedures for church discipline in relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, to submit to righteous discipline when approached biblically by brothers and sisters in Christ, and to submit to discipline by church leadership if the need should ever arise (Ps. 141:5; Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; Gal. 6:1-5 8; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 1:9; 3:10-11; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:5-7, 14-25).
- To agree, by God's grace, to walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who has saved us from our sin so that we could live a new life (2 Cor. 5:17); to practice complete chastity before marriage and complete fidelity in heterosexual marriage by abstaining from practices such as cohabitation, pornography, and fornication (Job 31:1; Prov. 5; Rom. 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-7:16; Heb. 13:4); To refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness,

and other sinful behavior as the Bible, the leaders, and conscience dictate (1 Cor. 8:7; Gal. 5:19-21). Should one sin in such a manner, to agree to confess my sins to Christian brothers or sisters and seek help to put such sin to death (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5; 1 John 1:6-10).

- To get to know, live out and carry the values that we hold to be essential to being a healthy church. These values are explained in a separate section in this manual.
- We strongly encourage all our members to attend any church camps we organize as these are invaluable times where we grow together in relationships, understanding and love for our Lord.
- We also strongly encourage our members to come with us on outreaches (mission trips) that we organize on a regular basis. Such trips, both within South Africa or abroad, are wonderful times to serve the wider body of Christ, and are often times of growth and blessing for those who go.

Obligation of Joshua Generation Church to its members

- We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-5).
- We covenant to care for you and seek your growth as a disciple of Christ, in part by equipping you for service (Eph. 4:11-13) and praying for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
- We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
- We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
- We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1).
- We covenant to set an example in faith and in life and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12).

With the cutting (making) of covenant in Biblical times there would be a ceremony where vows would be made and often gifts exchanged. Once a covenant was entered into, both parties were inextricably linked and henceforward shared everything: assets, liabilities, friends, enemies, etc. That is why we bring people into membership with a degree of 'ceremony' where we make vows to each other before God. We also jokingly say that from now on, "what's in my fridge is yours and what's in your fridge is mine!" Though light-hearted, this actually reflects our hearts that from that point on, we are truly family.

What's the difference between a member and a non-member visiting Joshua Generation?

At Joshua Generation, we make a distinction between "members" and "guests." If you're not a member, then you're technically a guest that remains, to a certain extent, separated from our church family, and separated from the maturity, protection, accountability, and care that comes with being an active part of the church. This may not make much difference for visitors and non-Christians, but Christians who consume rather than commit to a local church do a disservice to Jesus' body (the church) and themselves. Members, on the other hand, participate as the church: sacrificing time, talents, and treasure; committing to the care and community of their fellow members; and submitting to the authority God has established to lead our congregation. The Bible also clearly states that the eldership of a local church will one day give an account before God for how well they have shepherded those under their care (Heb. 13:17).

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in

the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Cor. 12:12-27 ESV)

Why should I become a member?

The church of Joshua Generation is a family, adopted by God (Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:5). We care for each other, pray for each other, and serve together. If you're already a Christian, if you're already in some form of Joshua Generation community, if you're already giving of your finances and your time, then you're already fulfilling some functions of a member. Without making an official commitment, however, we cannot provide the same level of pastoral care and community support, in part, because we may not know who you are, and in part, because the Bible requires that we take care of our family first (Eph. 2:19 cf. Gal. 6:10).

If you're not a Christian, don't worry about membership until you've been reconciled to God through Jesus. If you are a Christian who has spent a lot of time at Joshua Generation, however, search your heart and identify your hesitation. There may be valid reasons to abstain from Joshua Generation membership. But we're rebels by our cursed nature; if you bristle at the very idea of becoming a member, ask yourself why - and don't hesitate to speak with a leader of your congregation or community.

If you are currently a member of another local church you will need to ensure that you leave that church well before becoming a member of Joshua Generation. Speak to your current leadership and ask them to release you from membership. If this is not possible, or if they are unwilling to release you, then please speak to one of our elders and work through these issues with them. We do not want to cause disunity in the wider body and we want to honour the work of others. We also believe that God adds us to church (Acts 2:47) and so should remain in the church God has joined us to until He releases us.

Do members have to be baptized?

Jesus commands that all of His disciples be baptized, (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is therefore a step of obedience that God requires. We want to be an obedient people and we want to admit into membership only those who are committed to living a life of obedience to Christ. Therefore, if you haven't been baptised we would love to talk to you about this before you join, and at the very least, come to an agreement that this is something that you must do. If you've already been baptized since you became a Christian, you don't need to get re-baptized.

Joshua Generation performs believer baptism only, which means we don't baptize infants. If you have more questions about baptism specifically, please speak with an elder or other leader at your local congregation.

This chapter borrows material from material put together by Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill church. We wish to acknowledge this and thank them for the work they are doing worldwide to help build the church of Jesus Christ.

"When we come to Christ we enter into covenant with him."

what values are we based on?



Our values

We want to spend some time looking at the values we carry as a church. These can't only be the values of the eldership, but must be the values of every member of the church. To carry a different vision is to bring division (literally meaning "two visions"). We must have one vision (Prov. 29:18) and we must be united in that vision.

These are some of our core values, some of the things that make us what we are: our spiritual DNA if you like. Those who join us should make every effort to develop the same DNA so that as we all make disciples, we raise up like-minded people. This, however, does not mean uniformity. It simply means that, as with any family, we may have some differences but at our core we are the same.

The church must be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11)

We cannot build on any other foundation. Our only aim is for Jesus to build His church through us. In order for Him to do this we must allow Him to lead us. We do not lead to please our members, to be inoffensive to visitors or to provide impressive worship or preaching: our only aim is to please Him.

As we lift high the name of Jesus, as we glorify Him and seek His presence among us, we know that men will be drawn to Him. That is how we desire to build church.

The church must be Word based

The bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and should be read, taught, understood and (most importantly) obeyed. God has a plan and a purpose for His church which is revealed through Scripture. It is as we renew our thinking to be in line with God's Word that we find His will for our lives and live in His favour (Rom. 12:2).

The church must have real and committed relationships

Our relationships are our priority. They come before plans, programmes, meetings and schedules. We need to ensure that our relationships are nourished, guarded, transparent and real (1 John 1:7).

We are more concerned with character than we are with gifting and anointing; after all the qualifications for leadership are almost exclusively based on character (1 Tim. 3:1-16; Tit. 1:5-9). For this reason we may not release you into some areas of ministry immediately, regardless of your experience or gifting. At times we will simply want to get to know you first (1 Tim. 3:10).

We are committed to helping each member to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and in relationship with one another; after all we cannot say we love God if we do not love our brother (1 John 4:20). To this end we will always endeavour to speak the truth in love, addressing issues of sin and encouraging one another to live Holy lives that are pleasing to God. If we focus on our friendships we will be able to build bridges to speak truth into each others' lives.

There is not one rule for the sheep and one for the shepherds. As leaders we are committed to living open and transparent lives, for we must be beyond reproach. When a leader sins, it will be dealt with properly and sometimes publicly, in line with Scripture (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Each of us can grow only if we allow God to trim away that which stands in His way or offends Him (Ps. 139:23-24; Heb. 12:1). God does this as He speaks to us directly by His Spirit or through the Word. He also does it by speaking through those He has put alongside us to help us (Prov. 27:17). Be open then, to people speaking into your life, giving you Godly counsel and advice.

As a people we care for and love each other deeply and unconditionally (John 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 13), serving one another and putting others above ourselves (Phil. 2:1-8).

We must meet together in our homes

Acts 2:46 tells us, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." We want to follow their example, meeting together at times in large groups (as congregations, or at our gatherings where multiple congregations come together) or in smaller groups. That is why we have communities or home groups where individuals can be part of a smaller family unit, and where relationships are more intimate. We ask each of our members to commit to both our Sunday and id-week community meetings as a minimum.

We see though, that the early church met every day. We do not wish to call meetings every day, but we do wish to see people getting together regularly for fellowship, worship, prayer, evangelism etc. This is where the true life of the church is. Our Sunday meetings should overflow with the life that is being brought into our homes during the week.

We must be led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14)

When God's Spirit moves to bring purity, change, power and direction, we need to be flexible to be led by Him. This needs to happen with every individual, as well as in our corporateness. We need to be prepared to put aside our own plans and agendas and follow where the Holy Spirit is taking us.

When the Holy Spirit works He may do things which some of us find strange or uncomfortable; in such cases we submit to His work and His ways. As a leadership we want to honour the Spirit and not grieve Him, so we are unwilling to either hinder Him or to have an 'anything goes' approach to our meetings. Rather we wish to 'test the spirits' to ensure that what is happening honours God.

Each of us needs to hear His voice, to walk with discernment and desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:31) and receive everything He has for us. It is He who convicts us, empowers us, changes us and grows in us both the gift and fruit of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12; Gal. 5:22-23).

We must have biblical leadership

In line with Scripture we believe that the local church should be governed by a local eldership team. Elders, shepherds or overseers (the terms are interchangeable) work in team to direct the affairs of the church. To assist the elders we have a team of deacons and also community (home group) leaders. Together these three groups of people are responsible for making sure that every person is looked after and disciplined.

Leadership must also be provided in the home, with husbands leading their wives and parents leading their children (Eph. 5).

Despite living in a culture that undermines leadership at every turn, without Godly leadership we will never fulfill God's purposes in our lives. Such Godly leadership is Christ-like in nature, not 'lording it over' those in our care, nor considering ourselves superior. Rather it is servant leadership, where leaders are prepared to lay down their lives for the sheep (Matt. 9:36, Mark 14:27, John 10:11, etc.).

We will deal with leadership in more detail in a later section.

We must practice the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9)

As the body is made up of many parts, so each part must fulfill its function (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, etc.). We are all priests before God and so all have a part to play. Each person is vital in our worship, in evangelism, in discipleship and in service.

Scripture is clear that when we come together, each should be prepared to contribute to the meeting (1 Cor. 14:26-33). Every Spirit-filled person has the capacity to bring a contribution in a meeting (whether on a Sunday or in home groups). Likewise every believer has a role to play in witnessing to the lost, discipling others, in prayer and intercession and in practical works of service.

In meetings, though, we need to realize that every person contributes whether they mean to or not. The way that we worship, the passion that we bring, the desire to usher in the presence of God, all will either bring momentum to our meetings or detract from them. Remember that God commands blessing when people are gathered in unity (Ps. 133:1-2). This is a unity of heart, of purpose, of desire: so when we come together we need to know that every individual makes a difference and if we are not there, then we are missed.

There are many ways to be involved in helping out practically in the church. These include (but aren't limited to): Children's Church, youth, hospitality, sound, audio-visuals, worship, administration, serving tea and coffee, outreaches, multimedia, etc.

Every person has a God-given function/gift/ability to help strengthen and edify the whole body. As leaders we wish to help you identify these gifts and help you find places in which you can serve, for it is in service to others that we find ourselves truly fulfilled in our church lives.

We must reach out to the lost and to the poor (Isaiah 61)

We believe in reaching those closest to us, those in our families, in our circle of friends and acquaintances, those in our suburbs and then further afield. We emphasize a multi-faceted approach, using friendship evangelism together with events, church meetings that reach out to the unsaved, and outreaches to other towns and cities. We also have a desire to adequately train each person to be an effective witness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with our words and with our lives. (Acts 1:8)

We do not want to grow the church primarily by having people transfer from other churches. Rather, we want to see the lost come to Jesus. Having seen people saved, we then need to effectively disciple such converts.

This should always remain our focus. Jesus came to seek and save the lost and has given us the same mandate (Matt. 28:18-20). The early church saw people saved daily and this should be our ambition as well.

We must be a giving people

We must give of our time, our talents and our treasures freely to bring glory to God. We are reminded many times in Scripture that we should place our trust in God and not in material things, and that where our treasure is there our heart will also be (Luke 12:34). We want Jesus to be our greatest treasure and to put His Kingdom first (Matt. 6:33: But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.).

We will look at finances in detail in a later section.



We must be a praying church

The Bible teaches that everything we experience in the natural realm has its origins in the spiritual. We are encouraged to pray constantly, fervently and passionately and in the Spirit. (Matt. 9:38; Luke 18:1; Rom. 8:26; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 5:13-16; Jude 1:20)

We need to develop a healthy and authentic culture of prayer whereby each member has a vibrant and real relationship with God and is constantly in prayer.

We sometimes call corporate prayer times and we ask our members to consider these as a priority. Likewise, we occasionally call for a time of fasting and we ask each person to join us (though of course we must use wisdom in fasting if there are health concerns etc.).

There are a number of types of prayer. These include:

- **Adoration:** where we praise and worship God.

- **Repentance/Contrition/Confession:** where we make right with God.
- **Petition/Supplication:** where we ask God for things
- **Thanksgiving:** where we thank Him for what we have received.
- **Intercession:** where we pray for others.
- **Meditative:** where we rest in God's presence, usually without speaking.
- **Tongues:** using the private prayer language given by the Holy Spirit.

We must have no generation gaps

Our young people and children are very important to God and to us. They are not second class citizens of God's Kingdom and should be loved, cared for and disciplined just as anybody else is.

We place a great emphasis on having exciting, fun-filled times for the kids especially during our Sunday meetings. These are not just times when the children are babysat but times when they are taught, where they worship and where they minister to one another.

Likewise, we highly value those who are older among us. In a generation that often discards its older members, we treasure those who have years of experience and honour them (1 Tim. 5:1-3; Tit. 2:1-6).

Of course, we recognize that different groups of people face different sorts of challenges and we need to help each individual to meet such challenges in a Godly way (e.g. a child does not face issues of marriage and parenthood whilst a retired person probably does not face problems of peer pressure, sex and drugs, the same way as a young person does). We also realise that those with things in common will gather together more easily, and that there is nothing wrong with that. For these reasons we have youth groups, kids church etc. as well as courses on marriage, raising children, finances and so forth.

Our desire is to see people from across generational (and indeed race, gender and social) boundaries to come together, to reach across such boundaries and to be fully functioning and integrated parts of one body, each honouring, helping and supporting the other.

For these reasons, our heart is not to, as the norm, have separate Sunday meetings for different groups (e.g. family service in the morning, youth service in the evening).

We need to establish strong, healthy, Godly families

Families should be established according to God's pattern. The husband is the head of the family as Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 5:22-33). Likewise, we need to train our children to love God and walk in his ways (Prov. 22:6).

These concepts are not popular in modern society but they are God's ways. As leaders we want to help each family to establish Godly order and health both for the happiness and well-being of the individuals in that family, and also to the glory of God.

We need to see signs, wonders and miracles

We are unapologetically charismatic in our approach as we believe (and have experienced) the working of the Holy Spirit in prophecy, tongues, healings and signs and wonders. We believe that these are gifts available to the church today for the blessing of its members, but even more so to provide a testimony to our God who is living and active today. Such testimonies are a powerful tool to reach the lost, to build faith among believers and to conquer the enemy (Rev. 12:11).

We need to be a prophetic/apostolic church

One mandate given to us by God is to help change the way the world sees and experiences church. The way we go about this is by being a prophetic voice to the churches around us. That means that we model authentic Christianity, living and speaking in such a way that we communicate the heart of God to those with whom we come into contact.

We want to go where God tells us and do the things that he tells us to do. This sounds glorious in theory but calls for sacrifice. He often calls us to go where we do not want to go, to do things we do not want to do, at times we would rather do something else. Yet we need to be obedient to His calling and as a leadership team we want to help you to do those things with us.

God has called us to be a model church (1 Thess. 1:7) that will influence other churches. To this end we often travel to other churches, around South Africa and the world, helping to strengthen and encourage them.

In recent times we have worked into: Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Mossel Bay, Namibia, Brazil, UK, Australia, New Zealand and USA.

As we have done outreaches (mission trips) in the past it has often been said that as powerful as the ministry might have been, the biggest impact has been made by the 'ordinary' members of Josh Gen who have gone and lived out our values. We urge you therefore to come with us when we go on an outreach, for as much as we are a part of changing the churches around us, such a trip often changes us even more. Such trips are a wonderful investment of time and finances and you will find you benefit more than you give during such times.

In addition, prayerfully consider helping others to go on outreaches by providing for them financially if you are in a position to do so.

"...we model authentic Christianity, living and speaking in such a way that we communicate the heart of God to those with whom we come into contact."

Biblical finances

We need to understand that Jesus wants to be involved in our whole lives; we cannot separate our existence into the secular and the spiritual, for everything we do, we should do as unto God. God is just as interested in how we treat our family, how we do our job, and how we treat the poor as He is in how we worship on a Sunday. The Bible therefore speaks a lot about our work and our money and how to glorify God in these things. As a church leadership we desire that you walk in the favour of God and are obedient in every area of your life. That is why we are willing to talk about the touchy subject of money: Jesus thought it important, and so do we.

We are aware that some leaders have abused their position of authority and have been unbiblical, manipulative or even downright dishonest in the area of finances. For this reason some people don't want to hear any teaching about this area. The proper response though, is not to ignore the subject, but to teach on it in a Godly, biblical way.

In order to thoroughly cover what is a very large topic, we will answer a series of questions in this section.

Where do material blessings come from?

We must always remember that it is God who provides for us. It is not only when we receive gifts from people that we see God's provision for the Bible tells us that our very ability to work and produce wealth is a gift from God (Deut. 8:18). This is one reason why we give our tithes and offerings, because we recognise that everything we have has been given to us by God.

Is the Bible for or against people being rich?

There are many passages in Scripture that speak of God's desire to bless His children (Gen. 12:2, Phil. 4:19 etc.), but there are also many warnings about the dangers of wealth. It can become too important in our lives (Jer. 9:23-24) leading us away from God to seek after material things: remember one cannot serve both God and money (1 Tim. 6:9). This is why Jesus warned about the difficulties of the rich entering the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-25). Money (and material things) can so easily have our heart, causing us to be lovers of things rather than lovers of God.

The Bible does not teach us that we must not be wealthy, but cautions the wealthy to remember that it is God who has given to them, and that He has done so for the purpose of us using such material blessings in order to be a blessing to others.

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."
(1 Tim. 6:17-19)

So how do I keep a Godly attitude toward my finances?

Put the Kingdom of God first (Matt. 6:33) rather than seeking for wealth.

- **Be content with what you have** (1 Tim. 6:9; Phil. 4:11-12) and rejoice no matter what your circumstances (Phil. 4:4). Remember that the richest man in the world is not the man who owns the most, but the man who desires the least. In a society that tries to sell us the lie that we can 'have it all and have it now; we need to discern between our needs and our wants.
- **Be a wise steward of what God has entrusted you with** as per the parable of Matthew 25:14-30. As leaders we don't simply want to tell you to give, we want to help you be good stewards of what you have. We want to provide help and advice where needed on budgeting, investing, getting out of debt and so forth.
- Be a person of faith. God sometimes asks us to give when our common sense tells us to hold onto what we have. We need to walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7), knowing that if we are obedient, God will always be faithful to us.
- **Develop a generous attitude.** Be generous with your time, your talents and your treasures. If you are in financial difficulties it is still possible to have a generous spirit and find small ways to be a blessing to others. We must never fall into the trap of thinking that we will be more generous if we have more. If one is not generous in the little it is doubtful whether one would then be generous with much.
- **Be accountable to others.** Let people know your income, your expenses, etc. Ask for advice before making large financial decisions. This is not so you can be controlled, but because there is wisdom in getting good counsel (Prov. 20:18).
- **Work hard.** We should never presume that we deserve to be blessed if we are lazy. In fact the apostle Paul clearly states that if a man will not work he will not eat. (2 Thess. 3:10-12) .
- **Remain humble,** acknowledging God as your provider (1Tim. 6:17).

In what ways do I give?

- **Tithe.** This is 10% of what comes into our estate (salaries, bonuses and commissions; plus inheritances, gifts, etc.). This should be a percentage of the gross (i.e. pre tax) amount as Scripture clearly states that we should give first to God, and we are told to tithe all of our yield (Deut. 14:22). We do this as an act of obedience and as a way

of acknowledging that all we have was given to us by Him. In effect, as it has been said, rather than giving God 10%, we should see it as Him giving us 90%. There may be many other questions about how and when to tithe, and we would be happy to talk to you about these things, but remember it is the heart of the matter that counts; we do not want to become Pharasaical in these things (Matt. 23:23). Tithes should be given to the local church as this is the 'storehouse' i.e. where you are fed spiritually. To tithe to a different church or organisation would be akin to eating at one restaurant and paying at another. Tithes are primarily (though not exclusively) for paying the wages of those who work for the church. We will look at some Scriptures on tithing later.

- **Offerings.** This involves giving over and above the tithe. This can be for general use within the church or sometimes for a specific purpose. Sometimes we will ask for an offering to bless somebody who has ministered to us (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- **Alms.** These are donations to the poor and needy, either those within the church or those outside. At Joshua Generation we work with an organisation called Ikhaya Le Themba which ministers to people in Khayelitsha and Nyanga, and also trains people to provide home based care to the terminally ill. In addition we have a house for those who desperately need a place to stay, as well as other initiatives to provide for the needy among us. We also have congregations in previously disadvantaged areas, and therefore have a responsibility to some of these brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **Personal giving.** In addition, the Lord will often lead us to give directly to an individual or a family. This may be because we see that there is a need (1 John 3:17) or simply to bless.
- **Apostolic giving.** Joshua Generation exists to glorify God, to serve its members and to reach Cape Town. It also exists to be a model to other churches around the world. We spend a lot of resources on travelling to other churches to help encourage them and build them up (Rom. 1:11-12). We encourage our members to come with us on such trips, but also to support such outreaches financially even if they cannot go in person. In addition, to this, we may sometimes take a collection which will be used to bless another church financially. As a church we generally use well over 10% of our income to be a blessing to other churches.

It is worth noting here that the leadership is accountable with its use of finances. Our accounts are audited each year and are available to members on request. In addition the salaries of elders and staff are set in consultation with people from outside of Joshua Generation and are not directly linked to the level of income of the church.

How do I give?

- Cheerfully, willingly and not under compulsion. (2 Cor. 9:7)
- With faith, knowing that God is our provider. Some people have argued that they cannot afford to tithe, for example. Yet by tithing, by exercising faith, we will see that God will honour us and provide. Indeed the issue of tithing is the only one in Scripture where God allows us to test Him! (Mal. 3:10)

- **Generously.** (Rom. 12:6-8)
- **Sacrificially.** (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

Why should I give?

- **To be obedient.** It is a command of God. If we say we love Him then we must obey His commands (1 John 5:3).
- **To express our love for one another.**
- **To further the gospel.** We cannot function as a church without finances.
- It is better than receiving. (Acts 20:35)
- **To be blessed.** Whilst this point may have been overemphasised by some preachers it is nevertheless true that if we give we can expect to be blessed. God wants to bless us in order that we can become an even greater blessing (2 Cor. 9:6-12).



Is tithing not an Old Testament principle?

A number of people argue that tithing is an act that is found in the Old Testament, but which is never commanded in the New. They argue that it is a part of the Law and therefore does not apply to those in the New Covenant (i.e. Christians today) in the same way that circumcision is no longer a requirement. Whilst we do not share this view (as you will see shortly), we can accept that our members may hold to this view. However, if one holds to this point of view then one must also accept that the New Covenant always calls us to a higher standard than the Law (Matt. 5:20: For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.). This being the case, such a person should consider that 10% is a minimum that we should exceed by the grace of God given to us.

We do wish to provide a brief explanation, however, of why we believe tithing is still relevant to us, under the New Covenant. This is in no ways, a comprehensive treatment of the subject and again we encourage you to speak to us if you have any problems in this area.

The first time we see tithing taking place is by Abraham in Genesis 14:17. He gives a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the priest-king who (we are told in Hebrews 7:1-4 is a type/shadow/forerunner of Christ). This takes place before Moses, before the Law, and is done by our father in the faith.

Abraham knew this was the right thing to do without it being prescribed to him by any law.

The Law then formalises the tithing system. It outlines how tithing must be done and prescribes penalties for failure to do so. As we are under the New Covenant we no longer fear the penalties, but this does not mean we should not be obedient to the requirements of God (Rom. 8:3-4).

That tithing is mentioned rarely in the New Testament, is not evidence that it is no longer a requirement. In fact just the opposite is true. Christianity grew out of Judaism and so many of the practices and values remained. Where there was little change there wasn't much need of teaching (e.g. there is little in the New Testament on how to worship). It is where there was a radical change that much teaching was needed. A great example of this is the issue of circumcision: this was no longer a requirement to be a part of God's covenant community, so Paul has to repeatedly fight for this truth against those who struggle to accept the new reality.

Yet, tithing is referred to in the New Testament in ways which affirm it. First Jesus rebukes the Pharisees (Matt. 23:23) for forsaking justice whilst being obsessed with ensuring that tithes are properly paid (even down to one tenth of each herb grown). Whilst He considers justice, mercy and faithfulness as more weighty matters than tithing herbs, He tells them to see to these things, without neglecting the tithe.

An even more telling passage is written by Paul: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:13-14). Here Paul argues that those whose work is preaching should receive an income 'in the same way' as the priests in the temple i.e. by tithes and offerings!

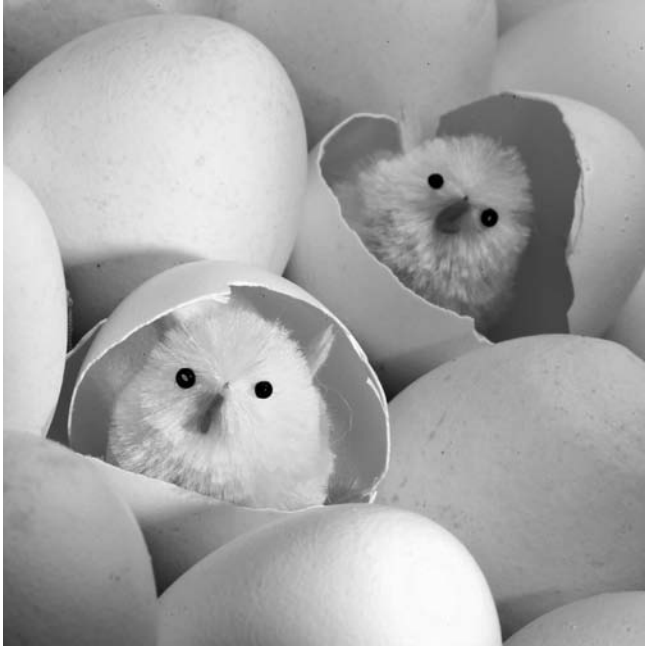
Malachi 3:8-10 states quite clearly that failure to give our tithes and offerings is to rob God of what is rightfully His. We are not suggesting that a person would be cursed for failure to do so (such a curse was a consequence of failing the law) but we do believe that just as with Abraham, if we wish to walk in blessing, we need to be faithful with these things.

What do I do if I am in need?

If you are in financial need you need to speak to your community leader. They will help and assist in any way they can, starting with helping to ensure that you are budgeting correctly and using your finances wisely. We appreciate that it can be difficult to admit to our failings and weaknesses, but if you find yourself in such a situation we encourage you to be humble and accountable so we can help.

In the first instance, the people in your community would be the ones to help you out. If the resources of those people are too stretched then we would try to help provide from the wider body. There is obviously the proviso that such difficulties are not due to laziness (2 Thess. 3:10-12), and that one receives and acts on counsel provided, but we are committed to one another as a family. Nobody who is a part of us should ever have to go hungry or be homeless.

fellowship as a community of believers



Community and family

The word fellowship (Acts 2:42 etc.) or community comes from the Greek word "Koinonia" which means "Having in common, fellowship, partnerships: participation, fellowship recognized and enjoyed, common interest and experiences of Christian men." It was a word borrowed from Greek philosophy where it was used to describe a utopia where all men would live in peace and harmony and love. When the Bible writers took it, they were in effect saying that this existence which previously had been only a theoretical concept was now being lived out in the church.

In the Old Testament Israel was also referred to as a community, whilst in the New Testament those in the church are referred to as the community of believers.

One of our values is to live out community Christianity with one another on a daily basis. The people you fellowship with on Sundays are not just acquaintances or fellow members of some club, they are family, people we spend time with during the week.

The picture of the church as the body of Christ gives us an image of unity and interdependence. We belong to one another and cannot function effectively without one another (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). We therefore need to give ourselves to one another, to love one another, and to be involved in each other's lives. There really is no other way to effectively build a healthy church. The Corinthian church is rebuked harshly by Paul precisely because they were divided into cliques. He goes so far as to say that their meetings do more harm than good! (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

We encourage people to get together regularly and informally, but for practical purposes we also set aside one day of the week for groups of people to meet together in certain homes. These meetings we call Communities (or home groups) and currently most meet on a Wednesday night.

What happens in a typical community?

1. People get grafted into the culture and values of the church. This is done through worshipping together and teaching, but also by just hanging out together and having fun. We often say that we must love each other enough to be willing to 'waste time' with each other. Certainly we desire these times to have life and be enjoyable, not to be rigidly programmed meetings.
2. It is a safe place to develop gifting. People can get the chance to lead worship, prophesy, preach and teach, open up their homes, pray for one another, etc. in a less intimidating environment than on a Sunday.
3. People find comfort, security, love and acceptance. Because there are close relationships formed here, it is a safe place to be vulnerable, to 'fall on our face and still be loved'. When choosing people to lead these groups, one of the questions we ask is, 'Can people relax and feel at home with this person? Will they feel cared for and loved in their home?' We also ensure that they meet the character qualifications as set out in 1 Tim. 3 for these are the kind of people that create a safe environment for others.
4. The Holy Spirit shapes and moulds individuals to be more like Christ. We see in Acts that the Holy Spirit falls upon people when they are gathered in a home (Acts 2:1-3, Acts 4:31, Acts 10)
5. It is a place of unity. Jesus prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:11-24). We see this developed in Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:32; etc. We can live together in peace and unity, and community is the place where we probably develop our strongest, most accountable relationships.
6. It is a place where unbelievers can visit and feel loved and accepted whilst at the same time presented with an uncompromised gospel.
7. Lastly, our community members do not only meet on a mid-week night. You'll find people having meals and coffee together, people sharing their lives with one another, sharing their common interests, and of course their fridges! Many have attributed the rapid growth of our church to this spontaneous, natural lifestyle of community.

At various times different communities may get together, or the elders may call a whole congregation together for a certain reason. Whatever is happening, we ask, and expect, our members to be committed to these meetings. We have always believed that these mid-week meetings, rather than Sundays, are the most important meetings in the life of the church.

Church discipline

We have been asked why we insist on dealing with 'unpleasant subjects' during this course. Surely, it is argued, we should rather show people how exciting and wonderful church is before we speak about the 'bad news'. This, however, shows a misunderstanding of discipline. Surely it is preferable to be joined to a church that loves its members enough to exercise discipline in a loving manner, consistent with God's ways as found in Scripture. Discipline benefits both the person who receives it (as we shall see) and the entire body. By exercising discipline, the elders are providing protection for the body as Scripture tells us, for example that "a little yeast spreads through the whole batch of dough" (1 Cor. 5:6). Furthermore, Scripture warns of wolves that would try to enter the church to attack the sheep: a loving shepherd is one that would expel any wolf he finds from his sheep pen. We believe that, although discipline has unfortunately become unfashionable in today's society, when properly understood and exercised it is a wonderful (though admittedly painful) expression of the love of God for His children.

There are a number of forms of church discipline. A leader who sins must be rebuked publicly (1 Tim. 5:20) and may even be asked to stand down from his position of leadership if such a sin disqualifies him from holding such an office. This is a form of discipline and is most likely to be temporary as the heart behind any discipline is to redeem and restore.

A fairly mild form of discipline might involve helping a person by placing certain 'boundaries' on them. For example, if a couple have fallen sexually, but are repentant, they would not be disciplined out of the church, but for their sake (to ensure they don't fall again) we may strongly suggest they do not spend time alone together.

A stronger form of discipline may be to withhold alms from a person who is lazy (2 Thess. 3:10). Again, this is done in love with a desire to cause the person to respond and deal with their sin. Another form of discipline may be to distance ourselves from a certain person while still treating him as a brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

The most extreme form of discipline is to 'put someone out of fellowship' (i.e. hand them over to Satan/excommunicate them). This is what we will be dealing with primarily in this section.

The heart of discipline

God disciplines those He loves. We can miss the benefit of discipline if we don't realize it's there to help us, not hurt us. In the times that we live in, people hate discipline because we don't enjoy being corrected. No one wants to submit to another, everyone wants to be independent, as Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way". However, if we understand "God is for us not against us" (Rom. 8:31), then when we go through discipline we can be changed to become wiser and more mature.

"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, And do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb. 12: 5-8)

What is a discipline issue?

We must remember that "He (God) is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Even though the world goes through cycles of morality, with men and women writing laws, nothing can go above God's holy word. Everything in our lives must submit to God's will as revealed in Scripture. We have to take a stand on our revelation and convictions, and deal with sin as God demands.

We have to stand before God as leaders and give an account for our actions, for how we have shepherded the sheep. We prayerfully, and with much debate around Scripture, make a decision of how to apply church discipline. We don't take these decisions lightly or with arrogance; lives are at stake, people's eternity could be affected, so we treat such issues with the gravity they deserve.

In 1 Corinthians 5 we read about Paul dealing with a discipline issue in the early Corinthian church.:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.' (1 Cor. 5)

The reason to apply church discipline is unrepentant sin. We recognize that each of us can fall into sin and that when we do, God is just and able to forgive us when we repent (1 John 1:9). This is not grounds for discipline, even if a person repeatedly falls into the same sin. As long as we are repentant God will forgive us any number of times for the same sin (Matt. 18:21-22). If someone is repentant, then there will be fruit, and a change in behavior. We would always show mercy and grace towards those who are struggling with sin, especially those who are broken. Discipline would only be exercised in an extreme situation after much guidance and counseling when there is an unrepentant attitude.

We must remember that it is not merely sexual sin for which a person can be disciplined. Scripture also refers to the greedy, idolater, slander, drunkard and swindler (1 Cor. 5:11).

Can we judge one another?

Actually we can. If someone claims to be a believer, then according to Scripture we must, in all humility, approach them, and go through a process of trying to assist them to obey God.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matt. 18:15-17)

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself or you also may be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)

We do not judge the world but we do judge those who are in the church (1 Cor. 5:9-10) and, in fact, we are to deal sternly with those who call themselves believers but act like unbelievers (2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Cor. 5:11, 13).

Divisiveness

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." (Rom. 16:17)

Jesus' last prayer was for our unity (John 17). He is not pleased if someone brings division into the body. How is this done? Quite simply by turning a Christian against another Christian. This is done through slander, grumbling and complaining, gossip etc.

We are warned to believe the best of one another (1 Cor. 13), not to listen to gossip and slander, and to keep short accounts. Jesus instructs us not to speak to a third party about a problem with an individual, unless we have first tried to resolve the problem. He shows us the way to deal with disagreements:

"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. 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. 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." (Matt. 18:15-17)

We are also warned not to entertain an accusation against elders unless there are two or more witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). Elders are easy targets for slander and accusation as we often give counsel which is misunderstood or misheard or simply disliked. The enemy would love to drive a wedge between you and your leaders. Do not let him do so! Defend your leaders to those who would undermine them and deal with such people firmly:

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9-10)

Divisiveness may also manifest in lawsuits among believers, which are unacceptable:

"When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the

church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!” (1 Cor. 6:1-8)

Divorce may well also be a form of divisiveness but we will deal with the complex matter of marriage, divorce and remarriage in a later section.

Scripture is quite clear on how to deal with divisiveness: “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” (Tit. 3:10-11)

Who applies discipline?

Acts 20, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12

The elders have been given a trust to watch over the sheep. They will be the ones who must give an account before God for how they led, cared for, taught, loved and protected the sheep. However unpleasant it is to have to apply discipline, the elders have to do it because they love and obey God. They will be looking ahead to see the result of discipline, i.e. that such a person would repent and turn back to God.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

Discipline then is the responsibility of the elders, but as we have seen, is to be done before the assembled congregation (1 Cor. 5).

Why do we take such ‘harsh’ action?

We must remember at all times that discipline is motivated by love and a desire for redemption and reconciliation. Such action may seem harsh at the time but is designed to save a person from much worse (that his body may be destroyed but his soul saved...).

We have in view when we implement discipline:

- The person being disciplined. We wish for them to experience the discipline of God and a separation from the fellowship and protection of the church. This way they will hopefully realize their folly, repent and return. Over the years we have disciplined a number of people, most of whom have actually been restored to us. In such instances we treat that person as if they had never sinned (2 Cor. 2:5-8).
- The church as a whole. Sin, we are told, is like yeast that works through a whole batch of dough. We need to deal with sin decisively in order to protect the church as a whole. It is akin to amputating one part of the body in order to save a life; it may not be pleasant but it is necessary.

Can such a person simply join another church?

Today there are many churches in any given area. This was not always the case. In New Testament times to be put out of a local congregation was to be put out of the church universal. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. Whilst we will not accept into fellowship someone who is under discipline from another church, not all churches believe or act the same way. In fact, some churches do not believe in exercising such discipline at all.

However, whilst man does not always follow God’s ways, God Himself is faithful to His word. We believe that, should a person be disciplined out of Joshua Generation there will be spiritual consequences, even if such a person joins another church. We would, in all likelihood contact the leadership of that church to inform them of the situation, but it would then be up to them to decide how to act. Even if such a person is accepted into fellowship though, we believe that God would view such a person as being outside of His church until such time as there is repentance (Matt. 16:19, Matt. 18:15-18).

Restoration

As we have said, the goal of discipline is restoration. We have actually seen this many times, as the majority of those who have experienced such discipline in Joshua Generation, have later been restored. We appreciate that such a person may feel shame and embarrassment and often such people ask if they can, once they have repented, go to another church. We strongly feel that, for the sake of that person, and for the church as a whole, restoration should take place within the same local community of believers. We have seen these times as invaluable in demonstrating the love and forgiveness the people feel for the one returning. At the same time it benefits the whole community as they rejoice over the one lost sheep returned (Matt. 18:12-13).

living in the light



Accountability & transparency

What is accountability and what is it not?

It is like having auditors in business. Such auditors:

- Check the accounts regularly to ensure there are no irregularities, that everything is legal and ethical and being done as efficiently as possible.
- Are available for advice and assistance.
- Can only be as effective as they are allowed to be. The books must be open to them. If a business is determined enough, it can hide the truth from its auditors, at least in the short term.

In the same way, being accountable provides us with a network of friends and family that help us to make wise choices and help prevent us making stupid mistakes or falling into sin.

We need to be open and vulnerable with each other, not just presenting our best side (keeping things hidden) out of fear of rejection or being judged. John the apostle was quite clear that true fellowship only really occurs when we walk in the light with each other (being open, confessing our weaknesses and sins, etc.).

We need to recognize our interdependence because this is how we have been created by God to be: we belong to one another. When we do so, we will actively seek people to speak to us, give us counsel and advice, disciple us, and help us in our areas of weakness. This involves inviting people into our lives, inviting someone to ask any question, any time, about any thing.

Introduction

Accountability is a much used and much misunderstood word in the church today. This probably stems from the discipleship movement of the 1970's and 1980's when there was much teaching on the subject, some of it extreme and harmful.

If you have been hurt by such teachings, the answer is not to reject the whole concept, but to find the valid, biblical expression of mutual accountability. Accountability is a cornerstone of fellowship (1 John 1:7) and fellowship is something we should be devoted to (Acts 2:42). For this reason we will look at this issue in some depth.

As with discipline, this can be seen as a difficult, unpleasant or 'negative' subject but it isn't at all. Andrew Selley tells the story of a time he went rock climbing with his sister. She was younger than him (and a girl!) so he was convinced that he would be able to do at least what she could do. However, she was an experienced climber and he had never tried it before so a climb she had completed easily, found him stuck. He could not see how to complete the climb as he couldn't see where to find a hold for his hands or his feet. Not only was he not experienced enough to find them but he was too close to the rock face to get a clear view. His sister therefore guided him, telling him where to put his hands and feet until he succeeded in the climb and was safe. This wonderfully illustrates the benefits of accountability. We often need those who have gone ahead of us, who have more experience or a better perspective of our position, to help us succeed. It is not a method of control or manipulation, but a God given strategy for each individual to walk in the fullness of the God given calling.

It is **not** simply asking someone, "Can I be accountable to you?" and then waiting for that person to chase us. It is us being proactive. It is not absolving ourselves of responsibility for making decisions or for the consequences of our actions (Phil. 2:12, Gal. 6:1-5). It is not going to various or specific people simply to "hear what our itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:3). It is quite easy to keep asking for advice until we get the advice we were looking for all along. It is very common in such instances to be selective with the information given in order to illicit a particular response. Do not expect the right counsel unless you have provided all of the relevant facts.

It is **not** each man doing what he considers right in his own heart to be right. It is very common today to hear that no man has a right to judge another, that each must simply follow his own conscience. This is simply not true (as we saw in the section dealing with discipline). If I am sinning, I need someone to point this out to me for my own heart may be deceiving me. I often need an outside perspective to keep me from making bad choices (Jer. 17:9; 2 Tim. 4:2).

It is most certainly **not** a vehicle or excuse for gossip. If there is a problem or sin issue with a particular person, the answer is not to speak to others about it, but in the first instance, to go to that person and deal with it directly (Matt. 18:15). It is so easy for believers to use religious terminology to disguise gossip and slander (for example, please pray for "X" I am worried about...., or I need some advice on how to deal with "X" ... etc.). Neither is it an excuse to pry into the affairs of others; nobody can enforce this on another.

It is not a system, a set of rules or a system of regulations; it is a heart attitude. Only if I have the right heart attitude, will it benefit me; but benefit me it will for I need the help, support and counsel of others (Prov. 15:22, 1 Thess. 5:11, etc.).

It is **not** a means of control. The leadership do not want to control you, and they do not want to take the place of Jesus in your life. A wise leader will listen, prompt, guide and advise but will do so by consistently pointing to Christ and urging you to find Christ and His ways for yourself. This is not about getting 'permission' to buy a car, move house, change jobs, get married, etc. It is a means by which, in God, we can make such choices wisely, and which will help in keeping us from falling.

When must I be accountable?

All the time, especially when struggling with addictions and so forth. We are in a constant battle and this is part of our armour. "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light" (Rom 13:12). The nature of our struggle may suggest that we put systems in place to help us. For example, a person battling with drugs may ask a brother or sister to regularly administer drug tests. A person battling with pornography may install software on their computer (e.g. Covenant Eyes) which will alert friends if there are any unsuitable downloads.

In fact, as a leadership, we may at times place certain 'boundaries' on a person who is constantly battling in an area of sin. This is not to control or restrict a person but to bring them into ultimate freedom.

We know that a newborn baby needs to be looked after constantly, and this is true of new spiritual births as well. Yet we never grow out of the need to be accountable. In fact, the more responsibility we have, the more we need to be accountable. Elders and deacons need to be above reproach and need to live lives of accountability for their own sake and for the sake of those they lead.

Why must I be accountable?

1. The heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). We are very good at self-justification: persuading ourselves that our actions and motivations are good, even when they are not. Also, many of us have 'blind spots' in our lives. We don't want to live a sinful life, but we do not realize that something we are doing is wrong, or may not even realize we are doing it. We need loving family to point out these things we are blind to, and to set us on the right path. We simply can't trust ourselves to be self-reliant in our decision making for these reasons.
2. Plans fail for lack of counsel (Prov. 11:14,15:22). Getting a wise perspective from somebody who is wiser, more mature, or simply an expert in a given area, can save us a lot of problems and heartache.
3. We can't rely on our own strength, willpower etc. to overcome problems. "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16, also Gal. 5:22: "But the fruit of the spirit is....self control"). We should have people around us that can pray for us, encourage us etc. They cannot do this effectively if they do not know what is really happening in our lives.
4. It is spiritual warfare (Rom. 13:12). We need to recognize spiritual forces at work in our lives and live in such a way as to walk in freedom.
5. God will make it known sooner or later anyway, in this world or the next. "There is nothing concealed which will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops" (Luke 12:2-3).
6. It glorifies God. It shows that He is indeed working in us and is a testimony to His mercy. John 3:21 says, "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."
7. It keeps us from stumbling. "A man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles for he has no light." (John 11:9-10)
8. It brings us into closer fellowship. (1 John 1:5 – 7, 1 John 2:9-10)
9. It is a way to forgiveness. (1 John 1:5 – 7)
10. It is wise. "He who listens to a life giving rebuke will be at home among the wise". (Prov. 15:31).

Who should I be accountable to?

We are not speaking here of a hierarchical thing whereby each person is simply 'accountable' to a leader who is over them (a sheep to a deacon, a deacon to an elder, an elder to the lead elder, and the lead elder to an apostolic figure). We are speaking more of an interdependence on each other and an accountability from the leaders to those in their care. We need, though, to be accountable to the following:

- **God** (Ps. 139:23). We read in Luke 16 of a manager who is called to give an account for his actions to his master. The things that we have, and who we are, are not ours but God's. We, like that manager, will account to the owner. Likewise elders will give an account for how they have led and teachers will give an account for what they have taught (Heb. 13:17, James 3:1).
- **Leaders** (elders and deacons) (Prov. 13:1). "A wise son heeds his father's instruction" (Also Heb. 13:7 & 17). We need to see our leaders not as those who seek to control us, but those who seek to protect us. Sheep without shepherds scatter and are easy prey for wolves.
- **Friends**. The closer the friend the more accountable we should be. Likewise, the more accountable we are, the closer we become. "The kisses of an enemy may be profuse but faithful are the wounds of a friend". (Prov. 27:6)
- **Each other**. (Eph. 5:21) "Submit to one another out of reverent fear for God." Anytime anybody speaks to us, no matter who they are, how long they have been saved, or their age, social status, etc. we need to ask God if He is in it. God spoke through a donkey to Balaam and often speaks to us through the most unlikely sources, even the unsaved.

How do I go about it?

Like Nike says: Just do it!

- Open up your life regularly.
- Make it part of your lifestyle.
- Be totally transparent.
- Invite certain people to speak into your life - and then listen to them.
- Give permission to certain people to be able to ask anything, anytime.

How many people should I be accountable to?

In some ways only a few but in other ways to everybody. There is no formula, but as a guideline: seek advice from a few, but listen to advice from all! (Though of course you do not necessarily accept everybody's advice. Sift advice prayerfully and consider the source: an elder's advice should carry more weight than that of a young believer).

It is also advisable to seek advice from certain people for particular decisions. For example before buying a car I would speak to Russell (who had a car repair business) and one of my friends who sells cars for a living. When buying a house I spoke to Grant (an architect by training) and somebody who is clued up on finances and banking.

How open must I be?

Most of us are frightened of opening up our whole lives because there are things we are embarrassed about or ashamed of. We fear rejection if people know the truth, or fear they may hurt us with such information (e.g. by gossiping). These things may happen, but in general the more open we are the more accepted we are. Ultimately, we need to trust God, by living His way. Being open, we are, in effect, saying that we trust God to help us through whatever the consequences. We cannot allow fear to prevent us from living God's way. Whatever happens, God will work things for our good (Rom. 8:28) and He will bless us for doing the right thing even if we suffer for it (1 Pet. 3:14).

Our attitude should be one of complete openness and accountability, with wisdom being our guide as to what to share, when and with whom. Sometimes it is wise not to share certain things in certain contexts, not due to self-preservation but for the sake of our listeners. Some people may simply not be able to deal with what they hear and other things may be inappropriate for a particular audience. We should reach a point, though, where there are certain people from whom we have no secrets. This is in fact a very safe and secure place to be.

How do I respond if I disagree with a person's perspective?

- Check what was said against the Word and Holy Spirit, not your own emotions. Do not simply react. We cannot listen only to things we agree with; the most offensive things are probably those that are true.
- Pray sincerely about it and ask God to show you what you cannot see (Ps. 139:23).
- Obey those put over you unless their advice is clearly contrary to the Word or is clearly a sin.
- If necessary, get an HONEST second opinion (don't keep on looking for advice until you hear what you want to hear).
- Remember God always rewards obedience.
- Be especially cautious of reacting if somebody 'attacks' one of your 'sacred cows' (e.g. your spouse, your children, the way you drive, etc.).
- Do not rely on 'having peace' about something in judging its truth. We sometimes can 'lose our peace' (temporarily) because God tells us something that we do not want to hear.

How do I speak to somebody else about an issue?

- Ask yourself if what you have seen is a real issue. Often we can become upset or irritated with another person because of what is in us.
- Ask yourself, "Will it help that person to hear what I have to say?" We should only speak for the other person's benefit, not to make life easier for ourselves.
- Pray first. We have no right to address a person until we have prayed for them.
- Go in humility, especially if that person is a leader or is older (1 Tim. 5:1).
- Speak first to that person alone (only if they refuse to repent of a sin issue should you ever discuss it with somebody else).
- Speak the truth in love.
- Be specific, be truthful, be encouraging and redemptive. The aim of such a conversation should be to help the person become more like Christ and not to make them feel guilty or ashamed.



Conclusion

Ask yourself:

- Am I walking in all God has for me?
- Am I struggling with sin/addiction/character issues from which I wish to be free?
- When was I last audited?
- Who am I truly open with / accountable to?
- What am I going to do about it?
- How will I adjust?
- Where will I be tomorrow, next week, next year, if I do not adjust to this?

Church leadership

We see in nature that every organism has a structure. Likewise the church is an organism in that it is a body, (1 Cor. 12, Rom 12) and needs to have a structure. There needs to be leadership, and there needs to be organization.

It is popular today for people to reject the concept of leadership in the church. Such people can 'spiritualise' their position, claiming to be under the leadership of Christ alone. This is a very common element of many 'home churches' where they claim to have no leadership, and no hierarchy. The truth, however, is that whenever people meet together there will be leaders, whether they are designated as such or not (simply ask certain questions in such an environment and see who answers and how).

In every structure in society we also see leadership: a country has government, a school has a principal, a family has a father, and so forth. The church is no different. Scripture makes it clear that the church needs leaders and that those leaders should govern and direct the affairs of the church well (Heb. 13: 7, 17 & 24, 1 Pet. 5:1-3, 1 Tim. 5:17, Mat. 26:31, etc.).

To understand true biblical leadership, we need to understand that leaders are not to 'lord it over' those in their care but to serve them and give their lives for them (Mark 10:42, 2 Cor. 1:24. etc.). In fact, the best example we have is that of Jesus Himself. Paul writes of this in Philippians 2:1-10. Here, Paul is saying that the Father and the Son are equal but serve different functions within the Godhead. Recognising this, the Son submits whilst the Father exercises His authority without apology. Likewise, we are all equal before God, but perform different functions and must submit to those God has placed in positions of authority. Leadership in the church then, is a matter of function not of title.

We operate in 'team', just as Jesus Himself did (both within the Godhead and with His disciples). That is why we have a team of elders, working together in mutual submission, each recognising the grace God has placed on the lives of the others. These elders then work together in team with the deacons, other leaders and, of course, the rest of the church.

These elders are men who have been called by God and anointed for the task of leading His church. However, Ephesians 2:20 teaches that Jesus Himself, not man, is the cornerstone of the church. We must recognise at all times that, in fact, Jesus leads the church; He is the great Shepherd and the elders are His under-shepherds. Scripture makes clear, though, that the appointment (or ordination) of elders and deacons ensures that the church of Jesus Christ will grow into unity and maturity.

Independent churches with no accountability to outside voices can be in danger of drifting into error. For this reason we are often asked by potential members who we as a church leadership relate to or 'who is our covering?' Before we answer, we need to look at the concept of 'covering'.

The teaching that everybody (individuals and churches) needed to be under some 'covering', i.e. some authority figure acting as an oversight, became popular in the 70's and 80's with the discipleship movement. Whilst it carries some merit, it was taken perhaps too far and systems were

**When we ordain somebody
onto eldership, we do so in recognition
of what God has done.**

often entrenched instead of real relationships. We recognise the need to be accountable as leaders and as a church, but we feel that this needs to be done in a real, relational manner and in accordance with biblical principles.

Therefore our real 'covering' is first and foremost Jesus Himself, who leads and builds His church.

The leaders are then accountable to the church itself. We will never encourage a culture where the leaders are untouchable by the people. We desire to live among the people, leading by example, with lives that are open for all to see (1 Thess. 1:5). Likewise the leadership needs to be approachable; if there is any defect in character, any sin or any unbiblical doctrine in the teaching, any member of the church should be able to (in humility) raise such a matter with the elders. If an elder falls into sin, this will not be 'swept under the carpet', but will be dealt with in public in such a way that honours the man involved and is redemptive (for we are all fallible), but that also sets an example for the church (1 Tim. 5:20).

The elders are also accountable to each other. We know each other well and work together closely and are therefore able to speak into each other's lives on an ongoing basis, helping each other to become more like Christ.

Finally we are accountable to a number of people from outside the church. We are part of an apostolic movement known as 'FourTwelve' which brings together a number of churches and Ephesians 4 gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists pastor and teachers). We seek input from a number of these recognised men on an ongoing basis and on a range of issues. We invite them to audit the church and the leaders to ensure that the church is healthy. We also invite people in from different movements / streams that we recognise as having the call of God on their lives, and who are able to help us build a healthy church that glorifies Jesus.

Whilst there are many areas of service within the church and many opportunities to provide leadership and discipleship to others, there are only two kinds of ordained leadership in the local church today, namely elders and deacons.

Elders

There are three words in the New Testament that, describe the same office and are virtually interchangeable. When we ordain somebody onto eldership we do so in recognition of what God has done. be the same office and are virtually interchangeable. They are:

- Presbuteros: translated, elder
- Episkopos: translated, overseer (or bishop)
- Poimén: translated, shepherd (or pastor)

We see each of them used, for example, in 1 Peter 5:1-2 where we see them used in connection with the same office.

We, therefore, do not have a Pastor as the leader of the church with a group of elders serving him. We have a team of elders, though we recognise different giftings, anointing and functions in each of the elders. In particular we, as a team, recognise the particular grace anointing on Andrew Selley as the leader or captain of the team. He is often described, therefore, as the lead elder or visionary elder.

In the Old Testament, the elders would sit at the gates of a city where they would govern, decide on who could enter and made judgments on matters concerning the citizens of that city. Each city would have its elders who would administrate the affairs of their own city. This is a picture of elders in the church. We see in Scripture that there was a church in each city, governed by elders.

Elders are called and anointed by God, but recognized and commissioned by men. When we ordain somebody onto eldership we do so in recognition of what God has done. In all likelihood such a man would have already been fulfilling a leadership function in the church whether he had a 'title' or not.

The qualifications of an elder are described in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Note that these are almost exclusively related to character rather than gifting. We need also to see that these character qualifications are to be the aim of every believer. In other words, elders are to be those whose lives are worthy to be followed and imitated (2 Thess. 3:7-9, Heb. 13:7, 1 Cor. 11:1). We must remember that meeting these requirements, in itself, does not make one an elder, rather that one is disqualified if one does not meet these requirements. After all, as well as good character there must be a calling and anointing to fulfill the role before one can be recognized as an elder.

We highly value and esteem the women of the church, but we believe that eldership is a role for men. This is not because men are in some way superior to women but because we are created differently for different functions. Though only the men are elders, our wives play a crucial role on the leadership team. They don't just support their husbands but often bring insight and perspective that is highly valued.

This is not simply our opinion but is based on Scripture:

- Elders were exclusively male in the Old Testament. Should there have been a radical change in the New Testament period we would expect to read of it, as such a change would have required much teaching to change mindsets.
- Under the qualifications of elders there is no mention of women. In contrast to the list of qualifications of a deacon, where there is allowance for women.
- No female elders are mentioned in the New Testament, though we do read of many women who are highly regarded and who fulfill essential roles in the church.
- Paul does not allow women to teach or exercise authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:12). This cannot be an absolute rule about teaching because we do read of women teaching in a variety of contexts (including Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos: Acts 18:24-26). Seeing as teaching here is linked to authority it may be best understood as saying that Paul does not permit women to fulfill an eldership function (with or without the title).

- Leadership is always seen as a male role (for example husbands lead their wives, Adam was the head of Eve, etc.).

We know that this is a contentious issue in the church today, but we must take a stand on what we believe to be a clear biblical principle. Please appreciate that we believe women are not second class citizens in God's Kingdom and are essential to the body. They can prophesy, lead worship, teach in certain contexts, etc. just as men can. They cannot, however, fulfill 'governmental' positions.

There isn't time to expound upon this fully, so we encourage you to speak to us if you have any problems or questions regarding our position on women in ministry.

The function of elders

- 1. They rule, or govern the church.** The church is not a democratic institution. It is a theocracy, under the headship of Christ. Those whom He has called as His 'under-shepherds' are to make decisions on issues relating to doctrine, discipline and direction. This they will do wisely and in prayer, together with those who are gifted to help, whether from inside or outside the church (e.g. apostolic figures).
- 2. They preach and teach.** Being able to teach is the one qualification of an elder that is based on gifting rather than character. Yet we see in 1 Timothy 5:17 that not all elders have the same kind of teaching gift. Some have an ability to preach and teach in a corporate setting, whilst others may be more effective in a smaller group setting or with individuals.
- 3. They lead by example.** As we have already seen (1 Pet. 5:3 etc.), elders are those who live lives worthy of imitation. The elders need to live out the values of the church, for people to catch who we are more than what we say.
- 4. They feed the sheep** by teaching, counseling, encouraging and correcting (Tit. 2:15, Tit. 3:10, 2 Tim. 4:2, John 21:15).
- 5. They protect the sheep** (Acts 20:28-31, 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Elders are called to be shepherds of God's flock. A shepherd's role can be seen in Psalm 23. Shepherds also protect against predators and also clean the sheep of ticks and other parasites.
- 6. They learn from each other** regarding practical issues of church leadership. We all need to be led and shepherded, including the leaders. None of us is a finished product yet. As a team we challenge each other and learn from each other constantly, in order to become better leaders.
- 7. They lead our corporate meetings.** This does not mean elders do everything, for it is the role of each individual to bring contributions. The elders, however, are ultimately responsible for the meeting and for bringing direction.
- 8. They strengthen the church** by operating in their individual gifts. Not all elders carry the same gift make up; some are very pastoral whilst others may be more gifted in preaching or administration. By working together as a team and each bringing his own gifts, we help the whole body to be healthy. Among our eldership team we have gifted preachers, pastors, teachers, worship

leaders, administrators and counselors as well as those gifted in the apostolic, prophetic and so forth. No single leader fully reflects Christ to the church, but as a team we can be a better representation of who He is to the church.

- 9. They recognize up and coming leaders.** They look to a person's character, commitment and gifting. Ultimately though, we must recognize that it is God Himself who raises up leaders, the elders simply recognize that which God is doing.
- 10. They administer church discipline.** This we have already looked at in detail, but we need to see that this is part of the role of a shepherd (i.e. protecting the sheep). They protect the sheep from wolves i.e. those who are divisive, idle, immoral or teachers of false doctrine (Tit. 3:9-11, Rom. 16:7-20, 1 Cor. 5, 2 Thess. 3:6-14).

We know that as elders we will give an account before God for how we have led the church (Heb. 13:17) so it is a responsibility and a privilege that we take very seriously.

We understand that the church does not belong to us but to Christ and that it is, in fact, Him that builds His church (Matt. 16:18). We are called to represent Him, to love the people and lay down our lives for them just as He did. Our role is that of servant leaders whose motivation is love (Luke 10:27, 1 Cor. 13:1-3, 1 Pet. 5:1-7). Despite the seriousness of the role we do so gladly and willingly, knowing it is by doing so that we fulfill the calling of God on our lives and serve His church the best way we can.

Your responsibility to the elders

- 1. Obey them and submit to their authority** (Heb. 13:7 & 17). The real test of submission comes when there is disagreement. A wise and godly man will follow his leaders even when he disagrees with them, unless it would lead to sin.
- 2. Be loyal.** Honour your leaders, don't gossip, slander or criticize them behind their backs. It is easy to be a critic, it is a much harder job leading a church. Don't even entertain an accusation against an elder without witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19); in other words don't listen to an accusation to weigh up its merits, but rather stop a critic before their words poison you. Vigorously defend your elders for they are in a position where they are easily attacked, both by men, as well as spiritually (2 Tim. 4:16-17).
- 3. Respect them** as men who have been tested and who are worthy of being followed (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Respect them as a child respects his father. (Philem. 1:10, 1 Tim. 5:1, 1 Thess. 2:11)
- 4. Be committed.** We desire to have hearts that are committed, not just 'present'. We ask that you give yourself totally to Jesus and to the local church. For example, when we call an important meeting it needs to be important to you too. We need to have the same values and priorities as we co-labour in God's vineyard. You need to be committed to the vision and the values of Josh Gen, to your personal relationship with Jesus, and to our meetings (Heb. 10:25).
- 5. Affirm and encourage your elders.** The elders are only human; they deal with the same fears etc. as everybody else. They also carry the burden of the church. Eldership can be very lonely as the elders often forsake friendships

for the sake of the people. They also often face criticism from many places. They do need constant (but real) affirmation and encouragement.

6. **Pray for them.** Pray for their mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Pray for their families who often sacrifice for the sake of the church. Pray that they will stay refreshed in God and hear from God on the many important decisions they make. Pray also that their work will be fruitful (Col. 4:3). Many people in ministry burn out due to the demands of the work (mental, physical and spiritual). In fact, church leadership has one of the highest statistical burn-out rates of any 'job'.
7. **Support them financially.** It is easy to assume that people in the ministry are well paid for doing little. The reality is that the full-time elders do work hard, often for a lot less money than they would be earning if they were still in secular employment. Many elders who are still in secular employment also work extremely hard (in effect carrying two jobs) and often sacrifice promotions, raises etc., in order to be more available to the church. The Bible is clear that such men deserve to be supported and blessed materially (1 Cor. 9:9-11, 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
8. **Cover their weaknesses.** Elders are not perfect. In fact they are far from perfect. It is our responsibility to acknowledge their calling and function as elders, whilst still working with them despite their weaknesses. We all have idiosyncrasies, strengths and weaknesses, limits to our knowledge and understanding, etc. Accept the elders as human beings doing their best to please God and serve the people as best they can.

Hierarchy

Most people in church today react adversely to the concept of hierarchy. This is because we have often been taught badly, or have experienced abuse from those who enjoy power and lord it over others. The answer is not to reject the concept out of hand, but to see if there is such a thing as godly hierarchy and then implement it if there is.

We have seen that every living thing has structure, but that the structure serves the creature not vice versa. Likewise, the more complex a creature, the more it can achieve (compare the structure of a jellyfish to that of a human, for example). As a large church, with many congregations we need a structure that serves us, that enables us to be effective in reaching our City and making a difference in the world.

Likewise, we do see hierarchy in God's order of things. In the trinity there is a hierarchy: though each of the persons of the Godhead is equal, the Son submits to the Father, and the Spirit submits to both (Phil. 2 etc.). In the angelic realm there is a hierarchy, with different spiritual beings carrying different roles and authority (Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16, etc.). Even in the family we see the husband as the head of the wife and the parents as head of the children.

There is also a hierarchy in the church, though we must remember that this is a hierarchy based on function and on grace gifting, not on title or position. It is also a servant- hearted hierarchy where the greatest is the least.

At Joshua Generation we currently have an eldership team, a deacon team, other leaders and then 'sheep'. This in itself

is a hierarchy of sorts already but we have needed to further define roles as we increase in numbers and spread across the city. Each elder recognizes the role, the gifting, the strengths of the others and is committed to working for the good of the church. The exact structure, like the skeleton in a human body, is not intended to be highly visible, but is designed so that we can work effectively, be spirit led, be mutually accountable and can serve the church each to the best of our God given ability.

Deacons

This word comes from the Greek 'diakonos' which means servant. Whilst we should all have the heart of a servant, those who are so called and qualified are ordained into the office of deacon.

Like elders, the qualifications for deacons are character based (1 Tim. 3:8-12) and, according to the book of Acts where we see the first deacons, they must be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3).

In one sense they are selected by the people, not in the sense that we work democratically, but in that such people are often recognized by people as being potential deacons before they are ordained (in other words people follow them); and also because we will always announce the name of a potential deacon to the people and invite a response before we ordain them.

Whilst elders are always male, there can be female deacons (Rom. 16:1, plus 1 Tim. 3:11, can read either wives or women). This is because a deacon is not a governmental position but is an office designed to support the elders and to take away the burden of a lot of the practical aspects of church life from them (Acts 6:1-3).

That is not to say that deacons are merely those who help practically. We read in Acts of deacons ministering in great power (Stephen preached powerfully and was martyred, Philip was a powerful evangelist). A deacon holds a high office and receives great spiritual reward if he is faithful (1 Tim. 1:13).

Deacons often lead communities (home groups), though not all do, and some home groups are led by people who are not deacons. Deacons may be responsible for other ministries in the life of the church (the poor, the children, administration, etc.). Some may be full-time and some part-time. What they all have in common is that they have proven reliable and can be entrusted to lead others (2 Tim. 2:2). They should carry the values of the eldership team and, in turn, teach these to others. It is likely that most members of the church will be closer relationally to deacons than they will to most elders.

Deacons are an integral part of the church; without them we would not be healthy. They are a vital cog in the structure of the church, helping to disciple members, facilitate meetings and events, etc. They are to be honoured and respected as men and women whose lives are worthy of following (Heb. 13:7).

commanded blessing in unity

Authentic worship

Worship begins with God

"We love because He first loved us" 1 John 4:19

Worship begins with God. We do not worship God because we have found Him to be the best god of all the gods we've tried. "9 out of 10 housewives prefer Yahweh!" He is God. There is none beside Him. We love Him because He made us. We love Him because He first loved us. Our worship is a response to Him, who He is and what He has done.

God's great affection for us was not shown in a delicately penned poem or love letter, though the Bible does contain some of those. His extravagant love was not demonstrated with a bunch of flowers, or a tender word whispered in our ear, though He created every flower and often speaks as the still small voice.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

God demonstrated his love for us through the brutal sacrifice of His one and only Son. Our individual response to His works, His nature and His presence should be just as extravagant and just as sacrificial.

When King David was offered for free items he wanted to sacrifice to the Lord, His response was, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). If, like David, we are to have a heart after God's own heart, we will learn that it is offensive to God to only offer what is easy, or comfortable, or cheap.

In the same way that Christ surrendered His life for us, God must become the focus of our whole life. Paul writes to the Colossians:

"...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

Worship is about more than the words we sing. Not that we mustn't tell God we love Him, but a husband who loves his wife, will tell her AND show her. To do one without the other is either false or misleading. Words are cheap; Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). He knew it would be easy to speak of our love for God, it is quite another matter presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, day in day out. But that is the spiritual act of worship God is looking for. Any singing we do must flow out of that.

Communicating with God in worship is one of the moments when we can meet God and hear from Him. We do not worship God to earn treats or favour from Him, but the Bible is clear that encounters with God happen to those who are seeking Him. Worship is one way to seek Him.

"You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you," declares the LORD" Jeremiah 29:13-14

Worship the way God desires

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Hebrews 13:15,16

So singing is important as well, the Bible says to bring a sacrifice of praise to the Lord, but what sort of sacrifice should we bring? Does it matter? Surely, if we just express our worship however we want to, that will be fine?

That was King Saul's mistake. When God sent Saul to destroy Amalek, sadly, due to pride, he repeated his previous error of not doing it the way that God required. Whether it was the kind of pride that doesn't listen and so gets things wrong or the kind of pride that thinks it can improve on God's plan is unclear. The result, however, is shockingly clear; God not only rejects the offering, but Saul himself. In his rebuke to Saul, Samuel says:

"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams" 1 Samuel 15:22.

God is less bothered with receiving offerings than with the manner in which they are offered. If we are to please Him in our worship, it must be the kind of worship He wants.

In John 4, Jesus is talking with the woman at the well. She brings up the question of where a person should worship, Jesus moves the emphasis away from the 'where' and onto the 'how'. "True worshippers", He says:

"will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks" John 4:23.

From this we learn two things: God desires a specific kind of worship, and this, from a specific kind of worshiper.

Worship in truth

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24

On its simplest level worshipping in truth means telling the truth when we worship. Don't only say things because they sound right. "You are Lord": is He? "You're all I need": then as soon as the service has finished, "Man, I NEED a coffee!" Telling the truth when we worship means, not faking, not being a hypocrite. Do we reduce our high words then, to the level of our imperfect lives? No, certainly not, it is a matter of intent. Let us rather depend even more on God's grace, and with His enabling see our lives soar up to His glorious standard.

Worshipping in truth also means telling the truth about God; the definitive truth. There is truth which is always true, whether we feel like it is or not. God is good, even when we feel He has not been good to us. God is holy, even when we have not been holy. God is righteous, God is worthy, God is glorious and God is mighty. We talk about magnifying or glorifying the Lord. This is what I'm doing when I sing truth about God. It isn't that I can add glory to Him or make Him any bigger than He is; but when I sing of His glory He becomes more glorious to me, and when I focus on his character He is magnified in my eyes. This is not because I've made something small appear big, but because in that moment the detail of something huge has been brought right up close and into sharp focus.

2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...". When we focus on the truth about God, we begin to see Him; when we see Him we are changed, becoming more like Him.

That's why it is so important to focus on God during worship. If I spend most of my time singing about myself, that's who I end up looking like! If I'm singing about God, I'm worshipping God, and that's who I end up looking like.

Worship in spirit

Worshipping in spirit is not just "singing in tongues", though that may often form a part of our worship. Worshipping in spirit refers, firstly, to the fact that worship is something more than a physical act. Hebrews tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). If we are to worship God in spirit, we can only do so by faith.

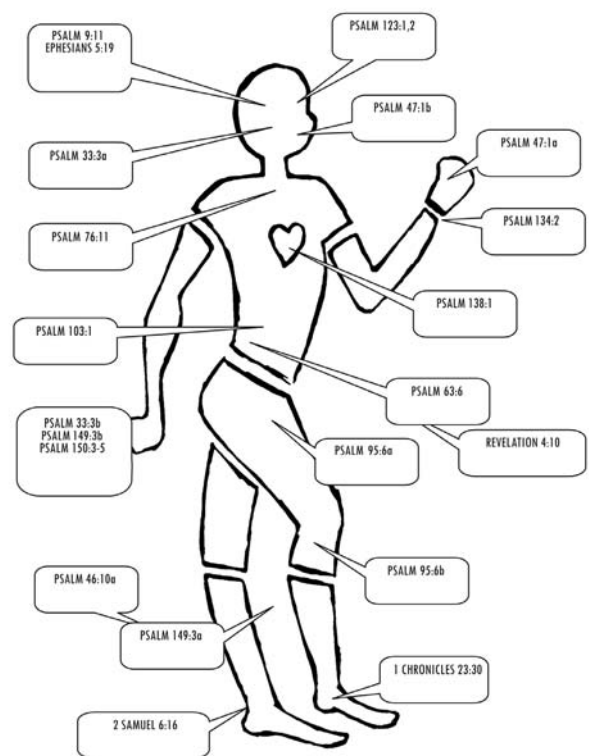
Faith in what? Faith that He is, that God exists, and that seeking Him will pay off. Faith that what I am told in Hebrews 10:19-22 is true. Faith that we can "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh". That "since we have a great priest over the house of God", we can "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith".

When Jesus was crucified and the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, it was a sign that once, for all men, for all time, a High Priest had entered the Most Holy Place with an offering that would never need to be repeated. The barrier between God and man had been erased. Jesus' broken

body is equated to the barrier now breached; He is the way, He is the door. No one comes to the Father but by Him.

Hebrews isn't speaking of when we approach God on the final day. There will be no need for faith then; God will be visible for believers and unbelievers alike. This faith is what we need now, to boldly approach God now. By faith we worship God in the spirit, believing that when we do, we are not earth bound creatures shouting to a God far away; we are spirit beings walking into the presence of the One who has promised to indwell us and never leave us. That is the intimacy we find in worship. That God is in us, and we are in Him.

So we come to Him boldly, but not irreverently. When Jesus speaks on worship in John 4, the Greek word used is *proskuneo*, meaning to kiss the hand; more literally: to lean forward like a dog. The image is of a dog licking its master's hand in joyful but reverent submission. Worship is about total surrender of self to God.



Worship with your body

"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

Of course, total surrender cannot happen on a purely spiritual level. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Demonstrating surrender with our bodies is an important aspect of worship. As James argues regarding faith and works (James 2:18), one person could claim to worship in the spirit, while another says they worship with their body, but in truth we demonstrate we are worshipping in the spirit

BY worshiping with our bodies. When we present our bodies in worship, by faith, it becomes a spiritual act. There is something supernatural in the very natural act of raising our hands to God. When we dance we are revealing through our bodies the freedom that we have found in the spirit. When we raise our voices in a victory shout, hell trembles. Not because we were loud, but because our volume was a demonstration of our faith in Jesus who always leads us in triumphant procession.

Throughout the Bible, particularly the Psalms, we are encouraged to worship God with our bodies. By each reference, list how we can use every part of our body to worship God.



Worship together

"... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Ephesians 5:18-20

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25

Worship is something we must do in private, but it is also something we can and should do together.

Always remember that the worship is not for us, it is for God. So if when we come together, the style of music or the beat of the songs is not to our taste, we worship God regardless, because He is worthy. If by nature we are not inclined towards dancing, or raising our hands, or singing loudly in public, we do those things anyway, because we want to praise God the way He likes it, not just in the way we feel comfortable doing it.

We need to know that each of us plays a vital role in our corporate worship. Each of us brings something unique, a contribution that can change a whole meeting. Even the way we worship can influence the people around us and will either add momentum or take it away.

If we mistakenly think we are "keeping it real", by standing at the back with our arms folded, we need to think again. When King David didn't feel like praising he would just tell himself to get into gear (Psalm 103). We can't just sit back and watch the band; at best that's lazy and at worst it's spiritual voyeurism! When we come together to worship, it is still a personal act; an intimate personal response from our individual hearts to God. Each must bring their own sacrifice of praise. But worshiping together, the experience is also something more. It is something of unity, and when we come together in unity, God commands a blessing (Psalm 133).

Ephesians 5 tells us to speak:

"to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with [our] hearts to the Lord".

Psalms are sacred songs, sung to accompaniment. In the Bible the name is synonymous with the book of Psalms, which is a collection of songs written for personal and congregational use. Some Psalms speak of trials and troubles, others of the joys of life, others the beauty of creation. However, the common thread throughout the Psalms is always that God our Creator is steadfast and will save us; Psalms are songs of hope in God. In a corporate meeting we can expect to sing songs that declare our hope is in the Lord.

Hymns are also songs; the root of the word in Ephesians 5 suggests them to be songs of celebration. In corporate meetings we can expect to sing hymns of praise; songs that celebrate everything that God is.

Spiritual songs are songs inspired by the spirit. Here the root of the word in Ephesians 5 suggests songs breathed from God. Often in the Bible we are encouraged to sing a new song, in corporate meetings we can expect there to be spontaneous songs. Sometimes these will be songs we can all join in singing to God, other times they will be songs from God sung over the congregation; His response to us.

Beyond worship

We have already said that worship is one of the moments when we can meet God and hear from Him. If our worship is born out of relationship with God, it is only natural that when we speak to Him He will speak back. In a corporate setting this is especially true. Whereas, when alone, each of us will hear God in part, together we can hear more fully what He is saying to us.

In times of worship we can expect those present to move in spiritual gifts. It is important in a public meeting that those exercising spiritual gifts do so in submission to the leaders present. In this way unity is maintained and everything can be done for the benefit of all. When Paul corrects the overzealous Corinthians (who in worship, as in life, had moved into excess), he tells them that while everyone is able to bring all manner of songs and psalms, prophecies and words, tongues and interpretations, everything must be done in order, for the benefit and edification of the body (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

In other words, Paul is saying there should be something constructive in what is brought; a discernable thread in our meeting together. It shouldn't just be random, "... for God is not of turbulence but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" 1 Corinthians 14:33.

When God moves among us, we can also expect to see signs and wonders, possibly 'strange' manifestations, both Godly and demonic. For those not used to such things it can be frightening or confusing. We would ask that you speak to your leaders about anything with which you are uncomfortable; their reaction will not be one of judgement or ridicule but a genuine desire to help you walk in the fullness of what God has for you whilst helping to protect you from anything that is not from God.

Worship Him forever

Finally, we love to worship because worship gives us a glimpse into eternity. In the book of Revelation we are shown the day when the universal church is gathered to worship our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who sits on the throne forever. When we worship, by faith, we join the multitude of angels in God's presence, who day and night never stop singing, "Amen! Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks and honor, power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" (Revelation 7:12). That is something that will never get old!



Divorce & remarriage

Given the astronomical divorce rate today, it is inevitable that a number of those who consider joining us will need to know our stance on this subject. We have included extracts from a much more detailed examination of the subject in order to present an overview of our position. You may, of course, obtain a copy of our more detailed manual on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Of course this is a wide ranging topic with many possible variables. We have intended to give a detailed overview here, but it may not cover all eventualities. Also these are principles that we hold to which then have to be applied to the lives of individuals. Should you have any questions about your own situation, please speak to us; our desire is to find God's best for each individual and not to approach the matter in an impersonal legalistic manner.

However, while there are aspects of this statement that some Elders do not hold as personal convictions, **we all assent to this statement being the church guide for membership and discipline.** Please ensure that you have read this and agree with it before you join us.

Introduction

Divorce is painful. It is emotionally more wrenching than the death of a spouse. It is often long years in coming and long years in the settlement and adjustment. And then there is often the agonizing place of children. Parents hope against hope that the scars will not cripple them or ruin their own marriages some day. Tensions over custody and financial support deepen the wounds of years. And then the awkward and artificial visitation rights can lengthen the tragedy over decades.

Because of these and many other factors, people with sensitive hearts weep with those who weep. In care, they try not to increase the pain. Sometimes this care is confused with compromise. People think that loving care is incompatible with confrontation—that the tenderness of Jesus and the toughness of His demands can't both be love; but surely this cannot be right.

Jesus was an extraordinarily caring person. His teaching on divorce and remarriage was also firm: "What God has joined together let not man put asunder (separate)" (Mark 10:9). In fact, firm and loving confrontation with the demands of Christ IS a form of caring, because a sinful decision is just as harmful to a person as the emotional pain. The great challenge to the church in the face of divorce and remarriage is to love biblically. John wrote, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments" (1 John 5:2). In other words, the test of true love to people is not only the feeling of compassion in the heart, but also conformity to the commandments of God in behavior. This alone will honor Christ and preserve the spiritual health and power of the church.

Why is there a special concern with divorce and remarriage?

There are at least nine reasons for devoting a special position paper to this issue.

- People who come to JoshGen want to know where we stand on this issue.
- Inside the church people need clarification about where the leadership of the church stands and what the church position is.
- Divorce involves sin that is more destructive than many others. The hurtful impact of a broken marriage on the spouses and the children and the web of relationships surrounding the marriage, is immense.
- Divorce is thrown into the public limelight by the recognition in our society that it must be handled by the civil courts.
- Marriage, divorce and remarriage involve the mingling of solemn oaths and sacred physical union unlike any other relationship.

- Marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is set apart by God to signify to the world the relationship between his Son and His bride the church (Eph. 5:21-33). Therefore, the breaking of this bond is the most extraordinary among all human bonds.
- Divorce falls into that group of acts which, when they are committed, are very hard to undo. The words, "I'm sorry," can make right many sins against another person. But divorce and remarriage cannot be made right like that.
- Divorce happens by plan and intention of one or both spouses. It is not like a habit against which one struggles with successes and failures.
- Divorce has reached epidemic proportions in our culture, to the extent that even secular leaders are groping for a place to stand that may preserve the stability of the home.

Is divorce or remarriage the unforgivable sin?

When divorce begins to be discussed in this way it is common for someone to ask whether divorce is the unforgivable sin. The answer is found in the following texts.

"Every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

"All sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28).

"Let the wicked man forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

From these wonderful promises we learn that forgiveness for sins is available on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus. Forgiveness is available for all sins, without exception. Forgiveness is received freely through trusting Christ. And trusting Christ involves confessing sin as sin and turning away from it to embrace the ways of God with joy.

The only unforgivable sin is the sin that we refuse to confess and forsake

We commit unforgivable sin when we cleave to a sin so long and so tenaciously that we can no longer confess it as sin and turn from it. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31) is the resistance of His convicting work to the point where He withdraws, leaving the sinner in helpless hardness of heart.

Neither divorce nor remarriage is in itself the unforgivable sin any more than murder, stealing, lying or coveting. God is faithful and just to forgive, but forgiveness is NOT unconditional. It is conditional. This does not mean it can be earned. It means forgiveness is given to those who truly trust Christ. Trust is not an act by which anything can be earned. It calls attention to the worth of God's grace, not the worth of our action. Trust is not mere intellectual assent to Biblical facts. It involves hearty affirmation of the will of Christ. Therefore trusting Christ involves confessing sin as sin and taking up arms against it.

Therefore the ultimate form of church discipline (excommunication) is never a simple response to past sin. It is always a response to sin that a person continues to affirm or practice. No past sin that is renounced, confessed and forsaken is grounds for church discipline.

Therefore, marital sin is in the same category as lying and killing and stealing when it comes to church discipline and

church membership. If someone has lied, killed, stolen, or illegitimately divorced, the issue is not, can they be forgiven? The issue is, do they admit that what they did was sin? Do they renounce it? And do they do what they can to make it right?

If a person in the church was known to affirm lying, killing or stealing as appropriate behavior for a Christian, that person would be liable to the discipline of the church. Not because they have lied, killed or stolen in the past and cannot be forgiven, but because they go on affirming NOW that sin is not sin. Or if a person was openly planning to lie, kill or steal with a view to receiving (cheap!) forgiveness afterward, that person too would be liable to church discipline.

In all these ways, illegitimate divorce and remarriage are **not** in a class by themselves. They are not the unforgivable sin. When it comes to church discipline and church membership they should be treated the same way other public sins are treated.

What makes divorce and remarriage seem to be a special matter of concern in the church is that very seldom does someone affirm the rightness of lying, killing, and stealing. On the other hand, people often affirm the rightness of divorce and remarriage. In other words what usually causes the conflict is not whether divorce and remarriage are unforgivable sins, but whether they are sins at all - to be confessed (from the past) and to be avoided (in the future).

If a person has stolen things in his past and wants to join the church, no one would say that we are treating stealing as the unforgivable sin if we insist that this person confess his sin and begin to make amends to those he defrauded. A sin is not unforgivable because it must be confessed as sin, renounced as an option, and its effects made right (as far as possible). So it is with illegitimate divorce or remarriage. It should not keep anyone out of the church, nor put anyone out of the church any more than a past life of robbery; but there must be a heartfelt confession of the sin committed and a renouncing of it and an affirming of what is right, just as with all other sins of the past.

When we affirm the church covenant we are not only affirming what we pledge to do. We are also affirming what we believe ought to be done. In other words, **church membership is a commitment to hold in common, convictions about what is right and wrong in behavior (Church Covenant) as well as in doctrine (Affirmation of Faith)**. Without this shared conviction, the possibility of holding each other accountable, is gone.

So the decisive issue concerning divorce and remarriage at Joshua Generation Church, is what we can agree on, from the Scripture, about is right and wrong. Is there a Biblically legitimate divorce and remarriage which is not sin and so does not need to be confessed or avoided? If so what are the circumstances that define it?

Diversity of viewpoints in Joshua Generation Church and the wider church

Among the membership of JoshGen complete unanimity does not exist concerning the question of what divorces and what remarriages are Biblically permissible. This lack of unanimity is a reflection of the church worldwide.

However, startling and convicting is the following fact: "In the first five centuries (among Christians) all Greek writers and all Latin writers, except one, agree that remarriage following divorce for any reason is adulterous. The marriage bond was seen to unite both parties until the death of one of them." This is all the more startling in view of the fact that both the Jewish and Roman culture of the time allowed divorce with remarriage. The followers of Jesus stood over against this culture with their radical prohibition of remarriage. In spite of this extraordinarily high, counter-cultural standard, the church grew like wildfire for 400 years.

Many, but not all of those in leadership at JoshGen share this early Christian consensus that remarriage after divorce is wrong while the spouses are still living.

If we are to be a Biblical church - a church with mutual accountability and proper discipline - the question that must be faced is, what convictions concerning divorce and remarriage can we agree to as a church to make the foundation of our accountability and discipline? When the Church Covenant binds every member to be "faithful in our engagements" and to "sustain (the church's) worship, ordinances and discipline," what will we understand as faithfulness in the engagement of marriage vows?

Elders represent the church in matters of discipline

No one in leadership can be asked to act against his conscience (Rom. 14). Therefore each pastor will teach and counsel and perform marriages according to his personal conviction within the parameters of this statement. Despite this, when it comes to church membership and church discipline, we must find a level of expectation for marital relations that we can agree on that no member of JoshGen may violate, while remaining a member in good standing.

In other words, what we need is a statement of the kind of divorce and remarriage which the church, as a concerned and responsible body, will regard as clearly outside the Biblical limits of what is acceptable.

Let it be made clear again what was said above: there is NO past divorce or remarriage that in itself brings church discipline. None of the divorced and remarried members of JoshGen will automatically come under discipline because their divorce or remarriage falls in a category which this statement declares to be unbiblical. An expression of genuine repentance for the sin involved is all that is needed to settle the matter and make a person a member in good standing.

Our prayer is that all divorced and remarried brothers and sisters will gladly affirm this statement either because they believe their situation was Biblically legitimate, or because they now see that it was not, and are genuinely repentant as they look back.

Statement of guidelines for mutual accountability

Marriage is a human relationship ordained and instituted by God (Mal. 2:14-16). **His original design was one man and one woman united by covenant and sexual union for life** (Gen. 2:23-4). The relationship was a mystery in that it set forth symbolically in physical form the relationship between himself and His people (Eph. 5:21-33, Is. 54:5, Hos. 2:14-23, Ez. 16, Jer. 3:20). Therefore, God hates divorce for what it does to people and for what it does to the glory of His own covenant with the church.

Nevertheless, because of the deceit and power of sin, and because of the remnants of corruption in our own hearts, divorce still happens in the lives of some Christians. A mature and spiritual Christian may be forsaken by a disobedient or unbelieving spouse. Two professing believers may drift so far from the Lord that they no longer acknowledge in their hearts the authority of the Lord Jesus or the binding nature of their marriage covenant.

The church, as a spiritual family with radical commitment to Christ and earnest love for each other, should be ready to minister forgiveness, healing, reproof, discipline, correction and restoration wherever appropriate to its members. Specific guidelines are needed regarding divorce and remarriage, and these are given below.

The following guidelines should be read in the light and spirit of the preceding introductory pages. They should be read with the constant awareness that for many of us in the church they represent a minimum expectation for Christians and a weakening of Biblical standards. Even those of us who affirm them as entirely Biblical can imagine a married couple, previously held back from a divorce by the conviction that it would be contrary to Scripture, now going ahead with it because they can see an "out" in one of the statements below. **None of us wants these guidelines to encourage divorce or weaken the commitment God means for us to have to our marriage covenant.**

To encourage this kind of sensitive reading and careful application of the following statements, we will expand on the statements with words that bring out the differences among us. In this way we will avoid giving the impression that all the statements are put forth as ideal positions.

The guidelines

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse deserts the relationship or commits adultery (1 Cor. 7:15, Matt. 19:9, 1 Cor. 7:11). We simply acknowledge that there are times when the Bible permits separation.

Some of us want to stress that "divorce" in this statement should not imply a decisive and permanent end to the relationship while the spouses are alive and not remarried. We see that even after long periods of separation and alienation, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness (Hos. 2:14-23). Others of us want to stress that decisive divorce in certain cases is permitted, and that this leaves the deserted spouse free to remarry.

We all want to emphasize that the phrase "may be permitted" holds out the possibility that inquiry may reveal that the deserted partner engaged in a wrong behavior that drove the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. In addition, we all want to stress that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to separation or divorce even where adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew 18:21-22, "Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'" (See Luke 17:3-4)

4. The remarriage of the aggrieving, divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behavior did not biblically justify being divorced, may be free to remarry a believer (Matt. 19:9), if he or she has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes. Recognizing the honest and devout differences of conviction in the church, those of us with more limiting

standards for remarriage consent, at this point, not to make them normative for the whole body. Others of us, who regard this fourth statement as fully Biblical, respect those among us with a more limiting interpretation and do not require or expect them to act in any way against their consciences in attending, supporting or performing enactments of marriage they regard as contrary to Scripture.

All of us urge every member who contemplates remarriage to struggle in prayer and study with all the relevant Scriptures, with the sole aim of glorifying God through full obedience to His Word. Consider fairly the arguments against remarriage and those for it.

Moreover we want to affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service, both before marriage and after marriage. It is commended in 1 Corinthians 7:7,11,32-35, and elevated by the examples of Jesus and Paul and hundreds of great single saints.

5. After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation, the aggrieved partners referred to in guideline #3 may, together with the leadership of the church, come to regard their marriages as irreparably broken. In such cases remarriage may be a legitimate step, if taken with serious reckoning that this cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation that God may yet be willing to produce.

This guideline is, for some of us, the hardest concession to make. Remarriage after a divorced spouse marries again at least has in its favor that the possibility of reconciliation was decisively cut off before this. But while the spouse is still unmarried and alive, reconciliation is still Biblically possible. This makes it very hard for some of us to condone a step that decisively cuts asunder what God meant to be permanent and which could yet be permanent (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Others of us believe that 1 Corinthians 7:15 ("If the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so, in such a case the brother or sister is not bound.") gives freedom to a Christian to remarry if abandoned. We also believe that denying remarriage puts an unwarranted strain on the chastity of the divorced person who may not believe he or she has the gift of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7). But we all agree that serious efforts should be made at reconciliation, including the intervention of the church if necessary, before any aggrieved spouse is resigned to singleness, or is free to remarry.

6. The aggrieving partners referred to in #3 (who were guilty of abandonment or adultery) should repent and be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Cor. 7:11, 1 John 1:9). If it is too late because their spouses have remarried, then they should remain single because they left their first marriage without Biblical warrant (Matt. 19:9, Luke 16:18, 1 Cor. 7:11).
7. The amount of time that has passed, and the change in standing from unbeliever to believer, does not alter the application of the guidelines for divorce and remarriage (See Matt. 19:4-6 which highlights the fact that enduring marriages are part of God's plan for all His human creation, not just his redeemed people.)



Statement of faith

1. I am a Christian saved from the eternal wrath of God by faith in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, through his death and resurrection, by which I am assured of eternal life (John 3:16-18, Rom. 3:23-26).
2. I believe Jesus Christ is exactly who he claimed to be (Isa. 53:6, Matt. 26:64, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:70, John 4:25-26, 6:29, 8:58, 11:25-27, 14:6-7, 15:5).
3. I have repented of my sins and have been made a new creation in Christ (1 John 1:9, 2 Cor. 5:17).
4. In obedience to Scripture, I agree that baptism in water is a necessary step of obedience to Christ. Through baptism, I personally identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and publicly demonstrate my commitment as a disciple of Jesus (Col. 2:12, 1 Pet. 3:21).

Statement of doctrine

1. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in their original writings.
2. We regard the Scriptures of the New Testament as being final as to authority and infallible as to truth, regarding all facets of church life and discipline.
3. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
5. We believe that God created man in His own image. Thereafter, sin entered the first man through disobedience on man's part, resulting in spiritual death for all mankind.
6. We believe that Jesus Christ had to die for the sins of mankind so that man could be reconciled back to God.
7. We believe in the bodily death, burial and resurrection of Christ.
8. We believe in His ascension into heaven and His future return to earth.
9. We believe in the initial reception of the Holy Spirit at conversion (Rom. 8:9), His internal sealing work thereafter (Eph. 1:13), followed by continual infillings of His presence from within us (Eph. 5:18).
10. We believe in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust.
11. We believe in the regular practice of the breaking of bread and the taking of wine / grape juice to remind us of the new covenant established through Christ's death on our behalf.
12. We believe in the baptism of believers by immersion in water.
13. We believe in the five-fold ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11-12.
14. We believe in using these gifts in the life of the church and to affect the communities we minister in.
15. We believe in the equality of all persons irrespective of their race, culture or social background.
16. We believe that marriage is a creational ordinance ordained by God between a man and a woman and that any relationship of a sexual nature outside of marriage, or between people of the same sex is contrary to Scripture and therefore unacceptable to God and His Church.

Our constitution

It is necessary for us to have a constitution in order for us to fulfill our legal obligations. This document spells out our beliefs (including our doctrinal statement as per this manual) as well as our objectives, legal status, procedures for ordaining leader, handling finances, etc. We encourage you to read this as by becoming a member you are agreeing to the contents of that document.

What now?

If you are feeling that God is adding you to Joshua Generation, then we would love to chat to you. Please ensure that you complete a membership form and hand it to one of your elders. We will then contact you and should there be any issues that need resolving or any questions you have, we can talk through them, before we officially welcome you into membership.

We urge you once you, have decided to join, to jump in with both feet and give it all you have. It is a biblical principle that the more you give the more you receive, so give everything. We look forward to many fun times as we grow and serve Jesus together.

If you aren't sure about joining us yet, don't worry. You can always speak to one of your leaders if there is anything you aren't sure about. Likewise, you are more than welcome to continue visiting with us until such time as you decide to join us (or to join elsewhere).

If you believe that this is not the church God wants you to be a part of, then that is also fine. We don't want anybody to join us if they feel God is calling them elsewhere. We wish you all of God's blessings as you continue to walk with Him knowing that we are all part of the one (universal) body of Christ. We do urge you though, to commit yourself to a local church that is healthy and that will disciple you into fullness of maturity in Jesus Christ.

We want to thank you for taking the time to join these 'Starting Point' teachings and for reading this manual. We hope that you have all benefitted in some way, whether you have been walking with Jesus for days, weeks, months or years.

*"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
(Heb. 13:20-21)*

