

**BEING &
BECOMING
THE CHURCH**

LEADER'S GUIDE

Study written by Brandy Eldridge & Dakota Searles
Graphics/Layout by Chelsea Hoffman & Melony Lucas

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DEAR FRIENDS, SINCE GOD SO LOVED US, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD, BUT IF WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, GOD LIVES IN US AND HIS LOVE IS MADE COMPLETE IN US.
1 JOHN 4:11-12



Main Point: GOD ASSEMBLES US

God has called His people to gather together for His specific purposes, and His Word provides the insight we need to understand those purposes.

Leader's Note:

This study is designed in such a way that you can walk through each session together without completing homework in advance. However, you are free to approach it in whatever way fits best with your group. For example, you might ask group members to do some of the Scripture readings in advance, or consider assigning the “Heart Check” component of each session as homework to discuss at the beginning of the next session. Additionally, a “Dig Deeper” section is provided at the end of each session as an optional recommendation for additional study, should anyone in your group desire to do so.

What exactly is “the church”?

AS A GROUP, BRAINSTORM TOGETHER: WHEN YOU THINK OF “CHURCH,” WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND? There are no right or wrong answers, so feel free to throw out any thought you have.

Have a member of your group look up “church” in an English dictionary. What definitions do you find there?

In the New Testament, the Greek word used for church is *ekklesia*. In Greek sources outside the Bible it means simply “an assembly or gathering.” The concept is carried over from the Old Testament use of the Hebrew *qahal*, translated as “assembly,” “gathering,” or “congregation.” Taken from its literal roots, *ekklesia* can also be translated as “called out ones.” It is a relatively neutral word. It is not overtly religious in meaning and does not specify the reason behind the assembly it identifies. Thus, the context must supply the particular intended meaning – for what purpose are the people being called out and assembled?

With that in mind, look at a few key verses that help clarify the meaning of *ekklesia* as the biblical authors use it (to find where *qahal* or *ekklesia* is used, look for the word assembly, gathering, or church in each passage). What does each one suggest about the biblical purpose of the church?

DEUTERONOMY 4:9-14:

JOSHUA 8:34-35:

ACTS 9:31, 14:27, 16:1-5:

EPHESIANS 1:15-23:

HEBREWS 12:18-24:

How does this overview of the biblical use of *ekklesia* inform your understanding of what “church” means? How does it compare to the initial thoughts you brainstormed as a group?

What does the *ekklesia* do?

Implicit in the concept of *ekklesia* is that our faith is not meant to be a solitary endeavor – God assembles us intentionally. What, then, are we meant to do when we assemble? Luke provides the clearest picture of what the gathering of the people of God entails.

AS A GROUP, READ ACTS 2:42-47. Make a list together of what this passage specifies about what is to occur as part of the gathering.

The New Testament is predominantly made up of letters sent to churches – to gatherings of God’s people in specific places. As such, much of what these letters say can be considered instructions for what church should look like. To go through every instruction given to the churches about how they should function is well beyond the scope of this session. However, to get a feel for the overarching themes, consider the instructions provided in the following key passages:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

HEBREWS 10:19-25

1 JOHN 4:7-12

How do Life Groups at Grace Community Church live out the purpose and function of the *ekklesia*?

Grace Community Church exists to know Christ and to make Him known. Life Groups serve a critical function in that mission, as they provide a small group context in which people can (1) grow in their understanding of who God is and how we respond to Him as His children, and (2) receive equipping and encouragement to live out faith in daily life in such a way that we testify meaningfully to others about Jesus.

It has been said that growth happens in circles, not in rows. The meaning here is that our spiritual growth happens when we engage with other believers to discuss the meaning of Scripture, understand how it applies in our own lives, and challenge and encourage one another to live out our faith. That is difficult to accomplish in a large Sunday gathering consisting mostly of sitting in rows listening to a teaching. Small groups are where we sit in a circle, face-to-face with fellow believers, where we can know one another and have ample opportunity for interaction that helps us grow.

How does a Life Group provide opportunity for the priorities of the *ekklesia* as specified in the above Bible passages?

What role do you see this Life Group playing in your efforts to know Christ and make Him known?

How can our Life Group live out this purpose and function well?

Take a few minutes as a group to take stock of how your group can apply itself to the purpose of the *ekklesia*, as explored throughout this session. As you do so, keep in mind **1 JOHN 4:7-12**, focusing on what it means to love one another well and how that represents God living in us.

If your group is new, consider some ground rules that will help make the group feel like a safe place to share openly with one another about both joys and challenges related to growing in faith. If your group has been meeting for a while, use this as an opportunity to evaluate what has been going well, and what changes might be beneficial to help you better live into the purpose of the *ekklesia*.

Heart check

Take a few minutes to prayerfully consider your individual role in your Life Group. What strengths do you bring to the group that will be an asset as you seek to live out the purpose of the *ekklesia* together? What are areas in which you might need the help of the group in order to grow? Formulate one goal for personal growth that you are comfortable sharing with the group. Take note of one another's goals so that you can check in with and encourage one another as the study progresses.

Dig deeper

1 CORINTHIANS contains Paul's guidance on many practical concerns that faced the first-century church. Read through this book, noting the truths about God and biblical values that Paul roots his advice in. Consider how these values and truths might be applied to specific challenges facing your Life Group, Grace Community Church, or the church at large today.



**“I AM JEALOUS FOR YOU WITH A GODLY JEALOUSY. I
PROMISED YOU TO ONE HUSBAND, TO CHRIST, SO THAT
I MIGHT PRESENT YOU AS A PURE VIRGIN TO HIM.”
2 CORINTHIANS 11:2**



Main Point: GOD LOVES US

God loves His people. He designed human marriage to be a metaphor for His love.

Leader's Note:

This lesson relies heavily on passages from the Old Testament, and deals with some challenging topics, including marriage and sexual relations. Particularly, the imagery in Ezekiel 16 may cause discomfort to members of your group. We must remember that this lesson is about the Bride of Christ, and how human marriages were made to be a reflection of that greater reality. This is not a lesson about our human relationships. Those in your group who are single, widowed, or divorced will still be able to participate fully in the discussion because the ideal marriage — namely, Christ and His Bride — is visible to all people through Scripture. Be patient, and consider breaking the lesson into two sections if the group needs time for pastoral care or prayer.

What did the first marriage look like?

In the Garden of Eden, we see God's relationship with humanity, and the first humans' relationship with one another.

AS A GROUP, READ GENESIS 1:1, 1:26-31 AND 5:1-2.

According to 1:28, what are the first words God speaks to humans? Why is this mission considered a blessing?

How would humans accomplish this mission/blessing?

What do these verses tell us about the relationship between humans and God? What unique characteristics do humans possess that the rest of creation does not?

AS A GROUP, READ GENESIS 2:7 AND 2:18-25.

Describe the relationship between Adam and Eve.

In Genesis 2:24 the author breaks into the narrative with a moral imperative or command. Why is this an appropriate place to put this command?

The unfaithful bride

Genesis sets the tone that the marriage relationship is special. God uses this familiar image of marriage to describe his relationship with his people. **AS A GROUP, READ EZEKIEL 16:1-14.**

Describe the state of the Lord's people (represented by Jerusalem) before and after the Lord interacts with them.

Just as we understand that unfaithfulness is a violation of the marriage relationship, so too God says idolatry is spiritual adultery and a violation of the relationship between God and His people.

NOW READ EZEKIEL 16:15-34 AS A GROUP.

What has Jerusalem done to anger God?

Why does Ezekiel use the metaphor of a marriage covenant in this chapter?

AS A GROUP, READ EZEKIEL 16:59-63.

What does God promise to do in response to the unfaithfulness of his Bride? What does this suggest about God's faithfulness?

The Lamb and His bride

You may be wondering how this connects with the church. After all, you've not read any of the New Testament yet in this session! This is meant to demonstrate that this idea is not "new" to the New Testament. God's love for His people is throughout the Bible. The New Testament helps clarify what that relationship looks like, and how it will come to fruition in eternity.

AS A GROUP, READ REVELATION 19:6-9 AND REVELATION 21:1-14.

Who is the bride? Describe her.

Does God have more than one bride? How does this passage demonstrate the unity between Israel and the church?

Putting it all together

AS A GROUP, READ EPHESIANS 5:21-33.

Why does Paul quote **GENESIS 2:24** here?

How does Christ, as a husband to the church, demonstrate His love for His bride?

Heart check

Human marriages are intended by God to reflect the love He has for His people and His desire to share an intimate, faithful, and unbreakable union with them. We are declared to be His bride and can experience the goodness of this reality by pursuing increased intimacy with Him.

Is God's love for us based on our performance or faithfulness?

What does it look like to be a faithful bride to Christ?

How does knowing God's faithful love to the church shape our lives?

Dig deeper

Several other passages speak about God's people as his bride. **ISAIAH 54:4-8**, **EZEKIEL 23**, **HOSEA 1**, and **MATTHEW 9:14-15** all describe God (or Jesus) as a husband to His people. There are both Jewish and Christian traditions that believe the **SONG OF SOLOMON** (Song of Songs) is an allegory of the love God has for His people. Explore these passages to better understand how God loves His people, how His people have been unfaithful to Him, and how He pursues them even in their unfaithfulness. What a loving God we serve!



“BUT 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. ONCE YOU WERE NOT A PEOPLE, BUT NOW YOU ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD; ONCE YOU HAD NOT RECEIVED MERCY, BUT NOW YOU HAVE RECEIVED MERCY.”

1 Peter 2:9-10



Main Point: GOD IS WORKING IN US

God both declares His people distinct from the world and continuously works to shape us into the likeness of His Son.

Leader’s Note:

This session asks the group to consider what it means to be set apart by God, including both being chosen to be His people, and what it means to live into our identity as such. Encourage your group not to get too caught up in terms like “priest” and “priesthood,” thinking they only apply to pastors or clergy. Biblically, they apply to *all* people of God — we are *all* set apart. This is where theologians get the idea of the “priesthood of all believers.” If we are in Christ, we are part of this priesthood, even if we ourselves are not clergy, church staff, or otherwise involved in professional ministry. This means that we all as believers experience both the benefits *and* the responsibilities of being set apart by God.

What does it mean to be a holy nation?

AS A GROUP, READ EXODUS 19:1-8.

According to verses 4 and 5, what has God done, and what response is He expecting of His people?

What result will occur if the people do as God has asked?

What additional rationale for being a holy nation is offered in **LEVITICUS 20:26**?

In Hebrew, the word for holiness is *kadosh*, and it refers to being completely set apart and distinct, especially from that which is ordinary, common, or profane.

READ ISAIAH 6:1-8. What does it mean for God to be holy?

READ HOSEA 2:1-23.

What does it mean for God's people to be holy? What is associated with unholiness?

Based on Hosea 2:14-23, what is God's ultimate plan for His people, and who initiates it?

This idea of a holy nation is carried through into the New Testament.

AS A GROUP, READ 1 PETER 2:4-10.

What analogy is used to represent the people of God in this passage? What role does Christ play in that analogy?

A cornerstone in ancient Near Eastern construction served as both the weight that supported the entire building and the measure by which the walls were kept straight. Knowing this, how does Christ serving as the cornerstone relate to the holiness of His people?

According to verse 9, what is the purpose of being a holy priesthood? In what ways do you see this play out in the modern church?

How do we become holy?

Justification is the act of declaring someone righteous, guiltless, and debt-free. Through the grace of God, received by faith, Christians are justified. In other words, we are given the gift of holiness (see **1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31**). Believers are set apart for God's purposes, and righteousness is granted to them simply because they are His people.

TOGETHER AS A GROUP, READ ROMANS 5:1-11.

How do we obtain justification, according to these verses? What results from justification?

Sanctification is the process through which believers become increasingly Christlike in thought, word, and deed. Though we are declared righteous through faith, we continue to need additional growth as we mature spiritually. So we are simultaneously declared righteous (justified) and undergoing growth in righteousness (sanctification).

TOGETHER AS A GROUP, READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8.

What do these verses indicate about what characterizes the sanctification process?

What does our holiness accomplish?

Another way to talk about justification and sanctification is positional holiness and experiential holiness. Justification is about what camp we are in – do we belong to God, or the world? It is an either-or, as you must be in one camp or the other. We are holy – set apart – because God has firmly positioned us by planting our feet in His camp. Sanctification, however, is something we increasingly experience as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit while He grows and matures us in faith. We become increasingly holy as our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors become more and more like those of Christ (meaning we will look less and less like the world around us).

How does positional holiness contribute to hope?

In what areas do you believe God is calling you personally to increased experiential holiness?

What role do both positional and experiential holiness play in evangelism, that is, our testimony about Jesus to the world?

Heart check

Spend a few minutes in personal prayer, reflecting with God on what it means for His people to be a holy nation. Consider both what it means for God's church as a whole, Grace Community Church, and you as an individual.

After prayerful consideration, share with the group one component of how God is leading you to apply this concept to your own life in the coming week(s).

Dig deeper

Learn more about the concept of holiness by examining its meaning in the original Hebrew. Here is a good starting place:

<https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Meditations/Kadosh/kadosh.html>

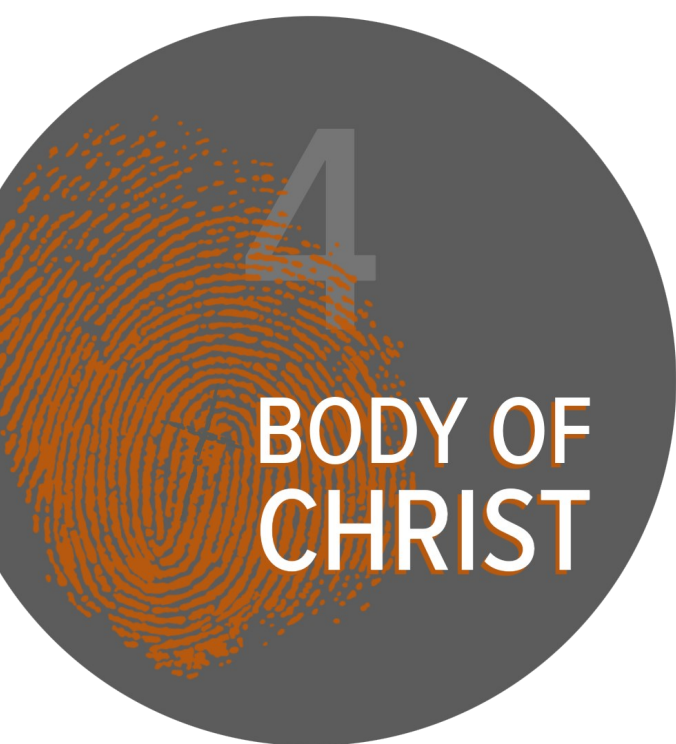
Additional Old Testament references to being set apart to explore further include **EXODUS 15:11-18**; **LEVITICUS 11:44–45**; **DEUTERONOMY 14:2, 26:16-19, 28:9**; and **JEREMIAH 2:3**.

Read through **ROMANS 1:1-8:39**. As you go through the text, make notes about what Paul is telling us about both positional and experiential holiness. How does what is explained there stir you to make changes in how you live out your personal faith?



“THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT DISTRIBUTES THEM. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SERVICE, BUT THE SAME LORD. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORKING, BUT IN ALL OF THEM AND IN EVERYONE IT IS THE SAME GOD AT WORK.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6



Main Point: GOD IS WORKING THROUGH US

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to each believer to empower them for godly living and service to the body. Christ accomplishes His work through His church.

Leader's Note:

Today's lesson discusses spiritual gifts. This lesson is not meant to be a discourse on whether or not particular gifts continue to this day. There may be people in your group that land on either side of the continuation vs. cessation debate. Do not let today's discussion drift here. Stay focused on the purpose of gifts as Scripture outlines — building up the church — and then how we can use the gifts we have together to build up the church.

What unites the church?

AS A GROUP, READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-18.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the head of the church?

What role in a body does the head play?

How does the head relate to other parts of the body?

AS A GROUP, READ EPHESIANS 4:3-6.

According to this passage, what is the source of the church's unity?

Why is unity important for the church?

Diversity amongst unity

Having examined how the church is united by the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's mission, we now turn to explore the diverse methods by which the Holy Spirit accomplishes Christ's mission.

AS A GROUP, READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11.

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts (see verse 7)?

NOW READ THE REST OF THE CHAPTER (VERSES 12-31).

What is the benefit of having different gifts operating in different people?

Can Christians exist without other members of the body? Does God intend for Christians to be reclusive or isolated from the rest of the body?

Think of a time when you broke a bone or had surgery. How did other parts of your body function during the pain and recovery? Based on this, how ought members of the church body relate to one another?

What spiritual gift(s) do you have? How can you use (or how are you using) these gifts according to their purpose?

Leader's Note:

If your group has expressed interest in exploring this topic more and discovering their spiritual gifts, then invite them to take an online spiritual gifts assessment before the next group meeting. Free online assessments can be found here: <https://gifts.churchgrowth.org/spiritual-gifts-survey/gifts-survey/> and here: <https://giftstest.com/test>. Then, with results in hand, have people share one at a time what their assessment reported. Have other members affirm which gifts they see in the person sharing. Encourage the group to find ways to put into practice the gifts confirmed by the assessment and the group.

Example: Judy shares her results, stating she scored highly in Hospitality, Evangelism, and Generosity. She knew she would score highly in hospitality, but the other two were new to her. Michael says he has seen Judy interact naturally with newcomers at church services; this may be evidence of her gift of evangelism. Scott remembers a time when Judy was especially generous; he believes she is a generous person. You (the group leader) ask Judy if she is using these gifts, reminding the group of the content of Being and Becoming the Church Lesson 4, that gifts are given to us for the benefit of others. If Judy is unsure how to put the gifts into practice, suggest ministries that need people with her gifts.

Remember: no gift or part of the body is unnecessary; God has good works prepared for everyone! Pray that God will allow more opportunities for Judy to use these gifts and that she would be bold in using them. Then allow another person to share their report.

RETURN TO EPHESIANS 4 AND READ THE REST OF THE PASSAGE (VERSES 7-16) TOGETHER.

What is the standard or goal of Christian maturity?

Does the body grow if its members are not doing their work (see verse 16)?

Arrange the following events in their chronological order:

Leader's note: the correct order for this question is: D, A, C, B, E.

- A. The church is united by its one faith
- B. The church builds itself up in love
- C. The Spirit gives gifts to the church
- D. Christ ascends into heaven
- E. The church matures to Christlikeness

Based on the last question, what stage(s) have yet to be completed? How are they to be completed?

The local and the global church

The universal church consists of all believers and groups of believers who share in the one true faith (EPHESIANS 4:4-6). Grace Community Church is one expression of the universal church.

How does division in the universal church impact Christ's mission? Does competing for members or speaking poorly of other faithful churches help Christ's mission?

How can GCC or our Life Group “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (EPHESIANS 4:3) with other churches and church groups?

Heart check

Spend time in prayer this week. Ask God to reveal what your disposition is toward the body using the following prompts:

What is my disposition toward people with other gifts?

Do I harbor resentment, jealousy, or anger towards anyone in the body?

Is there anyone in the church of whom I've thought “I don't need them”?

Do I view the success of other Christians as a victory for the church and for myself?

Is there anyone in the church I have not forgiven?

What is my disposition toward people from other churches?

Dig deeper

If you would like to explore what spiritual gift(s) you may have the please use one of the following free online assessments:

<https://giftstest.com/test>

or

<https://gifts.churchgrowth.org/spiritual-gifts-survey/gifts-survey/>



**“DON’T YOU KNOW THAT YOU YOURSELVES ARE GOD’S
TEMPLE AND THAT GOD’S SPIRIT DWELLS IN YOUR MIDST?
IF ANYONE DESTROYS GOD’S TEMPLE, GOD WILL DESTROY
THAT PERSON; FOR GOD’S TEMPLE IS SACRED, AND YOU
TOGETHER ARE THAT TEMPLE.”**

1 Corinthians 3:16-17



Main Point: GOD LIVES WITH US

God seeks meaningful and tangible connection with us so we can dwell together with Him - first through the temple, then in the incarnation of His Son, and finally through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within all believers.

Leader's Note:

This is a session that has the potential to bring out political or theological debate, particularly with regard to the current status of Israel and what God's intention for Israel/the temple is in the end times. While there is a rightful time and place for studying and discussing end times, that is not the purpose of this study or this session. Encourage your group to stay on topic, and stick as closely as possible to the intended meaning of the biblical texts you will be studying together.

What is the temple?

AS A GROUP, READ 2 CHRONICLES 6:1-42.

According to these verses, how does the temple permit interaction between God and His people?

What key purposes does the temple serve among the people?

What response does God provide to Solomon's prayer in 2 CHRONICLES 7:1-3?

What important information do we learn about the temple in this verse?

What does Jesus say about the temple?

Though it may be obvious by the way we build our churches and conduct our Sunday services, it is important to note that as New Testament believers we no longer use the physical temple for sacrifices, prayer, or worship.

What new understanding of the temple does Jesus offer in JOHN 2:13-22?

In what ways is Christ the fulfillment of the purposes of the temple listed in 2 CHRONICLES 6?

How does HEBREWS 9:23-28 offer additional insight about how Jesus inaugurates something greater than what was established with the Old Testament temple?

The dwelling of the Holy Spirit

After Jesus's death and resurrection, many aspects of faith in the Living God found their fulfillment. This means that a spiritual, heavenly reality was revealed that was only hinted at by the previous physical, earthly symbols.

TOGETHER AS A GROUP, READ ACTS 2:1-13. What occurs in this passage that indicates a new and revolutionary way for God to interact with His people?

How do the events documented in this portion of Acts link back to the temple as described in the Old Testament?

What impact do the events of Acts 2:1-13 have on those who witnessed them?

New Testament believers as the temple

The temple continues to be a powerful image in the New Testament, with God's people themselves –both individually and collectively – described as temples. Read the following passages and discuss how they add to the picture presented in Acts 2:1-13.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20

God's temple persists

At the most fundamental level, the temple is the place where God and humanity overlap, an access point at which God interacts with the world in an especially tangible way. Even though the physical building in Jerusalem has long since been destroyed, God's temple has carried on, in and through His believing faith family!

What does it look like, practically speaking, for believers as a group to be the temple?

What implications of being a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit are there for the individual believer?

Heart check

As a believer, you are yourself a temple – a special seat of residence for God, with the Holy Spirit living within you. As such, you represent a unique and meaningful point of contact between God and the world. Take a few moments to prayerfully consider the ways in which others encounter the Living God when they interact with you. What changes might God be asking you to make so others can see Him more clearly in and through you?

After this prayerful consideration, share with the group one way you can grow spiritually so that others better experience the Living God when they interact with you. Pray for each other as you encourage one another toward growth in these areas.

Dig deeper

Read **GENESIS 1-2**. In what ways could creation as God formed it be described as a temple, especially in regard to God's original intention for it and the role humans played in its functioning?

Read about how the tabernacle was constructed (**EXODUS 25:1-26:21**) and how the temple that took its place was built (**1 KINGS 6:1-38**). What were the main components of the tabernacle and the temple? What do these suggest about how God related to people in the Old Testament? Consult **HEBREWS 9:1-28** to help you compare these earthly representations to the heavenly realities they reflect.

PSALMS 120-134 are referred to as Psalms of Ascent, and they were intended to be sung as the people came up to the temple for festivals and other significant times of worship. Read through these psalms, noting as you do the ways in which people's interaction with the city of Jerusalem and the physical temple pointed forward to a coming fulfillment of its purpose in the person and work of Jesus Christ.



**“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**



Main Point: WE ARE FAMILY

God uses the depiction of a family to show that those who are in Christ belong with Him permanently and to teach about the loyalty, devotion, and edifying relationships we are to cultivate among ourselves.

Leader’s Note:

This session draws from the image of family to describe who the people of God are and how they are meant to interact with one another. Depending on the experiences your group members have had with family, it may be important to make space for highlighting the central message that God’s family is focused on His ideals, purposes, and ways. Though our experience of earthly family members may range from loving and joyful to harsh and abusive, God’s definition of ideal and proper family dynamics does not change. We can draw hope from learning more about the biblical picture of God’s family, and experience healing through redemptive relationships with God Himself and with our spiritual brothers and sisters who treat us as God intends and instructs.

Adopted as children of God

Read the following passages and make note of what they say about who God's people are.

JOHN 1:12-14

ROMANS 8:13-17

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

What does the Bible say about family?

As the above passages illustrate, the Bible draws on the image of family to instruct us on what it means to be the church. However, the reality of our fallen world means that many of us have pain, brokenness, anger, sadness, and other difficulties as part of our experience of family. For this reason, it is important to allow Scripture to define the proper picture of family.

READ GENESIS 2:18, PROVERBS 17:6 & 17, MATTHEW 15:3-6, MARK 10:5-9, AND 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-8.

What do these passages suggest about the permanence of familial relationships?

What responsibilities accompany family?

What joys accompany family?

We aren't only children!

One of the beautiful things about God's plan for the church is that when we are adopted into His family, we are not adopted as only children. Instead, we join a diverse and yet united group of brothers and sisters marked by the commonality of our commitment to Christ.

What it means to have brothers and sisters in the faith is a key theme of **PHILEMON**. Read this short book together, and discuss the following:

How does Paul speak about the people he refers to by name in the book? What does that suggest about how he regards them?

What does Paul suggest specifically about how Philemon should approach his relationship with Onesimus?

What will the likely implications be if Philemon follows Paul's advice?

What lessons can we draw from Philemon and Onesimus about how our relationships as believers are shaped both by our worldly relationships (e.g., boss and employee, friends, student and teacher, etc.) and our identification as spiritual brothers and sisters?

Learning from our brothers and sisters

The Bible does provide some practical guidance about how we can live well together as brothers and sisters. When we follow what Scripture commands, we live into the ideal picture of family as God intended it.

What does **GALATIANS 6:7-10** suggest about how we are to treat one another and what rationale does it use for this instruction?

What does Paul urge us to pursue in **1 CORINTHIANS 1:10**?

What key ways of interacting in the family of God are highlighted in **COLOSSIANS 3:12-17**?

Our growing family

Read the following verses the chronicle the growth of the early church:

ACTS 2:41, 2:47, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7, 11:24, 12:24, 13:48-49, & 19:20

How are more people added to the family of God?

Over time, earthly families will change. Families that love one another rejoice when new people join the family, whether through marriage, birth, or adoption. So too with the church! Church families that love one another will want to grow and share their love with other people.

Spend a few minutes thinking about a time your earthly family grew. What was your reaction?

As a group, read **LUKE 15:3-10**. How do those in heaven react when someone is added in God's family? How should we react?

Heart check

What has been your personal experience with family relationships on earth? What are some ways in which right understanding of God and authentic relationship with Him could bring about redemption and healing (if needed) of your view of family? Similarly, how can biblical relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ either further develop or correct your understanding of the true meaning of family?

Take time as a group to reflect on how well you are living into your call to be brothers and sisters to one another. It may be beneficial to look back to the ground rules and expectations you set during Session 1 to guide your discussion. Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to knit your group together tightly as family and provide guidance as you grow in your relationships with one another.

Dig deeper

Read the story of the fall of Jericho in **JOSHUA 2:1-6:27**. Take note as you do about Rahab's interaction with the Israelites. How do her actions demonstrate the characteristics of spiritual sisterhood held in high esteem by the Bible? What does **JOSHUA 6:22-25** indicate about her fate? What applications can we draw from her story to inform how we ourselves interact with our brothers and sisters in Christ? How might doing so impact the Kingdom of God as it moves forward in the world?



“..YOU ARE GOD’S FIELD, GOD’S BUILDING.”
1 Corinthians 3:9



Main Point: GOD PROVIDES FOR US

God is a master gardener who works to cultivate His people into flourishing and fruitful lives.

Leader’s Note:

This session focuses on human flourishing. This may be difficult for people in your group who are experiencing difficult circumstances. Remember and remind your group that circumstances are not to be used to interpret God's opinion of us (i.e., saying things like “If I'm experiencing bad circumstances, then God is angry with me”). True flourishing means living as God wants us to live, with Jesus as our prime example. Ultimately, this is possible both in good times and during difficulty.

One garden, or two?

In a pre-industrial society many people depended on farming and gardening for their own livelihood.

AS A GROUP, READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-9.

Who does Paul identify as the field in this passage?

Who, according to verses 6-7, causes the field to grow?

The image of God as a gardener is a common metaphor used in the Old Testament as well.

AS A GROUP, READ ISAIAH 5:1-7.

Who does Isaiah identify as the vineyard in this passage?

According to this text, why did God plant this vineyard? What did God expect of it?

You may be wondering if Israel and the church are different gardens. Paul addresses this concern in **ROMANS 11:13-24**. Read it together.

According to Paul, is there one garden, or two?

How do Gentiles become part of God's garden? What specific term does Paul use to describe this unification of Jew and Gentile (see verses 17 and 19)?

Have you ever done a tree or plant graft? What does that process look like?

Using the imagery in this passage, what do Israel and the church share in common?

God, the gardener

Paul says God has “grafted in” the Gentiles so that they share the same root. Just as we saw from previous sessions there is only one “people of God”. Both Jews and Gentiles are in God’s garden. Jesus also used this imagery and taught that God is a gardener.

AS A GROUP, READ MATTHEW 13:1-8, AND 18-32.

In the first parable Jesus compares people to different kinds of soils. Identify who or what the following characters represent:

The sower

The seed

The birds

The 4 kinds of soils

According to this parable what does God do? What is our role as believers?

In the second parable Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a field with weeds. According to this parable what does God do? What is our role as believers?

In the third parable Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. According to this parable what does God do? What is our role as believers?

What do all of these passages tell us about the Father’s desire for us?

AS A GROUP, READ JOHN 15:1-8.

Pruning is an unpleasant experience that stimulates long-term growth. How does the Father prune our lives to promote our long-term growth?

When a garden is fruitful, the gardener is praised. When a Christian is fruitful, God is praised.

REREAD JOHN 15:8. According to this passage, how do Christians glorify God?

True flourishing

The oldest lie told to humans was from the serpent in **GENESIS 3:4-5**. Here the serpent declares that God is holding out on Adam and Eve, that they will flourish by knowing evil instead of trusting God. However, true human flourishing comes when we live according to our God-intended design in a right relationship with God and with other humans.

What kind of fruit did God look for in Israel? Hint: see **ISAIAH 5:7** again.

What kind of fruit do Christians bear? Hint: see **GALATIANS 5:22**.

What does true human flourishing look like? How do God's actions prove that He wants us to flourish?

Heart check

Where does God need to prune you? Often in our hyper busy society we allow little to no marginal time in our schedules. Examine how much time you invest in different activities, habits, and relationships throughout your day. Pray for God to remove anything unnecessary in your life so that He can cause you to grow. What is one activity, habit, or relationship that is preventing you from growing closer to God and bearing fruit?

Dig deeper

Read **PSALM 1:1-3**, **JEREMIAH 17:7-8**, **HOSEA 14:1-8**, **MATTHEW 15:13**, **MATTHEW 20:1-16**, and **LUKE 20:9-16**. Then, using a reference tool like a concordance or theological dictionary, explore how terms like "garden", "vine/vineyard", and "planting" are used in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic literature. What do these verses reveal about God's character, and His purpose for His people?



“NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO IMMEASURABLY MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER AND EVER! AMEN.”
Ephesians 3:20-21



Main Point: God completes His work

The church of Jesus Christ will endure until the end of time, and will contain people from every generation.

Leader's Note:

This is our last session. As such it allows time for your group to reflect on the study as a whole and look forward to the future. As is true for all Growth Group studies at Grace, we hope that "Being and Becoming the Church" has brought about lasting spiritual growth for you and your members. This session allows you to reflect more on how to apply and live out what you have learned about in the study — if we merely use this to learn more information, then we miss the discipleship mark. We also hope that it has kindled interest in your group to study these topics further.

As we all seek to grow, please let us know how this study has benefited you, how you would improve this study, and what other topic(s) you would like to have resources on for further study.

What have we learned?

For the last 7 sessions, this study has focused on various biblical conceptions of the church, and what those concepts tell us about who God is and how He works in, through, and for His church. Let's do a quick recap.

What would it look like if all Christians lived as an *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ?

What would it look like if all Christians lived in the love God has for His bride?

What would it look like if all Christians lived as a holy nation amongst other nations?

What would it look like if all Christians lived as a body committed to mutual growth?

What would it look like if all Christians lived knowing that God lives among us?

What would it look like if all Christians lived as a loving family?

What would it look like if all Christians lived knowing that God desires and works for our flourishing?

Being and becoming the church

In session 3 we discussed positional holiness (justification) and experiential holiness (sanctification). This “already/not yet” paradigm also exists for the church at large. The church is a living organism composed of human beings who grow and struggle and live in an ever-changing world.

Why do you believe this study is named “Being and Becoming the Church”?

It has been said that “God has a mission for his church.” However, this phrase should be stated “God has a church for his mission.” The church does not exist without a mission, without a purpose. God is at work in the world and brings his people to work along with him.

“Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”
-Christopher Wright

For what purpose did God make the church? What is the mission of the church?

When the foundation is sure, the structure will withstand the trials that come its way. Jesus speaks about the foundation of the church in **MATTHEW 16. AS A GROUP, READ VERSES 13-19.**

According to this passage, upon what is the church built?

In the ancient world a gate was primarily a defensive structure to a city. When closed, these gates prevented unwanted traffic from the outside world.

Given the nature of gates, who does Jesus tell us is on defense (**MATTHEW 16:18**)? Who is on offense?

How does the church accomplish the mission? What is the church’s plan of attack?

Future church

It has been said that the best time to plant an apple tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is today. Our mission may seem like an insurmountable task! However, all things are possible with God. We know this, because God has promised it to us. As a group, read the following passages about God being glorified.

PSALM 46

PSALM 67

ROMANS 11:33-36

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11

REVELATION 5:11-14

Our God finishes each work He starts. PHILIPPIANS 1:6 says. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Thus, the church will continue to grow and be renewed until the Lord comes.

God will be glorified in all the earth and throughout each generation.

AS A GROUP, READ EPHESIANS 3:20-21.

What can you do or are you doing to ensure the future church is better equipped to complete the mission in their days? Ask someone to encourage and check in on your work in this area.

Heart check

Spend extra time this week praising God for who He is and thanking Him for what He has done.

Read PHILIPPIANS 1:21-30. What is your attitude toward the future? Many generations of Christians have believed Jesus would return within their lifetime - even Paul (1 THESSALONIANS 4:15) - and so far all have been wrong. Are you prepared for the possibility that the Lord may tarry another 1000 years?

