
SEO for Churches

Everything You Need to Know
to Get Found Online





Since 1992, Faithlife Corporation has grown from a couple of programmers in a basement into the largest developer of Bible study software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing.

Today, Faithlife is proud to have built the world's first integrated ministry platform, which houses everything church leaders need to engage and disciple their communities online. No matter your role, [Faithlife's integrated ministry platform](#) is the robust tech stack you need to do the critical work of the church.

Best of all, as the makers of [Logos Bible Software](#), we built the entire platform around Scripture, so you can always keep the main thing the main thing.

One platform. One login. Infinite possibilities.

About the author

Tobin Perry has served as a writer and editor for Saddleback Church, the North American Mission Board, and the International Mission Board, where he has frequently focused on church leadership issues. He has also served as the lead pastor of a church in Southern Indiana. He has written for numerous publications, including *Christianity Today*, *HomeLife*, *ParentLife*, *Baptist Press*, and *On Mission* magazine, and has ghostwritten for several Christian ministry leaders. He has served as managing editor for *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox* and as the editor of the pastor's version of *On Mission* magazine. He was also a contributing writer for Zondervan's *The Jesus Bible*.

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— **SEO: A GPS System for Your Church's Visitors**

If you're like me, you depend upon a GPS to get to where you need to be. I have an awful sense of direction. Before the days of readily accessible GPS devices, getting lost was a regular occurrence. I'll never forget the college road trip I took from Columbia, Missouri, to Chicago. I ended up in Wisconsin!

But GPS changed the equation for me. Suddenly, I could type my intended direction and this knowledgeable (although annoying) voice would direct my pathway. Finding my way to a restaurant, a job interview, or a new church was no longer left to chance.

Without an SEO strategy, you're leaving your potential church guests—people who want to find you and need the ministry you provide—to wander around the digital world without a GPS. The most determined may still find you, or they may end up in Wisconsin.

What is SEO?

SEO is short for search engine optimization. It's the process that digital communicators use to make it easier for people to find them when using a search engine like Google. [With more than a billion websites](#) in the world, search engines rely on a complex algorithm to give their users the best sites to answer their questions.

When you optimize your website for that algorithm, you're handing people a GPS that leads them to your church's digital presence.

You would never send out church communications and leave off your church's address. You know that an address is critical to people finding your physical building. It doesn't matter how effective your ministry is if people can't find you.

An SEO strategy is critical to people finding your church's digital presence.

Why does SEO matter?

The consequences of not providing potential guests with digital directions to find your church? They get lost.

The best-case scenario is they find another church. But by far, the most likely outcome is they never find their way to any church and decide to spend their next Sunday morning at the beach, in bed, or hanging out with friends.

[According to Grey Matter Research](#), 17 million people who don't attend church regularly visited a church website during a 12-month period. In our digital age today, an SEO strategy isn't a geeky side issue that only matters to a subset of people.

It's a matter of biblical compassion for people who need to hear the life-changing gospel.

In the next few pages, I'll show you the roadmap when it comes to SEO—and offer practical, easy-to-follow tips you can use today to start optimizing your website.

Keywords

Your first action item when trying to get found on Google is to create a list of keywords that people may use to find you. To do so, you need to put yourself into the shoes of the people you're trying to reach.

You're likely trying to reach at least two different kinds of people. First, you want people to find you who may be new to town but have a general idea that they're looking for a church. Or maybe they're just looking to switch churches because they're struggling to connect. But the key is—they're looking for a church.

Of course, you also want to reach new people who don't even know they're looking for a church. These people have real needs your church can meet as you engage them spiritually, but they likely don't know their needs can be met at a church like yours.

The keywords you choose will be different for each group, so you must consider both. As you begin planning your keywords, look at both groups.

Ask yourself what each group might search for as they look for you.

For the person who is specifically searching for a church, three of the most popular keywords are:

- **Churches in [your city]**
- **[your city] churches**
- **[your city] church**
- **[your denomination] church**
- **[name of your church]**

If your church engages people of a second city or community, you can try to use those keywords as well. Think of the attributes you believe church-seekers who would feel at home with you might use, particularly ones that might set you apart from other churches in your area. Maybe it's "friendly church [in your city]" or "Bible-believing church [in your city]."

To reach the other group—those who don't know they're looking for a church—you need to include some felt needs. Everyone has a felt need, but the most important ones for your context are the ones in which churches are uniquely qualified to engage. For example, someone who is lonely in your community may go online to look for “places to find friends.” Someone struggling to overcome an addiction might look for 12-step recovery groups. If your church has ministries that address those issues, those are keywords that you could potentially engage.

As you choose keywords, you'll want to evaluate them with keyword tools like [Google Trends](#) and [Ubersuggest](#). You're particularly looking at three factors:

- **Frequency:** How often are people searching for those keywords?
- **Competition:** How difficult would it be to get ranked for that keyword?
- **Relevance:** Is the keyword related to something your church offers?

Your goal is to pick keywords that people are searching for, are relatively low in competition, and have something to do with what your church does. It's a tough trio to get right, but your focus needs to be trying to rank locally. That's why optimizing your site with keywords like “[city] church” is crucial. You have a much better chance of ranking high in local searches than nationwide ones.

Metadata

When it comes to websites, metadata does the behind-the-scenes work. Metadata, in its simplest form, is data that describes data. While it doesn't sound like the most exciting part of your SEO strategy, it's one of the most important. The metadata provides search engines with important clues about what your church's website is about.

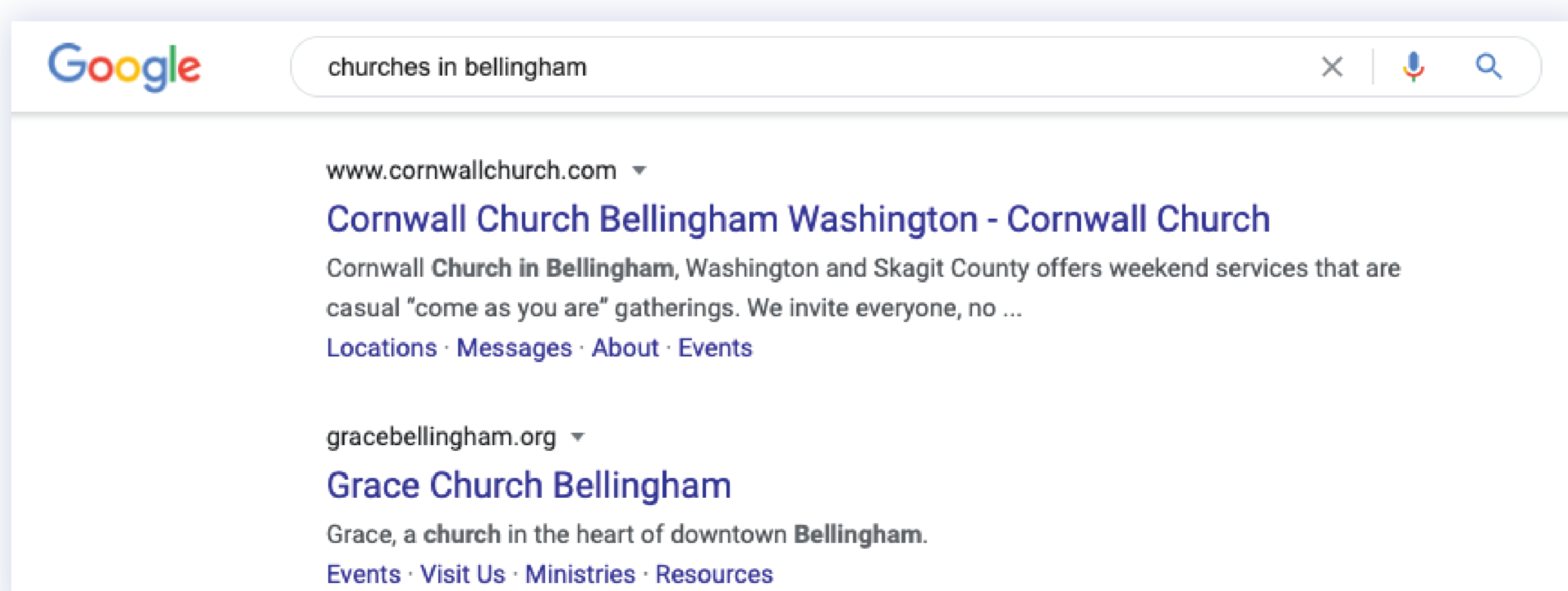
Metadata is another important part of your website. Like signage on your property, metadata signals to search engines what the content on your site is about and helps them match your site to what users are searching for.

Your church website's metadata includes three essential parts, which I'll explain below:

- **Title**
- **Description**
- **Tags**

Title and description

Your website title and description appear in search engines as the hyperlinked text and the text snippet below, respectively. They work together to tell search engines what your page is about, and they describe the page to potential guests browsing in search engines, as well as inviting them to click. Your website's title and description should quickly and efficiently capture your potential guests' attention, tell them what the page is about, and entice them to click on your page.



In a sense, this text is like your church sign for your physical building—but there’s a crucial difference: you likely don’t have nine other church signs in your church’s vicinity.

When someone finds your church in a list of search engine results, your church is sitting near a bunch of other churches. If your church title and description doesn’t answer their questions, they will go on to the next one.

Title

Here’s how to format your title, so it shows up in searches and prompts people to click through and visit your page:

- **Include your church’s full name**
- **Include other keywords** from your church that you identified earlier (for example, your church’s denomination, city name, or other descriptors)
- **Separate distinct phrases** in your title with one of these characters: |, —, or :
- **Keep your title under 55–60 characters** (including spaces)

Your title might look something like this:

Christ Church Bellingham (PCA) | Home

Each page’s title is controlled by a set of title tags in the page’s HTML code. The code looks like this:

```
<title>Christ Church Bellingham (PCA) | Home</title>
```

You can either edit the content between the opening and closing tags in your HTML source code manually or use a website editor. Most web hosting platforms have a user interface with a field where you can enter your desired title text for each page.

Description

The description in your metadata gives searchers a little bit more information about your church’s website. It’s the second thing people see when they find you online. They’ll only take a look if your title tells them

your website has valuable information and could meet the need they're experiencing.

Like the title, your description has two main audiences. First (and most importantly), you're writing it for the guest who is looking for your church. It needs to be clear, helpful, and grammatically correct.

Second, you are writing it for the search engine. The search engine will take clues from your description to understand what your site is about (and whether it can help the searcher with what he/she is looking for).

Your description, extending the analogy from earlier, is like your church building (although again, it's not a perfect comparison). If a guest is driving down the road and spots your church sign, they'll likely take a look at your building before pulling into your parking lot. You can't discern everything about a church through the sign and the outside of the building, but you can learn the basics about who they are, how they maintain their building, and what they value. It may not cause someone to check out your church, but it can certainly turn them off.

What makes a good description that engages a reader and helps a search engine find you?

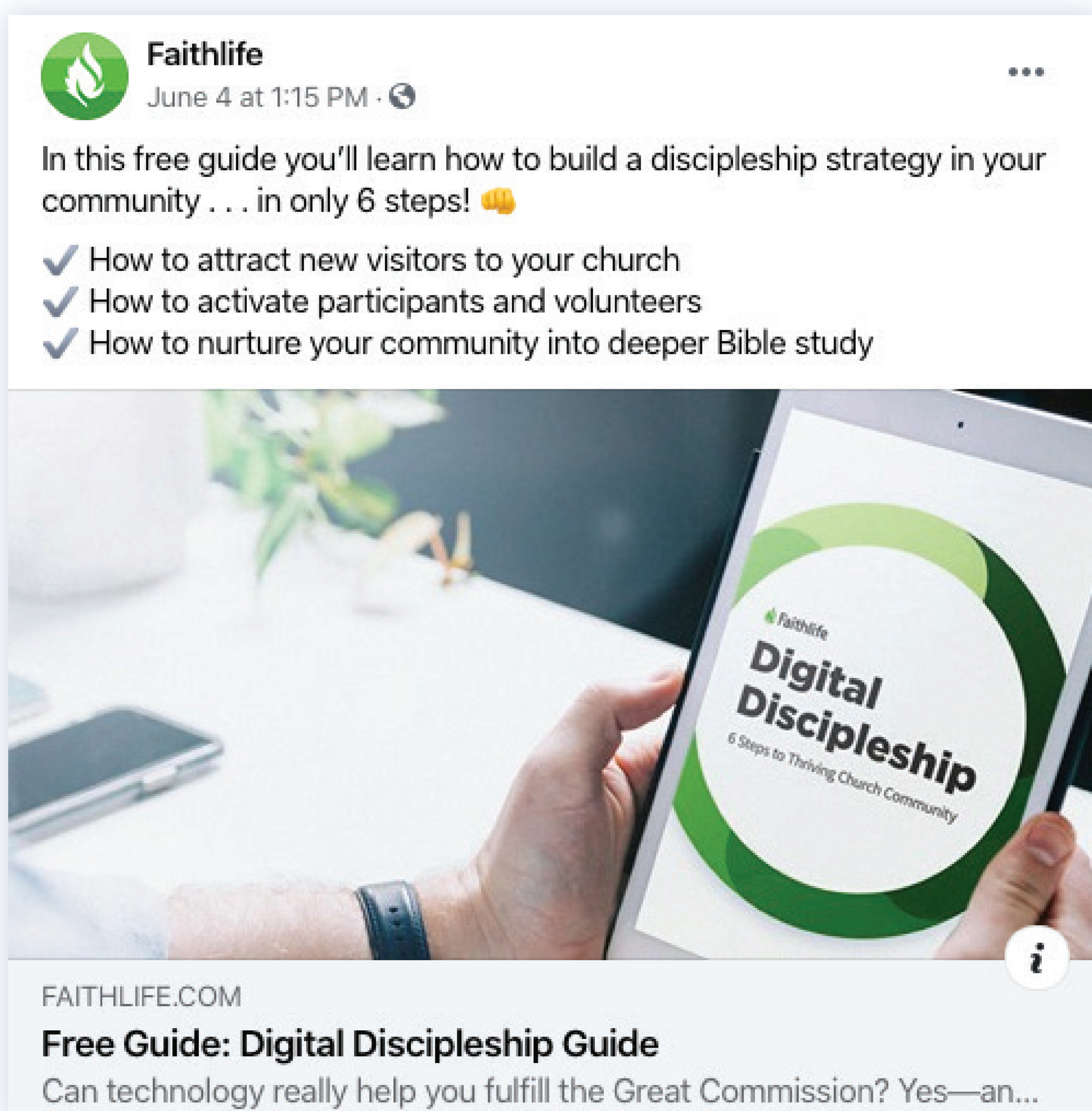
- **Provide context for people who may be intrigued about your church.** This is a particularly good time to hit some of those secondary keywords you've identified (particularly around style).
- **Provide an incentive for people to click** (or tell people why they'll benefit by visiting your site or your church).
- **Include key information about your church** that you believe a guest might want to know.
- **Use full sentences.**
- **Limit your descriptions to 155–160 characters** (including spaces).

Tags

Tagging is another important part of the metadata on your website. Like signage on your property, tags point search engines to your site by cluing them in that the content matches the search.

Here are some of the important tags and how to maximize their value:

- **Robots tags:** These tags give instructions to search engine “crawlers” that search and index sites like yours. The four main robots tags are:
 - **FOLLOW** (tells a search engine to follow the link on that page)
 - **INDEX** (tells crawler to include the page in its index)
 - **NOFOLLOW** (tells crawler not to follow the link on that webpage)
 - **NOINDEX** (tells crawler not to index the page)
- **By default,** web crawlers will follow all links and index each page.
- **Open graph information:** These tags give you control over how social media platforms engage your content. If you’ve ever seen something shared from your site with the wrong photo or text in it, this is why. Since social media drives a significant amount of traffic to websites today, you must retain a bit of control over what people see so that the experience encourages more sharing.



The image shows a Facebook post from the page 'Faithlife'. The post is dated 'June 4 at 1:15 PM' and is public. The text of the post reads: 'In this free guide you'll learn how to build a discipleship strategy in your community . . . in only 6 steps! 🙌'. Below the text is a bulleted list with three items, each preceded by a checkmark: 'How to attract new visitors to your church', 'How to activate participants and volunteers', and 'How to nurture your community into deeper Bible study'. The main image in the post shows a person's hands holding a tablet. The tablet screen displays the cover of a guide titled 'Digital Discipleship' with the subtitle '6 Steps to Thriving Church Community'. The Faithlife logo is visible in the top left corner of the guide cover. Below the image, the post includes the website 'FAITHLIFE.COM', the title 'Free Guide: Digital Discipleship Guide', and a snippet of the description: 'Can technology really help you fulfill the Great Commission? Yes—an...'. There is an information icon (an 'i' in a circle) in the bottom right corner of the image area.

- **Language tags:** This simple tag tells search engines what language your site is in so it can deliver your content to searchers in that language. You also have an option to tag web pages with “alternate” languages. This is particularly helpful if your webpage versions are in languages other than the dominant one in your area.
-

Content

The most important part of any website is the content on the page. The whole reason for SEO is to get more people to visit your page so they can take action on your content. If your church's SEO is like a trip to your church, your content is the meat of the user's experience. It's what happens when they arrive, worship with you, listen to a sermon, and experience your church's ministry.

How you present the content on your page will help your visitors learn more about you and help search engines understand if you can help people they want to send your way.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about your content.

Headings

Your primary heading is called "H1." It's the headline on your page. You'll want to make sure your H1 includes your church's full name—not just a nickname. You only have one H1 tag on every page. Make sure you're highlighting the most important thing on your page. For your home page, that's your church's name.

On the other hand, you'll have multiple H2 headings. These are what most people refer to as "subheads." Keep your keywords in mind as you create these. Most of all, think about serving the reader by pointing them to answers to the questions they may have about your church.

Body copy

Most of your content will be in the body copy. On your home page, make sure to include your church's service times, your location, and information about children's ministry, baptism, and other services.


You'll also want to include some information about your church's doctrine. Sometimes people will search for churches that share their theological

convictions. If your church’s reformed, charismatic, or congregational convictions are an important part of your identity, consider including that information. Also, include a statement of faith. New people to your community looking for a church are likely to search for churches with specific doctrinal commitments.

In the early days of SEO, Google rewarded you for “stuffing” your content with as many keywords as possible. That’s not true anymore—Google will now punish you for doing that. According to Google, your best results come when keywords flow naturally in the text.

Images

Search engines can’t “see” images, but they can see what you call the images. Image tags let you tell Google (and other search engines) what the photo is and how it relates to your page. Make sure your image tags are clear and include keywords. *Don’t merely use the default file name of the photo.*



1 asset ↗ ☰ ♥ ✉ ↓

Title
Work party at the church

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 0 ratings

Authors
✕ Stephen Clark

Description
In August, the church held a work party to ensure the grounds were ready for the influx of new visitors during from the Back to Church campaign.

Tags
✕ Work Party ✕ Fall 2020

Status
n/a • Draft • **Published** • Retired

Can View
Admins • Moderators • Members • Followers • **Public** • Use Default

Can Edit

Videos

Whether it's a sermon or a promotional video of some sort, you're likely to have some videos on your page. Video tags act similarly to photo tags. Search engines can't see videos either. Use a clear tag that includes a keyword.

Interlinking

Links tell search engines that you have authoritative content. They also help search engines see a bit of your website's structure. Every page on your website needs to link to another page. Plus, when possible, make the link itself a keyword.

Google Tools

Google provides several tools that can help you better optimize your church's website for search engines.

Google My Business

If you've ever done a Google search for a brick-and-mortar business, you're familiar with the list of businesses that appears near the top of the results. The listing includes times of operation, phone number, address, location, website link, etc. Churches, too, can benefit from these listings.

Search for the name of your church on Google. If you have a listing, make sure the information is updated. If you can't find a listing, you can create one. There is no cost for this service, but you'll need a Google account. Visit google.com/business and click Start now.

Google Search Console

Through this tool, your church can see what search queries are bringing traffic to your site. Because the information in the console is technical in nature, it's best that this is managed by the person who runs your website.

It'll take some time and expertise to verify that you own the website you're trying to get information about. Once it's set up, you'll be able to see what pages on your site your church is ranked for and what pages you need to work on. You can also discover what kind of devices (mobile, desktop, etc.) people are using. Besides finding out about clicks (people visiting your site) your church site is getting, Google Search Console will tell you how many impressions (the number of times people see your listing in the search results) and average CTR (click-through rate, the percentage of people who click through to your website).

Google Analytics

This tool will give you just about any information you're looking for on how

your church website is performing in searches. There is both a free and paid version of it, but most churches will do fine with the free version.

Google has various [training videos](#) to help you use Google Analytics. It'll take some time to use, but the software is full of helpful information.

Let's get started!

At its core, optimizing your church website for search engines isn't about your website. Your website is a vehicle to reach people and disciple them in the truths of the gospel, and a strong SEO strategy will help you reach even more.

You've got all the tools to do it.

Go for it!





**To learn more or to schedule a demo,
visit us online at faithlife.com.**

[Learn more](#)