

# First Baptist Church

Pastor William Randolph

## **Navigating Through Uncharted Territories**

Pastor Paul Cannings D.Phil.  
Living Word Fellowship Church of Houston  
President of Power Walk Ministry  
www.lwfellowshipchurch.org  
www.powerwalkministries.org

### **I. Introduction**

It is easy for us to start to think, because of all that has taken place for so long, that we need to rethink church. That is true in some ways but not conceptually. The scripture however states; *“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”* (1 Corinthians 3:10-14; NASB) The theology of Ecclesia is the same but the application is a work in progress for each church in every community.

### **II. NAVIGATING – MUST HAVE A GOOD COMPASS – AN OVERVIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

#### **A. Who is the church?**

1. Christ - He is the **first** to mention the word church in the New Testament (Matthew 16:18 universal church; Matthew 18:17 local church), and He is **the head of it** (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). The Word of God must rule as **the authority, not leaders who think they own the church** because they help build it. **It is the only organism** (the body of Christ) the Lord God is committed to.
2. All those who accept **Christ into their lives are representatives** of the church in society (Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23, Ephesians 3:16-17). The church **does not exist for itself**, but for its impact on individuals, families and communities (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 3:10-11).

#### **B. What is the church?**

1. The church should be a viable process that impacts believer’s lives, **constantly stimulating growth** (through the teaching, praying, fellowship and evangelism; Acts 2:42-47) and commitment to Christ through His Word (1 Timothy 4:8).
2. The church should be an environment where the believers are **constantly stimulated to submit every part of their lives to the authority of God** (1 Timothy 3:15).
3. The church should impact a believer so that **the believer impacts society** (Matthew 5:13-16).
4. The church represents and reflects **the person and program of God in history** (Luke 17:21).
5. The church must function **in accordance with God’s Word** (1 Timothy 3:13; 1 Corinthians 14:40).
6. The church **must not allow tradition to control** its’ proper functioning (Colossians Matthew 15:7-11).
7. The church must move from programs to **comprehensive ministries**. It must seek to impact the whole world (Ephesians 4:11-13; Colossians 1:28).
8. The church must **not be satisfied with mediocrity**; instead, it must always strive for excellence (Colossians 1:16-18). When this occurs, the church will prove itself effective in the market place.

*"If we do not operate on God’s agenda, we will not experience God’s results."*

### C. The goal:

1. **The main focus** of the church is **to make disciples** (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:6-11). This is the command. As a result, all church ministries, programs and structures should be consistently scrutinized so that this process can occur. As Paul states in Colossians 1:28, his focus was to present everyone perfect in Christ.
2. The above-mentioned goals will only be attained if **the church addresses sin** (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). First as a result of members who hold each other accountable on an individual basis (Matthew 18: 15-17). The church **must** hold each member accountable corporately (1 Corinthians 5). Also, as a result of accountability, the church **must** restore those who have fallen into sin (Galatians 6:1-2).
3. The church **must** also **seek to maintain unity** (Ephesians 2:14-22) by way of the Lord's supper in a biblical manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-32), fellowship and worship.

### D. The purpose:

1. **Israel's sole purpose** was to be God's royal priesthood that would demonstrate His glory to the surrounding nations (Exodus 19:5-6).
2. This focus is the same for the New Testament church as **found in Matthew 16:17 and Ephesians 3:10-11.**
3. The New Testament church **must demonstrate the glory of God** (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:15-17; Ephesians 5:20).
4. The purpose of the church is to be a community where:
  - a) Believers **use their gifts** to serve each other for the glory of God (1 Pet. 4:10; Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:21-31).

## **III. TO NAVIGATE – MUST HAVE DISCIPLES**

A. Too many churches have focused on building big memberships rather than true disciples (the Lord will judge us for the quality of our work not quantity; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 10:12-13). Now that the pandemic has emptied churches, the struggle for believers to be committed in their walk of faith is the new pandemic. This is because what Christ told us to do has come front and center. He told us to make disciples (go, a command that we must actively seek to do – make – we must create the need in believer's lives). Consequently, discipleship is responsible Christian living:

1. Discipleship leads to a **life of faith**, and it is faith that the Lord rewards (Hebrews 11:6). When faith is tested it provides **eternal rewards** (James 1:12; 1 Timothy 4:6-8).
2. Someone who is committed to discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 14:26-33; Col. 1:28-29), is committed to disciple others (2 Timothy 2:2). This leads to the **multiplication** of spiritual growth within the church and **church growth** (Acts 2:42-47; 6:7).
3. It is required of a leader to be **reliable** and **teachable** (2 Timothy 2:2). Without this requirement being met, leaders are only holding positions which is **no help** to the vision of the church or to other believers. Christ disciplined His leaders first before He sent them out. Paul disciplined the elders of Ephesus before he established them as leaders in the church (Acts 20:25-35).
  - a) A believer's commitment to the authority of scripture **supersedes** their desire to hold to **church traditions** when those traditions violate the Word of God (Colossians 2:6-8; Matthew 15:2-9).
  - b) A believer is someone who demonstrates a willingness to have a greater commitment to a biblical approach to ministry, rather than a **philosophical approach** (our own reason and logic is not

allowed; Prov. 3:5-6 – this is only to be used for the application process) to ministry (Colossians 2:8-10).

4. When believers are more committed to being **disciples of Christ** rather than just to serve the title, it creates a **loving community** of believers (John 13:34-35). This is the **most important priority** for the church (1 Corinthians 13:3 – notice this verse says, ‘it profits **ME** nothing.’).

#### **IV. TO NAVIGATE – A LIFE OF FAITH IS REQUIRED**

- A. **Theological Definition:** This word is used absolutely for believing in Christ. It implies knowledge and a confidence in Christ as a result of a deep commitment to trust Him, which is the same as saying it is an unreserved commitment to the Word of God. Faith does not refuse to face reality but looks beyond all difficulties to see God and His promises.
- B. **Faith is everything** because it is only faith that is tested in trials (2 Timothy 4:6-8), and it is the only time we will **be rewarded** by God (Hebrews 11:6).
- C. **It is faith that blessed people** to navigate **the worst situations** of their lives:
1. Numbers 13-14 – there were giants in the land (we learn later the giants were afraid of Israel; Joshua 2:9). The people lived by sight while Joshua, Caleb and Moses lived by faith; *“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “we should by all means go up, and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.”*
    - a) Joshua said, *“If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us — a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”* (Numbers 14:8-9; NASU)
  2. David said; *“..... For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God”* (1 Samuel 17:26). Notice that Goliath is uncircumcised, so he has no covenant with God; neither can his sins be forgiven. He is a Philistine so he had no relationship with God and he “taunted” the army of God. Anyone who curses God’s people will be cursed (Genesis 12:3). Goliath was a dead man before David did anything.
    - a) David’s focus was not how powerful Goliath was; he maintained his focus on God (2 Samuel 17:45). Joseph was the same way (Genesis 41:16, 38-40).
    - b) David said; *“The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”* (1 Samuel 17:37).
  3. Daniel did not care if they put him in a Lion’s Den for doing what God told him to do. He was fully surrendered to the will of God (Daniel 6:16-28).
- D. Each story exposes that faith began with a **deep commitment and full surrender** to the Word of God. Remember the Word of God never returns empty (void; Isaiah 55:11; Deuteronomy 8:3-6).

## V. TO NAVIGATE – FAITH LEADS US FORWARD

- A. **A plague is nothing new.** It has taken place repeatedly in Biblical history. I cannot imagine human history. In each case God either protected His people (Egypt), or determined who lived (in the wilderness) or died. He did all of this in a time where there were no vaccines or hospitals (this does not mean we do not need them).
- B. God instructs us as pastors that **the Word is “adequate for every good work.”** (2 Timothy 3:16) and our members have **“everything they need for life and godliness.”** (2 Peter 1:3-4). We must stick with the scriptures (**the call to faith**) to navigate this time because this is living by faith (Romans 10:17) and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7-8). What does scripture say is the clarion call?
1. God says that He has placed **government** in place to protect His people (Romans 13:1-7).
- C. God told us to go into Judea, Samaria and all the world (Acts 1:8). **Many churches became more committed to maintaining membership, not disciples** and struggle to inspire members to serve their community (Judea), their city (Samaria) and they seldom do world missions. When the church in Acts did not do this God sent Paul. **Paul was the virus to the New Testament church.** It is the persecution led by Paul that scattered the church.
1. Paul's scattering of the church (James tells us what that did to them) **caused the church to go to all the world.**
  2. The church in Jerusalem became the church, as a result, that needed financial help (2 Corinthians 8) because it seems **to have forgotten Christ's mission to the community and the world.**
  3. In revelation churches are being **closed for a lack of reminding focused.**
- D. The challenge is how do we continue the work of God while being dispersed (diaspora; Isaiah 58). Here are some ideas:
1. **Church is not a sermon. The church is not a worship service** even though that is crucial and the heart of it (Acts 2:42-27). The very word means the collection of faithful believers and **we are told not to neglect the assembling together** (Hebrews 10:23-26; It does except in the case of viruses. So how do we do this in respect of government that is put in place by God to protect us?) Here are some examples of how we (Living Word Fellowship Church) are living by faith in the pandemic (God allowed the pandemic to be during a time of great technology):
    - a) **We regather in the numbers we are allowed.** We chose not to live by fear.
    - b) We do not stay away longer than necessary. **Missing church can become a habit** (Hebrews 10:25). **Habits are hard to break** especially in this new era where it's already hard to get the new generation to come to church consistently.
    - c) We need to develop **Hybrid services** – in house (following the protocols) and live stream. It is touching people who would not have come to church. This should not be just for worship but for Sunday school as well.
    - d) We need to seek out individuals with **good marketing and technology skills.**
    - e) We need to **more consciously** go to Judea (neighboring communities), Samaria (touch neighborhoods that are cross cultural), and the world.

- f) There are people who are still out of work, **still suffering** from the lost of loved ones, still **disillusioned** because of all that God has allowed and because of our national climate have hate in their hearts.
- We have **provided food** to over 200 cars per day (except for Saturday and Sundays) until January, 2021 where we went to three days a week.
  - We are even more conscious about sharpening our **counseling ministry**.
  - We have tried to keep our church informed as to where **jobs** are being offered.
  - We are doing **street evangelism** in neighborhoods where people are walking around. This is outside, respecting social distancing.
  - We have continued to **support our missionaries**. We did not go to Belize but we worked with the church in Belize to do a virtual VBS in Belize. Power Walk has done several conferences in various parts of the world virtually.
- g) We have a **Comfort and Care and Prayer Ministry** that has been a tremendous support to many families. They meet virtually every week to help me and our deacons keep up (Romans 4:9-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15).
- h) Our elders meet in person every Sunday morning for **prayer because of Acts 6:1-2**.
2. We have to **stop thinking about what we cannot do** and start thinking about how to get it done. The disciples were told by Christ to go into all the world (Acts 1:8). Christ did not give them donkeys or ships. He simply told them to go. **Peter told us how penniless** he was when he said he no silver or gold (Acts 3:6).
- a) **Christ knew He came in the right season of time** (Galatians 4:4). He knew the Romans had developed maps to travel by sea. In their desire to conquer the world they developed transportation lanes for their military. As a result, by the end of the Book of Acts Paul was writing to Rome.
- b) God has provided to us technology that can reach around the world. He has provided to sophisticated medical systems and a lot of Biblical tools. **We must learn to think outside the box that man made traditions has created**.
3. We need **to retrain leaders** who refuse to think outside the traditional box (Mark 7:6-8). We need to find leaders who are more committed to Biblical traditions (1 Corinthians 11:1-2) than man made ways of thinking (Colossians 2:8-10).
- a) **Christ did not use the traditional leadership of the Jews**. He had no Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, elders or high priest. As matter of fact, He told them to respect those whom Christ chose to put in authority when they joined the church (Hebrews 13:17). **Christ chose those who were committed to walk by faith and not by sight** (Mark 16:14-20; John 20:24-29). He needed disciples who would **trust His word no matter what other people think** (Acts 2:5-13).
- b) We need to find leaders who are **more committed to resolving problems rather than being the problem** (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Titus 3:10-11). Too many leaders are holding positions rather than using their positions to serve the kingdom agenda of God. **We need to do a refresh or change leadership**. It is useless to put new wine in old wine skins (people that don't care to change or don't want to put in the time to learn to change).

- When there was a problem in the New Testament church, Christ’s leaders got together and solved it and set the New Testament to Christ’s agenda (**Acts 15**).
  - We need a group of leaders that understand the nature of the churches of Christ, **are deeply committed to His Word** and are also willing **to think of practical ways to implement it**. To walk in the truth stimulates the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 16:13) who in turn provides us freedom (John 8:31-32) to do the work of the ministry.
    - *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**” (2 Tim 3:16-17; NASB)*
    - *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; **seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence.” (2 Peter 1:2-4; NASB)*
4. We may have to shorten our worship services, **not the message** because of the different audiences we serve on social media.

## VI. Conclusion

As in the case of “**diaspora**” (the scattering of God’s people) in the Old Testament, God expects us to rebuild the ruins (Isaiah 58) and to take worshipping and serving Him more seriously. This is something God says in Isaiah 58:13 we must become purposeful about (*“If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day.....”*). He will not turn our foot for us, we must decide to obey Him and abide in His Word (John 15:1-11). To not do so is to again be turned over to our enemies (Deuteronomy 28:47-48). These are the last days, but the church, like in the case of Israel in Egypt, does not have to suffer along with the world (1 Peter 4:17).