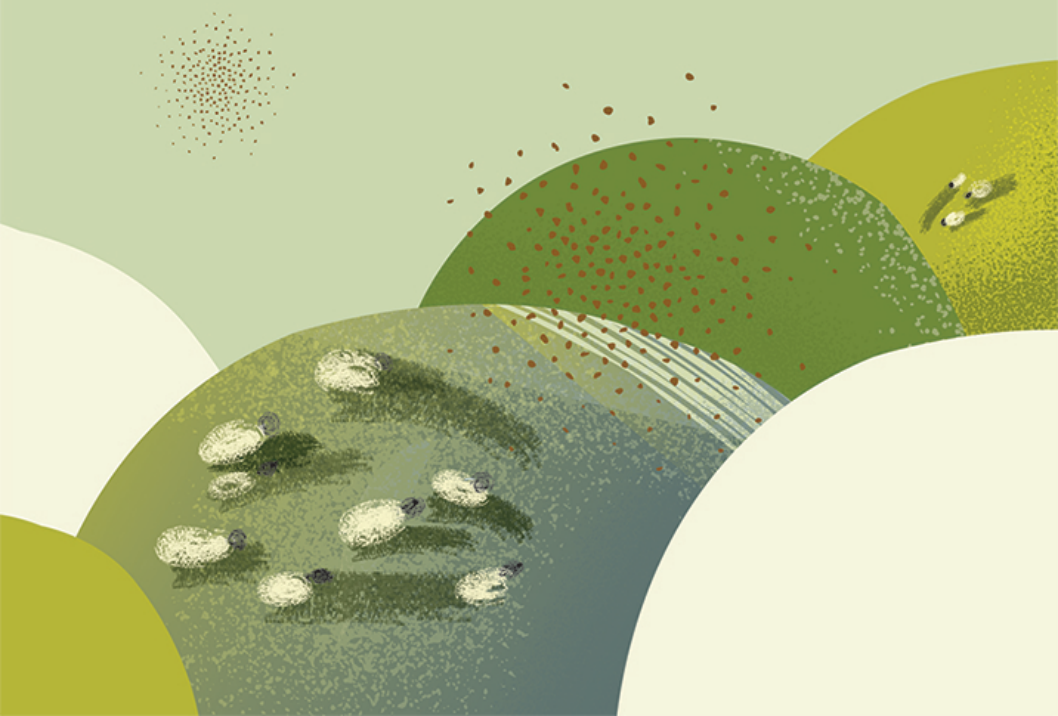


KARL DEENICK

GATHERED TOGETHER

The beauty of living as God's church



Sunday: time for church.

Do you feel eager anticipation? Or has life or weariness turned church into a dutiful habit?

Either way, it's useful to pause and ask:

- What is church, and what's it for?
- Why do we go?
- What does God expect us to do when we're together?
- What gifts does God give to his church, and why?
- How does our time together influence our time apart?

Long-time pastor and theologian Karl Deenick has thought deeply about these questions and has years of experience in living out the answers. In *Gathered Together*, Karl helps us to reflect on our relationship with church.

This book is clear, biblical, honest, timely and wise. It's essential reading for everyone who wants to *enjoy* being part of God's people, God's way.

Karl Deenick is the coordinator of community and student care at Sydney Missionary and Bible College, where he also lectures in Theology. Before that, he served as a pastor for 10 years. He is the author of *Righteous by Promise: A biblical theology of circumcision*.



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This is a wonderful book, full of biblical insight, practical wisdom and theological depth. It is a great antidote against the individualism, selfishness and consumerism that constantly seep from our world into our church. It encourages us to be the church we believe in and want to belong to.

Peter Adam

Vicar Emeritus, St Jude's Carlton, Melbourne
Former Principal, Ridley College, Melbourne

A clear and compelling book about the church, carefully grounded in the word and insightfully applied to our world. Deenick inspires us with God's glorious vision for the church, prepares us for challenges and struggles that we will encounter, and equips us to be what God calls us to be. Read this book, and be excited about the church!

Derek Brotherson

Principal, Sydney Missionary and Bible College

Church is, or should be, a big part of the lives of all Christians. But many turn up without thinking very clearly, biblically or practically about what church is all about. This great little book will help them do exactly that. Deeply rooted in Scripture, it is a crystal clear, deeply challenging and wonderfully refreshing guide to living in God's church today. I'd love to see everyone who goes to church read it—they and their churches will benefit greatly.

Murray Capill

Dean of Ministry Development, Reformed Theological
College, Melbourne

Arguably the greatest challenge the pandemic has brought to the church has been in people's understanding of the purpose and importance of church itself. Against this background, Karl Deenick takes us carefully through the Bible's teaching on the centrality of the church as the *gathered* community in God's purposes for his people and his world. We need this book right now.

Michael Raiter

Director, Centre for Biblical Preaching, Melbourne

Karl has done us a great favour in writing this book. He shows us simply and clearly from the Bible how Jesus loves and cherishes his church, his bride, and why we should love Jesus' church too. As gatherings of Jesus' people, our churches will be communities of joy and love; as gatherings of sinners, they will experience conflict and hurt. All love is costly, but Karl shows us why loving and investing in our church communities will have overwhelming benefits now and in eternity. If you're having trouble being motivated about church, pick up this book. You'll be glad you did. Really!

Al Stewart

National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), Australia

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The beauty of living as God's church

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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Gathered Together

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Für meinen lieben Freund Achim.
“Es gibt einen Freund, der anhänglicher ist als ein Bruder.”
(Sprüche 18:24)

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INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, a couple of people I know were travelling in a car together when the car started to make a strange sound. One of them suggested they pull into a service station as soon as possible to see if a mechanic could solve the problem. The other person suggested they turn up the radio so they couldn't hear the noise! Thankfully, they chose the former option and had the car looked at. It turned out that another mechanic who had recently worked on the car had made a mistake reassembling the brakes. The results of continuing without fixing the problem could have been disastrous.

The thing about warning signs is that you need to pay attention to them. And for a while now, there have been some warning signs around church life.

Perhaps the biggest warning sign has been the declining number of Christians who go to a church each week. I'm not talking about church attendance across the whole population (although that's a huge issue in itself); I'm talking about people who call themselves Christians and think of themselves as belonging to a church, but simply don't show up from week to week. For

example, the numbers in Australia (in a survey taken before COVID) suggest that only 60 to 70 percent of church members attend on any given Sunday.¹ As some have noted, whereas the regulars used to come twice a Sunday, now they come twice a month.² Other Christians seem stuck on a merry-go-round of looking for a church, staying at one church for a few years before moving on to another. Similarly, there are a growing number of people who are ‘post-church’—they still claim to be Christians, but they’ve abandoned commitment to any kind of regular gathering with other Christians.

The reasons for this lack of commitment are many: dissatisfaction with what’s offered on Sundays; lack of relational connection and meaningful friendships; past hurts from other Christians or churches; busyness that squeezes out the time for church; embarrassment about Christianity’s declining social status and fear of what friends and neighbours might think; or disappointment over the church’s lack of evangelistic or social impact.

Whatever the reason, it’s a major warning sign.

Another warning sign is exhaustion. While many have noted that pastors seem to be burning out more frequently than in generations past, the problem is far broader. Everyone seems to

1 M Lean, ‘The creeping trend of church absenteeism’, *The Gospel Coalition Australia*, 26 April 2017, accessed 1 February 2022 (au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-creeping-trend-of-church-absenteeism); see also A Barraclough, ‘When did you last go to Church? The spiritual battle it seems like we are losing’, *Sydney Anglicans*, 18 September 2019, accessed 1 February 2022 (sydneyanglicans.net/news/when-did-you-last-go-to-church-the-spiritual-battle-it-seems-like-we-are-losing).

2 A Barraclough and D Steele, ‘How do you encourage the sheep that God has given you to care for to come to church to hear his word? With Antony Barraclough’, *The Pastor’s Heart*, 28 August 2018, accessed 1 February 2022 (thepastorsheart.net/podcast/2018/8/28/how-do-you-encourage-the-sheep-that-god-has-given-you-to-care-for-to-come-to-church-to-hear-his-word-with-antony-barraclough).

be exhausted. Sometimes people are exhausted because of church commitments, but often they're simply exhausted from life. Even more problematic is that many feel that church life doesn't seem to help with their exhaustion, but instead makes it worse.

Those warning signs, and the questions they have raised, have become even more prominent during the COVID pandemic and the closure of many churches during the lockdowns. As churches have reopened, many have struggled to coax their members back. Some people have simply dropped off the radar. A recurring theme during COVID was the rest that people found, not just from the busyness of life but also from the busyness of church. In fact, while stopping our public meetings should have been a source of great sadness, for many it was a delightful experience.

Even for me as a pastor, the start of COVID was a kind of little haven. It was in lockdown that I rediscovered the idea of 'personal worship'—an old idea that Christians in past centuries knew. It's not that I'd never spent time in personal devotions. But trapped alone in my house on Sundays, I would spend a couple of hours on my own in Bible reading, personal prayer, singing and lifting my heart up to God. It was such a rich discovery. But why, I wondered, did I not leave our public church gatherings feeling the same way? It almost felt as though it was easier to enjoy God alone at home than it was at church.

Others have rediscovered the joy of meeting with fellow believers in homes, not just to eat and talk about the week, but to sing, read the Bible, hear the Bible taught and pray. They could do that across age groups, with families and with those living on their own. Again, those have been rich experiences. But they've raised questions about things that seem to be missing from our church life.

More than any other question about church, COVID has raised the question of why we gather as Christians at all. Staying at home and watching the sermon online is so convenient. It's easier for the kids. It takes less time. And not only that, but I can also stream the best preachers on the planet right into my lounge room.

This is not to say that good things have not been happening. God has continued to be faithful. But the warning signs have been there for some time. And those warning signs and experiences have raised questions about what church is and what it does. What does it mean to be a church? And by that I mean not “What do *we* think the church is or should be?” but “What does *God* think the church is? What does *God* think the church should be?”

These are important questions not just for a post-COVID world; they're important any time. And they're important not only for pastors, but for every church member. The success and maturity of the church requires far more than church leaders who understand these things. It requires the whole church—every single member—knowing and understanding these things. It is pointless and fruitless for one or two people in a church to understand how God means for his church to live and function if the rest of the church doesn't share this understanding. Because, in the end, it will be the members of the church in whose lives the church will operate.

But the aim of this book is not simply to help you understand the church; the aim is to help you love it.

Despite all the challenges and warnings, I love the church. But that hasn't always been the case. Like any love, it has taken time to grow and mature. And like any love, it's also been tested and tried many times. But by God's grace, over time, I've come to see what

a precious thing the church is. I've been blessed by it, and so have many, many others around me. I've written this book because I love the church, and because I want you to love the church. In fact, one of the greatest joys in my life is to see others growing in their love for the church.

Maybe you've never really loved the church. If not, I pray that this book will help you to love it for the first time. I pray you'll come to love it as much as Jesus—the one who gave his life for the church—loves it. Or maybe you already love the church, but you've noticed the warning signs, and you don't know what to do about them. If so, I pray that this book will help you to know how you can keep persevering in loving and strengthening God's church.

This book, then, is a little primer on the church—what it is, what it does, and how it does it. But its perspective is from the pew. It's not a book on how to run a church—there are plenty of those. This is a book to help you live in the church as a faithful member, or, better still, as a faithful partner and co-worker.

1

RESETTING OUR EXPECTATIONS



Expectations are powerful. They seem to have a disproportionate power to affect our enjoyment of things. Expecting too much can lead to disappointment, while expecting too little can lead us to settle for less than what could or should be.

For example, a couple might enter a marriage with unrealistic expectations of how wonderful married life will be: marriage will solve all their problems, it will cure their loneliness, it will be one moment of joy after another—a perfect partnership. But when reality starts to bite, those unrealistic expectations will inevitably lead to disappointment, bitterness and, at worst, one or both deciding the marriage isn't working and that it would be better for them to separate. On the other hand, another couple might enter marriage with very low expectations. They expect married life together to be full of arguments, and so they settle for a life full of arguments. They expect each other to be selfish, and so they settle for being selfish and don't work to grow in serving

each other. They don't expect married life to have any joys, and so they settle for a joyless marriage. Again, those low expectations can lead to one or both deciding that the marriage isn't working and that it would be better for them to separate.

Sadly, the same dynamics often play out in the life of the local church, where many people have wrong expectations. The problem is that sooner or later those expectations take their toll and can lead to bitterness, disappointment and resentment.

In some cases, we can find ourselves expecting our church to be perfect. We would never say it that way, but in practice this is what we expect. So whenever someone hurts us or lets us down, we find it very hard to cope, partly because we didn't expect to be hurt. This unexpected hurt leads many to abandon their church or even abandon the Christian faith altogether. Likewise, we can expect our church to meet all our needs, or we can expect everyone to be our best friends, or we can expect every church meeting to be fabulous and inspiring. Anything less becomes a source of enormous disappointment and discouragement.

On the flip side, we can expect too little. We can assume all our relationships in church will be superficial and casual, and so settle for that, never discovering the delight of deeply loving one another. We can expect church gatherings to always be uninspiring, and so turn up on Sunday with our hearts and minds disengaged. We can expect the church members never to grow or change, and so content ourselves with being stuck in sin.

One of the most important things as we begin our journey of learning to love and live in God's church is to reset our expectations according to the Bible. The church of God is a glorious and wonderful thing that God has called into existence through the gospel, but it's also a place of struggle and sin. And to live in our own church well, we need to hold tightly to both of those truths.

The glory of the church

One of the most common places people turn to think about church is the book of Acts, because it tells the story of the beginning of the New Testament church.

Acts begins with the apostles holed up in a room waiting for Jesus to send the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit finally arrives on the day of Pentecost, the age of the Holy-Spirit-empowered New Testament church begins. In a single day, three thousand people are converted. And the result is a brand new, vibrant community of people who are dedicated to hearing the apostles' teaching every day, devoted to prayer, and committed to meeting in each other's homes and generously sharing all that they have.

It's an amazing picture. And as we read on in Acts, it only gets more and more exciting as more and more people are converted. Several times in the early chapters, Luke, the author of Acts, records the spectacular growth of the church at large. For example, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).³ The book is full of vibrant spirituality and what seems like daily conversions.

But it's not only Acts that paints a stunning picture of church life. For example, the Bible describes the members of one local church as members of the body of Christ:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Rom 12:4-5)

There is a deep and profound unity not only with each other, but most importantly with God through Jesus. The church in Ephesus

³ See also Acts 2:41, 5:14 and 11:24.

is described as “God’s holy people ... the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph 1:1). The local church in Corinth was a community of people who had been engaged in all kinds of sinful behaviours but had since been washed, set apart and reconciled to God. The apostle Paul describes their new condition this way:

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9-11)

The Corinthian church is also described as God’s sacred “temple”—the place where God had chosen to dwell by his Spirit and meet with his people:

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. (1 Cor 3:16-17)

The Thessalonian church was a community of faith, hope and love:

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 1:2-3)

It was also a community of eager and powerful witness:

Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction ... you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. (1 Thess 1:5, 7-8)

The New Testament vision of church life is extraordinary. The churches are communities of people who were sinners, but who have been justified by the blood of Christ and washed by the Holy Spirit, and who together are now God's dwelling place, God's holy people, God's own treasured possession—people belonging to God. The churches are vibrant communities of ongoing learning of the deep truths of the gospel, communities of rich and constant prayer, of loving relationships, of sharing and generosity. They are communities of faith, hope and love. They are communities that are growing in number. They are communities of gospel power and deep conviction. They are communities of joyful, faithful witness.

We rightly have high hopes for our churches. But the tragedy is that often our hopes are far more mundane than the ones presented in the Bible. Often we hope for lesser things: good music, a short meeting, slick leading, good crèche facilities or a great children's program. And not only do we aspire to those lesser things; we see our failure to achieve those lesser things as an unbearable loss. We're embarrassed by bad PowerPoint slides or dodgy music, while our failure to achieve a community of love, grace, worship and delight in God causes barely a stir.

The first step, then, in living as God's church is to recapture God's vision for the glory of his church. When our hearts are fired by God's vision of the church in the New Testament, our hopes are lifted to much greater things. You could have the worst

music in the world, no kids' program or a cold building with no windows and no heating. But if you have a group of sinners saved by grace, indwelt by God, empowered by his grace, filled with love, constant in prayer, overflowing with generosity and labouring in the gospel, then you have everything you could ever hope for or need.

The struggle of the church

Yet God's glorious vision for the church is only one side of the story. If we only consider the kinds of passages listed above, we'll come away with a very distorted picture. The truth is that the Bible presents us with a much more complicated picture of church life.

For instance, while three thousand people are converted in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, two chapters later Peter and John are thrown in prison and dragged before the authorities. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira lie to church leaders about giving money and are struck dead by God. In Acts 6, a significant disagreement arises about distribution of the food that's being shared. The church that was supposed to be glorious and united is already suffering and displaying signs of fracturing.

This pattern of incredible success as well as difficult struggle continues throughout the New Testament. In 2 Timothy, Paul says that Timothy's church is full of both true believers and false believers:

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. (2 Tim 2:20)

The "large house" that Paul mentions is Timothy's church. In it, there are what Paul calls vessels for "special purposes" and vessels

for “common use”—that is, vessels that you use for fine dining and vessels that you use for cleaning the toilet. Timothy’s church is a mixture of the good and bad, of the useful and useless, of the clean and unclean. For instance, there are those in Timothy’s church who are teaching lies and undermining the faith of others. Their lies are like gangrene—they just keep on spreading, and every time they spread, more of the church dies and more of the church needs to be cut off (2:16-18).

Likewise, Jude wanted to be positive in writing to one particular church, but had to change tack because of the moral and theological problems there. He writes:

Although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 3-4)

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, it was being damaged by favouritism and church politics (1 Cor 1:10-13), sexual immorality (5:1-2), lawsuits (6:1-8), idolatry (10:14-22), and greed and selfishness (11:17-22). The messages to the seven churches in Revelation tell of a church that had lost its love for Christ (Rev 2:4), a church that was engaged in worshipping other gods and in sexual immorality (2:14), a church that was involved in a kind of religious prostitution (2:20), a church that was spiritually dead (3:2), and another that was lukewarm (3:15). The New Testament also tells us about churches that were in danger of deserting the gospel (Galatians 1) or of denying the divinity of Jesus (1 John), or that

were pandering to the rich and ignoring the poor (Jas 2:1-13).

One of our greatest mistakes in thinking about our church is that we expect it to be perfect. We read all the wonderful and amazing statements in the New Testament about various churches, but we can forget about all the passages that say difficult things about church life. As a result, we're surprised to find that churches can be difficult; we're surprised to find struggles or sin or weakness. But God has never promised that his church, this side of Jesus' return, will be perfect. The New Testament seems to show that the church will always be mixed and always in danger from corruption.⁴ Here on earth, the church is united but divided, holy yet full of sinners, universal but fighting turf wars, faithful but at times heretical.

This is not to say that we should be indifferent to or complacent about sin in the church. Not at all. Paul encouraged Timothy to work hard for the purity of the church. Timothy was to flee sin, patiently instruct his opponents, and have nothing to do with the godless and the immoral who pretended to be Christians (2 Tim 2:16, 22-26; 3:1-5). The reason Paul wrote to Corinth, and the reason Jude wrote his letter, was to encourage those churches—not just the leadership, but every member—to take the purity of their church seriously and to struggle for the purity of their church.

In fact, while the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace, the church is the frontline on the battlefield between Christ and the kingdom of Satan. The church is not a haven of peace on earth; it's the frontline in the battle “against the powers of this

4 This truth came home to me with great force when I first listened to a talk by Peter Adam: 'Making of a man of God, part 1', *The Gospel Coalition*, 14 March 2009, accessed 1 February 2022 (thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/making-of-a-man-of-god-part-1).

dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

The church is glorious, and the church will be glorious, but we also need to realize that life in the church this side of eternity will always be a struggle.

Living in the gap

But how do we live rightly in the midst of that struggle? To answer that question, it’s helpful to look at one passage where Paul unpacks God’s great vision for his church.⁵ Paul writes to the church in Ephesus:

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:8-11)

Paul says that God’s intent is to make his wisdom known in the heavenly realms. Incredibly, Paul says that God intends to achieve this *through the church*. By saving a people for himself from every tribe and language and people and nation, by reconciling them to himself and to each other and building them into a place in which

5 Again, I am indebted to Peter Adam’s series of talks. On this point in particular, I found his second talk especially helpful: ‘Making of a man of God, part 2’, *The Gospel Coalition*, 14 March 2009, accessed 1 February 2022 (thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/making-of-a-man-of-god-part-2).

God lives (2:19-22), God is making his glory known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places and also to the world through all generations (3:21). The church that Paul has in mind is the church of all believers through all time and in all places.⁶ But it has implications for the Ephesians in their own local church. That plan and purpose of God is so wonderful, Paul says, that it should keep the Ephesians from being discouraged by Paul's sufferings: "I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory" (3:13).⁷

The first way, then, that we live in the midst of the struggle is by remembering God's great intent to make his wisdom known through the church—through gathering together a people for himself.

But the second way that we live in the midst of the struggle is by praying for God's glory to be manifest in the church. Paul continues:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be

6 We'll think more about the different ways the word 'church' is used in the New Testament in the next chapter.

7 In fact, Paul's sufferings work towards the glory of the Ephesians—his sufferings "are your glory". As he suffers for their sake, the gospel takes root in their lives more and more, and hence they are transformed into the image of Christ "with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor 3:18).

filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:14-21)

Paul prays for something we sometimes struggle to see as clearly as we should: that God might be glorified “in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations” (v 21). His vision, then, encompasses both the church across the world and through time, but also, again, the local church in Ephesus which is merely one small part of that bigger “church”.

And yet our local churches, as well as the church of God throughout the whole world, so often seem light-years away from the biblical ideal. They are marred by scandals and put down by the media. They are pulled apart by divisions, sometimes over important things like truth, and at other times over unimportant things like what colour the chairs should be. And yet there are moments when we catch glimpses of God’s glory in the church. We see it most clearly when the members of a church truly love God and delight in him. We see it when they love each other, share in each other’s joys and sorrows, care for each other by generously giving time and money, and prayerfully speak God’s truth in love for the building up of one another.

And so what does Paul do? He prays. He gets on his knees and prays for people to be strengthened through the Spirit, that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith so that “being rooted and established in love” they might be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”. Nothing short of being filled to the brim with the entirety of God’s powerful, gracious, transforming

presence will be enough for God's glory to be manifest in the church. And importantly, although God's vision is for his glory to be displayed in the church through "all generations", Paul prays for that big glory project to come about by praying, first of all, for the Ephesians in their local church. Incredibly, the manifestation of God's glory begins in our little local churches.

But what an astonishing prayer to pray! If it wasn't in the Bible, we might not even dare to ask such a thing. And yet I suspect that many of us don't pray that way. We look at the church—either our own or the church at large—and instead of getting on our knees and praying to be completely saturated with the radiant presence of God, we just give up and think that the glory of God in the church is out of reach. Alternatively, we get on with developing our plans to make the church amazing without ever stopping to pray, forgetting that the glory of God in the church takes a miracle of God: the supernatural power of the Spirit and a deep knowledge of the love of God. And yet Paul says that when we pray, God is able "to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine".

It's a helpful and revealing exercise to reflect on what you pray or imagine God could do for your church. In fact, many of us probably never (or only rarely) ask God for anything for our churches. And if we do, we only pray for ourselves, our friends or those in particular need.

But if you were to pray for your church, what would you ask God to do?

You might ask God for a church with cutting edge music—or old music, depending on your taste—or a first-class Sunday School and youth program, or a clever new sign that really grabs people's attention, or a website that makes the church seem more vibrant. You might imagine a new foyer, a new backdrop,

a new lectern, new chairs or a mini-cafe. But, frankly, if those are the limits of our prayers or our dreams for our church, they are embarrassingly small.

God says his plan is to do so much more through the church than that. God's plan is to make his wisdom known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church, by turning sinners into saints, and enemies into friends, and by filling them to the measure of all the fullness of God.