
Building Blocks

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Purpose of this document:

TO ASSIST ADVANCE STRENGTHENERS IN DISCERNING KEY AREAS TO STRENGTHEN IN LOCAL CHURCHES.

Disclaimers:

- ▶ This is an inward-facing document written to serve Strengtheners, not an outward-facing policy document designed for church elderships.
- ▶ This is a working document that we are looking to iterate over time (We want to serve Strengtheners by releasing an 80% complete document that we refine together, versus prolonged delays in attempting to produce a perfect document before release).
- ▶ This document isn't designed to be exhaustive in either scope or depth. Still, it could, we hope, initiate the writing of other documents, papers, and resources which may elaborate on each of these building blocks for churches.
- ▶ Whilst having some overlap, this document neither replaces nor supersedes our Advance Values documents.

Framework

PAUL WRITES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

GIVEN THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT, THERE ARE SEVEN THINGS WORTH NOTING FROM THIS PASSAGE:

1. There is a specific grace from God to both plant and strengthen a local church (v10).
2. Multiple people are involved in this building project (v10).
3. The foundation work and building work, although connected, are distinct (v10).
4. Jesus Christ is the only foundation that should be laid (v11).
5. We are meant to build on the foundation of Christ (v12).
6. Our work of building ought to be skilled (v10), careful (v10), and use appropriate materials (v12).
7. The quality of our building work will be evaluated at the return of Christ and we could potentially be rewarded for the quality of our work, or we could suffer loss if we have built poorly or on the incorrect foundation (v13-15).

GIVEN THE RICH TRUTH OF THIS PASSAGE, WE DESIRE:

- ▶ That a team of people graced by God would skillfully lay Christ as the foundation and then use appropriate materials to carefully build up the local churches they are seeking to serve.
- ▶ To see Advance strengtheners skillfully assist local churches to establish Christ as the only foundation and then also to continue building up local churches using these key building blocks to ensure that all our churches are well built.

- ▶ Soundly-built churches endure and thrive as healthy, gospel-centred, faithful, multiplying and resilient mission-focused gospel communities that will help the gospel speed ahead and be honoured (2 Thess 3:1-5).

HOW THESE TRUTHS APPLY TO OUR ADVANCE NETWORK:

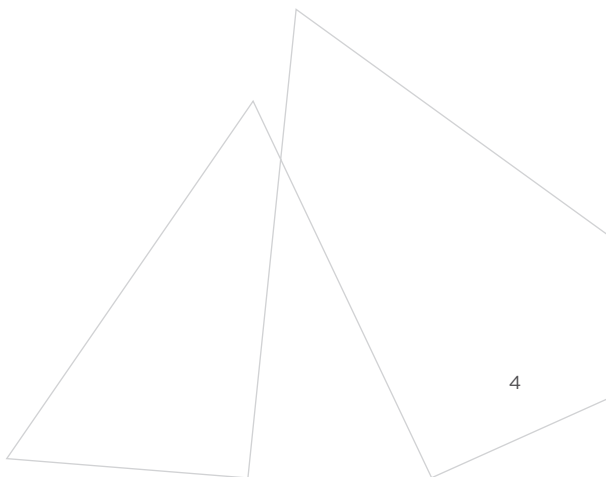
We desire that God would grace the Global Team and Strengtheners to be skilful master builders, laying Christ as the only foundation and carefully using these key building blocks to see local churches built up.

THE KEY BUILDING BLOCKS

'Key building blocks' is a phrase used to summarise both the appropriate materials and the skilful building Paul calls for in this passage. The phrase is meant to highlight both substance and strategic significance. The word 'key' highlights strategic significance, and 'building block' speaks to substance as it is both strong and weight-bearing. We acknowledge, nevertheless, that human definitions are imperfect and have weaknesses.

Along with our Advance movement distinctives and our leadership, partnership, cultural, and planting values, these key building blocks will help those with apostolic gifts and Strengtheners to plant and strengthen healthy churches:

1. Scripture
2. The triune God
3. The gospel
4. In Christ
5. Spirit-empowered life
6. God's church
7. God's mission
8. God's kingdom
9. God's sovereign grace



Key building blocks unpacked

1. SCRIPTURE

- ▶ We believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient, and trustworthy.
- ▶ We also believe in the necessity, clarity, and authority of the Bible.
- ▶ We therefore see the Bible as our final authority for all doctrine and practice for all time and all cultures.

The way we see this playing out in actual church practice would be as follows:

- ▶ The Bible is the primary shaper of doctrine and practice in the church.
- ▶ The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and obey the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the transforming power of the gospel. (1 Tim. 4:11-13, 2 Tim. 3:14-17).
- ▶ We believe that biblical preaching is central to the life and health of any local church. Our goal in preaching is to present the entire counsel of God to the people of God, so that we might present them mature in Christ. We believe that the best way to accomplish this goal is through expository preaching.

Therefore, we believe that regular preaching in a church should be expository; meaning that the sermon is based upon a passage in which the main point of the passage is the main point of the sermon. The sermon helps God's people to see how His Word shapes their lives.

Topical sermons can be both helpful and necessary at times, but they must still show that the main points of those sermons are clearly rooted in biblical truth.

We believe that all Scripture points to, is fulfilled in, or finds its resolution in Jesus Christ. Therefore, all faithful preaching should reveal Christ and call hearers to trust in His finished work.

Though not a requirement, we commend the practice of preaching through books of the Bible, allowing God's Word to set the agenda and provide context for each sermon.

Finally, expository preaching must go beyond explanation to Spirit-dependent application; helping people see how God's Word transforms their lives and calls them to obey it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

See the following helpful resources:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-attributes-of-scripture/>

<https://www.logos.com/grow/7-key-elements-doctrine-scripture/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-doctrine-of-scripture-and-biblical-contextualization/>

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ How does the church use scripture in its liturgy?
- ▶ What is the regular preaching make up of the church and are adjustments needed?
- ▶ How does the church encourage and equip the congregation to read, understand, and apply Scripture?

2. THE TRIUNE GOD

- ▶ We believe that God is triune: Father, Son, and Spirit.
- ▶ We believe that:
 - God is three Persons (John 1:1-2; 1 John 2:1; John 14:26; Matt. 3:16-17)
 - Each person is fully God (John 1:1-4; Col. 2:9; Acts 5:3-4)
 - There is one God (Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Tim. 2:5).
- ▶ We believe that the Son is begotten of the Father, not made (John 1:14,18; John 3:16,18; Heb.1:3; Phil. 2:6) and that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 14:26, 15:26).

Though Trinitarian theology is known for being complicated, it is the fountainhead for all Christian belief. What does it mean for God to be love (1 John 4)? Only the Trinity offers a coherent answer to this question: God has always been a Father loving his Son. The entire work of redemption is to bring humanity into this eternally existent, loving relationship (John 17).

The New Testament writers seem at pains to show us the riches we have in the three persons of God. We pray not merely to God in general, but to the Father, in the name of the Son, and by the power of the Spirit. We baptise new believers in the name of all three. And it is not merely what we do for God, but what he does for us: the Father is always providing, the Son is ever interceding, and the Spirit is present and always helping. At every point of redemptive history, the Father, Son and Spirit have been at work, together.

The Trinity should, above all things, lead us to true worship. Unfortunately, that is not always the case: it has often been merely something to study, argue over or cognitively wrestle with. When that happens, we end up drifting from a Trinitarian faith. In fact, many of the Trinitarian (and Christological) heresies during the early church era were the result not of extremism or licentious theology, but of conservative attempts to make the Trinity more manageable and understandable. But it cannot be managed; it is paradoxically wild and untamed. The 'tri-unity' of God is not something to dissect, but something by which we are overwhelmed and awed.

That said, much of Christian belief (including a proper understanding of the gospel) is downstream from the Trinity. As Herman Bavinck has said:

'In the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of the Christian religion: every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine.'

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is the doctrine of the Trinity clearly taught and affirmed in preaching, teaching, and discipleship?
- ▶ Is there a Trinitarian emphasis, or even bias, in worship, prayer, liturgy, and preaching?
- ▶ Is worship marked by awe and intimacy that flow from knowing a relational, Triune God?

Helpful resources

Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith by Mike Reeves

3. THE GOSPEL

We believe that the gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through faith in Jesus Christ, who died in our place and rose again.

This good news is God's very wisdom, utter foolishness to the world, and yet it is the power of God to those who are being saved. (1 Cor. 1:18) It centres on the cross and resurrection of Christ.

The gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed. The authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if His death and resurrection are not central (the message is: 'Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised' (1 Cor. 15:4)).

This good news is:

- ▶ Biblical (His death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3, 4))
- ▶ Salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19))
- ▶ Historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins and we are to be pitied more than all others (1 Cor. 15:12-19))
- ▶ Apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Lk. 1:1-2))
- ▶ Intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual people are saved (1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:21-23))

How does a right understanding of the gospel apply to how we build?

The gospel is the central element in the Christian life, continually renewing the believer and the Church. The gospel of grace is not the first step in a stairway of truths; rather, it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth. The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the Kingdom.

The gospel of grace is the means by which anything is renewed and transformed by Christ, whether it is a heart, a relationship, a church or a community. It is the key to all doctrine and to our view of our lives in this world. Many problems result from a lack of a proper orientation of application of the gospel. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts, thinking and approach to absolutely everything. We believe mature churches should be gospel-centered.

To be gospel-centered means that we hold to a ministry philosophy that puts the gospel message at the centre of all ministry in the church, both for non-Christians and Christians. Non-Christians are urged to enter the Kingdom by turning from sin and putting faith in Christ. Christians are urged to grow in the Kingdom (sanctification) by turning from sin and putting faith in Christ in the specific areas of their lives where they are failing to believe the gospel.

Furthermore, Christians are urged to think through all aspects of life and ministry through the lens of the gospel, adopting it as a worldview, and to live out the implications of doing so. This gospel-centeredness, therefore, shapes how we structure our worship services, how we counsel people, how we understand the central message of the bible, how we preach the bible and how we see sanctification working out in the lives of God's people. The Bible gives us different descriptions of the gospel that help us enjoy its full richness. Different descriptions may have greater resonance in different cultures.

Examples of this would be:

- ▶ Salvation: the condemned person is saved
- ▶ Liberation: the slave is set free
- ▶ Redemption: the slave is set free, and the broken is made whole
- ▶ Reconciliation: the enemy is made a friend
- ▶ Sanctification: the unclean is made clean
- ▶ Justification: the guilty person is declared innocent and righteous
- ▶ Adoption: the slave becomes a son or a daughter
- ▶ Victory: Christ is victorious over the powers of evil, sin, and death through His death and resurrection

What is the accompanying gospel fruit of salvation we can anticipate in the lives of believers?

We help Christ followers live in the goodness of their salvation in the present age as we look forward to all that awaits us in the coming age. Christ followers ought to:

- ▶ Be living in the goodness of God's love and forgiveness and in turn forgiving others.

- ▶ Be living in the experience of being at peace with God.
- ▶ Be secure in their belonging through God's adoption of them into His family.
- ▶ Be assured of their eternal life by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
- ▶ Be living out of their identity and new nature in Christ as a response to the gospel.
- ▶ Be living with an indestructible hope in Jesus.
- ▶ Be meaningfully connected to a gospel shaped community of faith (the church).
- ▶ Be caught up in God's purposes and partnering in His mission.
- ▶ Be active in working out our salvation and progressing in sanctification.

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is there a Gospel-shaped culture in the church community and leadership team?
 - Is there a culture of forgiveness, humility, and grace in relationships, or of performance and legalism?
 - Do people seem secure in their identity as adopted sons and daughters, or are they striving for approval?
 - Is the church welcoming and loving toward those who are struggling, doubting or sinful, offering them hope through faith in Jesus?
- ▶ Does preaching consistently point to the person and work of Christ as the hope for both unbelievers and believers and is sanctification preached as 'believing the gospel more deeply', or is it moralism or behaviour modification?
- ▶ Do the songs, prayers, and sacraments centre on the gospel story (creation, fall, redemption, and restoration) and are they filled with assurance and joy?

4. IN CHRIST

The doctrine of believers being 'in Christ' is a central concept in Pauline theology. This concept is expressed through various phrases such as 'in Christ', 'in Him', 'in the Beloved' and 'in Whom', especially evident in passages like Eph. 1:3-14. The 'in Christ' concept emphasises the believer's union with Christ, which is fundamental to Christian redemption and identity.

Tom Schreiner considers it the 'nerve-centre of Pauline theology'. The doctrine is rooted in the historical events of Christ's death and resurrection. The 'in Christ' doctrine underscores the profound union between Christ and believers, as well as Christ's

role in embodying and establishing essential Christian doctrines.

Being ‘in Christ’ can be summarised as follows:

- 1. Our union with Christ.** Through faith, we have been joined to Christ (Jn 15:4-5; Rom. 6:11; Col. 1:3; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:3-5). As a result, Christ’s life, death, resurrection and inheritance become ours through our union with Him.
- 2. Our identity in Christ.** Through faith in Jesus, we were made new creations; we have a new identity (2 Cor. 5:17). Specifically, we are adopted as God’s children and belong to God’s family (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4-7). God now considers us His ‘saints’ (Eph. 1:1).
- 3. Our spiritual blessings in Christ.** We are chosen by God the Father, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3-14). In Christ Jesus, we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7). We are declared righteous in Christ (Rom. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Christ in us is our hope of future glory (Col. 1:27). In Christ, we are sealed with the Spirit and given a guarantee of our inheritance to come (Eph. 1:13-14).
- 4. Our position and status in Christ.** We are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). For us, there is no further condemnation because our lives are hidden in His life (Col. 1:3; Rom. 8:1). Because we are in Christ, we have free access to God (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12).
- 5. Our community and unity in Christ.** We who have believed in Christ are now one body (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4). There is no place for divisions of any description. Ethnic, social, and gender barriers are broken in Him (Gal. 3:28).
- 6. Our hope and future in Christ.** In Christ, we have a sure hope of resurrection and eternal glory (1 Cor. 15:22; Col. 3:1-4). Believers will share in His glory (Rom. 8:17, 30) and they can be assured that nothing can separate them from His love (Rom. 8:38-39).

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is there a tone of confidence and assurance in the gospel as a sense of resting in Christ’s finished work and spiritual blessings?
- ▶ Are people encouraged to live from their position in Christ rather than striving to earn favour with God?
- ▶ Do believers demonstrate freedom and boldness in prayer, knowing they have access to the Father through Christ?

- ▶ Is there evident unity across ethnic, social, and generational lines which reflects that believers are one body 'in Christ'?

Helpful resources:

<https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/in-christ-the-meaning-and-implications-of-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ/>

<https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/what-it-means-to-be-in-christ>

5. SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE

In addition to affecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While the Holy Spirit indwells all genuine believers at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well.

Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. He imparts His supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body, and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practised.

All believers ought to pursue an awareness of being empowered by the Spirit in the following ways:

1. This empowering of the Spirit means that we are made alive to God, and have His Spirit dwelling within us by which we cry out 'Abba Father'.
2. This ongoing empowering of the Spirit is the power in our lives that enables us to be sanctified. Because the Spirit is at work in us, we are able to believe the gospel, say no to the passions of the flesh, and bear the fruit of God's Spirit.
3. This empowering of the Spirit gives us gifts for the building up of the church. The gifts that are taught in Scripture are still given today for the building up of the church and forwarding of the gospel in the world. We believe that to honour Scripture, we are not only to believe in the continuation of the gifts, but to earnestly seek them (1 Cor 14.1) in love for the building up of the church.
4. We live lives in fellowship with God by His Spirit, and are dependent upon His power for our lives and ministry, seeking to be continually filled with the Spirit.

Helping the churches we serve experience what 'being filled with the Spirit' means and helping them to embrace spiritual gifts is a key building block focus area.

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ What evidence points to the church's dependence on the Holy Spirit for power in life, ministry, and mission?
- ▶ Are believers encouraged to seek fresh empowering from the Spirit, or is the topic largely avoided or downplayed?
- ▶ Are the gifts of the Spirit expected, welcomed, and exercised in the life of the church and are they practiced in an orderly and edifying way, shaped by love and aligned with 1 Cor. 12-14?
- ▶ Is there active dependence on the Spirit in helping people fight sin, grow in character, and live in step with the gospel?
- ▶ Does the church cultivate Spirit-led prayer and worship and facilitate a space where people are attentive to God's leading and presence?
- ▶ Is there a vision for the Spirit's empowerment not just inside the church, but in everyday mission and public witness too?

6. GOD'S CHURCH

We believe the Church is made up of all those who have by faith received the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:15-17). This universal church is manifested in local gatherings of believers of which Christ is the only head (Col. 1:17-18; Heb. 10:24).

We believe that everyone who is part of the universal church should be a committed member of a local church (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Heb.10:24-25). The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit and the ongoing witness to Christ in the world (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:22, 3:10, 21).

We believe the church should neither hide from the world nor blend in with the world, but should be distinctively engaged in the world as both 'salt' and 'light' (Matt. 5:13-16).

The church is recognisable by her gospel preaching from Scripture, her discipline, her mission, her worship of God, her observance of baptism and the Lord's supper, her faithful obedience, and above all, by her love for God and by her members' love for one another and the world (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Matt. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Matt. 28:19-20; Heb. 12:28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Jn. 14:15; 1 Pe. 1:8; Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Pe. 4:8, Jn. 3:16).

Biblical metaphors for the Church

The New Testament employs various metaphors to illustrate the nature, function, and relationships of the church. These metaphors draw from diverse aspects of human life, including family, agriculture, construction, and the human body.

The most well-known metaphors include the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of God, a royal priesthood, the flock of God, and the bride of Christ. Each metaphor serves to highlight different aspects of the church's character and its relationship with God. For instance, the 'people of God' metaphor emphasises the church's unique relationship with God, while the 'body of Christ' illustrates the organic union between Christ and the church, as well as among church members.

Other metaphors include the church as a family, with God as the Father, and believers as brothers and sisters; the branches on a vine, an olive tree, a field of crops, and a building. These rich and diverse metaphors are not merely linguistic devices, but represent entire worlds of human experience, reflecting the analogical structure of the universe as created by God.

Importantly, these metaphors are always directly theological, continually relating the church to the triune God. Christians are encouraged to meditate on these metaphors to deepen their understanding of the church, and to inform their prayers for God's people.

Biblical church leadership

Advance refers to the New Testament for our pattern of church leadership. Alex Motyer describes the opening verses of Philipians as: 'a remarkably full summary of the constitution of a New Testament church' and those various groups who comprise it. Let's look at some unique traits of local churches from a survey of the New Testament:

▶ 1. Saints

All believers are called 'saints', not because of personal righteousness, but because of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. The gospel creates this community; without it, no true church exists.

▶ 2. Elders

- Leadership in the early church was clearly established, with identifiable leaders.
- Leadership was shared (plural, not singular) (Acts 14, Titus 1, James 5).
- Elders were part of the community, not above it.

- They had external partnerships (e.g. with Paul).
- Elders were appointed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28); eldership is a sacred thing.
- Elders are to be examples of mature Christian living (NB: personal holiness).
- Their responsibilities include leading, feeding, guarding, and guiding; all of these reflect the shepherding motif in Scripture.
- Eldership is reserved for qualified and called men, based on a plain reading of 1 Tim 2-3, Titus 1, and Acts.

▶ 3. Deacons

Deacons are distinct from elders and are tasked with serving and leading in practical areas.

- They must meet character qualifications and be tested (1 Tim 3).
- Men and women may both serve as deacons (Rom 16:1).
- They function under the authority of elders and do not set doctrine.
- Deacons gather around functions (service roles), not as a leadership team.

4. External relationships

Though mature and self-led, the church in Philippi still maintained an external relationship with Paul.

This relationship can be characterized as:

- ▶ God-centred: Paul sees God as the initiator and sustainer of their relationship and mission.
- ▶ Relational: deep affection and joyful prayer mark their connection (Phil. 1:3-8).
- ▶ Missional: their partnership fuels gospel advance, even through suffering.
- ▶ Maturing: Paul prays for their spiritual growth and Christlike character.
- ▶ Inclusive: others like Timothy, Silas, and Epaphroditus were involved, showing an evolving and porous partnership.
- ▶ A true partnership: the Greek term *koinōnia* implies shared mission, sacrifice, and commitment (e.g. financial support, prayer, and ministry).

5. Gospel partnerships

Though not a command, external gospel partnerships are seen as desirable and a means of grace. They align with Scripture, personal experience, and church history (e.g. Puritans' relational networks). The primary aims of such partnerships are mission and maturity, occurring both locally and globally.

6. Baptism and the Lord's supper

These are ordinances given by Christ as means of grace and are vital aspects of orthodoxy.

We believe that baptism and the Lord's supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus Christ as means of God's sanctifying grace and blessing to the church. Baptism is the immersion of the believer (that is one who has repented and trusted in Christ) in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19-20).

This water baptism is a visual sign of a person's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. It signifies that one's former way of life has been put to death, that one is released from enslavement to sin, and that one has entered into a new life of obedience and faith (Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 2:11-13).

The Lord's supper is to be observed only by those who have trusted Christ for salvation and is to be observed regularly throughout the Christian life as a commemoration and proclamation of Christ's death, and as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of that death. In the observance of the Lord's supper, we are strengthened in our faith, we signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and we anticipate Christ's return (Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26, 27-30).

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is the church marked by genuine love, both for insiders and outsiders?
- ▶ Is the church distinct from the world (holy), yet engaged with the world (missional), living as salt and light?
- ▶ Are the various metaphors of the church (body, bride, family, temple, flock, etc.) reflected in the relational life of the church, or is there a bias towards or away from certain people?
- ▶ Is leadership biblically shaped i.e. led by a team of qualified, called male elders who are responsible for shepherding the church through leading, feeding, guarding, and guiding?

- ▶ Are both men and women joyfully serving according to their biblical convictions?
- ▶ Is the church actively participating in gospel partnership with other churches, with translocal gifts and the movement?
- ▶ Is baptism practiced as a believer's response to the gospel?
- ▶ Is The Lord's supper celebrated regularly, reverently, and in a way that highlights Christ's atoning death, ongoing grace, and the unity of the church?
- ▶ Is the church engaged in making disciples both locally and globally?
- ▶ Is there a visible commitment to maturity by growing the body in Christ through teaching, mentoring, correction, and shared life?

7. GOD'S KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God is a central concept in Christianity, referring to God's sovereign rule over all creation and His people. It encompasses both the present reality, and a future promise. Jesus' life and teachings exemplify God's kingship on earth, offering forgiveness, and freedom from sin to those who accept Him as the Messiah.

The Kingdom is characterised by righteousness, peace and joy, and is entered through spiritual rebirth. While God's rule is universal, it is currently opposed by various forces. The church plays a crucial role in manifesting and witnessing to God's Kingdom, though the two are distinct. Unlike earthly states, God's Kingdom provides for all needs, is guided by God's Spirit, triumphs over adversity, and offers eternal life. Christians are called to prioritise their citizenship in God's Kingdom while living in the world.

The 'now' and 'not yet' of the Kingdom

The concept of 'now' and 'not yet' concerning the Kingdom of God is a theological framework that describes the current state of God's Kingdom as both present and future. Jesus' ministry inaugurated the Kingdom of God, but its full realisation is yet to come. The Kingdom is seen as 'already here' in some aspects, but 'not yet' fully consummated.

In the present, believers experience a restored relationship with God that echoes both the past and the future. Still, it remains incomplete, as illustrated by Paul's metaphor of seeing 'in a mirror dimly'. The church is called to live 'between the times', proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom to all nations while awaiting its final consummation.

This framework provides a theological basis for global mission and shapes how Christians understand their role in the world, living as ‘people of the future in the present age’. It also informs the Christian approach to prayer and resistance against worldly powers, recognising God’s ultimate authority while acknowledging the ongoing presence of evil and injustice in the current age.

Correctly understanding the Kingdom of God also enlightens our response to suffering, persecution, injustice, illness, and the need for deliverance.

Possible themes covered under the Kingdom could include:

- ▶ The King of the Kingdom (Jesus)
- ▶ The rule and reign of God in all of life
- ▶ Setting people free
- ▶ Suffering and persecution
- ▶ Understanding the times we live in
- ▶ Ministries of justice and mercy and the priority of care for the poor
- ▶ Healing and deliverance from demonic influence

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is Jesus clearly preached as the King of the Kingdom, Whose reign defines the church’s mission and the believer’s life?
- ▶ Is the Kingdom of God regularly taught as both a present reality and a future hope (now and not yet)?
- ▶ Do members live as citizens of God’s Kingdom first, with clear distinction from worldly values and idols?
- ▶ Is there active concern and care for the poor, the marginalised and the suffering? Does the church engage in mercy ministries that reflects the character of the King and the priorities of His Kingdom?
- ▶ Are people being set free from sin, addiction, demonic oppression, shame, and spiritual blindness?
- ▶ Is the Spirit’s power expected, welcomed, and exercised in a way that aligns with Jesus’ ministry in the gospels?
- ▶ Does the church prepare people for suffering, persecution, and opposition as part of Kingdom life?

- ▶ Is there hope and endurance in the face of sickness, hardship, or spiritual warfare rooted in the promise of a coming Kingdom?

8. GOD'S MISSION

God's mission, as revealed in the Bible, is a comprehensive plan to reach and redeem all of creation, with the ultimate purpose of glorifying Himself. This mission, known as *Missio Dei*, is rooted in God's love for all peoples and His desire to restore the broken relationship with humanity that began with Adam and Eve's disobedience.

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, outlines God's strategy to connect with all people on earth, starting with His promise to Abraham of 'a blessing for all people'. This mission involves the entire Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, working together to fulfil God's purpose.

Christians are invited to participate in this 'common mission' or Great Commission, crossing barriers to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom through both word and deed. The mission of God will culminate in the worship of 'every nation, tribe, people, and language', ultimately leading to God's glory being fully realised.

Mission is not just one of a hundred different biblical themes that we might explore; the Bible is fundamentally about mission, and is even the product of that mission. We are not just people who 'do missions' for God, but God himself is a missionary God and we have the immense privilege of being incorporated into and involved in the mission of God.

The church exists for God's glory, advancing His kingdom through church planting, missional living and global evangelism. We need to let God's mission shape our priorities, strategies, and plans.

- God's glory is the goal of the mission.
- Church planting: the God-ordained strategy of mission.
- Missional living is the natural response and responsibility of every believer.

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Does the church clearly communicate that God is a missionary God, and that mission is central to the biblical storyline from Genesis to Revelation?
- ▶ Is the church's vision for mission shaped by God's desire to glorify Himself among all peoples?

- ▶ Does the church demonstrate a concern for both local witness and global mission (e.g. church planting, unreached peoples, and global partnerships)?
- ▶ Is the church meaningfully connected in some way to mission efforts beyond its own community, especially those that involve cross-cultural evangelism or unreached groups?
- ▶ Are members equipped and encouraged to live missionally in their everyday lives (homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods)? Do people view themselves as missionaries sent into their spheres of influence, not just supporters of missions done by others?
- ▶ Is church planting seen and practiced as a primary strategy for mission, either directly or through partnerships?
- ▶ Is God's mission visibly shaping the church's priorities, structures, programs, and use of resources?

9. GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE

The doctrines of sovereignty and grace are fundamental concepts in Christian theology. They emphasise God's supreme control over all things and His unmerited favour towards humanity. Sovereign grace combines these two attributes, highlighting God's absolute rule in creation, providence and redemption, while also demonstrating His undeserved kindness towards sinners.

This doctrine teaches that salvation is entirely a work of God, from election to perseverance, and not based on human merit or effort. The concept of sovereign grace is humbling, as it removes any grounds for human boasting and places the focus solely on God's mercy. Sovereign grace provides the strongest motivation for holiness and good works, as it stems from gratitude rather than an attempt to earn salvation.

The doctrines of grace emphasise God's role in every aspect of salvation, from election by the Father to the preserving work of the Holy Spirit, with the ultimate aim to glorify God by attributing all aspects of salvation to His sovereign will and gracious action.

Sovereign grace in straightforward terms means that 'God saves sinners'. God acts sovereignly to save sinners from first to last. We believe in justification by faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone, revealed by the scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone.

Sovereignty and suffering

God's sovereignty extends to suffering. God's sovereignty, while sometimes appearing to challenge God's justice, is affirmed in biblical wisdom literature as God's control over all events. The suffering of the righteous is tied to God's redemptive work, as exemplified in Christ's suffering and Paul's understanding of his own afflictions. While God's sovereignty in suffering can be difficult to comprehend, it is a source of comfort and hope, as it means that even in horrible hardships, God can bring about good.

Suffering can serve various purposes, including teaching dependence on God, fostering empathy and mysteriously confronting evil. However, we must acknowledge the complexity of this topic, noting that simplistic answers about suffering rarely help pastorally and we are called to mourn with those who mourn.

Questions to help evaluate this church building block

- ▶ Is the gospel clearly presented as salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and is it clear that salvation is initiated, sustained, and completed by God's sovereign will rather than by human effort?
- ▶ Is there a sense of deep humility, joy, and assurance among the people, reflecting the belief that they are saved purely by God's grace, not their merit?
- ▶ Are holiness and good works motivated by gratitude for God's grace, not pressure to earn God's favour?
- ▶ Does the worship exalt God's sovereignty, majesty, and mercy clearly and consistently?
- ▶ How does the church speak about suffering? Does it reflect a biblical understanding of God's sovereignty even in hardship?
- ▶ Does the church's view of sovereign grace fuel a passion for evangelism; trusting God to save as we proclaim faithfully?
- ▶ Are people offered real assurance of salvation based on God's promises, not their performance, and are those struggling with assurance or guilt pastored in a way that points them back to the finished work of Christ?

