

A high-angle, blurred photograph of a large crowd of people in a public space, possibly a transit hub or a large indoor arena. The people are captured in motion, creating a sense of a busy, crowded environment. The colors of their clothing are varied, including blues, purples, reds, and greys. The text "the body" is centered in the middle of the image in a dark, sans-serif font.

the body



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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
How to Use This Book .....	7
Week One: The Message of the Church .....	9
Week Two: The Mission of the Church .....	19
Week Three: The Life of the Church .....	29
Week Four: The Foundation of the Church .....	39
Week Five: The Structure of the Church .....	49
Week Six: The Members of the Church .....	59
Week Seven: The Refining of the Church .....	69
Week Eight: The Heartbeat of the Church .....	79
Week Nine: The Building of the Church .....	89
Week Ten: The Responsibility of the Church .....	99
Acknowledgements .....	109



# Introduction

The church in America has fallen on hard times.

Back in 2013, Steve McSwain wrote an article in the Huffington Post simply titled “Why Nobody Wants to go to Church Anymore.” He cited the statistic from the Hartford Institute of Religion Research that 40% of Americans say that they go to church each week, and then went on to show that the real number is more like 20%—a number that has continued to shrink since 2013. Kelly Shattuck on churchleaders.com puts the number at 17.7% currently, and writes that “even with a broader definition of church attendance, classifying a regular attendee as someone who shows up at least *three out of every eight Sundays*, only 23–25 percent of Americans would fit this category.”<sup>1</sup> Ouch.

But here’s the question: Does it really matter? A 2016 Pew Research Study showed that Americans are more spiritual than ever, with a variety of indicators up 7% just in the last few years.<sup>2</sup> While people in general don’t always seem to be wild about His followers, Jesus remains quite popular. If spirituality is on the rise, even if church attendance is on the decline, isn’t that still a good thing? Is the church really necessary these days?

In 251A.D. Cyprian of Carthage made the famous statement “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.” More recently, Derek Webb paraphrased Cyprian in song, singing from the point of view of the Father: “You cannot care for me with no regard for her / If you love me, you will love the church.”<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, in an exposition of 2 Corinthians 8:5, recognized the imperfection of the church, and acknowledged the difficulty that connecting with a local body can be at times. However, he still exhorted his listeners to be committed to a local fellowship, despite the problems. He said it this way:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.churchleaders.com](http://www.churchleaders.com), “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America.”

<sup>2</sup> [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), “Americans may be getting less religious, but feelings of spirituality on the rise.”

<sup>3</sup> Derek Webb, “*The Church*”, *She Must and Shall Go Free* (Fair Trade Services, Nashville, TN, 2003.)

Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it... The Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. The Church is the nursery for God's weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep—the home for Christ's family.

When it comes to the church, as with all discussions of real significance, there is a preponderance of opinion on all sides of the argument. To make things more complicated, many of us approach this conversation with hurt, frustration, and distrust that come from our past experiences with various local churches. But what does the Bible tell us about the church? Are we truly called to be committed to a local church community? Why does the church even exist in the world? How much of the way that we experience church is dictated by our cultural context—and is that alright? In short, *what is the church, and why does it matter?*

This fall, it's my hope and prayer that, through the study of God's Word, we'll uncover the raw beauty and power of the bride of Christ, the church. We'll certainly find that she's full of inconsistencies, hypocrisy, and brokenness. But I believe that we will also find, through the grace of Jesus, that she reveals the manifold wisdom of God to the world. (Ephesians 3:10)

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Brian Kannel  
York Alliance Church

# How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the 2016 Fall sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passages for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study as you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and a weekly LIFE group gathering, a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at [www.yorkalliance.org/resources](http://www.yorkalliance.org/resources).

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts and to give you understanding.

Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual studies individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study and to connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, that person can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. However, if you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section and move to the next one.

This particular study guide has a few unique features to help you grow as a student of the Word as well as a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- As you study, you will be encouraged to do a slow and methodical reading of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. While our study will engage a variety of texts,

Ephesians is a letter written to the church about the church, and therefore, has a variety of parallels to our study. The passage each week is relatively short—quite easy to read at one sitting as part of your regular time in the Word. I would encourage you to re-read the passage, using a variety of different translations, each day during the week.

- Each week’s study will consist of three main sections: a broad study of the week’s topic in the Word, an “Emphasis from Ephesus” which will help connect Paul’s letter to the Ephesians to the topic, and a “Walk it Out” section that will encourage tangible action steps as you engage these truths.
- I encourage you to read each Scripture passage, as well as the book of Ephesians, in multiple translations. Remember that every translation is just that—a translation. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations will be from the English Standard Version, which is a literal “word for word” translation. The New Living Translation is a “phrase for phrase” translation that is very readable but also quite accurate. I recommend reading key passages in both translations when possible. Both translations, along with dozens of others, can be found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).
- Included with each study are blank sermon note sheets (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as a “Facilitation/Application” sheet. While the primary intent of this page is that it be used within York Alliance Church LIFE groups, this resource can be used in a variety of other settings as well.

If you have questions about how to best utilize this study guide, have comments on what you’re finding in it, or just want to report your experiences with using it, all are welcomed! Email me at [bkannel@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bkannel@yorkalliance.org).

*Lord Jesus, You gave Your life for Your people, the church. You told Peter and Your disciples that You would build Your church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. As we study, Lord Jesus, we pray that You would build Your church. Increase our faith in You and our love for You. Unify us as Your people and create in us a deep love for one another. Heal old wounds, restore broken relationships, and give us a passion for Your glory expressed among Your people. Teach us to walk in grace with one another, and to love the world around us as You do.*

*In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*



# **Week One: The Message of the Church**

Acts 2:14-47

We live in a culture in which “church” is an overused and misunderstood concept. What makes a church? Foundational to what it means to be the church is the message that is proclaimed. In order to truly be the church, we must rightly proclaim the Gospel—that Jesus has not just come to save us from our sin, but to establish His church and be the only Lord of His people.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 2:1-10  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## The Heart of the Gospel

The word “gospel” literally means “good news.” While we recognize the word as it’s often used in church circles, Tim Keller makes the observation that the original word was most often used in the secular, political realm:

There is a Roman inscription from about the same time as Jesus and Mark (*the gospel writer*) which starts: ‘The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus.’ A gospel was news of some event that changed things in a meaningful way. When Greece was invaded by Persia and the Greeks won the great battles of Marathon and Solnus, they sent heralds (evangelists) who proclaimed the good news (gospel) to the cities: ‘We have fought for you, we have won, and now you’re no longer slaves; you’re free.’ A gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that’s been done for you that changes your status forever.<sup>4</sup>

The question is: What’s the “good news” that’s proclaimed in the Scripture so forcefully that we have shaped the usage of this word around the message of Jesus?

Read the following verses:

- Mark 10:45
- Romans 6:23
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-5
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- 1 John 4:10
- Revelation 5:9-10

What are some of the common messages in these verses?

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller, *The King’s Cross* (Dutton, New York, NY, 2011.), pg. 14-15.

These are just a few of the “summary statements” of the gospel that are found throughout Scripture. Each of them highlight the key parts of the “good news” that is the gospel of Jesus, and taken together, we can begin to see the whole picture. Now, read Titus 3:4-7.

- What motivated Jesus’ work on our behalf?
- How are we saved from our sin? What responsibility do we have?
- What do we receive in this life? What about in eternity?

The question is, then—how do we respond to such great news? It may be surprising in our day to find that there is no record of “praying a prayer to accept Jesus” in the Bible. It’s not that this idea of a “sinner’s prayer” is a bad practice—in fact, it can be a very helpful response for our hearts—it’s just not the prescribed biblical response. Read Acts 2:38.

- What are the two specific activities to which Peter calls his listeners during this Pentecost sermon?

The clearest understanding of the word “repent” (*metanoeo*) is to turn from one way of life and to embrace another. Romans 6, which is the Apostle Paul’s clearest teaching on baptism, gives the same idea. When we truly hear the gospel, our response should be one of taking specific action!

Application:

- Have you actively responded to the gospel? What is different in your life because of the “good news” of Jesus?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 2:1-10**

As Paul writes to the Ephesian church, he's very concerned that they have a proper understanding of the gospel. Even just a few decades into the life of the church, there were a number of "false gospels" that had begun to circulate and infiltrate the church. (Reference Galatians 1:6-9) It's easy to understand how this might have happened—the good news about Jesus can easily seem too good to be true!

Read slowly through Ephesians 2:1-10. Answer the following questions, using the "Observation, Interpretation, Application" method of study.

### Observation

- How does Paul describe our state prior to encountering the grace of Jesus?
  
- Is this due to our behavior, or due to our nature from the moment of our creation? What is God's just position toward us due to this reality?
  
- What are the actions that Jesus takes toward us, even while we were helpless, dead in our sin? What motivates those actions?
  
- Why did He do this?
  
- What is the conduit by which we are saved by grace? Did we generate this ourselves as a response to the love of God? Why not?

- What is the natural response that God has prepared for us following our transformation through His grace?

### Interpretation

- If our state is “dead in sin,” and that’s true for everyone, what part of salvation are we able to take part in? Why?
  
- Is the greater glory of God or my salvation a greater purpose behind the work of God through Christ? Why is that important to know?

### Application:

- How should this reality change the way that I see people around me? Who are some specific people that I should see differently through the lens of this truth?
  
- Think about the current circumstances of your life. What are some of the “good works” that God might be planning for you right now? Read Acts 17:26-27. How might this apply to your life currently?

## **“Walk it Out”—The Gospel According to Me**

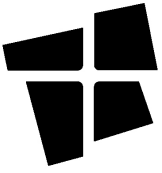
The idea of a “Gospel According to Me” can and should be a very scary thought! However, a set of objective truths that are studied and memorized but never engaged and internalized are of no help to any of us individually, and are certainly no help to the world around us. While the “Gospel” can never originate with me, it *is* vital for me to learn to express the good news about Jesus in my own words, just as the truth about Jesus must ultimately take root in my heart if there is ever to be a real change in my life.

Look back at the last two studies, and think through the ideas that are found there. As necessary, take a few minutes to look up some of the Scripture and refresh yourself on what the Bible has to say about these things.

Now, take some time to formulate your own explanation of the good news about Jesus. Use your own words. Imagine if someone that you know came to you one day and simply said: “I know that you go to church, and that you’re into this “Jesus” thing. Can you explain to me what it’s all about?” How would you respond?

Application:

- Can you imagine yourself having a conversation like this? Why or why not? Pray for one person in your life, asking God for an opportunity to have this kind of conversation with them.



# **The Message of the Church**

Acts 2:14-47

Sermon Notes:





## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite season of the year? Why?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Acts 2:14-47

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- When you hear the word "gospel" what's your initial reaction?
- Before this week, what would you say the primary "message" of the church is? Why would you say that?
- Have you actively responded to the gospel? What is different in your life because of the "good news" of Jesus?
- How should the truth of the gospel change the way that you see people? Who are some specific people that you need to see differently as you look through the lens of the gospel?
- Think about the current circumstances of your life. What are some of the "good works" that God might be planning for you right now? Read Acts 17:26-27. How might this apply to your life currently? How about us as a group?

**World:** One of the ways that our position toward the world around us changes when we truly understand the good news about Jesus is that we want the blessing of forgiveness and new, abundant life for all of those we love. Think of one person that's connected with your life for whom you'd like to pray for God's blessing this fall. Make a list of those names as a group (first names are great!) and pray intentionally for each one through the fall. Look for opportunities to embody the love of Jesus to these and to others in the world around you!

Note: Please check [www.yorkalliance.org](http://www.yorkalliance.org), register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

# **Week Two: The Mission of the Church**

Acts 1:6-8

In order to be a healthy church, the message of Jesus can't simply terminate on us. Rather, a healthy church takes seriously the command of Jesus to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. This means intentionally reaching into our local communities while being committed to the ends of the earth.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 3:1-13

*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## Ministers of Reconciliation

Think about the latest thing in your life captivated you with its excellence or beauty. It could be anything from a television show, a great dish at a restaurant, a song/album/band, a technological gadget—even another person! Think about your emotional response to that thing. What did you immediately want to do about it? For most of us, after the initial enjoyment, we immediately want to tell someone else about that thing of beauty... in fact, if we're honest, it almost feels like a necessity! C.S. Lewis, contemplating the admonition to worship that is given to us throughout the Psalms, says this:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with...<sup>5</sup>

God has wired us in such a way that, when we experience something powerful or life changing, our natural response is to tell others about it. The call to mission is simply the outworking of this natural propensity!

Read Philemon 4-6.

- What does Paul say is the driving factor in Philemon's life, for which he thanks God as he prays for Philemon?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What does he say is the natural result of sharing his faith?

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<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms in The Beloved Works of C.S. Lewis*, (Inspirational Press, Edison, NJ, 2004. Originally published in 1955 by C.S. Lewis.), pg. 179.

It seems that the process of evangelism—telling others about Jesus—actually leads us to a greater knowledge of the benefits of our relationship with Jesus. It would stand to reason, then, that the inverse is equally true: when we fail to share our faith, our growth is somehow stunted.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20 slowly. Take note of the process Paul is describing.

- What is the controlling factor in this process?
- What changes in the way we relate to the world around us?
- What is our natural response to the change that God makes in us?

As “ambassadors,” we can still often resist being active in sharing our faith. We hope that our lives will cause people to question our beliefs, at which time we will respond appropriately. 1 Peter 3:15 even directs us toward this posture. However, there are two problems with this being our *only* strategy for mission.

1. Jesus didn’t command us to make disciples of those who ask... He called us to make disciples of *all* people. (Matthew 28:18-20)
2. This only works for those who are in natural proximity to us, and would mean that a majority of the world would be out of our reach if we didn’t actively “go.”

Read Romans 10:8-17. Allow these words to propel you into the mission of God!

Application:

- What are the biggest barriers for you in sharing your faith with others? How might you overcome these barriers? How does Jesus’ promise in Matthew 28:20 change your perspective when you think of these barriers?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 3:1-13**

The cultural context of the early church was such that there was a great desire to uncover “hidden” mystery and receive “special” wisdom and revelation from the gods. (Reference 1 Corinthians 2) Paul uses these concepts in his letter to the Ephesians to help them to understand the mystery that has been revealed in Christ and the responsibility that he has (and they have!) to reveal these mysteries to the world around them. This is particularly vital as he writes this letter to them from prison and they recognize that there is a very real potential for persecution when they proclaim their faith boldly.

Read slowly through Ephesians 3:1-13. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- Paul clearly tells the Ephesians what the “mystery” is. What is it? (*Hint: “Gentiles” would have been Paul’s way of describing all non-Jewish people.*)
  
- How does Paul describe his status among the other “saints” in the church?
  
- What entity is the vehicle through which the wisdom of God will be seen in both the seen and the unseen world?
  
- Where does Paul say boldness and confidence come from?

### Interpretation

- Why is it such a mystery that God would include Gentiles as part of the same body as Jewish believers? How might this have impacted the way that Jewish believers saw the world around them?
  
- How might the church be positioned to reflect this mystery to the world?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is Paul's argument for believers in Ephesus so that they would have boldness and not lose heart over Paul's imprisonment?

### Application:

- Are there groups of people that are "missing" from your community (either a smaller, more intimate community or the larger church fellowship)? How might their absence make the gospel less apparent?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How might God's plan and presence increase your boldness in the world around you?

## **“Walk it Out”—A Spiritual Biography**

If you’ve made it this far in this study, you have a story of faith, or a “spiritual biography.” In some way, the God of the universe has been at work in your life, and you’ve recognized it (at least to some degree).

Take some time to think through some of the key events in your spiritual life. Think about times when you encountered God in a very personal/meaningful way, people who have influenced your faith journey, specific “markers” on your journey (conversion, baptism, key decisions, etc.), and specific struggles that you’ve had along the way. Jot them below in brief bullet-point style ideas:

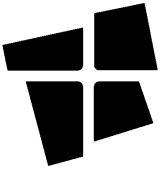
Now, looking at these key points, put together a very brief spiritual biography. Your goal is not to hit every detail, but rather, to have a basic understanding of some of the ways that God has worked in your life and to be familiar and comfortable with them. (You may need to use a different sheet of paper.)



Finally, think through your story with the perspective of the gospel that you wrote during last week's study. (Pages 14-15) How do these stories work together? Do you see points in your story where specific aspects of the gospel became real to you? Go back to your personal re-telling of the Gospel, and make notes about the ways your personal story fits in.

Application:

- Have you ever realized that you had a story about God's work in your life? Find at least 3 people to tell this week about at least one key aspect of your story. You are welcome to talk with both other believers and those who are not followers of Jesus—however, you are encouraged to *stretch* and make one of the people you talk to someone who doesn't fully understand faith yet. It will be good for you! (Philemon 4-6)



# **The Mission of the Church**

Acts 1:6-8

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite... (pick one!) book, movie, band, or local restaurant? Describe why you love it in 2 minutes or less."

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Acts 1:6-8

- How have you seen Jesus at work this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- When is the last time you shared your faith with someone else? What was that experience like?
- What are the biggest barriers for you in sharing your faith with others? How might you overcome these barriers?
- Does reaching out to your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, or the end of the earth feel most intimidating to you? Why?
- Are there groups of people that are "missing" from our community? How might their absence make the gospel less apparent to those around us?
- What are some specific ways that God has equipped us to share faith with the world around us? Are there specific skills, aptitudes, interests, or demographics that God has given to us so that we might be a blessing to the world around us?

**World:** Jesus has called us to be empowered first by the Spirit and then to go to those in our closest communities, those who are a bit further but still close, those who are very different than us, and those who are literally around the world. Take some time to pray together as a group. How might God be calling us into the world specifically as a group? Listen for His voice, and then discuss ways that you can impact the world around you.

Note: Please check [www.yorkalliance.org](http://www.yorkalliance.org), register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

# **Week Three: The Life of the Church**

Acts 2:42-47

Whether we're talking about the universal church or the local church, there are key aspects that have been present in the church from the beginning. The way individual communities and individual believers live them out can vary greatly, but there is a consistency in the life of the church that draws us back to that which is eternal.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 3:14 - 4:6  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## Living Life Together

Paul's letter to the Romans has long been regarded as one of the greatest theological treatises in history. In this incredible book, Paul makes a statement in Romans 12:5 that is easy to miss, but is one of the most profound realities in the entire book: "*So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*" (Romans 12:5, underline added) He literally tells the individual parts of the church that we *belong* to one another! The rest of the New Testament will then unpack the way that we are supposed to engage each other within the body. One way to look at those teachings in summary is to study the "one another" commands. Read through the following list slowly:

1. "Be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:50)
2. "Wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)
3. "Love one another..." (John 13:34, 35, 15:12, 17, Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11, 12, 2 John 5)
4. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (Romans 12:10)
5. "Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)
6. "Live in harmony with one another..." (Romans 12:16)
7. "Stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:13)
8. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." (Romans 15:7)
9. "Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)
10. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." (Romans 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Peter 5:14)
11. "When you come together to eat, wait for each other." (1 Cor. 11:33)
12. "Have equal concern for each other." (1 Corinthians 12:25)
13. "...Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)
14. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be destroyed by each other." (Galatians 5:15)
15. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." (Gal. 5:26)
16. "Carry each other's burdens..." (Galatians 6:2)
17. "Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)
18. "Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)
19. "Forgiv[e] each other..." (Ephesians 4:32)
20. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph. 5:19)
21. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

22. "In humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)
23. "Do not lie to each other..." (Colossians 3:9)
24. "Bear with each other..." (Colossians 3:13)
25. "Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." (Col. 3:13)
26. "Teach...[one another]" (Colossians 3:16)
27. "Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
28. "Make your love increase and overflow for each other." (I Thessalonians 3:12)
29. "Encourage each other..." (I Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, 10:25)
30. "Build each other up..." (I Thessalonians 5:11)
31. "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24)
32. "Do not slander one another." (James 4:11)
33. "Don't grumble against each other..." (James 5:9)
34. "Confess your sins to each other..." (James 5:16)
35. "Pray for each other." (James 5:16)
36. "Love one another deeply, from the heart." (I Peter 3:8, 4:8)
37. "Live in harmony with one another..." (I Peter 3:8)
38. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (I Peter 4:9)
39. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others." (I Pet. 4:10)
40. "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..." (I Peter 5:5)

- As you read these, do you think first of how you should be living toward others, or how others should be living toward you?

Look back over the list, and choose one command that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Then, brainstorm some creative ways that you can do it!

#### Application:

- What are the biggest barriers that get in the way of truly living out these commands in your life? What might you do to lessen those barriers?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 3:14 - 4:6**

A study of the “one another’s” can be an exercise in futility if you’re not living under the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s easy to get motivated to live sacrificially toward others, but ungratefulness, unresponsiveness, annoyances, and just general “humanness” get in the way of joyfully living that way in the long-term! Paul, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote a majority of these commands, knew this as well as anyone. In fact, some of his clearest writing about the way that we should live in community, including the revelation that we belong to each other, is written after admonishing us that we need to live as a “living sacrifice.” (Reference Romans 12)

Read slowly through Ephesians 3:14 - 4:6. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- Who/What is the focus of 3:14-21? How does it shift in 4:1-6?
  
- Read Paul’s prayer carefully. What is he praying for?
  
- What two “places” does Paul say will bring glory to God?
  
- What is the calling that we are to “live worthy” of? (*Hint: Read Ephesians 1:3-4 for a summary, although there’s much more in the first three chapters.*)



- Paul makes one set of exhortation/admonitions and then makes another set of declarations. How would you summarize each of those?

### Interpretation

- How does knowing the love of God relate to being strengthened with the power necessary to do all that Paul is praying for us?
  
- How do love for one another and unity work together? Why do you think Paul encourages one but declares the other?

### Application:

- How do you understand the work that Jesus has done on your behalf? How does this effect the way you live?
  
- Are you “eager” to maintain unity? In what ways do you express that eagerness?

## “Walk it Out”—Living the Values

The characteristics that have always been found in the church in every time and place are really the eternal values of God. They can be expressed in any number of different ways, but at York Alliance, we use the “4 W’s” to express these values:

1. **Welcome**—We believe that God has called us into community with one another. We express “welcome” when we invite others into our lives and we intentionally and sacrificially get involved in the lives of others. Real welcome moves beyond surface relationships into deep loving and caring for others.
2. **Worship**—The glory of God is and will be the centerpiece of all eternity. When we enter into worship now, we express these eternal truths. “Worship” is not simply singing and praying. Rather, it’s an intentional re-centering of our lives in the reality of the presence of Jesus in our midst.
3. **Word**—The written Word points us to the Living Word. He is full revelation of God and the expression of the love and mercy of God toward His people. When we seek to not just gain knowledge of the Word but to actively apply that knowledge in our lives, we express the deep value of the eternal Word.
4. **World**—The Word points us the reality of the love of God for the entire world. Therefore, our lives express the value of “World” when we no longer live wholly for ourselves, but give our lives for the sake of those in the world around us. This happens both across the street and across the globe.

As you read through these values, how might you apply them to your life personally? After all, you are the church! The first answer is the simplest one: if you’re already part of a LIFE group, these concepts are very familiar to you because you practice them together with your group just about every week! Therefore, if you’re not currently a part of a LIFE group, the question that you should start with is: “Why aren’t I? Is there any way that I can make that kind of commitment work?” If so, feel free to put this study guide down right now and send me an email at [bkannel@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bkannel@yorkalliance.org). Let me know what days of the week will work for you, where you live, and if there are specific people with which you already have a solid connection. That’s all it takes!

If you're already in a group, then let me encourage you to use the worksheet below to do the following exercise. Under each value, think of practical and tangible ways that you can express this value in the next seven days. Refer to the descriptions above if they are helpful! Plan it out, get it on the schedule, and then *walk it out* by practicing this value in the next week.

Welcome

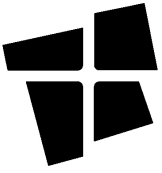
Worship

Word

Works

Application:

- Which of these values is strongest in your life? Which is the weakest? What's one long-term way that you could improve the one that's the weakest?



# **The Life of the Church**

Acts 2:42-47

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite icebreaker question/exercise that you've ever done, either in LIFE group or another setting?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Acts 2:42-47

- Where have you seen Jesus around you this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Who would you list as the close community with which you work out the "one another" commands?
- What are the biggest barriers that get in the way of truly living out the "one another" commands in your life? What might you do to lessen those barriers?
- How do you understand the work that Jesus has done on your behalf? How does this effect the way you live?
- Are you "eager" to maintain unity? In what ways do you express that eagerness?
- Which of the 4 W's are we the best at as a group? The worst? Why?
- How can we encourage one another to stay committed to that which is eternal instead of spending so much time/energy on the temporal?

**World:** Take time to pray intentionally for those you've listed at the beginning of this study as those whom you desire to see the blessing of God in their life. Talk about the ways that this group could become too inward focused—how do we maintain connection on the world around us? Talk about tangible steps that you could take as a group to maintain your "otherward" focus.

Note: Please check [www.yorkalliance.org](http://www.yorkalliance.org), register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

# Week Four: The Foundation of the Church

Genesis 15, Revelation 5:1-10

God's relational position towards His people has always been covenantal, not contractual. This provides the model for our engagement of one another as a community. Covenantal relationships are not conditional based on performance and *quid pro quo*, but a self-giving commitment to one another grounded in the love of Jesus.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 2:11-22  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## Old and New Covenant

One of the most beautiful moments in every wedding ceremony is when the couple exchanges covenant vows with one another. Often the setting is a beautiful one: the bride is stunning, the groom is nervous with anticipation, and they are surrounded by friends, family, and flowers. However, it's no less meaningful if the setting is less formal and less picturesque—there's still a beautiful moment when these covenant vows are spoken. "For better or worse. For richer or poorer. In sickness and in health..." and on and on they go. Why is this such a touching moment? At the heart, it's because that these two people, madly in love with one another, are expressing their love by making promises that are without condition. It would be far less meaningful and beautiful if the vows were conditional. Just imagine:

Groom: "I will be committed to you as long as you earn more than the national average, make nutritional meals that also taste good, and don't bother me twice a month when I'm out with the guys."

Bride: "Wonderful! And I will be committed to you as long as you provide me with at least a six figure salary, clean up after yourself around the house, and spend at least 2 weeks a year with my parents and my sister."

We wouldn't find those kinds of vows nearly so touching! A covenant agreement is foundationally about the *giving* of oneself to the other for the benefit of the other; on the other hand, a contract is primarily concerned about *getting* for personal benefit.

Read Exodus 19:3-6.

- What is the condition of the covenant that God promises to Moses? What do the Israelite people have to do?
  
- What is promised to them if they fulfill this condition?



- How did the people react to God's offer of covenant relationship? See both Exodus 19:8 and 24:3 (Before and after they understood the commands that God was asking them to obey.)

Of course, the people of Israel failed to live up to the condition of the covenant. They repeatedly disobeyed God, just as we do. So is the agreement null and void? A contract certainly would be! However, God is still committed to the best for His people.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

- Is there a condition in the promise of the "new" covenant that is to come?
- Who is responsible to fulfill this covenant? What is promised?

Now, read Luke 22:20. How does Jesus refer to the cup?

There are incredible parallels between the old and new covenants, and the depth of God's covenantal love is worthy of a lifetime of study. The heart of the matter is that God's love for us is based on our good at His expense—and He commands His disciples to love in the same way. (John 13:34)

Application:

- What would change in your life if you took John 13:34 seriously as it relates to the church body?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 2:11-22**

One of the most difficult parts of faith in Christ for us to understand, given our cultural context, is that we bring nothing of value into our relationship with Jesus. The hymn writer says it well: “Nothing in my hands I bring / Simply to the cross I cling.”<sup>6</sup> Or as Jonathan Edwards put it: “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” Paul repeatedly reminded the churches to whom he was writing that their salvation was by grace alone (Ref. Romans 5, Galatians 2), but nowhere is the reality more clearly spelled out than in the second chapter of the letter to the Ephesians.

Read slowly through Ephesians 2:11-22. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- Who is Paul addressing in this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does Paul describe their/our status in relation to Christ and the covenant?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Through what are we “brought near”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Read carefully through the passage again. What are we called to do in order to engage this truth or qualify for it?

---

<sup>6</sup> Augustus Toplady, “Rock of Ages” (Public Domain, 1776).

- What are some of the metaphors that Paul uses to describe the people of God?

### Interpretation

- If there is nothing that we need to do in order to engage this truth or qualify for it, what could we do that would *disqualify* us for it?
  
- Why would abolishing “the law of commandments” (the ceremonial law of the Jews) create one “new man” in the place of two?

### Application:

- What are some ways that you find yourself seeking to earn what you’ve already been freely given in Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Are there ways that you, in your life as a follower of Jesus, or we, as a church, recreate divisions between people through our behavior or rules?

## **“Walk it Out”—Contract vs. Covenant Day to Day**

We all tend to live in the midst of dozens (maybe hundreds!) of contractual relationships every day. For instance, if you're employed, you have either a formal or informal contractual relationship with your employer: you do work, they pay you money. If you fail to do the work on a consistent basis, they will stop paying you—and if they no longer pay you, it's quite likely that you'll stop doing the work! Another easy example for many of us is our cell phone plans: we commit to pay a certain amount of money each month, and in return, we are given a certain amount of voice, text, and data coverage. If you no longer get the coverage you need, sooner or later you'll stop paying for it. And, of course, if you stop paying for it, it won't be long until your phone is no longer good for much more than telling time!

On the other hand, we have many fewer covenant relationships. The ones we have, however, are usually our most treasured relationships: our marriages, our kids, our church family. These relationships are such that, even if the other party failed to provide their “end of the deal” for a significant period of time, we would remain committed to them. There are certainly circumstances in which those earthly covenants get broken—however, they are much more rare, and when it happens, it's a far bigger deal.

Take a few minutes and list all of the contractual relationships that you can think of in your life.

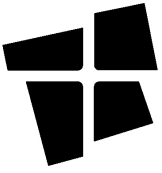
Now, list the covenant relationships that you have.

In covenantal relationships, you don't wait to have your needs met; instead, you seek to meet the needs of others. Think about the "one another" list from last week (pages 30-31). What would happen if you *demand*ed others treat you like that, or else you would no longer remain in relationship with them? On the other hand, how many people would be in relationship with you?

Application:

Take some time, either below or in a journal or separate paper, to consider the following:

- What would happen if my contractual relationships became covenantal?
- What would happen if my covenantal relationships became contractual?
- What is the danger that comes when the body of Christ is seen as a contractual relationship and not a covenantal one?
- Why are covenantal relationships deeper and more satisfying than contractual ones?
- Meditate on Jesus' words in John 13:34. How has Jesus loved us as His disciples? How does it look when we love one another that way?



# **The Foundation of the Church**

Genesis 15, Revelation 5:1-10

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's the worst (or best) big purchase you ever made?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 15, Revelation 5:1-10

- How has God been at work around you this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do you view this group as a set of contractual relationships or covenantal ones? Why is that?
- Do you view your relationship with York Alliance Church as contractual or covenantal? Why? Is it different than with this group?
- What are some ways that you find yourself seeking to earn what you've already been freely given in Christ?
- Are there ways that you, in your life as a follower of Jesus, or we, as a church, recreate divisions between people through our behavior or rules?
- What would change in this group if we took John 13:34 seriously in our relationships with one another?
- In what ways might we model covenantal love in a way that world around us could see and notice?

**World:** Jesus' words couldn't be more clear—if we love one another the way that He has loved us, the world will know that we belong to Him. Think about ways that you could expose those around you to the love of the body of Christ for one another. Is there a specific gathering or event that would fit your group well? Plan, pray, and then do it!

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# **Week Five: The Structure of the Church**

1 Peter 5:1-10

Within each local church, God has established elder leadership for that local body. The role of Elder calls for both personal, spiritual, and gifting requirements. Elders serve the church by protecting, leading, and ultimately, by modeling what it means to follow Jesus to the church as a whole. We are called to follow our Elders as they follow Jesus.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 4:7-16  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## **What's an Elder Like?**

Confusion abounds when it comes to Elders and their leadership in the local body. Who are they? What do they do? What makes someone an Elder? What skills do they need to have? Do they start to glow as the holiness exudes from them? Are their meetings like some sort of Secret Society or Jedi Council?

The reality, of course, is far less fantastical. There are many portions of the Bible that infer what leadership is to look like within the church, but only a few that explicitly describe the role of Elder and the kind of people who should fulfill those roles.

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

- List the qualifications that Paul tells Timothy that an Elder must have:

Now, read Titus 1:5-9.

- List the qualifications that Paul tells Titus that an Elder must have:

Finally, read 1 Peter 5:1-10.

- What qualifications does Peter list for Elders?

Go back and look at your lists.

- What *skills or gifts* are listed for Elders?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What are the rest of the qualifications (that are not skills or gifts)?

As with all leadership in the church, God is far more concerned with character and maturity than He is with skills, gifts, or age. That's great news because it means that God can and will use you regardless of your gifts and skills. He just desires a soft and moldable heart that's moving toward maturity.

Application:

- Do you feel like you meet the spiritual qualifications for Elder at this point in your life? Why or why not? If not, what's one thing that you could ask God to work on in your life that would move you closer?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 4:7-16**

The beginning of Ephesians 4 is one of the most coherent and powerful teachings on the way that God intends for the church to interact as a body. A few weeks ago we looked at Paul's call to unity (see "Week Three: The Life of the Church" on pages 32-33) which leads into this passage. After establishing this call to unity, Paul talks to the Ephesians about how this unified body is to interact with one another.

Read slowly through Ephesians 4:7-16. Answer the following questions, using the "Observation, Interpretation, Application" method of study.

### Observation

- How many people are given gifts through Christ according to Paul?
  
- Paul is highlighting five specific categories of gifts—what are they? What does he say the purpose of these gifts are?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the ultimate goal of this equipping and building of the saints?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the activity of the church that leads to the church growing up into "him who is the head, into Christ?"

### Interpretation

- If the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, who should be *doing* the work of ministry?
  
- In the instance that some who have gifts given by Christ don't exercise them within the body, what *won't* be able to happen?

### Application:

- In what ways do you see those who are gifted equipping saints for the work of ministry? In what ways do you see them doing ministry themselves?
  
- How might Elders equip the church through the various gifts they've been given? Look at 1 Peter 5:3. What are some ways that you see this happening?
  
- What are some ways that you're currently using your gifts within the body? Where/How else might you use them?

## **“Walk it Out”—Praying for Leaders**

1 Timothy 2 and Hebrews 13 makes it clear that we should pray for our leaders. In many instances, our leaders give sacrificially of their time, energy, and gifting for the benefit of the body. Leadership within the church, while a great joy and privilege, can take a significant toll on both the leader and their family.

Consider committing to praying consistently for the leaders of York Alliance through the end of this study. Pray:

- That they would be men and women who pursue hard after Jesus, even more than ministry activity.
- For their spouses and families, and that God would strengthen their marriages if they are married.
- That they would be given supernatural strength, wisdom, and discernment that comes from the Spirit.
- That God would encourage their hearts, minds, and spirits.
- For the work they do, both inside and outside of the church.

You might divide this list up or pray for each one each day. It’s totally up to you! However, you are encouraged to make a serious commitment to pray for your leaders in this season.

### Pastoral Leadership

Brian Kannel, Lead Pastor

Tim Shuey, Associate Pastor

Mike Carletti, Executive Pastor

Chris Horsman, Pastor of Student Ministries

Beth Wharton, Children’s Ministry Director

### Elder Leadership

Kimmy Cole

Todd Jackson

Bill Jones

Jim Tuttle

Jonathan West

Denny Williams

### Governing Board Leadership

Charlotte Aldinger, Treasurer

Dianne Kolb, Assistant Treasurer

Ann Searing, Secretary

### Staff Leadership

Nancy Sterner, Administrator

Re Tuttle, Secretary

Mary Beth Mackley, Administrative Assistant

Margaret Shuey, Prayer Coordinator

### Worship Leaders

Abigail Horsman

Scott King

Jacob Shuey

Ashley Thrush

Gary Thrush

### LIFE Group Coaches

Matt Brose

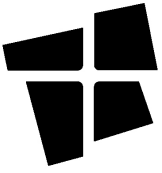
Kimmy Cole

Amanda Kannel

Brooke Stock

In addition to these who lead at the “whole church level,” pray for: Student Ministry leaders, Children’s “Dig In” teachers and “Thrive” leaders, your LIFE Group Leaders, Mom 2 Mom leaders and mentors, Redemption Group leaders and mentors, Deacons, Trustees, Finance and Personnel Committee members, Deaconesses, Sound Technicians, Projectionists, Worship Attendants, Global Action Team members, and many others who lead in specific areas in the church.

Whew! Look back over this list, and marvel at all it takes for a church like York Alliance to operate—and this doesn’t even include dozens of less formal leadership roles. Take time to pray intentionally for those who sacrificially lead us.



# **The Structure of the Church**

1 Peter 5:1-10

Sermon Notes:





## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Would you rather lead a Fortune 500 company, edit a magazine, run a National Park, or direct a play?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** 1 Peter 5:1-10

- How has Jesus been working in you this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do the list of Elder qualifications seem overwhelming to you? Why or why not?
- Do you feel like you're being equipped for the work of the ministry? Why or why not?
- What's an area of your life that you feel that God is calling you to work on as you move toward maturity?
- What does it practically look like for you to obey your leaders and submit to them? (Hebrews 13:17)
- Is there anything that stands in the way of you stepping into leadership? What can you do about it?

**World:** Continue to pray specifically for those in your life whom you are asking God to bless this season. Begin to think about the holiday season, which, believe it or not, is fast approaching. How might you be part of the way that God blesses the world around you in this season? Brainstorm as a group and pray intentionally about ways that your group might be a blessing.

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# **Week Six: The Members of the Church**

Hebrews 13:17, Romans 12:3-16

When we enter into a covenant relationship with a local church body through membership, we recognize God's placement of us in that specific local body. God calls us each as members of the body to love and serve one another using the gifts that we've been given. This pushes against the individualistic nature of our culture--we are called to be members together of one body.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 4:17-32  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## Spiritual Gifts

My wife loves to give gifts. It's not that she is extravagant or over-the-top with her gift giving—she just loves to find that perfect gift for people. This is particularly true with people in our family. Christmas can be a hectic time each year as we try to figure out the “perfect” gifts for each family member! But, of course, when someone we love receives that perfect gift, it's well worth the effort.

In many ways, that's the way God is. He also gives gifts to us, His children! Read Matthew 7:11 and James 1:17.

- What kind of gifts does God give to us?

But how do these gifts work? Who gets them? And most importantly to most of us... What's MY gift? Or do I get a few?

Now, read 1 Corinthians 12:6-7.

- How many believers are given gifts of the Spirit?

Words like “all” and “everyone” make it pretty clear that we all have gifts. There are four primary listings of gifts in the New Testament. Look up each of the passages and write a list of the gifts that you find in each of them.

- Romans 12:6-8

- 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

- Ephesians 4:11

- 1 Peter 4:10-11

So if we all have a gift, and these are at least *some* of the gifts that God gives to those in the body (the New Testament writers don't seem to be concerned about creating a comprehensive list), how do we know which gift we have?

Spiritual gifts tests and reviewing lists like the one above of the gifts mentioned in the Bible each have a place. However, the best way to determine the gifts we've been given by God is by examining our passions and proficiencies, asking our community, and examining the needs of the body.

- **Passion**—God has wired you (Psalm 139:13-16), so what you love can often be an indication of how you've been gifted.
- **Proficiency**—One of the clear indications of a gift is when you find something to be easy and enjoyable when others find it to be hard and laborious.
- **Community**—Those who are closest to you likely see things in you that you will have a hard time seeing in yourself. Ask them!
- **Need**—There are times that God gifts people in certain ways for certain seasons simply because the local body needs that gift.

Application:

- As you think about your life, what are some of the gifts that you are able to readily see?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 4:17-32**

In the second half of Ephesians 4, Paul describes what he infers should be the life for a “normal” follower of Christ. He’s not describing a “super-Christian” or the leadership team—he intends to be describing the average Joe or Jane Christian who is pursuing life in Christ. John Stott calls it an “integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe) and Christian ethics (how we behave).”<sup>7</sup> The point that Paul’s making is that these things should never be separated!

Read slowly through Ephesians 4:17-32. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- How does Paul describe the “Gentile” (he is using that word to mean “pagan”) way of life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What verb phrases does Paul use when calling Christians to both remove some behaviors and add others? Does that sound active or passive?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- On the following chart, list the sin that we are to “put off”, noting the positive command as well.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Stott, *Ephesians: Building a Community in Christ*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 1998), pg. 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 42

Verses

Sin to Put Off

Positive Command

4:25

4:26-27

4:28

4:29

4:31-32

implied: make amends

Interpretation

- Can you see a logical progression in the way that Paul describes pagans? What is it?
- Can you see a logical progression in the way that Paul describes the Christian life? What is it?
- What seems to be the role of the mind in the behavior of both? (vs. 18, 20-24)

Application:

- What actions do you take to renew your mind in Christ?
- What are some things that need to either be “put off” or “put on” in your life?

## **“Walk it Out”—Serving the Body**

The “family” image is one that the Bible will use extensively as a metaphor for the church. We are “brothers and sisters” in Christ, a phrase used roughly 120 times in the New Testament alone to describe the relationship between followers of Jesus united in a local body.

I love extending that image to the idea of a family meal. When we gather together on Sunday mornings or throughout the week, it’s like all or part of a family is coming together for a meal. We are coming to receive the nourishment that we need, certainly, but there is also a significant component of that meal that’s all about those we are enjoying the meal alongside! And like a family meal, each one has a different role—some are hosting, others buying the groceries, others preparing the main course, bringing along sides or desserts to share, setting the table, guiding the conversation, cleaning up the table, doing the dishes, and getting the kitchen back to the appropriate condition after the meal is finished. In a healthy family, everyone pitches in! There are different roles that each family member tends to fall into, but they can also change with each meal. The bottom line is simply that everyone is coming not just to receive, but to serve as well.

Contrast that with the image of going out to eat at a restaurant. You are escorted to the appropriate table, servers bring you drinks, you choose the food you want from a variety of options according to your own preference, the food is prepared for you (usually out of sight) by chefs and cooks and then it “appears” before you, you eat what you desire, someone else clears the table, does the dishes, vacuums under your table at the end of the night, and your sole responsibility is to pay the bill. As long as you pay, you can get exactly what you want. And, of course, if the meal isn’t to your satisfaction, there’s always another restaurant that you can go to the next time!

As you can see, these images are dramatically different, and it’s not a surprise that the family image is the one that the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to use throughout the Scriptures.

But it begs the question: Are you doing your part as a member of the family?



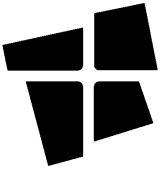
- What are some ways that you serve the local family of God right now?

- Are there additional ways that you feel God might be calling you to serve?

Of course, the great danger of this is that those who are already serving a bunch (maybe even far more than their share) will feel as though they need to serve more. Be honest—if you are already doing your share, simply thank God for the opportunity to be part of this family and re-commit to serving in these same ways for the next season of life and ministry! However, if your honest assessment is that you're not doing your share, consider how you might serve the body. You might be able to use a specific talent or gift in a way that blesses the body, or it might be that you simply fill a need that's out there just because you can. My family and I have been blessed for the last several years to clean bathrooms about once every six weeks or so. It's certainly not a special skill that we have—but it's a need that the church has, and we've been glad to fill it! How can you serve?

As you consider, the following is a partial list of those you can contact in order to “plug in” to serving in practical ways:

- Dianne Kolb, facility cleaning: [degaly61@aol.com](mailto:degaly61@aol.com)
- Beth Wharton, children's ministry: [bwharton@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bwharton@yorkalliance.org)
- Don Grove, facility maintenance: contact [mcarletti@yorkalliance.org](mailto:mcarletti@yorkalliance.org)
- Matt Brose, LIFE Group Leadership and Coaching: [mkbros@me.com](mailto:mkbros@me.com)
- Tim Baker, emergency/hardship ministry: contact [nsterner@yorkalliance.org](mailto:nsterner@yorkalliance.org)
- Nedra Baker, facility decor and aesthetics: [1788mom@gmail.com](mailto:1788mom@gmail.com)
- Mike Carletti, general ways to serve: [mcarletti@yorkalliance.org](mailto:mcarletti@yorkalliance.org)
- Brian Kannel, “I'm not sure where to serve”: [bkannel@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bkannel@yorkalliance.org)



# **The Members of the Church**

Hebrews 13:17, Romans 12:3-16

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite team or group that you've been part of?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Romans 12:3-16

- Where have you seen God at work in the past week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- When you think about the idea that we "belong" to one another, what reaction does that create in your spirit?
- As you think about your life, what are some of the gifts that you are able to readily see?
- What actions do you take to renew your mind in Christ?
- What are some things that need to either be "put off" or "put on" in your life?
- What are some gifts that you see in each other's lives that are not being used effectively right now?
- How can we create space for one another to use their gifts in this group?

**World:** This is a great time of year for your gifts and passions to be used to create an opportunity for those in the world around you to truly encounter the love of Jesus through your community! Consider planning an event that utilizes some of the gifts and passions of your group, and how you might use that event to bless the world around you. Pray specifically for those in your group that have passions in these areas, and pray for those who will be blessed by what you do. But don't just pray about it—do it as well!

Note: Please check [www.yorkalliance.org](http://www.yorkalliance.org), register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

# **Week Seven: The Refining of the Church**

Matthew 18:15-20

The gift of church discipline is given to the church in order that each of us might be more like Jesus. While many view church discipline through a negative lens, it actually should be practiced regularly within a healthy church, with the vast majority of instances being resolved quietly, positively, and joyfully as we encourage one another toward Jesus.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 5:1-16  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## To Judge or Not to Judge

I heard an observation recently that the most well-known and often quoted verse in the Bible is in the process of changing. For generations both the church and unchurched alike have recognized the most famous reference in the Scriptures: John 3:16. Many also knew the heart of what that verse says: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.”* (I’m not sure that’s any one specific translation, but likely an amalgamation of many of them because I’ve learned it so many different ways over the years!) Why would such a powerful statement lose its place as the most famous verse in the Bible?

Read Matthew 7:1. Write the verse below:

In an age that values tolerance so highly, almost above anything else, this statement from Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount seems to have usurped John 3:16 as the most well-known statement in the Bible.

But was Jesus actually telling us that we are not to judge others? And if so, who are the “others” that He’s referring to? Read a bit further in Jesus’ teaching in order to get some context: Read Matthew 7:1-5.

- What kind of judgement is Jesus condemning?

Read John 7:24. Write the verse below in your own words:

So there seems to be a right kind of judgement, and a wrong kind as well. But what are they, and how do we know?

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is addressing an overtly sinful situation that was happening in the Corinthian church—a man was having a sexual relationship with “his father’s wife” (vs. 1), likely his stepmother. Read the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 5 to get an idea of how Paul handles the situation.

- Does Paul believe that he has the right to pass judgement in this situation? What is his pronouncement on this man?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In vs 9-13, what seems to be the dividing factor for Paul on who we are to judge as believers?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Even though he recognizes that we shouldn’t judge or disassociate with unbelievers who are in the midst of immoral behavior, does Paul seem to condone their behavior? Why?

At times we take this principle to mean that we shouldn’t judge the morality of others, but Paul doesn’t equivocate on what’s right and wrong. He is clear on what’s right and wrong—he simply reserves active judgement for other believers.

Application:

- Are there certain behaviors among believers of which you tend to be too tolerant? On the other hand, are there times in which you are too judgmental? Think through examples of each.

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 5:1-16**

When we think about church discipline, it seems like such a weighty and important matter—and, of course, in some ways it is. However, when you think about discipline, it’s usually something that’s associated with being a child! In fact, the writer to the Hebrews explains to us that the discipline of God only comes to us because we’re His children. (ref. Hebrews 12:5-11) As you’ve read through this passage from Ephesians 5 and meditated on it this week, maybe you’ve felt the weight of the impossible call of God on our lives; and if we were reading it without context, it would certainly be impossible! However, the key to understanding the whole passage rests in the very first verse: “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

Read slowly through Ephesians 5:1-16. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- What’s the context Paul gives us in vs. 1 for obeying all that follows?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What are the four areas of the character of Jesus that Paul is calling us to imitate as children?
  - vs. 2
  
  
  
  
  - vs. 3-7
  
  
  
  
  - vs. 8-14
  
  
  
  
  - vs. 15-16



### Interpretation

- How do children learn the right way to live?
  
- Can children continue to live like a child and live like an adult as well?
  
- Why does Paul say that the sleeper should “arise from the dead” and that *Christ* will shine on them? Does this seem to be our work, or His?

### Application:

- What are some areas in which you need to be willing to let go of your “childish” life in order to truly imitate Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Paul calls us to expose the works of darkness by bringing them into the light. As a child of the light, how do you expose the darkness in you and around you?

## **“Walk it Out”—A Discipleship Group**

It's hard to get our heads around the very biblical idea that the only way for darkness to be expelled is by bringing it into the light. For most of us, we work very hard to conceal and hide the ways of thinking and living that we are ashamed of (those that belong in the darkness) and we often bring into the light those areas of our lives that we've already gotten “cleaned up” and now look presentable. We tend to be far more comfortable with “I used to really struggle with...” than we are with “I am currently really struggling with...”

However, both Jesus' and Paul's teaching on church discipline highlight the idea that behaviors must be exposed and dealt with for the best of the person involved, not to mention for the best of the church as a whole. There is a clear admonition to deal with sinful behavior head on, rather than hiding the behavior until it's dealt with. In many instances, not only is the behavior hidden, but we see people “disappear” for weeks, months, or even years until they feel that whatever struggle they are having has been dealt with and they can re-emerge. This is such a clear affront to the gospel! Jesus' death on our behalf is a clear indication that we are both sinful and unable to deal with our sin—therefore, we all should be able to recognize that, this side of heaven, we will always struggle with sin.

In many instances, the kind of relationships where these kinds of things can be exposed and dealt with simply don't exist. We have surface level relationships with others in the body, and sometimes even solid friendships, but we have failed to cultivate the kind of relationship where real transparency and confession can take place. Honestly, many of us are terrified of those kinds of relationships!

Read Ecclesiastes 12:14 and Luke 8:17.

- What is the message of both of those verses?

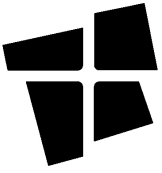
- Which is more terrifying—that reality, or an intimate relationship that may help me confront my sin now?

Cultivating the kind of relationship where honesty and transparency are normative is vital to this process of keeping our lives in the light. At York Alliance, we often talk about these relationships as being “Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy” relationships—connections with those ahead of you in the journey, beside you, and following after you. While these distinctions can certainly be helpful, the most important thing is not that you can label or define your relationship, but that you have relationships!

For many, there is a struggle with how to start these relationships. We’ve tried to develop a very simple model with our “Discipleship Groups”:

- Connect with another person or two at the most. No group should be larger than three for any significant length of time.
- Meet at least twice a month for roughly an hour. You can meet more often as desired. Meetings can be via phone if needed, but should be in person at least once a month.
- Each person should commit to studying a portion of Scripture—you can both/all study the same portion of Scripture or different portions.
- Talk about how Jesus has revealed Himself to you in the sections of Scripture that you’ve read: What do you understand to be true about the nature and character of God and your own nature and character?
- Confess: How does God’s truth reveal your sinfulness, and of what do you need to repent?
- Pray for one another, and then also pray intentionally for those in your life who need to encounter Jesus again or for the first time.
- If you already have three in your group and someone else is added (for a total of four), spend a few weeks establishing a routine, and then split into two groups.

If you don’t have a relationship like this, seek someone out! Your LIFE group is a great place to start, as well as others who have been a part of your journey in the past. Take time this week to start a relationship that will shape your life for years!



# **The Refining of the Church**

Matthew 18:15-20

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's the most trouble you got in as a child?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Matthew 18:15-20

- Where has Jesus been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- How do you tend to react when someone sins against you? What about when you observe sinful behavior in someone's life?
- Are there certain behaviors among believers of which you tend to be too tolerant? Why is that?
- Are there times in which you are too judgmental? Think of examples.
- What are some areas in which you need to be willing to let go of your "childish" life in order to truly imitate Jesus?
- Paul calls us to expose the works of darkness by bringing them into the light. As a child of the light, how do you expose the darkness in you and around you?
- How might the process of discipline help someone walk more closely with Jesus and the church?
- What are some ways that can help one another bring the deeds of the darkness into the light?

**World:** Think about ways that you've planned to reach out into the world around you over the past month or so. What's happened? What hasn't happened yet? Take time to prayerfully put details together so that you might make an impact on the world around you before the holiday season is fully underway!

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# **Week Eight: The Heartbeat of the Church**

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, Ephesians 5:18-21

The church is called to worship. The centrality of worship certainly must extend outside the sanctuary and be proclaimed beyond the the bounds of the community... but it must start here, burn brightly here, and the fire must be stoked here. When the church truly recognizes the reality of its message, the only proper response is worship.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 5:17 - 6:9  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## **Why were we created?**

John Piper begins his book on Global Missions with a sentiment that has since become famous in evangelical circles: “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”<sup>9</sup> His reasoning, particularly given even a cursory reading of the book of Revelation, is hard to refute.

Read Revelation 7:9-12.

- Who makes up the multitude around the throne? What are they doing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does this compare to the mission exhortation found in Matthew 24:14?

Take a few minutes and read through Revelation 21-22. While this last section of the Bible is full of symbolism, think about some of the big picture ideas contained in this passage:

- What is the relationship between Jesus and the Church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Where is the dwelling place of God in relation to His people?

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<sup>9</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993.), pg. 11.



Read Genesis 1:28.

- What practical command does God give to man?

The key question, then, is whether God is calling man to a specific task that is *separate* from the ultimate end of worship, or whether the relationship between God and man means that all activity, including these details, are intended as an act of worship. An in-depth study of Genesis 3 will bear out the latter reality, but far simpler is looking at a few of Paul's broad statements regarding our purpose.

- Read Ephesians 1:11-12. What does Paul say is our primary goal as we are transformed by grace?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Read Colossians 1:16. What is the explicit purpose of all creation according to this verse?

While there are far more biblical texts than can be explored beyond this brief study, it's clear that the intention of the Designer in our design is that of worship. And, of course, if that's the end goal that we are each called to as individuals, it must also be the calling and passion of the church.

Application:

- What are some ways that you are most fully able to worship God?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 5:17 - 6:9**

This famous passage from the book of Ephesians is immediately linked to practical relationships like marriage, family, and workplace connections. It's certainly true that these sections (marriage in 5:22-33, children and parents in 6:1-4, and servants and masters in 6:5-9) make up the bulk of the passage and the most easily accessible and applicable teaching in the passage. However, a more careful reading reveals that these three examples of relationships are simply acting as illustrations of the greater principles that Paul has detailed in the first part of the passage, and indeed throughout the letter. Stott sees these as illustrations of the "new standards which God expects of his new society, the church..."<sup>10</sup> As such, it's most important to understand the first section of the passage, and to understand how these commands are to impact the church.

Read slowly through Ephesians 5:17-21. Answer the following questions, using the "Observation, Interpretation, Application" method of study.

### Observation

- What does Paul say is the result of being exposed to the nature and character of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit but not "understanding what the will of the Lord is"?
- With what does Paul contrast being drunk with wine?
- What are the three results that Paul lists that come from being filled with the Spirit?

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<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, (Intervarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL., 1979.), pg. 213.

### Interpretation

- What are the parallels that Paul might be getting at between being “drunk with wine” and being “filled with the Spirit?”
  
- Looking at the results of this Spirit-filling, what relationships are impacted?
  
- What is the reason behind our relationships with one another being changed?

### Application:

- What gets in the way of you being able to worship personally? Corporately?
  
- Are you intentionally pursuing the filling of the Spirit? Why or why not?
  
- What are some relationships you have that are marked by mutual submission out of reverence for Christ? What are some that aren't?



Seriously, I'm not opposed to you posting about your joy in spending time with the Lord. However, my concern is that we all aren't wired in that same way. To use Paul's analogy, #timewithjesus might be great for an ear, but can be very frustrating experience for a foot! In the same way, we're exposed to those who worship God through serving others, being outdoors, time with family and friends, working out, or any number of other activities. These are all valid forms of worship—but they aren't for everyone! Our constant exposure to everyone else's worship style begins to develop an inferiority complex in us that we simply can't measure up... or it pushes us to continually try harder to do more, and somewhere along the line we stop worshiping and start performing!

Take a few minutes and think about how you are wired to worship. To use the words of Eric Liddell, when do you "feel God's pleasure?"<sup>11</sup> Think through times in the past that you've felt very close to God, or seasons when you sensed real growth in your spiritual life. List some of those activities below:

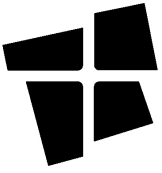
Now, think about how you might intentionally worship God this week. Look at your schedule, and mark out some time for a real worship experience. You don't need to do everything—but do something! Whether you're an ear, a foot, or an eye, recognize how God has made you, and worship Him accordingly!

#### Application:

- What are some ways that worship could be a regular part of your daily life? Are there ways that you've tried to "worship" in someone else's style?

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<sup>11</sup> Liddell was an English track star and missionary to China. He famously said: "I believe God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast. When I run, I feel His pleasure."



# **The Heartbeat of the Church**

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, Ephesians 5:18-21

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "When do you feel the closest to God?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, Ephesians 5:18-21

- Where has Jesus been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are some ways that you are most fully able to worship God?
- What gets in the way of you being able to worship personally? Corporately?
- How do you balance reverence for God and joy in the presence of God? Is that different on Sunday mornings from the rest of the week?
- Are you intentionally pursuing the filling of the Spirit? Why or why not?
- What are some relationships you have that are marked by mutual submission out of reverence for Christ? What are some that aren't?
- How might worship be a regular part of the daily and weekly rhythm of your life, beyond Sunday mornings?
- What are some ways that we can encourage one another to cultivate hearts and lives of worship?

**World:** John Piper boldly declares that worship is the fuel of missions. "I can't commend what I don't cherish."<sup>12</sup> Ask God to give you each a compelling vision of His greatness and glory, and then pray that He would allow that vision to "spill over" into the relationships you have with the people around you! If there are specific relationships in which you are asking Him to do this, pray specifically for those.

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<sup>12</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993.), pg. 12.



# **Week Nine: The Building of the Church**

Hebrews 10:1-25

Throughout history, there are two primary markers that distinguish the church from any other communal gathering: the proper preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments. These two activities point directly to the Gospel, and our response to it, and therefore, must be present if the church is to be the church.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 6:10-20  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## A Long Psalm

The psalms have long been heralded as the prayer and song book of Israel, and many have begun each day by reading a psalm as a way to reorient and center their hearts. Some are longer than others, but they generally work as a great “prayer length” opening to the day. That is, until the reader gets to Psalm 119.

To one who is unfamiliar with the text, it seems to start like any other psalm. There are unfamiliar words that seem to act as headings, usually printed in italics, but other than that, it starts out as a beautiful, poetic expression. And then it keeps going. And going. And going.

Psalm 119 is actually made up of 22 stanzas, corresponding with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza has 8 verses, bringing the whopping total to 176 verses.

You will need to set aside a bit of time to do this, but read all the way through Psalm 119.

- What theme(s) do you see?

- Are there specific promises that stick out to you in the psalm?

The psalmist uses a variety of different words and expressions to talk about the law of God. In fact, *every verse in the psalm* except vs. 121 and 122 mentions the law in some way!





### Interpretation

- Look back at the pieces of “armor” that you’ve listed. Are these spiritual skills that we perfect (like shooting a gun or marching in formation), or are they just part of the regular life of a believer?
- Are these tools more about who we are, or what we do?
- How might the believer in Jesus “gain” these tools for battle?

### Application:

- Do you believe that there is a spiritual battle all around you? How are you making sure that you will “stand firm” in the battle?
- How might you develop some of the marks of Christian character that Paul describes as armor for the spiritual battle?
- Is there a piece of armor that has proved to be particularly effective in your life? Is there one that seems to be missing or remains undeveloped?

## **“Walk it Out”—Encouraging the Community**

It's easy for us to take a very individualistic view of our faith. We tend to hear and use phrases like “personal relationship with Jesus” and “accepting Jesus into our hearts,” which are not found in the Bible but have become very much part of our evangelical culture. While it's certainly true that we are each responsible as individuals for our relationship with Jesus and that we cannot be saved solely by attending church or being connecting with other Christians, it's equally true that God doesn't simply save us as individuals. Ephesians 2 makes it clear that the grace of Jesus isn't just creating a series of saved individuals—He's creating a new community!

Think about the local community with which you're connected. Think about the diversity of people—their gifts, their backgrounds, their ages, etc. Think about the gift that they are to you in your pursuit of Jesus, and imagine the gift that you must be to them!

Engage this community the following ways this week:

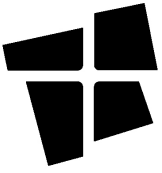
1. Pray intentionally for *at least twelve people* every day this week. You might pray for the same twelve, or rotate through different people. These might be leaders, they might be spiritual seekers, or they might be people with whom your life regularly intersects. List the people below for whom you pray:

2. Send notes of encouragement, either via email or actual pen and paper, to *at least five people* this week. Try to encourage them in very specific ways, and if they are some of the people you are praying for, you might also include ways that you are praying for them. Write the names of those five below:

3. Finally, make an intentional, face-to-face connection *with one person* this week with whom you wouldn't normally connect. It might be breakfast, coffee, having them over for dinner, going for a walk, or stopping by their house. It certainly doesn't need to be anything formal or spectacular, but make it personal. Look for an opportunity to pray with that person during your time.

Application:

- Are you as connected to the body of Christ at York Alliance as you'd like to be? What's one step that you could take to be more connected?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Is there someone that you've prayed for or connected with this week with whom you feel a greater connection? How might you continue that connection after this week?



# **The Building of the Church**

Hebrews 10:1-25

Sermon Notes:





## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's the most meaningful part of your experience in the local church?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Hebrews 10:1-25

- How have you seen God around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- On a scale of 1-10, how devoted are you in your personal life to the centrality of the Word of God? Why would you rate yourself there?
- Do you believe that there is a spiritual battle all around you? How are you making sure that you will "stand firm" in the battle?
- Is there a piece of armor (Ephesians 6:10-20) that has proved to be particularly effective in your life? Is there one that seems to be missing or remains undeveloped?
- Do you tend to emphasize Word, the sacraments, or community most highly? Why do you think that is?
- How might we stir one another up to love and good deeds?

**World:** As we move toward the holiday season, there are many who are interested in attending a church gathering, but aren't sure where to start. Unbelievably, a survey of people who don't regularly attend any worship gathering revealed that *more than 90% of people would attend church if invited*. Over 90%! That's an incredible number. Consider: Who might God be asking you to invite into your community during this holiday season? Pray for God's blessing in their life!

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# Week Ten: The Responsibility of the Church

Matthew 28:18-20

As Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples were left with one command: Go and make disciples. There is much that a church *can* do, but there is only one thing that we *must* do. Discipleship is the great imperative for each one of us as the church.

Meditation for the Week: Ephesians 1  
*(Read slowly each day, preferably in different translations)*

## A Difficult Letter

Throughout this series, we've paralleled the study of the church with the letter than Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus. His letter to the Ephesians is heralded by William Barclay as the "queen of the epistles" and modern scholar Peter T. O'Brien as "one of the most significant documents ever written." It is understood to be a clear treatise on the major doctrines of the faith, and how they are lived out within the church. And let me repeat: This letter was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus.

No more than a few decades (at most) later, another letter was written to the church in Ephesus. It was written by possibly the only person that could hold a greater position and authority than Paul—Jesus Himself.

Read Revelation 2:1-7.

- What are the three things for which the church is commended?

- What are the three commands that the church is given?

How could it be that this great church, with this incredible heritage, could have fallen to such a place? Paul himself planted the church, appointed the Elders, sent his protege Timothy to pastor it, and wrote one of the most incredible letters in history to instruct and encourage the church. How could it have gone bad?

- Read Revelation 2:4. What happened to the church?

It would be foolish for any church to believe that they were incapable of falling prey to these same temptations. If it could happen to this flagship church in early Christendom, it could most certainly happen to any of us today! The primary things can quickly become secondary, and even be forgotten.

- Read Matthew 28:18-20. What is the overarching imperative that Jesus gives to His disciples as He prepares to leave them?

- Now read John 13:34-35. How might these words from Jesus relate to both His words in Matthew 28 and this rebuke to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2?

Jesus calls us to love one another in the sacrificial way that He has loved us, and that love is to be the catalyst that sets us apart from the rest of the world. When we forget that “love [we] had at first” we will also fail to make disciples.. Our love for one another invites others to love Jesus!

Application:

- What are some of the ways that you expressed love for God and for others when you were first following Him? Are there aspects of those behaviors to which you should return?

## **An Emphasis from Ephesus: Ephesians 1**

The first chapter of Ephesians is crammed full of amazing truths—at one point, I devoted 55 pages of a study guide just to this first chapter!<sup>13</sup> So, of course, it will be impossible to do an in-depth study of this passage in the space and time allotted. For that reason, we are going to seek to understand Ephesians 1 from a “big picture” perspective.

Read slowly through Ephesians 1. Answer the following questions, using the “Observation, Interpretation, Application” method of study.

### Observation

- Is there anything that Paul asks us to do in this chapter?
  
- Where are all of the spiritual blessings that Paul enumerates found?
  
- What does Paul pray for when he prays for the church at Ephesus?

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<sup>13</sup> See pages 7-63 in the study guide “Jesus & His Bride” published in fall 2010. It is also available digitally on [yorkalliance.org](http://yorkalliance.org) under resources.

### Interpretation

- When does vs. 4 say that we were chosen in Christ? Was that before or after any good things (or bad things) that we did? Why is that important?
- Why might Paul pray for the things which he prays? How might that relate to the way that we approach life and the mission Jesus has given us?
- What place does the church hold (vs. 22-23) in the plan of God?

### Application:

- What might need to change in your life if you are to live “to the praise of His glorious grace?”
- How might having your spiritual eyes opened make a difference in your life?
- The church is central to God’s plan. What role does the church play in your life? Does that need to change? How?

## “Walk it Out”—Life in the Hourglass

For many of us, visual images can help take concepts and move them from information to real understanding. Discipleship was always that sort of concept to me—I had the cognitive knowledge of what a process of discipleship was like, but I had a tough time really understanding it and explaining it to others. I knew there needed to be an aspect of encountering God, gaining information, and learning to see my life through His eyes. I also knew there was a mysterious aspect to the discipleship process that I had very little control over—there were times where God just changed me and moved me forward in my journey. Finally, I knew that there was an active aspect to discipleship where I actually needed to live out the things that I was learning, so that love for God always translated to love for people.

The informational pieces of the discipleship process were somewhat clear to me, but I still didn't feel like I understood it. It was then a friend and Elder within our church suggested the image of an hourglass. The top portion of the hourglass represented the environment in which we encounter Jesus—through our worship, the community of other believers, and through His Word. The center of the hourglass represented those transformational encounters with Him, where He generates something new in us by His Spirit at work in us. And the bottom of the hourglass represented those things that have been generated in us being poured out for the sake of the world around us—first to the church, and then to the local and global community. When the cycle was over, just like with an hourglass, it's turned over and everything starts again. Now the pieces finally made sense!<sup>14</sup>

Think about the various aspects of this hourglass model:

- **Top of the Hourglass**—Lifestyle of Worship, Authentic Community, and The Foundation of the Word.
- **Center of the Hourglass**—Prayer is the First Work
- **Bottom of the Hourglass**—Serving the Body, Missional Living, and the Shalom of the City.

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<sup>14</sup> These paragraphs are adapted from my 2015 book “Becoming Disciples, Making Disciples” which is pending publication but available at [yorkalliance.org](http://yorkalliance.org). The ideas are also all expounded on in my previous book *Follow Me: Discipleship That Moves Us* published through CCS Publishing in 2012.



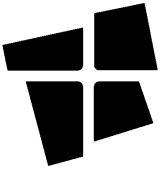
- Do you feel that your life is *strongest* in the top or bottom of the hourglass at this point?
  
- In the section of the hourglass that's the *weakest*, is there one specific aspect that is weaker than the others?
  
- What might you address in your life that would develop that specific area that is currently weak?

Take some time this week to evaluate each of the six values in the top and bottom of the hourglass, as well as your reliance on God to transform you, represented by the center of the hourglass. Think about areas that need to be developed, and determine clear and tangible actions that you can take to develop in those areas.

At York Alliance, part of our vision statement is that we are “becoming disciples who make other disciples.” Our own pursuit of Jesus very clearly impacts those in the world around us!

Application:

- What gets in the way of your fully pursuing Jesus as a fully committed disciple?



# **The Responsibility of the Church**

Matthew 28:18-20

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite Thanksgiving tradition?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Matthew 28:18-20

- Where has Jesus been at work this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are some of the ways that you expressed love for God and for others when you were first following Him?
- Are there aspects of those behaviors to which you should return?
- What active step in making disciples do you need to take?
- What are some of the things that we can get caught up in as a group instead of obeying Jesus' command to make disciples?
- How might having your spiritual eyes opened make a difference in your life?
- The church is central to God's plan. What role does the church play in your life? Does that need to change? How?
- What's one area that you know you can address within your own discipleship? How do you intend to address it?

**World:** Last week we saw the statistic, that, according to a survey from 2013, *more than 90% of people would attend church if invited*. God's call is that we would make disciples of all people—of course, that doesn't always mean attending church, at least at first. How could you be a part of the discipleship of those in the world around you? Pray specifically and intentionally as you move into the holiday season.

Note: Please check [www.yorkalliance.org](http://www.yorkalliance.org), register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

# Acknowledgements

This is either the third or fourth time in my almost seven years of weekly preaching and teaching at York Alliance that I've planned this series on the church. It's a subject that I'm passionate about, and something in which I believe that we desperately need to experience a correction from the Word. However, each time, I felt the gentle (mostly gentle, at least) tug from the Spirit to wait. I don't know all of the reasons why, but I'm certain that's what happened. This time, however, I was given a "green light" to move forward, and this book and series is the result. The writing process has been a long one, so I hope the final product will still be relatively cohesive—writing during an exceptionally busy season has been a challenge. However, I've sensed the Spirit's leading throughout the process, and trust that He will use it for His purposes.

I'm always thankful for our leadership team, but at the completion of this work, I've never been more so. Our Elders embody the role as the Bible lays it out, and I can say that each of them are men that are "examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3) Our various leaders, on the staff, Governing Board, LIFE group leadership, and various other ministry roles, lead and love sacrificially, leading with humility and grace. I'm thankful for all of them. Even as you read this, I would also ask you to pray for them. Leadership is difficult, and many of them can testify that the journey has been painful at times. Pray for God's protection and encouragement.

In the practicality of this study guide being put together, there are several people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. First of all, the York Alliance staff has held together remarkably during a very disjointed summer. A huge thank you to Nancy and Re for keeping things moving and the right people in the loop, to Mike and Tim for ably filling in when my absence left a vacuum, and to Chris, Beth, and Mary Beth for giving me grace when I wasn't around to answer a question, ask a question, or just lead in general. You are each gifts from God to York Alliance. I also want to thank Marty Krebs for once again jumping on board for the graphic portion of this project. Your skills and your eye create a compelling feel for this series that my words could never create, and I'm thankful for the joy of working alongside of you!

My family puts up with quite a bit during the “normal” seasons of life, so these periods of writing can be especially challenging. So big “shout outs” to my kids: Tia, who spent most of this writing process actually working for a living (when did THAT happen??), Ethan, who is becoming an impressive young man, Josiah, who makes me laugh out loud at least once every day whether I’m stuck behind my computer or not, and Micah, whose passion and energy is unparalleled, even in our quite passionate and energetic family. And, of course, a huge thank you to my wonderful wife, Amanda. Your partnership in ministry and life is the greatest gift I could ever receive, and it’s an incredible joy for me that we get to do this thing together.

Creative inspiration was a bit eclectic during this project, owing mainly to the long process and my odd taste in music. The Gray Havens continue to be one of my favorite bands from that last few years, fusing solid gospel truth with creative storytelling and contagious music. Come see their concert at York Alliance in October! Josh Garrels, Sara Groves, Rich Mullins, and Andrew Peterson retain their typical place on the playlist. The focus on the church drew me back to some of the early Derek Webb recordings, particularly “She Must and Shall Go Free” and “I See Things Upside Down.” Both are worth a listen if you haven’t heard them, or haven’t heard them for awhile. The brilliant soundtrack for “Hamilton” (which carries a warning label for language for good reason) was also part of the rotation this summer—my theatre roots appreciate what seems to be a bit of a revival in musical theatre, which seemed to be going downhill fast prior to this past year. And finally, my mother in law thought it hysterical to get me the actual recordings from Florence Foster Jenkins, the New York City socialite who fancied herself a singer but was absolutely terrible. I listened to it once. I haven’t gotten up enough nerve to do it again yet. It’s really painful.

Jesus is both the head of the church and the motivation for it. He is the reason this book is worth writing, the Scriptures are worth studying, and life worth living.

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel  
August 25, 2016

## **What is the Church? And does it really matter?**

Statistics abound showing a rapid decline in those who regularly attend church. The statistics can easily be backed up by numerous examples for those who are simply willing to ask a few questions... When speaking about the church, one can quickly find that Jesus is as popular as ever, but the intentional gatherings of His followers have fallen on hard times. Some struggle to make room in their schedules for anything except sporadic church attendance. Others are more forthcoming, outright doubting the value of any kind of institutional connection to a group of believers. Many struggle with past hurts that have never been resolved, abuses and imperfections that they have never been able to get past, and simply a lack of desire to connect.

The Bible, however, speaks of the local body in far different terms:

### **“The body of Christ.”**

Each part unique and valuable, interconnected to one another in such a way that they would be unable to exist on their own. (1 Corinthians 12) Uniquely gifted by the Spirit, the members of the church are designed to build up the body of Christ into maturity. (Ephesians 4) It would even go as far as to say that we belong to one another! (Romans 12) In short, the church may be clouded by cultural confusion, but she is also grounded in Scriptural clarity.

This 10-week study guide, designed to be used in tandem with the Fall 2016 sermon series at York Alliance Church, will help to illuminate a subject that is easily misunderstood and often misapplied. When we discover that great gift of God we know as “the church,” we will also find His fingerprints in a design that will lead us into real, abundant life.



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