



Membership Class

Membership at The Well

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The Story of the Well

Pre-Abilene

The journey of planting a church in Abilene actually began at a church in Boerne. Both of our founding pastors, Austin Lawrence and Jake Kreifels, served on staff at Currey Creek Baptist Church where they developed a passion for church planting. In 2009, Austin left CCBC and moved to Denver where he got some real hands-on training with a couple of recent church plants in the Acts 29 network (L2 and New City Denver). In 2013, Austin and his wife Katherine, along with the Kreifels began to feel that the Lord was calling them to take the risk and commit to planting a new work. As this vision took shape, God was faithful to lead a few families to commit to the new work as well, pledging to move to wherever God might lead. The next step was figuring out where that might be.

Why Abilene?

In the early stages, the team had prayed about planting in places like Denver, Tulsa and San Antonio. By the summer of 2013, they felt that God was leading them back to the great state of Texas, which made San Antonio the front runner. In July, Austin and Katherine attended a wedding in Austin, TX and had every intention of going from there to San Antonio to scout out some possible locations for the plant. At the reception, the Lawrences ran into some old friends, Zach and Kara Sheets, and after hearing that Austin felt called to plant, Zach shared a story:

“Austin, hear me out. Kara and I have felt lead to plant a new church in Abilene for the last few years. So, I ended up going to an ‘Acts 29 bootcamp’ (which is a church planting training event) with the thought that I was going to be the pastor of this church. That week of training confirmed that I am not the guy to plant. So, I decided to inform the regional director for church planting in West Texas (Dusty Thompson) that while there still needed to be a plant in Abilene, I was not the guy to do it. Dusty responded, ‘Zach, that’s great. But know that *God is going to have to drop someone out of the sky for this plant to happen. We don’t know anyone in Abilene that wants to plant there and honestly, it will be pretty hard to get someone to move there specifically for a plant.’* Now, Austin, I just had that conversation 2 days ago and I believe that the Lord might be connecting some dots here...”

Zach went on to ask Austin if he could pray that Austin, Jake and the rest of the team would plant their church in Abilene. Austin responded by saying “Man, you can pray, but I don’t think I’m moving to Abilene!” Needless to say...God had different plans.

A Church in Abilene

In a very short period of time, God changed Austin’s heart on planting in Abilene along with the rest of the team. God also provided abundantly through resources and people, and in January of 2014, the team moved to Abilene to begin this new work. The team had every intention of starting slow, meeting in living rooms, and slowly building relationships as the church developed. However, after the first interest meeting it became clear that the Lord had created some momentum and the group was too large

for a living room. Through a series of providential meetings, some enthusiastic word-of-mouth, and the generosity of the people at University Baptist Church, the group soon had everything they would need to do church and the people to do church with...all they needed was a location. After a couple of brief stops in other places around downtown Abilene, they soon found themselves meeting in an old cigar shop at 202 Cypress. The first service was held on March 2nd of 2014.

This is simply the story of how this church began and as you can see, the Lord has been leading the way and making things happen from day one. We are a church today not because of talented leadership or because of some awesome church-planting strategy. We are a church today simply because of the sovereign movement of God. He wanted a new church in Abilene and we have had the great privilege of being a part of it. We believe Jesus' words from Matt. 16 when he said that He would "build His church." The Well's history is one showing Christ's words are still as true today as they were in the first century.



The Mission of the Well

Christians have long held that the main goal of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. If this is true, then it should be the chief end of any church to introduce people to God and teach them what it means to follow him. We know of no better way to accomplish these goals than to **make disciples and plant churches**. That's why we're here. It's the reason we exist.

The Great Commission

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

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 28:16-20

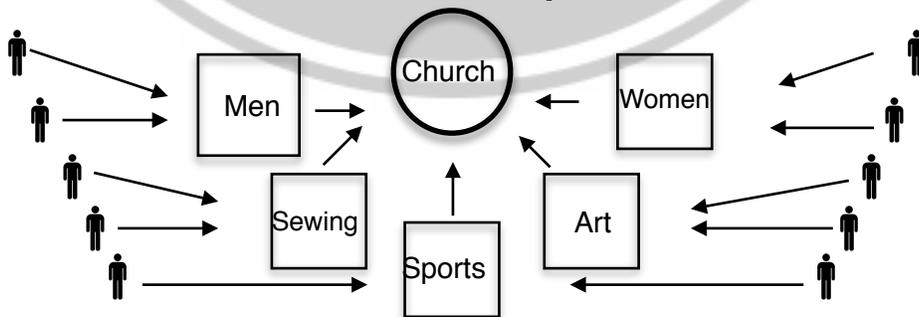
The Great Commission says it pretty clearly...If you are going to follow Jesus you need to be making disciples. This isn't a command only to pastors, church staff, and missionaries. Jesus calls **all** Christians to be about the work of making disciples. At The Well, we've tried to organize around this command in a few important ways:

Attractional vs. Incarnational Ministry

The Attractional Model

Many churches have adopted an "attractional model" of ministry. The idea here is that the church will attract people to their church through some means so that they can hear the gospel message. Paid staff create, fund, and support ministries and programs that bring people to the church building. Often these ministries and programs try to target a niche market along age or demographic lines. Whenever a new group is identified that the church would like to attract, the church develops a new program or hires a new staff person to reach that target group.

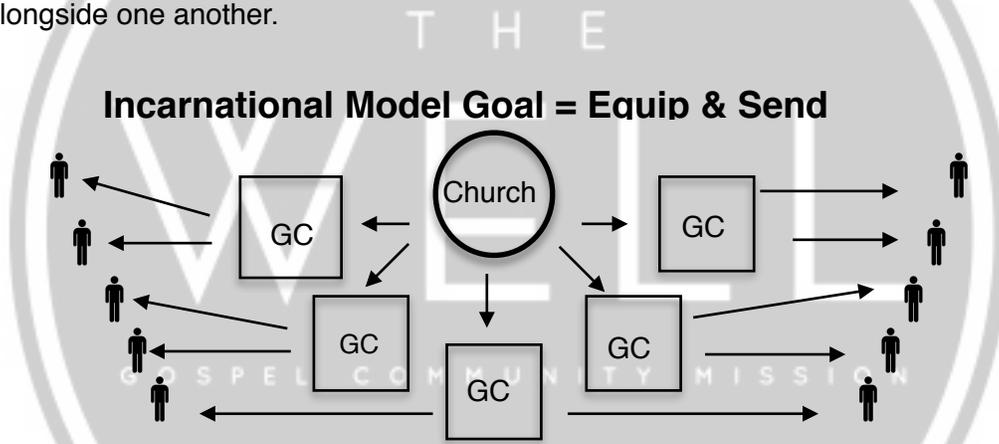
Attractional Model Goal = People Who Attend



The Incarnational Model

The Well's vision is to be "incarnational." All of Jesus' ministry and mission was "incarnational." The term comes from Jesus becoming carnate flesh to redeem humanity. He did not sit in heaven and wait for His followers to be attracted to Him. Nor did He come to the earth and spend his entire life preaching in a synagogue. While He did teach in synagogues and occasionally preached to large crowds, a great deal of His ministry occurred in homes, on streets, in fields, beside wells, in transit, at parties, and ultimately, on a cross. Even then Jesus preached the good news, or Gospel, to a criminal. To Jesus, everything was ministry because His whole life was on mission.

We seek to replicate this missional approach to discipleship. In an incarnational approach to ministry, we send believers out into their own community to spread the Gospel. Paid staff are charged with equipping and encouraging the church to carry out the mission that has been given to all of us. In this way, students are reached by other students living out the Gospel. Co-workers are reached by other co-workers living out the Gospel. Couples model grace to singles by living out the Gospel. These aren't events that have a limited scope and focus. This is truly Christian community, where believers live radical lives, rooted in the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and alongside one another.



Equip & Send: Disciple Makers

Disciple makers need to be equipped and sent to make disciples. That sounds obvious, but acknowledging this simple truth is the difference between talking about The Great Commission and actually living it. At the Well, we try to keep it pretty simple. We work to equip each other for the work of discipleship through three main areas:

Gospel-Centered Teaching and Preaching

With the message of the gospel central to every sermon and teaching at our church, we will strive to declare the "full counsel" of the divinely inspired, objective truth found in scripture. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Acts 20:26-32, 2 Tim. 4:2-5)

Gospel-Centered Community

The Christian faith is intended be lived as a community activity yet so many Christians treat their faith like a solo project. Therefore based on the freedom giving, transforming power of gospel, we will work hard to foster Gospel-centered community so that each of us can strive to humbly live life "in front" of one another as

we pray for, confess to, mourn and rejoice with those in our community. In this way, we are preparing one another for the ministry of discipleship as we are being discipled. (Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 3:12-13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Romans 12:9-13, Philippians 1:27, 2:1-8)

Gospel-Centered Opportunities for Mission and Service

Fueled by the gospel and supported by our community we will strive to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We will try to help members of The Well identify good opportunities for mission right where they are and around the world. Additionally, we will be dedicated to following Christ's example in serving one another humbly and sacrificially. (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 2:11-12 Matt 20:25-28, Philippians 2:5-11, John 13:12-16)

The Role of the Gospel Community

Gospel Communities are groups of believers that consistently spend time with one another, striving to apply the Gospel to all areas of life. While there are many similarities to standard small groups, Gospel Community groups are actually our primary avenues for church missions. These groups will not only share life and study Scripture together, but will ask the question: "How can we be on mission in our city?" A group may organize a BBQ to reach unchurched or dechurched neighbors. Another may teach English as a Second Language at Johnson Elementary. Yet another may build a community garden for refugee families. None of this could happen from Bible studies alone. This will happen as Christians share meals with one another and with unchurched, as they open their Bibles, as they pray for one another, and as they disciple one another. Just like larger body of The Well, Gospel Communities strive to equip their members to make disciples by providing Gospel-centered teaching, Gospel-centered community, and Gospel-centered opportunities for mission and service.

G O S P E L C O M M U N I T Y M I S S I O N

Some of our Gospel Communities may even identify needs – and supply the deacons, elders and planters – for new church plants in the Abilene area or in other West Texas towns.

Church Planting

If you've spent much time in Abilene or West Texas in general, you have probably noticed that there are no shortages of church buildings. It can seem like there is one on every corner. You may wonder, ***why would we need more churches?*** It's a great question and its one we get all the time. Here's a few reasons we are so committed to church planting:

Why Church Planting?

America needs more churches.

95 million people claim to be non-Christian in the United States.¹ *Many more are believed to claim Christianity by virtue of hereditary tradition rather than conversion.*²

The US is the largest mission field in the Western hemisphere and the fifth largest mission field on earth.

American church per capita ratio has dropped precipitously in the last century.³

In 1900, there were 28 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

In 2010, there were 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

New Churches are more effective than older churches:

Churches under 3 years old average 10 people coming to faith per year.

Churches 3-15 years old average 5 people coming to faith per year.

Churches over 15 years old average 3 people coming to faith per year.

New Churches necessarily develop more pastors and leaders.

New churches have to start from scratch which means they have to do the difficult but fruitful work of training pastors and leaders.

Believe it or not, Abilene needs more churches.

In 2011, there were 15 churches for every 10,000 Abilene area residents.

Between 2011 and 2014, Abilene grew by 1,100 people per year. At this rate, we would need to *plant 15 churches per year to keep up with population growth.*⁴

Abilene has 12,000 students enrolled in area colleges and universities. 62% of Americans ages 20-26 say faith is not very important to them.⁵

Abilene Christian - 4,558

Cisco Jr. College - 4,800

Hardin-Simmons - 1,640

McMurry - 1,003

TTU Pharmacy - 160

Abilene is marked by a dangerous “Cultural Christianity”

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my father.” - Matthew 7:21

Equip and Send: Church Planters

This is an area where we really need a lot of growth. God willing, The Well will one day have a Church-Planting residency program designed to give prospective church planters the opportunity to gain significant experience in pastoral ministry and to develop them as elders, pastors, and disciple makers before they are sent out to plant. We don't want to rush this process and we're not exactly sure what form it will take. Just know it's something we're working on.

¹ Based on census population projections from: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/RH1125214/00> Percentages drawn from: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

² George Hunter, “*The Rationale for a Culturally Relevant Worship Service,*” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Worship and Growth* 7 (1996): 131.

³ Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006, 2003), 8-9. Numbers based on Christian Congregation estimates from the Hartford Institute and the US Census.

⁴ Based on U.S. median church size from http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong

⁵ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

The Values of The Well

The mission of The Well is to Make Disciples and Plant Churches. While that mission is clear enough it doesn't answer a couple of important questions like: What does it mean to be a disciple? What should we focus on when making disciples? How do we prepare someone to be a church planter? What kind of churches do we want to plant? That's where our values come in. As we pursue the God's mission for The Well, we will be guided by three values: Gospel, Community, & Mission.

Gospel

What is the gospel?

The term "gospel" simply means "good news". Tim Keller described the gospel as "a pool in which an elephant can bathe and a toddler can wade." This statement speaks to the reality that viewing the gospel solely as a tool for salvation encompasses only part of the truth about the gospel but certainly does not fully describe the scope of its meaning.

Speaking to the depth and breadth of the gospel's influences in our lives, Bob Thune in the Gospel Centered Life states,

"The gospel is not just the means of our salvation, but the means of our transformation. It is not simply deliverance from sin's penalty, but release from sin's power. The gospel is what makes us right with God (justification) and it is also what frees us to delight in God (sanctification). The gospel changes everything!"

Practically, the gospel is "good news" that is to be declared, but it is also the vehicle by which we see the world transformed. Greg Gilbert sums up the primary elements of the Gospel like this:

God. Man. Christ. Response

Obviously, this is an intentional simplification of some complex and profound truths. These 4 Gospel elements are helpful because they help us to focus on the core Gospel story that has been the transforming story of the church since its inception:

"Contexts change, angles change, words change, and approaches change, but somehow and in some way the earliest church always seemed to get at these four issues: We are accountable to the God who created us (God). We have sinned against that God and we will be judged (Man). But God has acted in Jesus Christ to save us (Christ), and we take hold of that salvation by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus (Response)."⁶

⁶ Greg Gilbert, What is the Gospel? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 32.

To get any value out of these Gospel elements, it's important that we first understand what each of them means. Each element represents a remarkable truth that can be understood on at least a couple of levels. Each element breaks down like this:

God

Who is He? What is He like? What has He done? To what is he entitled?

Man

Who are we? What are we like? What do we do? What do we deserve?

Christ

Who is He? What has He done? What does this mean?

Response

How can we respond?

The Gospel at an Individual Level

If we think through each of these elements for our own personal lives, the Good News takes on a real weight and importance for us. Think about it like this:

God

A good and loving God has created you, placed you where and when you are, and has given you all that you have including your gifts, relationships, resources, etc. He has called you to love, worship, and obey him as this brings you the fullness of joy and gives to him the Glory he deserves.

Man

You bear his image and, because of that, have immense value and worth. But you are also deeply broken. By nature and choice you have sinned against God. Your actions have earned you the just penalty of sin, and you are incapable of saving yourself.

Christ

But God, sent Christ His son into the world to live the life you couldn't live, die the death you should have died that you might have the eternal life through his resurrection that you never deserved.

Response

By his life, death, and resurrection, the the grace of God, and the regeneration of the Spirit, you can believe in Christ and have hope as a result of your faith.

The Gospel at a Cosmic Level

We can also understand the Gospel at a cosmic level, that is, how the Gospel plays out through all of history. That story looks something like this:

God

A holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-encompassing God created the universe and established a perfect order of which includes everything, every animal, and human

beings which he created in his own image. This universe was harmonious and at peace in its original state.

Man

Created to bear the very image of God, humans were given dominion over the earth and a harmonious relationship with Him. Through the sin of human beings, all of creation has been thrown into chaos such that even the rocks cry out for relief. Because every element of creation has been touched by the curse of sin, creation cannot repair itself, but longs for restoration.

Christ

God himself took on the humble form of human flesh and through his life, death and resurrection all creation will be restored and reconciled in God's perfect timing. He has offered himself as a perfect and atoning sacrifice, broken the bonds of sin, and robbed death of its power, and through Him alone there is hope.

Response

The followers of Christ, the church, follow him and eagerly anticipate his triumphal return and the restoration of all things. We hope in confidence that the lion will lay down with the lamb and that tears, and mourning, and death will soon pass away.

Community & Mission — Two Sides of the Same Coin

We believe that community and mission are not just activities in which we engage, but are natural responses that flow from hearts that have been transformed by the gospel. If you are around here long enough you will hear us say that "community and mission are two sides of the same coin." We are convinced that hearts changed by the gospel and indwelt with the Holy Spirit will have a natural desire for community and be driven into a life of mission. When hearts have been made new by Jesus, Christian community becomes the fuel for Christian mission, and its Christian mission that gives life to your Christian community. Community and mission do not exist apart from one another. They are complementary responses flowing from the same source of gospel change.

Community is cultivated as we live our lives out in front of one another, practicing the art of confession and repentance. This kind of loving, vulnerable community leads to lives characterized by a freedom that comes only from redemption found in Jesus. In fact, the kind of community that Christ envisioned for his disciples was to be so powerful, so sacrificial, that it would become a ministry to the world:

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. 33Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 34A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

-John 13:31-35

Mission is simply what the Christian life looks like in the world around us. All Christians have been called to the task of disciple making whether in Africa, Philadelphia, or Abilene. We all have been called to engage those around us with the Gospel.



The Vision of The Well

Loving the City

We believe God has called us to Abilene to love Abilene. We don't want to be an organization that takes advantage of the opportunities that this city provides us. We want to contribute. We want to serve. This takes a few different forms:

We desire to share the whole Gospel with the whole of Abilene.

We want to serve this city in ways that bring health, healing and reconciliation.

We want to be a part of the life of the city.

A Training Church

Think about the hospitals you are familiar with. While there are many specializations, hospitals usually fall into two big categories: treatment or training. Hospitals that focus on treatment are all about the patient. They want to make sure that people walk out of their building in better shape than when they came in. It's a good goal. Training hospitals share that goal in that they certainly want to care well for their patients and see positive health outcomes. However, training hospitals also work hard to train technicians, nurses, and doctors who will treat patients in the future. If you'll follow the metaphor, we want to be like the training hospitals.

Making disciples and planting churches just cannot be accomplished if we aren't training future leaders of the church. Gospel Communities need leaders. Churches need elders, pastors, and deacons. Church plants need planters. The Well strives to prepare leaders for many roles including:

Disciple Makers

Group Leaders

Deacons & Ministers

Elders & Pastors

Church Planters

Planting Churches that Plant Churches

At one of our men's retreats, our speaker was John Free, the pastor of Currey Creek Church in Boerne, TX. Currey Creek was a church plant of First Baptist Church, Boerne and Currey Creek also was an integral part of planting The Well. At the men's retreat, John stood up in front of our men and said:

"You know, it's a great day when you have a child, but it's an even better day when you have a grandchild. When you've watched your child meet someone, fall in love, build a marriage, and then bring a child of their own into the world, that's when you really see the fruit of your labor. And the same goes for church planting. We were so excited when The Well was planted, but we're going to be even more excited when The Well plants a church of its own."

Just as we long to see our own children start a family, we also pray that the churches we plant will continue the good Kingdom work of planting churches. It is difficult work, but it is the work to which we are called. To this end, there are a few qualities we hope to see in every church we plant:

A commitment to the Gospel in all of life

A passion for teaching the truth of Scripture

Investment in healthy, Biblical community

A sacrificial dedication to the mission of the church

A culture of multiplication

The Family of The Well

When you use the word “family” in everyday life you probably have a good idea of what it means. Typically, people use this word to describe a group of people with common biological ancestry like fathers and sons, grandmothers and grand children, aunts and nieces. Certainly we also expand the definition to include people who have been legally adopted. There are even times when we would call someone “family” because of the common experiences we’ve gone through. At The Well, we use the word “family” to describe the believers in our church who have committed themselves to God and to one another through a covenant. This bond is not defined by common ancestry, but by our common salvation in Christ and our common belief.

Core Beliefs

The Bible:

At The Well, we believe that all 66 books of scripture were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are void of error in their original manuscripts and are to be viewed as the supreme authority in all matters of faith and our everyday lives. (2 Timothy 3:16).
This has implications for everything we do and believe at The Church.

God:

We believe that God is the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in three persons, co-eternal and co-equal in power (2 Corinthians 13:14) and of the same essence. We affirm the truth of God’s omniscience (He knows everything), His omnipresence (He is everywhere), and His omnipotence (He has all power).

The Person and Work of the Father:

God the father, distinct from the Son and the Spirit in person while fully unified in essence and purpose, is sovereign Lord over all and operates primarily as originator and creator. He has always existed in perfect love and harmony with the Son and the Spirit.

- Creator of the universe (Genesis 1 & 2)
- Sovereign Lord (Psalm 135:6, Job 42:2, Romans 8:29-30)
- Sent the Son (John 3:16-17)
- Sent the Spirit (John 14:26)

The Person and Work of Jesus:

Jesus is the Son of God, fully God and fully man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. Jesus paid the full penalty for our sin and drank deeply of the wrath of God according to God’s predetermined plan. He has triumphed over the powers of Satan, Sin, and Death (Colossians 2:15).

- Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10-14)
- Jesus is our faithful High Priest who is both our advocate and intercessor (Hebrews 3:1)
- Jesus is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18)
- Jesus is King of Kings who sits at the right hand of the Father and has all authority in Heaven and Earth (Ephesians 1:20-23, Daniel 7:13-14)
- Jesus holds all things together (Colossians 1:17)
- Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)

- Jesus is the great Warrior who came to destroy the works of the devil and who is
- currently ruling in the midst of His enemies (1 John 3:8, Psalm 110:1-3)

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit:

We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and came into the world to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit...

- Convicts (Acts 2:37)
- Regenerates (Titus 3:5)
- Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)
- Seals (Ephesians 1:13-14)
- Leads (Galatians 5:18)
- Teaches (John 14:26)
- Helps (John 16:7)
- Empowers for Witnessing (Acts 1:8)

Humanity:

We believe mankind was created in the image of God, but through Adam's sin the race fell. Man is born into sin. Man has a radical bent towards evil and rebellion, is under the wrath of God, and cannot save himself. All men are in need of salvation that can only be supplied by the grace of God as it is revealed in the gospel. We also believe that God has placed great value on human life evidenced by His willingness to give His only begotten Son to die for humanity and to adopt us into His family. Our view of humanity is shaped by two truths.

- First, the Imago Dei. Man is made in God's image and because of that all human beings have value and worth.
- Second, total depravity. All humans are sinners by nature and choice. This does not mean all people are as wicked as they could be because of the constraining grace of God. It does mean that salvation is a gift of God received by grace through faith in Jesus.

Salvation:

We believe that salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received through faith in Jesus Christ whose blood was shed on the cross at Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins. (Ephesians 2:8) Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we can be set free from sin, Satan, and death.

The Church:

We believe in both the Church universal and the Church local. The Church universal is comprised of all believers who have died in Christ and believers yet living. It is a Chosen Race and a Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 12:22-23). The Church local is the visible Body of Christ on Earth and is characterized by...

- Regenerated Members (Acts 2:41)
- Biblical Leadership (Christ commissioned apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the Saints) (Ephesians 4:11-14)
- Gathering For Worship and Training (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Sacraments of Baptism (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4) and Communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-29)
- Unity in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-4)

- Discipline for Holiness (1 Timothy 4:6-7)
- Community of Love (Colossians 3:14)
- Making Disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19)

Christ's Return:

There are lots of theories about what Jesus' return will look like, when it will happen, what happens first, etc. While we believe that many of these theories find their root in scripture, we do not believe that all of them are essential from a doctrinal stand point. Here's what we believe is core to understanding Biblical teaching on the return of Christ:

- Christ will return (John 14:1-3)
- Christ's return will be a literal, physical event (Acts 1:9-11)
- Christ's return will be bright, loud, and glorious (Rev. 1:7, Matt. 24:27, 30-31)

Members

As Christians, we are members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19), called to function, participate, and minister in a particular place within the body of Christ. A healthy body requires that each member do its part well. A healthy church requires the same: members that are sacrificially committed and well-equipped to do the works of service that God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10; 4:12). Members function as the primary missionaries of the gospel to Abilene and beyond. God, in His sovereignty, has placed us here—in this city, among these people, in this time—for a reason (Acts 17:26–27). By joining The Well, you are pledging to partner in gospel ministry as others are pledging to help you grow in love and obedience to Jesus.

Additionally, membership allows the elders and deacons to know which people they are shepherding and to give members a place of covenantal accountability. None of us can follow Jesus well on our own, and all of us need support, encouragement, and correction for the inevitable times when we'd prefer to unplug and do life on our own terms. Having a binding commitment provides positive support and a great safety net when there is a lack in our desire for Jesus. Finally, the churches described and addressed in the New Testament Epistles seem to be more than just a bunch of people attending services and groups together. There was a commitment first to Jesus and His mission and, simultaneously, a commitment to each other. There may be other ways to accomplish this, but a covenantal church membership seems to be a great way to express this sort of committed love. While we do not find indisputable proof texts for local church membership, we do find passages that imply formal membership in local assemblies. For example, Paul's formal exclusion of the sinner at Corinth presupposes formal inclusion.

(In 1 Corinthians 5) Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to remove a brother from their ranks who was sinning in a way not even approved by pagans. Paul is calling for the exclusion of this immoral brother, which would imply that it meant something to be included in that church. He would lose the privileges of membership he once held. Formal exclusion presupposes formal inclusion. Paul's reference to "the majority" in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 seems to refer to a group commonly recognized as the church's members. "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise

such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”

The early church kept a list of widows. We know from the widow list mentioned in 1 Tim. 5:9 that lists of people were kept and tracked. If widows were listed, it is likely that a list of current members was kept and updated as well. God Himself keeps a list of all believers. “Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (Phil 4:3). ...and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into [the New Jerusalem], but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27).

God has always made a clear distinction between His people and the world. Drawing this distinction was the reason for the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Covenant; these laws distinguished Israel from the nations surrounding them, as a people set apart to the Lord. Such clarity of distinction between God’s people and the world argues for clarity and specificity on our membership rolls.

Deacons*

The word deacon literally means “servant.” Again, let’s read the definitive text on this issue (1 Timothy 3:8-13): “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must [or “Women, likewise, must”] be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

This list is surprisingly like the list for elders, except for the fact that deacons are not required to be effective teachers. The job description is a little different for deacons because the Bible gives less definition to their role. Deacons lead operational level ministry, and they are the hands and feet that make the ministry happen.

Elders

What do elders do? We should start with the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3: “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

The office of overseer is synonymous with that of pastor or elder. This text gives us big clues into what kind of person should lead the church, but the rest of the New Testament

shows what kinds of things are done. Here is a good list from Gene Getz in his excellent book *Elders and Leaders*.

- Teaching biblical truth (Galatians 6:6; I Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9)
- Modeling Christ-like behavior (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6; I Thessalonians 2:10-12)
- Maintaining doctrinal purity (Acts 20:29-30; Titus 1:9)
- Disciplining unruly believers (Galatians 6:1-2)
- Overseeing financial matters (Acts 11:29-30; II Thessalonians 3:10-12)
- Praying for those who are ill (James 5:13-15)

In short, elders at The Well are men who have proven in their homes and in their responsibilities in the church that they are capable leaders and managers, and they are able to teach. Additionally, we believe in plurality of leadership, where all votes are equal. It is our conviction that the New Testament did not imagine a modern American CEO model of corporate leadership in the church, but a place rightly governed by qualified men who share the pastoral burden.

One of the biggest problems with the way most churches govern themselves is that enormous burdens are placed on the senior pastor. He is expected to be an excellent preacher, an innovative leader, a skillful counselor, a personable confidant, an effective manager, a thoughtful theologian, and a compassionate caregiver in times of crisis. No senior pastor could fulfill these expectations. We hope that a plurality of gifted leaders will meet needs where they exist and provide effective leadership. Our Lead Pastor, then, will serve as one of the elders. However, the eldership body will serve alongside the vision of the lead pastor, who serves as a “first among equals” role in the eldership.

Between our elders and deacons, we can grow in community together without burning out our pastoral leadership. As our elder board expands, they will hold one another accountable, both pastorally and as Christians. Given the widespread failures of many pastors, it is easy to notice a common trend: most of these men were the primary leader of their congregation with very little internal accountability, support, correction, or encouragement. While moral failures can't be absolutely eliminated, a loving elder body can go a long way to protect our leaders from immorality.

Key Relationships

Acts 29 Network

A diverse, global family of church-planting churches characterized by theological clarity, cultural engagement, and missional innovation.

Theological Distinctives:

- Gospel centrality in all of life
- The sovereignty of God in saving sinners
- The work of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry
- The equality of male and female and the principle of male servant leadership.
- The local church as God's primary mission strategy

Learn more at: acts29.com

Redeemer Network

The Redeemer Network is a family of churches mostly in West and Central Texas who are committed to planting and establishing healthy churches together. These churches are tied together by relational trust, theological distinctives (Acts 29), and a desire to plant more churches in collaboration.

Learn more at: redeemernetwork.org

Supporting Churches

Currey Creek Baptist Church - Boerne, TX
Redeemer Church - Lubbock, TX
Redeemer Christian Church - Amarillo, TX
New City Church - Denver, CO
Redeemer Round Rock - Round Rock, TX
Beltway Park Church - Abilene, TX

THE WELL'S COVENANT TO YOU

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the church leadership covenants the following:

1. We covenant to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Hebrews 13:17; I Thessalonians 5:12).
2. We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the Scriptures (Galatians 6:6; I Timothy 5:17–18).
3. We covenant that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27–28).
4. We covenant to help you in times of need (Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–35; James 2:14–17).
5. We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (I Timothy 3:1–13; 5:17–22; Titus 1:5–9; I Peter 5:1–4).
6. We covenant to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick or have any other area of trial (James 5:14).
7. We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28–31).
8. We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matthew 18:15–20; I Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1).
9. We covenant to help you become equipped in your character and unique spiritual gifts to serve Christ and his church (Ephesians 4:11–13).
10. We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1–5).
11. We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members (I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; I Timothy 4:12).
12. We covenant to be good stewards and managers of the resources of this church (Acts 11:29–30; II Thessalonians 3:10–12)

G O S P E L C O M M U N I T Y M I S S I O N

THE WELL'S MEMBER COVENANT

With the guiding help of the Holy Spirit, I, the undersigned, publicly proclaim the following:

1. I am a Christian who has been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith. I have accepted His gift of salvation, bought by His death on the cross, as He endured the punishment for my sins, and His resurrection, by which I am assured of eternal life (John 3:16–18; Romans 3:23–26).
2. In obedience to Scripture, I have been baptized after I became a believer in Jesus Christ as evidence and testimony of my commitment to be His disciple (Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21).
3. I have read and am aware of the The Wells Doctrinal statements. With this understanding, I commit to not be divisive on any secondary issues, but to purposefully seek unity in the body. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership, and I will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Ephesians 4:1–3; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
4. I will endeavor to maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through personal and consistent study of the Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and practice of the other spiritual disciplines. My commitment to follow Jesus Christ will be evident through my regular participation and service at The Wells assembly and worship services, my willingness to serve where needed, and my involvement in fellowship with other members of the church body through a Gospel community, and attend members' meetings (Psalm 119:97, 105:1–2; Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:23–25).
5. I will strive to properly manage the resources God has given me, including my time, body, spiritual gifts and talents, attitudes, finances, and possessions (Proverbs 3:9–10; Romans 12:1–2; Ephesians 4:1–16, 5:15–18; Gal 5:22–26). This includes regular giving and service to the local church (The Well) that is sacrificial, cheerful, active, and voluntary (Romans 12:1–8; II Corinthians 8–9, 12:7–31; I Peter 4:10–11).
6. I commit myself to The Well's church family and agree to aid in fulfilling its missional purpose of living the Gospel and taking it to Abilene and to the nations by pursuing holy conduct as a doer of the Word and not a hearer only, serving Jesus as my Master and Lord in every area of my life (James 1:22).
7. I covenant to practice the humility and sacrificial attitude of Christ by considering the needs of others (Philippians 2:1–11), by seeking spiritual friendships (Proverbs 17:17), and by avoiding gossip (Proverbs 16:28; Matthew 18:15–17).
8. I covenant to be self-disciplined, to follow the biblical procedures of church discipline regarding my brothers and sisters in Christ, and to submit myself to church discipline if the need should ever arise (Matthew 18:15–17; I Corinthians 5:1–5; II Corinthians 2:5–8; Galatians 6:1–5, 8; I Timothy 5:20; II Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:9, 3:10–11; Revelation 2:5–7, 14–25).
9. I covenant to submit to the authority of Scripture as the final arbiter on all issues (Psalm 119, II Timothy 3:16–17). As God enables me, I will take seriously my commitment to this Membership Covenant. I understand that it is an evaluative tool, as well as an affirmation of my continuing conviction and purpose. My responsibility will be to notify The Well's leadership if, at any time, I can no longer commit to this covenant or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The Well Church.
10. I want to join with the other members of The Well and I commit my life, abilities and resources to help with the purpose of The Well Church.

The Well Covenant Agreement

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Current Gospel Community: _____

I am serving the church in this way: _____

Children's Names and Ages: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____