

Life in the Church

- Our Western culture tends toward individualism. (strong self-sufficient heroes)
 - Every individual needs to obey Jesus' call to follow, however we cannot follow Jesus as individuals.
 - The proper context for every disciple maker is the church.
 - It is impossible to make disciples aside from the church of Jesus Christ.
 - The New Testament is full of commands to do this or that for "one another." Love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, etc.
- Q: How can we teach people to "observe all that I have commanded" if they have no one to love, pray for, or encourage?
- We can't claim to follow Jesus if we neglect the church He created, the church He died for, the church He entrusted His mission to.
 - Making disciples is a never-ending process that requires us to interweave our lives with the Christians around us.
 - As disciple makers, we will join together with other believers, help them overcome the sin that holds them back, and challenge them to grow into more effective disciple makers.
 - This session will examine the way in which we are called to live together as the church.
 - The next two sessions will focus on the call to reach out to the people in our local setting and to the rest of the world.
 - Our call to make disciples is fulfilled through the God-ordained vehicle of the church.

Committing Your Life to the Church

- The church is life and death. What we do inside the church matters.
- The church is God's strategy for reaching our world.
- God's church is not a social club, it's not a building, and it's not an option.
- The church is a group of redeemed people that live and serve together in such a way that their lives and communities are transformed.
- God cares about the way we love each other and the way we pursue His mission.
- If you are not connected with other Christians, serving and being served, challenging and being challenged, then you are not living as He desires, and the church is not functioning as He intended.
- Out of 114 times that the "church" is mentioned in the New Testament, at least ninety of them refer to specific local gatherings of believers who have banded together for fellowship and mission.
- God intends for every follower of Jesus to be a part of such a gathering under the servant leadership of pastors who shepherd the church for the glory of God.
- Many people try to live the Christian life apart from a serious, personal commitment to a local church.

- Some people are self-reliant and self-sufficient, the submission and accountability to others that the Bible talks about frightens them.
- Some people are often indecisive, hopping from one church to another looking for the “perfect place”, the “perfect people” and “the perfect pastor.”
- Most people don’t see the importance of being specifically connected to a local church.
- The Bible says the local church is important.
- God has entrusted local churches with godly leaders who teach us His Word and care for our souls (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1–8; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; 5:17; Titus 1:5–9).
- God has united us together in local churches to keep one another from sinning and straying from Christ (Gal. 6:1–5; Matt. 18:15–20).
- God has commanded us to gather together in local assemblies where we preach God’s Word, celebrate the Lord’s Supper, baptize new believers, and pray for and encourage one another (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24–25).
- Then we scatter to care for believers and to share the gospel with unbelievers (Acts 2:43–47).
- Making disciples involves committing your life to a local church where you are joined together with other believers under biblical leadership to grow in the likeness of Christ and to express the love of Christ to the world around you.

1. Why do you think the New Testament places such a priority on Christians being committed members (or parts) of local churches? How can this priority best be reflected in your life?

2. Read Ephesians 4:1–16. How should this passage affect the way you view your responsibility to other Christians in the church?

Bearing One Another’s Burdens

- God gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (pastors) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (Eph. 4:11-12)
- A pastor’s job is not to do all of the ministry in a church, but to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”. (Eph. 4:12)
- We shouldn't be overwhelmed by the task of ministering to others.
- We need to develop a realistic view of what ministry is really about.
- Ministry is faithfully servicing the people God has placed in your life.

Gal. 6:1–2 // Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

- Not everyone will be gifted to preach sermons, start a rehabilitation clinic, or lead a marriage retreat.

Q: Do you know people who struggle with sin and carrying burdens?

- The first steps toward becoming a minister is helping others through sin and burdens. (Gal. 6:1–2)

- Your problems are not just your problems—ultimately, they belong to the church body that God has placed you in.
- You are called to encourage, challenge, and help the other Christians in your life, and they are called to do the same for you.
- Our own sanctification happens as we minister to others.

3. *Think about your unique setting and identify a few opportunities that God has given you to minister to the people around you. Have you taken advantage of these opportunities?*

4. *Take a few minutes to meditate on Galatians 6:1–2. What would it look like to help bear someone else’s burden? Is there anyone in your life right now whom you should be helping in this way?*

Getting beneath the Surface

- When it comes to helping others, do not gravitate toward solutions that are quick, easy and only at the surface level.
- Invest in the lives of others that are hurting, listen on a consistent basis and offer help and love whenever you find a need that you are able to meet?
- Get involved with in the lives of others, take their struggle with sin seriously and walk with them as they work through the issues involved.
- We can’t be so quick to find a solution to the external behavior that we overlook the internal problem.
- Most external struggles are rooted in internal problems.
- Most issues are heart issues. (Luke 6:45)

Mark 7:18-23 // And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

- Every struggle with sin that we could possibly encounter in our own lives or in the lives of the people around us are represented in the list Jesus offered in verses 21-23, Jesus said these things come from within.
- Whatever help we can offer people who are struggling with sin has to be aimed at transforming hearts, not behavior.

5. *Why do you think we tend to focus on the external circumstances and behavior when we try to help people change?*

6. *Using your own words, try to explain why it is essential to get to the heart of the problem rather than merely addressing the circumstances and behavior.*

Transformed by the Gospel

- It's impossible to change a person's heart.
- The gospel is not merely about "getting us saved," God describes "salvation" and the transformation of the Christian life in Ezekiel 36.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 // **And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

- "Getting saved" is not about praying a prayer and then continuing to live our lives as though nothing happened.
- When God enters our lives, we are changed from the inside out forever.
- The good news (gospel) is that God has acted in the person of Jesus Christ. Through His life, death, and resurrection we are transformed, made new.
- As we come alongside the broken, hurting people God has placed in our lives, remember where our power comes from, the Holy Spirit.
- The power to transform hearts and change lives comes from the Holy Spirit (**John 6:63**), through the Word of God (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**), and through prayer (**James 5:16-20**).
- God has supplied us with everything we need in order to fulfill His calling.

Where The Power Comes From

Scripture: Use scriptures to give counsel to others, there is power (Heb. 4:12).

Prayer: As we pray passionately for their hearts to change, there is power. (Mark 9:29, John 14:13-14, James 5:14-16)

The Holy Spirit: God works in and through us by His Spirit. (Acts 1:8)

- Through the gospel, people can be set free from the enslaving power of sin (Rom. 6).
- Through the gospel, we are actually empowered to uproot the sin in our hearts and live in a way that pleases God (Gal. 5 and Rom. 8).
- Paul promised: "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13).

7. How should the truth of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit affect the way we approach helping people change?

- We must bear one another's burdens, a church full of isolated individuals feeling defeated by their sin and stripped of their joy was never God's plan for the church.
- Jesus intended for His church to advance powerfully, full of love and joy. (Matt. 16:18)
- God has empowered us to bring truth, healing and transformation into the lives of the people around us, the kind of healing and transformation that only comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

8. *Would you say that your church body is characterized more by defeat and isolation or the power and transformation of the Holy Spirit? Why do you say that?*

9. *What steps can you take right away to help your church function more like God intended?*

Every Member Doing Its Part

- The mission of your church is too important to leave to everyone else.
- The moment you begin to believe that your church can be healthy while you sit on the sidelines, you have given up on God's plan of redemption.
- God placed you in your unique situation because He wants you to minister to and with the other Christians He has placed around you.

Eph. 4:15–16 // We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. **(Paul's vision for the church included every Christian)**

- The goal of the church is to grow up in every way into the likeness of Christ.
- The church will never reach its goal unless "each part is working properly."
- Each member must do their part.
- If you are not active in the church, you are hurting the church. (One paralyzed member of the body forces the rest of the body to work twice as hard)
- God made you to be exactly who you are, and His Spirit has empowered you with unique spiritual abilities, or "gifts."
- Together, we function as one body. Until you and every person in your church are actively ministering to the people around you, your area will not have an accurate picture of what the church was created to be.

When we step outside of ourselves and begin bearing the burdens of the people around us, it is time-consuming, messy, and often confusing. But it is necessary. Helping people change is what discipleship is all about. As we help other Christians follow Jesus, we are going to run into the temptations, lies, and idols that hold them back. It will be difficult, but we know what Jesus has accomplished, and we know how this story will end. We have a part to play in God's plan of redemption. It won't always be fun, but we must be faithful to God's calling.

10. *Would you say that you have been playing your part in the body of Christ? If so, how might you still need to grow in this? If not, are you ready to get involved? What steps might you need to take?*

11. *Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to give you confidence in the Spirit's power to use you in ministering to other people. Ask Him for the wisdom to know what to do and the discernment to recognize people who need help. Pray that God would use you and your church to continue His plan of redemption in your unique setting.*