

## **Backyard Church Planning and Strategy Guide**

[www.backyardchurch.org](http://www.backyardchurch.org)

Helping you get started in your own backyard, home, park, or elsewhere in a way  
That is simple, inexpensive, effective and biblical

By

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## About Backyard Church

We are a house church gathering of about 50 people who meet in Auburn, AL. We started when the onset of pandemic in 2020 and a few months in, realized that God had started a new church. We aspire to be disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. Prayer is essential to everything we do in the ministry as we believe God is still working, informing and empowering today so we seek God for his help in making decisions about everything we do. We believe the Holy Spirit gifts people to bless the church and the world. It is important at BYC that we encourage people in their gifts and make space for people to use their gifts. We also value discipleship, learning to follow Jesus and surrendering to Him in all areas of our lives. Part of being disciples is to make disciples and as we make disciples we start new churches. This is what we see in Acts and in the New Testament.

The following is a guide that is based on what we have learned so that you don't have to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. If you have any questions or need help, please let me know! [matthewdabbs@hotmail.com](mailto:matthewdabbs@hotmail.com)

## Sunday Worship Gathering

Meet weekly on Sunday for an hour + fellowship time.

### Outdoor worship plan

- Meet 9am in the Summer and 2pm in the winter (to help regulate the temps)
- In the warmer months we have purchased outdoor fans that we set up to help those who are older be more comfortable

### Indoor worship plan (rain, cold)

- Someone hosts in their home or we use an alternate location (Free or rental).
- Be cognizant and respectful of neighbors when you meet in a home. The additional cars can upset some people. Be aware of the laws (don't part near a stop sign or fire hydrant and don't park on both sides of the road in a way that would prevent emergency vehicles from getting through – just be aware of the local laws and inform your people to keep the neighborhood peace).

### Online worship

- There are times like holidays when so many people are out at once that we move worship to online via our YouTube channel.
- People record from home: prayer, lesson, communion, and worship leading and we edit it into one video and upload to YouTube

### Children in worship

Being a small church we don't have large groups of volunteers to take the children during the worship. That means our kids are frequently in the worship, which is a huge blessing. The kids

are learning that they belong to the church and are active parts in the worship. They lead prayers, pass communion, answer questions, etc.

There are times we do take them to have their own Bible lessons, geared toward following Jesus (discipleship). Here is how we coordinate that:

- Signup sheet in the cloud (give example and create)
- [AWANA](#) material for discipling kids (referral link?)

### **Weekly Worship Rhythm:**

Each week of the month we have a special focus and the reason for this is to practice on Sunday what we want to practice during the week. Since we believe God is guiding us and that we need to pray and stop to listen to God, we have incorporated these principles into our monthly worship rhythm. This also gives our worship leaders time to recharge as they are not leading and practicing every single week (since they are volunteers):

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday – Prayer Sunday (start the month in prayer)

- Short lesson focused on prayer
- Prayer prompts that are assigned in advance via text/whatsapp
- Communion

2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – Singing worship

- We have a worship team that leads our worship
- Lesson from the Bible (interactive)
- Prayer
- Communion

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Potluck worship - close the month in silence/listening and sharing

- We ask in advance for people to pay attention to how they see God working during the week and come with something to offer/share (a prayer, a song, a scripture, a testimony, etc)
- We start in silence waiting on God to move – when someone feels compelled to share, we begin
- Short lesson is possible, communion and prayer

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday – special Sunday of service and/or a meal together

### **Sunday setup:**

Here are the things we have learned to help you see the Sunday setup to not have to think through all of this!

We set up a table every Sunday and on that table we place:

- Communion
- Activities for kids (coloring sheets, anything parents need to grab)
- Basket for prayer requests and prayer cards

- Print copies of the lyrics
- QR Code sheet (links to our About/Our story on line, giving link, lyrics link). This allows new people who don't get the text/WhatsApp to have easy access to the song lyrics and get to know more about us via our website (you don't need a website to do a house church 😊)

### **AV setup:**

If you meet outside and you get over 15 people you really need to consider amplifying the sound so people can hear you. Each Sunday I load the following in my truck. We have started giving some people parts of this to make it easier. The only problem you run into there is if they are out:

- Activity bin for the kids
- Electric fans if it is hot
- AV Equipment (see list at the end of the document)
- Camp chairs for our family plus a few extra (new people often don't have chairs the first time they come).

### **Communion**

We set communion on a 6 foot white folding table (one that folds in half so it is easy to store). We have someone share a thought and a prayer for the communion and then have an open table for people to come and get what they need. We practice open communion (open to anyone who decides to take it). Sometimes people will get it and huddle up with others or someone next to them and commune together.

### **Weekly giving**

We don't practice a verbal call to give or the passing of trays. There is a basket on the table that people put prayer requests in that sometimes someone will put money/check in. People know that there is online giving and they do that of their own accord. When Paul established the idea of the weekly offering in 1 Cor 16:2 he told them that they no longer needed to continue the practice when he arrived. While it is fine to take up a weekly offering, we have decided that there are better ways and less obtrusive ways for people to give. The Bible says giving is not to be done under compulsion (2 Cor 9:7). We have found this is the way that fits what we find in the New Testament.

### **Special offerings**

We do periodically mention specific needs for mission or in the church body or in the community that people can give to and will report back what was offered and the impact it had. That is really the only time money/giving is mentioned on Sunday unless there is a lesson on it.

## Deacons/Servants & Involvement

In the Bible the word deacon literally means a servant. It is vitally important in house church to keep people involved. With fewer people means each person will be involved more often than in a large congregation. This is a blessing (1 Peter 2:11 – we are a royal priesthood – all disciples, not just a select few).

One way to delegate the responsibilities of the church is to have deacon/servants over various priorities to make sure the church stays active and on track with its mission. Here is one way this can be done:

Start in prayer – ask God to help make clear who needs to serve in each area and for God to make the areas clear that He is calling people into.

Lay out job descriptions for each role (See below).

Set term limits – no one needs an eternal job nor will anyone want to replace others if the job is forever. I suggest 6 months with an intentional and prayerful handoff to the next person.

Suggested roles and job descriptions:

Servant of fun – plan a monthly activity that engages the church family in having fun together. Communicate and coordinate the dates with the other servants to avoid conflicts. Communicate events with the church at least a few weeks in advance of the event.

Servant of service – plan a monthly service event for the church family. Communicate and coordinate the dates with the other servants to avoid conflicts. Communicate events with the church at least a few weeks in advance of the event.

Servant of prayer – to make sure we keep focused on prayer and dependence on God. They plan a monthly prayer walk and communicate with the other servants and with the church at least a few weeks in advance of the prayer walk. If you want to know more about prayer walking you can learn more [here](#). This is central to our mission.

Servant of the children – it is helpful to have someone keep things with the kids on track, particularly the signup to see who is going to teach the kids on weeks they have their own lesson.

Servant of worship – this is a point person to make sure Sunday worship is on track. Worship roles are assigned far enough in advance for people to prepare. Teaching needs more prep time than leading a prayer, for instance. There are other simple formats for the lesson that reduce prep time (See below). Here are the major roles for Sunday that we regularly coordinate: Welcome (update people on what is happening), communion thought/prayer, lesson, & prayer.

On prayer Sundays (first Sunday of the month) we coordinate more people with specific prayer prompts.

Transitioning service roles to a new person: Three months into the role, begin praying about a transition to someone new. As a name comes to mind and you have prayed about it – approach this other person about taking this on. This gives you three months/three events where they can help you plan and communicate so they are ready when you stop your service role.

## **Communication**

### **How we communicate:**

We communicate in two ways – WhatsApp and text

Create a WhatsApp group for your house church. For those who don't have the app, create a text group. Each week, messages go out to both. You can create a QR code, print it and have it at your gathering in case new people want to keep informed (as said above, we put this out on the table for new people to get the lyrics).

### **What we communicate:**

- We send a weekly text/WhatsApp about what is happening on Sunday: theme of the message/scripture, lyrics for the worship (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays), location and time (as this can change due to weather). Our worship leaders send me the lyrics for the upcoming Sunday by mid-week. I take that and make it into a pdf and upload it to the internet so I have a link to share with the church in advance of Sunday.
- Special event details
- Special needs for giving
- Worship assignments to those involved in worship – I reach out each week and ask people to pray, lead communion, and teach when I am not teaching. I get this list to the worship team and welcome person (if it isn't me) before Sunday so that they can better segue to what is next. If you don't do this then it often leaves the worship people wondering who to hand the mic to/pass off the worship to next.

## **Prayer Focus**

Prayer is essential to house church, discipleship and starting new churches. This is not praying just to pray. It is praying to:

- Seek God's direction and be ready to follow His lead
- Surrender to God in all things
- Ask God for miracles
- Prayer for mission – Ask God for workers and a harvest
- Ask God to raise up new leaders
- Ask God to mature the disciples in your care

Here is a list of my [Daily Prayer Prompts for Mission](#).

Pray about everything.

### **Fasting is also important**

Fasting helps us keep our desires in check and put God first. We humble ourselves and put God above food...above desires...above the flesh. This helps us find peace with God and with other people and helps us better hear the voice of God. Jesus said in John 10 that the sheep will know His voice. We can tune into the voice of Jesus. Another way to do this is be in His Word so that we get familiar with His ways, His teaching and His voice so that we can distinguish between what Jesus is telling us (via the Spirit) and what our flesh desires.

Again, prayer walking is vitally important (see link above) as it gets us out in the community where we bless people, encourage people and pray with people. It mature us and it reaches new people.

### **Create a prayer team**

Each of our house churches has its own prayer team. We communicate prayer needs via WhatsApp. There are people on the prayer team from within the house church and also prayer partners from other places, even other countries.

### **Weekly Saturday Prayer Zoom**

Every week we meet at 8pm on Saturday to pray. We keep it to 15 minutes and pray for God to bless the churches represented on the call. We ask God to do miracles and move powerfully. We ask that He be glorified. This is incredibly easy to set up and makes sure that every time we gather, the gathering has been prayed over in advance.

You cannot pray enough or be intentional enough about prayer.

## **New person integration**

Everyone is welcome at BYC and we want everyone who comes to feel like they are welcome, they belong and they are family.

The only caveat to this is that if the house church grows too large, it can lose its effectiveness in keeping people close and involved.

Our approach is that all who come are welcome and loved. And. As we grow we begin praying about asking God to raise up new leaders for new churches so that we can maintain our closeness while staying on mission. That brings us to the next topic...multiplying house churches.

## **Multiplying House Churches (Starting New Churches)**

If you want to reach your community, they won't all fit in your house! That means you need more houses, which means you need more leaders willing to step out and start a new house church. Here are some tips on how to help someone else get started.

1 - Begin praying for God to raise up leaders. Pray for this and for mission (see the list above) daily. It probably won't be whoever you suspect it might be. God has a way of answering this prayers in ways that are so unsuspected that it is clearly from Him!

2 – When a leader is identified you begin training them. Give them this Strategy Guide. Pray with them.

3 – There is a process you can walk through with them to start a new church that involves prayer, finding access ministries into a community or neighborhood, prayer walking, starting a Bible study and over time transitioning that Bible study into a new house church. Here is a link to that information. Please read it and walk through it with the person God shows you. It is essential that you practice these things together (as Jesus said 2 by 2) so that they can see in you what they are trying to do. Here is the link to [Becoming an Effective Disciple Maker!](#)

4 – Read Acts 13:1-4 to be intentional about selection and send off (worship, fasting, prayer and listening for the Spirit's direction and lead)

5 – You can help this new leader start a new church (which starts as a Bible study). This will, in effect, put you in two churches at the same time until the new church gets off the ground and the new leader has the character and competency to see it to maturity.

4 – Please reach out to me if you have questions or need help – [matthewdabbs@hotmail.com](mailto:matthewdabbs@hotmail.com)

## **Identifying and Using Gifts**

There are various places in the New Testament where there are lists of spiritual gifts. God gifts His people for specific purposes. The one we look at the most in Ephesians 4:11-16. Please examine these verses and you will see that if we embrace/practice these roles, we will be mature, not prone to false teaching and become more and more like Jesus. If we neglect these roles, the exact opposite will happen and is happening in many churches.

See this [handout on identifying and using gifts](#).

## **Being in the Word and Teaching/Proclaiming the Word**

Jesus told us in the Great Commission that a disciple is someone who is baptized and taught to obey all Jesus commanded. If we want to be His disciples we need to know what He said to live



what He said. One of the best ways to practice this with regularity is Discovery Bible Study (DBS). This is a simple approach to getting in the Word to understand, live/obey and share the Word with others. It just so happens that Christian maturity happens best when we grow in knowledge, in obedience/faithfulness and in sharing with others (Curtis Sergeant has said this many times and I agree).

I mentioned above that teaching takes more prep time than some of the other roles, so give people plenty of lead time in asking them to teach. DBS can actually be used to lead a Bible study in the house church assembly. It is very simple, very effective and takes little prep time.

Here is the [DBS Tool](#) and here are scripture lists to use with DBS on the [teachings of Jesus](#), since he said a disciple obeys His teaching.

### **Equipment and Resource List & Links**

6 Foot folding table – communion (we bought at Sams)  
Basket for bread/crackers  
Tray for cups/juice  
Basket for giving

Microphone – [Shure BLX24 \(with receiver\)](#) & Shure SM58 cardoid  
[25 foot XLR cable\(s\)](#) for the [SM58](#) or a less expensive option – [SM48](#)  
[Mic stands](#)  
Manhasset [Model 48](#) or [Model 50](#) Music stand  
Extension cord  
Cord Reel  
Plugin splitter  
[Stand for sound system](#)  
Speaker stands  
Sound System – [Fender Passport Conference S2](#) (4 inputs with speaker stands and cables (\$600)

Please reach out to me if you have questions or need help – [matthewdabbs@hotmail.com](mailto:matthewdabbs@hotmail.com)

If you would like to receive the weekly email that will help equip you for mission and give you links to all our new blogs and videos you can [sign up here](#).

### **Starting a Backyard Church!**

All of this information is given with no strings attached. We hope and pray it is what some people need to get started and thrive! If you would like to be recognized as part of a larger network of house churches, we would love to talk with you about that. Here are the benefits of doing that:

- 1 - Get regular support and encouragement through a bi-weekly zoom for leaders
- 2 – Get use of our Logos, yard signs, etc.
- 3 – Get added to our backyard church directory at [backyardchurch.org](http://backyardchurch.org)
- 4 – Connect with other BYC church leaders and give/receive support

Please reach out to me and let me know you would like to get started –  
[matthewdabbs@hotmail.com](mailto:matthewdabbs@hotmail.com)

One of our goals is to assist people in simple ways of starting house churches all over the world so don't hesitate to reach out!