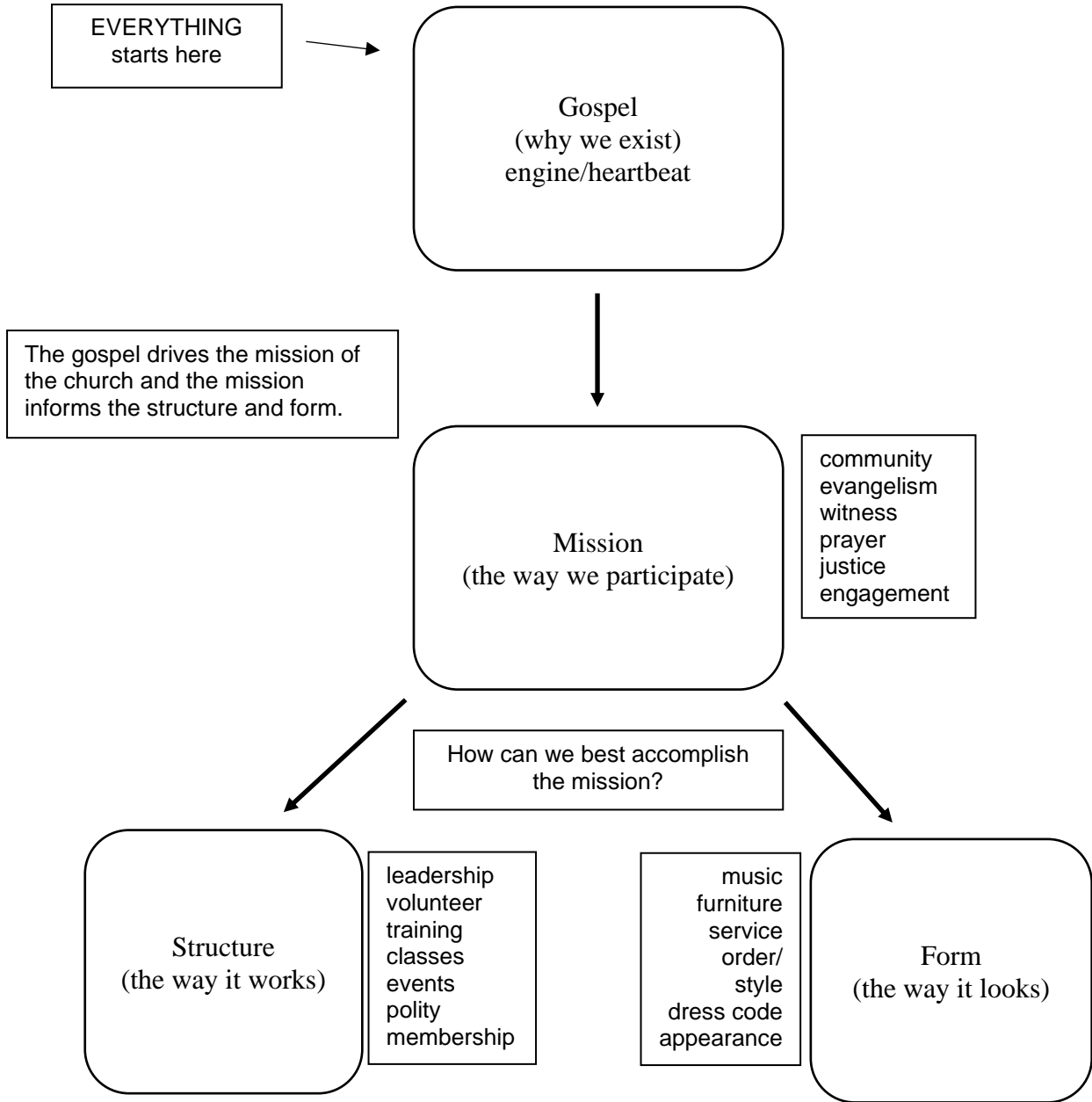


CHURCH MAPPING:  
THE FOCUS AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH



Structure and Form are tertiary and changeable. They must constantly adapt. This is contextualization.

## **GENERAL NOTES**

If we start with the bottom blocks (structure and form), we won't have any reason, rationale, or motivation for the changes we make. They will be arbitrary or contentious. Results for starting with bottom blocks: anger, apathy, conflict, idolatry, inflexibility, misunderstanding. At the most fundamental level, discussion of church begins with God and the gospel.

If we start with mission, we will likely be guilt ridden or driven to despair. Why? Because we might feel that we *must* do certain things rather than those things being the outflow of God's grace to us. or, we might be overwhelmed by all the things we would like to do. Or, if we are particularly benevolent, we might become prideful. In any case, starting with mission may cause us to point people away from the gospel.

## **GOSPEL**

Bad theology leads to aberrant structures and forms (e.g. liberalism; fundamentalism). For example, a church that proclaims a gospel of works will fall into the trap of fundamentalism and rigid forms. The form itself might become sacred.

Gospel-centered means every aspect of our lives is shaped and informed by the gospel. There are two types of churches common in the Bible belt. (1) Gospel-assuming churches affirm the gospel but seldom delve into its depths instead settling for moralism or therapy. (2) Gospel-proclaiming churches talk often about the gospel, but they think it is for evangelism only. Gospel-centered churches preach the gospel weekly not just to unbelievers but to believers. The gospel becomes the shaping factor for ethics, worship, mission, and life in community.

Ray Ortlund summarizes the message for Christians to rally around as: "God, through the perfect life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, rescues all his people from the wrath of God into peace with God, with a promise of the full restoration of his created order forever—all to the praise of the glory of his grace."

Ortlund: "The test of a gospel-centered church is its doctrine on paper plus its culture in practice."

## **MISSION**

God's people are always people of mission. The church is always on mission. The gospel is a word to be proclaimed.

We need to filter all questions of structure and form through the grid of our mission. That mission, of course, must be firmly fixed in the character of God and the glory of the gospel.

If we have gospel blindness, our mission will be incorrect or imprecise or nonexistent. Skipping the mission means we will focus on lower levels.

Two important points need to be made about the relationship of the gospel to mission. First, mission is a response to God's love. In other words, mission is the expression of our love for God and our love for others. Second, mission is a call to participate in what God is already doing. The gospel is not simply the story of God "saving" individuals. It is the story of God's new creation.

## **STRUCTURE AND FORM**

Focus on structure and form without theology and mission always leads to a lack of depth regardless of the structure and form (e.g. seeker sensitive; traditional).

Why do churches have ineffective structure? Because they usually haven't clarified the mission and adjusted the structure accordingly. For example, a church that states it wants to reach the community focuses all its resources inwardly. Or, they continue with a structure that only supports how things are currently done (Sunday school, midweek Bible study, etc.). A slogan heard in churches that have not clarified the mission: "We've never done it that way before."

Why do churches fight about the color of the carpet? Idolatry. The form has become an idol. When the form becomes sacred, gospel blindness has set in. The goodness and beauty of the gospel will be lost.