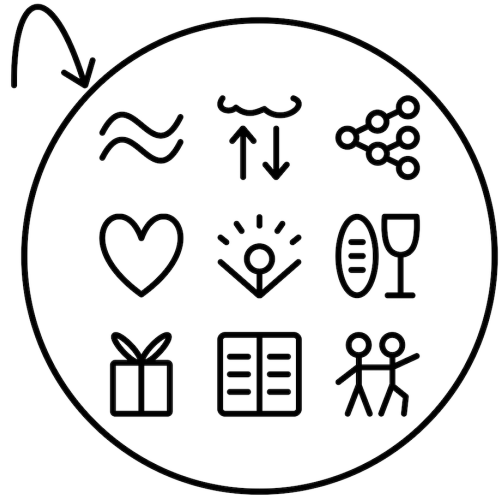


In this section of Bridges to People, I am thinking about contemporary disciples of Jesus who are in contact with unbelieving people, and as a fruit of their ministry they have new Christians around them. When the new ones can be invited to the classic church, it's great. But with many of them it is far from that simple! What then? I try to make the biblical, yet simple church, practically accessible to the guides of these new believers.

Do you lead a Discovery with unbelieving friends? Are you meeting with a mission team of Christians to encourage ministry to unbelievers? Do you have a group of disciples who win their acquaintances for the Lord? I assume that in any of these groups – you already **practice** some form of discussion over the God's word. I guess you pray there. And it's common to share and care for each other. Someone is definitely the initiator of your meetings. If you take turns, it is ideal for recognizing and developing other initiators and leaders. Are you encouraged to share the Good News and nurture new disciples? Do you have a way of worshiping Jesus? Perhaps without music, just in reflection and thanksgiving? Does your team or group have any other of these functions of the New Testament church?



If you do **not yet practice** some of the functions of the church, prayerfully study them again in God's Word. Some have found it helpful that, after fresh self-study of some of these functions in the Scriptures, they „just“ **tried** them out for themselves. For example, some friends, after discussing the relevant passages, „tried“ to make an informal Lord's Supper in their group. And they were surprised by how new and powerful experience of Jesus' closeness it was for them.

This doesn't mean you have to leave your current church! If one of your groups adopts the functions and identity of church, you can become an extended hand for your congregation to spread the kingdom of God!

I told you how some of the guests in the Alpha course believed, but most did not get into the church. If they continued to meet even after the end of Alpha and the organizing team would gradually add all the biblical functions of the church, for many of the new believers it would

be the most natural way to stay in the community to which they already informally belonged!

Do you remember the Firsts, who accepted Jesus, but were unable to attend meetings of Long-Time believers? Church at home was a natural solution for them! At the same time, the Long-Times continued to attend their church at least occasionally.

You will surely remember Petr from a previous lesson, who, in addition to his role of a pastor in a hundred-member congregation, also had his own house church. And his small house church **reproduced seven times** in less than three years! This means believers from Peter's house church started similar small churches of their own with other friends from outside.

When you do a Bible study with the disciples on the functions of the church, you may find that you actually ARE the church! You just might be missing some features. So with prayer just start doing them!

The apostle Paul added what was needed in the newly founded churches. For example, in local groups of new believers, which Luke clearly refers to as „**churches**“, only subsequently the caring leaders – so-called „elders“ – are appointed. (Acts 14,23)

It's a pity that the experience with small churches embedded in the very beginnings of most of our denominations somehow fell out of our active memory. Look at the start of your own history. I think you will find a lot of encouragement there!

Lord Jesus, I thank you for your simple guidance to new fellowships and to the whole movement. I ask for your empowerment for more and more of your followers to try and persevere until they see abundant fruit...