

FIELD NOTE 04 / ASCEND NETWORK

A House Built Around His Presence

From a compelling service to a people who live before God

The governing principle

The presence of God is not an atmosphere a church produces. It is the gift of the living God, who draws near to a people through Christ and forms them by His Spirit. A presence-centered house therefore cannot be measured by how long the music lasts, how strong a moment feels, or how often leaders use the language of revival. The question is whether the people are learning to know, obey, worship, and bear witness to God in ordinary life.

Moses' plea in Exodus 33:12-16 came after Israel's idolatry. He did not ask for a more impressive journey. He asked how they could go forward if the Lord's presence did not go with them. The presence distinguished the people because God Himself was with them, not because their methods were remarkable. The passage should make leaders tremble before they use "presence" as a brand. God is not a feature we add to our vision. His nearness calls the whole house to repentance, dependence, and obedience.

In Christ, God has come near in a decisive way. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Through the Spirit, believers are being built together into a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:19-22). This is why a church cannot reduce His presence to one room, one worship style, or one leader's gift. The people themselves are being formed into a holy habitation.

Four marks of a presence-centered house

1. The Word governs the encounter

The Spirit who makes Christ known does not compete with the Scriptures that bear witness to Him. In Acts 2:42-47, the first believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching alongside fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Their shared life was not sustained by novelty. Teaching gave shape to what they believed, prayer kept them dependent, and generosity made their devotion visible.

Preaching should open the text honestly, proclaim Christ, call for response, and equip people to obey. Prophetic ministry should be tested rather than despised (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). A powerful impression does not override a plain command of Scripture. A moving service that leaves people unable to discern truth has not formed a mature house.

Ask after a gathering: what did our people learn about God, what response did Scripture call for, and how will they practice it this week? These are spiritual questions, not merely teaching questions.

2. Prayer is a governing practice, not a prelude

Acts 13:1-3 shows leaders ministering to the Lord, fasting, and responding to the Spirit's direction in sending Barnabas and Saul. The passage does not prescribe an identical process for every staffing decision. It does expose the poverty of a leadership culture that makes every major decision in meetings where no one prays, waits, or listens.

Prayer belongs in the ordinary structure of the house: leaders praying before deciding, teams praying with one another, members learning to pray Scripture, and intercession carrying the city rather than merely the event. We should be honest about timing. A leader cannot announce "the Spirit said" to end discussion when others have not had room to test the direction. Waiting on God may clarify a decision, expose fear, or reveal a neglected person. It does not absolve us from examining facts.

3. Holiness protects what gifts can attract

The Church is God's temple, and His Spirit dwells among His people (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Paul's warning in context addresses those who damage the church through divisive and destructive building. Presence-centered language without holy leadership is dangerous. A public gift can gather people while private compromise teaches the house to ignore what God calls serious.

Holiness is not perfectionism and cannot be enforced through fear. It is a life set apart to God, with repentance when we fail and truthful protection when others are harmed. Leaders must not use "honor" to silence a wounded person. Sexual misconduct, financial deception, abuse of power, and doctrinal manipulation are not inconveniences to hide for the sake of momentum. A house that fears the Lord tells the truth, safeguards people, and accepts correction.

4. The whole body becomes a witness

Ephesians 4:11-16 describes leaders equipping saints until the body grows in maturity as each part works. Acts 2:42-47 joins worship, teaching, generosity, shared meals, and witness. The goal is not a room full of spectators having an experience near a gifted person. The goal is disciples whose lives are reordered by Jesus.

That means the presence of God should be visible in the weekday life of the church: enemies being reconciled, the poor being served with dignity, children being disciplined, volunteers being formed, leaders making clean decisions, and believers carrying the gospel into their work and neighborhoods. We do not manufacture those outcomes by perfecting a service. We teach, pray, obey, make room, and trust God to give growth.

Worship, order, and freedom

Some leaders fear that any plan will quench the Spirit. Others fear that any interruption will ruin the plan. First Corinthians 14:26-40 addresses a gathered church with spiritual contributions and insists that they be exercised for building up, with discernment and order. Order is not the opposite of life. It can make room for more people to be edified and protected.

Prepare musicians, preachers, prayer teams, and response leaders well. Teach them why the service is ordered as it is and how to respond if the Lord redirects attention. Make space for silence and prayer without turning every pause into a performance. Have a pastoral process for prophetic words, healing prayer, and public testimony. Consent, clarity, and care matter. No one should be pressured to disclose a wound publicly to prove that God is moving.

A church can linger before the Lord and still begin on time, care for children well, communicate clearly, and honor volunteers' limits. Excellence is useful when it serves people and removes distraction. It becomes an idol when it cannot yield to obedience.

Build an ordinary discipleship architecture

If Sunday is the only place where a person expects to encounter God, the church has taught a smaller gospel than it intends. Give people a repeatable way to live before Him beyond the gathering:

- 1 **Scripture:** Teach a way to read a passage in context, see Christ, and obey rather than collecting isolated promises.
- 2 **Prayer:** Show new believers how to pray honestly, listen with discernment, and bring their needs before God.
- 3 **Community:** Put people in relationships where they can be known, corrected, encouraged, and cared for.
- 4 **Mission:** Help them name who and where they are sent to serve, witness, and make disciples.
- 5 **Formation:** Mark progress by love, truth, endurance, generosity, and obedience, not only by attendance at programs.

This is not a five-step substitute for the Holy Spirit. It is a trellis that can support living growth. The church should review the pathway with actual people in mind. Can a first-time guest find it? Can a new believer enter it? Can a mature leader help another person walk it? If the answers are unclear, the pathway exists on paper more than in the house.

A case for the leadership table

A church is known for worship that often runs long. People testify that they encounter God. Parents also report that children's check-in is inconsistent, volunteers are exhausted, and newcomers cannot tell how to receive prayer without walking to the front during a public moment. Some leaders dismiss these concerns as resistance to the Spirit.

The answer is not to shorten every service to meet a formula. The answer is to ask whether the house is caring for the people God is drawing. Listen to parents and volunteers. Train more prayer ministers. Create a clear, gentle route for prayer and follow-up. Review children's safety and staffing. Decide in advance how a service can respond to an extended ministry moment without leaving workers unsupported. Keep worship free, and make the house trustworthy.

Presence and pastoral responsibility are not competing values. The Spirit forms a body, and bodies have members whose needs matter.

A 90-day house audit

Days 1-30: Listen. Ask leaders, volunteers, new believers, and longtime members where they recognize the Lord's work and where the church's rhythms make obedience harder. Read the answers without defending the current system.

Days 31-60: Align. Examine preaching, prayer, discipleship, worship, care, and decision making against Scripture and your stated convictions. Choose two changes that would move the house from a compelling moment toward durable formation. Give each change a leader and a date.

Days 61-90: Practice and review. Teach the congregation why the changes matter. Train the teams who will carry them. Ask what happened to real people, not only whether the new process ran smoothly. Keep what bears fruit. Correct what creates confusion. Pray again.

Do not promise that a ninety-day plan will produce revival. Faithful structure cannot command God's presence. It can remove hypocrisy, neglect, and unnecessary confusion while a people seek Him together.

Questions to bring to your table

- If our most gifted leader were absent for a month, would people still know how to pray, read Scripture, and care for one another?
- Where have we confused an intense moment with lasting formation?
- Do our worship and prophetic practices make people safer and more mature?
- What part of our current pace is consuming volunteers or families?
- What would it mean for the presence of God to shape our Monday decisions as much as our Sunday gathering?

The charge: Do not settle for a room that can host a moment but cannot form a people. Build a house where Scripture is trusted, prayer is normal, holiness is protected, and the whole body learns to carry His presence into daily life.

Scripture for further study

Exodus 33:12-16; John 1:14; 15:4-5; Acts 2:42-47; 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 14:26-40; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22.

AT THE LEADERSHIP TABLE

One Sunday practice to examine

One weekday practice to strengthen

Who will own the next step
