



Session 7

A Purpose Driven Church: Our FELLOWSHIP

In the previous session we saw that God's purpose shapes our *mission*; we now explore the fact that God's purpose also shapes our *fellowship* as God's people.

For the church to fulfil God's greater purpose (see session 5), it must *model for the world what living in relationship with God is all about*. The church must be a united, harmonious, supportive, thriving community. Therefore, part of our vision is to be an attractive community; one that the world sees and wants to be a part of.

It is a massive responsibility we carry. We are God's address here on earth and when people come visiting, we want them to meet the genuine article, God in his irresistible fullness – nothing less than that.

So, a purpose driven church will work hard to have a corporate life which reflects all that God wants for us relationally. To make it easy to understand, God has given us a number of pictures to illustrate how we should live as his community. Here are three of them:

Picture 1: A Family

Our *The Church I See* vision statement says:

'THE CHURCH I SEE is a deeply committed, loving, caring, **family** amongst whom the lonely and the broken find new hope and belonging.'

Family imagery is used extensively in the Bible to illustrate our relationship with God, our heavenly father, and our relationship with each other – we are members of the same household...

'God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:15).

(See also: Romans 8:14-17, 1 Corinthians 1:3, Matthew 6:32)

Our responsibility is therefore to be a functioning family, a place with people of all ages, life stages, nationalities, races, educational backgrounds and upbringings. A place where there is protection, nurturing and personal encouragement to develop in a balanced and

healthy way. A place where I have brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and a multitude of aunts and uncles! A place where I can be corrected too, because we all need tough love sometimes.

Picture 2: A Building

Closely related to this is a second picture, that of a **building**. The following verse combines these two pictures:

*'You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and **members of God's household**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the **whole building** is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him **you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives** by his Spirit' (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

So when I said earlier that are God's address, I was speaking literally! God lives in you and me! So when we meet together – something we should do regularly (Hebrews 10:25) – we can rightly say that 'God is in the building'! We are where people come to find God, have him explained and have their questions answered.

Picture 3: A Body

A third picture used to describe the church is 'The **Body** of Christ.' This is a powerful metaphor. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:

***12** The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ... **27** Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Turn this passage up in your Bible and read verses 12-27 for the full picture.

These **three pictures** all speak of belonging, interconnectedness, unity, harmony and a willingness to work together. They describe what the church must be like if it is to serve God's purpose.

The pictures in practice

Practically outworking the truth contained in each of these pictures means things like:

1. Being Together

The Bible teaches that we should 'never give up the habit of meeting together' (*Hebrews 10:25*). To be a family, building and body, we must be together... and not just 'in spirit' but in real relationships, functioning groups and communities.

Jesus called the disciples first to be *'with him'* before sending them out to share the message of the Kingdom. He wanted fellowship, friendship and relationship before they did any ministry together (See: *Mark 3:14*).

Being together regularly cultivates a sense of belonging. It brings security, stability and strength to us as individuals within the church family.

In a large church you will never know everyone, so you must find your relationship network within the larger body. It will tend to be with those of like mind and interest and especially those you serve with. The great thing about a large church is that your relationships can keep growing and changing as you involve in various aspects of life and ministry over the years.

Here at *Abundant Life Church* we believe that a commitment to being together regularly, sharing life - including both the good times and the bad - and having fun together, carries a great promise: It will cause you to flourish in life:

'Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.'
(*Psalm 92:13*)

2. Learning Together

The first Christians were known for *'devoting themselves to the apostles teaching'* (*Acts 2:42*). This means they wanted to be together to learn (*see also Colossians 3:16*).

As a church family it is important that we listen to God's Word together. This is feeding spiritually together, corporately sensing God's Word to us as a church. We are then able to talk about it together and keep provoking one another to walk in it.

3. Growing together

The Bible says:

'Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him'
(*Colossians 2:6-7*).

Individual growth and change are hallmarks of the Christian life (*2 Corinthians 3:18*). However, as we spend time together and sit under God's Word together we inevitably also grow together. So, as a body of people we grow in our understanding of how to live out our Christianity to the full.

4. Standing together

At times, being together, learning together and growing together will also involve battling together! By this we mean standing together against an enemy.

Turn to *Ephesians 6:10-18* and note all the references to '*standing*'.

The enemy may be many things: People causing division in the church; sickness and ill health; poverty and shortage of resources; people or organisations that oppose the spread of the Gospel; etc. Spiritual forces lie behind many of these attacks and we must therefore deal with them as Spirit filled, God-empowered people.

But we need not fear. When we stand together we prevail together! I am just so glad that I do not have to stand alone on those occasions, I have my spiritual family with me! And we must never forget the words of Jesus who said:

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; but I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10).

So, for the church to fulfil God's greater purpose, it must ***model for the world what living in relationship with God is all about***. That is the essence of why we believe we must have a strong corporate life; great fellowship!