

January 1, 2017 by Steve Brandon



# A Biblical-Theological Model of Ministry

## Various

1. Our Purpose
2. Our Distinctives
3. Our Structure
4. Our Function

As most all of you know, I am pursuing my Doctor of Ministry degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Early tomorrow morning, I head off to spend a week there in class. My class is entitled, "Leadership in Volunteer Ministries."

The prep for the class has been very helpful to me. It has forced me to read several books about leading volunteers. If you think about it, that's my job. Nearly everyone in this congregation is a "volunteer." And it's my job to lead you all in your volunteering. And yet, I have never read a book about volunteering until this fall. And reading through these books have demonstrated to me my weaknesses in doing a good job of that task.

Now, this next week, one of my assignments is to give a presentation on my working biblical-theological model of ministry in my local context. Essentially, it means this: What are we aiming for as a church? What does the Bible speak about how our church should function? What does the Bible say about my role? What does the Bible say about your role? Where are we thriving? Where are we lacking?

And as I thought about my preparation for this presentation, I thought that it would be helpful for all of us to see what it is we are aiming at here at Rock Valley Bible Church. What's our vision? What's our goal? What are we aiming for?

And I thought that this would be an especially helpful message at the beginning of the New Year. A natural time for reflection about what the new year will bring. A natural time for us to resolve to live differently.

And so, my message this morning is entitled, "A Biblical-Theological Model of Ministry." It sounds intimidating, but I'm sure that you will track just fine. As we work through a biblical-theological model of ministry here at Rock Valley Bible Church, I want for you to be thinking of your own life and how you fit. Perhaps God will work in your soul this morning to give you a renewed focus for the vision of our church and your involvement in it.

Unlike a normal message of mine, we aren't going to land in one text and sit there and dig deep. No, we are going to be broad this morning, covering lots of topics and lots of texts. We are going to be all over the Scriptures this morning, so get your fingers ready to move as you want to follow along in your Bibles. If not, I will do my best to display some verses on the overhead for you.

I thought that it might be helpful, first of all, to talk about ...

### 1. Our Purpose

In other words, why does Rock Valley Bible Church exist? Around here, we say it like this: "We exist to Enjoy His Grace and to Extend His Glory."

If you visit our website, you can see it right there on the front page. If you look at your bulletin, it is right there. If you pick up a pen, it's there, written on the pen. If you have a mug at home, it's there. If you receive the Weekly Word, it is right there.

You say, what does this mean? It means that we exist so as to be the joyful recipients of the grace of God in our lives. And receiving and enjoying such grace, becomes the manner and the power by which we live our lives.

We live our lives to the glory of God. But it doesn't merely end with us. We long for others to glorify the Lord as well. And so, we exist to extend the glory of God. Sharing the gospel with others. Calling others to join with us. Seeing our influence expand across this city and around the world.

Now, there are many other ways to say this. You can say that we exist to reach up to God, to reach in toward one another, and to reach out to the world. You can say that we exist to exalt the Savior, to equip the saints, and to evangelize the world. You can say that we exist to love God, and to love others. You can say that we exist to know Christ, and to make him known. You can use one-word phrases, like "win, build, send" or, "gather, grow, give, go."

Essentially, all of these purpose statements are getting at the same thing. There is a God-ward purpose of worship and exaltation. There is a man-ward purpose of reaching the lost.

Now, one of the reasons why we, as a church, have chosen to say it this way--Enjoying His Grace; Extending His Glory--is because of the flavor that such phraseology puts forth. These words describe a joyful experience with the kindness of God that compels us to go forth and tell others of Jesus.

Illustrations of this abound. Take the leper that Jesus healed. He told him to say nothing to anyone, but to show himself to the priests. And what happened? You couldn't keep his mouth shut.

Mark 1:45

But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

What happened? He experienced the grace of God and couldn't help, but to extend the glory of God to all he met! Take another illustration of the deaf man that Jesus healed. When his ears were opened and his tongue was released and he spoke plainly, ...

Mark 7:36

... Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

What happened? The crowds were witnessed the grace of God and couldn't help, but to extend the glory of God to all who would listen.

It works like this: You experience something in this life that really excites you. Say your child's athletic abilities. Or, a new Toy you find intriguing. Or, a YouTube video that is amazing Or, an event you are excited about.

You can't help but to talk about it. "Come and see my child perform." "Let me tell you about the new drone that I purchased." "Look at the new Lego set I got for Christmas!" "Did you see the recent Dude Perfect where they made a basketball shot from 500 feet?" "Are you coming to the youth retreat? It was great last time."

And what the world does with its toys and shows, so we ought to do with the gospel. The gospel of Christ--the free forgiveness that God extends to us in Jesus, by his grace, which he lavished upon us in Christ. This message ought to come into our lives with such impact that we cannot but help to go out and tell it to others.

And should Jesus tell us not to talk about the salvation that he has brought into our lives, it would be like trying to hold a laugh in during a laughing contest. Sooner or later, we are just going to burst, telling others of God's grace in our lives.

And so, likewise, we as a church exist to enjoy his grace (in its fullness), and to extend his glory (to the nations).

We are weak here! I remember one time telling someone about the purpose statement of our church, and he told me, "It's not working." Now, that doesn't deny the truthfulness of our purpose or it's biblical basis. Rather, it tells us of how we are failing, and need to do better.

We have a plan for this. We have a plan to join the Crossway network, which is a network of churches. The Crossway network will help with an evangelistic heart, and Lord-willing, will help plant churches.

Let's move on to my second point this morning. We have seen Our Purpose. And now we look at ...

## 2. Our Distinctives

That is, the beliefs which give us reason to exist and set us apart from churches down the street. There are hundreds of churches in the Rockford area. But what sets us apart?

There are three core beliefs we hold to and practice. First of all, ...

### a. We believe in the power of the Word of God.

In other words, we believe that ...

Hebrews 4:12

the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

We believe that the word of God ...

Psalms 119:105

... [Your word] is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.

We believe that ...

1 Peter 1:25  
the word of the Lord remains forever.

We believe that ...

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

We believe in the power of the word of God. Now, lots of churches would say this. But, I believe we practice it. And you can go no further than this pulpit. There is a reason why our pattern is to preach verse by verse through books of the Bible. Because we aren't trusting in our own wisdom, but in the wisdom of God as he has revealed it in the Scriptures.

We don't need to go chasing down every relevant topic pertaining to our Christian lives, packaging together in our own way what the Bible says about this or that. Because, we believe in the power of the Word of God. We want to let God speak.

A few years ago, I preached through the book of Leviticus, chapter by chapter, Sunday by Sunday. That's not the best way to grow a large church. I know that. But that's the best way to let God's word work in our lives. We really believe that ...

2 Timothy 3:16  
All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

But, beyond the pulpit, we seek to be Bible-centered in all that we do. We encourage Scripture reading. We encourage Scripture memorization. In our small groups, the Scriptures are our focus. In our prayer meeting, the Scriptures are our focus. In our youth groups or youth retreats, the Scriptures are our focus.

We really believe in the power of the Word of God. So, we seek to let it loose in our lives. We believe in the power of the Word of God.

#### **b. We believe in the power of the God.**

Fundamentally, this is why we believe in the power of the word of God, because we serve a powerful God who backs up his word. When he makes a promise, he brings it to pass. When he decrees, it happens.

Psalms 115:3  
Our God is in the heavens;  
He does all that he pleases.

And there is nothing that is too difficult for him.

Jeremiah 32:17  
Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!  
Nothing is too hard for you.

God rules the world, as he created it by the power of his speech.

He rules over all of the objects of creation. He isn't the weatherman who reports the weather. He is the one who causes the weather.

Psalms 147:15-18  
He sends out his command to the earth;  
his word runs swiftly.  
He gives snow like wool;  
he scatters frost like ashes.  
He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs;  
who can stand before his cold?  
He sends out his word, and melts them;  
he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

He rules over the animals, commanding them to come to the ark (Gen. 6:20); commanding even the frogs, gnats, and swarms of insects to saturate the land of Egypt (Ex. 8); commanding the ravens to bring food to Elijah by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3-4); commanding the mouths of the lions to be shut (Dan. 6:22).

He rules over the spiritual beings. Angels are sent at his command (Acts 12:11; Matt. 13:41). Evil spirits are sent at his command (Judges 9:23; 1 Samuel 16:14; 1 Kings 22:23). Even Satan is under his command, as he asked permission to touch Job (Job 1-2) and Peter (Luke 22:31). Eventually, God will cast him into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10).

God rules over human beings. God gives us life (Gen. 2:7). He determines when and where we live (Acts 17:26). He directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9). God raises up leaders (Is. 44:28-45:1). God pulls down leaders (Exodus 11:1). The LORD buries every king.

God rules over the souls of men. This is what makes this point a distinctive of our church. Many would say that they believe in the power of God, but not over the souls of men. It's right here that we stand unique.

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;  
he turns it wherever he will.

The king of a country might like to think that he is the one who is in control.

But, in actuality, it is God who is in control.

God moves his heart wherever God wants it to go.

One of the great examples of this was the case with Herod and Pontius Pilate. When Jesus walked upon the earth, the LORD's hands were all over their hearts. The early church prayed thus, ...

Acts 4:27-28

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

To be sure, Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and all who had a hand in the death of Christ were all guilty for their actions. And yet, God is the great mover of history, moving the hearts of men to accomplish His purposes.

Regarding our own souls, it is God who rules over them. If you this morning are a believer in Christ, it is solely due to God's grace in your life to overrule your sinful nature and give you a new heart to discern the truth of the gospel and believe. According to 1 Corinthians 2:14, ...

1 Corinthians 2:14

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The only ones who can spiritually discern the truth of the gospel is those who God elects and changes their heart to believe. None of us would ever do this on our own.

God is the one who rules our souls. He is the one who "causes us to be born again" (1 Peter 1:3). It is the Spirit of life that God blows into our hearts that gives us new life in Christ (John 3:3, 8). We can take as much credit for our spiritual birth as we can take for our natural birth. None. It's all of grace.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we believe in the power of the God. And thus, we embrace the doctrines of grace. We believe that salvation is all of grace, and none of us. It was God that "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3). When people believe the gospel, it is only because God appoints us to eternal life.

Acts 13:48

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

When we come to faith, it's because of God's sovereign pleasure.

John 1:12-13

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

We could say much more about this, but we must press on. Third, ...

### **c. We believe in the power of the Gospel.**

Consider Romans 1:16, ...

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

You can't get much clearer than Romans 1:16 says it. There is power in the gospel.

As you think about this, you might easily reflect, "What a strange thing." We can understand power in the words of the president of the United States, whose mere words can shake national economies. We can understand power in a magnetic personality who promises health, wealth, and prosperity to all who hear. We can understand power in a large assembly of people (that's what makes the Super bowl so special -- hundreds of millions of people will be watching it). We can understand power in an air show, as we see and hear the roaring of the jets and they scream by the airport at low altitude. But, "power in the gospel"?

The gospel of God is none of these things. By and large, the gospel isn't spoken by rich and famous and powerful people. In great measure, the gospel promises you a life of suffering. Jesus said that we must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. There are few who believe the gospel, so great crowds won't bring it power. The gospel doesn't bring you great might and power and strength in this world.

You say, "What's the gospel?" It's simply this, we are sinners, who are on a path headed to damnation, when we are judged by the infinitely holy God. There was absolutely nothing that we could do to save ourselves from this "terrifying expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27). But, as a manifestation of God's great love, He sent His Son to rescue ruined sinners like us. His name is Jesus Christ. He came and lived a sinless life. Nevertheless, He was "despised and forsaken of men" (Is. 53:3). He was carried away to execution as a common criminal, even though He "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 1:22). And as He died upon the cross, something marvelous took place. "The LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Is. 53:6). Jesus, Himself, "bore our sin in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24). Though His death, Jesus conquered death.

To receive this forgiveness of sins, we simply need to repent from our sins and believe upon Jesus. We don't come to Him with our good works to offer for our salvation. We don't come to Him with our religious reputation to give in exchange for salvation. We don't come to Him with our beauty, as though we deserved salvation. We don't come to offer God anything in exchange for what He gives. We simply come to God with our sin, confessing that we are sinners.

And the amazing thing is that God actually receives us and redeems us from our sins and reconciles us to Himself. That's the gospel. It's the greatest story ever told. It's the greatest news that you will ever hear. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to [many after His death]" (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

There is power in this message. This simple message has turned drunkards into respectable citizens (1 Cor. 6:10). This simple message has turned homosexuals into straight men and women (1 Cor. 6:10). This simple message has turned idolaters into God-worshippers (1 Thess. 1:9). This simple message has turned demon possessed men into spirit-controlled men (Mark 5:1-20). This simple message has turned the worst of sinners into the greatest of saints (John Newton, Augustine, the apostle Paul).

And if this morning finds you entrapped in any sin, this message of Christ crucified is sufficient to give you the strength to overcome sin. In fact, I'll say it more clearly than that. If you are engulfed in any sin today, the gospel is the only hope that you have of overcoming your sin!

Before we continue on, I want to make a crucial point here in Romans 1. The gospel isn't only for unbelievers. The gospel is also for believers as well. We all need to hear the gospel. Consider Romans 1:15. Paul writes, ...

Romans 1:15

So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The simple question at this point is this: to whom is Paul writing? Romans 1:7 gives the answer, "to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints." To whom is Paul writing? He's writing to the Christians who were in Rome during the first century. And he said in verse 15 that he was eager to preach the gospel to them. Paul longed for the desire to step foot in the church in Rome and preach to the believers there of the saving grace of God in Christ.

How can that be? Aren't those people already saved? Do they need the gospel? Why does Paul have this desire? Because there is a way in which the gospel puts our focus directly where our focus needs to be.

As believers in Christ, we can have "bad days," where we see our sin at every turn. And we can have "good days," where we see ourselves yielding to God and walking in the Spirit. And on both days, we need the gospel.

On "bad days," we need the gospel to remind us that there is hope in Christ who died for the very sins that we are committing that day. Such news will encourage us in our despair. On "good days," we need the gospel to remind us that it's not in our righteousness that we are ever right with God. Such news will humble us in our religious pride.

As a result of our belief in the power of the gospel, we will focus our attention upon the cross of Christ. We will speak without apology about the cross of Christ. We will focus our attention continually upon the cross of Christ. We will sing about the cross of Christ. We will meditate upon the cross of Christ. We will pray in light of the cross of Christ. The simple reason is because it is powerful in our lives.

Let's move on.

### **3. Our Structure**

And it is right here that we get very practical. When the early church was established, there were four characteristics of the church that marked out its activities. They are set forth in Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

We see here four activities of the church.

- a. The apostles teaching
- b. Fellowship
- c. Breaking of bread
- d. Prayer

The early church "devoted themselves" to these things. That is, they gave strong attention given to these activities. And I believe that they are normative for us as well. We, as a church, ought to give "strong attention" to these activities as well.

Rather than simply go through each of these characteristics one by one, I would like to show how they relate to our church. We engage in each of these activities on Sunday mornings, here at the church building.

We meet together to pray at 9am. To pray together as a church (Acts 2:42) We meet to pray in order to plead for God's guidance, strength, and wisdom in the church and in our lives; to intercede for others at the throne of grace; to share our trials with one another; to visibly demonstrate as a church our complete dependence upon God for everything (Ps. 123:1); to inform those who come with the needs for prayer; to train those who come in prayer; to express our love for one another in praying for one another; to learn more about God; to submit to God's will

We experience teaching in our Sunday morning worship service at 10:00am in the auditorium. This corporate worship service allows us to worship God publicly. To remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. To provide a forum for the public reading of Scripture. To instruct the church in godliness. To equip the church body for works of service. To bring unity to the church (i.e. once a week, all are gathered in one place). To give opportunities for service. To obey God's counsel to gather together (Heb. 10:24-25). To stimulate one another to love and good deeds. To mobilize a group of people to work to promote God's glory

Every Sunday, we have a fellowship time, namely the hour after the service. This is why we have snacks--to foster this time. to connect with others; to encourage one another (talking, praying, ...); to discover ways to serve one another; to stimulate one another to love and good deeds; to meet others; to strengthen relationships.

We experience Breaking of Bread together. Every four to six weeks, we celebrate the Lord's Supper together. We have our monthly Fellowship dinners. Eating together forms a bond with one another

Where is our weakest point? We do pretty good at teaching. We do pretty good at fellowship. We do pretty good at breaking bread. We are weakest at prayer.

It's a barometer of our coldness of heart. It's a barometer of my coldness of heart. It doesn't beat as it ought to beat. I'm often late. I'm often prayerless throughout the week. May the Lord help me. May the Lord help us.

I'm simply calling you this New Year to evaluate your own commitment to depend upon the Lord in prayer. By yourself, alone with God. With your spouse (if you are married). With your family. In your small group. With the church. Pray.

I would encourage you to strongly consider coming to church an hour early to our prayer meeting. We have sought to prioritize it in the life of our church. It's not another trip for another meeting. You are already coming on Sunday morning, so come an hour earlier. I know that our Sunday morning prayer format isn't perfect. I know that it is awkward at times.

But I do believe that if we would come with zealous hearts, ready to pray, things would be different. And so, I encourage you to come with a zealous heart and help us depend upon the Lord for all things in the life of our church.

#### 4. Our Function

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:4-27.

1 Corinthians 12:4-27

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not

belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The big idea that Paul is putting forth here is of the organic nature of the church. It is to be compared to a body. Where people naturally serve in their role. If they are a hand, they do hand things. If they are an eye, they do eye things. If they are a head, they do head things. If they are a foot, they do feet things--all with the goal that the body would function well, and that it would prosper.

When a member hurts, all hurt with that member. When a member thrives, all rejoice with him. Paul gives a similar picture of the church in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Again, there is the organic nature of the church. It is a body that grows, almost by itself.

A body doesn't need much instruction. It simply happens. And over the years at Rock Valley Bible Church, this has been the dominant picture in my mind of the church, where people are organically serving one another. Sure we have some structure at Rock Valley Bible Church, but many times, not enough structure.

And I must admit, this is an area of my weakness. Truth be told, this is one of the biggest reasons why I am pursuing my Doctor of Ministry degree. To help establish some more structure into the life of our church.

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne wrote a great book a few years ago called, "The Trellis and the Vine." In it, they describe ministry in relationship to a trellis and a vine.

A trellis is made to hold up the vine. And when it comes to church life, many of the structures put in place in the life of a church are intended to do the same thing, provide a structure in which the life of the vine might flourish. However, too often, churches focus too much attention and give upon the trellis. Time and resources and efforts are given to the trellis. Meetings and events and finances and infrastructure and organization and governance and management take over. And all the while, the vine is dying.

In seeking to highlight the structure that we have in place for our vine to thrive upon, I will mention our small groups. We have Small Groups which meet every other week. Right now we have four small groups. But as the church enlarges, we will simply multiply the number of small groups. Everyone is together in the family reunion. Everyone is together in a small, intimate group.

This is why we do what we do! Don't think that we merely come together to have a nice time. We are coming together with purpose. They meet to provide opportunities for application of Biblical truths, to fellowship, to pray together, to foster relationships, that will enable the natural serving of one another, to develop future church leaders in the context of smaller, caring communities, to provide a smaller environment where newer people can begin to be involved in the church, to share our lives together, to enjoy time with one another, to extend the reach of the church into neighborhoods, to provide accountability in our lives.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 1, 2017 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

---