



WHAT IS THE CHURCH & WHY DOES IT MATTER?

CHURCH -matters-

WHAT IS THE CHURCH & WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A study emphasizing God's grand vision for ...
the Bride of Christ,
the Household of God,
the Gathered Ones,
THE CHURCH

Sermon Series & Small Group Curriculum Guide
Fall 2025 | January 2026

Church Matters: What is the Church & Why Does it Matter?

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The Church

Filled with Christ. Formed for Mission.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

- Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV)

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church, he has made him the head of everything. The church is the body of Christ and is filled with Christ, who completely fills everything.

- Ephesians 1:22-23 (CEV)

He (Christ) is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

- Ephesians 1:22-23 (MSG)

Paraphrase

Study Notes:

¹ Unless specified, all referenced Scripture taken from the *English Standard Version* (ESV), 2010.

² The use of the capital 'C' Church designates God's living, invisible, spiritual body Church comprised of all genuine believers in all places of all times, whereas the lower case 'c' church is used to specify the institutional, visible, local body church comprised of genuine believers and unbelievers.

³ *Her/her* is used as the primary pronoun for the Church/church (note ²) due to the living nature of the *Bride and Body of Christ*; however, the use of *It/it* is occasionally used and is not intended to reflect a theological change.

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Foreword

Thanks to advances in modern technology, we can stream sermons from the most sought-after Bible teachers anytime and anywhere. With the click of a button, we can listen to worship music by our favorite artists from the comfort of our car or bedroom. In a culture that values personal preference and convenience, the question is understandable: *Does church still matter?* Can't we follow Jesus on our own? Isn't faith personal?

Yes, our faith is personal. But, in the words of Charlie Barham, one of our elders, God never intends for our faith to be private. The New Testament likens the church to a body, a building, and a family. We are saved not just into an individual relationship with Jesus but into a gathered community that Jesus calls His church. This is a timely truth to be reminded of as the U.S. Surgeon General declared an epidemic of loneliness and isolation in 2023. The local church is where God intends His people to find belonging.

Over the coming weeks, we will explore what Scripture says about the church. And when we say, ***“Church Matters,”*** we mean it in two senses—an examination of the matters, or issues, that are foundational to the church, and a consideration of why the church matters, or is relevant, to followers of Jesus Christ.

As much as I'd like to tell you, we'll discover a blueprint for how church can be convenient for busy people who lead busy, overworked, and over-scheduled lives; that is unlikely to happen. Make no mistake about it—church is not convenient. And that's not the half of it—it's also imperfect! But Jesus calls it His bride. As we consider God's intention in calling a people to Himself, I hope that we will gain a deeper understanding and a greater appreciation for this special, Christ-centered, Spirit-led community we call the church.

Your brother in Christ,

Andrew Wild

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Wild', with a stylized, cursive script.

Executive Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

Introduction - Using the Guide

Church Matters is a study that will explore various topics related to the Church. These subjects have been selected to guide us from the makeup and mission of the Church to its ministries and the benefits or merits that result, all as ordained, designed, and gifted to followers of Jesus Christ by God the Father.

In the process, we hope that these topics will provide us with answers, insight, encouragement, and conviction in our pursuit of discovering the mind of Christ as it relates to what the Church is and why it matters.

Although this is a topical series rather than a verse-by-verse study of a specific book of the Bible, it is rooted in, framed by, and supported by Scripture and faithful interpretation of the selected passages.

Furthermore, during this season of *Church Matters*, the core message and main idea are rooted in *Ephesians 1:22-23*, serving as a reminder that the Church has been, is, and always will be, **filled with Christ and designed for mission**.

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus emphasizes the supremacy of Christ over everything. It highlights the importance of believers recognizing Christ's leadership, authority, and connection with His church. But it's not just about seeing Christ as the Head of the Body; it's also about understanding that through the church, the gathered followers, Jesus Christ is revealed, and His presence is made known in the world.

Wow! Did you catch that?

Christ fills everything through His Church, and it is through this community of believers that His work is carried out on Earth. In simple terms, the Church, empowered by Christ, acts as a witness to the world of God's kingdom and Christ's ultimate authority. When we understand this truth, then how we answer, "Does the Church matter?" becomes more important, more urgent, and more necessary.

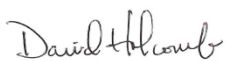
While much more remains to be learned about the Church, if we view everything through the lens of the calling for the Church to be a witness to the world of God's redeeming power—made possible by His grace received through faith—then all other aspects of understanding the Church will be seen in light of its role in fulfilling God's divine purpose on earth. This broader, more grand perspective will foster greater respect and love for the Body of Christ.

How To: This workbook has fifteen units, each with four main sections. Along with the weekly sermon, this material aims to deepen understanding and support our growth in Christ-like maturity and wisdom.

- ***Scripture & Noteworthy*** – The opening page of each unit will highlight the scripture most relevant to that week’s study. Read it, memorize it, reflect on it, and discuss it. Additionally, a *noteworthy* insight will be provided, offering a relevant historical or interesting commentary on the topic.
- ***Questions*** – A set of questions is provided each week as the primary focus for small group and personal study time. They include prompts to encourage deeper reflection and challenge our preconceived beliefs and ideas. Let them serve as starting points for further and more insightful curiosities for you and/or your group. Hopefully, the answers don’t always come quickly, as our growth should include times of additional study, conversations, and ongoing contemplation.
- ***Response*** – After the foundational questions, there are prompts for reflection and application where we ask, “*What am I going to do with what I just learned?*” Remember, when studying God’s Word, we start by examining what God reveals about Himself, His people, and His world, then consider how we should respond to what He shows us.
- ***Around the Table*** – We’re especially excited about the final page of each unit in this upcoming season. It offers a suggested framework for how we can incorporate *Church Matters* into intentional time at home. Its purpose is to help parents share God’s Word with their children, including questions, conversation ideas, video and audio links, prayer prompts, and calls to action. Whether your nightly table includes children or not, this section can be valuable and helpful for everyone. We pray that the Lord uses these moments in powerful, uplifting ways across generations for His glory.

Finally, as we start, I encourage everyone to stay engaged, show up, and be “all-in.” The Church isn’t just a place we attend—it’s who we are. It’s the living, breathing expression of Jesus to the world. That means *we* matter. *You* matter. And what we do together as the Church matters a lot more than we may realize. Let’s not just be part of the Church—let’s live like it truly matters. Because to Jesus, it absolutely does.

Because He lives,
David Holcomb



Discipleship Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

An Always Ready Church

Wait, wasn't *Always Ready* the theme of a previous study? It was.

So, aren't we moving on to another focus? Not exactly.

Let's consider it this way. During the *Always Ready* year, the main focus was on understanding, loving, and sharing the Gospel, mainly as individual followers of Jesus who are always ready to give a reason for our hope. This is at the heart of who we are and who we aim to become.

Through *Church Matters*, we now embrace the collective mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. In fact, a spoiler alert: while this study highlights many biblical benefits and purposes of a local church body, the highest calling will always be that our gathering, growing, and going aim to honor His name, His glory, and His kingdom. We are a people assembled to be sent out with the Gospel, ready for the mission.

Prayerfully, the idea of turning everyday conversations into gospel conversations (see the 3 Circles tool on the next page as a refresher) continues to become part of the DNA of River Oaks Community Church. In this, the lens through which we view this series is that of an *Always Ready* church.

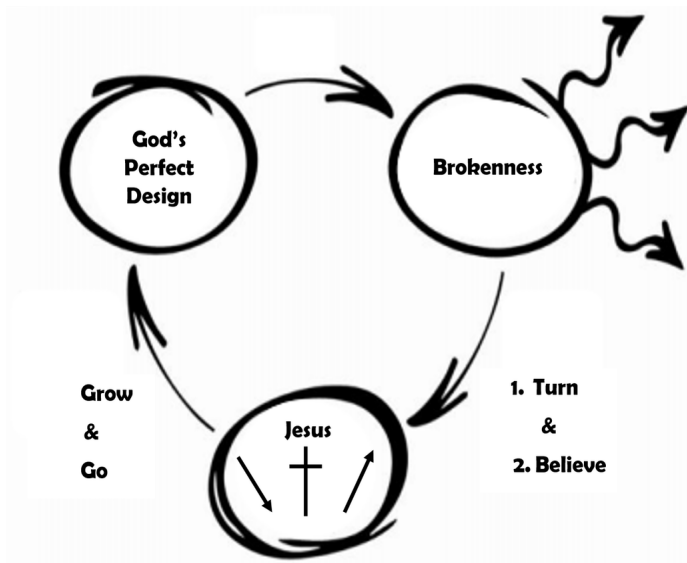
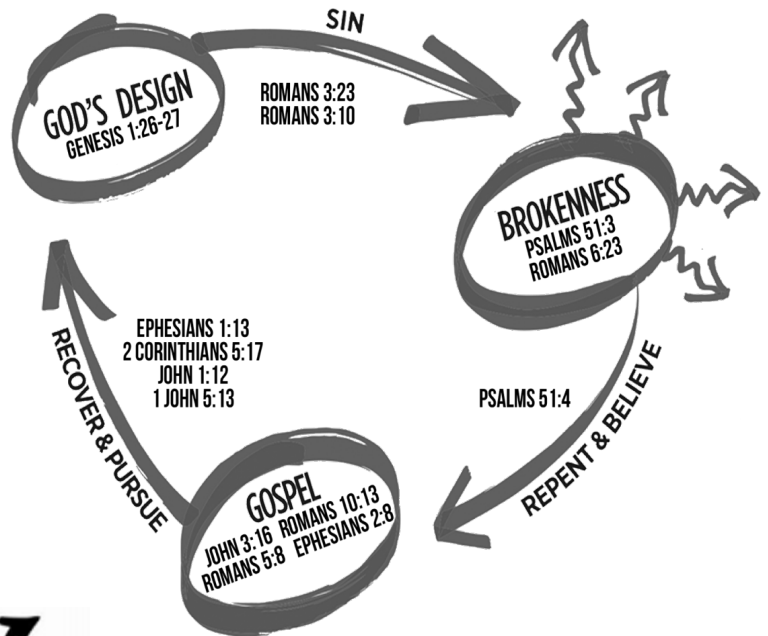
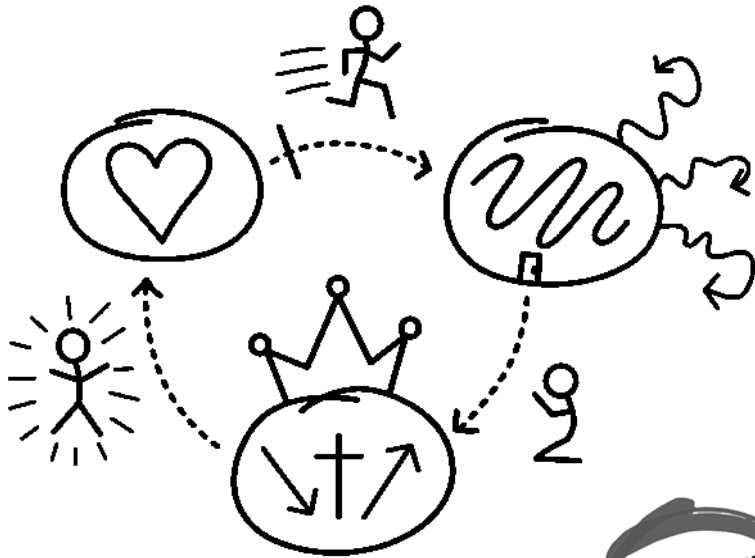
This means that even as we pursue the marks of a healthy church, consider the ordained missions of the church, celebrate the divinely appointed makeup of the church, and benefit from the merits of the church, we never lose sight of the Gospel of His Church as the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

Church matters because God sent His Son, Jesus, to reconcile us and restore us back into a relationship with Him. Jesus lived, died, was buried, and rose from the dead in victory over the sin that separated us from God and left us broken. God made a way through Jesus so we could be saved from eternal separation and brought into eternal fellowship with Him. This is the Gospel.

Importantly, to receive this gift of God's grace through Jesus, we are instructed to confess and believe, turn to Jesus as Lord of our lives, and repent of willfully choosing a life of brokenness (sin) as our lord. All who repent and believe will be enabled to recover and pursue God's design. This is the Good News.

In short, Church matters, because He, Jesus, lives.

Three Circles Gospel Sharing Framework - Examples



Scan QR Code for
More Information





PART ONE

Units 1-2

What is the Church?

The Make-Up

The first two units of this study aim to identify and describe who makes up the Church. In other words, is the Church composed only of members, or does it include anyone who attends? Is the Church a local gathering or a global one? Is the Church an invisible entity or a visible one?

Building on the question of who makes up the Church, how does God view the criteria and characteristics of those who “make up” His Church? In this, we will examine two biblical realities and expectations for the Church: that Her members are a set-apart people and a family. Both are essential and are made real through the saving grace and sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

UNIT ONE

The Church is ... A Set-Apart Community

1 Peter 2:9-10, Colossians 3:11-14

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; — 1 Peter 2:9-10

Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. — Colossians 3:11-14

noteworthy ...

Being set-apart as God's holy people has been inseparable from God's plan for salvation and worship from the very beginning of the biblical narrative; from the Garden to the Israelites through the new covenant in Jesus and the formation of the Church as we know it today. Yet, at the same time, Scripture is clear that set-apart is not "isolation" from the world. Based on passages like John 17:14-17 ("they are not of the world ... don't take them out of the world") and the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, it has been said:

"A holy life is the surest way of infusing grace into the world; the witness of Christian holiness is the most powerful polemic."

— John Owen, English Puritan Church Leader (1616–1683)

"The biblical stance of Christians is not to hide from the world, but to go forth and win the world for Christ. We are not to be 'of' the world, but we are to be 'in' it."

— John M. Frame, Christian Philosopher/Theologian (b. 1939)

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, answer the following question: *What is the Church?*
2. Are any of these descriptions of the Church helpful, new, or confusing to you? Share your thoughts or questions.
 - "Church" from the Greek *Ekklesia*, meaning a gathering or assembly.
 - Church is a place. Church is a sacred space.
 - The lower-case 'c' church is local vs. a capital 'C' global Church.
3. A common expectation of the Church in Scripture is that it should be distinct from the world around it. How was this first established with the people of Israel in the Old Testament (OT)? Consider Exodus 19:5-6, Leviticus 20:26, Deuteronomy 7:6, as well as the Law.
4. How does 1 Peter 2:9-10 reflect the Old Testament call to God's people for the New Testament Church? What aspect of "set apart" is highlighted in both the OT and NT references? (Hint: 1 Peter 1:13-23)
5. A description and guidelines for a church striving to live as the people (race, nation) who are set apart can be found in Colossians 3:11-17. Read this passage and list your top three observations below.
 -
 -
 -

6. What tension exists as a set-apart Church being a "sent" Church? (Matthew 28:16-20). Read John 17:14-18 and respond to how being "in the world but not of it" should shape the life of the Church.
7. Read Matthew 7:21-23. What do these verses teach us about the makeup of the local church on this earth?

RESPONSE

- In what ways does your life reflect the identity of someone chosen by God? What is the "different" or the "Jesus" that the world sees in you?
- In what ways do you personally find it difficult to live as someone set apart by God? What cultural influences guide you more than the gospel?
- How can you/we cultivate a culture of holiness, love, and humility in our church community?
- Pray for God's help in living a life of holiness, worship, and mission with His Church so that you and your local church reflect God's character. Ask the Lord to protect your heart from unhealthy and unholy influences around you. Pray to be different and set apart from the world.

Around the Table

This week's lesson focuses on the Church as a set-apart community. Start by asking, "*What does it mean for something to be set apart?*" Followed by asking if it is possible for something or someone to be set apart but not separated, isolated, or disconnected from everything else? If so, how?

Next, explain that God instructs His people, those who follow Jesus, to be set apart from the world, even while still in the world. Why do you think He wants this? And how does this work if we are to love our neighbor and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world?

Ask someone to read **Colossians 3:11** and discuss:

- What does it mean to be a Jew? A Gentile? What about a Scythian!
- Do you think there was discrimination and division among these groups? Is there still discrimination and division today? Why?
- How would living out Colossians 3:11 make the Church different than the world around it? Why is that important?

Ask someone to read **Colossians 3:12-14** and discuss:

- The world struggles with division, but how does Paul say a set-apart Church, and each of us, can overcome discrimination and division?
- Do you ever struggle with any of these Christ-like traits for overcoming hatred and dislike toward others who are not like you: *Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Patience, Forgiveness, or Love?*

STOP! Pray for an increased portion of the Christ-like traits that allow us to be more set-apart, different, and holy, so that the world will know Jesus and worship God. Ask the Lord to keep you in the world, but not of the world.

SING-ALONG For those with younger children, or those just young at heart, listen, view, and sing-along to the Slugs & Bugs *Fruit of the Spirit*. Follow the link: [S & B Fruit of the Spirit \(Galatians 5:22-23\) Sing the Bible Vol. 4](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Two

The Church is ... A Family

Romans 8:14-17, Ephesians 2:19-22

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

— Romans 8:14-17

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

— Ephesians 2:19-22

noteworthy ...

In the Ancient Near East (during Old Testament times), a “family” was far more expansive and dynamic than our modern nuclear family concept. It was a multi-generational, kinship-based household deeply embedded in social, economic, and covenantal life. Jesus and the early believers reinforced this concept as a spiritual reality and an identifying mark for followers of Jesus, for which the Church served as their earthly home base.

“We are all members of one household; God dwells among us as Father, and Christ has made us brothers and sisters in the same family.”

— St. Augustine of Hippo, Theologian/Author (354–430)

“Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, for I’m part of the family, the Family of God.”

— The Family of God (lyrics), Bill & Gloria Gaither

QUESTIONS

1. When you hear the word *family*, what comes to mind—positive and negative?
2. Have you ever had a “*like family*” relationship with someone who isn't a blood relative? Why do you refer to them that way?
3. Why do you think God uses the imagery and language of family—such as *Father, children, brother, sister, and adoption*—to describe His people and His Church instead of something more formal or institutional?
4. Read Romans 8:14-17. What are the main theological and practical insights for believers being joint “heirs” with Christ? What are the implications of verse 17 in terms of the evidence of one’s faith?
5. Read Ephesians 2:13-22. In verses 13-16, what has God done so that we might become family? (Respond to what you observe in each verse). Additionally, what do verses 17-22 tell us about the particular relationship for this “family” and how God uses it for His glory?
 - v. 13
 - v. 14
 - v. 15
 - v. 16

6. Ephesians 2:20-22 describes the household of God as a temple. Why is it essential that we connect “family” and “temple” as the reality of God’s community of believers?
7. As a member of God’s family, how might viewing the Church as God’s household, which is meant to develop into God’s temple, influence your involvement with the Church? How could you use this passage to respond to someone who says they don’t need a church because they feel more connected to God at the lake, in the mountains, or elsewhere?

RESPONSE

- What practical steps can you take this week to treat someone in the Church like family? This might mean breaking down your own “wall of hostility” or simply loving and serving others as if they were family.
- How can you come together with others to help build God’s household into a holy temple? (Ephesians 2:21-22)
- Record your initial thought to, *“You are a child of God?”*
- Pray for the honesty to share your struggles with God about seeing the Church as a true family. Praise Him for the blessing of adoption, the inheritance you have in Christ, and the status of brother and sister you share in His family.

Around the Table

This week's lesson focuses on the Biblical view of the Church as family. Start by asking, *"Who is your family?"* and have everyone share their answers. Encourage children to draw a picture of the people they call family.

Next, explain that God has made those who have accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives into a family. Have you ever heard someone call another person "brother" or "sister" at church? Why do you think that is?

Ask someone to read **Ephesians 2:19-22** and discuss:

- What does it mean that all believers, from all time and all places, are "members of God's household"?
- Where do members of a household get together? What about our brothers and sisters around the world? Are they really our family?
- How do you think God wants members of His house and family to behave toward one another?

Ask someone to read **Romans 8:14-18** and discuss:

- How are Christians "adopted" by God the Father? What does that make everyone who is adopted by the same Father?
- Do you know what an "heir" is? Explain the significance of heirs in Scripture who received the Father's inheritance and how that connects to all believers being "joint heirs" in Christ.

STOP! Pray for God to give you a genuine love for all your brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank God for adopting us into His family and ask Him to fill us with joy as we meet together, serve together, and worship Him together, as one family. Ask God to protect and encourage your "family."

SING-ALONG For those with younger children, or those just young at heart, listen, view the words, and sing-along to Tommy Walker's *God's Family*. [God's Family – Tommy Walker; VGKSA SOMERSET-OOS](#) or scan the QR code.





PART TWO

Units 3-5

What Does the Church Do?

The Mission

If the Church is a set-apart family of believers in Jesus Christ, then what is Her purpose? *Part Two* will explore three of the main missions of the Church as outlined in Scripture and evident in the Church from the earliest New Testament gatherings to the twenty-first-century Church.

As you might expect, the first of these missions is to share the gospel. An always-ready Church is a Church on a mission, fulfilling its highest calling as a set-apart household. Additionally, the Church is called to worship and praise the Lord, which is the lifeblood of communion with God and one another. Lastly, the Church is tasked with building up Her members so they can share the gospel, worship, and praise the Lord!

Unit Three

The Church ... Shares the Gospel

Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” — Acts 1:8

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
— 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

noteworthy ...

The Greek word for **“witness”** in Acts 1:8 is the word **μάρτυς** (martus), from which we get the word **“martyr.”** Initially, the term referred to someone who gave testimony, typically in a legal context. However, as a result of Christian evangelism, the word evolved to signify those who died or were harshly persecuted for their testimonies.

For early followers of Jesus, the gospel was not just spoken; to witness was to be willing to lay one’s life down, not merely to raise one’s voice. The word they bore wasn’t cradled in comfort—it carried the weight of a cross. Their witness spilled from lips and lives alike.

“The church bears witness by word and deed; evangelism demands both faithful preaching and incarnational love.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pastor/Martyr (1906 – 1945)

QUESTIONS

1. Who comes to mind, whether personal or famous, when you think of someone who is a great ambassador of something or someone? Why?
2. What is the difference between “selling” good news and “sharing” good news? What must be settled first in the heart of the messenger?
3. In Acts 1:8, the disciples are promised _____ by way of _____
_____ for the purpose of _____.

Now, paraphrase Acts 1:8 in your own words with an emphasis on the directness and simplicity of what Jesus is saying.

4. What do the geographical areas mentioned in Acts 1:8 represent? How can the Church most effectively fulfill this imperative for believers?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. What does the “ministry and message of reconciliation” refer to that Paul mentions to the church in Corinth?

6. There is great power, conviction, encouragement, and instruction in verses 20-21 of 2 Corinthians 5. Why does Paul use the phrase "*ambassadors of Christ*"? What does he mean by it? How would you share the gospel with someone by only using 2 Corinthians 5:21?
7. How do these passages illustrate the divine partnership between God's power and human responsibility in the Church's mission?

RESPONSE

- Reflecting on your answer to question one, how might others see you as an ambassador of Christ? What challenges do you face in representing Christ through your words and actions?
- How can you join with others (your small group, other "family" members) to participate in the "ministry of reconciliation"?
- How can you strengthen your reliance on the Holy Spirit's power?
- Pray for a greater work of the Holy Spirit in your life as you represent Christ through your words and actions. Pray for His direction to lead you to where you are called to participate in the mission of the Church – building up followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical view of the Church as established by God to share His love with others. Begin by asking, *"What's something you couldn't wait to tell someone about recently?"* Maybe it was a specific food, a video you saw, or something you did.

Next, explain that God wants His Church to share the good news of His plan, called the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the world. One main purpose of the Church is for Christians to learn, go, and share this message together.

Ask someone to read **John 3:16** and discuss:

- Why did God have to send His Son? What is "eternal life"?
- If this verse is true, who do you think needs to hear it? How could hearing the truth about this verse change someone's life?
- What are some ways you and the Church can share John 3:16 with others? Does it help to share it with others, as a group? If so, why?

Ask someone to read **Acts 1:8** and discuss:

- What is the setting, or context, of this verse?
- What do you think is meant by "witness" in this verse? What do you notice comes before we are told to be witnesses? Why is this important for the Church to believe?
- How can the Church go to all these places to witness?

STOP! Pray for God to use you as part of your church to share the life-changing news of John 3:16 with others. Pray for family members and friends who don't know this news yet. Ask the Lord for courage, excitement, and opportunities to share. Give thanks to God for loving you.

WATCH-ALONG For all ages, view the Bible Project's animated video titled *Witness* and discuss the call to "Bear Witness" as a Church about Jesus. [Witness: Bible Project](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Four

The Church ... Worships, Honors, and Glorifies God

Psalm 100, 1 Peter 2:9

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations..

— Psalm 100

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

— 1 Peter 2:9

noteworthy ...

In a world crowded with idols and emperors vying for praise, early Christians did the unthinkable: they bowed their knees to the crucified Messiah and called it worship. What emerged was unlike anything seen before—not polytheism, not rebellion, not an idol made of man—but a covenantal fidelity and communion with the Triune God. This wasn't just theological innovation; it was the result of Truth Incarnate and an act of Divine grace.

"Christian worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father."

— James B. Torrance, Scottish Scholar (1923–2003)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe worship without mentioning “music or singing.”
2. How does being part of a church help you honor or glorify God? Be specific about a time, moment, or season that comes to mind.
3. Read Psalm 100. List the seven commands given in this psalm. Are these invitations meant for individuals or an assembly of people?
4. Describe the images in Psalm 100 that illustrate God’s relationship with His people and explain how they inspire the call for collective worship.
5. Why would the psalmist, David, consider joy, gratitude, and serving gladly as important to our worship as singing and praising? How could that be significant for the Church today?

6. How does 1 Peter 2:9-12 highlight the church's calling to worship? What is the purpose of living a worship-focused life? See also Psalm 40:3

7. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12 and list the four identities given to followers of Jesus, then describe how each one relates to our worship of God.

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Follow-up: What is the stated purpose of our identity?

RESPONSE

- How can you “make a joyful noise to the Lord” as part of the Church?
- In what ways can your personal worship strengthen the worship of a local body church and the global Church?
- Are there areas where your heart hesitates or struggles to worship and honor God? Share this with your church family and intentionally focus on your worship and praise this week.
- Pray for a life filled with worship that serves as a testimony to a world in need of joyful noise and glad hearts. Ask the Lord to broaden your understanding of worship, to show you how your day is worship before Him. Give praise and worship Him for who He is right now!

Around the Table

This week's lesson focuses on the Biblical view of the Church as established to conduct and inspire the collective worship of God.

Start by asking, *"What does the word 'worship' mean?"* Then explain that the word comes from the words "worth" + "ship" (a suffix meaning condition of or quality)—the condition of being worthy. In other words, worship is an expression of how much worth we attribute to the object of our worship. Discuss what it means to worship God and why He is worthy.

Ask someone to read **Psalm 100** and discuss:

- What are your thoughts on this praise and worship song? What does this worship song say about God and the reasons we worship Him?
- If you wrote a song, poem, or paragraph of praise, what would you write about God or to God? Go ahead, create a praise to the Lord.
- Are you filled with joy when you come before God in worship? When you arrive for worship on Sunday? Why does God want us to be joyful?

Ask someone to read **1 Peter 2:9** and discuss:

- Peter uses the term "holy nation" for God's people – this is another way to understand God's Church. What does Peter say we should do?
- What are some ways we can praise God and worship Him together as a church? Why do you think God wants us to worship together?

Stop! Pray that God fills your heart with joy and thanksgiving in worship at all times (Psalm 34:1). Praise God as the only One worthy of our worship. Pray that He might be honored when we gather as a church in worship, and continue to praise Him throughout the week.

SING-ALONG For all ages, particularly youth, listen, sing-along, and worship with *Build My Life* by Pat Barrett, sung by WorshipMob). [Build My Life – Housefires + Spontaneous](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Five

The Church ... Builds Up Her Members

Ephesians 4:11-13, Colossians 1:28

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
– Ephesians 4:11-13

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.
– Colossians 1:28

noteworthy ...

God's desire for His Church has always been that it be necessary for His people, and not discretionary. In other words:

"The communion of saints is not a luxury—it is the means by which we are sanctified together." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

To treat the church as a luxury is to savour its sweetness when life is calm and hearts are stirred. But to truly embrace the church is to press in with all you have and to pour out all you are in service to the body of Christ so that God might be worshipped and you (and others) might be built up.

Church Treated as Luxury	Church Treated as Divinely Purposed
• An optional privilege enjoyed	• A non-negotiable responsibility
• Can be indulgent or fleeting	• Often sacrificial and enduring
• Springs from abundance	• Springs from allegiance
• Might soothe the senses	• Must engage the conscience
• Easy to forsake	• Hard to ignore

QUESTIONS

1. Who in your life has come alongside you in learning a specific skill or strength? Who has helped you grow spiritually?

2. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What specific roles or offices does the Apostle Paul mention in v. 11? Describe how these roles serve the Church today.

3. As it relates to a congregation of believers, what does this passage say about the primary purpose of these roles? Does this surprise you? What have you believed to be the primary purpose of the teachers, shepherds, and leaders in a local church?

4. According to Ephesians 4:13-14, what are the goals for those who have been called to the purpose of equipping the saints for ministry?
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5. Read Colossians 1:28-29. What is Paul's mission, and what is the goal of this mission? What do you notice about "who" this mission is for?

6. What does it mean to become 'mature'? What about '*mature in Christ*'? How is this possible?
7. How do these passages in Ephesians and Colossians complement each other in describing a vital mission of the Church? What does that imply about what we receive from faithfully participating in church?

RESPONSE

- Assess your spiritual growth honestly. Ask yourself, "*Am I progressing toward maturity in Christ? Or am I stuck?*" What is one area where God is prompting you to grow, and what step can you take to do so?
- How are you using your gifts to help others grow? Whether at church, at home, or elsewhere? If you're not currently doing so, how do you see your role in helping others grow moving forward?
- Which aspect of Paul's vision of the Church challenges you the most – and why?
- Pray for God to reveal and make clear and prepare you for a work of ministry in building up the body of Christ. Ask the Lord to give you a deep desire for growth in love and knowledge of Him. Pray for wisdom and endurance for those serving in roles of equipping the saints.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical view of the Church as essential for equipping and teaching its members. Start by asking, *"Who are some of the people who teach us and help us learn?"* Then ask each person specifically about one thing they have recently learned from church.

Next, explain that God designed the Church like a team with many different ways to contribute and various roles to play. Some roles involve helping others "grow up" in their faith. How do you think they help?

Ask someone to read **Ephesians 4:11-13** and discuss:

- Who are the "saints," and what is the work of ministry? What kind of training or learning is necessary for this work to be effective?
- Why do you think God wants us to help each other grow in our faith, and why didn't He say we're supposed to only learn on our own?
- What does "mature" mean? How does the Church help with that?

Ask someone to read **Colossians 1:28** and discuss:

- In the Church, it is "Him" we proclaim; who is "Him?" (See verse 27).
- When is the last time someone warned you about something and it was for your good? You were glad they did. Have you ever been warned about anything at Church? Were you happy you were warned?

STOP! Pray for God's help in becoming more mature in Christ and growing in a deeper understanding of God and His Word. Pray for those who teach, train, and warn you. Ask God to help you teach others what you have learned. Thank God for our different abilities and gifts.

WATCH-ALONG For those with younger children, or those just young at heart, watch and learn about The Church: One Body With Many Parts from Bible Story. [Bible Story – One Body With Many Parts – Life Kids](#) or scan the QR code.





PART THREE

Units 6-11

What is a Healthy Church?

The Marks

How can you identify a Bible-believing, mission-oriented, healthy local church? You observe the traits or marks it consistently displays. Scripture speaks extensively about these characteristics. In *Part Three*, we explore six of them. This isn't an exhaustive list, but these six are strongly emphasized in God's Word as vital for a spiritually mature and effective kingdom-focused church. They include:

- **Order:** A church free of chaos in doctrine, practice, and fellowship.
- **Accountability:** A church that addresses exposed, willful disobedience and is transparent in its administration.
- **Unity:** A church that genuinely embodies oneness in essentials, while remaining loving in non-essentials, and going beyond mere tolerance.
- **Sacraments (Communion & Baptism):** A church that faithfully and regularly administers the sacraments.
- **Faithfulness:** A church that regularly attends, serves consistently, and worships together.

Unit Six

A Healthy Church is ... Ordered

Acts 14:23, 1 Corinthians 14:26...36-40

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
— Acts 14:23

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up... Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

— 1 Corinthians 14:26...36-40

noteworthy ...

Francis Turretin was a Reformed theologian from Geneva, Switzerland, whose writings helped shape Protestant thought. One of his key convictions was that the way the church organizes itself is a matter of divine instruction.

The church structure—how leaders are chosen, how decisions are made, and how discipline is handled—is not just a practical issue. It's theological. Turretin warned that reshaping church governance to fit modern tastes risks compromising the truth and unity of the church.

Turretin's legacy invites us to ask: Are we building the church according to God's blueprint—or our own? His voice still challenges believers today to pursue worship and order that reflect God's will, not just what feels right.

"The ordering of the Church is not a matter of preference, but of obedience to the Lord who instituted it."

— Francis Turretin, Swiss Theologian (1623–1687)

QUESTIONS

1. What's the most surprising or unusual, chaotic or confusing thing you've ever experienced during a church service or congregational meeting?
2. If a healthy Church is identified by its order and decency, what then promotes order? How does this look and function at your church?
3. What does the appointment of 'elders' in Acts 14:23 tell us about the early church structure? Research the original Greek word for the English word 'elder'—do you know how that relates to River Oaks?
4. How are church leaders selected and ordained today? What qualities should we seek in church leadership? (Hint: 1 Timothy 3:1-13).
5. A second type of 'order' concerns the structure and management of a worship service and ministry activity. Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-33. What is the main point that Paul is emphasizing in this passage?
6. Verse 33 of 1 Corinthians 14 says, *"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."* How should this guide our planning and participation in worship? What about our expectations for worship? Does this apply to small groups and other ministries of the church? (Refer to v. 26 as helpful).

7. The instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 can be controversial based on how it is interpreted and applied. How do different churches and believers within the same church understand this? How should the Church approach passages like these in light of order, building others, unity, humility, and mission?

RESPONSE

- Is there an aspect of your worship, doctrine, or leadership that has caused disorder or confusion? How do you handle disagreement with decisions made in your church? How is God calling you to grow in these areas?
- Why do you think the membership vows at River Oaks include: *Do you promise to promote the unity, purity, and peace of the church?* How can you contribute to promoting the unity, purity, and peace of the church?
- Pray for the elders, deacons, teachers, ministry and service team leaders, group leaders, and those called to support others. May their leadership be divinely guided, led by the Holy Spirit, and faithful to God's Word.

NOTE: During this unit, we will host nightly mid-sized gatherings called **D3: Discipleship, Desserts, & Denominations**. Choose a night to enjoy church fellowship and discuss what denominations are, their origins, and how the Church can be united as one Body of Christ, despite a seeming lack of universal order.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical view of a healthy church being identified by order. Start by asking, *"What does your room look like when things are out of order? Or, when everyone in the same room is talking at the same time?"* Then try it – everyone starts talking at once!

Next, explain that God wants His Church to have order so it is not chaotic and noisy, and most importantly, so it does not send the wrong message about who He is or what His Word says to the world.

Ask someone to read **Acts 14:23** and discuss:

- What is an "elder"? What do they do, and why is it important to have them in the church? Do you know the elders in your church?
- Who are the leaders dedicated to and committed to serving first?
- How can a church without order or godly elders affect people's faith?

Ask someone to read **1 Corinthians 14:26 & 40** and discuss:

- What are some things the church should always do in a worship service? And how do these verses say those things should be done?
- How can all of us show respect to God and those around us during worship so that it is not a room without order?
- What's your favorite part of the worship service? Why?

STOP! Praise God for placing us all together like a puzzle, where each piece complements the others and strengthens the Church. Thank God for His perfect order in sending Jesus to die for our sins. Pray for your church leaders and members that they may honor and please God in an orderly way, so that God will be fully worshiped and others will come to know Him.

WATCH-ALONG For all ages, particularly youth, or those just young at heart, watch a lesson from St. Bart's Kids on Order in the Church. [Order in the Church! St Bart's Kids Talks: Week 15 of God's Church](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Seven

A Healthy Church ... Embraces Accountability

Matthew 18:15-17, Hebrews 13:17

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
— Matthew 18:15-17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.
— Hebrews 13:17

noteworthy ...

Just for fun ... the following was created as an experiment using CoPilot AI to explore the role of accountability in a healthy and holy body of Christ. It was prompted by John Owen’s quote on the body of Christ.

*To walk with Christ is not alone, but in a house where grace is known.
Each soul a stone, each heart a flame, held fast within the Savior’s name.
When sin takes root and blinds the eye, a brother’s voice must not pass by.
Reproof in love, correction true, restores the heart and makes it new.
“To be a member,” Owen said, “Is to be shaped, not just be fed.”
Autonomy may charm the ear— but Spirit’s fruit is drawing near.*

“To be a member of Christ’s body is to submit to its order, its care, and its correction. Autonomy is not a fruit of the Spirit.”

— John Owen, English Puritan Church Leader (1616–1683)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when you, either as a child or an adult, received correction that didn't feel good at first but ultimately helped you grow. What did you learn?
2. Read Matthew 18:15-17. What do you observe about the steps in confronting a sinful act? Why is this important?
3. How does this teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 challenge modern attitudes toward confrontation and accountability, and inform the purpose of church discipline? See also Titus 3:10-11.
4. What are the risks of a church skipping the steps in Matthew 18:15-17 and instantly imposing public discipline? What are the risks of a church failing to address willful, unrepentant sin by one of its members at all?
5. A healthy church demonstrates a willingness to hold members accountable in a loving, restorative way that reflects grace and truth. According to Hebrews 13:17, what is expected of church members? Paraphrase this verse in your own words.

6. How is *obeying and submitting to leaders in the church* different from blind obedience? What steps should you take in this process of discernment and obedience?
7. As leaders (church, ministry, small group), how can 1 Peter 5:1-14 help you lead, encourage, address unrepentant sin, or even point out the blind spots in members' lives more effectively?

RESPONSE

- Given that many have experienced unloving and unjust discipline within the Church, honestly reflect on how you naturally respond to correction—defensively, humbly, gratefully, or in another way?
- What systems of accountability have you set up in your life to address sin and blind spots? Do they include other believers? Describe how that accountability process works.
- Submitting our lives to the Lord is fundamental to salvation. Are there areas in your life where you haven't fully submitted to Him? Reflect on why submitting to God might be difficult for you in these areas.
- Pray that the Lord reveal to you if there is anyone you need to confront or lovingly reconcile with this week. Pray for Him to reveal any blind spots of disobedience in your life as you allow others to hold you accountable and encourage you in your faith.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical view of the Church as an essential part of both encouraging followers of Jesus and holding them accountable. Start by asking, *"What do you do when a friend makes a bad choice – talk to them about it or pretend that it didn't happen?"*

Next, explain that God designed the Church to be a place where people can find encouragement when they are discouraged and receive correction when they make wrong choices. Why is this important for the Church to do?

Ask someone to read **Matthew 18:15-17** and discuss:

- Jesus says when someone does something hurtful to us, we should talk to them about it. Why is this better than telling all your friends?
- Talking to someone who hurt you is hard to do most of the time. What else can we do to prepare for a conversation like this? What would it mean to get godly counsel before confronting them?

Ask someone to read **Hebrews 13:17** and discuss:

- What does it mean to submit in the Church? What's the difference between submitting to Christ-like leadership and ungodly leadership?
- Have you ever received helpful advice from someone at church because you were willing to listen and learn?
- How can you encourage someone in a good way, even though they are not submitting to you as a leader?

STOP! Pray for God to give you a humble spirit so you are open to being encouraged, led, and, when necessary, confronted by others when you make bad choices. Ask God for the courage and wisdom to speak kindly to someone who has hurt you, and for eyes to see if you have hurt others.

WATCH-ALONG For all ages, particularly youth, watch a lesson on iron sharpening iron, then discuss. [Iron Sharpens Iron – Got Questions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/iron-sharpens-iron) or scan the QR code.



Unit Eight

A Healthy Church ... Pursues Unity, Not Uniformity

Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-19

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. — Romans 12:4-5

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? — 1 Corinthians 12:12-19

noteworthy ...

Unity seeks harmony among diverse individuals who share a common purpose, where individuals are respected and valued. In contrast, **Uniformity** aims for sameness in form, thought, or behavior, pursuing consistent appearance or agreement, and often suppresses the individual.

"Unity creates something stronger. It allows for friction without fracture, difference without division, and diversity without disconnection."

— Uniformity vs. Unity: What's the Difference | This vs. That

"To be at one with those who agree is easy; to be at one with those who differ is possible only if a profound unity underlies surface differences."

— St. Augustine of Hippo, Theologian/Author (354–430)

QUESTIONS

1. List at least one talent or skill you have that is mostly hidden from others. If you're in a group, share what it is and more details about it.
2. Read Romans 12:3-8. What does it mean that "*you do not all have the same function*"? List specific examples you see in your church.

Follow-up: What does Romans 12:3-8 not say regarding responsibility? and participation in the Church? How might we use it as an excuse?

3. Building on individual parts, Paul emphasizes that "*each member (part) belongs to all the others*" (Romans 12:5). How does that work? What's a good image or analogy to describe what Paul is saying here?
4. Over the past few lessons, we have seen that God's design for a healthy, holy Church often goes against our cultural worldview and context. How does this passage challenge the role of individualism in modern society? How have you struggled with this?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-19. The comparison of the physical body to the spiritual Body is insightful and useful. List three ways this analogy is accurate. What is one way this analogy could be misused?
 - Accurate:
 - Accurate:
 - Accurate:
 - Misused:

6. The idea that unity does not equal uniformity is clearly illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12:12-19. How would you explain what this means? What does this look like in practice? In your church?
7. How can the church make sure that those who feel like they are the “less significant” parts of the body are honored and valued?

RESPONSE

- Do you feel like a less important part of the Church body? This week, consider how you can use what God has given you, knowing that He values you as a vital part of His Church.
- Do you know someone who feels less valued or isolated from the Church? How can you encourage them and affirm their contributions?
- Share a conversation or coffee with someone different from you in age, background, interests, or ministry focus. Bridge the gap and become the unity in diversity Scripture calls for. Thoughts?
- Pray that the Church reflects one Body, composed of many parts. Ask the Lord for unity in His Church that mirrors His unity with the Father. Pray for those who feel unvalued or disconnected, that the Lord may encourage them and provide opportunities to join the Body with joy.

Around the Table

This week's lesson focuses on the Biblical command of Church unity. Begin by asking, *"What is one thing that makes you different from your best friend?"* Highlight that, despite the difference, they are still best friends.

Next, explain that God holds a high standard for His Church regarding unity and getting along. It is another way for the Church to stand out from the world around it.

Ask someone to read **Romans 12:4-5** and **1 Corinthians 12:12-19** and discuss the following:

- What does it mean that we are "one body with many parts"? Why is that a good thing for the Church? How do we celebrate that?
- Why do you think God uses the body as an example to explain how the Church works? Does your body need all of its parts, or could you replace them all with more elbows? Relate that to the Church.
- What does unity in the Church mean? And when there is disagreement, can there still be unity?
- How does unity differ from uniformity? Why can uniformity be harmful to the Church? What might a church look like if it demanded uniformity from everyone?
- How does recognizing our differences help us serve each other? What does God want us to do with believers who are different from us?

STOP! Pray for God to show you how you can work, serve, worship, and live in the body of the Church as a team, as one body, so that Jesus is honored and the world will know followers of Jesus by their love for one another. Ask God to reveal how you can deepen your connection within His Body.

SING-ALONG For all ages, listen, sing-along, then discuss the words to They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love [They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love – Jars of Clay](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Nine

A Healthy Church ... Faithfully Observes Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

– 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

noteworthy ...

Martin Luther and John Calvin—two towering figures of the Protestant Reformation—shared a deep reverence for Scripture. Yet, they disagreed significantly on the nature of Holy Communion, particularly regarding Christ's presence in the elements, as an interpretation of Christ's words in Luke 22:19-20, "This is my body ... This is the new covenant in my blood."

Luther's view, referred to as **consubstantiation**, preserved the real, tangible presence of Christ in the sacrament, as a comfort to troubled consciences. This presence exists in, with, and under the elements, though the bread and wine remain unchanged physically.

Calvin's view avoided any notion of material or magical transformation in or with the elements, focusing instead on the **spiritual presence** of Christ. The bread and wine serve as signs for the spiritual nourishment of faith.

Both stood opposed to the Roman Catholic doctrine of **transubstantiation**, in which the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ, the real presence of Christ having physically altered the elements.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the most meaningful meal you've ever shared with someone? What made it special or memorable?
2. Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist – Explain the “why, how, and what” to someone who has never been to church.
3. Read Luke 22:14-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. What are the notable similarities between these two passages? Is there anything that differs?
4. How does understanding what the bread and cup represent deepen our knowledge and love for the gospel of Jesus Christ?
5. Communion is described as being backward-looking, present-looking, and forward-looking. What does this mean? How does each perspective inspire believers to hold a deeper reverence and gratitude when taking part in the sacrament?
 - Look Back:
 - Look Around:
 - Look Ahead:

6. Why is communion of missional importance? (Hint: 1 Corinthians 11:26). Explain this by completing the following: *Every time I take the elements of communion with other followers of Jesus, I am saying to the world ...*
7. What is the link between the Passover events in Exodus 12 and the communion meal practiced by the Church? Did you include this connection in your explanation of communion?

RESPONSE

- Do you have a clear understanding of your church's teachings on communion? Can you explain how it differs from other churches, and which aspects are non-essential liberties versus essential differences? If you're unsure, ask a group leader or elder, and review the resources on communion in the ROCC digital library (see page 74). Thoughts??
- Do you have a typical way you approach communion? After this unit, how can you better prepare your heart for each time you partake?
- Pray for a grateful heart as you approach the Lord, remembering the body and blood sacrifice He made for you. Pray for a reverent, celebratory, and expectant heart when participating in this sacred meal that He, Jesus, gave to the Church.

Around the Table

This week's lesson covers the Biblical instruction and practice of communion, also referred to as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Start by asking, "*What is the meaning of communion?*" Discover everyone's general understanding of communion and the reasons we celebrate it.

Next, explain that Jesus gave us two ways to remember what He did for us and to express our gratitude for the benefits of His grace toward us. First, communion. How does communion remind us of what Jesus did for us?

Ask someone to read **Luke 22:14-20** and discuss:

- What does Jesus mean when he said that He was eager to eat with His disciples before He "suffered"? And, what does suffering have to do with bread and wine, which He calls His body and blood?
- What is the "new covenant" in Jesus? (Hint: The prophet Jeremiah mentioned the Messiah and His new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-32.)

Ask someone to read **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** and discuss:

- Paul instructed the Church to observe communion as He had been taught, as a remembrance and sign that identifies believers with Jesus. In this, would it ever be wrong for someone to take communion? And does Paul point to a time when we will stop observing communion?
- What are we telling the world when we take communion together?

STOP! Pray for God to help you understand the meaning of communion with thanksgiving, reverence, and celebration of the new covenant in Jesus. Praise God for His grace and mercy that Jesus shed His blood and gave His body for our sins and the opportunity for all of us to know Him forever.

WATCH-ALONG For those of all ages, watch this wonderful explanation of communion by Kids on the Move, then discuss and continue the conversation. [WHAT IS COMMUNION? RESOURCE | Kids on the Move](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Ten

A Healthy Church ... Faithfully Celebrates Baptism

Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 6:3-4

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
– Matthew 28:18-20

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
– Romans 6:3-4

noteworthy ...

The sacraments (Baptism and Lord’s Supper) have always been thought of as much more than symbols within the church. Relative to baptism, it is ...

A Sign that points beyond the one being baptized to the gospel promises fulfilled for all who believe. It reminds us of the enduring assurance of the work of Christ as being enough, that our salvation comes by way of grace alone through faith alone in the life, death, resurrection, and lordship of Christ alone. Just as water washes the body externally, His blood and Spirit cleanse the soul truly and irrevocably.

A Seal, which, as in the ancient world, authenticated a message and guaranteed the document as genuine, without altering its content, baptism assures believers of the new life already granted by Christ, confirming its reality in their hearts, without affecting or changing their salvation status.

R. Scott Clark, The Heidelberg, [What Do We Mean By Sacrament, Sign, And Seal?](#)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the dirtiest, or grimmest, you have ever been, and what do you remember about how it felt to clean up?
2. Baptism – Explain the “why, how, and what” to someone who has never been to church.
3. Read Matthew 3:13-17. Knowing that water baptism was a required ritual of purification and a symbol of repentance/spiritual cleansing in Judaism, why did Jesus choose to be baptized even though he had no sin?
4. Read Matthew 28:16-20. How does baptism fit into the Great Commission Jesus gave to His followers?
5. How can we be sure that it is not baptism that brings about salvation and the assurance of eternal life? (Hint: Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:9-10).

Follow-up: If baptism isn't necessary for salvation, how would you respond to someone who views baptism as optional since you “don’t need it”?

6. Read Romans 6:1-11. Based on this passage, what does baptism symbolize or represent? Why are followers of Jesus told to express this through baptism?

7. What does baptism signify to the world regarding a person's identity? How does that reflect a Church that is set apart and uniquely connected in relationships compared to other communities or institutions?

RESPONSE

- Do you have a clear understanding of your church's teachings on baptism? Can you explain how it differs from other churches, and which aspects are non-essential liberties versus essential differences? If you're unsure, ask a group leader or elder, and review the resources on baptism in the ROCC digital library (see page 74). Thoughts?
- If you follow Jesus and have never been baptized—whether as an infant or as a profession of faith—what questions or reservations do you have? If you would like to discuss with a pastor, please get in touch with the church office or reach out to any staff member.
- If you are a follower of Jesus who has been baptized (whether as an infant or after a profession of faith), does your baptism still serve as a reminder of your mission and message to the world? How can you prioritize it in your conversations and thoughts this week?
- Pray for a grateful heart to approach the Lord, remembering your being buried and raised to newness of life in Christ. Pray for and celebrate those who turn to Jesus and publicly declare their faith through baptism. May they serve as a witness to others.

Around the Table

This week's lesson covers the Biblical instruction and practice of baptism. Start by asking, *"What is the meaning of baptism?"* Discover everyone's general understanding of baptism and the reasons we observe it.

Next, explain that Jesus gave us two ways to remember what He did for us and to show our gratitude for His grace toward us. We discussed communion in Unit 9, and the second sign and seal Jesus gave us is baptism. How does baptism remind us of what Jesus did for us?

Ask someone to read **Matthew 3:13-17** and discuss:

- Did you know that baptism before Jesus died symbolized being cleansed from spiritual uncleanness? Jesus was not unclean, but what example did He give us for what our baptism would represent?
- In **Matthew 28:18-20**, after Jesus arose, He instructs His followers on what to do when someone comes to accept Him as Lord of their life.

Ask someone to read **Romans 6:3-4** and discuss:

- What does it mean that we were "buried with Christ" in baptism?
- What does "raised from the dead ... to walk in newness of life" mean?
- Through baptism, what are we telling others about us, about Jesus?
- Have you been raised to new life by trusting in Jesus? If so, have you been baptized? If not, why not?

STOP! Pray for God to help you understand the meaning of baptism with thanksgiving, reverence, and celebration of what Jesus did to cleanse our sin and make us clean. Ask God to help you walk in the newness of this changed life every day and pray that your life in Jesus points others to Him.

WATCH-ALONG For those of all ages, watch this excellent explanation of baptism by Kids on the Move, then discuss and continue the conversation. [WHAT IS BAPTISM? RESOURCE | Kids on the Move](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Eleven

A Healthy Church ... Assembles Regularly

Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:24-25

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together ... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. — Acts 2:42-44,47

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. — Hebrews 10:24-25

noteworthy ...

For over a century, the availability of “mobile” church has posed a challenge to the local church and has often become a slippery slope for individuals. From radio to television to personal devices, the risk of prioritizing polished productions over personal connection should not be minimized.

Most recently, a season of global pandemic highlighted both the benefits and challenges of remote worship. However, what has developed for many in the years since has been described as a progression from digital consumption to passive participation to complete disconnection. As a result, many experience spiritual drift—a search for more entertainment, greater convenience, and personal comfort.

Digital consumption can be helpful and necessary for many reasons, but ultimately, what must be understood is that the church is not a content provider, but a living body called to worship together, or else it will fall apart.

[The Danger of Digital Church Without Community - outreachmagazine.com](https://www.outreachmagazine.com/article/the-danger-of-digital-church-without-community)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when you were physically away from church for a while. How did that affect you?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. What does it mean to be “devoted” to something? What practices of “assembling together” did the early church believers devote themselves to? What does this suggest for the Church today?
3. What do you observe about the attitudes of the early church members when they gathered? Why do you think it was important to record this observation in Acts 2:42-47?
4. What impact did devotion to physical presence in community with other believers have on those around them? (Hint: Acts 2:47). Explain why.
5. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. The author of Hebrews provides several commands to followers of Jesus because of Christ's sacrifice. List these commands and briefly reflect on what they look like in your life.
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6. According to Hebrews 10:21-25, what is the reason for believers to keep meeting together? Why was this important to them?
7. Complete the following based on your experiences and observations: The early believers found great joy, urgency, and dependency in one another and the Church. Today it can seem like believers find _____, _____, and _____ in regular assembly. Thoughts?

RESPONSE

- In what ways is your heart devoted to the things of the Acts 2 church? What would those who know you best say you are devoted to?
- Do you know someone who has become disconnected from the church? What can you do to encourage them this week?
- Do you seek faithfulness to your local church? Why or why not? How does your devotion to the church balance blessing and burden? In other words, is deeper involvement better than wider participation when it comes to faithfulness?
- Pray that God will encourage your congregation of believers with a spirit of active participation, rather than merely spectating or consuming, when gathered together. Ask the Lord to protect your schedule and desire to assemble with the Church.

Around the Table

This week's lesson focuses on the Biblical view of the Church, which is called to meet regularly with devoted and joyful members. Start by asking, *"Where do you spend most of your time during the week?"* Then, consider those places you visit only a few times but are still important to you.

Next, explain that God has designed His Church to be a central part of His people's lives. One reason for this is that the Church's missions (Units 3-5) depend on it. Why else would God want His Church to meet regularly?

Ask someone to read **Acts 2:42-47** and discuss:

- What do you notice about the attitudes and descriptions of the church members in the early church? What actions did they do together?
- Do you think you would have been as devoted then? Why or why not? If so, would you like to share this connection today?
- What was the outcome of this regular gathering and worship? Do you think this has anything to do with why God wants us to meet often?

Ask someone to read **Hebrews 10:24-25** and discuss:

- How do you help encourage, or "stir up," others at church to "love and good works"? Have you been encouraged in this way before?
- Make a list of how you can do this, and if everyone does, what do you think that would look like?

STOP! Pray that God gives you a joyful and generous heart when it comes to being with your church family, loving and serving God regularly. Ask God to grant you wisdom and courage to encourage others to love and good works, so that the community around your church will come to know God.

SING-ALONG For all ages, listen to this song of the eternal Church and discuss how God has set up the Church as preparation for this great feast one day. [We Will Feast \(From Steadfast\) – Sandra McCracken](#) or scan the QR code.





PART FOUR

Units 12-15

Why Does the Church Matter?

The Merits

Having reached the last few units of this study, the question might now be some form of “So what?” In other words, it's one thing to know that the Lord's Church is a set-apart people, created for Kingdom missions, and instructed to live in a way that makes their marks undeniable, but how exactly do God's people benefit from the Church and this knowledge?

Beyond the many blessings the Church provides through humble and consistent participation, Scripture emphasizes the important and highly valuable benefits of the Church for believers.

Part Four will emphasize the significance of the Church in our spiritual maturity, in providing vital motivation, in offering healing, and in serving as a model of the gospel to the world.

Unit Twelve

Because the Church is Essential to ... Our Maturity

Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, 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. – Ephesians 4:11-16

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. – 1 Thessalonians 5:11

noteworthy ...

Institutes of the Christian Religion, first published in 1536 by Protestant Reformer John Calvin, is one of the most influential works of systematic theology and doctrinal reference ever written.

Regarding Christian maturity, *Institutes* does not view it as a separate doctrine but as an integrated goal of the Christian life, rooted in humility, sanctification, obedience, and communion with Christ and His Church.

One reference to this goal emphasizes the Church's role in nurturing believers through the teaching of God's Word and participation in the sacraments, the primary responsibilities of church leadership. Calvin writes,

"To those whom God is Father, the Church must also be Mother."
(*Institutes* 4.1.1)

QUESTIONS

1. How do you define “spiritual maturity”? What does it look like in the lives of those who follow Jesus? According to Hebrews 5:12, what is one mark of spiritual maturity?
2. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. According to Paul, who is writing to the church in Ephesus, the leaders and teachers in the church have a primary role for everyone’s benefit. What is this essential purpose?
3. In your own words, use Ephesians 4:14 to describe someone who stays spiritually immature in their faith.
4. How and why does Ephesians 4 present spiritual maturity as a collective, churchwide goal?

Follow-up: What are the risks of trying to mature or grow spiritually in isolation as a ‘Lone Ranger’ Christian?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11. Describe what living according to the instructions in verses 6-8 would look like in a believer's daily life. What words or phrases come to mind?

6. How does staying spiritually "awake" (1 Thessalonians 5:6) connect to growing into Christ-like maturity? Have you experienced this yourself or seen it in others? Explain.
7. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 begins with the word _____. Why is that important to the previous verses, and to what the rest of this verse says? How does this relate to being a benefit for believers of the Church?

RESPONSE

- List any ways, habits, or situations in which you have become spiritually "asleep." What do you need to do to start waking up from this sleep?
- Do you feel confused about truth, doctrine, or belief, and find yourself tossed back and forth by different inputs? Write them down and reach out this week for opportunities to grow in these areas.
- Who are you walking with right now, either helping them grow in their faith or looking to as a guide in your faith? Reach out to them this week with encouragement.
- Pray that the Lord use His Church to foster spiritual growth in your life. Pray for the Lord's encouragement within the Church, and that He might use you to speak life to others. Give thanks to the Lord for a Body created for our good.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical expectation for followers of Jesus to be built up and grow in spiritual maturity through the Church. Begin by asking, *"What have you learned most recently at church?"* and follow up with, *"How did what you learn change you or strengthen your faith?"*

Next, explain that God has designed and equipped His Church for the benefit of those who attend to grow in spiritual understanding – the love and knowledge of the Lord – so they can best represent Him to the world.

Ask someone to read **Ephesians 4:11-15** and discuss:

- Why are followers of Jesus instructed to continue growing in their faith all the days of their earthly life?
- Have you ever been tossed around by a wave pool, an ocean current, or a river rapid? What do you recall about your thoughts, control in the situation, or the ability to determine the direction you wanted to go? How is that like being tossed around by false teaching?

Ask someone to read **Matthew 7:24-27** and discuss:

- How is building a house on sand like becoming a believer in Jesus but not growing in biblical understanding and life application?
- How can you hear the words of Jesus and do them this week?
- How can you, as a part of your church, help others mature this week?

STOP! Pray for God to fuel your desire to live a life of being built up in Him and coming alongside others to build them up and encourage them. Praise God for His Church and its role in teaching you and protecting you from being tossed around by misunderstanding and biblical error.

SING-ALONG For those with younger children, or those just young at heart, listen, view the words, and sing-along to [Build Each Other Up | 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Timothy's Christian Songs](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Thirteen

Because the Church is Essential to ... Our Motivation

Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 3:13

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
— Colossians 3:16

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
— Hebrews 3:13

noteworthy ...

“Sin flourishes in isolation. It withers in the light of community.”
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (1939)

At his seminary in Finkenwalde, Dietrich Bonhoeffer cultivated rhythms of confession, prayer, work, and play—all within community. He knew that genuine sanctification was shaped by shared obedience, not through solitary efforts as a private spiritual ascent.

Bonhoeffer’s vision compels us to anchor our sanctification in life together under Scripture. How do we do this? According to *Life Together*, we might:

- Find motivation and purpose in regular corporate worship.
- Invite a friend or two or three into weekly rhythms of accountability, prayer, service, and even shared laughter—recognizing that our faith grows when we lay down pride and bear one another’s burdens.
- By weaving Word-centered disciplines into the fabric of real relationships, we step out of solo devotion and into the messy, beautiful community where true sanctification flourishes.

QUESTIONS

1. Summarize the most impactful motivational speech, talk, or advice you've received in your life. How did it help you?
2. When you think of the Church, does the word "motivation" ever come to mind? List as many ways as you can think of how the Church can be essential to spiritual motivation.
3. Read Colossians 3:12-17. Consider how this passage highlights the importance of the "one-another" relationships in the Church as vital for maintaining spiritual motivation—through challenge, encouragement, accountability, and example.
4. While many "bumper sticker verses" often lack accurate interpretation, Colossians 3:17 is a clear one. How can this verse help motivate our spiritual growth throughout the week?
5. Paul explains that fostering Christ-like maturity in the church in Colossae involves both "*teaching and admonishing*" (Colossians 3:16). What does this mean? Do you believe that we should seek to be taught and admonished? Why or why not?

6. Read Hebrews 3:12-14. What danger is the author of Hebrews warning against and instructing believers to encourage one another against? Have you ever observed this in your life? In the life of someone else?

Follow-up: How often should we do this? Occasionally?

7. Hebrews 3:14 is saying something similar to Hebrews 3:6; what is meant by *“hold our original confidence”* and *“if we hold fast”*?

Follow-Up: It is essential to understand that motivation is linked to sanctification, not salvation. What does this imply about the misuse of motivation in the Church and its limitations?

RESPONSE

- Who encourages you in your faith most consistently? How can you also encourage them?
- Are there any qualities in Colossians 3 that you find difficult to *“put on”*? Identify one here and be intentional about cultivating the mind of Christ around it through prayer, Scripture, practice, and conversation.
- Do you need motivation in your walk with Christ right now? If so, reach out to your church—a group leader, a trusted spiritual mentor, or an elder. Let the Church be the Church in this way.
- Pray that the Lord use the wisdom and courage of others to help you stay strong in your faith. Pray that your interactions may be a mutual blessing of exhortation so that all that is done will be done in the name and for the glory of Jesus.

Around the Table

This week's lesson emphasizes the Biblical view of the Church as beneficial to our motivation. In other words, we, as humans, sometimes need encouragement to do what is right and to stop doing what is wrong. Begin by asking, *"When is the last time someone spoke to you about something they observed in your life and, because they love you, gave you advice?"*

Next, explain that God has designed His Church in such a way that followers of Jesus are surrounded by those who love them and care for them. And they care about how the Church represents Jesus to the world. Why would this design element lead to the use of motivation and encouragement?

Ask someone to read **Colossians 3:16-17** and discuss:

- Do you notice what comes first in the commands to teach and correct each other, and being in God's Word "richly" or deeply? Why is this important? How would this order impact our interactions?
- What do these verses say about our attitudes, even when we teach and correct one another? What does that say about the purpose of encouraging each other in teaching and correction?

Ask someone to read **Hebrews 3:13** and discuss:

- Have you ever heard of an "accountability buddy"? What would having one mean for you? Who could be your accountability buddy?

STOP! Pray for God to place other believers—our brothers and sisters—into our lives to teach us, encourage us, and hold us accountable so that we may grow in how we love and serve God and others. Ask the Lord to give you encouragement this week as you learn more about Him and His Church.

WATCH-ALONG For all ages, watch and then discuss the Bible Project video on reading Scripture in a gathered community (church) for remembrance and motivation. [Public Reading of Scripture: Streetlights Remix](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Fourteen

Because the Church is Essential to ... Our Mending

Galatians 6:1-10, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

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. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ ... And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

— Galatians 6:1-2, 9-10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

noteworthy ...

The Puritans have long been known for their strict moral discipline, sternness, and strong concern for personal holiness. However, their goal of purifying the Church of England made them carefully consider what God intended for His church to be and do, especially as a healing ministry.

In the Puritan view, the church is not an assembly of the flawless but a gathering of the broken where hurt and heartbreak is shared, experienced, and worked out together. It is a gathering committed to the truth that brokenness is the very place where His sustaining grace meets us.

"In the furnace of affliction our hearts grow tenderest, for there the mighty hand of Christ lays hold of us most close."

— Thomas Goodwin, English Puritan Theologian/Preacher (1600-1680)

QUESTIONS

1. When you think of “healing,” including the physical, emotional, or spiritual brokenness we experience or will experience in this world, what do you see as the process for restoring health in each of these areas? Examples?
2. Foundational to understanding our greatest need for healing is recognizing the brokenness caused by sin into which we are born. How do Isaiah 53:5, Psalm 147:3, Luke 4:18, and 1 Peter 2:24 establish this understanding, and what implications does that have for the Church as a vital part of our healing process?
3. Read Galatians 6:1-10. What descriptions does Paul give to the church in Galatia for coming alongside others in restorative efforts? What do you observe about the tone and the ways we can support others?
4. According to Galatians 6:3-4, what can prevent a person or a group of people from offering restorative help to others? How might it look or feel if this warning is ignored?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Do these verses bring you comfort? Why or why not? What do they teach us about “paying it forward”?

6. Along with 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, read Romans 12:9-15 and provide examples of how these passages are vital for healing ministries like GriefShare, Divorce Care, Re-Engage, and Small Group.
7. How are joy and empathy linked to restoration within the Church? What experiences or examples come to mind? (See Romans 12:15)

Follow-Up: How do your examples depend on the first two verses of this passage (Romans 12:9-10)?

RESPONSE

- Are you currently in need of healing? Share it here and connect with someone who can pray for you and offer support. Consider seeking healing ministries of the church and/or counseling, and remember our Heavenly Father, the God of all compassion, in everything.
- What past experiences of hurt and healing have you been restored in, and are now available to share with others for comfort and support?
- What steps can you take to develop empathy (Romans 12:15) and emotional presence for others, especially those in the household of faith?
- Pray by presenting your wounds to the Lord. Ask Him to surround you with compassionate people. Pray for Him to bring you the broken and to fill you with genuine love, not judgment, toward them. Thank Him for healing the brokenness of sin we are born into.

Around the Table

This week's lesson highlights the Biblical view of the Church as a helpful support during tough times. Begin by asking, *"Have you ever needed help from someone to feel better when you were sad, hurt, or in trouble?"* Share how they helped you recover from your situation.

Next, explain that God designed the Church to be a source of healing and compassion for its members. While it might not be the source of physical healing, can you name the types of hurts that we might face in life for which the Church can be helpful? Explain your answers.

Ask someone to read **Galatians 6:1-10** and discuss:

- What are "spiritual transgressions"? How should we respond to someone dealing with disobedience, considering the items listed in the verse, and any other ideas from elsewhere in Scripture?
- Who does this passage tell us to "do good" to? How can we do this?

Ask someone to read **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** and discuss:

- The first part of this passage (verses 3–4a) points us to where we can find ultimate compassion and peace. Describe this in your own words.
- The second part of this passage (verse 4b) reminds us that our troubles and hurts can be transformed into something positive. Explain this in your own words and give an example.

Stop! Pray for God to give you eyes to see those in need around you, especially those hurting in your church community. Ask God for the compassion, courage, and wisdom to come alongside someone who is lonely, sad, or troubled about something in their faith.

SING-ALONG For all ages, sing-along, read the lyrics, or simply listen to Come As You Are, an invitation to lay down burdens and hurt and come to the table for healing to [Crowder – Come As You Are Lyric Video](#) or scan the QR code.



Unit Fifteen

Because the Church is Essential for ... Modeling the Gospel to the World

John 17:15-23, Philippians 2:1-11

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

– John 17:22-23

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:3-11

noteworthy ...

What is the Church, and why does it matter? Bottom line: the Church matters because it is the gospel to the world, Her ultimate mission and motivation. The Church fulfills this mission when She takes seriously the call to be a:

- **Living Letter** revealing God's salvation to others (2 Corinthians 3:2-3)
- **Mirror** reflecting the glory of Jesus in a dark world (John 1:9)
- **Embassy** of the Kingdom representing our King (Philippians 3:20)
- **Family Portrait** highlighting our adoption in Christ (Ephesians 2:19)
- **Body** in motion living differently with Christ as the head, always ready to share His love, truth, and grace (1 Corinthians 12:12-17)

QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever built models? Cars, planes, trains, dollhouses, cityscapes, or something else? Describe it. Whether you have or not, what do you find most interesting about models or miniatures?
2. When an unbelieving world observes the Church, what do they see? What would the Lord want them to see?
3. Scripture emphasizes that God's set-apart people – the Israelites in the Old Testament, and the Church, under Christ now and forever – are to reflect the gospel message. See images of this in *noteworthy* – which one most resonates with you and why.
4. Read John 17:15-23. In Jesus' prayer, there is a call for unity, but what is the purpose of this unity? (Hint: John 17:21, 23). Describe this vision and its purpose in your own words.
5. According to John 17:15-23, the Church, as a gathering of those united in Christ, is crucial for the world to see and understand the Gospel. How does the Church demonstrate this message? Think of it as a small-scale (model) version. What would it look like to someone watching it?

6. Read Philippians 2:1-11. Most of this passage provides instructions for a church seeking to model the gospel. What connection do these instructions have with the final verses of the passage?

Follow-Up: Unlike the “by being” instructions for a Christ-centered church in this passage, the “do nothing” and “do not” traits become obstacles to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world. What are these, and why do they hinder our witness?

7. As a final question for this study: ***What is the church? Why does it matter?*** Revisit the first question of Unit One and see if your definition of the Church has changed. If it has, how so?

RESPONSE

- Would an outsider observe your life and see a reflection of the gospel? In what ways do you want to better live out the good news?
- As a local church, would an outsider observe our life and see a model of the gospel? In what ways could we better demonstrate the good news?
- Is there someone you need to serve, forgive, or listen to within the Church to better model the gospel to those outside? Be specific.
- Pray that your life in the church is guided by a desire to live out John 17 and Philippians 2 with others, so that the community around the church will see and come to know Jesus. Give thanks for God’s Church because it is a living model of His salvation, and because it is this, it truly matters.

Around the Table

This week's lesson takes us back to God's purpose for the Church as a light to the world and a living example of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Begin by asking, *"Have you ever observed a group of people and been able to tell something about them before they ever say a word?"* Explain.

Next, explain that God wants His Church to be a model of His love, grace, and salvation for the world. Is this possible? Explain. If so, what is the most important way for the Church to demonstrate this?

Ask someone to read **John 17:15-23** and discuss:

- How can you tell that Jesus was praying for you in this prayer?
- What was His main prayer for you, me, and all His Church?
- What would it look like to live out our faith as Jesus prayed? How can you/we do this better?
- Does Jesus want us to live in peace with one another simply because it is nice, or is there a more eternal reason for our unity? Explain.

Ask someone to read **Philippians 2:1-11** and discuss:

- This passage is a recipe for relationships that showcase the love and life of Jesus. Discuss each ingredient, how you can live it out in your church relationships, and why the outcome would be attractive to an unchurched world around you.

STOP! Pray for God to make your church a light to your community. Ask God to protect your church from division and empower it with great power and love through reliance on the Holy Spirit and God's Word. Pray for the Lord to help you live out the gospel every day so that He is made known.

SING-ALONG For all ages, listen to this final worship song from Upperroom that recalls the beauty, mission, and gospel impact of the Church on the world. [The Church – UPPERROOM | Abbie Gamboa](#) or scan the QR code.



Sources Consulted / Suggested

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Additional Resources:

Baptism – *Creeds, Confessions, and Sacraments (3 of 3, “The Sacrament of Baptism”),* 2021. River Oaks Community Church YouTube/Playlists/Equipping Classes/Creeds, Confessions, and Sacraments, 3 of 3, or scan QR Code to the right.



Baptism EC

Baptism – Teaching by River Oaks' Pastor David on Infant (Paedo) and Profession of Faith (Credo), Baptism. River Oaks Web Page (Resources) www.riveroakschurch.org/resources/baptism

Communion – *Creeds, Confessions, and Sacraments (3 of 3, “The Sacrament of Baptism”),* 2021. River Oaks Community Church YouTube/Playlists/Equipping Classes/Creeds, Confessions, and Sacraments, 3 of 3, or scan QR Code to the right.



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