



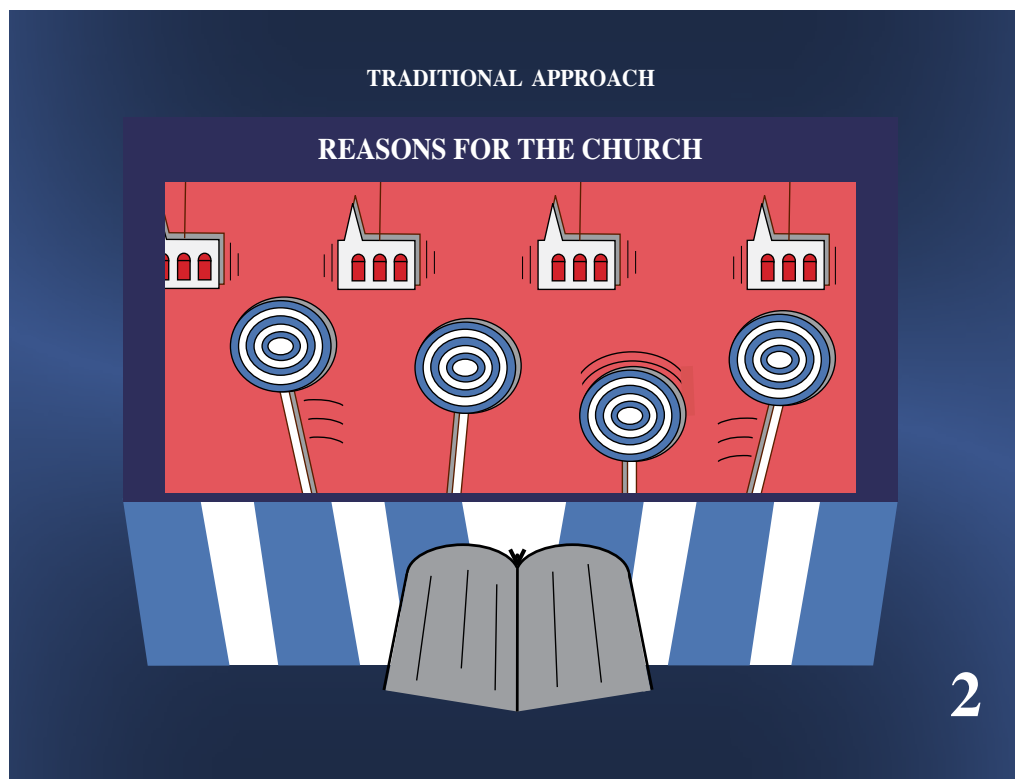
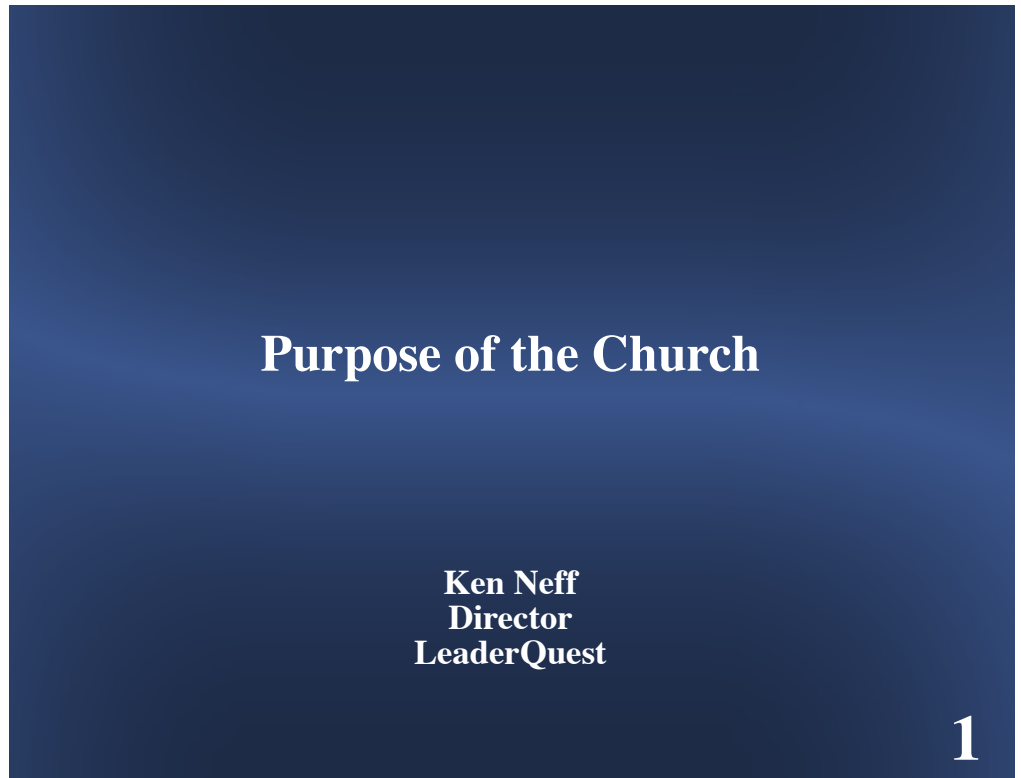
Slide #1

As the words *Purpose of the Church* roll off your lips, you may be wondering, “What is the actual reason for the church?” Some might even think, “Are we talking about the red-brick structure on Main Street?” If not, are we discussing, “The body of Christ, the individuals that make up the church?” Then, “Does the corporate church’s purpose differ from the purpose of each individual person in the church?”

Slide #2

People attend church for any number of reasons: music, friendships, children’s programs, youth programs, teaching, pastor, Sunday School, small groups, missions program, men’s or women’s programs, etc. And most churches provide a smorgasbord of opportunities and options from which to choose. In fact, church leadership asks the question, “What programs must we offer to attract people to our church?” In this case, the church means the red-brick structure on Main Street?

Recognize the church merry-go-round? Attendees come for certain church programs, mainly what they get out of them, and leadership seeks to provide programs to attract those very same people. Someone has said, “Shoot at nothing and you will hit it every time!”¹ But that isn’t the issue in the church. As in a shooting gallery with a shotgun, church leaders blast away at everything and hit everything most of time. No program goes untried. Consequently, the *reasons* for the church are confused with the *purpose* of the church.



Slide #3

The purpose of the church can be understood from two different perspectives. First, seen from *God's perspective*, the church's purpose is to glorify Him. Consider the following texts:

[Church was instituted for and] *to the praise of His glory.*
Eph 1:12

[Believers] *let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Matt 5:16

[Believer's] *good deeds* [to the] *glorify God in the day of visitation.*

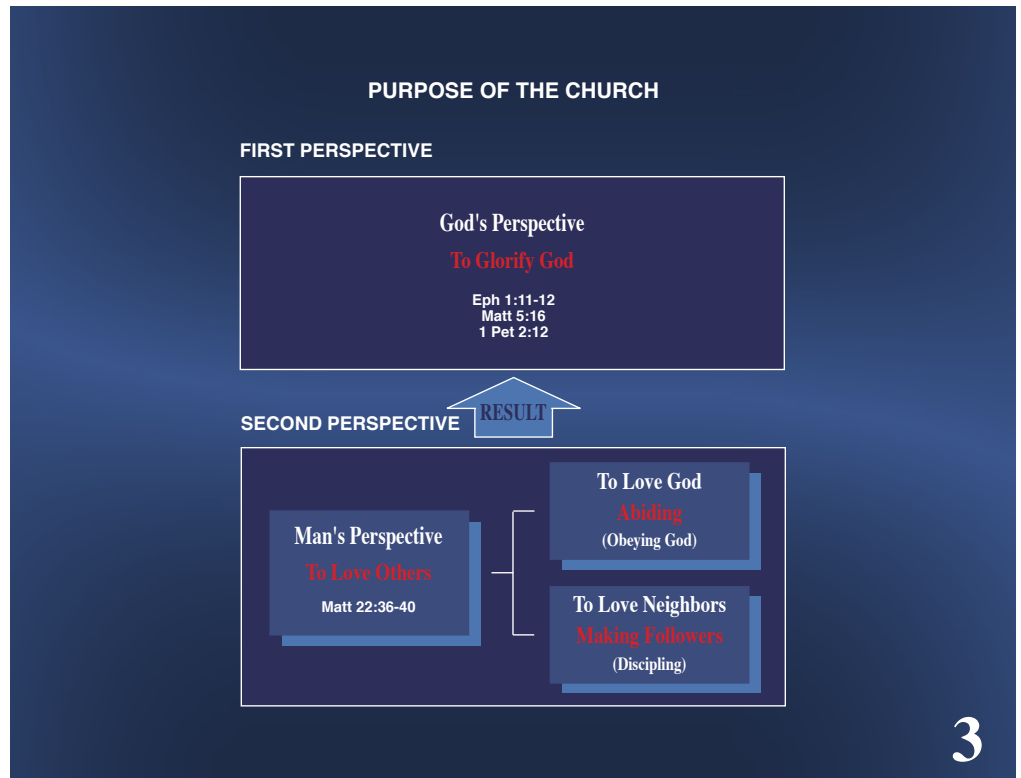
1 Peter 2:12

While the ultimate purpose of the church is to glorify God, the manner by which God is glorified is through the good works of the believers who are themselves the church. Good works, which result in the glorification of God, are in fact the church's purpose from the second perspective—from *man's perspective*. Whether scattered in the world or corporately gathered, the purpose of the church is to love others (Matt 22:36-40)—to love God and to love one's neighbors.

We will develop love's two aspects further. Here as a brief overview, *to love God* is to obey God, living in obedience to His commands (John 14:15), referring to *abiding* in Christ (v 23; 15:9-10). On the other hand, *to love neighbors* is to make Jesus followers, which is typically understood as *discipling* (Matt 28:19-20).

Slide #4

In Matthew 22 Jesus was asked by a religious leader, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (v 36). Responding Jesus pointed to two commandments summarizing the essence of the Law: to love your God (v 37) and to love your neighbor (v 39). Since those commandments apply to Christians, one directs his love vertically toward God.² At the same time, his love is focused horizontally toward his fellowmen, believers as well as non-believers.



Matthew 22:36-40

36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

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Slide #5

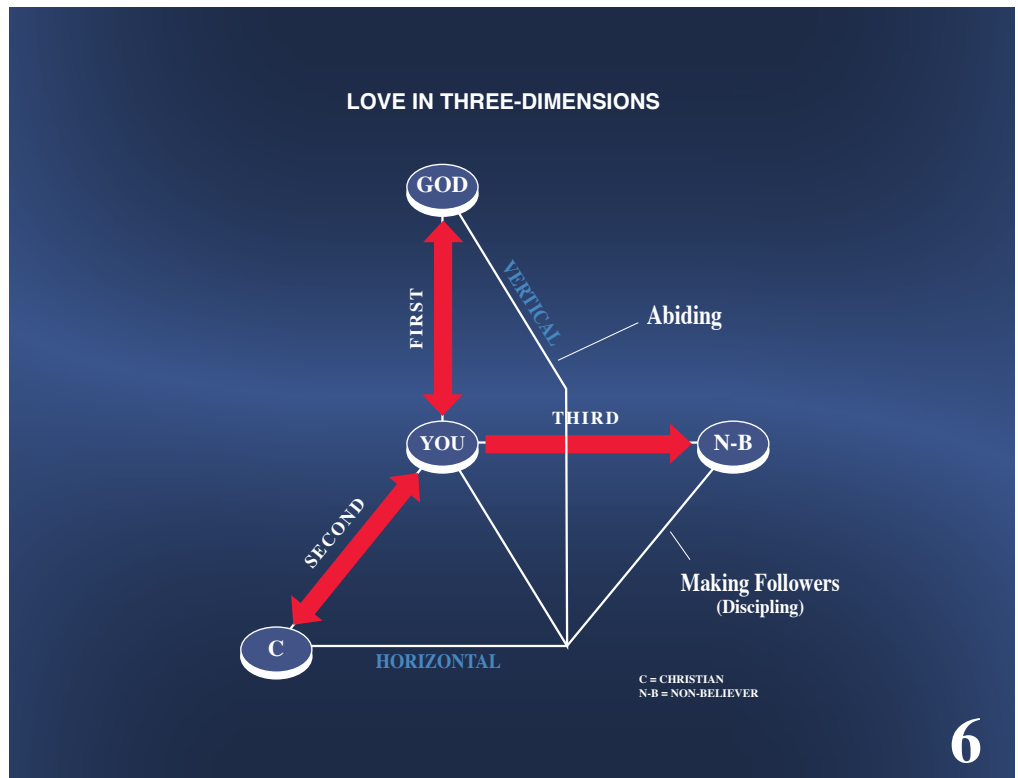
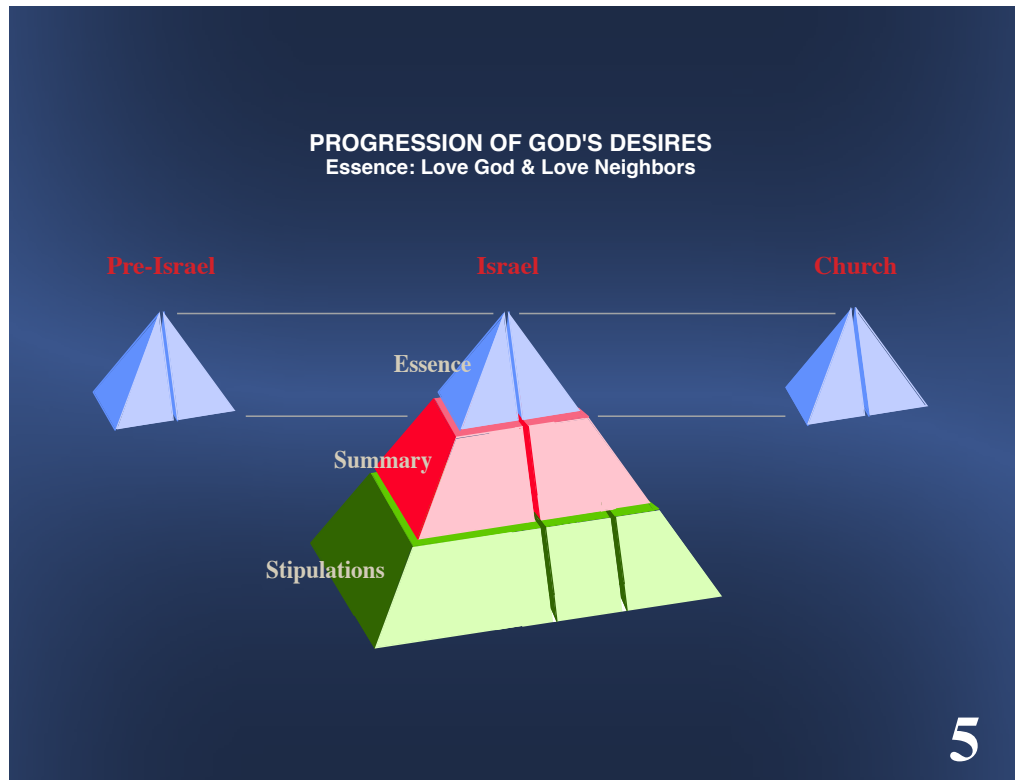
God's heart desire, at least the essence (loving God and loving neighbors), has never altered.³ What has changed is its actual means of expression, as portrayed in slide 5, *Progression of God's Desires*. Even without a written code prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law, believers were to love God and love their fellowman. Abraham walked obediently before God (e.g., Gen 22:1-18; Jam 2:21-24), evidencing his love for God (cf. John 14:21a), and is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as a hero of the faith. Even though "loving our fellowman" was not specifically addressed in Genesis, John reached back to Genesis to find support for this very principle in the story of Cain and Able (Gen 4:2-15). Interestingly, John set forth the proposition that love for God and love for another go hand in hand (1 John 4:19-21; 5:2-3). The former leads to the latter and Abraham's life showed love in action, while Cain's failed to do so.

The Mosaic Law was the written code of conduct for redeemed Israel. The overriding essence was to love God and to love one's neighbor as summarized in the Ten Commandments and further elaborated in 613 commands or stipulations. With the establishment of the church, Paul explained that the Mosaic Law is no longer valid for believers. No longer under the Mosaic Law, the law of Christ (Gal 6:2; cf. Jam 1:25) embodies in the commands in the New Testament and defines God's direction for the Christian. While the means of giving the law has changed over time, the essence remains constant. God's desire for His own to "love God" and "love others" transcends time.

Slide #6

The essence of the Law is to love God and to love neighbor. The former is directed vertically, while the later is directed horizontally and is focused on believers as well as non-believers. Consequently, law and love are three-dimensional.⁴

While a Christian's ("you" on the slide) direction of focus is signified by the *red arrows*, notice that in both the first dimension and the second dimension those arrows are two-directional. In both instances, there should be a reciprocal manifestation of love between the believer and God and between believers, which constitutes fellowship, a sharing of things in common. While God always, without fail, demonstrates His love for us in the first dimension, believers



are to walk in loving obedience to God (abiding). In the second-dimension, the two-directional arrow corresponds to the mutual-love ministry that should be experienced in the Church. The one-directional arrow in the third dimension depicts the Christian's ministry to those who are non-believers. Making followers of Christ (discipling) is the intended result of each believer's ministry in the second and third dimensions (see article *Three-Dimensional Relationships of the Church*).

Slide #7

A closer look at all three dimensions provides further insight to what “to love” should look like.⁵

Loving God—The vertical perspective takes us to John 14, calling on us to love God. “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me” (v 21a). The test of a person's love for and service to Christ is obedience to His word. While love is innate to the divine character of God, for man love (seeking another's highest good) is a choice. Choices have consequences. Failing to know and apply Christ's words in our daily life not only demonstrates our lack of love for Him but also reveals our arrogance and identification with the world. Then notice the remainder of verse 2: “and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” Believers who obey God's Word can uniquely experience a fuller expression of Christ's love and companionship, the experience of abiding in Christ.



Loving Neighbors Who Are Believers—Using the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus explained that a neighbor is anyone with whom you come into contact who has a need. Meeting needs of believers was taught by Christ's example in John 13 where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Jesus rose, laid aside His outer robe, took water and washed the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). Taking the role of “the Servant,” He gave them an example of love in action, a do-as-I-do-teaching moment (v 15). Love is choosing the interest of others before one's own. If we are seeking another's highest good, we are truly serving them. This was the reason Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).

Loving Neighbors Who Are Non-Believers—The believer's ministry as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20-21) relates to unbelievers. Christ was the *Light of the World* (John 8:12) and believers are to be *lights in the world*—reflections of Christ in what they say and do (Matt 5:14-16; Eph 5:7-11). In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul encouraged believers to “be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.” This appeal should again take us back to the Good Samaritan. We are to express love in giving physical and financial aid to those in need with whom we come into contact. “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” in serving them (Gal 6:10).

Nevertheless, the one greatest need is for men to place their faith in Jesus for eternal life. That is why Paul wrote,

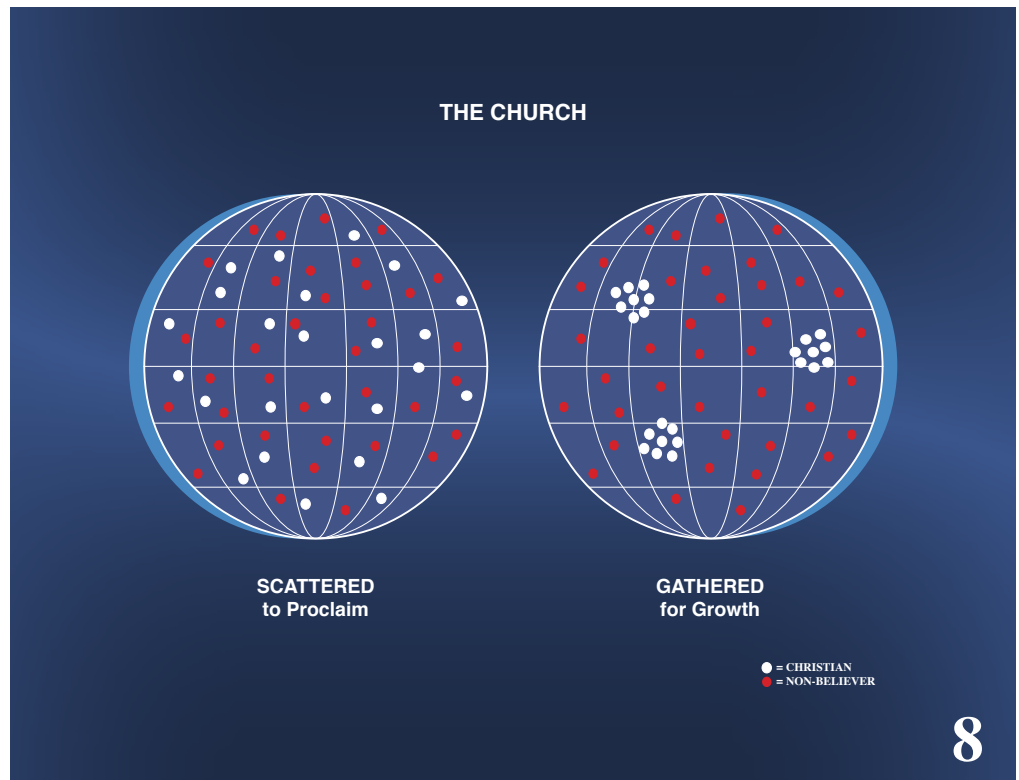
Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [non-believers], making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col 4:5-6).

What is “wisdom toward outsiders”? It is skillfully applying the Word of God in each situation, taking any and all opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ. Notice it isn't only what we do but what we say and how we say it that matters. Speaking polite, timely words—words that bring understanding and with understanding the appropriate response.

Slide #8

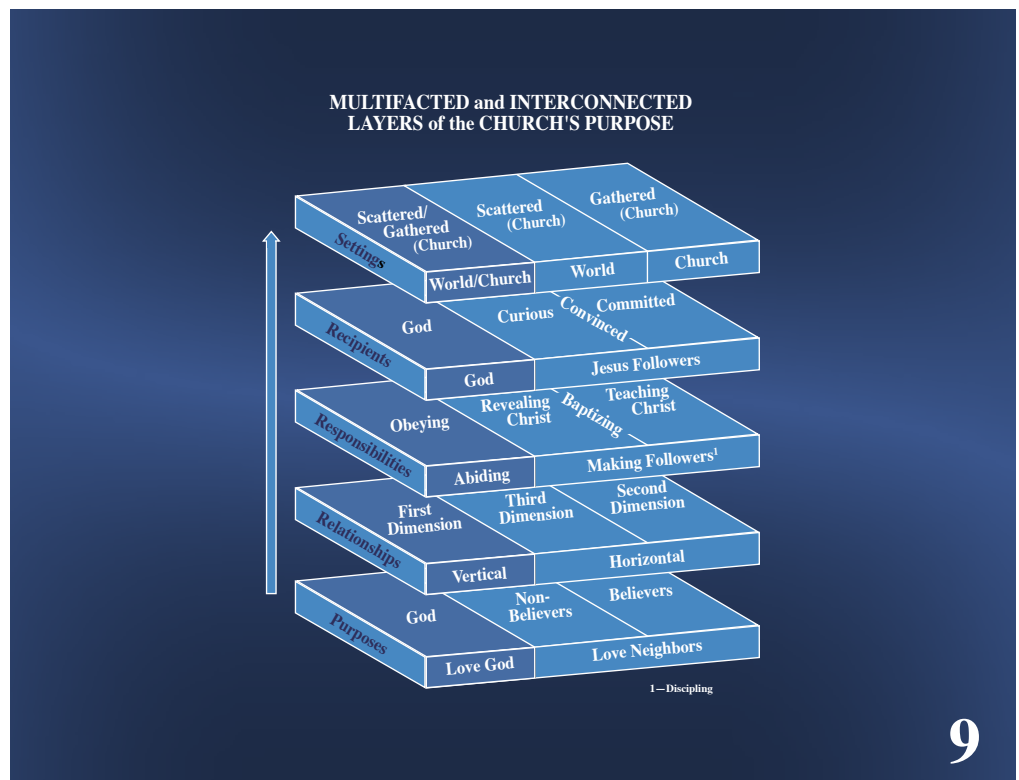
The purpose of the church cannot be rightly understood without being seen from the perspective of the church's setting: when the church is scattered and when it is gathered. The dots represent individuals—white dots for believers and red dots for non-believers. When the church is scattered in the world where each believer lives, works or goes the school, those are the locations in which the believer ministers to the world. While not to become like the world, each Christian lives in the world for ministry to unbelievers around them in their own particular areas of daily life.

On the other hand, when Christians gather together in assemblies of believers, they come together to minister to one another. Remember the church is not brick-and-mortar structures, but rather is a gathering of individual believers. Through mutual ministries, using their individual gift(s), under the leadership of the elders, the body of Christ is to grow in spiritual maturity.



Slide #9

Even though the purpose of the church individually and corporately is “to love God” and “to love your neighbor,” it must be understood in a multifaceted context. A number of interconnected layers are shown on slide 9. Beginning with the bottom layer being identified with the dual purposes of the church, loving God and loving neighbors. Correspondingly, in the second layer vertical relationships concern the first dimension, while horizontal relationships relate to the second and third dimensions. The third and fourth layers point to responsibilities and recipients. Loving God coincides with abiding, meaning obeying, which is directed toward God. On the other hand, loving neighbors correlates with making followers and concerns revealing Christ to curious followers and teaching Christ to those who are committed followers. Coming to the top layer that shows the settings in which the purpose of the church takes place, notice that loving God occurs both when the church is scattered and gathered.



Loving non-believing neighbors takes place when the church is scattered, while loving other believers occurs when the church gathers.

Now that you understand the flow, pretend for a moment that you are looking down from above the top layer and straight down through the layers below. As you look down at “Gathered (Church)” on the top layer, you see “Committed,” “Teaching Christ,” “Second Dimension,” and “Believers” on the layers below. That flow indicates when the church gathers, committed followers are to be taught the things of Christ in the second dimension since they are believers in Christ.

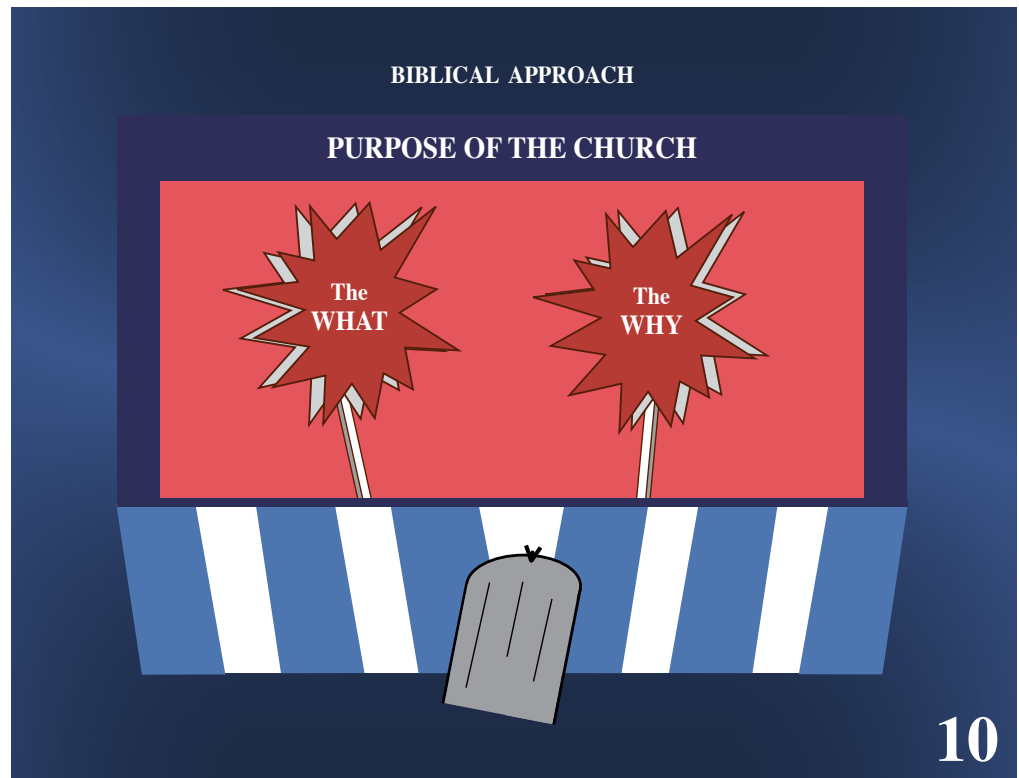
That illustrates the interconnected elements that relate to the purpose of the church gathered. Repeating this “look down through the layers” approach for the “Scattered (Church)” indicates when the church scatters into the world that Jesus is revealed through the believer’s life and words to curious non-believers in the third dimension. Lastly, deserving our obedience at all times whether the church is “Scattered or Gathered,” we are to obey Him in loving service in the first dimension.

Only by grasping these multifaceted and interconnected layers can we gain a clear prospective of the purpose of the church that leads to a proper understanding of a biblical philosophy of the ministry.

Slide #10

Lets return to the shooting gallery. This time our concern isn’t the many reasons for going to church or the reasons the multitude of programs are provided when the church gathers. Those concern “the What”—What you Do! It’s your *methodology* in the ministry (see article *Adopting a Biblical Ministry Perspective*). Our topic here is the “purpose of the church,” the foundational bottom layer (see slide 9), which determines one’s *philosophy* for the ministry—“the Why”—Why you Do what you Do! Only until you have developed a biblical philosophy of the ministry can you then determine the appropriate methodology in the ministry. The later flows from the former. So, take aim at “the Why” and then and only then consider “the What” in ministry.

Remember, the purpose of the church is to love God and love neighbors. Every program of the church must be evaluated in light of the biblical purpose of the church.



Endnotes:

1. At Dallas Theological Seminary, professor Howard Hendricks used this expression.
2. Ken Neff, *Escape* (Jacksonville Beach, FL: LeaderQuest. 2018), 180-82.
3. Ibid., 205-10.
4. Ibid., 201-02.
5. Ibid., 202-05.