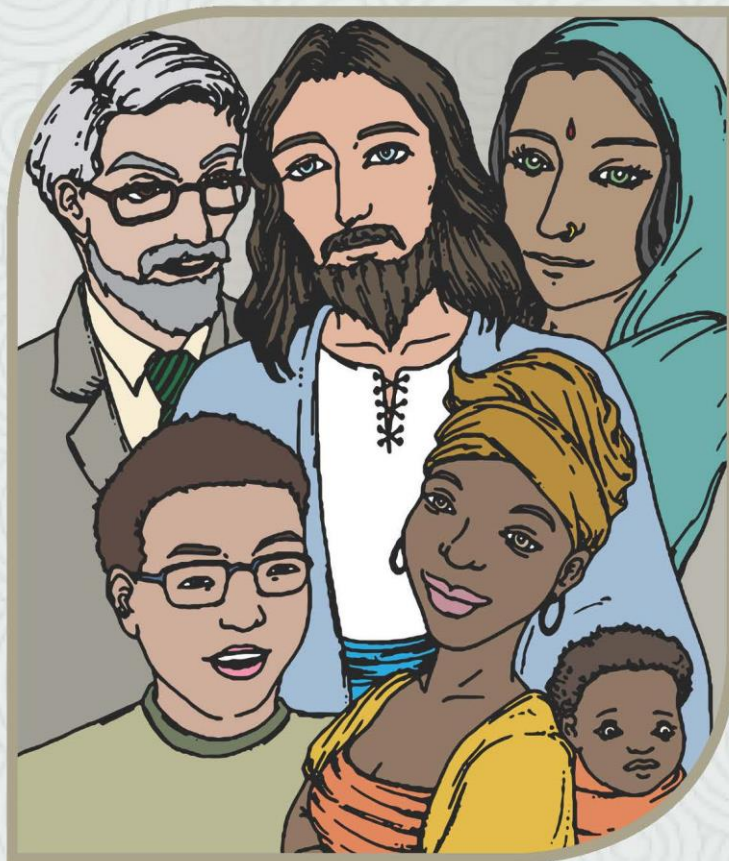




Living in Faith

Discipleship Series

From Christ
until now



The Christian Church

The Christian Church

From Christ until now



Multi-Language Publications
Bringing the Word to the World

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Living in Faith Discipleship Series

LIVING IN FAITH Discipleship Series 2019

Text adapted by Multi-Language Publications of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

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Getting Started

What is the Christian Church? There are many misconceptions about it in our world. To help us understand the Church, the Bible paints many different pictures of the unique character of the Christian Church to show us who it is, what it is to do, and where it is headed.

READ THE TEXT

Each lesson is broken up into smaller sections with a review question after each section. Feel free to stop at any of the passages to make sure you understand them or to dig more deeply into what they are saying. Circle, underline, or highlight key words.

GRAPPLE WITH THE QUESTIONS

In this book there are also questions to start, review and end the lesson. If you are studying this on your own, think through the questions for yourself. If you are studying in a group, use the questions for deeper discussion. Designate someone as a facilitator. Allow each individual a level of comfort to ask questions and freedom to discover and grow.

PREPARE TO SUMMARIZE AND SHARE AT THE END

The lessons are not just about learning information but applying it to your life and sharing it with others. As you go through lessons prepare to summarize it at the end to be able to retell it. It might be helpful to underline or circle key phrases or passages.

NOTICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Each page also includes additional references on the sidebar for those who want to dig deeper (You will need a Bible or a Bible app to read those sections). They are available to use in group or in personal study.



= Location of Bible Story



= Search options – related passages

APPLY IT TO YOUR LIFE & MAP OUT YOUR NEXT STEPS



After connecting the timeless truths to your life, make sure you map out Next Steps before ending the lesson.



Chapter One

CHOSEN TO BELONG TOGETHER

God's Loved Family



There are a lot of different images and impressions that come to mind when people think of the Christian Church.

1. What do you picture in your mind when you hear the term “church.”

The Christian Church is not a human invention or merely a visible organization. Jesus calls it “his Church.” He chose it, created it, directs it and perfects it. The Bible provides some pictures to grasp what it is.

THE CHURCH AS GOD'S ADOPTED FAMILY

You can't understand the Christian Church unless you realize the global crisis of humanity. Paul says,

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

We are by nature enslaved to the devil's spirit of defiance against God and imprisoned by our selfishness. It shows up in our heartless relationships and unacceptable behavior. It makes us spiritual outcasts. The only future we had was to face the wrath of God. The religions of the world turn to spiritual rituals, meditation or good works as the

solution. But nothing we do can free us from sin and its curse. That is why the Christian

The Christian Church is based on God's purposeful actions toward us

Church differs from all the religions of the world. It is based not by our activity, but on the account of God's purposeful actions toward us. At the heart and core of that story is how God sent his Son from heaven to become our flesh-and-blood brother.

"When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we



Our helpless predicament

Romans 1:18-32;

3:9-20

Titus 3:3



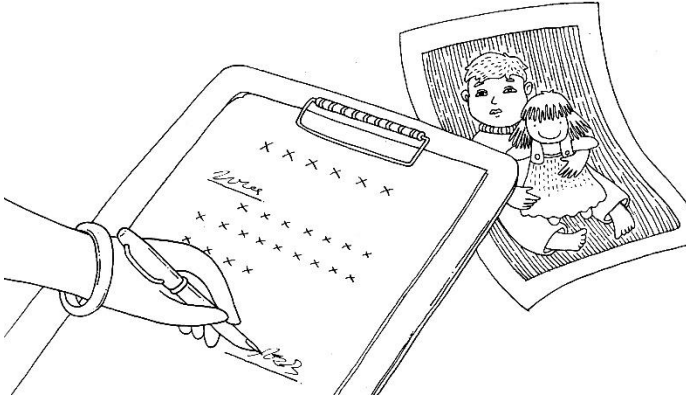
Adopted in to God's family

Romans 8:14-17

Ephesians 1:4-14

might receive adoption to sonship” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Think of the beauty of adoption. Parents consciously choose to love a child that originally was not their own.



That child gains their name, family reputation and home as his or her own. The other children become brothers and sisters. The same is true when God adopts us into his family.

“Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Hebrews 2:11).

How could God let us in? Jesus lived a holy life that God freely credits to us as if we had lived it. On the cross he shouldered our shamefulfulness so it wouldn't be held against us in the court of divine justice. That changed our status with God so we can enjoy an honored status with him as Father.

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of



Jesus is pleased to call us his brothers and sisters

Mark 3:31-35

Hebrews 2:9-17



Saved by Grace Alone through Faith Alone

Romans 4

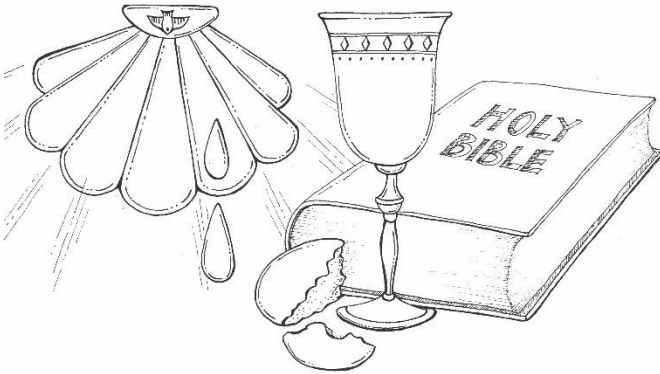
Ephesians 2:4-9

1 Timothy 1:13-17

his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:4-6).

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (James 1:18).

Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit gives us a new birth – a heart of faith that makes us at home with God. And like a signing of adoption papers, he seals our relationship with him through baptism



“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

God wants us to know we are more loved and accepted than we could ever imagine. Jesus gives us confidence to call God our “Abba Father” with whom we can freely talk in prayer like a child talking with a loving and protecting father. We trust and obey God as the powerful Father who knows best.

But you are not an only child in this relationship. That is where the picture of the Church comes in. When you are baptized, God also made you part of a



I am dearly loved

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

1 John 4:7-19

really large family – a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-generational community bound together as one family by their faith in Christ.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).



Even though there are many types of Christian churches in the world, in God’s eyes there is only “one Universal Church.” Jesus calls it “**one flock.**” It has “**one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**” (Ephesians 4:5-6). It includes all who put their faith in Christ no matter where they live, what nationality they are, or what level of society they come from. It

In God’s eyes there is only “one Universal Church,” one flock



Only One Universal Church

Ephesians 3:10-11,
3:20-21; 4:3-6

Colossians 3:11-14

Hebrews 12:22-23



Peter learns that God shows no favoritism as to whom he calls into his family

Acts 10

includes countless generations of people long before us who lived in faith.

It is often referred to as the “Invisible Church” because it is about what is in the heart

It is often referred to as “The Invisible Church” because only God knows them all. The Christian Church

then is not about some outward identity or nationality, but what is in the heart. It isn’t any building or institution or membership in any one specific church organization. We are the Church. We are family. The Church as the family of God exists wherever believers live or go.

2. Describe the different features of the Church as “God’s family.”

THE CHURCH AS GOD’S REPRESENTATIVES

The Christian Church was not a new religion started by the followers of Jesus. It is part of the continuing story of God’s mission to the world since the beginning of time.



Foreigners will become sons and daughters

Isaiah 56:6-8; 60:1-9

Ephesians 2:11-22



Treating each other like family

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Colossians 1:2



God’s covenant with Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6

22:15-18

Exodus 2:23-25

It connects you with people like Abraham and his descendants. Around 2,000 years ago God chose them to represent him in a spiritually dark and hopeless world. God pledged:

“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12: 3).

So God raised up Abraham’s descendants, the Israelites, to display his glory, power, and love to the world. He would do that with the wise teachings he revealed to them, the distinct practices he prescribed for them, and their loyal lives dedicated to him.

You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he” (Isaiah 43:12-13).

Their Passover celebrations recalled the Exodus story of God’s rescue to free them from the cruel slavery in Egypt. But the nation of Israel often lost sight of their unique mission in the world and became too much like the heathen nations around them. Yet no matter how wicked or godless the People of God became, God was true to his promise that the world’s Messiah would come from their descendants.



The account of the Exodus from Egypt

Exodus 5, 11-14



Called to be God’s treasured people, his priesthood

Exodus 19:3-6

Finally, Jesus, the Messiah, came. He said to the Jews,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).



That faith in Jesus inserts outsiders as new branches into the family tree of the People of God.

“So then, he (Abraham) is the father of all who believe ...” (Romans 4:11). **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”** (Galatians 3:29).

Jesus’ death on the cross is the central rescue story of

Jesus’ death on the cross is our key rescue story and the grand story of the Universal Church

the Universal Church of all time and all places. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus’ followers to

be witnesses of Jesus to the world.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special



Saved by the same faith as Abraham’ had

Romans 4

Galatians 3:6-14, 26-29



Abraham and others became the forefathers of our faith

Romans 9:4-8;

11:11-24

Hebrews 11

possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The true Church are people of faith who know they are flawed, struggling sinners who depend on the forgiveness and patience of Jesus. Paul recounts:

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

But just like the People of God in the Old Testament, people in the Christian Church frequently fail to act for the true God. They forget who they are and became like the world around

Many lost sight of their unique identity and God’s mission for them in this world.

them. Episodes of scandal, betrayal, and abuse of power throughout history brought shame on the name of Jesus and disgrace on the reputation of his Church. Yet God’s greater purposes supersede people’s failures. He still works through the Church to bring people to repentance and faith so that his glorious wisdom and grace can be seen and accomplish their work.

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal



Christians called “Church of God”

Acts 20:28

Galatians 1:13

1 Timothy 3:5, 15



How God viewed the “seemingly righteous” religious leader vs. the sinful tax collector

Luke 18:9-14



Chosen to carry out God’s purpose

Jeremiah 1:4-9

Luke 1:26-38

Romans 8:28-32

purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:10-11).

3. Review how God carried out his eternal purpose through the people of the Old Testament.

THE CHURCH AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

God isn't just giving us tasks to get done to accomplish his mission. He wants a close, intimate

Jesus delights in his Church like a bridegroom delights in his bride

relationship with us. It is a relationship he cherishes and zealously protects. So Jesus calls the Church

his bride! Think of a wedding you've attended. Picture in your mind the excited eyes of the bridegroom as his bride walks down the aisle so beautifully dressed.



In a similar way, Jesus delights in his Church like a bridegroom delights in his bride.



Jesus the bridegroom of the Church, his love

Mark 2:18-20

Matthew 25:1-13

John 3:27-30

2 Corinthians 11:2

“As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you” (Isaiah 62:5).

When the world slanders, mocks, marginalizes, or looks down on the Christian Church and its members, remember how Jesus sees it. His eyes are the ones that counts and give us confidence.

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master...I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion...I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God’” (Hosea 2:16, 19, 23). [cf. Romans 9:25]

How could he love me! How could he love us? What the world may see as still flawed, Jesus sees as unblemished and holy – a profound mystery. Purely

What the world sees as flawed, Jesus sees as unblemished and holy

because of his love and choice, he cherishes us as the **“church of God which he bought with his own blood”** (Acts 20:28). With his death

Jesus took on our filthy rags and now clothes us with his holiness. With his resurrection, Jesus pronounces, “I love you!” “You are perfect in my sight.”

The union of a husband and wife becomes God’s illustration of the Church’s relationship with Christ.

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to



You may not seem impressive to the world, but God chose YOU to love!

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Ephesians 1:1-8



Jesus paid the bride price

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

1 Peter 1:18-19



This is why Paul often addressed churches as “saints”

2 Corinthians 1:1

Ephesians 1:1

Philippians 1:1

present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).



That is why the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds can call this the “Holy Christian Church.” When you see the flaws of the church, remember the bridegroom who specifically chose the Church to be his bride and

The full blessings of being God’s People are “not yet” - the best is yet to come

made YOU a part of it. And in the struggles of life, we need to realize that the full blessing of being God’s People are “not yet.” The best is yet to come. You are part of those who **“long for his (Jesus’) appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:8). Jesus told his disciples that he would ascend to heaven to prepare a place for us. Then one day, he will come to bring us there to be with him forever. What a picture! In Jesus’ day, the wedding engagement was the same commitment as marriage. But the full union wouldn’t happen until the bridegroom finished



Zion and Jerusalem as metaphors for the Church, “the bride” of Christ

Hebrews 12:22-24

1 Peter 2:6-7

Revelation 21:2-5, 9-14



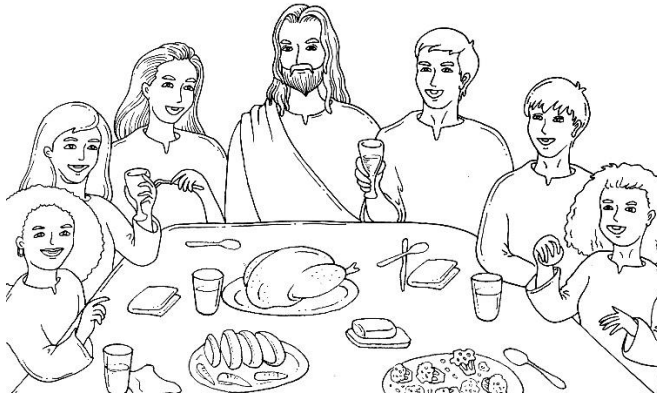
Looking forward to the home that God built – the heavenly one

John 14:1-6

Hebrews 11:10, 13-16

preparing a home in his father's compound to move into with his bride. Then he would come to get her and have a grand parade to the new home. So it will be at the end of time when Jesus comes to get his bride, the Church, and all who are part of it.

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear...Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:6-9).



So, this is the work and joy of the Church: telling everyone about our Jesus and inviting many more to join the wedding feast and eternal life with him.

"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

4. Discuss the different aspects of the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ.



The wedding feast

Matthew 22:1-14;

25:1-13



Names written in the heavenly wedding book of life

Luke 10:20

Hebrews 12:23

Revelation 21:26-27



CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. What aspects of being a part of the “household of faith” and the “family of God” can help you in your life.
2. Evaluate how being “God’s People” defines your connection to God’s activity in the world and your mission in life.
3. When is it most comforting or exciting for you to realize Jesus sees you as his Bride?
4. What is your story? Briefly tell each other how God called you into his family.
5. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
6. Please pray to God based on this.



DEVELOP A SUMMARY OF THE LESSON – Write down and discuss a brief explanation of this lesson. Make it clear and simple enough to share with others. If possible, illustrate it with a drawing or diagram.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

Study it!

Read again more carefully the passages in this lesson to understand what God is saying.

Memorize it!

Suggestion: Memorize **1 Peter 2:9-10** (Or identify a different Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you).

Apply it!

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

Share it!

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson and its summary to help you).

Go on to the Chapter Two to see why the church gathers together.

Chapter Two

GATHERED TO GROW TOGETHER

Being Disciples of the Good Shepherd



All over the world people gather for different reasons. They gather because they have something in common. It may be family. It may be a cause or a celebration. It may be for sports or for professional reasons. What you participate in regularly reveals what you think life is about.

1. What specific groups can you think of that regularly get together? Describe what they do when they meet.

A term Jesus used that we translate “Church” is the Greek word “Ekklesia.” Its root meaning is ones “called out.” It refers to “a gathering of people.” What binds them together? Why do they find valuable about gathering together? What do they do when they meet?

THE LOCAL GATHERINGS OF THE CHURCH

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Christian Church made its grand entrance. At the

The Christians Church made its grand entrance at Pentecost

Jewish festival of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples with boldness to proclaim

the story of Jesus.



“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call”** (Acts 2:37-39).

About 3,000 people responded to the message that day and were baptized. Soon the number grew to 5,000. Christian groups began to gather in places like



The Good Shepherd gathers and feeds his Sheep

Psalm 23

Ezekiel 34

John 10:1-16, 25-30

1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-4

Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, and Rome. What defined them? Paul writes,

"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Christians gathered in response to the call to faith. They were tied together with those everywhere that came together to gather in the name of Jesus. Each

Each group became a "local" church or the "visible" church

group became a "local" church. It is often called the "visible" church—local expressions of the

Universal Church, God's holy people. Gathering around Christ and his word is the clearest indication of our identity as God's people, his family. And what did Christians do when they gathered?

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42, 44-47).

2. Look through these verses again. List things that characterized this early Christian group.



Calling on the Name of the Lord

Genesis 4:26; 21:33

1 Kings 18:24, 36-39

Psalms 86:1-13

Romans 10:8-13



The label "Christian"

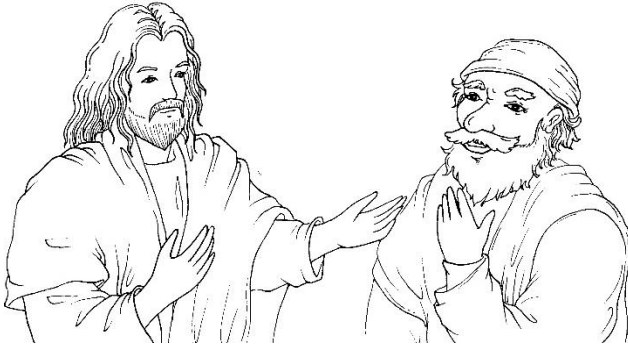
became a term to describe those who followed Jesus Christ

Acts 11:26; 26:28

1 Peter 4:16

DEVOTED TO THE APOSTLES TEACHING

Scripture describes God's people like sheep gathered under the care of a shepherd. He feeds them, takes care of them, calms them, and leads them. They know his voice and follow him. Jesus is that Good Shepherd.



For three years the disciples spent plenty of time with his Jesus. They would sit at Jesus' feet and learn about God from his teaching. They would see his dedication and obedience to his heavenly Father to learn how to honor God. They would see his miracles of compassion and learn how to love people. They would watch his way of life and learn how to live. Even enemies noticed the difference.

They spent plenty of time with Jesus

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Listening to, being with, and learning from Jesus is a mark of a disciple. That is what builds the Church.



Jesus displayed his knowledge and love of Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11

Luke 4:16-21

Luke 16:27-31

Luke 24:25-27, 44-48



Listening creates faith and obedience as a solid foundation for life

Matthew 7:24-29

Romans 10:8-17

That is why the early Christians “**devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings.**” The apostles’ teachings about Jesus would be the source and foundation of the Church and connection with God.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Just like the first disciples, we grow when we are meet with Jesus through his word. So the Christian

Listening to and learning from Jesus is a mark of a disciple

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-19).

God’s word provides the spiritual nourishment we need to grow up in faith. Without growing in Christ, the Church shrivels up. Regular hearing from God in Scriptures is to our souls what breathing, eating and drinking are to our bodies. This is the craving Peter encourages:



The Church’s foundation – the Word of God

1 Corinthians 3:9-17
1 Peter 1:10-13, 23
2 Peter 1:16-21
1 Thessalonians 2:13



Jesus the cornerstone

John 3:11-21
John 20:30-31



Growing as disciples

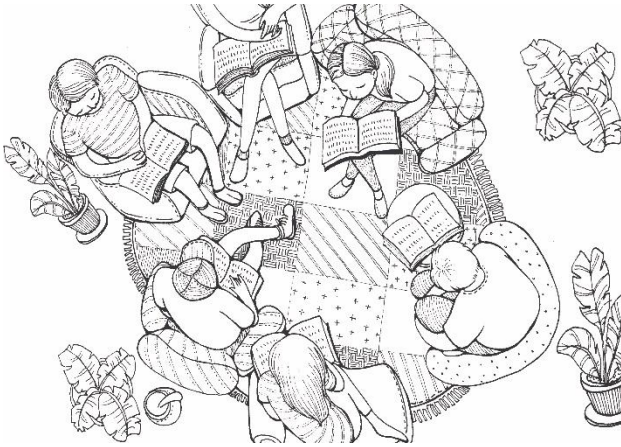
Colossians 1:3-12
1 Peter 2:1-3



Growing like a tree planted by streams of water

Psalms 1:1-3
Jeremiah 17:5-8
John 4:10-14

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2-3).



God’s word provides the spiritual nourishment we need to grow up in faith

Being “devoted” to the Word is evident in regular home devotional time with Jesus. It takes shape through parents training their children in the way of the Lord. It shows up in Bible Study groups gathered in homes, in churches, in coffee shops and public spaces. And it leads us to worship God together and in the daily routines of life.

3. Describe what it means to be devoted to the apostles’ teachings.



God’s word convicts, comforts and corrects to help us grow

Hebrews 4:12

2 Timothy 3:16-17



Importance of teaching the next generation

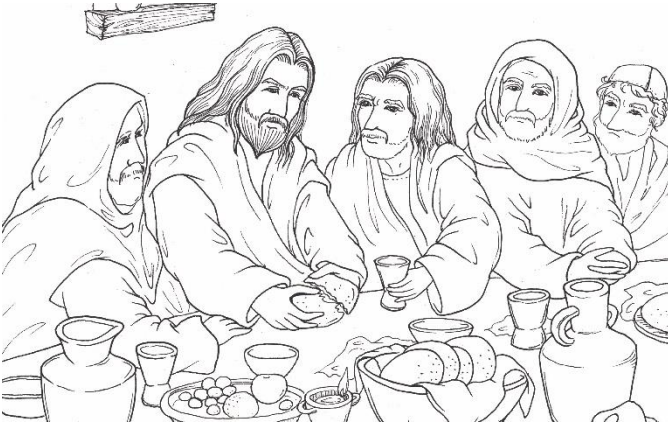
Deuteronomy 6:1-7

2 Timothy 1:5-7

DEVOTED TO WORSHIP

The early Christians were also “**devoted to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**” This is part of the rhythm of worship – God comes to us with his gifts and we respond in faith. The main spotlight of Christian worship is on God’s actions on behalf of humanity especially in sending his Son to live, die, and rise for us. Through the gospel message, Jesus becomes present among us. Paul says,

"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (2 Corinthians 6:16).



The power of the gospel is conveyed to us in the Bible as also through baptism and holy communion.

The gospel in Word and Sacraments are “Means of Grace” working in people’s hearts to build Jesus’ church

They are the “Means of Grace” that the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith. When they are faithfully presented, you can be sure the



Jesus loved to worship and have special time with his Father

Luke 2:41-52

Luke 4:16; 5:16

Holy Spirit is working in people's hearts to build Jesus' church. That gospel energizes hearts to join together in prayer and praise to God. So worship as an intimate dialogue between the triune God and his people. God speaks to us with his gospel in the Bible, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and we answer with heartfelt confession, thanks, praise and prayer. God serves us with his forgiveness, faith, hope, and listens to our prayers. We respond by offering our financial gifts for his work and our daily lives to worship and serve him in our activities and conversations.

After Jesus ascended back into heaven, his disciples began to meet on Sundays to constantly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It was the key event for their faith and fresh on their minds. At first, Jewish Christians met in synagogues. Soon it became common to worship in private homes, especially as more and more non-Jews came to faith. At times they even went underground (literally) to cemetery rooms (catacombs) to avoid the harsh persecutions of the government. No matter where they met, Jesus promised to present with his people.

Unlike the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament temple worship, God did not prescribe how Christians should structure their worship beyond a focus on Christ communicated through the Bible, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those who had Jewish roots, built worship around forms they were familiar with in the Jewish synagogue. When their Jewish customs began to confuse the gospel for new believers from other cultures, they adapted to ensure the gospel was communicated clearly to their local gatherings. No matter what they did, law and gospel were to be so distinctly proclaimed that even an unbeliever would have to face the truth that they are



Teaching and admonishing through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

Colossians 3:15-17

Ephesians 5:15-21

Adiaphora = things neither commanded nor forbidden by God
(freedom to decide in love)



Knowledge needs to be mixed with love for others

1 Corinthians 8:1-13;

13:1-7

a sinner and after hearing the gospel would say, “God is really among you” (1 Corinthians 14:25).



Over time, a Church Year cycle was developed around annual celebrations of events in the story of Jesus. It included Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Worship forms, called liturgies, began to appear to unify the church and help everyone participate

together. Today, because of the unique richness in each culture, the expressions and songs of worship are often different

Because of unique richness in each culture, the expressions and songs of worship are often different around the world

around the world. They can be simple or elaborate. Leaders might wear ornate robes or simple clothing. Music may have grand orchestras and pipe organs. Or they might use drums, guitars, and other local instruments or use none at all. They may have traditional hymns that tie us to Christian and cultural roots or use new expressions of song to connect with today. Each approach can benefit from the rich heritage of worship passed down from previous centuries in order to display unity with the one holy universal Church of all times and places. But finally



Unacceptable worship is less about form than it is about message, heart, and life

Romans 1:18-25

Mark 7:6-13

Isaiah 1:11-20;

Malachi 1:6-14



Protecting the gospel message and freedom in worship

Acts 15:1-11, 19

Colossians 2:16-19

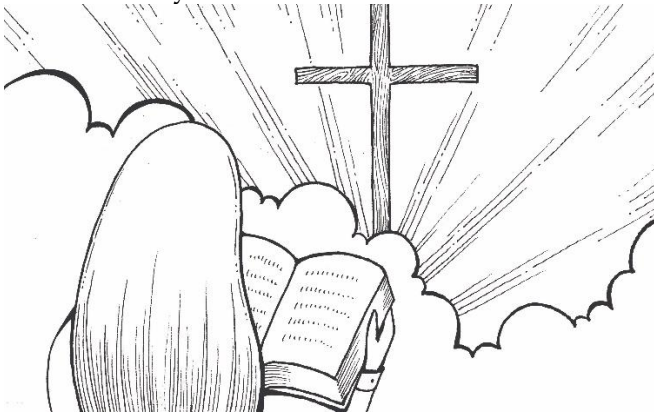
Romans 14:2-12

what binds them together as the Holy Christian Church is not the outward forms, but their faith in

Our highest worship is to hear, believe, and follow Jesus

Christ and devotion to the gospel transmitted to us in the Bible, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our highest

worship is to hear, believe, and follow Jesus in our lives. It is our filling station for faith to prepare us to meet the daily world.



Meanwhile, Satan works hard to spoil true worship of God. Even in the Old Testament, no matter how pure the form was, if hearts and lives weren't right, God turned away from them. Jesus quoted Isaiah:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules”
(Mark 7:6-7; Isaiah 29:13).

The early Church encountered people demanding strict obedience to their own practices. They emphasized conformity rather than love. It was undermining the beautiful freedom and message of the gospel (Galatians 5:1-15). Then at Corinth, the worship was becoming too disorderly, divisive, and



All of life to be worship

John 4:23-24

Romans 12:1

1 Corinthians 10:31



Remaining connected with Jesus bears fruit

John 15:1-13

unfocused. People displayed selfishness rather than unity. Apostle Paul reminds us that worship is to focus on Christ, not ourselves. It is to build up others and not just to satisfy our personal preference. So also in worship we have an opportunity to show love and consideration of others.

4. Define what is unique about Christian worship.

DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP

The early Christians were also “**devoted to fellowship.**” The Bible term often used for fellowship is the Greek word “*koinonia*.” It means “sharing” or “having something in common.” John wrote,

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

It is in local churches or gathered groups that Christian fellowship most vividly shows. It emerges from the special bond that comes from studying Scripture and worshipping together. That fellowship spills into attitudes and actions in everyday life. Gathered groups eat together, serve each other, watch after each other. The day before Jesus died, he washed his disciples’ feet and said,

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).



Attitude of unity with one another

1 Corinthians 1:9-10
Ephesians 4:1-6
Philippians 2:1-8



Love One Another

John 13:12-17, 34-35
1 Peter 2:17; 3:8
1 Thessalonians 4:9-10
2 Thessalonians 1:3



Through love for each other, the world notices what it is like to be with Jesus. Paul says,

“Be devoted to one another in love... Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”
(Romans 12:10, 15-16).

The New Testament is filled with many other “one another” passages encouraging us to care for, correct, comfort, do good to, love, be devoted to, forgive, submit to the needs of, and pray for one another. The sick need visits and the

The New Testament is filled with “one another” passages

prayers of their brothers and sisters in the faith. Those that face temptations and troubles need correction or encouragement. Paul tells the Galatians,

“Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Gathering together is God’s training grounds to go send us back into the world and show them Jesus. It



Caring for One another as the family of believers

Galatians 6:9-10

1 Peter 2:17



Showing compassion to those in need nearby

Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37

is in gathered groups that faith is trained and tested. It is there that love can be expressed and exercised. It is there that disciples grow so they are better equipped to make disciples of others.



That is why the writer of Hebrews urges us:

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

5. List some of the expressions of fellowship that Jesus desires from his Church. Which ones do you most long for or appreciate?



Collecting an offering for those in need far away

Romans 15:25-29

2 Corinthians 8-9



Praying for one another

Acts 4:23-31; 12:1-7

James 5:13-16



CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. Although faith in Jesus is a personal and internal thing, why is it important for Christians to gather together regularly?
2. Discuss ways in which you can become more devoted to the Apostle's teachings in your church or gathered group.
3. Some may think that worship is too routine or boring. Determine what you might tell them that would make worship more meaningful for them?
4. What is most needed to build up the fellowship in Christ among you? How will you intentionally work to make that happen well and train people to disciple people on the outside?
5. How can you combine all these three elements in the gathered group meetings: Scripture learning, worship, fellowship?
6. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
7. Please pray to God based on this.



DEVELOP A SUMMARY OF THE LESSON – Write down and discuss a brief explanation of this lesson. Make it clear and simple enough to share with others. If possible, illustrate it with a drawing or diagram.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

Study it!

Read again more carefully the passages in this lesson to understand what God is saying.

Memorize it!

Suggestion: Memorize **Ephesians 2:19-22** (Or identify a different Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you).

Apply it!

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

Share it!

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson and its summary to help you).

Go on to the Chapter Three to learn how we carry out Christ's mission to the world.

Chapter Three

SPREADING THE GOSPEL TOGETHER

Ambassadors for Making Disciples



Have you ever been somewhere or met someone so amazing that you couldn't help telling others? Did you come across a cure to a sickness and couldn't wait to share it with those who were affected? Did you ever witness an event that was so terrifying or spectacular that it dominated your conversations? What about recipes, products, games?

1. Describe what gets you excited and why it is so compelling to tell others.

What gets the Christian Church excited? What does have worth sharing?

REFLECTING JESUS' HEART FOR THE LOST

Jesus is the founder and builder of the church. So, the more you know Jesus, the more you understand the mindset and mission of the Church.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:36-38).

Jesus compared God's heart to a shepherd who goes out of his way to find a lost sheep or a woman who loses a coin and won't rest until she finds it.

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).



On one occasion Jesus started a conversation with a Samaritan woman who came to get water. Although it was culturally unacceptable for a Jew to be with her, Jesus cared enough to talk to her. He told her he could give her the gift of God - living water that



The harvest is ripe

Matthew 9:35-38

John 4:31-38



Jesus goes out of his way to reach the lost

Luke 15



Jesus provides living water for the foreigner - Samaritan woman

John 4

would be a flowing spring of endless life. Then he told her he was the Messiah who give it. She was so

She was so thrilled by his message that she immediately had to tell everyone

thrilled by his message she immediately went back to tell everyone in her town. They believed and said,

“We know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Jesus ultimately showed his heart for fallen humanity by offering his life as the sacrifice to save us. Without him there is no hope for eternal life. But Jesus said,

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)

Peter told the religious leaders of his day,

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

God’s desire is to rescue people. This is our message.

“God our Savior...wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

In our world of around 8 billion people, less than a third of the people put faith in Jesus. That means that more than 5 billion people today do

More than 5 billion people today do not know Jesus as their Savior



People of Israel were witnesses: There is no other God and no other savior

Psalm 78

Isaiah 43:1-13

Isaiah 45:14-25



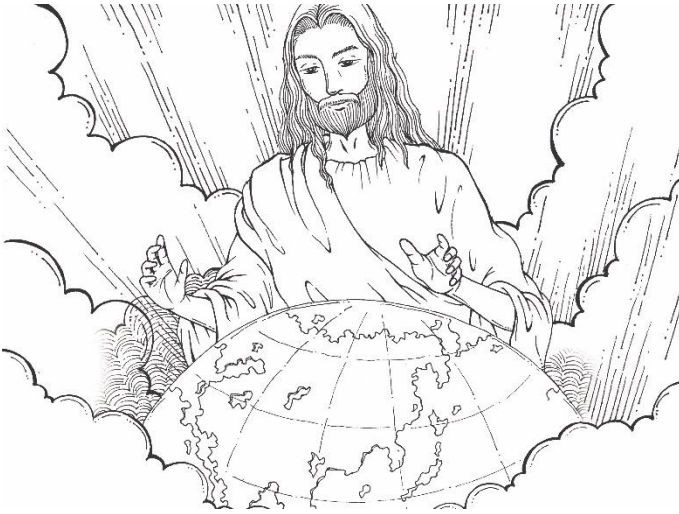
On the job training: Jesus sends out the 12

Matthew 10:1-20

then 72 (2 by 2)

Luke 10:1-20

not believe Jesus as their Savior. But one day every knee will have to bow to Jesus.



Some will see him as the Savior who comes to bring them into the mansions of heaven. Others will face him as the Judge who pronounces that their separation from God will become eternal in hell.

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4).

The Church is positioned and commissioned to bring to the world the message that can save souls from the darkness of unbelief and restore them to God.

2. Describe Jesus’ attitude and actions toward those who do not know or follow him.

THE CHURCH – AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST

It has often been said that the church is not a private country club where members come to enjoy being served. The gathering of God’s people is more like a training ground for rescue workers to go out into the world. It is like a briefing room to prepare ambassadors to bring the leaders’ message to other nations. Jesus was the ultimate ambassador sent by his Father into the world. He bore clear witness to the justice and love of God by his death on the cross. But he also told his disciples:

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”
(John 20:21)

Jesus invested them with the authority and power of

Jesus invested them with the authority and power of his Word and baptism

his Word and baptism. The objective: Make disciples of all nations. Jesus said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”
(Matthew 28:18-20).

Their work would be injected with the power of the Holy Spirit to speak clearly and boldly. Jesus said,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).



Jesus bears witness of what God is like

John 1: 16-18;
14:8-13
17:1-8, 25-26



To be a light to the Gentiles

Isaiah 49:5-7
Luke 2:29-32
Acts 13:46-48



Commissioned to share what they witnessed

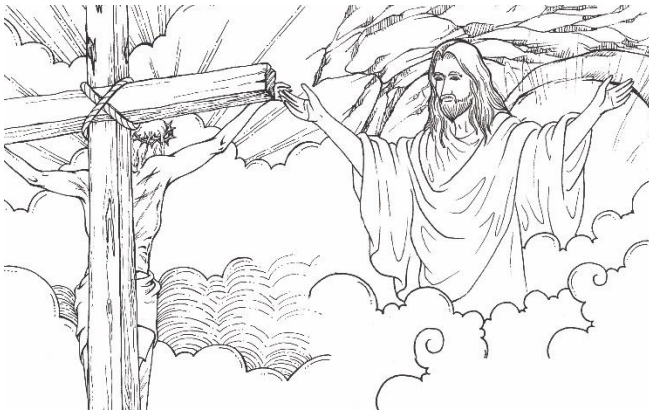
Luke 24:44-48

Jesus had been preparing them to be his ambassadors

Jesus had been preparing them to be his ambassadors to reach ever-widening circles

to reach ever-widening circles. It would begin in the hub (their Jerusalem), go to the whole country (all Judea), then to the neighboring countries (Samaria), and finally to the ends of the earth. They would say,

"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it" (Acts 2:32)



Faith is not just a private thing. It also goes to the mouth as a witness to what is in the heart. (Romans 10:8-11). It is the nature of God's people.

"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they (the apostles) never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:42).

How amazing it must have been to hear the apostles tell the story of their interaction with Jesus. The story



The Holy Spirit would give them power to share their witness

Luke 24:48-49

John 14:25-26;

15:26-27

Acts 1:8



The disciples spread what they had eye-witnessed with Jesus

Luke 1:1-4

Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:30-32; 10:34-43; 13:26-33

1 John 1:1-4

spread. Those who were scattered because of persecution told the message wherever they went (Acts 8:1-5; 11:19-21).



We hear of Philip meeting an Ethiopian who was puzzled about the Scriptures he was reading. When Philip told him that the passage was talking about Jesus, the man asked to be baptized right there. We read of Peter visiting an ethnic group he formerly despised and saw the Holy Spirit work faith in them (Acts 10). We see Paul, a persecutor of Christians, turn into one of its greatest ambassadors. He went to what is now Turkey, Greece, and eventually Rome. Each person, culture, or background created a unique starting point for Paul's dialogues with them:

"Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22).

Apostle Paul says that it comes down to this:

"Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him (Jesus) will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the



An enemy of Christianity becomes one of its greatest missionaries

Acts 8:1-3;
9:1-28



Paul starts with what they knew and valued

1 Corinthians 9:19-23
Jews: Acts 13:14-43
Greeks: Acts 17:16-34

same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' ...Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:11-17).

3. Describe the rationale behind the need to spread of the gospel of Jesus.

OUR LIVES – A LIGHT TO THE WORLD

The task of making disciples of all nations starts nearby. Inside our common and often fragile lives,

The task of making disciples of all nations starts nearby

God has placed his valuable story to share. God works through ordinary people in ordinary

relationships at home, work, and community.

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us... It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and



Jesus is the Light of the World

Luke 2:30-32

John 1:3-9; 8:12;
12:44-46

therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself” (2 Corinthians 4:7, 13-14).

Jesus compared it to being a light shining on a hill that should not be covered up but be a beacon:

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

Jesus showed he cared by eating and drinking with sinners. Being a witness to God’s glory and grace may start with winning the respect and trust of others through acts of love. It may begin with others noticing your life and becoming curious on what sustains you.



Listen to guidance from the apostles:

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).



Reflecting Jesus the Light of the world

Matthew 5:13-16

Acts 13:47-48

Ephesians 5:8-17

1 John 1:5-7



Lives that shine in a dark world

Ephesians 4:17-5:14,
6:1-9

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:5-6).

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life” (Philippians 2:14-16).

Our lives at home or work or community may be where many people are first introduced to Jesus. Loving actions have often opened doors to the message of Jesus among those having a different

Shining as a light starts with love and respect in family and marriage

social or cultural worldview and a different perspective about life. Shining as stars starts with your

own love and respect in families and marriages. It shows up in humble, honest work ethic, respect for co-workers, and fair business practices.



Being a blessing to the community

Jeremiah 29:4-7
Matthew 25:34-40



Only God can change a person's heart to believe

John 6: 44, 61-69
1 Corinthians 1:18-25;
2:1-14
2 Corinthians 4:1-7
Ephesians 2:1-10

It spills over to helping neighbors and finding ways to benefit the community. People see it in compassion that feeds, clothes, and shelters people. People see it in a life of hope and joy despite the struggles. It leads to honest curiosity about your faith.

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

It leads to telling what God has done through Jesus:

"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

As we do this work, Jesus leaves us with the promise,

**We just plant the seed
and water it. God makes
it grow**

"I will be with you always." It is his work to bless it. God works through his Church – the people of God, his

family. We plant the seed and water it. God makes it grow.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his



Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Matthew 13:1-43



God's word does its work

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-12

Hebrews 4:12-13

Acts 16:13-15

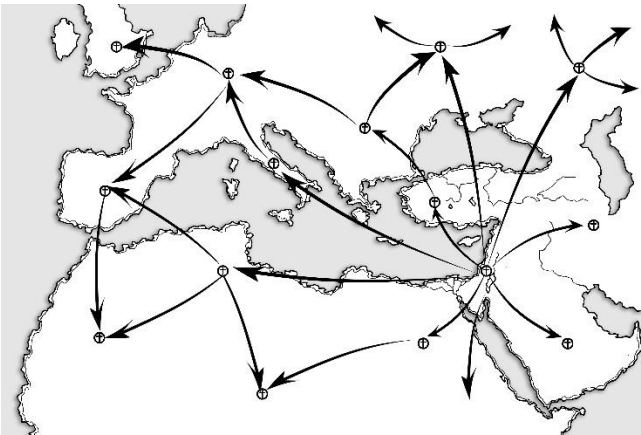
task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6).

Patently trust the Holy Spirit will work in hearts in his own timing and in his own way. How else can you help? The Philippians are recorded as financially supporting Paul (Philippians 4:10-20) and others showed hospitality in their homes to traveling brothers and sister in their mission work (Acts 18:1-3; 3 John 2-8). Paul and others energized the churches

God started with a small group of ordinary people whose lives were changed by knowing the risen Savior

by regularly reporting how God’s grace had opened doors to other nations and brought people to faith.

On his journeys, Paul reached new people, discipled believers, trained and appointed leaders. He then left the gathered churches to do it all over again in another city.



It is an amazing global movement that God started with a small group of ordinary people whose lives were changed by knowing the risen Savior. In the



Reporting the success of the gospel

Acts 14:27; 15:3-4, 21:19

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10



Praying for “open doors” to the gospel

Acts 14:27

1 Corinthians 16:5-9

2 Corinthians 2:12-16

Colossians 4:2-6

centuries that followed, the message went to northern Africa, Syria, and India and as far as China by the 7th century after Jesus. Eventually it came to you. And now it involves you and your church or gathered group into this story. You are not only results of others reaching you, but you are being sent to reach others. Who do you suppose he has on your list to reach?

4. Review the passages from this section. What do they teach you your approach to others as part of the mission of the Church?



CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. Discuss ways in which you each can shine like a light to the people around you in your daily life.

2. Be prepared! What Bible stories could you share with someone who feels there is no way out of their problems or struggles. (If time, think of key Bible stories that would help in conversations about other specific situations).

3. Develop a list of things you can do as a group to actively reach people you know or are within your reach.

4. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.

5. Please pray to God based on this.



DEVELOP A SUMMARY OF THE LESSON – Write down and discuss a brief explanation of this lesson. Make it clear and simple enough to share with others. If possible, illustrate it with a drawing or diagram.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

Study it!

Read again more carefully the passages in this lesson to understand what God is saying.

Memorize it!

Suggestion: Memorize **1 Peter 3:15-16** (Or identify a different Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you).

Apply it!

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

Share it!

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson and its summary to help you).

Go on to the Chapter Four to learn how we all work together as Christ's body.

Chapter Four

SERVING WITH GIFTS TOGETHER

The Priesthood of All Believers



People generally think of churches or temples as the place spiritual activity happens. They expect that priests have the holy or more spiritual ones set aside to carry out the sacred actions at temples. Often their clothing sets them apart from the rest of the community.

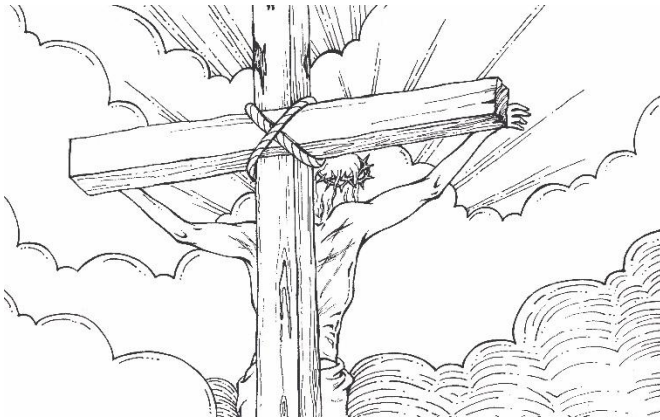
1. When you think of all the different types of priests in religions of the world, how would you describe them and what they do?

So who are the priests today? What does it have to do with how the Christian Church should be organized?

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

From the time of Moses to the time of Jesus, God chose to be personally present with his people at a tabernacle or temple. In the Old Testament, God also created a special priesthood with the unique role of representing God to the people and bringing people's offerings and prayers to God. You might say they filled the gap between God and man, between heaven and earth. But that was merely a visual type of the reality God was planning. It all pointed ahead to the one and only High Priest over the Church - Jesus Christ, who opens the way to God.

"There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).



His sacrifice for sins on the cross only had to be done once for all people to give us free access to God's

No one but Jesus can fill his role as high priest

throne of grace. As the high priest in heaven, he continues to intercede for us

before his Father in heaven. No one but Jesus can fill his role as High Priest of the Church. But today,



A priest was called and anointed by God to represent God and the people

Hebrews 5:1-10



Jesus remains our great High Priest of the Church

Hebrews 4:14-16

5:1-10; 7:20-28

8:1-13; 10:1-18

God's people are his temple, the dwelling in which God chooses to live and among whom Jesus serves as high priest:

" In him (Jesus) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22).

But God also anoints his people to be a nation of priests to represent him to the world and to bring the concerns of the world to him in prayer.



"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:5, 9)

The Christian Church isn't essentially entrusted to professional religious leaders or pastors. Jesus



You are the Temple in which God dwells

John 14:17-20, 23
1 Corinthians 3:16-17;
6:16
1 Peter 4:16



Proclaiming God's glory among the nations

Isaiah 42:6-7
55:4-5
66:19

entrusts the gospel ministry to the whole Church. He

**Jesus commissions us
all as the priesthood of
all believers**

commissions every Christian as part of the “priesthood of all believers.” We serve like priests by

bringing our prayers to God not only for our benefit, but for others. We do it by proclaiming the greatness of our God. We do it by introducing them to Jesus. We carry out our priesthood in a daily lifestyle that honors God in all we do.



It involves our hearts, lips, and hands, everything about us, as we do our everyday tasks to the praises and glory of God.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1).

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for



**Living a life
aligned with your
calling**

Ephesians 4:1-7

Colossians 1:10-12

Hebrews 3:1-6



**Grandma and
mother pass on
faith to Timothy**

2 Timothy 1:3-5

Acts 16:1-3

with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Where do you fit in being “Jesus with skin on” to others? It is often in everyday life that the quiet and multiplying effect of God’s love is most seen in the world. Sometimes it is the simple selfless actions

Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship

toward others that reveal your actions for Jesus. Every activity can be transformed into an act of praise

and worship when done as fruit of faith. God can use those also to lead others to the love and forgiveness of Jesus in the goal of making disciples of all nations.

2. Describe how every Christian is part of the priesthood of all believers.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The church is not merely an organization. It is more powerful than what is seen on the surface because of

The church is not merely an organization. It is the living, visible body of Christ

who is behind it. It is the living, visible body of Christ actively working in the world. He is its head and fills it with his presence.



Husbands won over by example of wife

1 Peter 3:1,7



Christ the Head of the Church as his body

Ephesians 1:22-23;
4:15-16; 5:23, 25-30

Colossians 2:19

“He (Jesus) is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church...” (Colossians 1:17-18)

Jesus has available to him all the resources of the universe and can do infinitely more than we imagine. He orchestrates all that for the benefit of his church.

“That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...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 1:19-20, 22-23).

So being a Christian is not a solo act or just a private matter. The Church is the body of Christ – one collective unit made of many parts to carry out his work.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

We may all be so different from each other in many ways, but we were baptized into the same body by the same Holy Spirit. Our work together would be pictured like an orchestra. It has many uniquely different instruments tuned to the same pitch playing the same symphony under the direction of the same conductor. When each instrument is playing their individual parts in harmony with the others, the beauty of the music be fully heard. Each has an important role to play.



The Church is the Body of Christ working together

1 Corinthians 12

Romans 12:3-16



Appreciating those who serve

Romans 16

Philippians 2:19-30

1 Thessalonians 1 & 2



They will know you are my disciples by your love

John 13:35

1 John 4:7-12



Also in the body of Christ there is no unimportant part or role. Each diverse part supports the other so that the body can work in harmony to accomplish the work of Christ.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:17-20).

There is no unimportant part or role. Each supports the other

Just as in our physical bodies, God has uniquely designed each Christian to support each other for the sake of the whole body. There is no unimportant part but honor in carrying out each role well.

“There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each



Without faith and love, the action is hollow

Matthew 7:21-23

1 Corinthians 13

other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

The body shares in each other’s honor and feels each

The body shares in each other’s honor and pain

other’s pain. And no matter how impressive or great a role may seem, without love, it gains nothing (1 Corinthians

13:2-3). Paul urges us,

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).

This often extends beyond a local church as groups of congregations share their resources to show compassion to those in need, develop training for those who lead, and send out mission teams to plant the seed. We hear at the last day,

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

What has God outfitted you to do? Look at your talents, your background, your experiences, the struggles you went through. Review the different roles God has put you in and who you are positioned best to serve. Become active in serving others to see what God reveals about where you fit in the tasks of making disciples of all nations.



The greatest is the one who serves

Mark 9:33-37



Serving those in need

Acts 6:1-7

James 2:14-18



Acts of kindness as natural response

Luke 10:25-37

Matthew 25: 34-40



3. Discuss ways in which the Church is like a body.

THE CALLING OF LEADERS OF THE CHURCH

All Christians are set apart to serve. But some are also chosen to lead. It is the special gift from Jesus to his Church, his body. Paul writes,

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

4. Identify the tasks of leaders listed here.



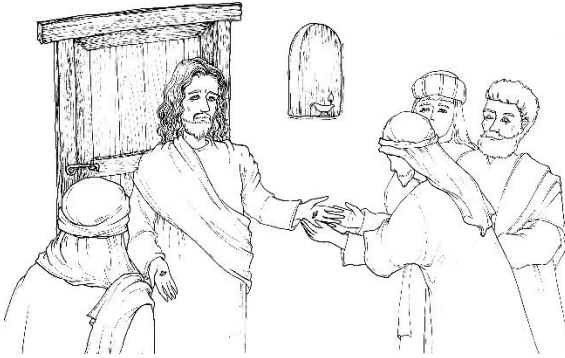
**Moses organizes
leaders to better
serve the people**

Exodus 18:17-26

One of the responsibilities of leaders is to equip

**Jesus invested himself
in training 12 disciples
to carry on his work**

people to serve their role in the body of Christ. Jesus invested himself in training 12 disciples to carry on his work.



They in turn would invest themselves in making disciples who would made more disciples. And the cycle would continue. Paul said to Timothy,

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

It is evident that a system of leadership was forming in each gathered group. It was a natural result of planting and establishing churches. Paul told Titus:

“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (Titus 1:5).

Every Christian has the primary calling of declaring the message of Jesus to the world. But some are



**James recognized
as leader of the
early Christian
Church**

Acts 12:17; 15:13-19;
21:18



**The early
churches created
systems for caring
for widows**

Acts 6:1-7
1 Timothy 5:1-16

called or chosen by a group of Christians to publicly lead the group in that ministry. We call it “public ministry.” It is also referred to as “representative ministry” because it represents the group in their role

We call it “public ministry” or “representative ministry”

of us often assumes different forms depending on the situation and setting. The early church used titles like bishop, overseer, presbyter, elder, shepherd (pastor), and deacon. They were similar or overlapping titles of serving rather than a specific system of hierarchy. They left behind no exact job descriptions nor does the Lord command us to have those exact roles in the church today. But that doesn’t mean God isn’t behind it. No matter what process they used to choose leaders, it was the Holy Spirit who led the process and calls the person to serve in it.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

As church groups grow, leaders often create teams or systems to care for each other, nurture faith, and

Peter reminds his fellow elders that this is God’s flock, not theirs

reach out with the gospel. Peter reminds his fellow elders that God calls them to serve his flock, his people, not theirs (1 Peter 5:2). Jesus is the main Shepherd and they are assistant shepherds under him. Their

as “the priesthood of all believers.” The one comprehensive gospel ministry that God entrusted to all



Same goal – different roles

1 Corinthians 1:10-16;

3:1-10

Ephesians 4:1-6



Leading in the Church – a high trust

1 Corinthians 4:1-2



Servant leadership like Christ

Philippians 2:1-11

1 Peter 5:2-3

attitude of leadership is to different than the world. They are to reflect the humble service of Jesus.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Leaders are to be living examples of what they teach and not bring shame to the ministry. Paul told Timothy, his apprentice:

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16).

It is essential for spiritual leaders to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Personal study of Scripture is key. Advanced education is important, but leaders

It is essential for spiritual leaders to grow in their relationship with Jesus

also need the continuing training of the Holy Spirit to serve their families, love their

neighbors, put to death sinful desires, and to stand strong and patient in harsh criticism. It is easy for a leader to feel alone as he serves people. The rest of the body of Christ also is to support his work.

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden,



No longer living for self

Luke 9:23

2 Corinthians 5:15

Colossians 3:23



Character qualification of spiritual leaders

Titus 1:5-9; 2:7-8

1 Timothy 3:1-7, 13; 4:12-15

for that would be of no benefit to you”
(Hebrews 13:17).

“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Remember that leaders are human too and may be struggling with their own challenges and weaknesses. That is why the Church comes together to live under Christ’s forgiveness and the transforming grace given us through the Holy Spirit.

5. Summarize the role, responsibility, and respect for leaders in the Church.



**Physically and
financially
supporting those
who lead**

1 Corinthians 9:4-15



CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. Consider what it means to be the priesthood of all believers. How will that show up in the perspectives and activities of your life?
2. Good leadership is essential for the Church. Discuss ways you can support those who could become leaders.
3. Try to identify each other's spiritual gifts. How can they each be used in the whole working of the body of Christ to carry out his work in the world?
4. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
5. Please pray to God based on this.



DEVELOP A SUMMARY OF THE LESSON – Write down and discuss a brief explanation of this lesson. Make it clear and simple enough to share with others. If possible, illustrate it with a drawing or diagram.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

Study it!

Read again more carefully the passages in this lesson to understand what God is saying.

Memorize it!

Suggestion: Memorize **Ephesians 4:15-16** (Or identify a different Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you).

Apply it!

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

Share it!

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson and its summary to help you).

Go on to the Chapter Five to read how God's people stood up for his word & work.

Chapter Five

STANDING ON TRUTH TOGETHER

Soldiers in the Kingdom



The mention of a kingdom or empire may bring a lot of vivid pictures to mind depending on what people have seen or experienced.

1. What things do you think of when you think of a kingdom?

Jesus told his disciple to “proclaim the Kingdom of God.” What is it? The more you understand that kingdom, the more you will understand the mission of the Christian Church and its effect in our world.

THE KINGDOM AND ITS WORKINGS

God told King David that one of his descendants would rule a kingdom that will outlast all worldly kingdoms. Isaiah prophesied that it would begin with a child who was born to establish justice and righteousness forever.



All these prophecies of the kingdom looked ahead to Jesus. When Jesus was on trial, the governor questioned if Jesus really was a king. Jesus replied,

All these prophecies of the kingdom looked ahead to the Jesus

“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place... You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18: 36-37).



Prophecies of the kingdom

Exodus 19:5-6

2 Samuel 7:11-12, 16

Daniel 7:13-14, 27

Isaiah 9:6-7

Micah 5:2



Prophets longed to see what we have seen

Luke 10:21-24;

Luke 24:19-27

1 Peter 1:10-12

This kingdom of God does not come to conquer with military force. It is not about worldly pursuits. It is about the battle in the spiritual realms and in the human soul. Its power is in the truth which Jesus championed and embodied. Truth is the divine weapon that conquers the deceptive lies which Satan uses to deceive people about God. Jesus told people,

“The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”
(Mark 1:15)

The truth revealed in the Bible exposes sin and its consequences through the law and offers peace with

Jesus established his kingdom by his teachings, his life, his death and his resurrection

God through the good news of the gospel. Jesus is the good news of the kingdom. It is the story of the cross

where he won the battle to rescue us from the dark stranglehold of Satan and hell.



“...The Father... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the



Government and Church serve separate purposes

Isaiah 45:1-7, 13

Romans 13:1-7



The blessings of the kingdom

Psalms 103 & 145



The values in the kingdom (Sermon on the Mount)

Matthew 5 - 7



Entrance to the kingdom is only through child-like faith

Matthew 18:1-5

Luke 18:15-27

John 3:3-6, 16

kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”
(Colossians 1:12-14).

So this is the kingdom at work: God turning hearts from Satan to God, from darkness to light, from sin to repentance, from unbelief to faith. The Christian Church is the result of this activity of the kingdom of God. It emerges with the miracle of baptism as the Holy Spirit welcomes people into that kingdom. It gives birth to a child-like faith in Jesus which defines the kingdom. It creates disciples who follow Jesus and find true freedom in his truth. Jesus said,

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

The Christian Church is the result of this activity of the kingdom of God

Jesus described the truth like a seed that grows in hearts even when no one is watching. That seed

spreads as the Church scatters and waters the seed. That is how Jesus involves us in making disciples of all nations. We spread the seed of God’s message so others also can enter the kingdom that is larger and more powerful than the human eye can see now.

“You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven...Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:22-23, 28).



The kingdom of God is like a...

Matthew 13:

Seed (v.24)

Mustard seed (v.31)

Yeast (v.33)

Hidden treasure (44)

Valuable pearl (v.45)

Fishing net (v.47)



God is our Fortress – our Refuge and Strength

Psalm 18:1-3

Psalm 31:1-3

Psalm 46

Psalm 62

But Satan hates the advancing of God’s kingdom. That is where the battle comes in. The devil and his demons attack in multiple fronts. Jesus assures us his Church will overcome and the gates of hell will not prevail. God equips us to be soldiers in the kingdom to stand up against Satan’s forces.



2. Review what the “kingdom of God” has to do with the development and task of the Church.

LIVING IN TRUTH – ADDRESSING SIN

Standing up for the kingdom is not merely claiming truth but also living truth. To pursue our mission without living in line with the gospel is incompatible. Without recognizing our own sin or without love for

We gather as a Church not to be a palace for the pious but as a hospital for sinners who need Jesus

people, churches can turn into Pharisees who exclude themselves and their listeners from the kingdom. We gather

as the Church not to be a palace for the pious but as a hospital for the broken, hurting, and struggling



In Christ, we will overcome

Matthew 16:18

Romans 8:31-39

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

1 John 2:13-14; 5:1-5



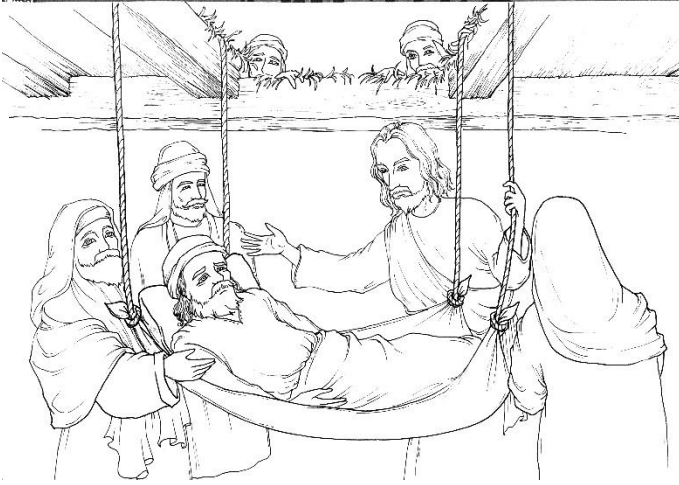
Putting faith into practice – obedience a fruit of faith

Matthew 7:21-29

John 14:23-27

1 John 1:5-7; 2:1-6

sinners of the world who need Jesus. He **“came to seek and to save the lost”** (Luke 19:10). Like its founder Jesus, the Church should be known as **“a friend of sinners”** by helping others find forgiveness, love, peace, and purpose in Jesus their Savior. For we need him too. We all struggle with our own weakness and sin and need a continual dose of God grace and forgiveness.



To be the light on a hill, the light to the world, the church has to be like a lighthouse keeper. It needs to first deal with its own inner darkness. It needs to maintain the beacon of light so others can clearly see Jesus. Indifference toward sin allows the rule of Satan to re-enter both individual hearts and churches and malign the name of Christ. Envy, discord, gossip, and strife threaten the unity and mission of the Church. That is why humility and repentance are to be part of the Christian lifestyle and the rhythm of the church.

But what happens when we are confronted? Do we try to save face by denial and self-deception? Apostle John reminds us,



The damaging hypocrisy of the religious Pharisees

Matthew 21:31-32;
23:23-28

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

Sin is so destructive, if left unchecked. It damages fellowship with God and leads to hell eternally. It is felt in deteriorating relationships with others. The word of truth exposes our idols and our selfishness to free us from the sin that threatens to enslave us. So an aspect of standing for truth is dealing with our own sin and listening to biblical admonition. But it also involves turning a fellow Christian back from sin to a life in Christ. Jesus gives us a pattern that starts with a difficult one-on-one conversation rather than easy gossip or public criticism.

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over (Matthew 18:15).



Repenting of our own sins before addressing others about theirs

Matthew 7:1-6

Galatians 6:1-5

1 Timothy 1:14-19



Not letting sin destroy the person and the Church

1 Corinthians 5:1-7, 11-13

2 Corinthians 2:4-11



Knowing how to address sin to bring healing not criticism

2 Samuel 12:1-14

John 8:1-11

Galatians 2:11-21

This can be done so discretely that no one else has to know. The attitude is not to put them down or shame them but of humble love. No one by nature wants

The attitude is of humble love to win a person back to Christ

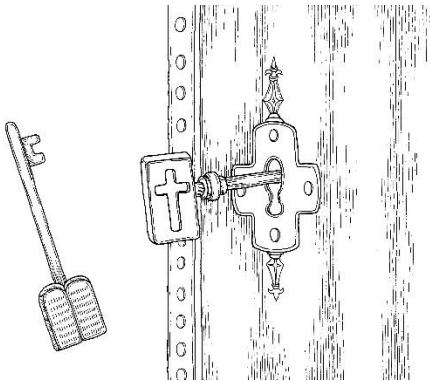
their sin exposed or to hear they are doing wrong. But the purpose is to win a person back to Christ

“so that the soul may be saved on the day of Lord” (1 Corinthians 5:5). Jesus goes on to say,

“But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:16-17).

This is often called “church discipline.” It carries with it the authority of Jesus which he invested in his Church to represent him (not themselves). He said,

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).



The Lord disciplines those he loves

Romans 5:1-5

Hebrews 12:4-13

1 Peter 1:3-9



Representing Jesus' heart for sinners

Matthew 9:10-13

Luke 5:29-32

Romans 5:1, 6-10

These are keys you don't want to lose or misuse. They are entrusted to the priesthood of believers. They unlock the kingdom of heaven when someone announces the gospel forgiveness to a repentant person and frees their burdened heart. But when someone intentionally lives in sin and refuses to repent, the "locking key" pronounces God's word of

The keys of the kingdom unlock or lock heaven to a person

judgment on their unbelief and lack of repentance. The task is not to keep sinful people out of church

(then there would be no one left), but to hold each other accountable so that nothing comes to lock anyone out of heaven and separate us from God.

"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25-26)

Like a lion trying to separate its prey from the pack, the Devil is ready to pounce when we are alone and vulnerable.



Let the power of the word address sin

Hebrews 4:12-13

2 Timothy 3:14-17



Behaviors that undermine the Church

Romans 16:17-18

1 Timothy 6:3-12

Jude 4-8



Equipped to stand strong with the armour of God

Ephesians 6:10-20

The Church is filled with sinful, broken people who need each other to point their hearts and lives to

It is important to return to devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer

Jesus. We are weaker when we are alone in the world of struggles, temptations and evil. That is why it is important to return

continually to devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and of prayer.

3. Explain the attitude and approach for addressing sin among God's people

THE TENSION OF LIVING IN TRUTH & LOVE

The visible churches that gather on earth will not yet look like the one pure Universal Church. Internal and personal conflicts threaten the unity and expression of the gospel. Look beyond the people and you will see that the disunity is orchestrated by **"the powers of this dark work and the spiritual forces of evil"** (Ephesians 6:11-12). As the arch-enemy of God, Satan schemes to tear down the walls that protect the church and attacks us at our vulnerable points. Paul warned, **"False brothers infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves"** (Galatians 2:4). Jesus said, **"They come like wolves in sheep's clothing"** (Matthew 7:15). Paul told the Ephesians:

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the



The Loving Father welcomes back his wayward child

Luke 15:11-32

Acts 9:1-15

Galatians 1:11-24



Deceiving and being deceived

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

1 Timothy 4:1-7

2 Timothy 3:13-19



False prophets

Matthew 24:11, 24

Mk 13:21-23

flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! ... Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:29-32).

The more you understand the glory and treasure of the gospel and what it gives us, the more you realize what jeopardizes it. False teachings are like drops of poison in someone’s cup of faith.



When truth is misrepresented or diluted by worldly viewpoints, the visible church slips off its foundation

The more you understand the glory and treasure of the gospel, the more you realize what jeopardizes it

and crumbles in its mission. When a teaching promotes legalism or open sin, it undermines salvation by grace alone. Jesus told the Pharisees that their false teachings shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces and made their converts twice as much a son of hell as they are (Matthew 23:13-15). It alienates you from Christ and causes you to fall away from grace



Some openly reject the King and his message

Matthew 2:7-18

Matthew 23:37

Acts 18:1-16



The Core Truth: Justification by faith alone

(not by our deeds)

Ephesians 2:8-9

Galatians 3:1-14,

3:26-29; 5:1-6

(Galatians 5:4). False teachings become like yeast rising through whole loaf of bread (Matthew 16:6, 11-12). It affects the whole message of Scripture with its errors and spreads like cancer (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Despite what others were saying, Peter confessed that Jesus “is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded:

“On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18)

So being part of the kingdom, means standing up for truth in a world that ignores, corrupts, or contradicts it. The church rises or falls based on the central message that by faith we stand completely justified before God because of what Jesus did and not on anything we do. Paul said:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! ” (Galatians 1:6-8).

The best way to spot false teaching (heresy) is to know the Scriptures well. The Bible needs to be the final authority - not leaders, culture, popular opinion, tradition, history, or personal feelings and

The Church rises or falls based on the central message that we stand justified by faith because of what Jesus did.



Not adding or subtracting from what Scripture says

Joshua 1:7-8

Revelation 2:18-20

experiences. Paul urges Timothy,

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

When Jesus sent us to **“Go and make disciples,”** he not only emphasized baptizing them but also

The Christian Church has always been a “confessional” church – one that takes a stand on what Jesus is and taught

“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Because of this, the Christian church has always been a “confessional”

church, one that takes a stand on what Jesus is and taught. At a meeting now known as the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), the apostles met to address false teachings that were robbing people of the joy and freedom of the gospel. It threatened to return people to the slavery and burdens of Jewish law. But the apostles made a unified stand. They clearly stated that God makes no distinction between people of any nation or race but purifies and accepts them all by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. They put it in writing so their stand against error could strengthen the churches. Several hundred years later in response to new errors, two major creeds emerged called the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.



Importance of teaching sound (healthy) doctrine

Titus 1:9-15

1 Timothy 6:2-5;

6:20-21

2 Timothy 1:13-14



Response to false teachers

Titus 1:9-16

2 John 1:9-11



Testing what is good

1 John 4:1-6

Acts 17:11

1 Thessalonians

5:14-23

They still are used regularly today to confess and stand on the core beliefs of the Christian Church.

Then in the 1500s came another pivotal point in defending the gospel. It is known as the Reformation of the Church. At its center was a man named Dr. Martin Luther. He spoke against the Roman Catholic Church to condemn their errors and defend the glory of the gospel. When they threatened his death, he said, "Here I stand, I can't do otherwise."



Those who agreed with him compiled confessions like the Augsburg Confession and put it into the Book of Concord as their stand for truth. Soon their motto became: Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Sola Scriptura - which means we are saved by "faith alone," given to us by "grace alone," revealed by "Scripture alone."

But now there are many different denominations: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, Assemblies of God. Others adopt a more generic community name. A credibility problem develops when those standing for truth join in efforts and ministries with those who clearly promote teachings and lifestyles that are contrary to Scripture. Taking a stand for truth often



Destructive heresies cause people to abandon faith in Jesus

1 Timothy 1:3-11

2 Peter 2:1-3

Titus 1:3-4; 9-16



Contending together to keep the faith clear

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

Jude 3-4



Fellowship broken

Romans 16:17-18

2 Thessalonians 3:14

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

2 John 3-11

means breaking visible fellowship with others who promote false teaching. That is the hard tension that comes with honoring God's Word while also trying to convey love to others who misrepresent God. This too is part of the cross Christians bear. We find strength in banding with those who live by the truth of the gospel and are not ashamed to share it.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Where the clear gospel is present, God makes his home and calls people to himself – despite errors. This is the grace we celebrate. We confide in the fact that **"The Lord knows those who are his"** (2 Timothy 2:19). We patiently wait for the revealing of those who are truly part of God's Church at the end of time.

4. Review the importance and challenges of standing on sound doctrine.

THE KINGDOM – HERE AND NOT YET

Not everyone welcomes the kingdom of God. Jesus warned his followers of the persecutions they would

Their faith made them less afraid of death than the shame of dishonoring Christ

face. At the hands of the Roman government, the disciples of Jesus faced torture and prison.



The cost of being a disciple of Jesus and standing for truth

Luke 24:25-35



Living with the end in view

Acts 20:22-24

Romans 14:7-13

2 Timothy 4:6-8



Persecution expected for the church that stands for truth of Jesus

Matthew 10:17-33

John 15:18-25

Revelation 2:10-11

Many met eventual death as martyrs for the cause of Christ. But instead of stopping the Christian Church, the persecutions increased the commitment to Christ and spread it faster. Some coined the phrase, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Their faith made them less afraid of death than the shame of dishonoring Christ and his name (Philippians 1:12-18). By faith they looked ahead to a better country – not an earthly one but a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16). Jesus said,

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). **"I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom"** (Luke 22:29-30).

Satan and all his earthly forces cannot stop the advancing of God's kingdom as it moves from heart to heart, community to community, and nation to nation. The kingdom is already at work in and through God's people, but its fullness is "not yet." Jesus said,

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:12-14).

On the final day the Lord of lords, and King of kings will come. With him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers whom he had gathered on earth (Revelation 17:14). They are pictured as a holy city coming down from heaven. Jesus says that many will come from east and the west and take their places at



Heroes who stood up for their faith

1 Samuel 17:41-50

Daniel 3

Hebrews 11



Standing firm until the end

1 Corinthians 16:13

Philippians 1:27

2 Peter 3:17-18

Revelation 2:10-11



The king will return

Matthew 25:31-46

Acts 1:11

Philippians 2:9-10

the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11). They are the bride of Christ ready for the wedding celebration.



“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.... These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, 14).

That is what the Christian Church Triumphant looks like. It is in view of that final day that we recognize the urgent mission of the church to make disciples of all nations. It is in view of that final day that we find boldness and strength. So, while we wait, be the people God intends. Be the Church, the people of God, the family of believers, the ambassadors of Christ, his bride, the light to the world.

5. Review how we should respond to each other when there is sin or error in our group.



The kingdom in heaven is like a wedding banquet

Matthew 22:1-14

Luke 13:22-29



CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. List ways the world or other religions show opposition to the Christian Church.
2. Have you felt opposition because you follow Jesus? Explain how you can remain strong and still exhibit Christ's love.
3. Discuss ways a church can address sin among the brothers and sister in Christ with a balance of love and truth.
4. What excitement and confidence does the picture of heaven give to the Church on earth?
5. What challenges do you face with fellowship with Christians who promote teachings or practices contrary to Scripture? How should you approach it?
6. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
7. Please pray to God based on this.



DEVELOP A SUMMARY OF THE LESSON – Write down and discuss a brief explanation of this lesson. Make it clear and simple enough to share with others. If possible, illustrate it with a drawing or diagram.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

Study it!

Read again more carefully the passages in this lesson to understand what God is saying.

Memorize it!

Suggestion: Memorize **Hebrews 10:23-25** (Or identify a different Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you).

Apply it!

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

Share it!

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson and its summary to help you).

Appendix

Luther's explanation of Apostles' Creed – Third Article

THE THIRD ARTICLE (Sanctification)

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.

But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Christian Church



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