



LOVE
YOUR
CHURCH

Group Guide
Worksheets & Discussion Questions

Introduction

Jesus did not come into this world merely to start a new community. He came to start a new kind of community. In a world of brutality and ugliness, Jesus gave his very lifeblood to start a community set apart by beauty—his own beauty.

But Jesus builds his new kind of community with sinners so bad they can't give God a single reason why he should even notice them. In his new kind of community we don't bring our strengths. We bring our needs. And he provides everything, by his grace. All we have now, all we need, is Jesus in his all-sufficient mercy. And that surprising strategy is how his beauty enters into this world of ugliness.

These worksheets and discussion questions will draw our attention to 8 key responsibilities of church members. Each responsibility is also a privilege. Regardless of where you're at, we all will benefit by recapturing the New Testament's vision of Jesus' church. We can all learn to love our church as he calls us to.

ONE: BELONGING

God has given us a need for community—and he has given us the place where that need for community is met: the church. The church functions as the family of God. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians of the previous generations pass on their faith, stories, and traditions, which we build on. As you consider both the legacy of your church family and what your church family looks like today, it helps to trace a sort of "family tree." Use these prompts to gain an understanding of your church family's DNA.

How did your church get started?

What has changed significantly in the history of your church?

Who leads the church now?

Who's been in your church a long time and has stories you'd like to hear?

Who are you regularly connecting with in your church family?

Discussion: BELONGING

Read: Ephesians 2:18 – 3:19

Discuss:

1. What images does Paul use to describe the church in 2 v 18-22? What does he want us to see about the church's identity?
2. Paul's mission is to preach to the Gentiles. What is his ultimate purpose, and the purpose of the church (3:1-13)?
3. What does Paul pray for his readers (v.14-19)? Why do you think he includes the phrase "together with all the Lord's holy people"—and how does that change your understanding of his prayer?
4. In your church, what does it look like to commit and belong? How could you encourage one another to do this? What rewards do you hope to reap?
5. What's the danger in not belonging to a specific local congregation?
6. What will you pray for your church, based on this passage?

TWO: WELCOMING

Prejudice and discrimination are ongoing human problems and talking about them (especially with regard to the church) often makes us very uncomfortable. But God's word addresses this issue in many ways and in many places, so God's people need to think about it. Consider what it means to experience prejudice, or simply to struggle with being welcomed or feeling like an outsider. Use this reflection to think of practical ways you can be welcoming.

1) List some things that have made you feel like an outsider before (at church or elsewhere).

2) How can you intentionally greet and welcome others so they are not 'on the outside' or 'at the fringes' of your church?

3) What sorts of people may feel particularly like outsiders at your church? (Think of what the culture at your church is like and who might not fit in as easily.) How can you be intentional in reaching out to them and not just to those who could plug in seamlessly?

Discussion: WELCOMING

Read: James 2:1-13

1. How does James show that favouritism is not just unhelpful but wrong (v.4-7)?
2. Why is it such a serious thing to do (v.8-13)?
3. Why does favouritism dishonour not only other people but God himself? And conversely, why is acting without partiality/favouritism a reflection of God's own character and actions?
4. What types of favouritism are particularly tempting in your setting? What are you and your church most likely to discriminate over?
5. In what ways is your church strong at welcoming outsiders? Where could it improve?
6. How can you personally be a part of that? What might need to change about the way you act or speak, both at church gatherings and during the week?

THREE: GATHERING

The church is more than a building you visit and more than an event you attend. However, this doesn't mean that gathering together for corporate worship is unimportant. What we do in our corporate gatherings is important for our growth in godliness, and it's an important way in which we commend the gospel to unbelievers. Gathering regularly takes effort, though. How might we set ourselves up to overcome the challenges? What are the biggest obstacles for you?

WE'RE CHALLENGED BY...

- 1) Distractions
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

WE COULD OVERCOME THIS BY...

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

HOW WILL YOU "MAKE SUNDAYS SWEET"?

Choose two of these ideas, or come up with a new one. Write them below and think through practical ways you can apply them.

- Recognize that you need your church and your church needs you.
- Sanctify Saturday nights.
- Prepare for drama at home on Sunday morning!
- Have some special traditions on the day of corporate worship.

1)

2)

Discussion: GATHERING

Read: Hebrews 12:18-29

Discuss:

1. The author of Hebrews is comparing the moment when the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai (v.18-21) to the state of affairs now (v.22-24). What's different and why? How does this serve as a motivation to gather as a church?
2. The description of v.22-24 is in one sense looking to the future gathering of all God's people in heaven. But it's also describing something of what happens in our gatherings now. Who are we gathering with? How should that impact the way we think about our Sunday meetings?
3. Why is it so urgent to listen to God's voice and to worship him together (v.25-29)?
4. On a Sunday, do you think of yourself as being there to contribute to and build up others in your congregation? How could you do this more?
5. What aspects of church gatherings do you personally find most precious? Why is it so valuable to gather to hear God's word, share the Lord's Supper, sing, and pray together?
6. What could you do to prepare well for Sunday? What "holy and happy habits" could you build, and how could that make a difference to your experience of corporate worship?

FOUR: CARING

The “one another” passages in the New Testament demonstrate the importance of caring for our brothers and sisters in our Christian community. That there are so many of these passages illustrates that this is a non-negotiable for brothers and sisters. We don't have to look far to see there is also plenty of need.

Can you think of a time someone's care for you helped you significantly, even if it was a small thing?

COMMON OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOW CARE

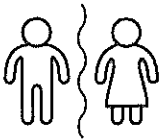
Brainstorm some practical ways you could show care to people in these common situations, so you're ready when the need arises.



New baby in the family



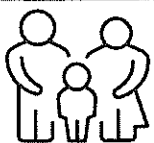
Death of a loved one



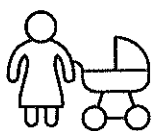
Separation, divorce, broken relationship



Facing long-term illness



Recent foster care placement or adoption



Single parents or kids without a present parent

Discussion: CARING

Read: Galatians 5:16–6:10

Discuss:

1. In 5:16-25, what reasons does Paul give for doing good to one another? What makes it possible to be caring and not selfish?
2. What dangers might we fall into as we seek to care for one another (6:1, 3-4, 9)? What ideas do you have on how you can avoid those while not holding back on caring for others?
3. What is our aim and ultimate hope as we do good to one another? How does this help us to persevere?
4. What is the greatest challenge in these verses for you personally?
5. Is your church one in which restoring, burden-bearing, sharing, and doing good take place? Which one is your weak point? What could you do to step up in that area?
6. What steps could you take to educate or train yourself (whether personally or as a congregation) in how to care for others effectively?

FIVE: SERVING

Followers of Christ are not spectators in the church, but servants in the church. As a Christian, you shouldn't think of your church as "the place where I listen to sermons" but as "the place where I serve." Use your gifts passionately for the good of the body. You need to be in a local church to be strengthened by the gifts of others, and you need to be in a local church because others need to be built up by your gifts! So how might you serve?

YOUR GIFTS

What are you good at? What are your spiritual gifts? What do you have experience doing?

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

What formal ministries or programs line up with your gifts? Are there informal opportunities too?

Discussion: SERVING

Read: Romans 12:1-21

Discuss:

1. What does whole-life worship look like, and what motivates it (v.1-2)?
2. How should we see our own identity (v.5)? How does this help us to serve well?
3. Verses 9-21 contain some challenging instructions. Why is doing these things hard? What difference can they make (v.21)?
4. What gifts has God given you? How can you use them with excellence, passion, and humility for the good of your church?
5. What needs do you see in your church? How could you meet them?
6. Is there anything in Paul's instructions that is lacking in your church's life or in your own life? How will you pray in response to this passage?

SIX: HONORING

In a church which is blessed by having faithful pastors who are attempting to serve under Christ in a way that honors him and builds up the body, there are many helpful ways to respond to their leadership biblically as well as to encourage them. Brainstorm those ideas below, keeping in mind that every leader is an individual with their own unique gifts, needs, strengths, weaknesses, and walk with God.

When you think of church, who do you think of?

Leaders include pastors, elders, deacons,
Bible study teachers, those who
coordinate kids' church programs,
and so many others.

How could you honor and encourage them?

See pages 113-118 of Love Your Church
for helpful ideas. Don't forget to factor
in the unique personality of each
individual you've listed.

Discussion: HONOURING

Read: 1 Peter 5:1-5



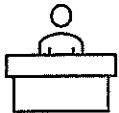


Discuss:

1. What dangers does Peter want his readers to avoid—both elders and other members of the church?
2. What is the purpose of elders and pastors seeking to lead in the way Peter instructs?
3. What is the purpose of church members being “subject to the elders”?
4. In what areas might people find it especially hard to submit to their elders? Have you had experiences of this kind of tension in church? What would humility, respect, and love look like in those situations?
5. In what ways are your elders and pastors a good example to you? How could you follow their example?
6. What might encourage each of your elders and pastors this week? How could you help them keep in mind Peter’s vision for leadership? What will you pray for them?

SEVEN: WITNESSING

Often, evangelistic methods involve only “on the spot” presentations, and they can be impersonal. They can simply allow us to check a box to appease our guilt, and then move on. But when you’re reaching out to people you see regularly, it requires faithfulness and perseverance. You need to do the necessary pre-evangelism, answer questions, slowly and gradually watch defenses go down, and hopefully—by God’s grace—see your friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbor declare, “Jesus is Lord.” Here are five real life-ways to engage with unbelievers in your network.

- Pray
- Invite
- Give books and resources
- Serve
- Share the gospel

Who	What
List specific names or abbreviations for people that come to mind.	Pick one of the five ideas above for each person.
 Familial	
 Geographical	
 Vocational	
 Recreational	
 Commercial	

Brainstorm a specific action you might take to ensure you follow through on witnessing to each person. If you’re in a group, it may be helpful to discuss ideas. For example, if you said, “give a resource,” ask others what book they’d recommend giving to someone who believes _____ or has _____ barriers to the gospel.

Discussion: WITNESSING

Read: 1 Peter 3:13-17

Discuss:

1. Why do you think honouring and revering Christ (v.15) makes it easier to avoid fearing others (v.14)?
2. What results should there be from doing good (v.13-16)?
3. As we engage with others, why is it important both to articulate a reason for our hope and to speak with gentleness and respect, as verse 15 directs us to?
4. Are you full of hope? What can you do to cultivate this virtue? How would you explain the reason for it?
5. What does it look like to speak with “gentleness and respect”? In what kinds of relationships is doing so particularly easy or particularly challenging? How can you help one another to grow in this area?
6. In what ways are you currently pursuing obedience to the call to make disciples (Matthew 28:19) both individually, as a group, and as a whole church? How could you be most effective as witnesses to your particular community?

EIGHT: SENDING

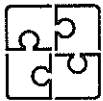
If a church isn't sending, it's ending. This may sound counter-intuitive, but usually churches that are raising up and sending out missionaries and church planters are vibrant churches. How can you support those your church is sending?



Who will you support? Browse a list of your church missionaries and select someone to intentionally support.



Consider where they are serving. What's it like? What do they do?



What needs might they have as they serve? What challenges might they be facing?



How will you reach out to support them? Ideas: Write a letter, make a donation, give them a call, pray for them regularly, or send a gift or a care package.

Discussion: SENDING

Read: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3

Discuss:

1. How do we see God at work through people as the Antioch church is established (11:19-25)?
2. What different roles do Barnabas and Saul play?
3. What attitude do the Antioch Christians have toward other churches, toward Saul and Barnabas, toward unreached people, and toward God himself? What does this teach you as a local church today?
4. How outward-looking are you as a church? What would be one step you could take to grow in this area together?
5. In your church, what could you do to follow the example of Barnabas? How could you encourage others to do the same?
6. What will you pray for your church, your community, and the world in the light of this passage?



GROWTH