



Connect with Your Faith

Leader's Guide

Week 4

Topic Week 4: Why do I need Church?

Before Class: Study these teaching points covered in the teaching video. Notice the time for both the teaching video and testimony video and plan the use of your time accordingly to allow good discussion.

Speaker: Pastor Jason Zemke

Script****

History of the Church

(See Church timeline – page 18 & 19 in participants guide)

The history of the church includes four major events. In the fourth and fifth century the lesser Eastern churches separated from the rest of the church due to differences in Christology. In the eleventh century the Catholic and Orthodox Churches split. The Protestant Reformation in the 1500s created Catholic and Protestant distinctions. In the nineteenth century denominations began to appear— prior to the nineteenth century there were no denominations. By 1900 there were 2,000 denominations; by 1980 there were 20,000 denominations; and by the year 2000 there were 34,000 denominations. Although there are many flavors of the protestant church, all hold to the core beliefs of Christianity.

From its inception the church has been persecuted. Today, in more than 60 countries in the world, Christians are harassed, abused, arrested, tortured, or even executed specifically because of their faith. 200 million Christians throughout the world live in daily fear of secret police, vigilantes or state repression and discrimination. Yet the church in those parts of the world is flourishing. Persecution spreads the gospel.

The Apostle Paul was the first Church planter we read about in the New Testament. He started churches throughout Asia. These local churches were comprised of many smaller gatherings much like a Church small group or class with twelve or less in each group. This format was modeled after Jesus' discipling method. He disciplined a group of twelve and they changed history. In a small discipleship group, people begin to drop their barriers and talk openly about things that are real. This kind of authenticity is as transformative now as it was 2,000 years ago.

Purpose of the Church:

Church is a safe place to be your real self. To love and accept each other despite our differences. Paul instructs the church at Ephesus to, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit,” knowing disagreements would be a continuous source of division and distraction for the church. St Augustine prayed that in the really essential things of the faith, those comprising the core of our belief, there would be unity, and in the things that are more peripheral, the non-essentials, there be freedom.

New Testament churches are described by the Greek word *koinōnia* [κοινωνία], which means ‘fellowship’. It’s the kind of intimate relationship we’re meant to have with God and also with one another. It cuts across race, color, education, background — and every other cultural barrier — and leads to a level of friendship rarely experienced outside the context of the church.

Church is family, the family of God.

It’s said there are two things you can’t do alone: get married and be a Christian! Unless you meet regularly with other Christians, it is almost impossible for your faith to survive. Encouraging one another, bearing each other’s burdens, and personal growth described as iron sharpening iron are both Biblical mandates and blessings for Christians. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said “the New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion.” Hebrews 10:25 says, “Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another.” Wesley and Paul recognized the human tendency to withdraw when we’re suffering or when we disagree with someone in our church community and remind us that our faith cannot survive in a vacuum.

Church is the way in which people see Jesus today. It's the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:27 *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*
The Apostle Paul is saying: ‘You are the church, and you are Christ to the world.’ So, each of you represents Jesus wherever you go. Jesus no longer has a physical body on Earth. He has you! You represent him in your family, in your place of work, in your neighborhood, in your leisure activities. You are Christ. Among the members of the body representing Christ on Earth, there exists a kind of mutual dependence. Paul says: The eye can’t say to the hand, ‘Oh, well, I don’t need you!’ and parts of the body of Christ cannot decide their role is unimportant and quit or become jealous of what others are doing. Paul’s message is clear - the church needs you, and you need the church. When everyone is fulfilling their role, something beautiful emerges, like an orchestra of musicians each playing their part, presenting something beautiful and harmonious to a hurting world.

Church is a holy temple where we experience the presence of God in a special way.

Ephesians 2:19-22 “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him 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.” The New

Testament temple is you. God lives in you. That's where He is. The only building that the New Testament references is a building made up of people. The New Testament speaks of you individually, 'You are the temple of the Holy Spirit,' and the Holy Spirit comes to live in you when you acknowledge Christ as God's son and your salvation - but more often it speaks corporately, of a gathering of Christians: 'You, church, are the temple of the Holy Spirit.' Something divine occurs when we come together, something holy, something others notice and are attracted to – God's presence. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

We love the church because Jesus loves the church

The church is the bride of Christ!

Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as 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 present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Paul then he goes on to talk about the marriage relationship. Then in verse 32 he says, 'This is a profound mystery' — not marriage, but, he says — "I am talking about Christ and the church." This marriage analogy sums up everything we've been discussing about the Church, because at the heart of Christianity is love. The New Testament uses analogies of the closest possible relationships, a parent and child, and Paul's analogy of the love between a husband and a wife, the most intimate kind of love. That is the love that Jesus has for you and for his church. St Augustine said that "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

If you were the only person in the world, Jesus would die for you. That's how much he loves you. He laid down his life for the church.

Commit to the Church:

Church membership is biblical and important - As we learned above in God's word, Christ made the Church to represent him to the lost.

Membership is not about a piece of paper, but heart commitment

Christ gave up his life for the Church. Lesslie Newbigin reminds us, "Jesus Christ never wrote a book; what he did was leave behind a community: the church."

The argument here is that Christians should be counted in, so that we can be counted on. That's what local church membership should mean. More than a formality, membership is what your signature signifies. It signifies your commitment to believe and live in a biblical, God-honoring way. As we just read in Ephesians 5: 25-32 above ... Can you fully love someone that you are not committed to? You have a commitment to your parents, your children, your friends, and your spouse. Some of those are unspoken but they exist out of love. The same is true with membership. To love the Church, the body of Christ, is to commit to it.

Membership facilitates mutual accountability to God.

Hebrews 13:17 – "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." Our church leaders "will have to give an

account” for how they watch over our souls. But how can they give an account if they don’t know whose souls they’re responsible to oversee? In 1 Peter 5:2–3, Peter tells the elders (those in leadership positions in the local church) to “Shepherd the flock . . . among you,” and then he says elders should not be “domineering over those in your charge.” The word there is actually “over the allotments, the portions, the lots.” Peter is implying that certain people were allotted by God’s providence to be in a particular church, under particular elders, at a particular time. These people made up “the flock among you” which the elders were to shepherd. They weren’t to shepherd every flock—just the flock “among you”. Peter assumed the leaders of the church he was addressing knew which particular Christians “belonged” to their flock—which ones God would one day hold them accountable for overseeing.

Membership expresses love and obedience to Jesus

By identifying as Christian, you’re declaring that you submit to the kingship and authority of Jesus. But Jesus has delegated some of his authority to pastors and leaders of local churches. Jesus wants his sheep under the care of those under-shepherds. If we refuse to submit to the under-shepherds that Jesus provides for us, then we aren’t fully submitting to Jesus. When the risen Christ confronts Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9: 1-5, he asks him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And Saul said, “Who are you, Lord?” And Jesus replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Jesus identifies himself so closely with his people that he considers himself persecuted when they are persecuted. Do you identify so closely with the local church that an attack on some of its members feels like an attack on you?

The church is not a club we join in order to reap certain benefits at our leisure, but is a complex of relationships of mutual encouragement and spiritual accountability in which we partner with one another for the advance of the gospel in the earth.

End Script****

Tough questions prep:

Do I have to join the Church? No, due to the reasons we discussed

Can I join later? Yes and you should when you are committed

Is there anything I don’t get if I don’t join the Church?

Could you get more out of Church if you were committed, yes. Is it about a piece of paper, no. To answer the question, only members can vote (if and when we should need to take a vote) and only members can hold the pastors accountable.

There has been a lot of distrust in Church’s with abuse, inappropriate use of funds and poor conduct of Church leaders. I trust God but not man. So, I can commit to Him but not the Church?

It is very sad to hear about sinful acts within the Church. I understand your concern. No one is pressuring you to be a member. But I would ask you to look at it differently. God is

perfect. Man is not. But God is always trying to redeem us. He is working in the broken people of the Church. They need redemption and we as brothers and sisters are called to help them. I wonder if you could be part of the Church leadership? I know that sounds big. But getting involved is the way to make Church holy as the bride of Jesus and fulfill God's calling on your life.

Do I have to be a member to serve?

No, there are some council positions where membership is requested. That is because of the heart issue we spoke about earlier. If they are willing to commit, we know they are in love with the body of Christ, thus their action would be out of love. It would be that outward sign of inward commitment.

Does the New Testament explicitly mention or describe formal church membership?

No, it does not. In the early church, baptism was the formalization of joining the church body. However, there are numerous truths and responsibilities in the NT which would be minimized or denied if there were no definable local church membership. The fact that membership is not explicitly mentioned does not mean it didn't exist. Those things which are explicitly mentioned necessarily assume that covenant membership existed. If we conclude that covenant membership is necessarily entailed by the Bible's commands for the church and the description of its life, we are morally obligated to pursue it in our churches today. If we conclude that it is not, we are free to regard local church membership as a matter of prudence which we may disregard if we think it not to be helpful in fulfilling our calling as the body of Christ.

Key Scriptures to review:

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Ephesians 2:19
- Ephesians 4:3
- Ephesians 5:25
- Hebrews 10:25
- Hebrews 13:17
- 1 Peter 2:9, 10

Class Timeline:

	Estimated time
1. Introductions	15 min
2. Teaching Video	Pastor Jason Zemke, 13 min
3. Discussion Questions	15 min
4. Testimonial Video	Autumn Johnson, 4 min
5. Takeaways	10 min

6. Prayer	1 min
7. Invitation for next week	1 min

1. Introduce the content and video for this class (in your own words):

Last week we learned that reading the Bible is part of growing our faith. It teaches us how to live in the Kingdom of God now, with Jesus. Today we are learning about Christ’s bride, the Church. He loves it and wants us to love it, too.

Let’s begin by defining the word “church.” There are two expressions of the term “Church”: one refers to the global or universal church of all Christ followers. The second refers to the Local Church. Mount Pisgah is a local expression of the global church. Church is like marriage. Marriage is a ring. It’s a marriage certificate. It’s a wedding service. It’s the marriage laws, the dress, pomp and tradition. Now, marriage may involve all of those things, but those are not the true essence of a marriage. At the heart of marriage is something far more profound – the unifying of two people for a lifetime. Similarly, at the heart of the church is something far more profound than pews, choirs, programs, and pastors.

Peter, the fisherman on whom God founded his church, describes the people and purpose of the church, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, 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 ...”

The Christian faith involves, first of all, a vertical relationship — our relationship with God. But it also involves a horizontal relationship — with other people. We are part of a community which began with God’s call to Abraham. The people of Israel prefigured the church, meaning the universal church consists of all people, across the world, across all time, who profess or have professed the name of Christ. We become a member of the church not by birth, but by new birth, the new and eternal life we have in Christ when we become a Christian.

Let’s watch this video below and learn more.

2. Play the teaching video. Pastor Jason Zemke, 13 mins.

3. Discussion questions (pages 21 & 22):

- 1 If the Church has been around for over 2,000 years to represent Christ on Earth. What would happen if we did not have the Church anymore?
- 2 The video gave 5 reasons why Jesus loved the Church (feel accepted as you are, belong to a bigger family, show the body of Christ to the world, experience the presence of God or because Jesus loved the Church like his bride). Is there one that resonates the most

with you?

- 3 In this modern day, many churches have down played membership. If membership means commitment, what is the risk to the Church as a whole and Christ's work if people are not committed?

4. Play the short personal testimony video. Autumn Johnson, 4 mins.

Offer an opportunity for membership. Ask if they would like to meet with our Connect Pastor / Associate Pastor and join at an upcoming service. (Please do so after class via email)

5. Closing / takeaways in your own words:

Key themes to understand:

- 1 The Church exists because God created, ordained it and has called it his bride. The Church was made by Christ, not man made ... Christ driven, not man driven.
- 2 The Church has existed for over 2,000 years because men and women have gathered in the name of Jesus to know Him and make Christ known to the next generation.
- 3 Membership is an outward sign of the inward commitment to God just like marriage is an outward sign of commitment.

Additional applications to share:

Story:

The American pastor John Wimber tells this story to illustrate the point of the local church (**page 23 in the participants guide**):

*He was greeting parishioners in church and a man approached him and told him he'd been contacted by somebody in great need. As he relayed his frustration in trying to get help for this needy person, he complained, "The man needed a place to stay, food, and support until he gets on his feet and finds a job. I'm really frustrated. I tried calling the church office, but no one could see me, and they couldn't help me. I finally ended up having to let him stay with me for the week. Don't you think the church should take care of people like this?" John Wimber replied, "It looks like the church did. Because **you** are the church. Every time you feed the hungry, that's the church doing it. Every time you visit the sick or visit someone in prison, that's the church. Every time you share Jesus, that is an extension of the Church. We, as believers in Christ, are the Church. Not a building or the staff that work at the Church. **We** are the Church."*

6. Close in prayer Use the PRAY model as we teach them to pray:

P = raise – praise God for who he is and what he has done. Use attributes to describe Him.

R = Repent – remind them of their sin and need for a Savior

A = Ask – petition your request for this group to our Father in Heaven including becoming part of the boy of Christ

PRAISE	Matthew 6:9	"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"
REPENT	Matthew 6:12	"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
ASK	Matthew 6:11&13	"Give us this day our daily bread." "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"
YIELD	Matthew 6:10	"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

Y = Yield – Submit to God's will with words that remind us to trust Him

7. Invite them back next week to learn about . . .

Next week during week 5 we will discuss "What are sacraments and why do we do them?"

Hope you will join us!