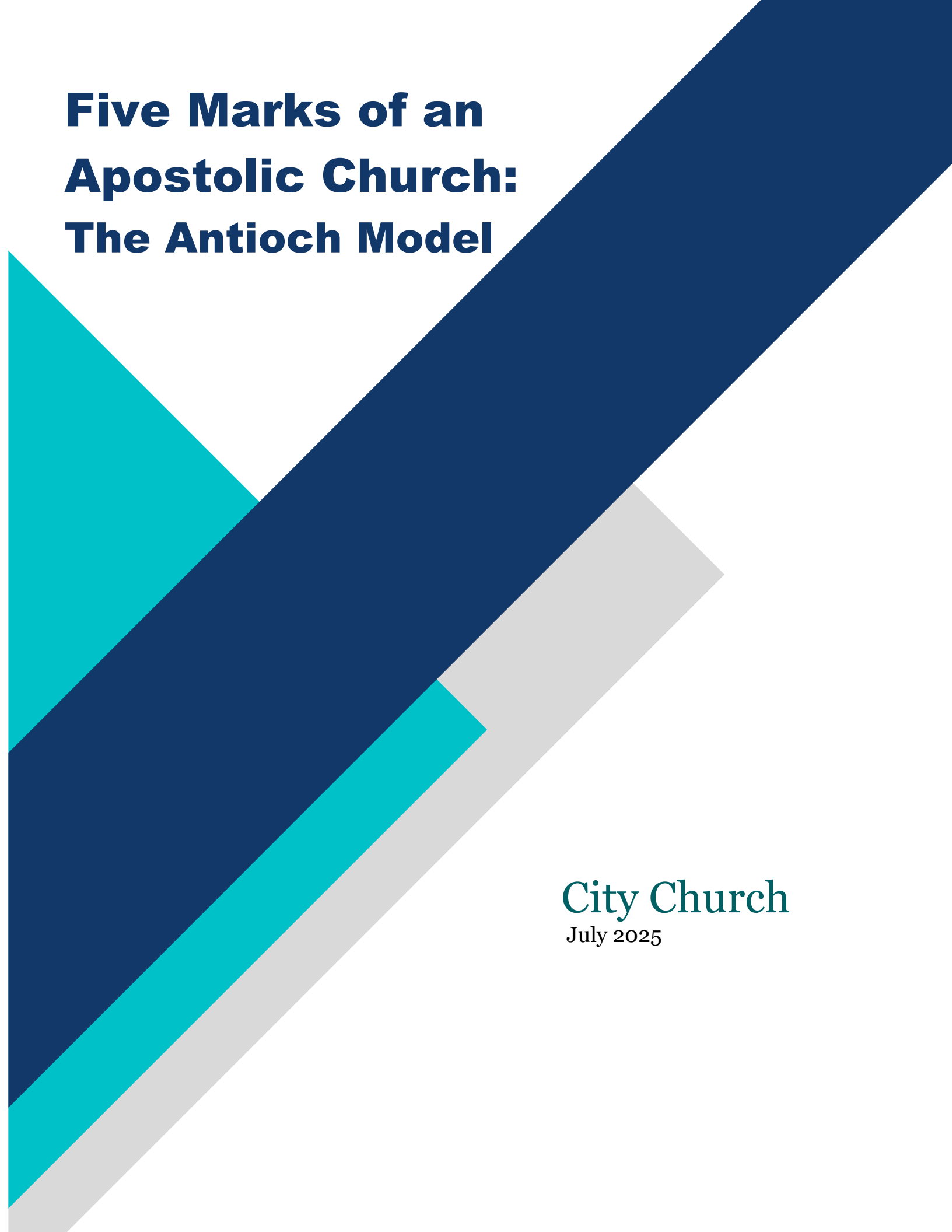




Five Marks of an Apostolic Church: The Antioch Model

City Church
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A Quick Look at the Apostolic Church

The Book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the Chief Apostle. Like an “apostolos” (one who is sent) in the Roman world, God sent Jesus from heaven to bring the rule and reign of heaven to earth and to show us how to live for this different kingdom.

While on earth, Jesus chose Twelve Apostles to send to continue this work. They planted churches and demonstrated God’s kingdom on the earth just like Jesus had done. These Twelve would hold and will always hold a special place. Jesus personally chose them to walk with him while he was physically on the earth. He personally shared with them his teaching and life. He told them they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The Book of Revelation states that their names are on the foundations of the gates of the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven. They wrote with full authority about what Jesus had taught them directly. The Holy Spirit specifically led them in this task. They have a place that no one else can hold. They did what he commanded them to do. They continued to express the kingdom and planted churches to do the same.

These created communities (churches) lived by God’s word. God’s Spirit led and empowered them. As followers of the Apostles’ teaching, they continued to express the kingdom and planted additional churches that would do the same. They then sent out apostles from their churches to other places to continue this work. This is what happened in Antioch. These sent ones were to continue and replicate this apostolic work in other places. This is what we refer to as an apostolic church. This is the type of model we pursue at City Church.

The Church at Antioch

We learn about the church at Antioch in the Book of Acts. This church would become one of the most important for several centuries beginning in the first century. We read in Acts 11 that this church was started by some unnamed people from the island of Cyprus, which was approximately 150 miles southwest of Antioch, and from Cyrene, which was about 1,000 miles away. This church was the first one that involved many Gentile (non-Jewish) people.

After hearing about this church, the Apostles in the church at Jerusalem, who were Jewish, sent Barnabas to see what was happening in Antioch. Acts 11 notes to us that Barnabas went to the church, was excited about what he saw, encouraged them, and then went to find Saul (later Paul) to come and help

him teach these new disciples. We find in this chapter that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, which was a name given to them by people who watched how they lived differently as followers of Jesus. This was likely a term of scorn rather than honor, but the Christians took this name with rejoicing. It was the beginning of the name we have carried for nearly 2,000 years.



The City of Antioch in the 1st Century

A group of prophets and teachers led the church in Antioch. They worked as a team in leadership. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they sent Barnabas and Saul (later Paul) as apostles to replicate what God had done in Antioch in other places. This church became a Gentile sending center just as Jerusalem was the Jewish sending center. They had a phenomenal experience of the word, the Spirit, and of community within the church. They saw and heard about God doing incredible things. They engaged in his transformative vision, and they sent and received various apostles and prophets.

We look to this church as an example of an apostolic model of church. The church at Antioch displayed five marks that we simply refer to as the five marks of an apostolic church. There may be more, but we do see these five clearly. We seek to be an apostolic church as well, and we look to this model to help guide us. We will now briefly explore these marks.

Apostolic Mark 1: Living under God's Kingdom

One of the marks of an apostolic church is that the church is committed to living under God's rule and reign (his kingdom). This means that we seek to live in a way where God's rule and reign are clearly among us. We are not our own. As Paul said, Jesus bought us with a price. The church at Antioch modeled living under God's kingdom. What this meant for them is like what it means for us today.

We pray what Jesus taught us to pray – your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We recognize that the rule and reign of this world work on different principles than what Jesus asks us to live by. As a people, we should live in a way that brings a different King to the forefront. We should

seek to display the peace, joy, and love of his kingdom. We should seek to honor our King in all areas of life. We should strive to be great servants, just as he taught us. We should see expressions of his kingdom happening with and through us in signs, wonders, mercy, freedom, and life. We should seek to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven just like Jesus and his early followers did.

Apostolic Mark 2: Living on God's Mission

The church at Antioch lived its life on mission. They recognized that everything they did was to be part of living God's mission. What is this mission? The New Testament authors wrote that Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost. His mission was to destroy what the devil had done. His mission was to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. It was to show us how to live as God's sons and daughters. It was to reconcile and restore all of God's created order back to its purposes. These were some aspects of Jesus' mission.

Whether they were eating together, working, playing, studying, ministering, sharing, or gathering, the early church realized that everything they did was to serve God's mission on the earth. They were to be about their Father's business just as Jesus was. This realization should shape how we view our families, our work, our hobbies, our community, our church, and anything else we are engaged with in this world. We are to live on God's mission as one mark of an apostolic church.

Apostolic Mark 3: Growing as Jesus' Followers

As people who are followers of Jesus, we should be pursuing growth in this calling. This was another mark of the apostolic church at Antioch. When we see the word "disciple" in the Bible, this is like the word "apprentice" in our modern culture. In an apprenticeship, a person learns from a master teacher and is expected to engage in the pursuit of truth, be equipped in the field, show accountability with others, and engage in the mission.

Believers in the early church took personal and collective discipleship seriously. They learned Jesus' teachings through the Apostles and what had been written. They pursued being equipped in their particular gifts, and they were committed to being trained, corrected, taught, and even rebuked, if needed. This was all to help them grow as a follower of Jesus. In addition, as mentioned earlier, they saw themselves as part of God's mission on the earth through Jesus. They were committed to being disciples of Jesus—his followers first and foremost.

Apostolic Mark 4: Partnering with the Holy Spirit

As a fourth mark, the apostolic church should partner with the Holy Spirit. Antioch demonstrated this partnership time and time again, as did those sent from Antioch. They listened to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit led and empowered them. They experienced the hand of the Holy Spirit. They saw his works among them and through them.

This is an important aspect of an apostolic church. It is not enough to rely on our own abilities. As Jesus told his disciples, we must provide opportunity for the Holy Spirit to testify about Jesus. We can only do so much. As an apostolic church, the believers in Antioch were called to do things that went beyond anything they could do on their own. They needed the leading and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. History shows that they found just that.

As a church, we also seek to be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We pursue partnership with him. His wisdom, power, and understanding are much greater than ours. As an apostolic church, we seek to partner with him just as the church at Antioch did.

Apostolic Mark 5: Resourcing, Equipping, and Sending

As a fifth mark, an apostolic church resources, equips, and sends. Antioch demonstrated these characteristics on numerous occasions. They received the prophet Agabus. They received the prophets from Jerusalem after the Jerusalem Council. They received Barnabas and Saul.

From the direction of the Holy Spirit, they sent Barnabas and Saul several times to a variety of locations. After they returned, they sent them again to the places where they had planted new churches.

In addition, the church in Antioch equipped the believers as disciples for their work of ministry. We read about the numbers of people being added to the church as believers and what was happening with the disciples. We observe Paul and Barnabas leaving to do a work elsewhere and then returning to continue the work at Antioch. There was a consistent flow of people in and out of the church at Antioch. The church resourced people for the work and ministry in Antioch and in other places such as Jerusalem during a famine. They strongly modeled these characteristics and seemed to flow well in these.

These five marks help define an apostolic church.

These five marks help define an apostolic church. Therefore, they can serve as a guide to us as we pursue this goal at City Church.

By understanding how the church at Antioch expressed these five marks, we can gain a better understanding of how we might do the same. They discovered how to do this in their day and age. By looking at their example, we may better discover how to do this in ours.

Our hope is that we will bear these five marks as we seek to be a church for our city and as we pursue the transformation of our city, state, and the nations. The church at Antioch, written about in the Book of Acts, provides evidence that this is possible.

Conclusion

At City Church, we desire to be an apostolic church and model ourselves after the apostolic church in Antioch described in the Book of Acts. We find in this church five marks that we also seek to be in us. We believe the pursuit of these five marks can help us have a transformative impact within the church, city, state, and nations.

**The disciples were
called Christians
first at Antioch.**

- Acts 11:26b