

## Leading by Faith

### Session #7: Believing in the Church

**Welcome** – Welcome back to Leading by Faith. We are so glad you came back after our Holiday half-time hiatus!

- We have three months together and I want to begin this second half with a reminder of why we are doing this, and what our vision is.
- We are in one of those uniquely important seasons in this church's life for people to increase their commitment to the church and step up into leadership for the church.
- So, I'm glad you are here. You have the opportunity to be part of that season. Glad to be here for such a time as this with you.

Living Faith has experienced significant fragmentation of its leadership core over the past 5 years due to Covid, the loss of our Senior Staff and the life transitions of our strongest demographic – the boomer generation.

- We need to reconstitute our leadership core group over the next 5 years.
- The fragmentation occurred over 5 years, so the rebuilding probably needs to be our focus for 5 more.

**Vision** – Our vision is to train 500 leaders who will lead by faith as the committed core group of the church, preparing Living Faith with the strength and integrity needed to be a faithful Gospel witness on Long Island to the end of the 21st century and beyond.

You may be here for other reasons, but that is why we want you here, and why we are grateful you are here.

- This course is just one way we are working to achieve that vision.
- We have learned together about Walking with God, Understanding Our Purpose, Knowing Yourself, Growing in Virtue, Battling Temptation & Sin and Managing Yourself & Your Household.

Today, we are turning our attention to Believing in the Church.

- You probably aren't going to increase your commitment to this church,
- Unless you believe in the church. What do I mean by that?

Faith in Jesus is obviously most important.

- But some people emphasize believing in Jesus in a way that diminishes believing in his local church.
- They love Jesus but reject so-called organized religion.

I contend, however, that the more faith you have in Jesus, the more you will believe in his church.

- The more you love Christ, the more you love his church.
- If someone's belief in and love for his church isn't strong, I think it may be because their belief in and love for Jesus isn't strong.

Why do I think faith in Jesus and believing in his church are so interconnected?

Well, it is because of what Jesus said, and what the Bible teaches about the church:

- In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “I will build my church.”
- What is happening here at Living Faith and other churches around the world is his work.
- To believe in the church is to believe in Christ’s building work.

In Matthew 9:15, and parallel passages in Mark & Luke, Jesus referred to himself as the bridegroom, and the Apostles Paul and John in Ephesians and Revelation use the language of bride about the church.

- As a husband myself, it would be very odd for someone to tell me they love me, but not love my wife, for we are one.
- Isn’t that the case with Jesus? We have been united to him by the Holy Spirit.

In Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and Ephesians, the Apostle Paul uses the language of head and body about Jesus and the church.

- He is the head. We are the body.
- Nobody loves the head and hates the body. Nobody has faith in the head but doesn’t believe in the body.

The more & stronger faith you have in Jesus, the more & stronger you will believe in his church.

- The more you love Christ, the more you love his church.
- If your belief in and love for his church isn’t strong, it may be because your belief in and love for Jesus isn’t strong.

To make this even more clear to you tonight, here's where we are headed:

- First, I am going to define church in three terms by simply reviewing all the occurrences of the word in the book of Acts.
- Second, we are going to spend more time on one part of the definition, tracing it from Genesis to Revelation, from beginning to end. So that you can get out of the trees and see the bigger picture of the forest.
- Third, I am going to summarize with one take away.
- Fourth, I'll give you your homework assignment.

A definition of church in three terms.

- Unpacking one part more thoroughly.
- One take away. And a homework assignment.

First, what is church? Three words are non-negotiable in that definition. #1 is people.

**1. Church is people.** Church is individuals, folks, persons.

When you look at human beings who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, you are looking at church. You are the church.

Let's see this part of the definition in the Scriptures. There are 17 verses in Acts with this word, but let's focus in on just Acts 8:1 and 8:3 for church as people. Most of you know and believe the church is people already so I don't want to spend too much time on it. Acts 8:1 and 8:3 read:

**<sup>1</sup>And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**

**Acts 8:1 (ESV)**

**<sup>3</sup>But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.**

**Acts 8:3 (ESV)**

These verses refer to the stoning of Stephen and the aftermath.

- Notice, the church was persecuted meaning people were harmed.
- Saul was ravaging the church, that is, he was dragging men and women to prison so that they would be executed for the crime of blasphemy. The church is clearly and unequivocally being described as people.

That is where it is most plain. Then, we see in:

- Acts 5:11, the church is afraid, a human emotion.
- Acts 9:31, the church is described as having collective human experiences like peace, being built up, walking, being comforted, multiplying.
- Likewise in Acts 11:22, the church hears.
- Acts 11:26, the church is taught.
- Acts 12:5, the church prays.
- Acts 15:4, the church welcomes.
- Acts 18:22, the church greets.

The church is people. That's the first non-negotiable when defining church – people. Second is...

**2. Church is ORGANIZATION.** The church isn't simply people. It is a group of people. More than that, it is a group of people who have united to operate together to accomplish a mission. Start this with Acts 12:1:

**<sup>1</sup>About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.**

**Acts 12:1 (ESV)**

Herod laid violent hands on the church. That is, he killed James and he threw Peter into prison. That is what v.1 is referring to.

- Then, you know what he did? He looked around to see which other people were part of this group.
- Who amongst all the people *belonged* to the church? Who was a member?
- We see the early stages of organization here. A simple prepositional phrase in Acts 13:1 confirms this concept:

**<sup>1</sup>Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**

**Acts 13:1 (ESV)**

The church in Antioch is described as having a sphere. You can be in it, which means you can also be out of it.

- This description is not geographical. Barnabas wasn't 'in the church' like he was in a specific location. Simeon wasn't 'in the church' like he was in a certain part of town.
- This description is not geographical and it's not referring to a physical structure either. Lucius, Manaen, and Saul weren't 'in the church' like they were in a building.

No, the description is organizational.

- The church is a group of people identified as one together. These five men belonged to the church. They were part of this new organization.
- Look at Acts 14:23 to see even more development of this idea:

**<sup>23</sup>And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**

**Acts 14:23 (ESV)**

Paul was sent out from the church in Antioch.

- He preached the Gospel in towns throughout Asia Minor.
- Then, he backtracked. And as he revisited the people who put their faith in Christ, he worked with them to appoint elders.

These groups are now described as having not just a sphere, but a formal leadership structure.

- There are elders. There are members.
- That is the church, not just people, but also organization.

Notice also, that there is more than one organization: Appoint elders for them in every church.

- This passage doesn't necessarily rule out an episcopal form of church government, but it does seem to rule out one worldwide church organization with an episcopal form of government.
- In the first couple years of the Christian movement, there are multiple churches, that is, multiple organizations. Next:

**<sup>3</sup>So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.**

**Acts 15:3 (ESV)**

This is very interesting.

- This organized group of people in Antioch with formal leadership, the church,
- sent Paul and Barnabas to the organized group of people with formal leadership structure in Jerusalem, the church there. Church sent to church.

They did that for the purpose of getting advice and direction about a doctrine that was being taught by a group called the circumcision party.

But that purpose isn't important for our purposes in this session today.

- What I want you to see here is that the church in Antioch *sent* Paul and Barnabas.
- What does it mean to send?

Well, my wife Cindy and I sent four kids to college.

- That is, we helped them pack, arranged the travel, prayed for them, hugged them goodbye, etc.
- We did a lot.

But when I say we *sent* four kids to college,

- a very important and even primary aspect of that sending was that we reached into our pocketbooks and paid for it.
- That's what I am talking about. We *sent* them to college.

So, the church sending meant, among other things, they reached into their pocketbooks and paid for it.

- Sure, there were hugs and prayers and goodbyes and supplies.
- But it involved money.

Given that fact, this Scripture implies, then, that there was offering.

- There was a budget. There was a treasury.
- There was administration. The church is organization.

Notice, lastly on this point, in Acts 15:22, the church in Jerusalem received the men from Antioch and sent them back. And in it we see some sort of decision process.

**<sup>22</sup>Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,**

**Acts 15:22 (ESV)**

The Jerusalem church sent Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with two of their members Judas and Silas.

- In doing so, we know that means there was offering, budget, a treasury, administration, and the like, in Jerusalem just like there was in Antioch.
- Different & separate organizations with their own authority both called the church.

Notice too that there was also voting or some method of decision making.

- The verse states that the decision seemed good to people.
- So, someone presented a way forward.
- Various people evaluated that proposal.
- And then they decided it was good and implemented the idea by choosing two men.
- It seems there was a nominating process and a vote of some kind.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> word about the church is a corrective to a fairly common error.

- See, it is not that the people are the true definition of the church, and the organization is a necessary evil. Some people think that.
- No. God created church as organization, not just people.

God created the local church with elders, members, budgets, administration, etc.

- In our context, that translates to IT, HR, finance, facilities, risk & legal management, communications, media, governance, etc.
- God is for all of that because he created the church as people to belong to a local church, his organizations.
- Okay, 3<sup>rd</sup> word and last on this definition of church.

**3. Church is GATHERING.** The church is people. It is organization. And it is appropriate to also call the corporate worship service church.

I went to church today.

- Not just to the people. Not simply to the organization.
- But to the gathering for worship. That's church.

There is less support in Acts for this word gathering as it relates to church than the other two,

- but it shows up more in the Epistles,
- and I am going to show you in a bit how God gathers from Genesis to Revelation and why it is church.

First, two verses from Acts though, starting with Acts 14:27:

**<sup>17</sup>And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.**

**Acts 14:27 (ESV)**

We know people gathered with the Apostles for worship regularly in the Temple in Jerusalem.

- And, outside the city in the places where the Apostles evangelized, all over the Roman Empire, Christians gathered on Sunday for worship.
- Over the years, Christians called this gathering – church.  
Look @ Acts 20:7:

**<sup>7</sup>On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.**

**Acts 20:7 (ESV)**

On Sunday, in Troas, in what is now Turkey, Christians were gathered in the pattern that had become norm in early Christianity.

- They had a morning worship service, and an evening communion experience called the Love Feast.
- The Apostle Paul was there that night at the Love Feast & preached a long sermon...until midnight. Don't ever complain about me going over 35 minutes!

And I am encouraged by this as a preacher.

- Eutychus fell asleep while listening to the Apostle, fell out of window and died. That's never happened to me while preaching.
- I always remind myself that when someone is fading in front of me.

Now, though this description was just that, a description not a prescription.

- Though it described what happened then, not prescribed what should or has to happen now.
- Though that is true, we do see the pattern for church worship here in Acts.

We do what we do on Sunday because there is historical precedent for it.

- It has been happening since the first century.
- They *gathered*. The word church literally means assembly, congregation, or meeting.

6:30 PM – More than the etymology of the word though, gathering has been God's plan all along.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> part for tonight, let's dive deeper on this idea of church as gathering so that you believe in the church. It's fascinating.
- The church began much earlier than the book of Acts. It started in Genesis.
- Before we dig deep into that, let's have some discussion.

## Discussion – What is the most meaningful aspect of the Sunday morning gathering for you?

6:40 PM – Here is the context of the gathering in 10 parts:

<b>1 Creation</b> – God created humanity to rule over his creation for his glory.	
<b>2 Fall</b> – Humanity chose sin.	<b>6 Call</b> – God chose humanity.
<b>3 Curse</b> – God sent humanity away.	<b>7 Jesus</b> – God came near to humanity.
<b>4 Flood</b> – God destroyed humanity.	<b>8 Cross</b> – God redeemed humanity.
<b>5 Babel</b> – God scattered humanity.	<b>9 Church</b> – God is gathering humanity.
<b>10 New Creation</b> – God will resurrect humanity to rule over his new creation for his glory.	

We are going to go through each of these, one at a time, but notice right away the correspondence of 1-10, 2-6, 3-7, 4-8, 5-9.

- 1 – God created humanity to rule over his creation for his glory.
- 10 – He will resurrect humanity to rule over his new creation for his glory.

Those are the bookends of the story. In between is...

- 2 – Humanity chose sin, but 6 – God chose humanity.
- 3 – God did send humanity away, but then 7 – God came near to us in Jesus.

4 – God destroyed humanity, but then 8 – he redeemed us in Jesus.

- 5 – God scattered humanity, but now 9 – he is gathering us. That's church.
- These are key dynamics to understanding the church as gathering in the context of the entire Bible and to believe in the church.

Now, 10 points for this second part, which seems like a lot, but I will be brief. First,

**1. Creation** – God created humanity to rule over his creation for his glory. Look at Genesis 1:28:

**<sup>28</sup>And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

**Genesis 1:28 (ESV)**

We learned about this topic in depth in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session called Understanding our Purpose.

- God put us human beings here on planet Earth to be reflections of his glory, to ruling it as he would rule it. With love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, etc.
- That sets the foundation for why he would gather people. And what he is going to ultimately do after the gathering.

#2:

**2. Fall – Humanity chose sin. This is found in Genesis 3:6:**

**<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.**

**Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

So, humanity rebelled against God.

- They listened to the voice of the devil rather than God.
- The choice was glorify self instead of God. The choice was the de-godding of God which is the root of all sin.
- And for our story line here, the choice was to reject the vocation given by God to humanity to be his images, to rule as he would rule. The result is... Genesis 6:22-24, #3:

**3. Curse – God sent mankind away.**

**<sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” <sup>23</sup>therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup>He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.**

**Genesis 6:22-24**

God prevented humanity from living forever for (1) his glory and for (2) our benefit.

- In other words, if he allowed us to live forever, his purposes for us to rule in his image over his universe would be thwarted. He can't have that. He is God.
- And, if he allowed us to live forever, we would experience that horror. All humanity existing as sinners for all time. That would be awful. Hell. So, he stopped that from happening.

The story continues in a fascinating way.

- **CHART – The text begins to present the formation of two peoples, two lineages, two groups.**
- That end in destruction and rebirth,

On the one hand, there was the line of Seth.

- They are described in the Bible as children of God who glorified God.
- They called on the name of the Lord. And presumably, they were doing their best to rule as God would rule. To image God.

On the other hand, there was the line of Cain.

- They were the children of men interested in glorifying themselves.
- They sought to make a name for themselves. They ruled over Earth as God wouldn't.

Unfortunately, as the story goes, everyone went the way of Cain.

- Marriage between the sons from the line of Seth and daughters from the line of Cain is described as the cause of that.
- Over the course of time, the line of Seth only had one man and his family left: Noah.

God's assessment of that time is that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart were only evil all the time.

- Therefore, his decision about what to do is described in Genesis 6:17.
- #4, except for Noah and his immediate family

#### **4. Flood – God destroyed humanity.**

**For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.**

**Genesis 6:17 (ESV)**

There was some inclination in God to completely wipe out humanity, but thank the Lord, he hit the reset button with the flood instead.

- Then there was rebirth, but the same dynamic happened all over again,
- which is clearly an indication that there is a problem with human nature itself, not just with outward behavior.

## CHART – The two lines were re-formed with Noah's sons just like Adam's.

- As there was the line of Seth, so there was the line of Shem, the children of God glorifying God.
- And as there was the line of Cain, there was the line of Canaan, the children of men glorifying themselves.

And just like before, everyone went the way of Canaan.

- But this time, there was no one left. No Noah.
- And God didn't put a stop to sin like he did with Noah. Instead of destroying with the flood and sparing one family...

## 5. Babel – God scattered humanity.

<sup>5</sup>And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” <sup>8</sup>So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:5-8 (ESV)

I think that phrase ‘nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them’ means no evil would be unachieved.

- It’s not God holding human back from doing good.
- It’s God holding humanity back from the full bloom of collective total depravity.
- It’s stopping humanity from ruling the opposite of the way God would rule.

And in this, we see that God initiated a plan to gather...

- what he sent away at Eden, what sin had driven away to the lines of Cain and Canaan and
- what he had scattered from that ancient tower of Babel,
- he started to gather with a...

**6. Call** – God chose humanity. Before we get to the Scripture that supports this point, very important point. Abram went the way of Canaan.

So, even though we are sinners by nature and by choice, God chooses us. He seemed to elect Abram for both salvation and service. Look at Genesis 12:2:

**2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.**

**Genesis 12:2 (ESV)**

So, humanity chose sin, but God, in his mercy and grace, chose humanity. That spoken word to Abram, became the word made flesh in #7...

## 7. Jesus – God came near to mankind. Phil 2:5-7:

**<sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.**

**Philippians 2:5-7 (ESV)**

What humanity could not do and would not do, glorify God, God did in becoming man.

- And he sent us away from Eden, but then he came near in Christ.
- As wonderful as that is, he did more, #8...

## 8. Cross – God redeemed humanity. Galatians 3:13:

**<sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”**

**Galatians 3:13 (ESV)**

God came near to humanity.

- He came personally to meet us.
- But more than that, he became a curse for us.
- What humanity deserved, Jesus took, the wrath for the rebellion.

And notice God destroyed in the flood, but then he redeemed. He renovated. He repaired. And he reversed the flow of humanity.

- It used to be that everyone went the way of Cain and the way of Canaan.
- By his call, his coming near and his cross, God changed the direction. This is fabulous...#9,

### 9. Church – God is gathering humanity. Galatians 4:4-5:

**<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.**

**Galatians 4:4-5 (ESV)**

Everyone went the way of Cain and Canaan. So, he scattered them. But, now he is gathering people into his family.

### CHART – The lines of humanity have been recast again, not as Cain and Seth or as Canaan and Shem,

- but as those who belong to Adam, the scattered children of men, glorifying themselves;
- and those who belong to Christ, the gathered children of God, not born by natural descent but by adoption, those who are glorifying God.

The flow has been reversed. God is gathering.

- You see. This is what God is doing right now. Picture those in Adam on my right and those in Christ on my left.
- And God is just feverishly working by his Spirit! Plucking dead people from that line and making them alive in Christ.

And the promise is that it will be a great multitude that no one can count from every tribe, tongue, and nation in Adam.

- Don't be deceived by the common notion that everything is getting worse and worse; and there are less and less Christians. Not so.
- It is true evil advances as it always has.

But remember this, at one time, there was no one righteous. Everyone had gone the way of Cain and Canaan, but God made a choice.

- He reversed the flow from scatter to gather.
- Though all have rebelled in Adam, he is redeeming some in Christ.

Did you know that the Lord is gathering 90k people *per day* who were in Adam and planting them in Christ?

- It is astounding what God is doing right now on planet Earth.
- It is estimated that 1/3 of them are Chinese.
- That gathering activity of God is shown to the cosmos by us going to church on Sunday.

What is the next stage of his plan...? Lastly on this second part of our time together tonight, #10...

**10. New Creation** – God will resurrect humanity to rule over his new creation for his glory. Revelation 21:1-8:

**<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.**

**Revelation 21:1-3 (ESV)**

The purpose of God for humans to rule over his universe as his image will be realized.

- We will glorify him, not by going back to Eden in some sort of restoration, but by going forward to something much better:
- resurrection and transformation of the entire created order.

Jesus is putting the world right regarding sin.

- He is going to right all the wrong done to us and by us.
- He is going to right all that is wrong within us.
- And he is going to right all that is wrong with the world.

We are going to live forever. And we are going to rule forever. How unbelievable is this good news!

- Think about the vastness of the universe. And it being transformed.
- And us eternally subduing it and reigning over it. Forming and filling and enjoying billions of galaxies.
- Star Wars has nothing on what it is going to be like!

So, to review, I defined church with three words. People, organization and gathering.

- Second, when you think gathering, have this 10-part story in mind.
- Third, then a summary and simple conclusion. One take away.

#### 7:05 PM – CHART – We live in the time of the GATHERING.

- Church is the weekly gathering of the people who belong to God.
- It is the manifestation in our world of that activity of God of reversing the flow of humanity...bringing people from being in Adam to being in Christ.

As such, realize that church/the gathering is the chief end of God in this time between Christ's ascension and Christ's return.  
*REPEAT.*

- To say it a different way, church is not a means to an end; church is an end in itself.
- I realize understanding that means knowing the difference between an end, a chief end, & a means to an end.

An end is a goal.

- A chief end is the highest goal.
- A means to an end is the steps to achieve goals. *REPEAT.*

For example, I like to go to Cooper's Hawk with my wife for a date.

- The means to the ends involved at Cooper's Hawk are our car, money, etc.
- There are a lot of ends. A nice conversation uninterrupted by kids. My wife's perfect face across the table. An Arnold Palmer.
- But, my chief end is of going to Cooper's Hawk is pistachio encrusted grouper! That's my main point of going there.

Like I could have a date with my wife anywhere.

- I have a variety of means to get to a variety of ends.
- But if I'm going there, that is my main reason. My chief end.

Means. Ends. Chief end.

- Understand the difference.
- Apply it to our topic.

Church is not a means to an end.

- It is not like the car to get to Cooper's Hawk. We don't do church SO THAT we can do something else.
- The gathering isn't a gateway to something better. We do church because it is an end in itself.

And church is not an ordinary, common end of God.

- It isn't one of his many goals. It's not Arnold Palmer.
- It is his chief end. It's pistachio encrusted grouper.

He clearly is doing a lot on planet Earth, but gathering is his main purpose. Get this clear in your mind. God's main purpose during this time period is not...

- Evangelism. That is a purpose, but not the main one. His chief end is to gather those converted.
- Compassion. Helping people. Good deeds. That is a purpose, but not the main one. His chief end is his compassionate gathering of sinners.
- Discipleship. Your individual virtue is a goal, but not the highest one.

His chief end is gathering those who are being transformed by his Spirit to sing, read, pray, preach and feast on the word of Christ.

- The chief end of God in this time period between Christ's ascension and Christ's return is church. It is his main thing.
- Now, I realize that you may not be convinced of this yet, but let's presume you are and apply this truth.

**7:10 PM – Discussion – What does it mean for our lives if church is the chief end of God in this life? How should that inform what we do?** Take 10 minutes to discuss, and when we are done, I will ask for at least one answer from each table, and the next table will have to give us a new one so that we have at least 14 implications of this truth.

**7:20 PM – Believing in the Church: Assignment**

- Okay, here's your 1<sup>st</sup> assignment of 2026.
- A 15<sup>th</sup> application of this truth of church being the chief end of God.

We have opened up registration for the second cohort of Leading by Faith that will start in the Fall.

- Your main assignment is to recruit someone to replace you in this room. Who is not in this room that you think should be in this room next time.
- Get them to sign up. You will get a sharable link this week in our follow up email.

A secondary need is for some people here to take this course again and serve as a table leader,

- investing your time in the development of new leaders, so that there's some relational continuity between this group and future groups.
- If you are interested in that, don't register. Simply email Cindy. Let's pray.