



PARTNERSHIP

Partnership 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 Jake and his wife Natalie, 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. After hearing that Austin felt called to plant, 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. They 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 except 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, plant churches, and love Abilene***. 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.

Incarnational Ministry

Part of 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 to be lived as a community activity. Yet so many Christians treat their faith like a solo project. Based on the freedom-giving, transforming power of the 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 disciplined. (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 partners at 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)

Locally, *We Love Abilene* is one of the ways that our church seeks to serve the Abilene and Big Country community. We Love Abilene (WLA) has the goal of loving Abilene the way Jesus loves Abilene. To our team, this means establishing relationships with vulnerable and oppressed populations in our community in order to reflect the redemptive power of the gospel in both their lives and ours. Our hope is to do this not only as a team, but to create a culture of living at The Well that focuses on walking alongside those in our city who need the support and hope that consistent, gospel-centered relationships can provide.

Internationally, our church actively pursues short-term and long-term missions opportunities and trips. We have a passion for seeing communities around the world impacted by Jesus, and will continue to promote a culture that celebrates and supports the spread of the gospel.

Church Planting

Our current church plants:

- Redeemer San Angelo - Ryan Owens - San Angelo, TX
- Redeemer Hutto - Joe Guenther - Hutto, TX
- The Table - Ryan Henson - Clyde, TX

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 it's 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.

The 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.

62% of Americans ages 20-26 say faith is not very important to them.⁴

New Churches are more effective than older churches:

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

¹ Based on census population projections from: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/RHI125214/00> 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 <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

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.

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

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.*⁵

Abilene has 12,000 students enrolled in area colleges and universities.

Abilene Christian - 5,293

Cisco Jr. College - 3,563

Hardin-Simmons - 1,933

McMurry - 1,100

TTU Pharmacy - 160

Church Planters and Residency

Our church continues to expand our church-planter residency program, giving prospective church planters the opportunity to gain significant experience in pastoral ministry and to develop as elders, pastors, and disciple makers before they plant their churches.

The Well's prayer is that we will continue to be able to host and support church planters, provide them with a space to grow and learn, and launch them out into the communities that they are called to with vision, purpose, and supportive community built around them.

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. Currey Creek was also 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

⁵ Based on U.S. median church size from http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong

The Values of The Well

The mission of The Well is to make disciples, plant churches, and love Abilene. 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?

As we pursue God's mission for The Well, we are guided by three values: Gospel, Community, & Mission.

Gospel

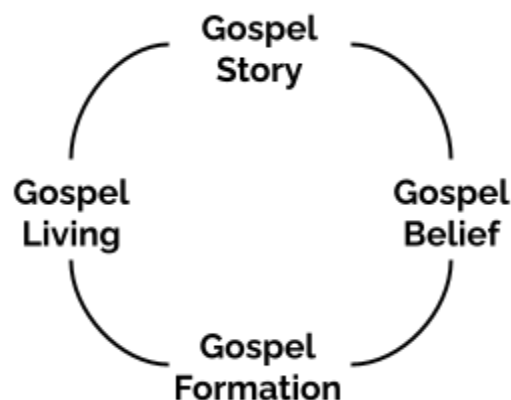
What is the Gospel?

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 its truth, and does not describe the full 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!"

At The Well, we are focusing on the gospel in four distinct but interconnected areas.

- Gospel Story - The Bible. In this area, we focus on helping disciples understand, interpret and apply the scriptures, not just in part, but in whole.
- Gospel Belief - Doctrine. Faithful Christianity holds to faithful theology. In this area, we help disciples develop a robust theology and help them to see the purpose of theology in the life of a believer.
- Gospel Formation - Spiritual Formation. We are not just thinking creatures. We are shaped into who we are and who we will become. In this area, we are disciples in biblical spiritual formation of our whole person and being.
- Gospel Living - Rhythm. The gospel transforms our lives so the way we live should be transformed as well. In this area, we train disciples in what it means to follow Jesus in everyday life including spiritual disciplines, biblical community, evangelism, and loving our neighbors.



Community & Mission — Two Sides of the Same Coin

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

John 17:17-18, ESV

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. A common phrase that we use around here is "community and mission are two sides of the same coin." We are convinced that hearts changed by the gospel and indwelled 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 it's 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.

Mission is what the Christian life looks like in the world around us. All Christians have been called to the task of disciple making regardless of your geographic location. We all have been called to engage those around us with the gospel.

The Role of the Gospel Community



"Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. ... I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, for eternity."
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

Gospel Communities are groups of believers that consistently spend time with one another, focusing on their relationship with Jesus and striving to inspire each other in the application of the gospel to all areas of our lives.

As The Well actively pursues its calling, we recognize that our church is a finite sample of a perfectly designed and infinite Kingdom. Gospel Communities are a reflection of The Well, and exist as a means of growth, spiritual transformation, connection, and discipleship for our people. As our church seeks to reflect the Kingdom of God, so too do our Gospel Communities. Just like the 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.

Community is cultivated as we live our lives out in front of one another, practicing the art of confession and repentance, celebration and exultation. 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.

Ministry Highlights

There are many parts of what our church prays that the Lord will accomplish through our ministry, and we want to highlight a couple of those here.

"When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little 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.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
John 13:31-35

We Love Abilene



Our church believes God has called us to Abilene to love Abilene. We've started a team dedicated specifically to this vision appropriately named "We 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.

The Mission of WLA:

- *We Love Abilene will equip and mobilize the local church to pursue real relationships with their neighbors by:*
 - *Creating community partnerships that allow opportunities to enhance awareness of local social issues.*
 - *Serving vulnerable and marginalized individuals within the community.*
 - *Effectively responding to community needs.*
 - *Training/Educating our partners to both know and serve people in their current contexts in a way that cares for the whole person.*

The Vision of WLA:

The vision for We Love Abilene is for the local church to be a physical representation of God's love for the people of Abilene by meeting needs, building relationships, and providing gospel-centered hope to our neighbors.



One of our key focuses will continue to be equipping followers of Jesus to live, love, and serve faithfully. **Equipping at The Well** has different avenues within which we equip our people to live, love, and serve faithfully.

- The **Equipping Program** is a 9-month discipleship immersion program where we dive deep into story, belief, formation, and living by going through the storyline of Scripture from

Genesis to Revelation. The purpose of the program is not only to know the story that God is unfolding, but to enter it.

- **Bible Studies** are dedicated to exploring particular books of Scripture, usually an Old Testament book in the Fall and a New Testament book in the Spring. Our hope is to be shaped by Scripture in how we think and live. These go for a period of 9-11 weeks and are divided into men's and women's studies.
- **Classes** are dedicated to exploring specific topics ranging from culturally relevant issues to Christian practice. Whatever topic we cover has the ultimate purpose of equipping our people for faithful living.
- **Weekenders** are short mini-conferences that equip us in important areas of cultural and practical relevance. Weekenders take place within the length of one weekend, usually starting Friday night and ending Saturday around lunch time.
- **Retreats** are a special time for us to get acquainted with each other as God's people. They usually last 1 to 2 nights and it is the perfect occasion to listen to God's voice as we re-examine our rhythms and practices.

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

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 grandchildren, 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 beliefs.

Core Beliefs

The Bible:

We believe that all 66 books of Scripture are inspired by the Holy Spirit and are void of error in their original manuscripts. Therefore, they are the supreme authority in all matters of faith and the everyday lives of all who trust in Christ for salvation. (2 Timothy 3:16). These principles underlie everything we do and believe at The Well.

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. (Hebrews 1:3) We

affirm the truth of God's omniscience: He knows everything (Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 147:5), His omnipresence: He is everywhere (Jeremiah 23:23-24), 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, is sovereign Lord overall while fully unified in essence and purpose. He has always existed in perfect love and harmony with the Son and the Spirit.

- He created the universe (Genesis 1 & 2)
- He is Sovereign Lord (Psalm 135:6, Job 42:2, Romans 8:29-30)
- He sent the Son (John 3:16-17)
- He 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 (Titus 2:13; John 20:28; Colossians 2:9; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7; Hebrews 4:15; Luke 1:26-38; 23:44-46; John 19:31-37; 1 Corinthians 15:3-20). Jesus paid the full penalty for our sin and bore the wrath of God according to God's predetermined plan (John 18:11; Romans 5:9; Revelation 13:8; Acts 2:23). 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 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 all humankind is created in the image of God, but through Adam's sin, the race fell. Humans are born into sin with a radical bent towards evil and rebellion, they are under the wrath of God, and they cannot save themselves. All people need salvation that the grace of God can only supply 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 adopt us into His family. Our view of humanity is shaped by two truths, the Imago Dei and total depravity. First, the Imago Dei: all human beings have intrinsic worth because God made them in His image. Image-bearing is not qualified by sex, ethnicity, intellectual ability, physical disability, or age, and it is

present from conception (Romans 10:12; Psalm 139:13-16). Second, total depravity: all humans are sinners by nature and by choice, although they are not as wicked as they could be because of the constraining grace of God. We believe 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 for the forgiveness of our sins. (Ephesians 2:8) Because it is a gift, it cannot be earned (Romans 4:1-12). Being dead in their sin, fallen human beings contribute nothing to their salvation (Ephesians 2:1-9). Jesus offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice by dying on the cross, paying the penalty for our sin, satisfying God's just wrath, and providing forgiveness for our sins (John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8; I John 2:2). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can be set free from sin, Satan, and death (Romans 8:1-2; 16:20).

The Church:

We believe the church is both universal and local. The church universal is comprised of all believers who have died in Christ and believers who are living (Hebrews 12:1). 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:

Because interpretations of Scripture relating to Jesus's return vary among earnest and well-informed Christians, we do not believe that conformity regarding the details is essential from a doctrinal standpoint. We believe the following core principles underlie our understanding of the Biblical teaching about the return of Christ:

- Christ will certainly 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, unmistakable, and glorious (Rev. 1:7, Matt. 24:27, 30-31)

Partnership

A healthy local church is made up of people who 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). In addition to their common faith in Christ, these believers are united in common doctrinal beliefs, a commitment to one another, and a calling to be on mission right where God has placed them. They worship together, serve together, pray together, and encourage one another. Additionally, they come together under Biblically qualified and appointed leaders who are called by God to shepherd and care for the body. All of these characteristics require some means of being able to distinguish those who are a part of a local church from those who are not. Many churches use a system of membership to describe the believers in their fellowship. While we do not condemn such a system, our elders have decided to use the language of Covenant Partnership to identify the believers in our community.

Why Partnership instead of Membership?

All Christians are members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19) by virtue of their adoption into the family of God (Eph 1:5). This membership is rooted in our saving faith in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit who guarantees our place in God's family until we fully take hold of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). This glorious relationship with God is not established by church authorities, nor can it be dissolved by any religious policies. It is necessary to distinguish between this kind of membership in the household of God and traditional church membership because we do not wish to create confusion among the body. For this reason, even though we have used the language of "covenant membership" in the past, the Elders of The Well have chosen to use the language of Covenant Partnership going forward.

Key Benefits of Covenant Partnership

- **First**, partnership indicates a level of commitment and responsibility for us all. Partners share in the labor and the fruits, the suffering and blessing, the good days and bad.
- **Second**, partners are actively involved. Partnership is more than a status or position within an organization. Partners are expected to be actively involved in the life of The Well.
- **Third**, partnership allows the elders and deacons to know which people they are shepherding and to give partners a place of 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.
- **Finally**, the language of Covenant Partnership is a way of honoring all believers at The Well. Christians who regularly worship with us or attend our events without becoming partners are our brothers and sisters and we are grateful for their presence. Partnership does not detract from their faith as believers or their membership to the universal family of God. Instead, Covenant Partnership serves to highlight those of us who feel a particular call and conviction to serve in Christ's body here at The Well.

4 Elements of Healthy Partnership

The Well flourishes when our partners are healthy and faithful in their walk with Christ. Here are 4 elements of healthy partnership at The Well:

- **Belonging**: All of our partners should be invested in biblical community. Typically, this will mean belonging to a Gospel Community at The Well, but there may be some seasonal exceptions to this. In general, all partners need to make sure they have close, spiritually intimate relationships where they are cared for and held accountable.
- **Serving**: All partners should consistently serve in some capacity at The Well. This will typically look like being a part of a service or ministry team (Wellcome, communion, prayer, kids ministry, etc.) or serving in a certain role (GC Leader, Deacon, etc.), though there may be other areas of service as well. Partners should be consistently contributing to the work and mission of The Well in a practical way.
- **Growing**: Spiritual formation is an ongoing process in the life of the believer. Partners should be consistently placing themselves in practices or environments for the sake of growing in Christ. This will often look like participating in one of our equipping (Bible Studies, Equipping Program, etc.) or discipleship (GC's, grow groups, etc.) environments.
- **Giving**: Partners of The Well should regularly give of their time, gifts, talents, and resources to support the work of our church. This giving should be sacrificial, joyful, voluntary, and consistent (2 Cor. 8).



Partnership Renewal

The Well asks all partners to review and renew their partnership covenant and meet with a church elder at least once every three years. This is for a few reasons:

- It gives us an opportunity to check in with each other. We strive to build great relationships throughout our church. Our elders want to ensure that there is a regular timeframe in which they get to spend time with every partner and their household.
- Renewal gives an opportunity to review the Partnership Covenant, the benefits of partnership, and the characteristics of healthy partnership - as well as discuss any questions or concerns that partners might have.
- If a partner has moved away from The Well, a renewal interval gives our leaders a means by which to keep more accurate records.
- This renewal check in for each partner or partner household is an opportunity to provide accountability, nurture growth, celebrate blessings, share burdens, and pray for each other.

Deacons

The word deacon literally means "servant." I Timothy 3:8-13 contains the definitive text on this issue. *"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.

Here at The Well, we believe that our deacons are called by God, established by scripture, nominated and examined by the Covenant Partners, and appointed by Elders to be the lead-servants of our body of believers. Deacons serve the church by assisting and working closely with the elders in leading and caring for our church.

It is our prayer that the sacrificial love and joyful service of our deacons in serving the members of our body would enable The Well to flourish in its mission and glorify God by its ministry.

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 a 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 Pastors, then, will serve as elders. However, the eldership body will serve alongside the vision of the lead pastors, who share the role of "first among equals" 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

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, and a desire to plant more churches in collaboration. Learn more at: redeemernetwork.org.

(original planting partners for our church)

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

Church Plants

Redeemer San Angelo - San Angelo, TX
Redeemer Hutto - Hutto, TX
The Table - Clyde, TX

We Love Abilene supports households and individuals alongside:

Foster 325
Abilene ISD Homeless Ministry
CarePortal
Habitat for Humanity
IRC
Young Life

Missions - Domestic and International

100 UPG (*non-financial support*)
Tom and Michelle Kyle – Southeast Asia
Paul and Molli Williams – Frydlant nad Ostravici, Czech Republic (*prior support*)
Dillon and Sarah Harris – Beirut, Lebanon (*prior support*)

THE WELL'S COVENANT TO YOU

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

1. We commit to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Hebrews 13:17; I Thessalonians 5:12).
2. We commit to providing teaching and counsel from the Scriptures (Galatians 6:6; I Timothy 5:17-18).
3. We commit that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27-28).
4. We commit to helping you in times of need (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35; James 2:14-17).
5. We commit 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 commit to praying for you regularly, particularly when you are ill or have any area of trial (James 5:14).
7. We commit to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
8. We commit to exercising church discipline when necessary (Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1).
9. We commit to helping you become equipped in your character and unique spiritual gifts to serve Christ and his church (Ephesians 4:11-13).
10. We commit to seeking 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 commit to setting an example and joining you in fulfilling the duties of church partners (I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; I Timothy 4:12).
12. We commit to being good stewards and managers of the resources of this church (Acts 11:29-30; II Thessalonians 3:10-12)

THE WELL'S PARTNER 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). *If I haven't yet been baptized, I commit to being baptized in the near future.*
3. I have read and am aware of the The Well's 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 Well's assembly and worship services, my willingness to serve where needed, and my involvement in fellowship with other partners of our church body through a Gospel Community, and attend partners' 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. After reviewing The Well's characteristics of healthy partnership, I sincerely endeavor to participate in belonging, serving, growing, and giving alongside The Well's church family.
8. I commit to practicing 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).
9. I commit to being 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).
10. I commit to being submitted 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 Partnership 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.
11. I want to join with the other partners of The Well and I commit my life, abilities and resources to help with the purpose of The Well Church.
12. I understand that Partnership at The Well is something that is renewed at least once every 3 years, and that an elder will set up a time to check in, answer questions, offer support, and provide accountability if appropriate.

The Well Partnership Covenant Agreement

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____, _____

Email: _____, _____

Current Gospel Community: _____

I am serving the church in this way: _____

Children Names and Ages:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Signature(s):

Date:

Partnership Covenant Appendix - Elder Statements:

Marriage (*Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-2, I Corinthians 7:1-5; Ephesians 5:31-32; Colossians 3:18-20; I Peter 3:1-8; I Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 2:23-26*)

The scriptures have established marriage as a life-long, covenantal union of one man and one woman. Created in God's image and intentionally distinct, men and women join in marriage to become one flesh to the glory of God. in the covenant of marriage. This relationship establishes relational, spiritual, and emotional intimacy, and is the only God-ordained pattern of sexual relations for men and women. Though marriage is a good gift from God, we know that some are called to the blessing of singleness and faithful celibacy. We celebrate the God-honoring lives of our unmarried brothers and sisters and are committed to surrounding them as a church family. Although we maintain this biblical view of marriage, we acknowledge that homosexuality and other sexual orientations and identities are very real and present for many. We believe the church is called to walk patiently and lovingly with any such brothers and sisters who, like all of us, are seeking to understand and live out faithfulness in their sexuality. Finally, we believe that every person should be shown compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity.

Politics (*Jeremiah 29:4-14; Galatians 5:13-14; Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 14:1-12; Titus 3: 1-10; 1 Peter 2:11-12*)

We find our primary identity as disciples of Jesus and children of God, made in His image. We believe it is right and good for Christians to be grateful for the nation in which the Lord has placed them, and we hold that those of us who live in democracies have a responsibility to steward our voice and vote to seek the welfare of our neighbors. However, our identities should never be rooted in any particular political group or party. Our church holds firmly to biblical values around justice, peace, and the sanctity of life. We also believe in loving one another faithfully, honoring Christian liberty, being good neighbors, and in caring for the marginalized and oppressed. All Christians, regardless of political party or background, are united in Christ as one body. The Lord calls all believers to strive for unity within the church through sacrificial love and God-honoring humility.

Abortion (*Genesis 1:26-27; Psalms 139; John 8:10-11; Galatians 6:2*)

We believe that every person is created in the image of God and has inherent value, dignity, and worth. We believe that every human life is sacred and precious, from the moment of conception to natural death, and that abortion is a terrible part of our broken world. We also know that God hears us, sees us, and heals us. Pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, and parenthood can all be incredibly difficult and require support and encouragement. Therefore, we believe that the church is called to walk with mothers, fathers, and children wherever they may need such help. We know that many in our community have faced the pain of this issue, and all should be shown love, care, forgiveness, and grace - and be welcomed in our church family.

Women in Ministry (*Genesis 1:27-28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-10*)

We believe in the biblical truth that God created two complementary sexes - male and female - equally valued, dignified, and essential in reflecting His image. Every member of the body of Christ, man and woman alike, are called to serve in the ministry of the church. We also see in the scripture that the office of elder, which includes teaching authority for the church, is reserved specifically for qualified men (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). Besides this boundary, as defined by God in Scripture, we believe that women can and should exercise leadership and fully participate in ministry within the church. We do not believe that this calling to leadership is a contradiction of God's design, but instead another wonderful expression of His creation.