

# WHY CHURCH?

A Bible Study to help students connect with  
and commit to the local church

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## Introduction

In the neighborhood where I grew up not a lot of other kids and families went to church. That might have been because they thought my family went enough for everyone. We were *that* family. Every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night, every special activity; if the doors were open our family was there. I never had a choice about church. I remember one Sunday morning as a kid; I was on my bike on the far side of our neighborhood. It was about time to leave for church, and I just remember wishing “Maybe we won’t go today and I can just keep playing with all these heathen kids.” Of course, that didn’t happen. Like every Sunday morning in history we were there. To this day I can’t tell you what was on tv in the 80’s on Sunday and Wednesday nights, because we were always at church.

I didn’t always mind going to church. As a teenager I liked “youth group” and looked forward to spending time with my friends. I think I saw the value of getting Bible teaching and learning about worship. But often on Sunday nights, I wouldn’t notice many other teenagers and didn’t usually think “I feel sorry for those guys” who were at home watching whatever was on that I didn’t know existed or the Super Bowl. So after 18 years of more church attendance than any other family in history, I understand why a college student who for the first time in their life gets to decide what they do with their Sunday mornings would decide to move church attendance down the priority list. And if you grew up with marginal involvement in a church, then when it was time for you to get yourself out of bed, it’s no surprise when your decision to find a church in college becomes a no-decision. Add to this the busyness of studies, the draw of late night weekends, community life across campus (both Christian and not) and you have a recipe for little to no church involvement for many college students. And unsurprisingly that is exactly what we’ve seen across our culture.

Sometimes checking out on church is a conscious choice either to take a break from religious stuff or to replace local church membership with campus ministry involvement. Why not only hang out with people your age, whose lives are exactly like yours, instead of having to deal with people who don’t know the difference between Spotify and Snap Chat? Plus, I can get everything I would get at church from a podcast and my favorite worship album, right? Other times checking out is a decision on the first Sunday of college to sleep in, which leads to 3 Sundays of sleeping in, then 2 away football game road trips, a major paper due, a trip home, midterms, finals, and 4 years later you “accidentally” haven’t gone to church. All of these situations are problems. It’s a problem that young people take a break from church, are only causally involved, or even replace church with campus ministry opportunities.

I hope you hear this as someone who is sensitive to your point of view. I know how easy it is to check out on the church. But when college students are not actively involved in the local church it hurts students, the local church, and God’s mission. No one wins, everyone loses. Maybe that’s why the writer of Hebrews

warns his readers in 10:24-25 “And let us consider how to stir 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.” The Bible speaks to this issue; therefore, this study is designed for you to explore what the Bible says about gathering with and taking part in a local body of believers near you. It’s my attempt to stir you to good works, especially not to neglect gathering with the people of God. This study simply answers the question “Why church?” My prayer is that through this study and the *Why Church* movement, many students will take a step forward to be more involved with the local body, no matter what their commitment level to the church is now; from no or causal attendance to regular attendance to active involvement to leadership and more. Why church? Let’s see what the Word says.

### **A note on how to use this guide**

This study can be used in several ways. An individual can simply read through the study. A group of individuals can read through the study separately and then come together to talk through the discussion questions provided in each chapter. A small group leader can use this material to guide their group through the passages in each section and use the discussion questions as a discussion guide. Your group could even use this material as a guide for large group time or as a follow up to large group teaching on the church.

However you use it, have your Bible out as the study explains, illustrates, and applies the passage in each section. Answer the discussion questions or follow the instructions in bold.

If your group doesn't want a four session study, you can either pick the section you think is most effective, or I would suggest using session 4. Session 4 refers back to several things in the previous sessions, but even if you have not been through them, you can use that session as a good overview to answer the question, Why Church?.

**Why Church?**  
**Session 1: The Body**  
**1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

Key Point

Identifying God's design for the church and how that effects our involvement in the local church.

Before we ask the question, "Why church?" it might be helpful to ask, "What is the church?" In this first session we'll look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 which answers both of these questions. It tells us what the church is, and begins to help us understand why it is so important. Throughout this passage we can identify some lies about church and the corresponding truth that responds to each.

**Discussion Question: What is the church? How would you define it?**

Lie #1: The church is a building, a service, or an organization.

Ask most people about church and they'll give you a **location**. "I'm going to church" means I'll be at a particular address. We identify buildings with church, at least in a lot of traditionally Christian places where churches own their buildings. But when the New Testament talks about the church it's not describing location, it's not a building.

Many people get that the church isn't about location, especially when they don't meet in their own building. But often they replace the idea of the church as building with the idea that church is a **worship service**. Instead of going to church, we're "having church." Now it's about a program or a performance. This falls short of the New Testament definition as well.

And finally, the church is often compared to civic **organizations or clubs** based on interests. Just as you have groups that gather based on common interests—from biking, to science fiction, to the *Lawrence Welk Show* (google it)—you have people who gather based on an interest in the Bible, Jesus, or religion. Or as you have groups like the Rotary Club which work to improve communities, that's what churches do with a religious twist. Churches are another community group where people get together for a common interest or cause. Though maybe moving in the right direction, this still falls short of how the New Testament defines the church.

**Discussion Question: Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. How does Paul describe the church in this passage?**

The Truth: The Church is a unified gathering of Christ followers.

Paul describes a gathering or people in terms of a body. Notice how in verse 13 he says “*we were all* baptized into one body” and “*all* were made to drink one Spirit” (emphasis mine). He’s not describing a building or program, but people who make up the body of Christ. With this reality in mind Mark Dever gives this definition “The church is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world.”<sup>i</sup> People, not buildings, programs, or organizational structures, define the church. It is people who believe in and are changed by Christ and now gather together to worship and make Him known in the world. These people are described as a body, a unified body. They are unified by their faith in Christ, not common interest, ethnicity, or stage of life. Paul will develop how their mission to make Christ known unifies them in the rest of chapter 12. The church is gathered people with a common faith and mission.

**Discussion Question: How does your description of the church based on 1 Corinthians 12 and Dever’s definition of the church effect the question “Why church?”**

With this definition and 1 Corinthians 12 in mind, we can already see some answers to “Why church?” It’s easy to avoid a building, a program, or a social club. But that’s not what we are. We are a unified body and this has profound implications that Paul deals with in the rest of chapter 12 as he expands what it means to be the body for each of us.

One quick side note: Some of you may ask the question here “What about the Universal Church?” Is Paul describing the world-wide church and if so how does that change what we’re talking about? If that’s your question consider two things. One, Paul usually has a local gathered group in mind when he’s talking about church. He identifies which church he’s talking about; that is, which local gathering of believers. Look at Romans 16:3-5. Paul gives the instruction to greet his fellow workers Prisca and Aquilla and then describes how “all the churches of the Gentiles” are thankful for them; that is, all the gatherings of Gentiles in local bodies. Then Paul says to also greet “the church in their house.” Paul is talking about local gatherings of people, Gentile gatherings across Asia Minor and the one in Prisca and Aquilla’s house. This is consistent throughout his letters as he identifies church as local gatherings in 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, and more. When Paul is talking “church” he seems to have in mind a group of people actually gathered together, not a hypothetical idea of all believers in all places and all times waiting to be gathered in heaven.

Second, even if, at times, Paul is describing the world-wide church, that should not effect our involvement in the local gathering of believers. The universal gathering of believers is made up of local gatherings. You cannot be a part of world-wide body if you are not in the local body. That’s like saying “I’m a citizen of the world.” That may be a great idea, but there’s no passport for that citizenship, so good luck seeing this world you embrace. In order to travel the world, you need a

passport from a particular country. In order to get a passport from a particular country you need a birth certificate from a certain state, county, and city. They build on each other from local to global. You can't skip the local to get to the global. Does the church transcend time and place to encompass all of history around the world? Yes, but that doesn't mean that the universal church replaces local gatherings of believers. Without the local gatherings there is no universal. If you're not convinced, keep reading.

Lie #2: I'm not needed.

As long as our understanding of the church is about buildings, programs, and organizational structures, we could say that we are not needed in the church. We may need someone to preach and lead music. Someone has to run sound and media, maybe we need some greeters. But if I'm just there to sit in the seats and enjoy the program how much does it matter if I'm there or not? This attitude is too common among students. They think their attendance only affects them, because they think they don't contribute anything to the gathering of God's people. But when we consider that we are body (a gathering) made up of parts (individuals) that fulfill its purpose (worship and mission) then every part is necessary.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-20.**

Paul gives us the example of all the different parts of the body thinking they aren't necessary. That seems silly, and that's exactly the point.

**Discussion Question: What is Paul's point in showing this conversation between body parts?**

The Truth: The Body is a diversity of gifts.

We are thankful that our bodies have feet and hands, eyes, ears, and noses, etc. The diversity of body parts is necessary for a healthy functioning body. For the church that means you can't say "I'm not necessary." We all have a function, we all have roles. And when you decided that your role isn't necessary we are an amputated church.

If the church is going to be more than a Sunday morning performance, we need you, all of you. When you stay home, you hurt us. When you aren't actively involved, we don't have all the pieces. God doesn't give all functions to one body part, nor does he give all the gifts necessary in the church to one person. Paul is clear in this conversation between body parts and in 12:7-10 and 12:27-30 that no one person has everything necessary to be the body of Christ and to carry out its mission.<sup>ii</sup>

Can you learn a lot by listening to a podcast? Can you worship listening to your favorite band online? Can the church down the street put on a service without you there? Yes, Yes, and maybe. But no local church can be a fully functioning body



while you sit at home. God gives diverse gifts to each believer and all are necessary. And about that ‘maybe’; some of you have gifts that churches desperately need for what happens each week. You may attend a church where they seem to have all the resources they need. That may not be as true as you think it is. And there are plenty of churches around every campus in America that could use some help. They may not have the great College Ministry, they may not have any college students. But they may really need some. They may really need someone who can work with children or youth, lead in music, organize neighborhood outreach, or set up chairs. Those are great opportunities to be the body. If you think you’re not necessary, you either have a wrong idea of what the Church is, or you’re needed in another local gathering.

**Discussion Question: How are you using your gifts and fulfilling your role in a local body right now? If you’re not, how can you?**

Lie #3: You’re not needed.

If some people think they are not necessary, some people have no trouble believing that they are integral to the life of the church. These however, may mistakenly think that they don’t need others in being the church and carrying out its mission. That’s the attitude that Paul deals with next.

**Discussion: Read 12:21-26. Sum up the discussion of the body parts here.**

Too often we have a tendency to prioritize certain gifts, personalities, or abilities as the ones we really need for church to happen and others we can do without. But just as it would be silly for an ear to say to an eye, “Since I’m not an eye, I’m not needed in the body” like in 12:16, it’s also silly for an eye to say to a hand “I don’t need you” like in 12:21. Eyes can’t do everything. They need the other parts to be a complete body.

The Truth: The Body parts are dependent on each other.

God made us dependent on one another. That’s one reason he didn’t give all the gifts or roles to one person. In fact, Paul says that the parts that seem least important are often the most important. To step into another realm of illustration think of a football team. On a football team there are some really different looking people with very different roles; compare a punter to a defensive lineman. Who are the most important players on a football team? Or at least, who are the most recognizable? Most people wouldn’t say a kicker. Fewer people would say a holder (usually a back-up quarterback or the punter). And even fewer people would say the long-snapper, a position for which few people could even name a person that plays it. These would not be the most recognizable, and few people would say the most important players on the team. But when the game comes down to a last second field goal, these are the three most important players. What seems insignificant turns out to be indispensable.

Paul says the same is true for the life of the church. If we point at people and think “we can do without him,” we actually can’t; or look at others and say “she’s not that important here,” she actually is. God has given people gifting, experiences, and backgrounds that we need in the church that may not seem obvious at first. Just think of the mission of the church, which is the context for all Paul is discussing here. Before and after his explanation of the body, he highlights the use of spiritual gifts; that is, all the ways God equips people to build up the church and extend its mission. When we think of the church’s mission, most of us see the importance of pastors on Sunday morning. But let’s be honest, as a pastor I can see that if the mission of the church was just up to the pastor, most often it would be a miserable failure. Of course we need good leadership; Paul says so in 12:28. But that’s not all we need. Pastors may have gifts and roles that place them in the spotlight, but the real mission of the church rarely happens in the spotlight. We don’t just need a bunch of pastors, we need some junior high girls who play in the band to reach other junior high girls who play in the band. We need high school guys who play football to reach other high school guys who play football. We need college ladies who love kids and can reach out to apartment complexes with lots of kids, or college guys in the Engineering Department who can reach out to International Students in their classes. We need twenty-something guys who don’t mind lifting heavy things who can fill an apartment with furniture for families of international refugees. I can do some things but it’s been a long time since I touched a saxophone, I’m out of shape, I’m not great with kids, my math stinks, and I would probably hurt myself trying to lift too much furniture. If my church is going to do these things, and we should, then we don’t need any more preachers. In fact, I’m dependent on you for these things to get done. I need you and your gifting, We need each other.

**Discussion Question: How can you encourage someone else to start using their gifting, which maybe they or others are overlooking right now, to help the church or carry out its mission?**

Lie #4: The Church isn’t necessary

If you’re struggling with church involvement, this is probably the lie you believe. With all the options available for community, preaching, music and more, I don’t need to gather with God’s people. I think it’s clear from what we’ve seen in 1 Corinthians 12 already that this argument can’t stand. But let me give one more clear reason why this is wrong.

The Truth: The Church is divinely arranged.

God designed the church this way. Twice Paul says this explicitly. Look at 12:18 “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” And then in the second half of 12:24 he says, “But God has so composed the body.” This is God’s design to give a diversity of gifts and interdependence in a unified body called the church. And He knows what He’s doing. I’m terrible with tools and

building things, but God is not. He has designed the church by giving roles and abilities where he sees fit. He has determined all the parts, and He didn't forget any or give some to the wrong people. If it were a symphony He has all the right notes in all the right places, and has assigned all the parts to all the right instruments. The only question is whether all the instrumentalists will show up. If you have decided that the local body of believers does not need you, then you are saying to God that His design is wrong. Or worse, you're saying that you have come up with something better.

### **Why Church?**

Because by God's design you have been gifted and given a role in carrying out the mission of the church. When you stay home or casually attend, we are an amputated church. When you tell others we don't really need them, we are an amputated church. We're not a building, a performance, or a hobby that you can use or not at your leisure. The church is a unified body, which God designed with a diversity of gifts and a dependence on each other. In short, we can't do it without you; not because you're more important than someone else, but because that's how God designed it.

**Discussion Question: What attitude or action can I change right now to better reflect God's design for the church?**

#### **Further Discussion:**

1. So what do you say to someone who says "I don't need to go to church I can just watch it on tv or online"?
2. How do you think local churches in your area would be different if college students took their roles and spiritual gifting seriously?
3. Which of the four lies mentioned here about church are you more likely to believe?

**Why Church?**  
**Session 2: The Bride**  
**Ephesians 5:22-33**

Key Point

Recognizing Jesus' affection for the Church and how that changes our attitude toward the local church.

One of the best parts of working with college students is getting to be a part of weddings. My wife and I love the opportunity to prepare students for marriage and I love being a part of wedding ceremonies. They are sacred, special, and beautiful. Always one of the best moments of the ceremony is right after all the family has been seated, the wedding party members are in their places, a groom is waiting at the altar and there is a slight pause. Suddenly there's a change in the music, the doors in the back of the room open and out steps the bride. Everyone rises to their feet, they watch this lady in her new white dress walk slowly down the aisle. At the altar the groom is either smiling like a fool or crying like a baby as he watches his bride walk toward him. It's beautiful. I love it every single time I get to see it. Maybe that's because I remember watching my bride walk down the aisle (I was the smiling like a fool kind of groom). No matter the reason, it's just beautiful and sacred, every single time. No matter how much she spent on the dress, no matter the venue, whether Pinterest abounds or it's a simple décor, there is something special about seeing a bride walk down the aisle to her groom.

What does that have to do with why we should go to church? Quite a bit. One of the places we see most clearly Jesus' attitude about the church is in a passage about husbands and wives. In fact, the church is identified as the bride. As we answer the question, "Why church?" what we'll see here is that Jesus' attitude and affections for the church should make us passionate about the church as well.

**Read Ephesians 5:25-33**

At the end of Ephesians, Paul deals with how the gospel affects various relationships in the home. He talks to wives and then husbands, children then parents, slaves then masters. Of all the groups, he gives the most instruction to husbands. One possible reason for this is that we're idiots and need all the help we can get. But probably more likely is because husbands find their example in Christ, so there's a lot to point out about how a husband treats his wife based on the life of Christ. The ultimate example for marriage is not our parents, grandparents, or the sweet couple you know. All of those are great but the ultimate example of marriage is the relationship between Christ and the church. So in Ephesians 5 we see two (related) things clearly; what gospel centered marriage looks like, and Jesus relationship with the church. Since this study is not on marriage but the church, we'll focus on the second.

**Discussion: Look at Jesus' example for husbands in this passage and come up with a list of all the things that Paul says Jesus does to or for the church.**

Here's my list:

Jesus loves the church (5:25a).

That's the first thing Paul says in verse 25. Husbands get their example of love for their wives from Jesus' love for the church. This is not some fleeting emotion or some peripheral relationship; this is a significant relationship for Jesus. As a follower of Christ I'm supposed to love what He loves.; and He loves His bride, the church. If we didn't hear anything else about Jesus and the church, this should be enough for us to realize the great importance of the church. But Paul doesn't stop there.

Jesus dies for the church (5:25b).

If we are confused on what love looks like (and many of us are), Paul makes it clear what kind of love Jesus has for His church. It is sacrificial love. It is love that pays the ultimate price for the benefit of the beloved. Jesus sacrifices himself for his bride in order to save her. In 5:23 Paul calls Jesus the church's savior. That's why He dies for her. This love is not the Taylor Swift love-hate, get together-break up, "this is great"- "this is terrible" roller coaster we've been hearing on the radio for the last ten years. It's not fleeting emotions and momentary infatuation that change with the seasons. If the church's friends got together to talk about her relationship with Jesus no one would say, "He's not that into you" or, "Are you sure about him?" They would say, "Wow, no doubt he loves you. Look at how he sacrificed himself for you." Jesus leaves no questions about his love and commitment to the church. The cross will forever be the ultimate example of all love. Certainly those who have experienced the salvation Christ provides through His death, know the depth of his love.

Jesus purifies the church (5:26-27)

Paul gives another description of Jesus' saving the church. He gives the reason why Jesus "gave himself up." I love the imagery of 5:26-27 of Jesus making his bride clean and beautiful. He washed her with the gospel to make her clean. He presents her to himself without any impurities. This is the first and only time in history a bride needed a groom to make her beautiful for her wedding day.

Every bride I've ever known wanted to look her best on her wedding day. They all want to be "without blemish." Some often fret if they have to deal with blemishes on the big day. But none of them asked their groom for help with that. On the day I got married, my wife didn't ask for my help to pick out a dress, put on her make up, fix her hair, any of that. I couldn't have made her more beautiful if I wanted to, she did just fine on her own. My job was to put on a tuxedo that made me

blend into the background and repeat after the preacher when he told me too. Brides want to look beautiful and not a groom on earth could do anything but get in the way of that if they tried. But for Jesus and his bride, she is not beautiful on her own. She needs a savior, and he, through his blood on the cross, washes away her impurities and makes her beautiful for their wedding. She is stunning because he made her that way.

Jesus provides for the church (5:28-30).

Paul moves on to the example of taking care of your body. Men provide for their bodies. When they are hungry, they eat; when they are dirty, they take a shower (...sometimes, ...hopefully). So Paul tells husbands to take care of their wives in the same way. They are to nourish and cherish; that is, take care of your wives (5:29). And then we're reminded again that that's what Jesus does for the church "just as Christ does the church." He provides what we need. What we needed most was salvation, and he has provided that, but he continues to provide what the church needs. He takes care of us like a good husband should.

Jesus knows the church intimately (5:31-33).

Like most passages in the New Testament on marriage, the writer quotes Genesis 2:24. Paul quotes Genesis to show that marriage involves a "one-flesh union." The one-flesh union isn't just physical intimacy, but it certainly includes it. Marriage is the most intimate of relationships, including physically. Husbands and wives know each other in ways that no one else does, or should. There are exclusive parts to their relationship. They see each other, relate to each other, talk to each other, and encounter each other in ways that they share with no one else. I always tell couples that marriage isn't the next step in their relationship; it is a whole new kind of relationship. That is in part because of the exclusive intimacy they will share. And Paul is clear that this kind of intimacy describes Jesus' relationship with the church. This does not mean that Jesus and the church are physically intimate. It does mean that the relationship of Jesus and the church is reflected in the most intimate relationship that humans have on earth. Jesus isn't friends with the church. He isn't a coworker of the church. He isn't a prom date, or a weekend fling. He is intimately connected to the church as the example of the most intimate relationship people experience with each other.

**Discussion Question: Review the list. If this is Jesus' relationship with the church, what does that mean for our view of and relationship to the church?**

If you want to have any kind of relationship with me that goes beyond mere acquaintance, there are a lot of things on which we don't have to agree. I believe that pineapple on pizza is an abomination, and I am pretty sure the Bible says so. I believe that as of Summer 2015, only 3 Star Wars movies actually exist. As a Saint's fan I believe the Atlanta Falcons are the worst sports franchise in the world. But to be my friend we could disagree on all these and that's no big deal (except maybe the

Falcon's one?). What is a big deal is if you agree with me on all these things and more, but you are antagonistic to my wife. If you want to be my friend, how you view and treat my wife is a big deal. In fact, it is a deal breaker. Trying to be my friend while mistreating my bride will never work. But that's exactly what some people try to do with Jesus and his bride.

Some people who claim to really love Jesus are apathetic or even antagonistic to the church. But if Jesus treats his bride in the ways we have described, we cannot stand for this because he certainly won't. To disagree with Jesus on any issue is a big deal. To disagree with Jesus on our understanding and support of the church is a really big deal. This is not a peripheral issue for Jesus. It's not pizza toppings, movies, and sports teams. It's a relationship that provides the example for the most important and intimate relationships we have on earth. It is a relationship for which he suffered dearly. How could we possibly dismiss the church when it is so dear to Jesus? But that is what we do when we avoid, replace, or demean the church.

### **Why Church?**

Because it is so important to Jesus and therefore it should be a non-negotiable for us. Jesus demonstrates ultimate love, sacrifice, salvation, provision, and intimacy for the church. We cannot possibly claim to love Jesus while not loving something he so clearly loves.

#### **Further Discussion:**

1. Our first response to what we see in Ephesians is to realize Jesus love for us. We are invited to be the church and experience the love and salvation he has for us. Which of these things that Jesus does for the church stands out to you right now?
2. Our second response is to emulate Jesus love for the church. What are some ways that we can show that we love the gathered body of Christ?

**Why Church**  
**Session 3: The Family**  
**Titus 2:1-8**

Key Point

Understand the importance (especially for young believers) of God design of diversity within the Church.

It's different when it's family. No matter the circumstance, no matter the issue, it's just different when it involves family. Maybe "different" means complicated, maybe "different" means easier. Whatever it means, we know that your relationship with your family is not the same as your relationship with, well...anyone else. The permanence and intimacy of family is a good thing. Some of you know that immediately. But others of you need to be reminded of that. At this stage of life you are redefining the boundaries with your parents, and spending much more time away from them than ever before. They begin to have less and less influence on your decisions. Plus, your relationships with friends are often the most important thing in your life. But high school and college are small windows of life where perhaps your most important relationships (at least your perceived most important relationships) are not your family. But friendships change. Sometimes because we change locations, sometimes because our stage of life changes, sometimes we just grow apart. But family (except in rare cases) doesn't change. Whom you hang out with on the weekends probably looks different than when you were 15. But whom you spend Christmas with probably hasn't. The only exception proves the rule. If you've married and your family has expanded by a spouse and in-laws, then whom you spend Christmas with has changed. But it's because family has expanded. It's different with family.

**Discussion Question: The Bible affirms that it's different with family. It's all over the New Testament. Can you identify some passages where the Bible talks about believers as a family?**

Here's a quick (and incomplete) survey. Paul shows in Ephesians 1:5 and Galatians 4:4-6 that we have been adopted into God's family. Paul tells the Ephesians that they are no longer to be divided by Jew and Gentile ethnic distinctions since there are both "members of the household of God" (2:19); that is, one family. In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul tells us to relate to different age groups as fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. Paul's one message in the short letter to Philemon is that it's different with family. Now that Philemon's runaway slave is returning to him as a brother in Christ (vs. 15-16), Philemon should treat him differently than he could legally. In 1 John, we see major themes of the Fatherhood of God (3:1), and the brotherhood of believers. In fact, John uses love for our fellow family members in Christ as a proof for who are true believers in 2:9-11, 3:14, 4:11, and 4:20.



Throughout the New Testament we are told that as believers we are a family and that means we relate to each other differently. Our question here is “Why Church?” What we’ll do in this session is see how the church as a family impacts why we need the local body of believers.

**Discussion Question: What are some needs or benefits you can already identify as you think about the church as family?**

Below you will find several headings which I think are reasons why the church as a family helps us understand our need for a Biblical view of church.

Intergenerational Teaching and Example

Probably the thing I love most about the local church, and in particular about my local church is that it is intergenerational. I have visited newborns in the hospital and been to a 100 year-old’s birthday party. We have weddings for 20-something’s and anniversary parties for those celebrating as many as 7 decades of marriage. From newborns to ninety-year olds with every generation and stage of life in-between, we’ve got it. And unless you are in a local church somewhere, you probably don’t have regular access to that many generations and stages of life each week. As great as campus ministry or other college gatherings are for students, a major hindrance is that almost exclusively those in your same stage of life surround you. This may be convenient, but it is also incredibly limiting.

By God’s design in the church, you get to see and benefit from the wisdom of multiple generations. This was true for Old Testament Israel, where God commands his people to pass on their wisdom from one generation to another, for example in Deuteronomy 6:20-25 or Proverbs 6:20-23. Paul then urges something similar in the church in Titus 2.

**Discussion: Look at Titus 2:1-8 and describe how the generations benefit from each other in the church.**

Paul has already instructed Titus to appoint “elders” in 1:5. Of course this doesn’t just mean “old men” but he does describe someone who is mature in their faith and at a more mature stage of life, married with children. So we see one generation leading both peers and those at an earlier stage of life. Now in Titus 2:1-8 we see what Titus should teach each generation of people. So we expect in our local churches to have older men, older women, younger men, and younger women. In addition, we expect the older generations to teach and set examples for the younger generations. In particular we see that older women are to “teach what is good” and “train the young women” (2:3-4). Both by example and in explicit teaching they train the next generation. I think that is implicit in the instructions to the older men as well. The older men are told to be self-controlled, then the younger men are told to do the same. Young men should have an example of how to

live in older men. Paul then tells Titus to do this explicitly as “a model of good works, and in your teaching...” (2:7). That is, elders, both official leaders and in the example of older generations, provide the model and teaching for younger generations.

To apply this to the life of a student today, Paul probably didn’t mean for 21 year-olds to train and lead 18 year-olds. Don’t get me wrong, 21 year-olds should be leading 18 year-olds, setting an example, teaching them what they know. Life changes a lot from the beginning to the end of college and that wisdom and spiritual growth should be passed on. Nor do I think that being old makes you mature in the faith. In addition, young men often teach older men. Paul instructs Timothy to do just that in 1 Timothy 4:11-16. But he also reminds Timothy to deal with older men differently than his peers (1 Timothy 5:1). With all that said though, when Paul shows the example of teaching from old to young in Titus 2, I think Paul has a wider gap in mind here than Seniors to Freshmen. He emphasizes the benefits of truly intergenerational example and teaching.

Take an issue like marriage as an example, which Paul uses in Titus 2. If your world is nothing but students, you probably know a lot of people who hope for, talk about, prepare for, or even recently started married life. But in the context of a local body you have the benefit of seeing and learning about marriage not just when it starts, but at the various stages that make up “until death do us part.” The first couple years of marriage are exciting and difficult. But when you have access to living examples who have faced the difficulty and endured, who started their families, who have dealt with difficult issues and grown closer together, who have finally learned how to forgive quickly, who navigated the changes that come with kids going to school or kids leaving the house, who held onto each other through financial crisis or job changes and relocation, all the way to saying goodbye when a spouse dies; you can better prepare and better practice the journey of marriage. Who do you want to teach you about any given book? Would you rather someone who has read the introduction, or someone who read the whole thing? We would be wise to learn from those who are generations ahead of us. Again, I don’t think age is an automatic indicator that you are a great example in marriage or any other issue, but a gift from God in the local church is the experience of those who have faithfully applied God’s word to their lives for decades who now pass on that wisdom to others.

**Discussion Question: Can you think of a time when you have benefited from the teaching and wisdom of an older generation?**

#### Accountability

I can imagine a push back from several students who would rather just be around other students, since other generations may not understand all the issues you face. There’s certainly some truth to that. At least once a year we do a breakfast on a Sunday morning with College Students with one of our oldest Sunday School

departments. One of my favorite discussion starters is “How much do you or did you pay in tuition?” It’s clear from the answers that a lot has changed over the years. But having regular contact with someone who isn’t in the same day to day world as you is not all bad. Paul just showed us in Titus 2 that there are things we learn from other generations. We can apply some of those benefits to the area of accountability.

One of the benefits in a diverse local body is that every individual and perhaps every generation or culture has blind spots. We often see the world differently based on our context, including age and heritage. I was reminded of this recently as I led a discussion of David Platt’s book *Counter Culture* in a group that included both college students and retirees. As we discussed hot topics in the culture I had to say, “Don’t assume that everyone around your table sees this issue exactly the way you do” because it was clear that wasn’t the case. And that’s not a bad thing. One major reason you need other believers is for them to speak truth into your life in areas that you don’t see, and this alone should get you into church. Such accountability can be your roommate, but those who live in the same context as you, often have the same blind spots. We don’t want the “blind leading the blind.” You need the benefit of people who have dealt with many issues and aren’t blinded by a limited context.

For example, if I asked a room full of twenty-something’s if it is permissible to use someone else’s login information to watch programming regularly on Netflix, Hulu Plus, Watch ESPN, or other online subscriptions, based on my experience I would get a lot of “yes” answers. If I asked that same question to a room of sixty-something’s I don’t think the answer would be the same. I’m convinced we should apply Ephesians 4:28 to this issue; that is, “Quit being lazy and come up with your own \$7 a month instead of using your roommate’s uncle’s friend’s (whom you have never met) Netflix login to watch *Parks and Recreation*.” Before we get sidetracked by the issue, I only say this to point out that often, especially in what we like to label “grey areas,” we need an outside perspective to help us apply the Scripture faithfully to our lives.

That is a role of the local church. I tell students when they become members of our church that they are giving us permission to get into their business. It’s our job to see areas of struggle or misunderstanding that they don’t, and help them see and apply God’s Word to those struggles. We all need that. So if the role of the church is to help us watch our lives and avoid pitfalls, how broad a perspective do you want? Do you want to follow the guy right in front of you who’s navigating the same trail you are, or do you want someone up ahead of you, who can see where you are as you are about to take a wrong turn? We need the accountability of those who see things from a different perspective based on a lifetime of experience applying God’s word to their lives.

In addition, not only do multiple contexts and generations allow the church to see your life clearer than you can, they also can help you deal with sin in ways

that your contemporaries often cannot. Too often accountability is not accountability at all when it's a group of people all at the same level of maturity, all struggling with the same sins. Heath Lambert talks about this in his book on dealing with pornography, *Finally Free*. In his chapter on accountability, one of his principles is that "Effective Accountability Involves Someone with Maturity."<sup>iii</sup> Lambert describes what too many of us have experienced in "accountability" when everyone in the group just confesses all the same failures for the week. Lambert points out in this context that,

No one in the group has the spiritual stability to counterbalance their communal confusion. None of these guys have the proven wisdom to correct their collective waywardness. No one who has experienced lasting victory is there to guide the group out of long-standing defeat. You must have someone providing leadership in your accountability group who is more advanced in holiness than the others.<sup>iv</sup>

Especially with the issue of pornography, it is imperative to have someone outside of the college context. Statistics and experience tell me that the vast majority of college men are looking at porn. So where do we go to find the victory and maturity to deal with it? It has to be another context, and God provides that in the church. Are older men looking at porn? Regrettably yes, but apparently not on the scale of young men. And many older men have dealt with this issue in ways that lead to lasting victory and can help you work through it as well. This is true whether the issue is pornography, body image, greed, or gossip. We need some maturity in our lives, not just to help us see our issues, but move past them. And God has given us the local body of believers, made up of different ages and contexts to do so.

**Discussion Question: How has the diversity we discussed here changed your view on accountability? What could accountability look like for you now?**

#### Care and Concern

Of course a great benefit to family is the way they care about and for us. This is God's design for the church. Earlier in this study we looked at that great passage on the church in 1 Corinthians 12 about the Body of Christ. That passage ends by saying "But God has so composed the body, ...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored all rejoice together" (12:24-26). The church cares about each other, hurts together, and celebrates together. During my wedding ceremony, one of the few things I remember the pastor saying was that in marriage sorrows are divided and joys are doubled. Because we carry burdens as a couple, now they are half the weight. Because we share the joys, they are twice as sweet. That is what Paul says life in the church is like. As a family we divide burdens and multiply joys.

The care and concern of a church is particularly helpful when it's intergenerational (like we talked about above). I tell students in our church that whatever they are facing, whatever difficulty will come their way in college, someone in our church has already been through it. Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that when we go through difficulty part of the reason is to help others who will face similar situations. So when a student gets an unsurprising diagnosis, or the unexpected news from home, or the unwanted issue with school, in the church there are those who have already faced those exact issues, learned to trust God through them, and learned about his faithfulness in them. Now those people can listen empathetically and pass on the comfort and wisdom they received.

This is the beauty of God's design in the church. We don't face things alone. We're not the first to face this struggle. God gives us his people to help us through. But that doesn't happen when we don't know you and what you're going through. If you still think a podcast and a worship song is a fit substitute for gathering with God's people, I would point out that a podcast doesn't care when your mom dies. A worship song can't encourage you when you fail a big test. But God's people can. And when you are regularly gathering together with God's people, they can help you in difficult times, and celebrate with you in good times. That's what family does.

**Discussion Question: Can you share an experience where someone in the church took care of you in a difficult situation?**

### **Why Church?**

Because as the family of God we benefit from varying generations, life stages and backgrounds. We get the benefit of those who are ahead of us on the journey and the lessons they've learned applying God's Word to their lives. We contribute fresh perspective to generations who may have fallen into unhelpful patterns. We have help in seeing blind spots in our personal lives and generational habits. We have a family that cares for us, and we care for them.

#### **Further discussion:**

1. We focused on Titus 2 and the benefits of diverse generations in the church. According to Ephesians 2:11-22 (mentioned in the quick survey) we also see varying backgrounds of heritage in the church. How do you think the benefits mentioned in this session would be different if we focused on heritage or ethnicity instead of age and life stage?
2. What does the intergenerational mix look like in your life? How do you see various ages and backgrounds interacting at your church (or campus ministry)?
3. Can you think of some changes for you or your church to better interact with varying ages?
4. Based on this session what would you say to someone who says that they just need a campus ministry for their spiritual health?

**Why Church?**  
**Session 4: So now what?**  
**Ephesians 4:1-16**

Key Point

Because of all we have discussed about God's plan for the church we must find and invest in a local church that reflects God's design.

Some classes you take because they are required. You won't ever need them again and as a result you probably won't remember anything you "learned" in them. Introduction to Sociology was that for me. I have a distinct memory of being in the classroom at least one time, but I couldn't tell you a single thing I learned there. But other classes you have to learn, remember, and put into practice. If you are a Civil Engineer, I hope you remember all the math, physics, and engineering that go into building a sturdy bridge. If you're a medical student, I hope you remember the difference between my heart and pancreas and how to treat each. This study has been an attempt to show you what the Bible says about the local church, and I hope that it is not a "sit through it and move on" study; rather, it is something that we learn, remember, and put into practice right away.

My hope has been to let the Scripture change your attitude about and involvement with the local church. But what now? How do I choose a church? What's a good next step to put into practice what the Scripture says? Let's close by answering these questions, looking at one more passage that sums it all up.

**Read Ephesians 4:1-16.**

Ephesians 1-3 has essentially been Paul explaining the gospel. Paul praises God for the gospel (1:3-14), prays that the Ephesians will understand it (1:15-23), explains it (2:1-22), takes a moment to show how significant this message is (3:1-13), then prays again that the Ephesians understand it and experience the gospel's fullness (3:14-21). When we get to chapter 4, Paul begins to show how we live out the gospel. He starts in verse 1 by telling us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." This calling is salvation, which has been his only subject in Ephesians. And he tells us to walk worthily, that is live in accordance with the gospel. The gospel changes how we live. He'll say that over and over again in chapters 4 & 5 using the term *walk* (4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:15). The first area in which he talks about gospel change is within the church. Even though he never uses the term "church" it's clear from the context this is what he has in mind (see especially 4:11-12 & 16).

In this passage I see three descriptions of a healthy church; one that helps people "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1).

## 1. United in Faith. 4:2-6

**Discussion Question: Describe how you see unity in verses 2-6. What does Paul say unites us? How is what Paul says unites us different that what we typically think unites us with others?**

Immediately Paul goes into characteristics of people that are unified. The characteristics listed in 4:2 are Christ-like, but they also describe people who get along. Humble, gentle, patient, and loving people get along easily; that is, they are easily united. Think of the opposites. Proud, harsh, angry, mean people will struggle in unity. Then Paul sums up these characteristics with the goal of unity in verse 3. Then in verse 4-6 we see unity and agreement as a major theme with all the “one’s” listed. Paul lists seven areas of absolute agreement, seven things that unite us.

We need to note that all these areas of agreement center on what we believe. We are not just united. Lots of groups can be united for various of reasons. In the church we are united by what we believe: we are one body based on one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father. All of these can be summaries of the content of our faith. We are absolutely united by what we believe, by the gospel that Paul has been explaining for three chapters.

Subtly however, we often look for unity in our churches based on other things, from affinity groups, to worship style, to socioeconomic status & age or stage of life. What we see in Ephesians 4 is that what binds us is our faith, and that binds us together despite any other differences. The church should demonstrate that the gospel binds us together with people with whom we would not otherwise associate. It’s a place for all races, all socioeconomic statuses, all shapes & sizes; a place where all the dividing lines of the world are blurred. Paul deals with that explicitly in Ephesians 2:11-22 as he describes how Jews and Gentiles are both reconciled to God (2:16), fellow citizens and members of the same household (2:19). Jesus unites to seemingly opposite groups. Paul alludes back to that here by showing the unity of our faith.

Think of it this way. As a New Orleans Saint’s fan I am required to not only love the Saints, but to hate the Atlanta Falcons, and the feeling is reciprocated by Falcon’s fans. They are NFC South rivals, and the rivalry is alive and well. So if you’re in New Orleans, you hate the Falcons & love the Saints. If you’re in Atlanta you hate the Saints and love the Falcons. The rivalry defines you in these places. But imagine you’re right in-between New Orleans and Atlanta, say in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Things are different there. In Tuscaloosa the love-hate divide won’t be as distinct. In fact, I imagine there are both Saints’ and Falcons’ fans in Tuscaloosa and they get along just fine. Why? Because in Tuscaloosa you are not defined by whom you cheer for on Sunday, you are defined by whom you cheer for on Saturday. What happens when Alabama plays on Saturday unites in a way that changes the dividing lines of who plays on Sunday.

The same should be true in the church. You may not naturally hang out with people in fraternities and sororities, or maybe that's all you do. You may not thrive in intramurals and avoid that crowd, or that may be your place. Across the campus you can see all the dividing lines of preference and identity. The gospel takes people from all those places and unites them in ways that are more powerful than whatever would divide. Further, it takes not only college students, but all ages and backgrounds like white-collar, blue-collar, children, retirees, African Americans, Hispanics, Caucasians, musicians, jocks, artists, good ole boys, and city folk and unites them together, because what defines all these groups is more powerful than anything else that divides them. We all believe in the same God, have experienced the same gospel, and have the same purpose in spreading that gospel.

So what do you do now? How do you choose a church? Choose a church where you can be united in faith. You need a place to belong. You need a community. And you need a community that may look different than every other community around you. As we discovered in session 3, you need different ages, and we could add different races, interests, and more. Find a place defined by the gospel and become a part of that community. Live life with those people demonstrating that what unites you is more important than anything that could divide you. In other words, don't just pick a "cool" church that draws everyone that looks and thinks like you. Maybe you end up at that church, but it shouldn't be because you are united to that place based on a style, but by what you believe and what they teach.

There's also a warning here to choose a church that teaches the gospel. Let's not assume that every church available really teaches the one Lord, one faith, one hope that Paul has explained in Ephesians 1-3. You should be able to answer the question "Why do you go to church there?" with something about what you believe not just style and convenience. I've seen too many students choose a church because they liked its worship band and were led astray through the false teaching that followed and guided the well produced music. Don't let that be you.

If you are already in a church, are you really united to its people? Are you invested in lives and are others invested in you? A next step for you could be to step out of your clique in the church where you are united by age or preference. Let the gospel unite you to someone with whom you seemingly have nothing else in common. That can include becoming a member of a church. Commit to that local body, don't let being united to them be hypothetical. If you haven't been biblically baptized, take part in the "one baptism" that unites believers in local bodies.<sup>v</sup>



## 2. Diverse in Gifting

### **Discussion Question: How do you see diversity in 4:7-12?**

Paul is clear that we are united in a deep and profound way; however, we are not all the same. Starting in verse seven, he immediately talks about the differences within this unified group. He does this by highlighting spiritual gifts. We saw this in session one as we explored the diversity of gifts and dependence on each other in the image of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. In our unified faith, different people have different gifts to carry out different tasks in the body of Christ. Paul tells us that everyone has a gift (4:7-8). These gifts are given by the victorious king, Jesus (4:9-10). Paul then highlights different kinds of gifts for leaders in the church- apostles, prophets, shepherds, and teachers (4:11). And then he tells us the purpose of these leaders, so the church will be equipped to use their gifts to carry out ministry (4:12).

The application here is easy when asking what we do next, or where we go to church. Where can you use your gifts to build up the body of Christ? How can you contribute to your church? As we discussed in session 1, if you look around and say, "I'm not really needed here," you're either wrong or you're in the wrong place. Some church somewhere needs you to use your gifts to build up the church and carry out its mission. So the next step could be finding where you are needed within your church or in another context.

What gifts has God given you to contribute? I think we over-complicate spiritual gifts. What I see in Scripture is simply to identify how God has gifted you; that is, what am I passionate about and skilled in, and/or how have I or the church seen God use me in the past? Then identify what or where are the needs in front of me. Sometimes these things align perfectly, sometimes not. But we have to ask, "What are the needs in front of me?" Then we can ask, "Am I equipped to meet that need?" Are there needs in your local body right now that you can help meet? Maybe there's another local body that has a desperate unfulfilled need that you can meet. If more students started basing their church involvement on contributing to the health and mission of that church instead of a "what can I get out of this?" attitude, we would move ahead greatly in the church in America and the answers to "Why Church?" would be obvious.

To sum it up, find a church that needs you and is ready to put your gifts to work. If you're already in a local body, ask about how you can work in and with the church. Work in the church meeting needs, and work with the church to spread the gospel. As for college students, you can work with the church by extending its influence and ministry to the campus as long as you're not trying to replace or work independently of your local body. So everything from playing the piano for a small church on Sundays, to setting up chairs or running sound, to teaching a children's or youth Sunday School class, to taking part in a mission trip, to having a Bible study in your dorm room to helping other students connect with your church can be the next step. Put your diverse gifting to work where it's needed right now.

### 3. Maturing in Christ. 4:13-16

One last characteristic we see of a body that helps people live appropriately in light of the gospel is maturing faith. Look at how verse 13 describes what happens in a properly functioning church, “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In verse 15 we see that through hearing and speaking the truth we “grow up in every way.” Paul says that we will have grown-up faith. In college you’ll learn to grow up in many areas of your life. You’ll, at least start, to learn grown-up finances, relationships, work habits, and more. You will naturally grow in lots of areas, or you’ll get stuck in adolescence. The same thing should be happening with your faith. You grow into mature faith with the help of the local body of believers (as we discussed in session 3 on the family).

I started the study by describing my thoughts as a kid wishing I didn’t have to go to church so much. At least part of the issue was that I was immature. Maturity is going to reflect a love for an involvement with God’s people.

**Discussion Question: Look through 4:13-16. How does Paul describe mature faith? How do you describe mature faith?**

Mature faith has Jesus in the right place. In verse 13, maturity is the “fullness of Christ.” Mature faith means your life is full of Jesus. It’s not a little Jesus on Sunday, when I need Him, or when it’s convenient. It’s a life centered on and full of Jesus. Which implies that we are spending time knowing Jesus in the Word and prayer, and developing the character of Jesus in obedience to His teaching. **Of all the things your life could be full of right now, what would others say fills your life right now?** ...Xbox, football, calculus, Taco Bell, your significant other, The Bachelorette? Mature faith is when your life is full of Jesus, he is the defining reality of your life.

In 4:15-16 we see that Jesus is the head of the body. Not only for individuals, but also for the church, Jesus is the head. He has the place of primacy and authority. Mature faith means Jesus is in charge and ruling of every area of my life. He has my attention, my affection, and my obedience. And in my life and in my church it’s clear that Jesus is the star. If in your church you are not hearing often of the central place of Jesus, you’re in the wrong place. And if in your life it is not clear about the central place of Jesus, you don’t have mature faith.

Mature faith is not deceived. Paul tells us that the purpose or result of spiritual maturity is that we do not buy into false teachings. We are not like children, who will believe anything you tell them (14a). You can convince children of all kinds of things that are not true. Yes, Jesus tells us to have faith like a child, simply and humbly to trust him. But whereas child-like faith is good, childish faith is not. Paul shows us, and we know from experience, that many people will try to teach us things contrary to the gospel. They use cunning, craftiness, and deceitful

schemes. If we aren't mature in our faith, we can be easily swayed, like a boat tossed by waves or a leaf driven by the wind (14b).

Probably in no place is this more real than the college campus. From the classroom to the dorm room and every room in between there can be challenges to faith in Christ. If you are going to withstand what can be a constant onslaught of deceitful schemes, you are going to need mature faith. And if you want mature faith, you need a good church. That's how Paul ends, by highlighting the body of Christ. When we are growing into maturity, we are growing into Christ and we become a healthy body (4:15-16). We are equipped, and the body grows and builds itself up in love (4:16). Spiritual maturity means some things for your individual faith, but it's also a community project. The church is the safety net to help you maintain true faith and protect you against lies and false teachings.

So what church should I join? What's my next step? You should join a church that helps you grow in your faith. A church that helps you mature and withstand challenges to your faith. As I said before, that means your church needs to be teaching the true gospel. And they should be providing regular and special opportunities to grow faith. If you're already there, how are you growing? Growth doesn't happen just by showing up. Consider as a next step how you can learn and apply more of Jesus' teaching to your life.

#### The Bottom Line- Belong, Grow, Serve.

Where should I go to church? What do I do next? I can sum up all that's been said here in Ephesians 4 about the church, and what I think is consistent with other teachings on the church like Acts 2:42-47, and what we've looked at earlier in this study with these three words. Join a church where you can belong, grow, and serve.

Belong- become a part of a community: community that is united by faith, a community that is more than similar interests, a community that cuts across all the dividing lines that normally define our culture. Live life with these people. Invest in the lives of individuals and families in your church, and let them invest in you. Don't make your church experience supplemental to your "real world" on campus. Make it central to your world.

A key step here could be moving your church membership. As we've discussed, that says to the church that you want to be invested in them, and you want them to be invested in you. If your church has some kind of an adopt a student program take part in it. And maybe show up to a church event, maybe a regular event that has nothing to do with college students.

Grow- don't just show up, soak up the teaching and wisdom of your church. You don't need something to check off on the list, you need to mature in your faith. Of course that could be from pastors and Bible study teachers, but it could also be from a mentor in your church. If you feel like you're not maturing, talk to a staff

member, teacher, or pastor about that. Maybe you are missing out on some great opportunity right there in your church.

Is it possible to be connected to the local body and not grow? Certainly that's possible, but what is more probable is that students will not grow outside of a connection to the local church. It may not seem that way now, especially with all the great opportunities through campus ministries. But I have consistently seen students who love and commit to the local church thrive in their faith beyond graduation. And I have also seen students who do not commit to the church flounder in their faith after they leave the comforts of a campus ministry. There is no campus ministry after college. There's the church. If you don't know how to connect with and commit to a church, your long-term spiritual maturity is in jeopardy. Now is the time to help ensure a life-time of growth by committing to the local church.

Serve-use your gifting to meet the needs in front of you. If there has been a major theme in this study, I think this is it. You need the church, and the church needs you. If the church is going function properly and you are going to mature, then it means every college student contributes to the body. It is so easy to find needs in a church. That can be something that happens at weekly gatherings or ways your church is or wants to reach out to the community. Remember: if you are in a dorm room sleeping in or choosing a podcast and an mp3, we are an amputated church.

It's often said that great revival includes a move of God among young people, like in the First and Second Great Awakenings. It's often college students who pray, lead in missionary endeavors, and evangelize. Many are praying that this will happen again, and happen on our campuses. Lots of things could prevent that. I am convinced that one of those would be ignoring the church. Can God move as we ignore that for which Christ died and loves? Can God move as we ignore his design to carry out the mission and help us grow and mature in the faith? God can and will do whatever He wants, but don't see great moves of God in the midst of ignoring His design and priorities.

### **Why Church?**

God's design is the body of Christ working together to carry out its mission (session 1). Christ's priority and love is his bride (session 2). As young believers we need to give and receive the benefits of wisdom and care in the family of faith (session 3). Therefore we love and commit to a church where we can belong, grow, and serve (session 4).

#### **Further Discussion:**

How has church been a place for you to belong, grow, and serve?

What benefits have you seen from being in a body of believers where you can belong, grow, and serve?

How would you identify your relationship to the church?  
What would you say to someone who has taken an extended break from the church?  
What's a specific next step for you when it comes to the church?

## Final Thoughts

Maybe you've never committed to the local church. Maybe you're a new believer and only know the college student who shared the gospel with you, or a campus ministry near you. I hope you have seen here the glorious reality of the body, the bride, and the family that God has given us. Take the next step to go, engage with, and commit to a local congregation.

Maybe you've been hurt by a church. Maybe you've grown apathetic to the local body. Maybe you are currently on an extended break from the church. I hope the Scripture and the Spirit of God have shown you what you are missing. And I want you to know that we want you back.

A couple years ago I was watching the NBA finals, and the San Antonio Spurs were about to beat the Miami Heat to win the NBA Championship in Miami. San Antonio was ahead with just seconds to play, so many of the Heat "fans" left the game. Meanwhile, the Heat fight back to within three points. And after LeBron James missed the game tying shot, Ray Allen gets the ball with the last seconds ticking off on Miami's season. Allen, in one motion, gets the ball, sets his feet behind the three-point line, and throws up the last prayer for the season. And of course, it goes in. The game goes to overtime. Meanwhile, all those fans who left the building find out that the game is not over. However, like most sports arenas there is a no re-entry policy. Fans who exited the building not only missed the miracle comeback, they will now miss the overtime that the Heat win on their way to a championship. They left, they missed out, then they were shut out. I want you to know that in the church, you may have left, you may have missed out on what God was doing while you were gone, but you are not shut out. We want you back. We need you back. We will welcome you back. Come be a part of God's design, Christ's love, and your family once again.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Dever, Mark. *The Church*. 3.

<sup>ii</sup> In the original language of the New Testament you can ask a question in three ways- expecting a “yes”, expecting a “no”, or with no expectation of the answer. Paul asks the questions in 12:29-30 expecting a “no.” “Are all apostles, prophets, or teachers?” The implied answer to each question is “No.” “Do all work miracles, heal, speak or interpret in tongues?” Implied answer “No.”

<sup>iii</sup> Heath Lambert. *Finally Free*. 49.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>v</sup> Biblical baptism would be after conversion, by immersion, as symbol of your salvation. So biblical baptism would not be as an infant when you had no faith, nor in order to be saved. The picture of death and new life in Christ, comes after faith in Christ alone for salvation as an external and public demonstration of what has happened inwardly in your life through Christ. This symbolism of dying and rising again in Christ is important, therefore the immersion part of baptism is also important, something you don’t see in sprinkling and other forms. Plus, by immersion is the only form of baptism we see in the New Testament.