

Membership at
NEW LIFE



Prospective Member,

Thank you so much for taking the time to explore membership at New Life. The fact that you are willing to investigate what we believe, why we believe it, and how we seek to put our beliefs into practice both humbles and encourages me.

It humbles me because I am reminded that we have been given the wonderful and sobering responsibility of seeking to understand, explain, and apply God's Word to the lives of real people with souls that will live forever. What we believe and how we live it out is of eternal significance. As a pastor, that humbles me.

It encourages me because it tells me that you take Christian faith and practice seriously enough to look into church membership, and specifically, membership at New Life. Even if you aren't yet persuaded that church membership is necessary or biblical, I'm encouraged because you're a "Berean" – you're willing to look at Scripture and investigate this for yourself, rather than just living based off of assumptions (see Acts 17:10-12).

In 2008, members of Living Hope Baptist Church in College Station were asked to begin meeting together to launch a new church. After nine months of prayer and planning, New Life Baptist Church held its first public worship service on March 28, 2009. Since then, New Life has baptized hundreds of people, and sent out hundreds more to churches all across our nation and our world. We've sent out numerous missionaries to some of the most unreached places on earth to bring the Gospel and plant healthy churches that can make disciples for the long haul. God has done wonderful things in and through us, and we are amazed by his grace and provision.

I love God's Church, and I love New Life. I consider it one of the greatest privileges of my life to pastor this church alongside my fellow elders. I look forward to the opportunity to getting to know you better through the Membership Process, and to teaching you more about what we believe and why. I hope that you find this book, our classes, and our pastoral care to be a blessing.

For the Glory of God,

Allen Duty
Preaching Pastor

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Part 1:
WHAT IS THE
CHURCH?



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Is it a building? Is it a program? Is it a political action group? Is it a social club? Is it a service organization? Is it simply where we go to hear sermons and sing songs about God?

There is great confusion – and plenty of disagreement – about what the church actually is. But that shouldn't surprise us; after all, most people in the world do not consider themselves Christians, and sadly, many professing Christians have never seriously considered the subject.

But what about you? Can you answer the question, “What is the church?” Can you explain why the church is vitally important to the Christian life?

In the Bible, the Greek word *ekklesia* is most often translated “church.” The word means “congregation” or “assembly,” referring to a gathering of God's people. In the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), this word is most often used to describe a gathering of God's people. But that brings up a very important question – perhaps the most important question – *who are God's people?*

WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE?

When Paul wrote to Titus, one of his disciples and a pastor in a local church, he said that Jesus, “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14) What we learn from Titus 2 is that God's plan – his unwavering commitment throughout human history - is to purify a people for his own possession.

If we then look at Ephesians 1:3-6, we find this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Let that sink in for a moment. Before the foundation of the world - long before we were born, long before he created our first parents, Adam and Eve – God chose us, his people, in him. He predestined us, or decided beforehand, that he would adopt us.

What we find recorded in the Bible, then, is the story of how God purified the people he chose for his own possession before the foundation of the world. This story, which plays out over thousands of years, is divided into four great themes – creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

creation

The story begins in the Garden of Eden, with God creating the first man and woman in his image and likeness. They were created “upright” (Eccl. 7:29), holy and without sin, and were told they could eat from any tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed, and walked in close, personal communion with God. God had created “a people for his own possession” (Titus 2:14). But sadly, the people he created rebelled against him.

fall

Satan, disguised as a serpent, questioned God’s Word and his character, and convinced our first parents that God was holding out on them. Though they were already “like God” in that they were created in his image and likeness, Satan told them that God only commanded them not to eat of the tree so they wouldn’t be like him. Adam and Eve chose to listen to Satan’s word instead of God’s Word, and they disobeyed God’s command. Because of their rebellious choice, they died spiritually, which God promised would also lead to the breakdown of their physical bodies and to physical death. Every part of them – their wills, desires, minds, consciences, and bodies – were affected by this spiritual death. That spiritual death is passed down to every one of their descendants, including you and me. Every human being, therefore, is born dead in sin, unable and unwilling to obey God. We are sinners because we sin; but at a much deeper level, we sin because we are sinners. This sad reality is on vivid display through the pages of Old and New Testament, which corresponds perfectly to our own experience as human beings – “there is none who does good, not even one” (Psalm 14:3).

redemption

Thankfully, God promised that one day, “the seed of the woman” would crush Satan’s head, defeating sin and death forever. From that point forward, people began to look for this promised Savior, and God continued to reveal more about who this Savior would be. He promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation, and bless all nations through him. He promised David that he would establish his throne forever, and that one of his descendants would sit on it. Through the prophets, God foretold that the Savior would be none other than God himself, born of a virgin in Bethlehem, and that he would reign forever in perfect righteousness. That Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, was indeed born of a virgin in Bethlehem, meaning that he was both fully God and fully man – the only One capable of serving as a Mediator between sinful man and a holy God. According to his own words, Jesus came, “not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17). He was tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet was completely without sin (Hebrews 4:15). So then, at the right time, Jesus gave himself up, the righteous for the unrighteous, and died on a cross in our place and for our sins (Romans 5:16, 1 Peter 3:18). His resurrection on the third day proved that he had defeated sin (since the wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23) and that his sacrifice was accepted by God. Now all who repent (agree with God about their sin and turn from it), and believe in Jesus (place their trust in the person and work of Jesus alone for forgiveness and justification before God) will be saved (John 3:16, Romans 10:13).

Although Jesus' death and resurrection secured our right standing before God, the story is not over yet. Jesus promised that he would return one day – a day that no knows and no one can predict – to judge all people, both the living and the dead, in holy, perfect righteousness. Then, as we read in Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Every person who has repented of sin and has believed the Gospel will spend eternity in Heaven worshipping God and enjoying His blessings (Matthew 25:34–40; Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:3–5). Every person who has not repented of sin and believed the Gospel will spend eternity in Hell enduring God's righteous wrath. (Matthew 25:41–46, Ephesians 5:6, Revelation 21:8).

SO...WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE?

God's people are those whom God chose before the foundation of the world, redeemed through the work of his Son, and who have responded with faith to God and his Word all throughout history.

We can rightly say, therefore, that people like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, the apostles, and every believer in Jesus Christ from the first century to today, are all part of God's people, which we can also call, "the universal church." We aren't members of the universal church because our parents were or are Christians. We aren't members of the universal church because we were baptized, or because we went through a confirmation class at some point. We aren't members of the universal church because we married a Christian.

We are members of the universal church because God chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be adopted into his family, and we join God's family through repentance and faith in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Almost every time the word “church” appears in the New Testament, it is referring to a local gathering of believers – not to the universal church. Consider a few examples:

- As Jesus explains the process for disciplining an unrepentant Christian in Matthew 18, he says that the final step before excommunication is to, “tell it to the church.” It is clear from the context that Jesus does not mean the universal church (that would be impossible), but the brothers and sisters making up the local church who are dealing with the person in unrepentant sin.
- In the Book of Acts, the apostles don’t travel to an area, preach the Gospel, and leave – they organize believers into local churches with recognized leaders. Consider what Luke records in Acts 14:21-23:

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- With few exceptions, the New Testament letters were written to specific local churches – to the church in Rome (Romans 1:7), to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 2:1), to the church in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1), to the church in Philippi (Philippians 1:1), to the church in Colossae (Colossians 1:2), and to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2).

A local church is a visible, tangible expression of the universal church. Without local expressions of the universal church, we cannot obey many of the commands we find in the New Testament to love, serve, lead, obey, mourn with, and rejoice with other believers in any kind of meaningful way.

To put it directly, a Christian living detached from meaningful connection to a local church is a concept that is foreign to Scripture, and would have been foreign to all Christians until very recently. We’ll explore that concept more fully in the following sections.

HISTORIC MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH

The “Church” of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormon cult) claims to be a church. Jehovah’s Witnesses (who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ) think they’re a part of a church. Westboro Baptist Church, whose website is devoted almost entirely to preaching against homosexual behavior, claims to be both Baptist and a church. All three of these “churches” would say, without apology, that their “church” is the only true church. This begs the question: **What is a true church?**

one

FAITHFUL PREACHING OF THE WORD.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:14-17

Without the preaching of the Word, the Gospel will not be heard, and therefore it cannot be believed. Therefore, you can’t have a true church without the faithful preaching of the Word, because the preaching of the Word is the means God uses to call and sustain his chosen people.

two

FAITHFUL ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORDINANCES, WHICH ARE BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER.

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

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Jesus gave the church two ordinances, or commands: baptism and communion, or what we call ‘The Lord’s Supper.’ Baptism symbolizes what happens to us when we place our faith in Jesus: we die with Christ, we are buried with Christ, and we are raised to walk in new life with Christ. The Lord’s Supper symbolizes our ongoing fellowship with God and other believers through our faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection. The bread represents his body broken for us; the wine represents his blood poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins.

FAITHFUL ADMINISTRATION OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

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. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my in in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. (Matthew 18:15-20)

Jesus instituted church discipline (Matthew 18) for the purpose of preserving the church's witness to the lost world by preserving its holiness. Churches that allow professing believers to live in unrepentant sin without warning, correction, rebuke, and finally excommunication are not acting in love and are rendering impotent their gospel witness.

Without these three marks, any entity that claims to be a church is making a false statement. However, having these three marks alone doesn't make a make a church healthy. A healthy church will be marked by many other characteristics, especially those Mark Dever outlines in his classic work, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*:

- Expository Preaching
- Biblical Theology
- Biblical Understanding of the Gospel
- Biblical Understanding of Conversion
- Biblical Understanding of Evangelism
- Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
- Biblical Church Discipline
- A Concern for Discipleship and Growth
- Biblical Church Leadership

New Life desires not only to be a true church, but a healthy one. So from the very beginning, we have preached and taught expositionally (where the point of any sermon or teaching is based on the point of the passage being preached or taught), seeking to proclaim a theology that clearly connects the Bible's teaching to every area of life – starting with our life together as a church body.

IS LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP A BIBLICAL IDEA, OR A MODERN INVENTION?

“Membership in a local church is not an antiquated, outdated, unnecessary add-on to true membership in the universal body of Christ; membership in a local church is intended as a testimony to our membership in the universal church. Church membership does not save, but it is a reflection of salvation. And if there is no reflection of our salvation, how can we be sure that we are truly saved? As John explains, ‘If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen’ (1 John 4:20).” Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 152

1. WE ARE COMMANDED TO MEET TOGETHER REGULARLY FOR OUR OWN GOOD AND FOR THE GOOD OF OTHER CHRISTIANS.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

2. WE ARE COMMANDED TO USE OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO BLESS OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BODY.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

3. WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE OTHER CHRISTIANS WITH ACTIONS, NOT MERELY WITH WORDS.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

4. WE ARE COMMANDED TO JOYFULLY SUBMIT TO SPIRITUAL LEADERS WHO KEEP WATCH OVER OUR SOULS.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

5. WE ARE COMMANDED TO EXERCISE CHURCH DISCIPLINE TO PRESERVE THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH.

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

Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for

NOTES

OUR LOCAL CHURCH

NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

OUR MISSION

New Life Baptist Church exists to preserve and proclaim
the Gospel of Jesus Christ
to make mature disciples of all nations
for the glory of God.

PRESERVE THE GOSPEL

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

MATURE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

OUR THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES

I. REFORMED

a) Sola Scriptura (“Scripture Alone”)

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

b) Sola Gratia (“Grace Alone”)

Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

c) Sola Fide (“Faith Alone”)

Romans 4:1-8: “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

d) Solo Christo (“Christ Alone”)

2 Timothy 2:5-6: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

e) Soli Deo Gloria (“For the Glory of God alone”)

Romans 11:36: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

OUR THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES (CONT.)

2. BAPTISTIC

a) Baptism by Immersion after Conversion

Romans 6:4: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

1) *Baptism is a command of Jesus.*

At the most basic level, we believe that baptism is not optional because Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that He commanded (Matt. 28:18–20). Additionally, Jesus Himself was baptized (Lk. 3:21–22).

2) *The mode of baptism is important because baptism is a symbol.*

The Greek word *baptizo* literally means “to immerse” or “to submerge;” it does not mean “to sprinkle” or “to pour.” Baptism symbolizes us being buried with Christ and then raised to walk in new life (Rom. 6:1–4; Col. 2:11–14). Immersion in water captures that symbolism; sprinkling or pouring does not.

3) *The timing of baptism is important because it is a symbol.*

In Scripture, the only people who are baptized are those who have responded to the preaching of the Gospel with repentance and faith (Acts 2:38–41, 8:12–13, 9:18, 10:44–48, 16, 19:1–5). You will not find any commands to baptize the children of believers, as this practice would be opposed to the message that we are saved through personal faith in Jesus – not by the decision of someone else on our behalf.

Because we are a baptistic church, we not only practice baptism by immersion in water after conversion, but we require every church member to be baptized in that manner. If you have not been baptized by immersion in water after conversion, we will ask you to be baptized in that manner to join our church.

b) Regenerate Church Membership

Acts 2:41: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

c) Elder-led, Congregationally-Governed Polity

Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

NOTES

OUR THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES (CONT.)

3. COMPLEMENTARIAN

We believe the Scriptures clearly teach that both men and women have equal worth and dignity before God, as both are created in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:27).

However, we also believe the Scriptures teach that men and women have been given distinct roles in the church and in the home, just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are equally God but have distinct roles within the Trinity.

a) In the Church

1 Timothy 2:12-14: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."

b) In the Home

Ephesians 5:22-24: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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."

OUR REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

one

WE REQUIRE OUR MEMBERS TO UPHOLD OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH, CHURCH COVENANT, AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH.

two

WE REQUIRE OUR MEMBERS TO REGULARLY ATTEND CORPORATE WORSHIP ON SUNDAY MORNINGS.

three

WE REQUIRE OUR MEMBERS TO GENEROUSLY AND REGULARLY GIVE OF THEIR TIME, TALENTS, AND TREASURES.

four

WE EXPECT OUR MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN OTHER DISCIPLESHIP OPPORTUNITIES WE PROVIDE – PARTICULARLY OUR LIFE GROUPS.

five

WE EXPECT OUR MEMBERS TO LIVE OUT OUR MISSION STATEMENT, PRAYING AND WORKING TO MAKE MATURE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

NOTES

NEW LIFE STATEMENT OF FAITH

THE SCRIPTURES

We believe Scripture, or the Bible, is the Word of God written to man. The Bible consists of the 66 books of Genesis to Revelation. God inspired human authors who, using their own unique gifts, passions, and communication style, wrote His Word (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20–21). The Scriptures are inerrant in everything they address, including matters of faith, science, and history (Proverbs 30:5). The Scriptures are infallible and achieve the ends for which God intended them (Isaiah 55:11). The Scriptures are clear, “making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). The Scriptures are sufficient for faith and practice, and “are useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

GOD

We believe God is the eternal, uncreated Creator and Sustainer of all things (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16–17). He is the First and the Last, and beside him there is no god (Isaiah 44:6). This one God exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Matthew 3:16–17) and each member of the Trinity is fully God. God is holy (Isaiah 6:3), unchanging (Malachi 3:6), omniscient (Isaiah 46:10), omnipresent (Psalm 139:7–8), omnipotent (Job 42:2; Luke 1:37), just (Deuteronomy 32:4), gracious (Exodus 33:19), and loving (1 John 4:8).

A. GOD THE FATHER

We believe God the Father is the infinite personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love. We believe that He infallibly foreknows all that comes to pass, that He concerns himself mercifully with the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all that come to him through Jesus Christ (Matthew 23:9; Luke 10:21–22; John 3:16; John 6:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Timothy 1:1–2; 1 Timothy 2:5–6; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6).

B. GOD THE SON

We believe Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man,

that He came in the flesh and was born of a virgin, and lived a sinless, miraculous life (John 8:46, 18:38b, 19:4, 21:25). He was in very nature God, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:4–5). He taught that He alone was the means by which man would be reconciled to God. He believed and proved that He was equal to God, eliciting the anger of His enemies according to the predestined purpose of God. (John 5:18, 10:30–33, 14:6; Acts 4:28) He was tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). According to the Father’s perfect plan laid out in eternity past, He gave himself up freely as a ransom for our sins (Mark 10:45; John 10:18; Acts 4:28; Ephesians 1:3–6; Philippians 2:6–11; Revelation 13:8). He was crucified by sinful men (Acts 2:36), and rose from the dead three days later (1 Corinthians 15:4). Today, He sits at the right hand of the Father until His second coming, for which we expectantly wait (Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10; Revelation 1:7).

C. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe the Holy Spirit is fully God (Genesis 1:2; Acts 5:3–5). He is given as our Helper (John 14:26) and is the Deposit who guarantees the inheritance of every believer (Ephesians 1:13–14). He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7–11). He is the leading agent in the planting and building up of the church, since His job is to testify of Jesus and to the truthfulness of the Gospel (Acts 1:8, John 15:26). The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each believer for the edification of the church and the proclamation of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:22). While every believer is told to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit alone decides which spiritual gifts each believer receives (1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11).

MAN

We believe God created man on the 6th day in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27). He created man morally perfect with a free will to choose good or evil

(Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 2:16–17). Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were able to choose to obey God and live under blessing or to disobey God and die under a curse. They chose to disobey God, and they died spiritually. Every part of man was affected by this original sin. All the areas of man's self – his will, desires, mind, body, and conscience – were affected by the fall (Jeremiah 17:9). God cursed man with immediate spiritual death (separation from God) and eventual physical death (Genesis 3:19). Because of their choice, their posterity is given a sinful nature at conception and is held equally responsible for Adam and Eve's disobedience (Psalms 51:5). Every person also chooses of his own free will to disobey God as revealed in Scripture (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10); therefore, every person is a sinner by nature and by choice (Psalm 14:1–3). As a result, every person is an enemy of God (Job 15:14; 25:4), under His righteous wrath, and without excuse (Romans 1:18–32). Man is dead in trespasses and sins, and apart from the grace of God cannot and will not seek after God (Jeremiah 13:23; John 6:44; Romans 3:10–18, 8:5–8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1–3; Colossians 2:13).

THE GOSPEL

We believe that because every person has sinned against God by refusing to honor him as God and obey His Law, God is under no obligation to save anyone from His wrath. In fact, all men deserve eternal punishment (Romans 1:16–32). The Gospel is the Good News that God has chosen to save some undeserving sinners from His righteous wrath for His own glory (Ephesians 2:5–7; Titus 3:4–7). He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to do what man could not do and would not do, viz. live a sinless life and submit perfectly to God. Jesus gave himself up in our place and on our behalf (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). He then rose from the dead on the third day, victorious over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 17).

SALVATION

We believe salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His death and resurrection obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification (John 3:16, 6:44; Acts 2:37–38, 4:12, 11:18, 17:30; Romans 4:1–5; 2 Corinthians 7:10–11; 2 Timothy 2:25).

A. REGENERATION

We believe regeneration is a change of heart given by the Holy Spirit who gives life to those dead in trespasses and sins. In regeneration the Holy Spirit grants the ability to understand the Word of God, to exercise saving faith in the Word of God, and to love and practice holiness (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1–6; Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:1).

B. CONVERSION

We believe repentance and faith are required by God for salvation. While two distinct principles, they are not two separate acts. A regenerate person turns from sin (repentance) and turns to Christ (faith) as a result of his new nature given at regeneration (John 6:44; Acts 2:37–38, 11:18, 17:30; Romans 4:1–5; 2 Corinthians 7:10–11; 2 Timothy 2:25). God has promised to save any who repent of their sins and trust in the finished work of Christ alone for forgiveness and reconciliation with God (John 3:16, 6:37; Acts 4:12).

C. JUSTIFICATION

We believe God chooses to justify, or declare both not guilty and righteous, every person who repents of sin and believes the Gospel. Though no person is righteous, God counts a believer's faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as righteousness (Romans 4:1–5). Through faith, the righteousness of Christ is credited to the

believer, and the believer's guilt through sin is credited to Christ. No believer is justified by works of the Law, but each believer displays evidence of justification by doing good works (Galatians 2:15–16; James 2:20–24). Salvation is the work of God from start to finish, not a work of man, so that no man may boast (Romans 9:11; Ephesians 2:8–9) or despair (John 10:28–30). Those God has predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified He also glorified (Romans 8:30).

D. SANCTIFICATION

We believe sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming like Christ. Those who have been justified are also sanctified by God's Word and Spirit dwelling in them. God chose us to obey him and be holy (Titus 2:11–14; 1 Peter 1:2). In becoming like him, we know him more intimately and display His glory. The process of sanctification will culminate in the resurrection of our physical bodies when we will be without sin (John 17:19; Romans 8:29–30; 1 Peter 1:23; Revelation 21:1–8, 22–27).

E. GLORIFICATION

We believe glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the believer (Romans 8:29–39, Revelation 21:1–22:5).

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

We believe every person who repents of sin and believes the Gospel is a member of the Universal Church, which consists of all believers who have lived, are living, and will ever live (Colossians 1:24). The Universal Church is the only institution that will not and cannot be defeated (Matthew 16:18). Christ died for His Bride, the Church, and will sanctify the Church to present her to himself without spot or blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).

THE LOCAL CHURCH

A. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

We believe the local church is a visible expression of the Universal Church, and we believe God has called every believer to join a local church. A local church is made up of a group of living believers who have covenanted together to preach the Gospel, to care for one another

and others, and to live distinct lives under the authority of God's Word (Acts 2:42–47, 11:26, 12:5, 14:23). God has graciously given each believer spiritual gifts, which include but are not limited to those listed in Romans 12:4–8, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 and 27–28, Ephesians 4:11–12, and 1 Peter 4:9–11. These gifts are to be used to honor God, to build up the church, and to evangelize the lost; they should never be used to draw attention to one's self (1 Corinthians 13:1–3, 14:12). As Christ's ambassadors, believers have the joy and privilege of caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed.

B. LEADERSHIP

We believe God has graciously given elders and deacons to serve the church. The elders are set aside by God to lead the church, to equip the saints, to preach the Word, and to pray (Ephesians 4:11–12; 1 Timothy 3:1–7, 5:17–18). Their leading, equipping, preaching, and praying are to be done humbly in service to God and to His church. Leaders are to shepherd the flock willingly, not under compulsion or for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in their charge, but serving as examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2–3). In response, believers are exhorted to submit and to obey their leadership (Hebrews 13:17). Deacons are set aside by God to serve the church and to free the elders to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the word. (Acts 6:1–7; 1 Timothy 3:8–13).

ROLES OF MEN & WOMEN

We believe both men and women were created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore have equal worth and dignity. We also believe that men and women have distinct roles in the home and in the church, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have distinct roles in the Trinity.

In the home, husbands are called to love their wives as themselves, and wives are called to submit to and respect their own husbands.

In the church, every believer is called to use his or her spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. Women are permitted to teach; however, they are not permitted to

teach or exercise authority over men.

By submitting to God's wisdom in these areas, men and women are able to flourish in both the home and the church.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

A. MARRIAGE

We believe marriage was ordained by God at creation to be between one man and one woman until they are parted by death. Any other form of "marriage" is contrary to the Scriptures. Marriage is a picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church, and thus serves as a living symbol of the Gospel. (Gen. 1:26-28, 2:18-25; Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4-6; Lev. 18:22; 20:13a; Rom. 1:26-27; Eph. 5:22-33)

B. DIVORCE

Though never required, we believe that divorce is permissible in cases of adultery or abandonment. God allows divorce because of the hardness of the human heart (Mark 10:11-12; Matt. 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-16).

EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

We believe that the church and individual believers are God's means for proclaiming the Gospel by which He draws people to Himself, regenerates souls, and grants repentance and faith unto sanctifying perseverance. The proclamation of the biblical Gospel to all peoples is the joyful duty of every Christian in obedience to the commission of Jesus to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach them to obey His commands (Romans 10:14-15; Matthew 28:18-20). The local church and every individual believer have a responsibility to obey and to teach the commands of Christ to those under their care.

THE ORDINANCES

We believe God has given two ordinances to His church: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

A. BAPTISM

We believe Jesus commanded every believer to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism by immersion serves as a symbol of

being buried with Christ and being raised to walk in new life and as such is to be performed only on professing believers (Romans 6:4-6). Baptism is a matter of obedience, not salvation. It does not confer favor from God beyond the blessings that come from obedience to God. (Luke 23:43; 1 Corinthians 1:13-17).

B. THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ on the night He was betrayed (1 Corinthians 11:23). The Lord's Supper consists of bread and grape juice or wine, which represent His body that was broken for believers and His blood that was shed for believers (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The Lord's Supper serves as a reminder to both believers and non-believers that Jesus has died, is risen, and is coming again (1 Corinthians 11:26). We will share communion with any believer of like faith and practice, but we will not allow unbelievers or those living in unrepentant sin or those under church discipline to participate, since these people would be eating and drinking judgment upon themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

ETERNITY

We believe the full consummation of the Kingdom of God awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age. We believe that every person will spend eternity in a literal place of blessing called Heaven or a literal place of cursing called Hell (Matthew 25:31-33). Every person who has repented of sin and has believed the Gospel will spend eternity in Heaven worshiping God and enjoying His blessings (Matthew 25:34-40; Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:3-5). Every person who has not repented of sin and believed the Gospel will spend eternity in Hell enduring God's righteous wrath. (Matthew 25:41-46, Ephesians 5:6, Revelation 21:8). As such, we desire that every person examine themselves and test themselves to see whether they are in the faith revealed in the Scriptures, and we encourage every person to repent of sin and to believe the Gospel (Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

NEW LIFE CHURCH COVENANT

We exist to preserve and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to make mature disciples of all nations for the glory of God.

We believe God, in His infinite wisdom and sovereign grace, has called and joined together every member of New Life Baptist Church as a visible expression of His Church on the earth. As a result, we agree to work and to pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 1:22, 4:3, John 17:21–23, 1 Peter 3:8, Romans 14:19, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Colossians 3:13–15, Hebrews 12:14)

We will uphold the Statement of Faith, ordinances, and discipline of the church. We will submit to the recognized leadership. We will admonish those who are disobedient to the Word, encourage the timid, help the weak, exercise patience toward all, and work for reconciliation. We will ask God for grace to speak, think, and act toward one another in love at all times. (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 1 Corinthians 13, Colossians 1:11)

We will support God's work in and through New Life by cheerfully, regularly, and humbly giving our time, talents, and treasures. We will serve with the strength God supplies, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

(2 Corinthians 9:7, Acts 2:44–45, 20:35, 1 Peter 4:11)

We will meet regularly to worship God, to edify one another, and to guard ourselves against the deceitfulness of sin. If we move from this place, we will unite with another local church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word (Hebrews 10:25, 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Ephesians 4:29–32)

We will fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn. (Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:15, John 13:34)

We will strive to make true disciples of Christ beginning in our homes and spheres of influence by sharing the message of reconciliation entrusted to us whenever and wherever God gives opportunity.

We will build multigenerational faithfulness by telling the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders that He has done. (2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 10:14–15, Psalm 78:4–7)

We will live in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all His power; that the watching world may observe our holy and distinct lives and glorify our Father in heaven. (Colossians 1:10–12, Matthew 5:16, Philippians 2:14–15, 2 Thessalonians 1:10–12, 1 Peter 2:12)

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Amen.

Part 2:
WHAT IS A
HEALTHY CHURCH
MEMBER?



EXPOSITIONAL LISTENER

Listening is the most important thing you will do as a member of New Life. As a Christian, you are called first and foremost to be a listener to God's Word. God's desire is not that you be a hearer only, but a doer of His Word, and that requires listening.

A. DEFINITIONS

1. **Expositional Preaching** — preaching where the point of a sermon is the point of the passage being preached.
2. **Expositional Listening** — “Expositional listening is listening for the meaning of a passage of Scripture and accepting that meaning as the main idea to be grasped for our personal and corporate lives as Christians” (20).

B. BENEFITS OF EXPOSITIONAL LISTENING

1. Cultivates a hunger for God's Word (Psalm 119:103–4).
2. Helps us to focus on God's will and to follow Him (John 10:27).
3. Protects the Gospel and our lives from corruption (2 Timothy 4:3–4).
4. Encourages faithful pastors.
5. Aids the gathered congregation.

C. HOW CAN YOU BECOME AN EXPOSITIONAL LISTENER?

1. Meditate on the sermon passage before it is preached.
2. Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after worship, during Life Group, or at other informal gatherings.
3. Act on the sermon throughout the week.
4. Cultivate humility.

Many well-meaning Christians have taken a hands-off approach to theology. They say things like, “I just want to talk about Jesus; I don’t want to spend time discussing theology.” Well, who is Jesus? As soon as you answer that question, you are engaged in a theological discussion.

Theology is simply the study of God; and more accurately, theology is the study of God as he has revealed himself in Scripture. Far from only being a concern of seminarians, young men with too much time on their hands, or divisive people, every believer should be pursuing a more biblical perspective on God, man, and the world we live in. Orthodoxy is the beginning of orthopraxy; that is, right belief is the beginning of right practice.

A. HOW ARE WE HELPED THROUGH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

Practicing biblical theology:

1. Helps us grow in our reverence for God.
2. Helps us to overcome our wrong ideas.
3. Helps inoculate the church against doctrinal controversies.
4. Is necessary to fulfilling the Great Commission.
5. Deepens our understanding of and facility with the Gospel.

B. HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP AS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN?

1. Study the Scriptures thematically as well as verse-by-verse.
2. Study the Old Testament with the New Testament and the work of Christ in view.
3. Know and agree to support New Life’s Statement of Faith.

GOSPEL SATURATED

The greatest need in the world and in the church is the Gospel. Without the message of Christ, no one can be saved or sanctified. The Gospel message distinguishes the church from the world. The world can teach psychology and self-help; only the church can preach salvation and restoration in Christ.

HOW CAN WE BECOME GOSPEL-SATURATED, HEALTHY CHURCH MEMBERS?

1. Know the Gospel.
2. Desire to hear the Gospel and preach the Gospel to yourself.
3. Order your life around the Gospel.
4. Share the Gospel with others. Some suggestions include:
 - a. Frequenting the same establishments at the same times with the goal of building relationships and sharing the Gospel.
 - b. Using vacations for short-term mission trips to share the Gospel.
 - c. Volunteering in community organizations with the hope of sharing the Gospel.
 - d. Engaging in hospitality with neighbors and members of the community to build relationships and share the Gospel.
 - e. Hosting a Bible study in your work place or inviting co-workers to another Bible study to share the Gospel.
5. Guard the Gospel.

GENUINELY CONVERTED

Chapter 4

New Life is committed to life-centered discipleship and evangelism and to biblical church government. Because of these two distinctives, it is very important that every member know, believe, and live out the Gospel. We want men and women who are actively seeking the conversion of the lost and the maturity of the saved, and who will make decisions for the church based on the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

How can we know if we are genuinely converted and help others to evaluate themselves, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 tells us to do? We need to ask a few questions derived from 1 John:

1. Do we walk in the light or the darkness (1:6–10, 3:5)?
2. Do we love God the Father (2:22–23)?
3. Do we love other Christians (4:7–12, 19–21)?
4. Do we have the testimony of the Spirit that we are children of God (3:24, 4:13–14)?
5. Are we persevering in the faith (5:4–5)?

“There is a great difference between presumption and full assurance. Presumption takes for granted, and with brazen face pronounces to be its own which it has no right to whatsoever. Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If with thy heart thou dost trust in Jesus, then thou art saved; but if thou merely sayest, ‘I trust in Jesus,’ it doth not save thee.”

Charles Spurgeon, from a sermon entitled The Prayer of Jabez 17:320

BIBLICAL EVANGELIST

Regarding evangelism, Anyabwile says, “The encouraging news is that when we have a good grasp of conversion, we realize that evangelism does not depend on eloquence, using the correct mood lighting, emotionally sappy stories or songs, or high-pressure sales pitches. We are free to simply and deeply trust God and the power of the gospel to produce the fruit he desires (Romans 1:17)” (58). We desire our evangelism to be faithful to the biblical message and model.

What does faithful evangelism look like? According to Michael P. Andrus:

1. It is content specific, presenting the truth about who God is, who men are, what sin is, who Jesus is, what Jesus has done about sin, and what we must do about what Jesus has done.
2. It must include the notion that Christ is the exclusive way of salvation, barring the idea that there are multiple paths leading to God.
3. It must call the hearer to repentance and faith in Christ.

Mark Dever offers some helpful advice concerning evangelism:

1. Tell people with honesty that if they repent and believe they will be saved — but it will be costly.
2. Tell people with urgency that if they repent and believe they will be saved — but they must decide now.
3. Tell people with joy that if they repent and believe they will be saved. However difficult it may be, it is all worth it!
4. Use the Bible.
5. Realize that the lives of the individual Christian and of the church as a whole are a central part of evangelism. Both should give credibility to the gospel we proclaim.
6. Remember to pray.

COMMITTED MEMBER

Chapter 6

Many Americans believe that being meaningfully connected to a local church is unnecessary for spiritual growth - perhaps even a hindrance to it. This view became increasingly common throughout the 20th century as parachurch ministries began and expanded throughout our country, particularly on college campuses.

But as we saw in Part One, being a committed member of a local church isn't an unnecessary add-on to our spiritual lives. On the contrary, scripture assumes church membership and presents it as a critical component of our spiritual growth.

Since we have already considered the what and why of the local church, we will now consider what a committed church member looks like.

The following are eight characteristics of a committed member:

1. Attends regularly (Hebrews 10:24–25).
2. Seeks peace (Romans 14:19).
3. Edifies others (1 Corinthians 12).
4. Warns and admonishes others (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
5. Pursues reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).
6. Bears with others (Romans 15:1, Galatians 6:2).
7. Prepares for the ordinances (1 Corinthians 11).
8. Supports the work of the ministry with time, talents, and treasures (Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8–9).

SEEKS DISCIPLINE

“Chaos,” notes Anyabwile, “is the enemy of growth” (73).

Discipline, then, is necessary for all growth, including spiritual growth. Though it is often thought of in the negative sense, far more discipline should happen proactively rather than reactively.

Second Timothy 3:16 says Scripture is profitable for teaching and for training in righteousness. This is what we would call “formative discipline.” Paul then says Scripture is profitable for reproof and correction, which is what we would call corrective discipline. Both are necessary, but if we are addressing issues we see in one another in love in an ongoing manner, by God’s grace there will be very little need for corrective discipline.

How do we joyfully seek discipline?

1. Receive the Word of God with meekness (James 1:21).
2. Learn to recognize chastisement as evidence of God’s love (Hebrews 12:5–6).
3. Humbly accept correction from others (Proverbs 1:7).
4. Take seriously your responsibility to discipline others (Proverbs 27:5–6).
5. Rejoice! (2 Corinthians 2:6).

“When a professing believer starts living like an unbeliever, those in the church who know about it are to confront him in love about his sin...If you aren’t part of the church, it has no authority over you and cannot do what Jesus said to do. Unless you join the church, your independence places you outside the way Jesus wants things to happen.”

Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, 50

GROWING DISCIPLE

Chapter 8

Many believers can point to a particular time when they believe they turned from their sins and turned to Christ in faith.

However, many believers also confess that they do not believe they have grown in some time. While occasional spiritual plateaus are common to every Christian, prolonged seasons without observable growth are concerning.

We desire that every member of New Life be a growing disciple; a believer who is pursuing growth in Christ through his means of grace.

Here are four Scriptural ways to ensure that you are a growing disciple:

1. Abide in Christ (John 15:5–8).
2. Use the ordinary means of grace; don't look for extraordinary events, feelings, or experiences.
3. Participate in the local church (Hebrews 3:10–13, 10:25, Ephesians 4:11–16).
4. Look to Jesus' coming (Titus 2:13–14).

“To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible. Levi must leave the receipt of custom and Peter his nets in order to follow Jesus...The call to follow implies that there is only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 62

HUMBLE FOLLOWER

Anyabwile writes on page 95, “How the congregation receives or rejects its leaders has a direct effect on the possibilities of faithful ministry and church health.” We desire to be a healthy church, and that includes healthy leaders and healthy followers. In 1 Peter 5:1–4, Peter exhorts the elders toward humble service, setting an example for those they lead. In response, a healthy church member should seek to be a humble follower as well.

There are three biblical attitudes members should cultivate toward church leadership:

1. Honor the elders, which includes caring for their needs and protecting their reputations (1 Timothy 5:17–19).
2. Show open-hearted love to the leaders (2 Corinthians 6:11–13).
3. Be teachable (Proverbs 15:5, 32).

Further, there are five biblical actions each member should practice with respect to church leadership:

1. Patiently participate in the selection of leaders (Acts 6:1–6, 1 Timothy 5:22).
2. Obey and submit to the leadership (Hebrews 13:17).
3. Follow the example of the leadership (1 Timothy 4:12).
4. Pray for the leadership (Colossians 4:2–4).
5. Support the outside ministry and interaction of the leadership (2 Corinthians 10:15–16).

PRAYER WARRIOR

Chapter 10

While nearly every Christian would agree that prayer is an important, perhaps essential, element of the Christian life, it is almost universally seen as a difficult task. Believers waver between neglect and frustration when it comes to prayer.

Most misunderstandings about prayer come from a misunderstanding of God's nature and our relationship to him. Anyabwile sets forth several wrong ideas concerning prayer, such as:

1. Unless we pray, God cannot act in the world.
2. God has already decided everything, so prayer is needless.
3. God is too busy to listen to our prayers.

HOW AND WHEN SHALL WE PRAY?

1. Constantly (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
2. In the Spirit (Romans 8:26–27).

FOR WHAT AND FOR WHOM SHALL WE PRAY?

1. Laborers and shepherds (Matthew 9:36–38, Ephesians 6:19–20).
2. All the saints (Galatians 5:16–25).
3. Those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–3).
4. Those who are persecuting believers and those they persecute (Luke 6:28, Hebrews 13:3).

“The reason we pray so little is that we do not plan to pray. Wise planning will ensure that we devote ourselves to prayer often, even if for very brief periods: it is better to pray often with brevity than rarely but at length. But the worst option is simply not to pray — and that will be the controlling pattern unless we plan to pray.”

D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, 20

ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL MEETING

Prior to your personal meeting, you will submit a Membership Questionnaire to the elders of the church. The elders will take time to read through each questionnaire and come to your personal meeting prepared to talk to you about your salvation history, your understanding of the Gospel, and any other important issues. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure, as best we can, that every prospective member has responded to the Gospel with repentance and faith in Christ, will agree to uphold our Statement of Faith and Church Covenant, and understands the distinctives of our church.

We hold personal meetings in order to be as diligent as possible in our efforts to shepherd the church. They are intended to serve you and to serve our church body well. As a result, they should not be approached with any reservation. Personal meetings are no mere formality, however, as though it was simply the next step toward guaranteed membership. There are three possible outcomes for every prospective member:

- 1) **Recommended for membership at New Life.** This is by far the most common result of personal meetings. We do not restrict membership any more than we believe we are required to according to the Scriptures or the particular convictions of our church body.
- 2) **Recommended for membership at New Life with the condition of baptism.**
- 3) **Not recommended for membership at this time.** We do not recommend membership for those who give evidence that they are not converted, who do not agree with our Statement of Faith or Church Covenant, or who do not agree with our unique distinctives.

Your interviewing pastor will make it clear whether you are recommended, recommended with the condition of baptism, or not recommended for membership at your personal meeting. Again, personal meetings are designed to serve you and the church body and should not be approached with reservation. We take church membership seriously because we believe God has called us to shepherd the church with as much care as possible.

CONSTITUTION



NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH, INC. (NEW LIFE)

Constitution

ARTICLE 1 – THE NAME

The name of this church shall be New Life Baptist Church, Inc. (New Life) located in or near College Station, Texas.

ARTICLE 2 – THE PURPOSE

New Life exists to preserve and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to make mature disciples of all nations for the glory of God.

ARTICLE 3 – CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. Qualifications for Membership

Membership at New Life shall be open to anyone who:

- 1) Has repented of his sins and received Christ by faith;
- 2) Has been baptized by immersion after conversion;
- 3) Believes New Life's Statement of Faith;
- 4) Promises to keep New Life's Church Covenant; and
- 5) Has been recommended for membership by the elders.

B. Receipt of New Members

After meeting the qualifications for membership in Article 3, Section A, new members shall be received in the following manner:

- 1) The elders will present a list of prospective members to the church at least one (1) week prior to a scheduled business meeting.
- 2) At the scheduled business meeting, the elders will notify the church body of any changes to their original recommendation. The elders will then present the list of prospective members to the church body. Prospective members shall be considered members of New Life after receiving an affirmative vote of 75% or more of the members present. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

C. Dual Membership

Non-permanent residents of our community may hold membership at New Life and one (1) other local church. Members with dual membership status shall have all the same privileges and responsibilities as members who do not hold dual membership.

D. Termination of Membership

Membership at New Life will be terminated for the following reasons:

- 1) Death.
- 2) Transfer of membership to another church. In this case, the member wishing to resign his or her membership (or his or her membership on behalf of the family unit) must resign in writing. The request must be submitted to the elders and state the reason(s) for the resignation. The church shall have the authority to refuse a member's voluntary resignation.
- 3) Persistent, unrepentant sin after corrective discipline has taken place (Article 5, Section C).

D. Expectations of Membership

- 1) Generally, the expectations of membership are outlined in the Church Covenant (Article 16).
- 2) Specifically, members are expected to:
 - a) Live in a manner worthy of the Gospel, proclaiming the Gospel as often as God gives opportunity.
 - b) Attend corporate worship services regularly and faithfully.
 - c) Use their spiritual gifts and talents to edify the church.
 - d) Give regularly and generously to support the financial needs of the church.
 - e) Join and regularly attend a Life Group.
 - f) Serve in areas of immediate need and other areas as led by the Holy Spirit.

ARTICLE 4 – CHURCH GOVERNMENT

New Life shall be led by a plurality of elders, served by deacons, and governed by the congregation. Under the authority of the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the elders will make most of the day-to-day decisions on behalf of New Life.

A. Issues Requiring Congregational Affirmation

The elders shall bring a recommendation to the church body and ask for their affirmation at a scheduled business meeting regarding the following issues:

- 1) The calling of new elders or deacons.
- 2) Corrective church discipline.
- 3) The approval of the annual budget.
- 4) Making any changes to the Statement of Faith, Church Covenant, or the Constitution.

B. Calling and Scheduling of Business Meetings

Business meetings shall be called and scheduled by a majority of the elders of the church. Any meeting not called and scheduled by a majority of the elders shall not be considered a business meeting and any decisions made at such meetings shall not be binding upon the church. When a business meeting is scheduled, notification shall be given at public worship services and electronically. While voting by proxy shall be prohibited, members who are unable to attend the scheduled business meeting shall be permitted to voice questions or concerns to the elders prior to the scheduled business meeting.

ARTICLE 5 – DISCIPLINE OF CHURCH MEMBERS

A. Corrective Church Discipline

Church discipline is necessary to protect a local church's witness to the watching world and to prevent church members from believing the lie that there are no spiritual consequences from unrepentant sin.

B. Reasons for Carrying Out Corrective Church Discipline

Corrective church discipline shall only be carried out on members of New Life for three reasons:

- 1) Persistent and unrepentant sin.
- 2) Failure to fulfill their duties as a member of New Life as outlined in the Church Covenant.
- 3) Teaching doctrine contrary to New Life's Statement of Faith.

C. Process for Carrying Out Corrective Church Discipline

The process of corrective church discipline will be carried out according to the commands and principles outlined in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Corinthians 2 as follows:

- 1) A member of the church who knows of a member's persistent, unrepentant sin or other conditions listed in Article 5(B) shall confront the erring member in love with the goal of repentance and restoration. If the brother or sister repents, the process joyfully ends at this stage.
- 2) Two or three members of the church who know of the member's persistent, unrepentant sin or other conditions listed in Article 5(B) and refusal to receive correction from the first person shall confront the erring member in love with the goal of repentance and restoration. If the brother or sister repents, the process joyfully ends at this stage.

- 3) If the erring member persists in unrepentant sin or other conditions listed in Article 5(B) after being confronted by one member and then by two or three members, one or more of the elders will attempt to meet with the erring member to discuss the matter. If the erring member refuses to meet with one or more of the elders or does meet with one or more of the elders but persists in unrepentant sin, the elders will publicly ask the church to pray for the erring member. If the brother or sister repents, the process joyfully ends at this stage.
- 4) If the erring member has not repented of his sin after the church has been notified to pray, the elders will recommend that the church exercise corrective church discipline and ban the erring member from taking the Lord's Supper and participating in any events with church members with the exception of public worship. The erring member will be removed from the membership roll and will be considered a former member at this point. Corrective church discipline shall be enacted with an affirmative vote of 75% of the church body present at the scheduled business meeting. Voting by proxy is prohibited.
- 5) Once the former member has been banned from the Lord's Supper, he or she will be permitted to attend public worship so that God will have the opportunity to bring repentance from the preaching of the Word. However, the former member is now to be treated as an unbeliever, and members should only have contact with the former member in order to discuss repentance and restoration.
- 6) Although confidentiality will be respected as much as possible, there will be times when it will be appropriate to reveal certain information regarding cases of church discipline to others. In particular, when the elders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people (including leaders in other churches or institutions) when a person refuses to repent of sin despite the actions taken in the previous five steps.

ARTICLE 6 – THE ROLE OF ELDERS

A. Responsibilities of Elders

According to Scripture, elders have three primary responsibilities:

- 1) **Preaching and Teaching the Word.** Unlike deacons, elders are to devote significant time and energy to the preaching and teaching of God's Word (Acts 6:2, 1 Timothy 5:17). While deacons may be very capable teachers (like Stephen and Philip, cf. Acts 6-8), teaching and preaching is primarily the elders' responsibility. Elders are to teach and preach publicly and privately as God gives opportunity (Acts 20:20). Elders should preach and teach to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and to build up the body of Christ as well as to see the lost converted (Ephesians 4:12-13, Romans 10:17).
- 2) **Prayer.** Elders are to set aside time for prayer, and are to employ deacons to ensure that this time is not compromised (Acts 6:2). Elders should pray for one another and for the church they oversee (Acts 20:28). Like all Christians, elders must pray for those in authority (Titus 3:1-2), for other churches and leaders (Ephesians 6:18-19), and for workers to be sent out into the harvest (Luke 10:2-3).
- 3) **Leadership.** While elders are not the final governing authority of the local church, they are called to lead the body through their teaching, example, and guidance. Elders are to shepherd the flock, exercising

oversight willingly and eagerly (1 Peter 5:2). They are not to domineer, but to serve as examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). The church is called to submit to the elders and to obey them, for the elders must give an account to God for their work (Hebrews 13:17).

B. Other Tasks

1) Performing wedding ceremonies. Elders are permitted to officiate weddings for members of New Life. Elders are not permitted to officiate weddings for members under church discipline (Article 5) or weddings that contradict the New Life Statement of Faith (Article 16).

2) Other tasks that require the elders to neglect their primary responsibilities of preaching and teaching the Word, prayer, and leadership should be delegated to a deacon or several deacons.

ARTICLE 7 – SELECTION OF ELDERS

A. Qualifications for Eldership

The existing elders of New Life shall recommend a man to the church body for eldership if he:

- 1) Meets the character criteria listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (Character).
- 2) Possesses the skills necessary for eldership, namely the ability to teach and the ability to manage his family well (Competency).
- 3) Senses, along with the existing elders, a calling by God to serve as an elder at New Life (Calling).
- 4) Complements the existing elders by his commitment to the Statement of Faith, Church Covenant, and Church Mission and challenges the existing elders with his unique gifts and perspective (Chemistry).

B. Process for Installing a New Elder

The process the elders will follow prior to recommending a man to the church body for eldership will be as follows:

- 1) The elders will inform the church body of a potential elder's candidacy. The church body will be given at least one (1) month from the date of the announcement to speak to the elders about the candidate and his qualifications for eldership.
- 2) The elders will present the candidate to the church body at a scheduled meeting of the church for their affirmation. At least 85% of the members in attendance must affirm the candidate for eldership for him to be installed. Once the church body has affirmed the candidate, the existing elders will lay hands on and pray for the newly installed elder.

C. Terms of Elders

There are no term limits for elders, though each elder will be evaluated regularly by the other elders.

ARTICLE 9 – THE ROLE OF DEACONS

According to Scripture, deacons are recognized to serve the church generally and the elders specifically (Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3). The word deacon means “servant.” It is clear from the New Testament that while some deacons are gifted to teach and to lead, these are not their primary responsibilities. The church body should submit to the deacons out of reverence for Christ and respect for their office, but the deacons will not serve to provide overall leadership for the church. Further, the elders form a collective that leads the church together; deacons serve on an individual basis at the discretion and request of the elders and the church body.

ARTICLE 10 – SELECTION OF DEACONS

A. Qualifications for Deaconship

The elders of New Life shall recommend a church member for deaconship if the member:

- 1) Meets the character criteria listed in 1 Timothy 3 (Character).
- 2) Possesses the skills necessary to discharge the duties assigned (Competency).
- 3) Senses a calling by God to serve New Life in the area of need (Calling).

B. Process for Installing a New Deacon

The process the elders will follow prior to recommending a member to the church body for deaconship will be as follows:

- 1) The elders will inform the church body of a potential deacon’s candidacy. The church body will be given at least one (1) month prior to a scheduled business meeting so that the church body will have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate or the elders.
- 2) The elders will present the candidate to the church body at a scheduled meeting of the church for their affirmation. At least 85% of the members in attendance must affirm the candidate for deaconship for the candidate to be installed. Once the church body has affirmed the candidate, the elders will lay hands on and pray for the newly installed deacon.

C. Terms of Deacons

There are no term limits for deacons, though each deacon will be evaluated regularly by the elders.

ARTICLE 11 – HIRING OF OTHER STAFF MEMBERS/EMPLOYEES

Due to the ever-changing needs in a local church, New Life may need to hire paid or unpaid staff members who may not be recognized as elders or deacons.

A. Qualifications for Other Staff Members/Employees

In accordance with New Testament principles of leadership, other staff members should not be selected solely on the basis of performance or professional credentials. Rather, paid and unpaid staff members must meet the following criteria:

- 1) A testimony to God's saving work in his or her life that is proven by the fruit of the Spirit.
- 2) A specific commitment to the vision of New Life and its recognized leadership, including joining New Life through the regular membership process (if applicable).
- 3) Gifts, abilities, and credentials that qualify the person for his or her responsibilities.

B. Purpose for Hiring Other Staff Members/Employees

Other staff members may be hired:

- 1) As a testing ground prior to beginning the deacon selection process.
- 2) To provide temporary help to the elders or deacons.
- 3) To serve the church in any way that the elders and deacons need.

C. Process for Hiring Other Staff Members/Employees

Paid staff members may be hired during the church's budget year if the church approves the position and proposed wage or salary at a scheduled meeting.

ARTICLE 12 – REMOVAL OF ELDERS, DEACONS, AND OTHER STAFF MEMBERS/EMPLOYEES

A. Removal of Elders and Deacons

- 1) If at any time an elder or deacon is charged by two or more witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19) with unrepentant sin or a sin that would disqualify him from office, two (2) or more elders will be given the responsibility of investigating the charges. After the investigation has taken place, the investigating elders will make a recommendation to the eldership. If the charges are found to be true, the elder or deacon will be removed from office immediately and publicly rebuked (1 Tim. 5:20). Since the goal of discipline is always restoration, the elder or deacon will be restored to the church if he publicly confesses and repents of his sin(s). However, he will be unable to serve as an elder or deacon for a period of at least three (3) years.
- 2) If the sinning elder or deacon is unrepentant, the elders (or a representative group of the elders if one of the elders is in unrepentant sin) will recommend that he be removed from office and banned from taking the Lord's Supper per the guidelines in Article 5 (C). The sinning elder or deacon will be removed from office and banned from the Lord's Supper with an affirmative vote of 75% of the church present at the scheduled business meeting. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

- 3) If the sinning elder or deacon was a paid staff member of the church, a severance package may be offered at the discretion of the elders. If a severance package will be offered, the elders will propose the terms to the church. The church will approve the severance package at a scheduled business meeting with a 75% vote of members in attendance. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

B. Removal of Other Staff Members/Employees

- 1) Staff members may be removed for the following reasons:
 - a) Failure to adhere to the criteria listed in Article 11 (A).
 - b) Failure to perform the functions of the job for which he or she was hired.
 - c) Actions which are inconsistent with the New Life Statement of Faith (Article 16) or Church Covenant (Article 17).
- 2) For a staff member to be removed, two (2) elders or one (1) deacon and one (1) elder must recommend termination of the staff member to the elders. Once termination has been recommended, two (2) elders will be given the responsibility of investigating the stated reasons for recommending termination.
- 3) If the elders believe the staff member should be terminated, the staff member will be notified by the elders or the designees of the elders. A severance package may be offered at the discretion of the elders. If a severance package will be offered, the elders will propose the terms to the church. The church will approve the severance package at a scheduled business meeting with a 75% vote of members in attendance. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

ARTICLE 13 – TRUSTEES

- A. New Life shall have three (3) trustees who are recommended by the elders and approved by the church at a scheduled business meeting. The trustees shall hold New Life's property in trust and affix their signatures to legal documents that authorize the sale, mortgage, purchase, or rental of this property. They shall have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, or transfer any real property without authorization through a vote of the church. If a trustee vacates his post, a replacement shall be recommended by the elders and affirmed by the Church at a scheduled business meeting.
- B. The trustees shall act as signatory agents for the Church congregation in business matters that require a formal or contractual agreement. This agency role may be required at any time and shall be performed at the direction of the congregation. Secular business matters which require trustee signatures include, but are not limited to: (a) agreements and real property transfer in the buying and selling of real estate; (b) construction contracts and agreements for improvements on the physical plant of the Church; (c) insurance agreements and contracts; and (d) public and private utility agreements, including street improvements.

ARTICLE 14 – INDEMNIFICATION STATEMENT

- A. The church will indemnify its employees and volunteers, including but not limited to elders, deacons, trustees, ministry workers, child care providers and others, in an amount not exceeding \$50,000 to a single person and \$100,000 for a single occurrence in the case of personal injury, death, or deprivation of a right;

and \$10,000 for a single occurrence of damage to property. This indemnification is limited to actual damages, attorney's fees, and court costs and to legal actions based on an act or omission, except intentional acts, by the person in the course and scope of the person's office, employment or service on behalf of the church. This indemnification extends to criminal actions but only to the following extent:

- 1) The amount of indemnification will not exceed \$10,000 for the prosecution of a criminal offense or the prosecution of two or more offenses prosecuted in a single criminal action;
- 2) The indemnification excludes those criminal actions based on a complaint or information approved by the Trustees;
- 3) The person is found not guilty after a trial or appeal or the complaint, information, or indictment is dismissed without a plea of guilty or nolo contendere being entered; and
- 4) The Trustees determine that the complaint, information, or indictment was either void or based on mistake, false information, or other similar basis, indicating absence of probable cause to believe, at the time of the dismissal, the person committed the offense.

B. For this indemnification to be effective, the Trustees must be informed in writing of the existence of a civil or criminal action within ninety (90) days of its institution. In a civil action, the Trustees must approve of any proposed settlement before the Church will be bound by this section. Indemnification will not apply in the event of a judgment taken by default.

ARTICLE 15 – PROPERTY DISPOSITION

On discontinuation of New Life by dissolution or otherwise, its assets are to be transferred to another church or non-profit entity through a vote of the members at a scheduled business meeting. A 75% vote will be required to transfer its assets. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

ARTICLE 16 – STATEMENT OF FAITH

ARTICLE 17 – CHURCH COVENANT

ARTICLE 18– PROCEDURE FOR AMENDMENT

Proposed amendments, changes, and modifications to this document must be presented in writing to the elders. The elders shall consider the proposed amendments, changes, and modifications. Any further action on a proposal will require a unanimous vote of the elders for the purpose of amendment. The elders will then propose the amendments to the church body and allow a minimum of two (2) weeks for the church body to ask questions or raise objections to the proposed amendment(s). The amendments will be presented at a scheduled meeting of the church. An 85% vote of church members who are present will be required to amend this document.

ARTICLE 19 – BUILDING AND PROPERTY USE

A. General building and property use. Buildings and property owned or leased by New Life shall be used for purposes in accordance with the Purpose of the church (Article 2), the Statement of Faith (Article 16) and the Church Covenant (Article 17).

B. Subleasing building and property. Buildings and property owned or leased by New Life may be subleased to members of New Life for specific events. Members shall request use of the buildings or property through the New Life office, and use will be granted contingent upon the approval of an officer of the church. Buildings or property shall not be subleased to members under church discipline (Article 5) or to non-members.