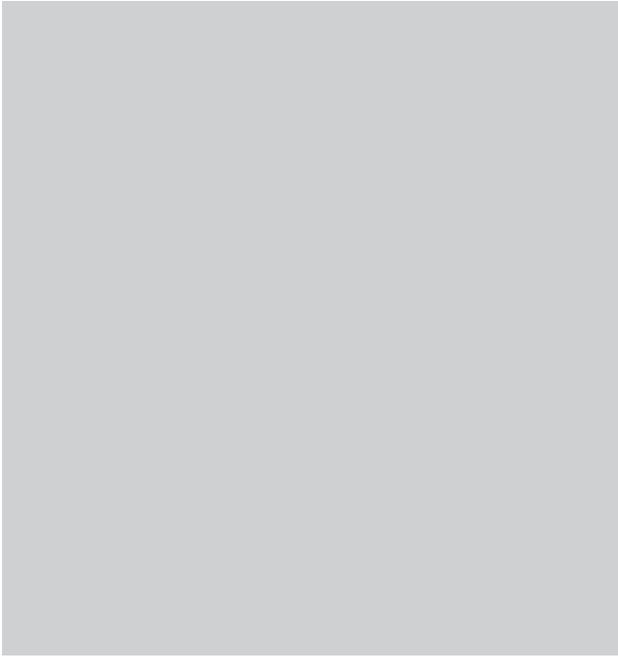


# THE CHURCH

Community Group Series



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# SESSION 1

What is church?

# CHURCH IS PEOPLE, NOT A BUILDING

*The Greek New Testament word for church is "ekklesia", which translated literally means "called out ones". The reference to "church" is thus a reference to a group or assembly of people.*

*The people of course are God's chosen and loved children, those that look to Him as God and Father.*

*Often we talk about "going to church." Technically this is wrong as it sounds as if the church is a building. Rather than going to church we actually gather as the church.*

*We, as God's "dearly loved children" (Eph 5:1 NIV), are the church!*

# The universal church

*The New Testament uses the word church to refer to either the universal church or the local church.*

*The universal church refers to all believers throughout history. It goes beyond generations and geographical boundaries.*

*Matt 16:18 – Jesus refers here to the universal church. He is clearly not referring to one particular local church. Col 1:18 – There is only one universal church. Jesus is the head. Every believer is included.*

# The local church

*Acts 11:22 – Here we have a reference to the “church at Jerusalem”. A particular group of people gathered at a particular place at a distinct point in time. See also: Acts 13:1.*

*Acts 14:23 – The word “each” here shows that there are different churches. There is more than one.*

*Rom 16:1 – Once again a reference to a specific group of people.*

*Rom 16:5 – Clearly this cannot be a reference to the universal church.*

*Acts 14:23, 1 Tim 5:17 – For a gathering of believers to be a local church it requires leaders/elders/pastors.*

# The universal and the local go hand in hand

*When God looks over His church He does not see denominations or groupings. He sees one church which gathers as different local communities in different geographical places.*

*2 Tim 2:19 – To join the universal church you need to be born again.*

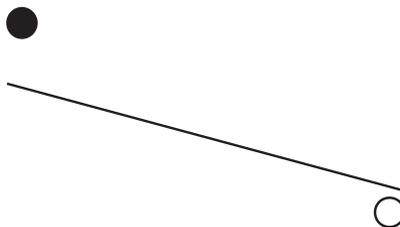
*Heb 13:17 – To join a local church you need to submit to its leaders.*

*It is possible to be a part of the universal church and yet not a member of a local church.*

*It is possible to be a member of a local church and yet not a member of the universal church. Jesus alone saves and not church membership.*

*Heb 10:25 – To be obedient to scripture, all believers should join and be active members at a local church.*

*It is hypocrisy to be a part of the universal body of Christ without*



# SESSION 2

Loving the church



## God loves the church

*Heb 1:9 – As God's people we are called to love what He loves and hate what He hates.*

*Eph 5:25 – As the bride of Christ, the church is dearly loved by God.*

*Rom 5:8 - There is no greater love than the love with which Christ loves the church.*

*God never gives up on His church (Matt 28:20). He does discipline (Heb 12), but His love never fails (1 Cor 13:8). It follows that if we love God, we should love what He loves! We too need to love the church.*

*Eph 3:10 – God's design is to reach the world through the church. There is no "plan b".*

*NPO's, schools, businesses, orphanages, etc are good and necessary, but they can never replace the church.  
"So precious is the church in the eyes of God that it can scarcely be too precious in the eyes of man" – AW Tozer.*



# Loving the universal church

*Understanding that we are all part of one universal church is fundamental to loving each other.*

*No normal person would deliberately harm his own body (Eph 5:29). We are all one (1 Cor 12:27).*

*When we love the universal church we will not gossip or undermine other local churches.*

*Eph 6:18 – We should be praying for all the churches everywhere to prosper.*

*2 Cor 9:5 – Leaders of local churches may see a need in another church and then administrate a gift for them. Different churches will administrate their meetings in different ways.*

*Every local church can learn from others. Even where there are different Biblical interpretations we should strive to love and honour each other.*

*Gal 2:4, Titus 1:10-11 – There are false brothers who need to be revealed.*

*But where we agree that salvation is by grace through Jesus alone, we are brothers!*



## Loving the local church

*Sometimes it's easy to love in principal, but being involved in the local church forces us to love in practice.*

*The church is a family (1 Tim 3:15, Eph 2:19) and in a family you don't choose your brothers and sisters. In the local church we will have people similar to us and people very different to us.*

*Rom 12:9-21 – The local church provides the perfect forum to live this out.*

*Heb 10:25 – We should be committed to meeting together. We should encourage each other at these times.*

*Many people sit on the fringes of community life; this is dangerous.*

*By not getting involved in the community you are losing out from what others have to share with you. The community is also losing out by not receiving your fellowship and love.*

# SESSION 3

Existing for our non members

## God loves the lost

Last week we saw how dearly God loves the church – His precious people. But God’s love does not end there. John 3:16 – God loves “the world” and gave Jesus to open the door of salvation to all people.

1 Tim 2:4 – God’s desire is that all would be saved and be added to His family.

Eph 3:10 – This will happen through the church.

## The church is called to more than self-service

Many people join a local church because it suits them in certain ways. This is natural.

The problem, however, is that we often then continue to think that the church is there to meet our needs.

As a body we do love and serve each other, but we are also called to reach out beyond ourselves.

## Serving our city

Acts 17:26 – God has determined when and where each one of us would live.

This is our time to serve our city and neighbours. What legacy are we going to leave behind?

Jer 29:5 – We are not to exclude ourselves from the city.

Jer 29:6 – Nor are we to embrace the selfish ways of the city.

Rather we are to see an “increase” of the kingdom. We are called to seek the welfare/peace/prosperity of the city by serving it (not worshiping it).

Jer 29:7 – In serving the city we will find our own welfare!

# Practical things

*Where does each one of us come into contact with our city?*

*(Work? University? School? Sports teams?)*

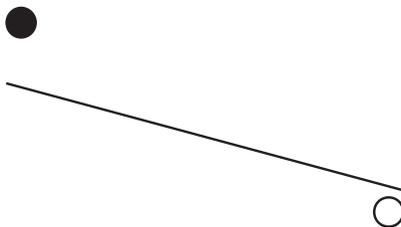
*Think about how you can serve those around you in a way that will see the "welfare" of that place increase.*

*Think about what you pray for. (Yourself? Friends? Family?)*

*Jer 29:7, 1 Tim 2:1-4 – God has called His church to intercede for our cities and nations.*

*Take a moment to think about how many people in our city are lonely, hungry, depressed?*

*As God's people we are called to reach out to these people with the gospel love of our great God and saviour. As a homegroup, what kind of things can you do as a team to serve and bless our city?*



# SESSION 4

A community of healing

# A city within a city

*Last week we looked at reaching out and serving our city to see God's love extended to all.*

*Once people have been saved they will join our church communities.*

*Ps 68:6 – God sets the lonely in families. The local church is God's family.*

*Acts 4:34 – The church is to be a place where lives and resources are shared.*

*Matt 5:14 – God has called His people to be like a city on a hill. Thus the church itself is to function like a city.*

*The church is to be an example of what a city under God's rule would be like.*

*And we are to be on display so that others can look in and see what life in such a city is like.*

# Embracing each other

*1 Cor 12:26 – When one member of the church is suffering we are all to feel the pain. When another rejoices we are all to feel the joy.*

*Acts 2:42-47 – Fellowship is one of our great needs as human beings. The church is to be the place where we can find this fellowship.*

*All of us have relational needs. We all need friends. We all need father and mother figures. God's church is the place where we enjoy the amazing privilege of fellowship and friendship with others.*

*It is the place where we find our fellowship desires met, and it is the place where we do the same for others.*

*1 Cor 5:13 – As discipline for someone who refuses to repent the final action is to exclude them from community. If it is discipline to be removed from community this shows just how crucial fellowship is.*

# Getting practical

*In your homegroup there will be a diversity of people. Have you taken the time to engage with those different from you?*

*As a homegroup what can you do to help when you notice others in the group are in some trouble or pain? Married people should fellowship with unmarried people. Young should fellowship with old.*

*We all need each other. We can't be best friends with everyone, but we can reach out to some and have real relationships with them.*

## Conclusion

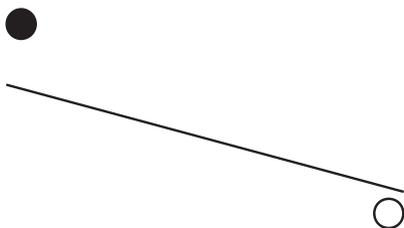
*Matt 16:18 – Jesus is building His church, and calls us to join Him.*

*God's plan to reach the lost is to save them and then add them into local churches which act as healing communities.*

*There is no other plan. God will build His church and accomplish His plans.*

*If you want to be successful in life, aim to build what God is building. You can't fail!*

*Gal 6:9 – Give yourself to building the church and not an ounce of time, energy or resources will be wasted.*





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