



GET CHURCHED

Del Wells





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These resources form the Next Courses series and are available online at freedomkw.com.

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Lesson 1 – Belonging - Church Life Matters

Welcome to *Get Churched*, a study about church life and why it matters. Each of the ten lessons examines important aspects of being part of a local group of Christ followers. We will explore Jesus' design for believers to mature in their faith and impact the world with the gospel. This course is a good introduction to the church for new Christians and a helpful review for veterans in the faith. You will learn how to establish yourself in a spiritual home base to be equipped for godly living and contribute to the stability, health, and mission of your church family. Freedom in Christ Assembly in Kitchener, Ontario, will be referred to occasionally as an example of intentional Christian community building.

Everything a local church does must contribute to making disciples of Christ as the response to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20). All the actions of church life examined in this study are pivotal for producing disciples who make disciples. All believers facilitate their spiritual growth and effectiveness in ministry by being part of a healthy church family that works to expand God's kingdom in their community and the world at large by facilitating the transformation of lives one person at a time.

Q1 At this point, how would you describe to someone what church is?

Common Myths About Church Life

The realities of church life are often quite different than the opinions expressed by nonparticipants and critics. It is true that not every local church is relationally healthy and unified in purpose. People are flawed and perfection is not possible for anyone or any group. However, there are churches that are healthy, maturing, and producing good spiritual fruit with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Rather than writing the church off for its shortcomings, consider the benefits for yourself and your family by being involved with a body of believers actively engaged in making disciples of Jesus.

The following are common myths about church with a brief note about the reality:

Myth 1. Church is a place to go to worship God.

Reality - The church is not a physical building that houses the presence of God. Church is the spiritual body of Christ wherever it meets in Jesus' name. God resides in every believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Myth 2. Church participation is optional for a believer.

Reality - The New Testament contains dozens of instructions for believers to be in close relationship with one another to encourage, teach, pray for, build up, and serve. None of these are individual or occasional activities.

Myth 3. Church is an event on Sunday.

Reality - A church service is not the church. Events are facilitated by the church for the purpose of worship, fellowship, outreach, and ministry.

Myth 4. Church belongs to the people who maintain it.

Reality - The church belongs to Christ alone. He is the head of the universal church that includes every believer globally and the local churches of every community. Belonging to your church is not the same thing as owning it.

Myth 5. Church should make you feel comfortable and be fun.

Reality - Where Jesus is Lord and the Holy Spirit is free to work, there will be much joy and fulfillment as well as conviction, truth-telling, discipline, and accountability. The Bible never says that the church must be entertaining and avoid challenging Biblical teaching.

Myth 6. Church is for only weak and gullible people.

Reality – Church is for every person no matter how strong and intelligent they think they are. Church is a spiritual organism that accommodates people of all types to experience daily life transformation. Admitting personal weakness and need of God is beneficial.

There are other misconceptions about church that get cleared up when you get involved in a spiritually healthy local assembly. These include believing that only pastors can do ministry, church only wants your money, church is anti-education, church is a bunch of rules and regulations, church is there to meet your needs and expectations, and church is a business where bigger is better. Research any of these assumptions to gain a more accurate understanding of church as Christ intended.

Q2 Why is it helpful to investigate a church before committing to belong to it?

The Church is God's Household

There are legitimate questions about church as an entity. What is the church and why is it necessary to be part of one? How would the world be different if there was no church? Why are there so many kinds of churches? Can you be a believer in Jesus and not be part of a church? Hopefully after completing this study, you can answer these and other questions for yourself and others.

“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. 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.” Ephesians 2:19-22

This Scripture gives insights about the church being a dwelling place of God. The apostle Paul wrote in the preceding verses (2:11-18) about Jesus making it possible for all people to have peace with God and direct access to him by the Holy Spirit. Because of that, “you are no longer foreigners and strangers”, like visitors or landed refugees in a foreign country. All believers are “fellow citizens with God’s people”, meaning they have equal status with everyone else who is a part of Christ’s church regardless of when they were saved. All Christians are “members of (God’s) household”, part of God’s large family as spiritual brothers and sisters with one Father.

Q3 What are your thoughts about the inclusive nature of Christ’s church?

God’s household is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”. These servants of God gave their lives for Christ and became the solid base for the whole church family. The church’s foundation is eternally secure “with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone”. Jesus is the eternal and indestructible anchor point for the whole church structure: “In (Christ) 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”
Ephesians 2:21,22

All believers are joined together and built up as a holy spiritual temple. God’s earthly dwelling place is in the lives of his spiritual family. The church often meets in physical structures for worship, fellowship, and serving but believers are the “dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Q4 Why is it important to know that God inhabits the true church by his Spirit?

Church Life Matters

Being active in a local church is essential for the spiritual maturity and growth of you and your family. You learn and mature through interactions with other believers beyond what you can on your own. Our lives are profoundly affected by the quality of our relationships, and God designed the church to form healthy ones.

Life transformation is at the center of everything Freedom Church does. The stated mission is clear and simple: ‘To equip people to live a Christ-centred life through daily transformation.’ That sums up the lifestyle of a disciple of Jesus.

The vision of Freedom Church is about positive and widespread life change: ‘Transformed lives impacting our world.’ Every member, young and old, can learn to influence people around them to meet Jesus, follow him, and become more like him. By using our God-given resources, the Holy Spirit develops us to influence and impact the community and world for Christ. Jesus designed his church to continue the work he did when he came to the world in human form.

No other entity on earth has been authorized and commissioned by Jesus to advance his redemptive plan. The Holy Spirit inhabits the church in the lives of believers and equips all members to live transformed lives as examples for others. You discover and develop your potential in Christ by learning and growing in an environment of grace and encouragement as you help other people do the same. That is why church life matters.

Q5 What do you say to someone who thinks that participation in church is optional?

Church Core Values

For a local church to be spiritually healthy and productive, it needs core values for direction and decisions that are understood and accepted by its members. Freedom Church has three core values that support its vision and shape its ministries: connect, learn, and engage. We will look at each value closer to see how they help believers to be discipled and make disciples of Jesus.

Connect

The 'connect' core value is about members building authentic relationships with Jesus and with one another. Connecting with Christ is your priority relationship. You must spend time alone with the Lord to get to know him more. You also need to meet with other believers regularly. You form some of your best and most authentic relationships with people of like faith.

We see the believers' commitment to connecting in the early church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42. The church members in Acts were serious about connecting and participating in fundamental spiritual disciplines as follows:

1) Devoted to being trained in God's word

The "apostles' teaching" includes all that Jesus taught his disciples to know and obey. You learn to think and act more like Christ by spending time in the Word on your own and with other believers.

2) Devoted to being in fellowship

The word "fellowship" is from the Greek term *koinonia* which denotes more than spending time together. It is acting as partners, sharing life, and doing ministry together.

3) Devoted to partaking of communion

"The breaking of bread" here refers to partaking of the Lord's Supper with believers. Freedom Church does this once a month to honour Christ by meeting at his table to remember, refocus, repent, reflect, and rejoice in his saving work.

4) Devoted to praying

"Prayer" here is communicating with God as a group of believers. There are powerful spiritual dynamics when praying with other Christians in unity (Matthew 18:18-20).

Q6 How have these spiritual disciplines connected you with Christ and other believers?

The Acts believers were devoted to their church. They loved Jesus who established and designed the church to be the guardian and bedrock of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The church is Jesus' idea, and nothing compares to it. Church is different than service clubs and other organizations. Their members pay annual dues to join and agree to follow the club rules after completing the application process.

Christ's global church is spiritual in nature, and you are included in it when you trust in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. You enjoy membership benefits by participating in one of the millions of local churches in the world. Christian maturity develops by doing life and ministry with other believers for the greater good. Discipleship is not done in isolation but with those who model, teach, support, and encourage everyone to grow.

Q7 How do you make sure you stay connected to God and to your church family?

Learn

This Freedom Church core value is about training yourself to think and act more like Jesus each day. How you think dramatically affects the way you act. Transformed thinking occurs through the renewing of your mind and transformed living results from renewed thinking.

Training yourself in God's word is essential for maturing spiritually in life and ministry. Read the Bible to know what it says and study it to know what it means. Memorize Scripture so that it gets absorbed into your mind and heart. Meditate on the Word and it will influence your perspective and decision-making.

Learn to develop a prayer life that keeps you connected to God. Seek the Lord's direction first in all things and condition yourself to hear the Holy Spirit speak into your spirit. Practice praying the Word into any situation. You will find it to be powerful and effective because it is divinely inspired. Become competent at talking with God with the Spirit's help. You can hear him answer you and act on what he reveals for you to do.

Life transformation involves learning to be a disciple of Christ. Your old ways are replaced with the new ways of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17). You must choose to practice your new lifestyle daily: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2a. The Holy Spirit enables you to learn and adapt spiritual truth to everyday living.

Q8 Why is it important to never stop learning and obeying God's word?

Engage

This Freedom Church core value is about positively influencing the world for Jesus. You represent Christ everywhere you go as an advertisement of life transformation. God has strategically placed every believer where they are to impact people for him in their neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and homes.

The church in action is not bound to a central building but is released into the everyday world where people see and know us. We enhance the quality of our environment in countless ways and gain the attention of people who do not know Jesus. We are not doing any of this on our own. We have others in our church family for prayer support, encouragement, and help for finding necessary resources. When every member does their part, Jesus is on display and people are touched by his presence.

People have questions about belonging to a church family: Do I fit here? Can I get to know the people well? What can I contribute that is needed? What is required to feel connected and useful? These questions get answered by choosing to do church life in a devoted, unified, and healthy group of believers.

When Christians lovingly engage with each other, people on the outside will take notice: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46,47.

The first church in Acts gathered daily for worship in the temple courts. They also shared meals with one another in their homes with gladness, sincerity, and praise. The community where they lived was impressed by the church’s devotion and showed favour to the Christians. As a result, outsiders continually came to faith in Christ.

Q9 Why would believers loving one another be attractive to those outside the church?

Participate in a Local Church

How do you know what church to be part of with so many options available?

First, make sure that the church you consider is Christian in its beliefs. That may sound strange but not every local assembly or denomination embraces historical and Biblical teachings. Ask good questions and investigate: What is the church’s position on the supremacy of Jesus Christ as Lord? What do they believe about the Trinity of God as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Is the Bible treated as the Word of God, the ultimate standard and measure of morals and values? Are the church’s practices supported in Scripture? These are questions to get answered before aligning yourself with a particular congregation.

Second, be sure to do church life as a family. Children can learn at an early age to know, love, and serve Jesus. Get your family members involved in worship, fellowship, and serving for maximum benefit. Whether you are a single person or are married with children, participating in church life accelerates your spiritual growth.

Third, local church membership is an effective way to firm up your commitment. You do not have to be an official member to join the congregation in gatherings, serving, and giving. At the same time, churches must have membership in place to function as approved entities. That is a legal requirement for operating as a charitable organization and securing liability protection against potential threats.

Official membership is a voluntary decision with many personal and corporate benefits. It identifies those who support the church's mission and ministry. Being a member in good standing is required for someone to be appointed to a leadership position. It is helpful for keeping members accountable to others for their actions. Members tend to show deeper interest and invest more generously in the health and growth of their church. By committing to church life long-term, you establish spiritual roots for yourself and your family. You have a home base for reaching the lost and making disciples of Christ.

Q10 What benefits have you experienced by belonging to your local church?

Church life matters for you, your family, and those being impacted for Christ. Healthy churches demonstrate the love of Jesus to its members and to those on the outside looking in. Everyone can connect with God and others authentically, train to think and act more like Jesus, and positively engage others for Christ by serving with his love. Do not attempt to live the Christian life doing your own thing. Get church-ed and you will enjoy facilitating your spiritual growth and help create a welcoming environment.

Life Application

1. Review the lesson and take note of the ways you align with the major points of belonging and the ways you do not.
2. If not participating in a local church, ask yourself what benefits you are missing and what it would take to get more engaged with a church family.
3. Make an outline of what you would tell someone about why church life matters.

Lesson 2 – Connecting - Church is the Body of Christ

The first lesson of *Get Churched* established the necessity and benefits of participating in church life. Hopefully, you are determined to work your way through this course to understand more fully the importance for you to be connected to a local group of believers for spiritual growth and ministry. This lesson takes a closer look at the spiritual and relational components of church.

The Body of Christ

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27

The human body is an exceptional creation of God with all its intricate parts working together with precision. Gray’s Anatomy has long been the textbook for studying the human body. It details the regional groups of head and neck, upper limbs, thorax, abdomen, back, pelvis, perineum, and lower limbs. It describes what we can see on the surface and what we cannot see internally. The functioning of the adrenals, appendix, brain, heart, and intestines is critical for our physical health. The body is a complex and fascinating organism.

The physical body is an object lesson for understanding what the church is, what it does, and where each member fits. The apostle Paul uses the plural pronoun “you” in this teaching section, meaning it is addressed to all the church members, not individuals only.

The church is called the body of Christ because it belongs to him and no one else. You become part of the church by putting your faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. You must choose to live in obedience to Christ and his teachings to experience the benefits of body life.

Every person who is part of the church can enjoy fulfilled living as God produces wholeness in them, body, soul, and spirit. We are not alone in our growth process but do things with others to be built up and expand the work of the kingdom. The church as the body of Christ depends on every member participating in making disciples and serving one another in love.

Body life involves more than attending Sunday morning service regularly which is a good habit to maintain. The church in Acts is an instructive example of Christ followers growing in faith and expanding God’s work. Every church member has a role to play and can do it productively with the Holy Spirit’s power and equipping.

Q1 How is it helpful to view the church as the spiritual Body of Christ?

Benefits of Participating in Church Life

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 contains four major benefits for you by connecting deeply with your church, the spiritual body of Christ. You experience more of what the Lord has for you by actively contributing to church life.

1. A Body to Belong to

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

1 Corinthians 12:12,13

Jesus has only one church body, and each body part is linked to all the others. You are incorporated into Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit at the moment of your conversion. You become spiritually joined to and integrated into the church with the other believers regardless of ethnicity or social status. The Holy Spirit in you resides in every Christian.

Your physical body is one complete unit made up of many different and unique parts. Every part is not a body itself but a member of the whole entity. Similarly, you are not Christ’s body alone but are joined to other believers within the one true church.

The body of Christ is a global organism that exists in millions of local churches worldwide. It is impossible for one person to interact with over a billion Christians. You need close contact with others to worship, fellowship, disciple, and serve. Your local church is a spiritual home base for learning, growing, and producing as a believer.

The church body is designed for anyone to experience love, acceptance, and forgiveness. God loves you to love others, accepts you to accept others, and forgives you to forgive others. Regardless of your age, your past, and your present circumstances, you belong to Christ’s body as a believer. Your local church is a refuge in troubles, a resource for living well, and an inspiration for your spiritual development.

Q2 What benefits have you enjoyed identifying with a local church?

2. A Body to Connect With

“Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” 1 Corinthians 12:14

Like your physical body, the body of Christ is a combination of many parts. Imagine a physical toe, ear, or nose considering itself a complete body. That notion is silly because all the parts are necessary to comprise a complete human. Consider this imagery as it relates to you as one member of the entire church.

“Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.” 1 Corinthians 12:15,16

No physical body part is meant to function on its own. Each part must stay connected to be alive because life flows through the whole body, not one part alone. Likewise, the church is a spiritual organism that depends on every part contributing to the well being of the whole entity. No body part can declare independence for whatever reason and survive spiritually.

God determines what church body part you are. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you not envy other parts and devalue your own. You have been given a unique function for the well being of the entire church.

“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”
1 Corinthians 12:17-20.

You connect with the church and contribute to body life for your own vitality and for the optimization of the whole church. You grow spiritually by interacting with other believers and learning to love them deeply. You need the input and help from others to think and act more like Christ. Together, you increase the potential of impacting the world around you for Jesus. You are strengthened and encouraged by joining people of like faith to share and live out kingdom values.

Q3 How has being connected to a church family facilitated your spiritual growth?

3. A Body to Care For

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”
1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Your human body needs all the parts to be healthy, so you are wise to take care of your well being. Physical conditioning takes effort, and it pays big dividends in your overall sense of wholeness. Likewise, taking care of the body of Christ is vital for each part's benefit. Every member must be involved with overall body care that requires continuous spiritual and relational conditioning by everyone.

No human body part is unnecessary, whether seen or unseen. Most of your vital organs are not visible and require Xray technology to locate. Similarly, most church body ministry is out of public view and unnoticed without specific attention. God often gives greater honour to unacclaimed members than to those more visible. Every body part is indispensable and must be cared for.

Equal concern for all means attending to members going through a time of suffering. Physically, when you break your leg, your whole body reacts and adjusts through the healing process. When a church member suffers, the entire body responds with remedial action for restoration to happen. The same concern for all means rejoicing with members who are being honoured, for, when one person is acknowledged, we all share in their joy.

Effective and quality church body care benefits everyone involved. As you give of yourself for others, you help build an environment for you to be cared for when needed. Overall body health is facilitated through intentional caring by everyone.

Q4 Why must church body care be every member's responsibility?

4. A Body to Serve From

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts."
1 Corinthians 12:27-31

God has designed the body of Christ for believers to serve from. You use what God has provided you with to minister to others. Every body part is necessary to ensure that needs are met, and spiritual health and growth are facilitated for all.

Serving is essential for your personal development as a disciple of Christ. If you are not involved in body ministry, you hinder your growth in faith and maturity, and your church does not reach its potential for caring and sharing. As a member of Christ's body, learn to serve others like Jesus would when opportunities are given.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Christian service as a joy and not an onerous obligation. Count it a privilege to lovingly serve your church family and those in your community and world at large.

Q5 Why is your church family ideal for learning to serve others?

God has equipped your church body to serve effectively. 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 is not an exhaustive list of God-given gifts in the church to serve with. It gives representative examples for each of the three major spiritual gift groups of the local church body: administrative, manifestation, and ministry gifts.

Apostles, prophets, and teachers are three of four administrative gifts of Ephesians 4:11-13. Their primary function is to prepare the members of the body “for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” 4:12b,13. These gifts from God are people who are appointed as spiritual overseers and equippers of the church body.

Miracles, gifts of healing, different kinds of tongues, and interpretation are four of the manifestation gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. The nine spiritual gifts are special enableings of the Holy Spirit “for the common good” of the church body (12:7). They are supernatural abilities God gives individuals at his discretion for building up the church to minister effectively. As a Spirit-filled believer, you can operate in any of these spiritual gifts as needed when God chooses you.

Helping and guidance (leading) are two of the ministry gifts of Romans 12:4-8. They are specific ways of functioning in the church to ensure that ministry needs are met. As a believer, God has gifted you to serve others in at least one of these ways that you will be inclined to do with the Spirit’s enabling.

The body of Christ is designed for you to serve from, so be involved in ministry life using the spiritual gifts you have received. By continual service, you increase your competency to minister to others effectively.

Q6 How does a church family benefit from all the spiritual gifts being utilized?

Summary

You are part of Christ's body and can thrive in your spiritual growth and service. Your church provides the environment for connecting and working with others for the common good. Use your personality and God-given gifts and abilities to contribute to the work of the ministry.

If you are an up-front person, use that to bless others while being thankful for the less noticeable types. If you are a behind-the-scenes person, do your thing faithfully while being thankful for those who are more visible. You need the outgoing types, and they need you to maintain overall balance and productivity.

The church is the body of Christ, and every member plays a part. Thank God that you are spiritually connected to other believers to build up the body, expand the work of the gospel, and bring glory to the Lord.

Life Application

Review the lesson and consider how well connected you are to your local church as measured by the major points examined.

What actions if any do you need to take for deeper connecting?

Lesson 3 – Loving – Church Life Inspires Devotion

We have learned in *Get Churched* that church life matters because it displays the visible body of Christ. As a believer in Jesus, you are a member of the global church and participate in it as part of a local congregation. You facilitate your spiritual growth and maturity by engaging with your church family in worship, fellowship, and serving. You contribute to the unity and health of the body by utilizing the gifts God has given you.

Remember that the church is built on a solid foundation of godly apostles and prophets with Jesus as the chief cornerstone of the entire structure. God’s earthly dwelling place is in the lives of believers, not in a physical building. Love for Christ and for one another is facilitated in the church as members are disciplined to know and obey the commands of Christ and to reach and equip others to follow the Lord.

God designed the church to develop healthy, authentic relationships among people who belong to Christ by faith. By participating in church life, you enhance your spiritual growth and help others to activate their faith and service.

Q1 What have you learned or relearned about the church to this point in *Get Churched*?

Loving One Another Sets the Church Apart

Jesus teaches his disciples to love believers deeply as a distinguishing mark that others take notice of: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34,35

This is not a new command in the sense that it had not been given by God before. We know that the Israelites were instructed to love their neighbors like they took care of themselves (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus’ command to love updates the Old Testament practice by giving it a targeted focus. Disciples of Christ are the ones receiving this new command and Jesus is the embodiment and example of the selflessness required. Loving followers of Jesus give clear testimony that they are his disciples.

Q2 How does believers loving one another contrast with the world’s concept of love?

Jesus teaches about receiving and living out God’s love in John 15:9-17. Jesus loves us and proves it by dying for our sins and providing salvation in his name. He continues to love us and expects us to do likewise to others. We now examine the main teaching points of this Scripture.

1. Jesus calls us to remain in his love

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love.” John 15:9

We remain in Christ's love by staying connected to him by faith. Read John 15:1-8 for Jesus' teaching about receiving and maintaining his life flow to produce spiritual fruit and have our prayers answered. Jesus also calls us to continue to grow our relationship with him and show love to others.

2. We continue growing in Christ's love by obeying his commands

"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:10

To keep (obey) Christ's commands you must know what they are. Read Jesus' teaching in the New Testament and highlight the specific expectations he has for his followers. *The Commands of Christ* course has done the work for you and identifies forty-eight direct commands to every believer. Notice that Jesus says he kept his Father's commands regarding his salvation mission on earth. We are to be as diligent at obeying Christ to stay connected to him in love.

3. We experience complete joy and bring Jesus joy by loving obedience

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11

Jesus' joy in us is produced by the Holy Spirit as spiritual fruit when we cooperate with his work (Galatians 5:22,23). You cannot experience Christ's complete joy if you are not intimately connected to him by faith. This joy is different from the emotion of happiness that depends on certain outcomes and circumstances. This quality is inner strength that sustains and encourages us regardless of how things are going.

4. We love one another as Jesus loves because it is a command

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12

Jesus' commands are not merely suggestions or good ideas to consider. They are instructions to follow completely without fail. As mentioned above, obeying the Lord's commands is loving him practically. Jesus continues with the love theme with this new command to love each other as he has loved us. This is not optional for anyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ.

5. We love one another sacrificially like Jesus does

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13

Jesus describes what loving to the maximum looks like. There is no greater love displayed than offering your life for the sake of a friend. You benefit them at the highest personal cost because you love them. Jesus did that for us by surrendering himself to death on the cross as our substitute. Self-denial and sacrifice are the highest expressions of love for others.

6. We are considered friends of Jesus when we obey his commands

“You are my friends if you do what I command.” John 15:14

This adds to the point above about staying connected to Christ by obeying his commands. Not only does Jesus mark us as his disciples for doing so but he also considers us his friends. Following his instructions is how we strengthen our relationship with him.

7. We are included in Christ’s mission knowingly

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15:15

While we are all servants of Jesus the Master of all things, we also have a personal relationship with him. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus brings us into his confidence and shares what the Father has told him. We are insiders with Jesus in the discipling enterprise.

8. We are chosen by Christ to be productive

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” John 15:16

It is sometimes suggested that we choose Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour, which implies we are in control. The truth is that Jesus chooses us to join him in his kingdom work and appoints us to our tasks. He expects us to produce spiritual fruit that is long lasting and bountiful. As a bonus, Jesus gives us permission to ask anything of the Father in his name and it will be done.

Q3 How does church life help you obey Christ’s command to love (John 15:17)?

Church Life Inspires Spiritual Devotion

God designed the church to be a loving environment. Sacrificing yourself for others builds relationships that are mutually beneficial. Others will inspire you to do whatever you can to mature personally and add to the church’s well being. You will devote yourself to practicing spiritual disciplines with people of like faith. You will also be motivated to invest your time and give your best effort to Christ’s agenda.

The church of Acts lovingly inspired deep devotion in its members to do the things that foster spiritual growth and unity. We further examine their ongoing spiritual disciplines discussed in a previous lesson: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42

1. Devoted to learning God's word together

The apostles' teaching includes all that Jesus taught his disciples to know and obey. It involves intentional learning, which is Freedom church's second core value. A balanced and healthy church provides Biblical teaching that equips its members to learn to think and act more like Jesus every day.

2. Devoted to kingdom partnership

The word fellowship means more than simply enjoying each other's company. It is partnership in the undertaking of making disciples of Christ. Fellowship involves growing deep relationships with other believers by sharing in life and ministry. It is investing oneself in the church family to produce maximum spiritual fruit.

3. Devoted to communion participation

The breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper that Jesus did with his disciples prior to his arrest and crucifixion. 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 provides the purpose and guidelines for participating in communion. Only true believers in Christ are invited to the table and must prepare themselves to do so in a worthy manner. This is to be a recurring spiritual discipline that honours Jesus by remembering, refocusing, repenting, reflecting, and rejoicing in salvation through Christ's death and resurrection.

4. Devoted to praying together

Prayer is communicating with God, both personally and as a unified group of believers. Jesus teaches that when individuals with deep prayer lives join with other believers to pray, spiritual authority is recognized and potential outcomes are increased: "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:18-20.

Spiritual devotion is not random, casual, or coincidental but is an intentional choice of actions. When you position yourself in an environment of love for Christ and his church family, you are drawn to the practice of spiritual disciplines for personal growth and for benefiting the church overall. Shared devotion builds authentic, healthy, and harmonious relationships that advance Christ's mission.

Devotion requires dedicating your time, talent, and resources as an expression of your love for Christ and his church. Learn to love your church deeply so you do not treat it as useful only should you need it. Devoted Christ followers are recognized by their commitment to loving, learning, and growing together with their church family members.

Q4 How have you been inspired to live a devoted life in Christ by church life practices?

The Church is Unique

It has been said that the church has many critics but no rivals. There are detractors from within who see weaknesses and flaws based on their personal preferences. There are faultfinders on the outside who judge the church without experiencing it or were disappointed by the church in the past. Remember that the church is made up of people who are not perfect just like the critics are not. The church is unique because it welcomes all sinners to be saved, regardless of their preconceptions and biases.

Jesus established and designed the church as the guardian of truth and expander of God's kingdom. No other group or organization can lay claim to that special privilege. The church must resist becoming overly institutionalized, losing its dependence on God, and relying on human abilities. Belonging to the church is different than being a member of a social club or civic organization by paying dues and following the rules. Humanitarian groups that seek to do good things for society require members to agree to follow the guidelines of the organization to participate.

Associating yourself with a church also requires cooperation and compliance with the terms of membership and conduct. You join by believing in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. You learn and live out God's expectations of godliness in the Bible. The church protects and maintains its Christian identity with rigorous disciplinarianism. It strikes a balance between requiring more than Christ commands and not being concerned about living up to what he expects. Give people time to investigate what they are signing on for to become active church participants. When informed and ready, they are more likely to commit themselves for the long term.

Q5 Why is it important for a church to have clear expectations for its participants?

The Impact of Devotion to Church Life

You want to know that the investment of your life in a church is worthwhile. To do that, you get involved in a local congregation where you feel loved, accepted, and forgiven. You stay connected by building meaningful relationships with others through caring, sharing, and serving. You commit time, effort, and resources to a vision that impacts people for Christ. You make yourself accountable to the local body by agreeing to respect and protect the integrity and name of Jesus as his representative. You willingly do whatever you can to ensure your church is unified and productive.

When church members are devoted, outsiders will be drawn in: "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:46b,47

Devoted church members met together regularly for worship, shared resources with one another, and did meals in their homes joyfully. People in the community took note of their loving interactions and came to faith in Christ daily because of it.

Q6 Why is healthy church life an effective tool for evangelism?

Benefits of Your Devotion to Church Life

1. Assurance of your identity in Christ's church

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27

Every person who confesses Jesus as Lord is part of the body of Christ. You show you understand and accept that reality when you openly participate with other believers in body life. Your devotion to loving your church family identifies you as belonging to Christ and his church. You demonstrate you are not ashamed of Jesus, and you want others to enjoy transformed living like you do. Those around you should know that you and your church family are disciples of Christ who live according to his commands.

Q7 Why is it important to know and accept your identity in Christ and his church?

2. Encouragement for faith and service

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24,25.

You need to be encouraged by others to keep growing in faith and they need you to do the same for them. You learn to love people deeply with church members who spur you on to be Christlike in all you do. You benefit spiritually, emotionally, and relationally by joining regularly with other believers and you lose those benefits when you do not.

Time is running out before “the Day” Jesus returns. You cannot afford to waste a moment as a follower of Christ and must make everyday count. Devote yourself to building up the church body so that it stays healthy, unified, and fruitful. That will encourage you and those who watch you closely.

Q8 How does everyone benefit from Christians encouraging one another regularly?

3. A sense of usefulness

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

God has gifted you with abilities to use to bless others. Your church offers a loving environment with unlimited opportunities to serve with eternal purpose. You get to see the difference you make in people’s lives which gives you a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. Every believer can feel useful by taking what they have and investing it in kingdom service. Time, talents, and resources are some of your best assets to put to effective use for Christ.

Q9 What effect does serving others have on you?

4. Spiritual protection

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” Hebrews 13:17

Submitting to the authority of your leaders places you under spiritual covering. Get to know the leaders of your local assembly and develop confidence in them to do what is best for the church. They are accountable to Christ and will be judged by him one day for their faithful obedience and service.

Be a blessing to your spiritual overseers with a willing and grateful attitude. Lighten their burden of ministry by devoting yourself to church life through loving, giving, serving, and encouraging. You jeopardize your spiritual covering by making life difficult for your leaders, so pray for and bless them often.

Q10 How have you sensed spiritual protection by supporting your spiritual leaders?

Summary

Get Churched is the focus of this study. You are learning that you have good reasons to get involved with local church life. The longer you wait, the more likely it is you will not get connected and plugged in. Regularly attending church on Sunday is one part of being churched. However, there is a difference between going to church and belonging to the church. Participating in church life requires more effort and it increases your potential for spiritual growth and maturity.

There are churches in your community to consider being part of. Make sure that whatever church you choose openly presents Jesus Christ as Lord, teaches the Bible as God's word, practices prayer in faith, encourages and trains its members to serve in ministry, reaches out to a lost world with the gospel, and worships the Lord together regularly.

You will feel a part of the congregation you contribute to and get involved with. Jesus is building his church, and you can join him in that mission. The gates of hell will keep trying to stop Christ's church from advancing and the Lord will always overcome the forces of evil (Matthew 16:18,19). Jesus has entrusted the keys of kingdom authority to his church to help people be transformed and set free. Commit to being an active partner with Christ in building up his disciples and impacting the world for him. Learn to grow in Christ's love and be devoted to spiritual practices with your church family.

Life Application

Review the lesson and realistically compare your love for Christ and devotion to spiritual practices identified and explained.

What steps are you prepared to take to fully engage in loving other believers and enjoy the benefits of devotion to church life?

Lesson 4 – Supporting – Church Life Practices Encouraging

Get Churched has been making the case about why church life matters. We learned that church is the body of Christ with many parts working together to connect with God, one another, and others. We noted devotion to spiritual disciplines builds and maintains a loving church that grows and matures. This lesson identifies the support needed, given, and received in an encouraging church family.

Q1 What else have you realized about church life so far?

We are God's Family

Your church is a spiritual family made up of real people who trust in Christ and look out for one another: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:10

Besides the expectation of doing good works, we have been entrusted by God with his truth and are expected to live accordingly: "you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." 1 Timothy 3:15b

As a believer in Christ, you are part of God's spiritual household. You are responsible to help your church be theologically solid and relationally healthy. You want everyone to feel like they belong so they can be taught, disciplined, and encouraged. Being part of a loving family is what all people want but do not always experience. Perhaps you have negative memories of family life which makes you unenthusiastic about being closely connected to a local church. Hopefully, you will not allow those emotions to hold you back.

Be careful not to equate God's best for us with human shortcomings in all areas of life. There are no perfect families that get everything right, but some do seem healthier and happier than most. Family life has its challenges and disappointments, especially when one or more of its members refuse to contribute and cooperate. Everyone must love and sacrifice to make the natural family work well.

Similarly, the family of God is made up of regular people who, for any number of reasons, bring harmony or disharmony to the church. Like a biological family, what one member does in the spiritual body affects the others both positively and negatively.

Q2 What are your thoughts about the church being God's spiritual family?

In your church, everyone in Christ is related spiritually to all the other family members. The Holy Spirit has already made this arrangement regardless of how you feel about it. We are all responsible for one another and must hold each other accountable for our attitudes and conduct.

The Freedom Church core value 'connect' focuses on building authentic relationships that are honest, real, deep, and gracious. Many people in the world experience human connections that are surface and superficial so that relationships are easily ruptured and broken with nothing substantial holding them together. Time and effort are necessary to know someone well and build a relationship that lasts. A spiritual family that enjoys doing life and ministry together is attractive to those seeking genuine connectedness.

Q3 Why do you agree that a healthy church family is appealing?

Church Life Promotes Encouragement

Church family ties are strengthened in an encouraging environment: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today', so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Hebrews 3:13

Encourage means to come alongside someone for support in whatever they are going through. Think about the positive effect on you being encouraged by a parent or sibling who cares. Imagine the healthy dynamics of all human family members supporting the others constantly. It would create a haven of security and confidence for everyone.

The church family should be known for encouraging one another. Life in the world can be demanding and discouraging. It is unusual for people to receive positive reinforcement at work, school, and in the community. Christ expects the church to be relationally healthy so that its family members give to and receive encouragement from to each other every day. Nothing else on earth has the potential for building people up like the church does because of the abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how often we are to cheer others on: "But encourage one another daily". This should be evidenced on Sundays when the church family gathers for worship, fellowship, and service. Additionally, we are to be encouraging other believers every day throughout the week. We have advantages today over previous generations with numerous ways to be in touch with others when they are not physically present. Phone, video calls, text, email, notes, and letters are helpful tools for communicating when being in the same place at the same time is not possible.

We are instructed to spur one another on every day. Do not wait until you receive encouragement to reach out and bless others. Be intentional about letting people know you are

thinking about and praying for them with hopeful anticipation of God's best being done. Spurring others on produces joy in you and has a positive effect on your entire church family.
Q4 How do you remind yourself to encourage other church family members regularly?

The Power of Encouraging

"...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" Hebrews 3:13b

Encouraging others benefits you. It protects you from hardening your heart and missing out on the Holy Spirit's work in you. There is a connection between participation in church life and increased engagement with the Spirit. Being an encourager in the church body safeguards you from developing cynical and critical attitudes towards the church and God. Depend on the Holy Spirit to cultivate an encouraging attitude and demeanour in you.

Sin's deceitfulness must be acknowledged and reckoned with. Sinful desires pull you away from closeness to Jesus when left unchecked. Without constant vigilance, you can lose sight of right and wrong and convince yourself that sin is not a big deal. To be deceived by sin means to be misled by false appearances and lies meant to delude you into compromise your beliefs. This is the devil's strategy as a deceiver who appeals to your fleshly desires while obscuring the tragic consequences of sin like bondage, fear, and eternal destruction.

Your spiritual downslide will be gradual. The harmful and deadly consequences of sin are not obvious at first so you can think it is okay. You justify your disobedience because you see others doing it without apparent harm. Over time, you become blind to the deception you bought into. The repetition of sinning dulls your conscience to God's ways of right living, and godliness becomes irrelevant and unreasonable to you. You can get to the place where you no longer believe God and his Word are necessary.

Any one of us can fall for the devil's schemes when we are not spiritually attentive to our lives and others. Do not minimize the importance of church family members encouraging each other in the faith every day. We must all ensure that no one becomes resistant towards the Holy Spirit. Being a spiritual encourager helps you to stay on track spiritually and assists your church in maintaining a life-producing environment.

Q5 How have you experienced the spiritual benefits of encouraging others?

Practical Ways to Encourage

The following are practical things you can do to build others up in the faith:

1. Encouraging Words

You can encourage someone with words in a variety of ways besides being there in person. Emails, texts, notes, letters, and phone calls are acceptable ways to convey your loving support. Whether facing challenges or enjoying relative calm, remind others that God is with them. Let them know that they have been a source of encouragement to you if so. That will spur them on to keep blessing others.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit puts a word on your heart to share with someone. Take them aside and tell them what your sense God wants them to know. Arrange a place and time to speak to them compassionately. Tell them that God prompted you to reach out to them for their benefit. How they respond to you is their choice. Simply be obedient to the leading of the Spirit and learn and grow from every experience.

God may also give you a word of exhortation to share with the whole congregation as it meets together: “But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.” 1 Corinthians 14:3 Present the Spirit-inspired message humbly so that it is received and responded to with grace. This spiritual gift is unique to the church to strengthen, encourage, and comfort individuals and the body at large.

You can always share Scripture with someone as a word of encouragement. The Bible is filled with messages of hope for all experiences and seasons. An example is calling attention to the reality of Jesus’ second coming and spending eternity with him as a word of comfort: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:18

The Lord expects us to speak encouragement into people’s lives, whether we feel like it or not. Doing that blesses the person and you.

Q6 How have you spoken encouraging words to others in any of these ways? What happened?

2. Encouraging Prayer

It is encouraging when someone says, “I am praying for you” and they really mean it. During times of momentous challenges, it is comforting to know you are not on your own. When your faith is put to the test, you can feel confused and uncertain about how to manage the situation. Being surrounded by spiritual supporters is a priceless gift that brings hope and strength.

Your church family members are partners in faith. You are there for them when needed and they are there for you. Pray constantly to be ready to intercede with the Spirit’s help at any time for those you know and others you do not. “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18

Everyone benefits from the practice of praying for one another and participating in the Holy Spirit’s work. Encourage someone today with prayer support, whether in their presence or at a distance. Watch and wait for the effects of your prayers in the strengthening of the one prayed

for, changes in the details of the circumstances, and an energizing in you for continued intercession.

Q7 How have you benefited from knowing that believers were praying for you and others?

3. Encouraging Participation

Do not overlook the potential of encouraging others by your choices and attitudes. The way you participate in church life can inspire or discourage others. You set a tone with the demeanour you bring into a gathering and any conversation. Be an eager and willing participant when your church family gathers.

What you contribute to connecting times is as important as what you get out of them. Choose to be a positive influencer regardless of how you feel. When you give your best effort, you will feel useful and productive. Make every opportunity count for building others up in faith.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24,25

Think about how you can motivate and inspire others to be loving and productive. We need to be reminded regularly to be more like Jesus by caring for others sacrificially. When every believer speaks encouragement and practices generosity, the whole body is strengthened and grows more unified and fruitful.

The second coming of Christ continues to get closer. Because of that we must increase our efforts to encourage one another to stay faithful to Christ and his mission. We must meet regularly as a habit and not miss the benefits of doing so. Participate with your church family enthusiastically and you will encourage others to give their best effort like you are.

Q8 In what ways are you influencing others to participate in church life enthusiastically?

4. Encouraging Lifestyle

Members of your family are influenced by the way you live your life. How you manage the good times and adversities makes a deep impression on your spouse and children. The church family is similar in this regard. Your brothers and sisters in Christ watch to see how you live your life whatever the circumstances. You may never know how much you inspired others by your trust in God no matter what life threw at you.

You will be encouraged by observing people you know overcome obstacles with grace and stamina. You will be an encouragement to others who see you navigate the difficulties of daily life resolutely. Always keep in mind that you are an example to those around you. That helps to

keep you accountable for your words and conduct. It also increases your joy knowing you are showing the way for others to experience God's best by trusting him.

The apostle Paul was greatly encouraged by the example of other believers he knew:
"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 3:7,8

Paul and his ministry team wanted their lives to count for Christ. They gave their best effort to make disciples wherever they were. They hoped their sacrificial investments would produce spiritually mature and faithful believers with bottom-line faith. Paul and his coworkers were rewarded spiritually with the knowledge that the Thessalonian church members were standing firm in their commitment to Christ.

Like that, those you pour your life into will be a source of blessing later when you may wonder if your work in the kingdom has produced fruit. You will be spurred on in service for Jesus by hearing that they are solid and active in their faith because of you. Choose to believe God on your best days and on the worst ones. You will grow your trust and confidence in the Lord, and you will impact those who watch your life closely.

Q9 How do you ensure your lifestyle makes a godly impression on others?

Some members of the church body have received the spiritual gift of encouraging for ministry. The Holy Spirit enables them to inspire and spur on believers to seize every moment with hope in Christ: "If your gift is...to encourage, then give encouragement." Romans 12:8a. We need gifted encouragers to be cheerleaders among us, spurring us on to love deeply and serve well. If you are inclined that way, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to encourage others effectively.

While some members are gifted encouragers, all believers are instructed to be "encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25b Make it a habit of uplifting the spirits of others with spoken and written words, with prayers, by active participation in church life, and by seeking God while obeying his commands joyfully. If you want to be encouraged, keep encouraging others.

Life Application

Review the lesson and assess how you are supporting your church family as an encourager.

What will you do to maintain and increase your supporting actions for others?

Lesson 5 – Relating – Church Life Builds Friendships

A healthy and appealing church is a community of believers where people know they will be loved, accepted, and encouraged. Worshipping God, learning to be godly, and fellowshiping with other believers is transformative. Church life can foster openness with God and one another when the Holy Spirit is invited to do his work in us freely.

Relationships in the church should be second to none. Members are taught and shown how to respect and learn from each other. There is a warm welcome to sincere inquirers about the faith without showing prejudice and pride. Believers spur one another on to do good works with Holy Spirit enabling. The sacrificing of self-interests and personal resources for the greater good is evident.

A robust church family adapts to changes of methods and ministry without diluting the gospel and commands of Christ. People willingly invest themselves to maintain the vitality of the church body to produce spiritual fruit. Who would not want to be part of a local Christian assembly like that?

Q1 How do you ensure that the health of your church family is sustainable?

Relational Dynamics

This lesson examines the potential of church life to develop deep and loving relationships that endure. People want to fit in and be part of something significant. That desire begins early in life as a need to feel accepted by others. Wanting to be valued by their peers is a reason children and young adults do things they may not on their own. It is why adults avoid confrontation, lie, and compromise their values in marriage, the workplace, and social settings. They fear being labelled oddballs and excluded from the group. The church is the ideal environment to satisfy anyone's need for belonging in a wholesome and fulfilling way.

The Bible is candid and instructive about building authentic relationships in all facets of life. The church has the capacity and tools to equip people to connect with others well. Many people have lost the ability to interact with people maturely because of diminished verbal and social skills. Conversation is often at a surface level, so we know very little about one another. Cyber friends may know details and information about people but cannot testify to the character of someone like you can with in-person experiences. We need real and present people in our lives to be open and honest with.

God created humans to connect with him and others. Unfortunately, many people have become self-focused and distant with people as a safeguard against getting hurt. We are tempted to wear masks of what we think others want us to be while hiding our real self. But what if we made the effort to get past our fears and connect with other believers while doing church life together?

Q2 How can your church family address the relationship deficits in our society?

Be a Friend With Actions

Marriages, friendships, and other relationships can be healthy, productive, and enjoyable. It requires being real, respectful, and trustworthy with one another. These are essential qualities of being a good friend and the Bible has much to say about the benefits of having loving people to share your life with.

1. Be a friend who endures

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.” Proverbs 17:17

It is a special gift to have one or more people who love you no matter what. You can be that for someone by standing with them whatever they go through.

2. Be a friend who helps

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9,10

It is a mistake to think you can go it alone. Doing anything with others multiplies your effectiveness in whatever you do. Also, you need others to help you get back up when you fall flat on your face physically and emotionally and do not have the strength to stand.

3. Be a friend who defends

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12

Fending off physical and verbal attacks by yourself is difficult. When someone has your back, the odds of overcoming are greatly increased. Going through challenges with others strengthens the bonds of your relationships. Deep and committed friendships are inspiring to witness. You see in action the qualities of respect, unselfishness, and trust on display. You will be thankful you made the time and effort to develop solid friendships. Your church family has people of good character for you to engage with and get close to.

Your relationship with Jesus is the foundation for connecting with others. Jesus should be your best friend. He gave his life for you and will never leave or forsake you. You can count on him no matter what: “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24

Jesus sets the ultimate example of being a close friend through thick and thin. The church is composed of believers who follow Christ and grow to become more like him daily. When you participate in church life, you will develop relationships that you can depend on in every circumstance. By spiritual connectedness with believers, it is possible to have quality friends that the world wants but rarely experiences. Give your best effort to develop deep relationships with godly people.

Q3 How is having Jesus as your best friend helpful for developing relationally with others?

Build Quality Relationships

A husband and wife should be best friends. Marriage is a lifetime relationship that flourishes when spouses love and like each other. Enjoy the time you spend together and show interest in things that are important to your partner. Be a cheerleader for each other and be ready to do whatever it takes to stay faithful to your trust commitment. Whether married or single, all quality relationships have the following characteristics.

1. Trustworthy – They protect personal information shared with each other.

“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.”

Proverbs 11:13

Be that person who others would trust their lives with. Learn how to guard information shared with you in private so that your reputation of trustworthiness grows.

Q4 What has it cost you to be trustworthy with a confidence shared with you?

2. Forgiving – They settle issues graciously and move forward.

“Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” Proverbs 17:9

Give your friends the benefit of the doubt when they do something unexpected. Be ready to forgive your friends when they offend you and keep growing your relationship. Settle your differences yourselves and do not draw others into the matter.

Q5 Why is readiness to forgive essential for lasting relationships?

3. Loving – They sacrifice for one another through good and bad.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.” Proverbs 17:17

Love is a fruit of the Spirit produced in you as you mature in Christ. It is not an emotion that changes with circumstances but a commitment to be Christlike regardless of the situation. You willingly sacrifice yourself for others when they need your help.

Q6 Why is sacrifice required to love others well?

4. Self-controlled – They are peacemakers when differences arise.

“It is to one’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.” Proverbs 20:3

With the Holy Spirit’s help, learn not to be easily offended by people’s comments and actions. Look for common ground for agreement when differences occur. Self-control is another fruit of the Spirit that enables you to stay balanced in every situation.

Q7 How does self-control help you make peace when provoked by a friend?

5. Realistic – They are honest and constructive with each other.

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” Proverbs 27:5,6

Knowing what you need to improve is better than not knowing. A true friend has your best interests at heart and their honest appraisal is beneficial. Flattery from someone you do not know well instead of being told the truth is dangerous to your well-being.

Q8 How does the Holy Spirit help you to tell the truth to someone lovingly?

These are some of the qualities of making deep connections with others. You experience much joy when you can be yourself with people who love you no matter what. Character qualities in a friend matter more than their personality and social status.

Q9 Can you think of other qualities that add to relationship building?

Church Life is Ideal for Developing Authentic Relationships

Your church family is where you learn how to develop deep and lasting relationships. You have Jesus as the model, the Bible for instruction, and the Holy Spirit as your teacher. You are uniquely placed with other believers to grow closer together. The following are some advantages of building church friendships.

1. You share a common purpose that is life-changing

There are mutual benefits to spending time with others who want to make their lives count for Christ. You help each other stay on track spiritually and influence the people around you for Jesus. Spending time together worshipping, learning, serving, and socializing helps you get to know one another more deeply.

Q10 How are Christ-centered relationships unique from worldly ones?

2. You can be real with those who love you and want the best for you

It is liberating not to have to pretend you are something you are not. You can be yourself as the Holy Spirit does his work in you. You learn to tell others the truth in love and get honesty from them for your well-being. You can redirect unhealthy self-focus to caring about the progress of others selflessly: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Philippians 2:3,4

Q11 How can you tell when someone values you above themselves?

3. You can build relationships for a lifetime

Some of your best longtime friends will be part of your church family. Ask the Holy Spirit to connect you with others through shared experiences and interests. Let the Spirit produce his fruit in you so that people are drawn to you and want to get to know you. Be available to serve with those you do not know well. Find out who is open to knowing you better. Make the effort to do life and ministry with them and watch your friendships grow.

Q12 Why are Christ-centered relationships durable and deep?

Church life is great for meeting people and making good friends who are real, genuine, committed, giving, loving, and sharing. With the Holy Spirit’s help, be the person others want to be around. Do all you can to create a loving environment as a church family with people of all ages and backgrounds engaging one another.

Enjoy times of celebration together like water baptisms, communion, baby dedications, and weddings. Take part in praying for one another and worshipping together regularly. These actions draw us closer to each other and inspire us to encourage our church family through generosity and serving.

Life Application

Review the lesson and evaluate how well you are building quality relationships with members of your church family.

Take note of what you can improve on and do it.

Lesson 6 – Equipping – Pastors Prepare People for Serving

To this point in *Get Churched*, we have examined various aspects of church life. We noted that church matters because it is the body of Christ and important to him. We considered how devotion to church life facilitates the growing and maturing of Christians. We also looked at developing an encouraging environment that builds authentic relationships to last.

Q1 What stands out for you so far regarding the transformative nature of the church?

What is a Pastor?

This lesson looks at pastoring from a Biblical and practical perspective. We will do an overview of the role and responsibilities of a pastor in a local church who gives spiritual oversight and covering to the body of Christ. Pastoring is a calling from God to those he chooses and appoints to serve in that capacity.

The pastoral call begins with a stirring by the Holy Spirit inside someone to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Christ and his mission. Pastoring is not a profession in the traditional sense but a way of life every moment of the day. A pastor is never not a pastor including time at home and in the community. The apostle Paul wrote the following to his protégé and young pastor Timothy: “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.” 1 Timothy 3:1

The Greek word for overseer is translated into English several ways in the New Testament: pastor in Ephesians 4:11, elder and bishop in Acts 20:17,28, and overseer, bishop, and elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. See *The Overseer’s Qualifications* course for further study and details about spiritual leaders.

The term pastor draws from the Old Testament imagery of the shepherd, the one who tends the flock of sheep by guiding, feeding, and protecting them. Psalm 23 refers to God as our shepherd throughout life and beyond. Jesus called himself the good shepherd who looks after his sheep. Pastors learn about leading people from the examples of Biblical shepherds watching over their flocks.

Note that someone who senses and pursues a pastoral calling on them “desires a noble task.” The role of pastor is an honourable undertaking that works for the good of others. It is not something to be taken lightly because of the responsibility required to model exemplary living full-time. Pastors who serve well consider their service for Christ a reasonable way to spend their lives in view of God’s mercy to them (Romans 12:1).

Q2 Why does the apostle Paul call pastoring a noble task?

Discerning the Pastoral Calling

How does someone know if they have been called to pastor or not? There are clues regarding one's suitability for the role that should be examined before taking the huge steps required. Pastoring is a humbling experience because no one feels fully adequate for the task. There are no perfect pastors, but you can be an effective leader when called and enabled by God.

The demands of pastoring will take you out of your comfort zone. You learn to lean into the Lord to help you do what you could not on your own. You treat your calling as a lifetime assignment so that, when challenges come, there is no option of turning back. Full surrender to Christ and his kingdom mission is made possible by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

A calling from God is difficult to explain but it is undeniable when you experience it. Certainty of your call is indispensable for staying the course no matter what you face. Seasoned pastors testify that knowing they were called helped them push on and not give up when confronting tough opposition and setbacks. Confidence of calling is like having a spiritual backbone of steel. You can stand firm and tall when others around you are fading. Pastoring is not for the fainthearted, so it is wise to make sure you have heard from the Lord and recognize what he is asking of you.

There are three indispensable aspects of discerning your calling, whatever it turns out to be: compulsion, conviction, and confirmation. Compulsion is a sense of obligation to something you think about all the time. It usually relates to what you are good at when utilizing your talents and abilities. Conviction is certainty of what you know deep within. This is a firm commitment to your godly values that influence your thinking and choices. Confirmation is the evidence of spiritual fruit being produced through you that others see as well. There are telltale signs that you are right where you should be.

No matter what God calls you to do, make sure that all three aspects align. When they do, offer yourself to the Lord and let him fill in the details regarding when, where, and how you will be of service.

Q3 Why must an aspiring pastor be certain about their calling from God?

A Pastor's Responsibilities

There are numerous Biblical qualifications for being a pastor as examined in *The Overseer's Qualifications* course. Church leadership requires spiritual maturity for the good of the people being led and the one leading. Choices made have spiritual life and death implications and must always be made wisely.

The following are three responsibilities for pastors that require supernatural enabling: spiritual covering, equipping for service, and modelling mature Christlikeness.

1. Spiritual covering for the church family

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” Acts 20:28-31a

The apostle Paul spoke these words to the elders of the Ephesian church. He reminded them of their responsibility to safeguard themselves and the church body against evil infiltration of false teachers. Overseers function as a spiritual covering for their church family with God’s approval and anointing. Church members are wise to keep themselves and their families in that favoured position of protection.

Pastors and other spiritual leaders guard the church family against those who would try to disrupt and divide. Many in the congregation do not realize their pastors are standing up for them in truth against the enemy’s attacks. Leaders must be able to operate effectively in the spiritual realm while others are looking at the physical. This responsibility is the most demanding and least visible aspect of what your pastor does as part of their calling.

Pastors must stay filled with the Holy Spirit to receive supernatural power, discernment, and wisdom to stand firm in faith. You encourage your pastor through prayer and support like Aaron and Hur did, holding up the arms of Moses as the Israelites battled the Amalekites (Exodus 17). Victory for Israel came through Moses’ spiritual covering as others stood courageously at his side.

Q4 How does your pastor being a spiritual covering affect your regard for them?

2. Equipper of the church family

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

Pastors are part of a group of spiritual leaders gifted to the church by the Lord to help believers mature and serve the kingdom well. Jesus is the one who chooses, calls, and appoints individuals for these positions of oversight and administration. Apostles are missionaries who go and establish new churches where people are being saved. Prophets speak for God, calling people to love and obey the Lord fully. Evangelists present the gospel to unbelievers and lead them to faith in Christ. Pastors are also teachers who shepherd by training believers to know and live out the Word.

We are most familiar with pastor-teachers because they are part of the local church full time. The other administrative leaders are usually mobile, spending time with multiple congregations because of the nature of their function. All these spiritual leaders have a clear mandate to follow. When doing their roles well, they equip the body to be unified in faith and in the knowledge of Christ and become mature like Jesus.

A pastor accepts the responsibility to teach the Word and prepare believers for works of service in the kingdom. They cannot do this alone and learn to train up others to help them equip the entire body. Pastors make the members aware of the other spiritual leaders with special abilities for establishing congregations, operating in the prophetic, and reaching the lost with the gospel. Mutual love and respect for one another's contributions to the kingdom are essential for church unity, health, and kingdom impact.

Q5 How can you support your pastor's efforts in teaching and equipping the body?

3. Example to the church family

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1

These are the words of the apostle Paul who always led others by example. He set the bar for his life and ministry high and did everything to live up to it. He determined to be more like Jesus in his thinking and doing every day. Paul was aware that others watched him closely and took note of how he put Biblical theology into practice. Spiritual leaders are wise to keep themselves accountable for spiritual growth and service.

Paul gave this charge to Timothy, one of the young pastors he mentored: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." 1 Timothy 4:12. All pastors start somewhere and grow into their leadership role. Congregations will be blessed by showing grace to young pastors as they develop their skills over time. Timothy needed to set the pace for the church family in life and ministry for his sake and theirs.

No pastor or spiritual leader is perfect, but they must be godly. They do stand out from the group because of their public ministry. There is no time when a pastor is not setting an example to emulate. A big part of pastoring is showing others how to be Christlike in any social setting. You can help your pastor deal with the pressure of that responsibility by expressing gratitude for their willingness to lead well.

Q6 How can you help others respect and value your pastor for being a godly example?

Real Life Preparation of Pastors

Where do pastors get their start? How can a local church produce pastoral candidates?

Church life is the ideal environment for developing and raising up spiritual leaders. The next lesson looks at all church leaders in action, identifying who they are, and how they are integral to overall spiritual health and growth. It is from this group that pastors are discovered and trained while serving as deacons and spiritual overseers.

The *Leaders With Substance* course is a useful resource to consider for understanding the nature of spiritual oversight. It makes the point that the Biblical qualifications for a deacon are a useful standard for someone to meet to fill any leadership position. They must have established a reputation of mature faith, healthy family life, and honest dealings with the community before taking on the deacon role.

No person is a ten out of ten in leadership qualifications. However, there should be unmistakable evidence of a life well lived for Christ with spiritual maturity. Experiences as a husband, father, worker, and ministry leader are useful for shaping and firming up one's values and learning how to deal with people effectively.

1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 list qualifications for deacons and elders. Note what it says regarding spiritual overseers like pastors: "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap." 1 Timothy 3:6,7. Spiritual leaders are warned about Satan's strategy to take them down. New believers are not ready for the intense spiritual opposition from the devil and must mature to do so.

Jesus made it clear that his followers would be treated poorly because of their faith in him (John 15:18-25). The enemy will attack you, and you have been taught how to prayerfully defeat every assault in Jesus' name with the Holy Spirit's power and spiritual weapons. Be constantly alert to the devil's schemes and stand firm in the Lord.

Pastors and spiritual leaders are prime targets for Satan because of their influence on the church family. When a spiritual leader falls for the devil's schemes and loses faith, morality, and integrity, damage is done to the church body. Pastors need your prayers and support every day to stay the course and provide spiritual covering and equipping for the church family.

Q7 How is your church an ideal training environment for pastors?

Be a Joy to Your Pastor

"Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you." Hebrews 13:17

Why would someone add to a pastor's burden intentionally? It is of no spiritual benefit to them, and it causes tension in the church family. A pastor can learn from others and is wise to be

approachable and open to their questions and concerns. As a church member, respect your spiritual leader's position and authority. They are watching out for you because they know they are accountable to the Lord for fulfilling their calling.

Always remember that pastors are imperfect humans like you. They have days when things are going smoothly and other days not so much. They can seem unfazed by some things and frustrated with others. They are still growing and maturing in life and ministry, seeing and accepting their limitations, and learning to lean on others for assistance when needed.

For pastors to thrive, they must distinguish between God's agenda and the expectations of others and themselves. They must prioritize seeking and listening to God for his directives and assurances. Pastors must be Spirit-filled and secure in Christ to stay the course. They need to commit to keeping in step with the Spirit every day. Pastors will disappoint those who have unrealistic expectations for them. It is not possible for any person to be all things to all people all the time. Even Jesus disappointed people when he did not do what they wanted.

Pastors can be hard on themselves and feel downhearted when realizing the things they cannot do, They are unable to heal every sick person they meet, give money to everyone in financial need, find jobs for those without work, help reconcile every troubled marriage, rescue each young person struggling with faith and identity, convince everyone to not turn away from Christ, and lead all people to a relationship with Jesus. However, a pastor can call people to put their faith and hope in Jesus as Lord, Saviour, Healer, and Provider, the one who is unlimited in every way. Pastors must learn to celebrate the victories and leave the impossibilities with God.

You will experience God's blessing when you support your pastor and the ministries they oversee. Pray for and encourage them to serve faithfully every day as a spiritual overseer and equipper of your church family. Be thankful that they are a special part of significant times of your life like salvations, water baptisms, weddings, baby dedications, funerals, and spiritual breakthroughs. Give your pastor every opportunity to flourish in their calling for that is in your best interest.

Q8 In what ways do you encourage your pastor in their life and ministry?

Life Application

Review the lesson and think about your pastors living out their calling as spiritual shepherds and teachers for your church family.

How can you help your pastors to serve well and stay strong and productive?

Lesson 7 – Modeling – Leaders Set Godly Examples to Follow

We have examined why you need to connect with a church family as an integral part of your discipleship progress. As a believer you are a spiritual body part of Christ's church with abilities to develop and put to good use. You have people to learn and grow with by devoting yourself to the spiritual disciplines of praying, studying the Word, fellowship, and communion. You contribute to the well-being of your church family by encouraging others in faith and service and developing authentic and loving relationships that last.

The previous lesson highlighted what your pastor is and does to prepare your church to minister for Christ effectively. This lesson looks at all spiritual leaders in your church as examples for you to learn from and follow. We will see how someone qualifies to be a leader, what their responsibilities are, and why mature leadership is essential.

Q1 What new things have you learned about church life in *Get Churched* to this point?

Leaders and Followers

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith...Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

Hebrews 13:7,17

We unpacked these verses in Lesson 6 as they pertain to pastors. They are applicable to all leaders in the church and the followers under their care. It is important to understand the necessity of leadership influence in all spheres of life. Leaders are positioned to tell and show people what to do. In the church, they serve as godly examples by teaching and backing up what they say up close and personal.

The Scriptures above give an overview of how leaders and followers are to conduct themselves in the church. Christ authorizes leaders to lead and keep watch over the members. They are accountable to Christ for how they fulfill their roles.

Followers are instructed to remember their leaders who sowed the Word into their lives. They consider the outcome of their leaders' way of life and imitate their faith. They have confidence in their leaders to guide the church with the help and direction of the Holy Spirit. Followers realize that overseers have a huge task, so they share the leaders' ministry load willingly. Followers and leaders benefit by showing mutual respect. Members are discipled and mentored with the Word of God by godly people who are accessible and down to earth. With the spiritual protection of leadership in place, the church family loves and serves together productively.

Q2 Why do church members need accessible spiritual leaders in their lives?

Spiritual Leaders Facilitate the Development of Healthy Churches

Capable leadership is a key component for the spiritual and relational health of a church. Seasoned men and women of good character and serving attitudes guide your church family to wholeness and maturity. They set the standard of ministry life with a spirit of generosity, humility, availability, and godliness. A church's intentional development of leaders ensures that members are being equipped to do the work of the ministry, and that the body is unified in faith and mission.

Veteran leaders keep learning over time, stand firm in faith, and reproduce themselves in others. Be grateful for leaders among you who set the pace in the spiritual race. Thank God for those who sense the prompting of the Holy Spirit and willingly lead. Spiritual fruit increases when leaders are adequately trained and deployed. Effective leaders stay attuned to the evolving nature of church life. They identify and evaluate your church's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges to overcome to advance the life transformation mission.

Get to know your church leaders and their experiences and learnings over time:
What was it like taking the first steps of leading others and why did they decide to do it?
How have they benefited by leading?
What things have been the most challenging as a leader?
What have they put in place to keep growing in leadership competencies?
How are they influencing others to be stronger in their faith life?
What would they like to accomplish yet in the kingdom?
What would they say to someone interested in being a spiritual leader?

Q3 What are some things you have learned by talking with your spiritual leaders?

Signs of Leadership Potential

Someone in your church family with potential for a leadership role is already positively influencing others by words and example. There are signs that point to their eligibility for spiritual leadership as you observe them over time. The following are some good indicators that someone has the aptitude for being an effective leader:

- They manage stresses of life well
- They are dependable in serving commitments
- They discreetly manage information shared with them
- They do not overreact when treated poorly
- They are spiritually discerning in complex situations

- They prefer truth and reality over people's perspectives and preferences
- They learn from the past for guidance in the present and future
- They are self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- They are not easily defeated when things do not go their way

These are qualities that every employer looks for in job applicants. They are things that set people apart from the crowd in every walk of life. These are also valuable assets for spiritual overseers. The leadership of your church family includes pastoral staff, ministry directors, deacons, treasurer, and program team leaders. These are appointed positions of responsibility for people who have proven themselves in character and conduct as role models for others.

Q4 Why must these qualities be evident before someone is appointed to leadership?

The Three Ms of Leadership Suitability

There are three major areas of life that determine the suitability of someone to be appointed to a leadership role in the local church: membership, maturity, and ministry.

1. Membership

A leadership candidate must already be a respected and active member of their church family. They demonstrate with words and actions that they are aligned with the beliefs and practices of the church. They openly embrace and promote the life transformation mission by supporting the pastors and other church leadership. They attend Sunday worship service every week and participate in church life opportunities. They give a tithe of their income to support church operations and ministries and give beyond that to missions and other needs. They are official members who take part in church family business matters. They are positive ambassadors for Jesus and your congregation wherever they are.

Q5 Why do potential leaders need to already be active members in church life?

2. Maturity

Someone suitable for leadership will give clear evidence that they are a healthy, stable, and growing follower of Jesus. How someone deals with life and ministry is directly connected to their maturity or immaturity. Failure to evaluate someone's capacity for guiding and making decisions for the group will not turn out well. The church functions as the body of Christ and everything it does has eternal implications. It is wise to get to know someone closely before giving them leadership opportunities.

There are obvious things to look for when assessing someone's spiritual maturity and growth. Consider how well they know and live by God's Word, how they stay connected to the Lord in

prayer, and how they engage the Holy Spirit every step they take. Qualified candidates will have healthy relationships with their spouses, if married, and with their children, friends, neighbours, coworkers, and church family. They will be sound and balanced in their thinking and decision-making and are dependable when committing to do things. Their presence brings a sense of stability and confidence into every situation as the Holy Spirit produces his fruit in them.

Q6 Why is spiritual maturity essential for leading others?

3. Ministry

Along with being a committed church member who is spiritually mature, a potential leader will be an active server. They are diligent with assigned ministry tasks and are willing to pitch in when needs arise. They bring value to their service by counting it a privilege to advance Christ's kingdom. They use their gifts and resources joyfully and give their best effort without complaining.

Followers of Jesus obey the Great Commission to go out and make disciples with the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Potential leaders are generous with their time to serve those in the church family and those outside the faith. They will demonstrate a lifestyle of impacting others like Jesus did during his time on earth.

Q7 Why is a serving disposition indispensable for spiritual leadership?

Spiritual Leaders are Committed to Kingdom Growth

Qualified leaders continue to grow in membership, maturity, and ministry. Over time they improve their skills and effectiveness in leading others. They learn to lean into God as they face each new challenge and treat it as another opportunity for the Lord to enable them to get the job done. They realize they are still growing in faith, stability, courage, and fruitfulness.

Committed leaders have a Spirit-fueled passion to see God's kingdom grow. If you are part of your church's leadership, you know how invigorating it is to spend time with other leaders recounting what God is doing in your lives and ministries. If you are not a leader, ask those who are to share their thoughts about what they believe God is accomplishing in your church family. You will be encouraged hearing about the church's vision unfolding, evidenced by lives inside and outside being transformed by Christ.

Look for clues of kingdom growth in your church family. Take note of the members who vocally and physically endorse the direction the church is heading. Get excited about people stepping up to live out their callings while supporting the leadership and one another. Become aware of young people getting involved and learning to operate in the Spirit's anointing.

Listen to the faith statements of those looking ahead, trusting God to do over and above. Be encouraged that godly values are being instilled into children, young adults, and seniors, and that the appetite for spiritual growth, prayer, and worship is increasing.

Spiritual leaders set the pace in building and maintaining your church's unity, health, and passion for kingdom growth. We need them to hear from God and guide the church family in the way he wants us to go. Treat your leaders with respect and pray God's blessing on them as they give their best in service. We need them to keep pouring their knowledge and wisdom into others. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower your spiritual leaders to be godly models to follow in lifestyle and ministry.

Q8 How is kingdom growth being promoted and modelled by your church leaders?

Life Application

Review the lesson and think about your spiritual leaders in terms of the dynamics of their roles and responsibilities identified.

How can you show continued support and encouragement for you spiritual leaders?

Lesson 8 – Maturing – Church Life Produces Healthy Members

As you work your way through *Get Churched* you are gaining a better understanding of how being active in church life benefits your spiritual growth and helps others do the same. Hopefully, you are putting into practice the principles you are learning to maximize your potential in Christ with the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Devoting yourself to spiritual disciplines with other believers like studying the Word and praying in agreement helps create a loving church environment and partnership in faith. Some of your deepest relationships will be with church family members you share life and ministry with. You have spiritual leaders like pastors and elders who watch out for you and show you how to be godly and live well.

This lesson examines the prime opportunity you have to mature spiritually, emotionally, and relationally to deal with life challenges supported by the members of your church family.

Q1 How is your perspective about church life evolving with this study?

Be Spiritually Mature

The previous two lessons noted maturity as a qualification for being a spiritual leader. This lesson delves into the necessity for every church member to grow spiritually mature with the help of equipping pastors and modelling leaders. We are all responsible to become highly functioning disciples of Christ that contribute to the unity and productivity of the church body.

Jesus designed his church to be a disciplemaking organism. When we talk about spiritual growth we are thinking about the development process for a follower of Christ. While you can make strides in becoming more like Jesus on your own, you multiply your potential for maturing spiritually when you learn and practice godliness with others.

It is vital to maintain a healthy spiritual heart that is soft towards the Holy Spirit and his work in you. A receptive heart is good soil for taking in God's word as seed that takes root, grows, and produces an abundant crop of blessing (Matthew 13:23). Consider that you may not be as spiritually mature as you think you are. People close to you observe how you deal with the stresses of life including difficult interactions with others. It is helpful to have people you trust keep you accountable for your attitudes and actions. Spiritual maturity is not instantaneous at your conversion. Growing into a spiritual adult is possible over time for anyone who commits to learn and grow in faith.

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how much you know, although increasing in Bible knowledge is commendable. You grow up as you put your learned beliefs into action and practice them with the support and interaction of your church family.

The Bible does not promote private, personalized, and isolated Christianity. You have a body of believers to connect with to test and solidify your faith. By doing church life you learn from others how to think and act more like Jesus. The whole church benefits when every member does their part in being disciples and making disciples of Christ.

Q2 Why is it important to choose to become a spiritually mature disciple of Jesus?

The Model of a Healthy Church

Ephesians 4:1-16 gives the picture of the church growing together in unity and maturity. We will unpack this Scripture and highlight essentials for developing a church family that is spiritually mature, healthy, and productive. Each member of any group benefits when everyone contributes to reaching the common goal. Even one person not doing their part hinders the overall progress and their own personal development. A priority of church leadership is to give everyone the spiritual tools to do their role well and the encouragement to give their best effort always.

Church life is not about the accomplishments of individuals but about what everyone does together to achieve success. In the sports world, superstars cannot win team events by themselves. A talented home run hitter in baseball needs other team members who can bunt, hit singles, and run the bases to score runs. An elite pitcher needs good fielders behind them to catch fly balls and line drives and turn double plays for outs. In soccer, a prolific goal scorer needs teammates who can accurately pass the ball and defend well. In hockey, a great goaltender needs solid defencemen who can block shots and clear rebounds. In football, an all-pro quarterback needs receivers who can catch difficult passes and run for first downs and touchdowns. A fleet-footed running back needs powerful and agile linemen to block for them. In business, a productive employee needs an owner to pay the company's bills and provide tools of the trade. A company owner needs dedicated employees who give their best efforts to make quality products on time. In a choir, a talented soprano needs altos, tenors and basses to make harmony. Surely you get the point. The team, not individuals, get the job done.

Q3 Why is the phrase, "There is no 'I' in team" accurate?

Two Things to Keep in Mind About Being a Church Team Member

1. Care more about the team's success than your own

Looking after your own wants and wishes comes naturally. The tougher assignment is looking beyond your desires and caring about what is best for everyone. Setting personal goals is a smart thing to do for growing and maturing. However, make sure your agenda is not in conflict with the development and success of the whole church family.

You will be called upon to sacrifice personal preferences, time, and resources for the unity and health of the body. Learn to do that naturally with the Holy Spirit's help.

2. Participate with the team rather than criticize it

There are self-professed experts on every activity known to humankind. Almost everyone has an opinion about how things should be done. The media has developed an industry of expert panels for every news event and sports contest under the sun. It is easy it is to sit on a couch at home or in a television studio picking out the mistakes of the players and coaches. It is another thing altogether to be playing the game as the action unfolds fast and furiously. Experts are simply watchers while the team participants are doers.

This spirit of analyzing to criticize can easily become part of a church culture if allowed. The personal growth of the critic and health and unity of the church suffer when casual observers are given an audience. You can make sure that an environment of supporting, encouraging, and building up is maintained by participating in church life and not simply analyzing and critiquing it.

Q4 What are your thoughts about these two observations of church as a team?

Promote Unity in the Church Family

Ephesians 4:4 underscores the oneness of the spiritually healthy church:

One body – Not two or more competing groups but one unit.
One Spirit – Not several spirits influencing decisions but one Holy Spirit.
One hope – Not multiple options for trusting but one source for confident expectation.
One Lord – Not many supreme leaders but one Lord, Jesus Christ.
One faith – Not a plurality of belief systems to follow but one way to know God.
One baptism – Not different modes of adoption into God's family but one Spirit baptism.
One God and Father of all – Not numerous deities and creators but one God over all.

God's stresses oneness of belief and practice in his church to build church unity.

Q5 How is this emphasis on oneness beneficial for everyone's spiritual development?

Necessary Values for Participating with Jesus Growing his Church (Ephesians 4)

1. Value Your Calling

"...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." 4:1b

The calling you have received from Jesus is to follow him as his disciple (Mark 8:34). You must be willing to deny yourself what you want and do what he wants. You must take up your cross of identifying with Jesus and suffer for him willingly. You must get to know Jesus by studying the Word and obeying his commands.

Living “a life lived worthy of the calling” means making every moment count for Jesus. You do that because you value Christ’s gift of salvation more than anything else. You show by your lifestyle that you have utmost regard for Jesus and his ways. You express gratitude to the Lord at home, work, church, and community.

Q6 How do you remember to live every moment grateful for your calling from Christ?

2. Value Your Church Family

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” 4:2

Imagine what it would be like if everyone acted like this with others. The instruction here is not about showing kindness occasionally to someone when you feel like it. This is a full-time assignment of extending grace to your church family members. While it can feel overwhelming to always treat others properly, remember that the Holy Spirit in you produces spiritual fruit and empowers you to be Christlike every moment.

Being “completely humble” means not acting proud, arrogant, or self-centered. It requires a shift in your thinking so that you value others as much as you do yourself. You show honour and respect in your approach to them and do not draw attention to yourself. Always doing this requires transformed thinking by renewing your mind.

The same effort is necessary to be “completely gentle” with others. There is no room for being rude and overbearing as a follower of Jesus. Like him, you are considerate, kind, and thoughtful when you interact with others. This becomes your default approach when you are being completely humble, showing interest in your church family.

“Be patient, bearing with one another in love” is about godly restraint and self-control. Patience is the spiritual ability to endure without complaining regardless of setbacks and inconveniences. People can be frustrating to deal with when they make matters difficult or cause delays. You can maintain Christlike composure and grace by “bearing with one another in love.” This is self-sacrificing love that denies your preferences for the benefit of others. That is clear evidence of your Christian discipleship (John 13:34,35).

Q7 How do you learn to value your church family and show it continually?

3. Value Your Opportunities to Unify

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” 4:3

Discipleship is not a passive endeavour. You must choose daily to live up to what you have been given in Christ by faith. Healthy Christians and church families do not progress with a 'wait and see' approach. There must be willing participation in spiritual growth by every member.

"Make every effort" means to not be lazy and make excuses for lack of involvement. You must give your best effort to add spiritual virtues to your faith to be effective and productive (2 Peter 1:5-9). Set the pace for other believers to be intentional about growing more like Jesus daily in thinking and acting.

You will have many opportunities "to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" in your church family. You cannot bring conflict and strife into any group and expect harmony and cooperation. You must develop a bond of peace with others by your calm demeanour and collaborative approach. Hearing out the opinions, frustrations, and suggestions of others goes a long way to peaceful resolution.

Promoting and maintaining "the unity of the Spirit" requires self-denial for the sake of the church body. You will often lay aside personal desires to show cooperation with the family members when it is the right and proper thing to do. The Holy Spirit unifies that which is naturally diverse and different when believers choose to rally around the same life transformation mission. Choose your words carefully to build up and not tear down in every conversation. Stay Spirit-filled and you will make the most of every opportunity.

Q8 How have you benefited by promoting unity in the Spirit in your church family?

Gifted and Equipped to Serve

We examined the next verses of Ephesians 4 in Lessons 6 and 7 regarding the responsibility of pastors and other spiritual leaders to equip the church body to minister effectively. We will briefly review that material here and comment on some details that need explanation.

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe)." 4:7-10

Christ has spiritually gifted every member of your church as he determines (4:7). You have been given abilities and opportunities to serve within the body along with every other member. No two members are identical, and each one must play their part in achieving church unity in relationship and mission. We must willingly discover and accept our assignments from Christ and put our skills to good use with the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:8-10, the apostle Paul gives a brief teaching about Jesus' ability and authority to grace his church with the necessary gifts for unity and kingdom advancement. Jesus descended to earth during the incarnation when he became human to live and die for the salvation of humankind. He ascended when he rose from the dead and went up into heaven where he now sits in authority over all creation.

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service..." 4:11,12a. Jesus strategically places people in the church to prepare believers for ministry. Recall that apostles establish new churches, prophets call people to live for God, evangelists point unbelievers to faith in Christ, and pastors and teachers shepherd and instruct believers in the Word. All these spiritual leaders do their work to equip church members for Christian service.

Q9 What do you find interesting about Jesus' strategy for church leadership?

"...to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:12,13

There are four goals for equipping believers to serve in the church family: building up the body, unity in the faith, unity in the knowledge of Christ, and spiritual maturity. When all members involve themselves in ministry, individual members and the whole church are strengthened and energized to continue serving. Members learn and embrace church doctrine together. They develop a Biblical knowledge of Christ and practical interaction with him in prayer. Everyone continues to mature spiritually until they meet Jesus on the day of his return.

Q10 How should these four goals shape the church's ministries?

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Ephesians 4:14-16

Individual and corporate spiritual maturity increase when the church is equipped for serving together. First, members act like spiritual adults in matters of faith and doctrine. They are stable when faced with waves of challenges and are discerning when hearing false teaching from deceitful schemers. Second, members act Christlike with each other. They lovingly tell the truth so that relationships are built on what is right and trustworthy. The Bible, including Jesus' teachings, influences their choice of words in conversations. Godly character ensures their faithfulness to keep commitments to one another regardless of the cost.

Third, members do their part to build up the church in love. They know that every member is connected to all the others in Christ and each one must do their part to ensure spiritual growth for all. They give unselfish support for every body part.

Q11 Why are loving Christian relationships the ideal model for all others?

You will facilitate your spiritual maturity by growing with other believers as you participate in church life. You have support to live a life worthy of your calling. You can help bring unity of the Spirit to the body through peace. You benefit by holding yourself accountable to the spiritual leaders for ministry training. You act like an adult in matters of Christian faith and doctrine as you build truth-based relationships in love. You give your best in serving others with the gifts you have received.

Jesus desires that you and every church member cooperate with the Holy Spirit for personal growth and to produce spiritual fruit. Healthy things grow when they are nourished with the right food and cared for effectively. Participate in a church environment that encourages maximization of your spiritual maturity and productivity.

Life Application

Review the lesson and assess your progress in spiritual maturity.

What do you need to do to help your church produce healthy and mature members?

Lesson 9 – Evangelizing – Church Life Reaches Out to the Lost

Hopefully, you are evaluating your spiritual vitality while working through *Get Churched*. Do not take for granted the benefits available to you by doing church life with other believers in loving and devoted relationships. You will be encouraged as you spur others on to spiritual maturity and kingdom service. Make yourself accountable to leaders who can teach and equip you to make the most of every opportunity. Do what you can to bring health and unity to your local church as a testimony to the world that you belong to Christ.

Q1 What are some spiritual insights about yourself you have gained in this study so far?

Commissioned to Go

This lesson focuses on your church family reaching out to the community for Christ. Develop spiritual eyes to see the people in your neighbourhood and region who need to meet Jesus and become part of a church family. Everyone longs for a place to belong where they are welcomed, accepted, challenged, and encouraged. It is remarkable when you discover a group of people who care for those around them like Jesus would.

How did Jesus connect with lost people? Study Jesus' approach for reaching out and integrate it into your daily living. We will examine Mark 2:13-17, where Jesus shows the importance of going out and influencing people for the kingdom.

Evangelizing is an expectation for every disciple of Christ. Jesus mandated that his followers share the gospel with others: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Mark 16:15 and "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." Matthew 28:19. A common strategy today for sharing the gospel is inviting unbelievers to church for services and events. While that can be useful, Jesus tells us to go where people are and introduce them to life transformation in Christ. That requires stepping out of our comfortable and safe environment into a godless and hostile world.

Jesus shows us how to reach out to the non-churched utilizing the power of loving acceptance which is different from giving approval for sinful lifestyles. It means to include others in your circle of relationships without agreeing with everything they believe in or do. That is easier said than done but it is worth the effort. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you can stay true to your godly convictions while modelling Christlikeness to unbelievers.

We are safe to agree with what Jesus says and does because he is absolute truth incarnate. He perfectly knows God's holy standards and lived them out flawlessly. We learn from his conduct and approach with people how to be and act godly with those outside the faith.

Q2 Why is it important to take the gospel outside of the church?

Jesus Reached Out

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.” Mark 2:13

Jesus went to a community gathering place. The lake is a nice spot for all kinds of activities. Picture a busy beach with families, college kids, seniors, and young people mingling and doing business. Think of jet skis, canoes, snack bars, merchandisers, and boats with people fishing, swimming, and throwing frisbees. That is where Jesus spent time getting to know others.

Jesus made an impression on people wherever he went. As often happened, a large group gathered around him on this occasion. He was an intriguing figure and people felt safe to gravitate towards him. Notice what Jesus did to maximize the opportunity. He began to teach the group about living God’s way.

Q3 How could this scene play out at a lake or other activity hub near you today?

“As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” Mark 2:14

While teaching the crowd as they walked, Jesus zeroed in on one person whose life would never again be the same. Jesus illustrated the gospel to his listeners in real time. The invitation was given, and life change began for Levi by getting up and following Jesus. He would be impacted in a way he could not have imagined.

Levi, also called Matthew, is identified as “sitting at the tax collector’s booth” which is valuable information to know. Tax collectors or publicans were not well liked by the Palestinian people. They were hired by the government to collect taxes and tolls from the citizens of countries controlled by the Roman Empire which included Israel. Tax collectors were not like government revenue agents in our country today. Civil servants are now paid a salary to ensure that every income earner pays the correct amount of tax on time. Government employees cannot legally ask for more than the required tax and pocket the difference for themselves. That is precisely what many tax collectors did during Jesus’ time on earth and they were despised by the people as a result. They had no interference from the Roman government and often became wealthy at the expense of ordinary, poor citizens.

Think about what Jesus did by engaging Levi. Out of all the people at the lake that day listening to him, Jesus interacted with someone others would not associate with, and he did so without a hint of hatred, pride, or prejudice.

Q4 What strikes you about Jesus choosing Levi to zero in on?

Jesus paused long enough to invite Levi to follow him. The tax collector had a choice to stay at his booth or do what Jesus told him. Every person who hears the gospel message faces a similar choice. They can either ignore the invitation or decide to find out more about Jesus. We note that “Levi got up and followed him”. What was it about Jesus and his words that persuaded Levi to take this step?

Levi’s decision was influenced by Jesus’ look and tone of acceptance for someone written off by others which was no small thing. What did Levi know about Jesus up to this point? Had he seen him at the lake before surrounded by a crowd of people listening to him teach? Had he heard stories about Jesus from those who had experienced or seen his miracles and healings? We are not sure, but his curiosity had been aroused so that he was ready to respond and follow Jesus when asked.

Levi is like people in our neighbourhoods. Many have not yet been told about Jesus and need to be. Others, like Levi, may have heard about Jesus and formed a favourable opinion about him. How many Levis are waiting to be invited to learn more about Jesus today? We can ask the Holy Spirit to empower and show us who to talk to about Christ.

Q5 What would inviting someone to talk about Jesus look like for you?

Loving Acceptance on Display

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.” Mark 2:15

There are some interesting insights in this verse. First, Jesus ended up visiting Levi in his home after telling him to follow. Did Jesus head directly to Levi’s house or was he invited by Levi during their walk? Also, notice that the disciples were present along with many other followers who had tagged along. And third, Levi hosted a social event for the group including other tax collectors and people referred to as sinners.

Levi had friends and acquaintances who were not part of organized religion. On this occasion they are having a meal at Levi’s house like they may have done many times before. Jesus is there enjoying an evening of fellowship as he teaches kingdom living with words and example. Jesus models for his disciples the art of reaching out and brings the gospel to life for the unbelievers present.

People can tell if you love them by your demeanour and words. Jesus accepted Levi’s hospitality and shared a meal with him and his acquaintances. Jesus was not pretentious or aloof but acted kindly, truthfully, and lovingly. He was on a mission of salvation, but he did not treat the unbelievers as projects to complete. He made himself available and conveyed his desire to be known. A sincere approach is disarming and preconceived negative opinions about you evaporate when you act real and interested.

Q6 How do you think you come across when engaging unbelievers?

Love People Not the World

The world is the system of beliefs and practices that are anti-God. It is a way of life under the influence of Satan that caters to the sinful desires of the flesh. Christians are to live a life pleasing to God that excludes worldliness: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17.

People are not the world. However, they can love the world’s system and its stuff. Keeping that distinction is vital for sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Treating people with respect regardless of their lifestyle and beliefs is what Jesus did as demonstrated by his interactions at Levi’s home. No one should question Jesus’ sinless perfection even while associating with those outside the faith.

Q7 What do you think about the saying, “Love the sinner, not the sin”?

Socializing with sinners is troubling for religious types: “When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” Mark 2:16.

“The teachers of the law who were Pharisees” were educated in Old Testament law and taught their version of its compliance to the Jews. Being Pharisees meant they set themselves apart as being devoted to God by strictly observing his commands as interpreted by the hundreds of religious rules and regulations they had established. They treated Jesus with suspicion because of his teaching and interactions with people that seemed inappropriate, especially for a rabbi with followers.

The Pharisees asked the disciples what they and Jesus were doing with obviously sinful people. Their conduct indicated they could not be God-followers no matter what they said. The teachers of the law would never put themselves in a situation where they felt they could be morally contaminated by unbelievers. They kept their distance from sinners to prevent their reputations from being tainted and being displeasing to God. Their question shows how perplexed they were about the way Jesus interacted with people, both religious and nonreligious. They wondered, how can the holy mix with the unholy? And why did Jesus seem to go out of his way to break religious rules?

Many church people today were raised to think like the Pharisees, adhering to rules and regulations for God to love and accept them. It is a real stretch for such legalists to learn and adopt Jesus’ teaching and example of engaging unbelievers with respect while disagreeing with

their lifestyle. God's grace can be difficult to figure out for some because it is so different than the human definition and conditions of grace.

Jesus challenges us to see things like he does. He is the expert at knowing how to love the sinner and not the sin at the same time. Jesus calls his followers to be in the world engaging people outside of the faith while not being influenced by the world and embracing its ways. We make the effort to learn how to do that because we care about our neighbours, friends, and relatives. We want them to know Christ and be transformed by his grace, so we show them how with a loving approach.

Q8 What does Jesus show you about being in the world but not worldly?

Sinners Need the Gospel

The church is Jesus' vehicle to spread the gospel. Believers work together to be Christlike with each other and with those outside the faith. That includes our family, friends, acquaintances, and people in other parts of the world. Evangelizing is not a solo effort, but a partnership of disciples invested in the Great Commission.

God sends out believers to reach the lost: "Then (Jesus) said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Matthew 9:37,38. This is one of the commands of Christ every believer must obey. There are people that the Holy Spirit has prepared to hear and accept the gospel but have not yet been told. Ask the Lord to stir the hearts of more believers to get involved in evangelism.

There is a sense of urgency to reach sinners and tell them the good news of Jesus: "How, then, can (unbelievers) call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" Romans 10:14,15

How many unbelievers are there in your social circles who have never been introduced to Jesus and offered his gift of salvation? How many people you have never met are in the same situation and need believers to be sent to tell them?

Q9 How does praying to God for harvest workers intensify your focus on evangelizing?

Jesus took the question posed to his disciples by the teachers of the law seriously and answered it for their benefit and ours: "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Mark 2:17

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' question is brilliant. He did not give a long explanation justifying his behaviour or minimize the importance of the question. Jesus simply described his salvation mission with a word picture that his listeners could understand and accept or not.

Healthy people do not need a doctor while sick people do. Jesus is the spiritual doctor who spends considerable time with those who need to come to faith and be made whole.

Unbelievers were open to what Jesus was offering. On the other hand, the religious types did not hang around Jesus because they saw themselves as already spiritually healthy. Despite their disdain for Jesus and his dealings with those they would never be seen with, Jesus takes time to speak truth to the Pharisees. They are also people Jesus came and gave his life to save.

No wonder so many sinners loved to be with Jesus. They never saw him compromise the truth while showing he genuinely cared about them. Jesus never condoned or approved their sinful lifestyles but accepted them as they were. He showed them the way to find spiritual wholeness through forgiveness of sins by believing in him. Jesus said he came to call sinners, and he did so continually. The greatest gift you can give someone is the gospel.

Q10 Why are religious types of all belief systems the hardest to reach with the gospel?

Church Life Reaches Out

Levi's story is one of dramatic life transformation. We first see him as a hated tax collector, the embodiment of a sinner to many people. Incredibly, Jesus called him out to follow the Lord. We see Levi immediately got up and went with Jesus to his home for a dinner party. By doing that Levi introduced many people in his social network to Christ. We will never know how many of them became followers of Jesus. We do know that Levi continued his spiritual journey and became one of the first disciples and an apostle. At some point, Levi changed his name to Matthew, the author of the first book of the New Testament.

How many Levi stories have yet to be written by people we know or have never met?

As a church family, we cannot go wrong by doing everything we can to evangelize. We can follow Jesus' example and extend grace to our neighbours, coworkers, relatives, and friends. We can show them acceptance and value them as creations loved by God. We can be catalysts for positive change in our community and world helping people be transformed. Let us get involved in church life and help the body to be spiritually healthy and mature by loving, encouraging, accepting, and forgiving one another. Let us do good works so that people are drawn to Christ.

We must stay open to hear from the Holy Spirit about who he wants us to share the gospel with. We can rely on the Spirit to empower us to move past our fears of failure and rejection. As we continue to mature spiritually, we can have confidence that Jesus is being seen in us by others. Let us ask the Spirit to increase our love for those who are different than we are so that they sense our respect and acceptance of them. Let us give generously to God's work so that the church family is well served and the lost and spiritually sick are found and made whole.

Q11 How does the Holy Spirit help us to reach out to see lives transformed?

Life Application

Review the lesson and become familiar with Jesus' example of evangelizing.

How can you get involved with your church family reaching out to the lost?

Lesson 10 – Growing – Church Life is Fruitful

Get Churched has challenged you to think through the importance for every believer to actively participate in church life. You must establish yourself and your family in a local body of believers to maximize your spiritual growth and kingdom impact. Doing church with others keeps you accountable for practicing spiritual disciplines regularly. You need people to encourage you to persevere in faith and they need you to cheer them on.

You will develop some deep and enduring friendships over time by serving together. You have pastors and spiritual leaders to look out for your welfare, prepare you for ministry effectiveness, and model godliness in the everyday world. You can help the church family to be spiritually and relationally healthy with your ongoing cooperation and support. With the Holy Spirit's presence and power, you can all reach out to the lost with the gospel expecting people to be transformed by Christ. Always remember that the primary goal of church life is making disciples of Jesus.

Q1 How convinced are you that church life participation facilitates discipling?

How Things Grow

This final lesson considers the potential of the church family to produce spiritual fruit. The Bible talks a lot about growing things. The smallest seeds can grow into the largest plants. Godly people grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and others. Believers are instructed to grow in faith and in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The influence of the gospel expands with every life that is transformed. The church grows numerically as unbelievers are saved and added. There is a connection between growing potential and being healthy. The following are basics about how physical things grow.

1. Things are growing long before we see the evidence

Vegetables and fruit are not visible to us in their initial stages. We cannot see what is happening below the surface, but we know that the process is underway. The same can be said about babies in the womb. It is a miracle that human beings are developing inside their mothers for nine months before they are brought into the open. Medical professionals use special x-ray instruments to capture an image of the baby being formed but everyone else must wait for final confirmation. The point is that things are growing long before we see them.

2. Faith is required to plant, water, and cultivate before the crop is ready to harvest

Planting seeds is an act of faith because, to have a crop to harvest, you must sow. Even without seeing the seeds germinate in the soil and start to develop, you trust that they will. After the

plants push through the ground, you water and cultivate, believing that these ongoing actions enhance the production. Without faith you would not invest yourself in the growing process.

3. Harvesting is the final part of the growing process, not the first

We like picking and eating fruit and vegetables when they are full-grown and ripe. There is satisfaction in reaping what you have worked diligently to produce. However, harvesting only happens when the earlier parts of the process are taken care of.

4. You reap what you sow

This statement seems obvious for farming and gardening. What you want to reap determines the seed you sow. An apple seed does not produce grapes, and a tulip bulb does not make roses. You determine what you want to harvest and sow accordingly.

5. Every part of the growing process must be done

Each element of growing things is vital no matter who does it. Failing to sow, cultivate, fertilize, and irrigate proficiently jeopardizes the outcome. Seeding without the follow-up of nurturing and pruning will not produce maximum yield.

6. No person in the growing process is more important than any other

People have different abilities and skills and varying levels of responsibility. Every person involved in crop production is part of a team. Any task left undone negatively affects the process and productivity. Every person must do their part for success.

7. God is the one who grows things

People do not grow anything – God does. He provides the sun, rain, land, and workers. God does what no one else is capable of, like miraculously bringing things to life. You could go through the entire process of planting, watering, and cultivating and, without God's enabling, the seed would remain a seed.

8. God does his part as we do ours

We are given various roles to play in the growing enterprise and we make sure the conditions are conducive for growth. Is the soil properly prepared and is the seed evenly dispersed? Are the young shoots being nurtured and protected against predators and weather events and is this the right season for growing?

There are many things for us to do to grow crops. While we cannot make things grow, we must make sure our part is done well. God brings the harvest to fruition, and we partner with him in the process.

Q2 What are some of your observations about how physical things grow?

How God's Kingdom Grows

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in Gods’ service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

We highlighted what is involved in physical things growing. This section examines the dynamics of spiritual growth in God’s kingdom.

The kingdom of God is everywhere the Lord is acknowledged as sovereign, particularly in the hearts of people who trust in Jesus. God’s spiritual dominion transcends the physical world and is visible only with the eyes of faith. The Bible often describes the process of expanding God’s kingdom using terms of organic growth. This helps us to understand the process, including what we do and what God does. People come into God’s kingdom by being born again and each new believer increases the kingdom’s influence. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 teaches us how things grow in the kingdom.

1. Every one of us has been assigned a task by God for growing the kingdom

“as the Lord has assigned to each his task” 3:5b

God gives every believer the privilege and opportunity to be involved with him in kingdom building. You have received this calling and must be willing to join him.

2. There are different tasks that need to be done

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it...” 3:6a

One person plants the seed of the gospel in people while another waters what has been sown with prayer and follow-up attention. These are two of the multiple tasks required in the work of kingdom expansion.

Q3 How do you make sure you faithfully undertake your ministry task?

3. God is the one who grows things

“but God has been making it grow” 3:6b

God is the life-giver who enables and causes anything to grow in the spiritual realm. All the elements of creation are under his supervision and control. People depend on God for their existence and spiritual development.

Q4 Why is it important to acknowledge that all spiritual growth is God's doing?

4. No individual is the most important one

"So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything" 3:7a

It does not matter who plants, waters, or anything else because no one is more important than another. We are all equal in God's sight and we do our part in growing the kingdom in harmony with everyone involved.

5. God is the most important one

"...but only God, who makes things grow." 3:7b

God is the only indispensable one involved. Seeds need God to bring them to life and start the growth process. Anything you try to create on your own is not going to last. Only what the Lord does is sustainable.

Q5 How do you learn to believe that God is the only indispensable one in everything?

6. All of us must work toward the same goal

"The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose" 3:8

Fruitful kingdom service depends on working as one body with the same purpose. Everyone gives their best to advancing God's kingdom in harmony with the whole church. No one should do their own thing because it hinders the growth process.

Q6 How is it possible to get every church member working towards the same goal?

7. We are rewarded for what we have done, not for the position or role we have

"and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor" 3:8b

Kingdom growth brings glory to God and reward to every person for their faithful contribution. No one gets special treatment from the Lord because of the assignment or resources they are given. What matters is that we use what we have to expand the kingdom. Faithful investment in God's work releases his blessing on you, your family, your church family, and those you influence now and eternally.

Q7 How do you learn to stay faithful to kingdom service and experience God's blessing?

8. We are partners in God's kingdom

"For we are co-workers in God's service" 3:9a

Think about the implications of this statement. Who are we that God would invite us to join him in his salvation plan? God wants no one to perish but to experience eternal life through faith in Christ. The Lord has chosen to undertake this mission through his church of which you are part.

Q8 What are your thoughts about being a participant with God building his kingdom?

9. The church is God's operational base

"you are God's field, God's building" 3:9b

Christ has transformed every believer to live for him. We are recreated by the Lord to "do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10. We are born again spiritually and saved for eternity. While on earth, the Lord calls us to be involved with him doing good works that glorify him (Matthew 5:13-16).

We are in the people business. We want every person to experience spiritual life change in Christ. We make sure that our church family is healthy and growing spiritually so that we can impact the people around us for Jesus. We are the visible representation of the Lord as his body wherever we are. We are God's field of operations and make every moment count. We stay ready and available for the Lord to use us as he chooses with the empowering and help of the Holy Spirit. Our work is not limited to a physical structure but is active wherever we are.

Q9 What are your thoughts about how God grows his spiritual kingdom?

Participation in God's Work Produces Spiritual Fruit

We now make the spiritual application of the list of principles of how physical things grow at the beginning of this lesson.

1. Spiritual things are growing long before you see them

This is true of your personal spiritual maturity and your church's development and ministry effectiveness. We are all works in progress and not the finished product. The Lord continually calls, equips, and empowers us to participate in his mission.

Q10 Why is it important to know that God is bringing spiritual life before we see it?

2. It takes faith to plant, water, and cultivate spiritually

Growing the kingdom is a long-term process that requires effort and faith. We sow the good seed of the Word, water the planting with prayer, and cultivate the ministry efforts with our serving. We believe that God is using us and causing kingdom growth.

Q11 How is faith required to do your ministry part and not give up?

3. Harvesting is the end of the growing process, not the first

Harvest time is exhilarating as the mature crop is gathered. However, a lot of work takes place before then. The harvesting of souls coming into the kingdom is the joyous result of faithful ministry of the gospel beforehand.

Q12 Why does God require a process for producing spiritual fruit?

4. We reap what we sow spiritually

You are determining today what you will experience in the days ahead. Whether good seed or bad, you reap what you sow. Reaping spiritual blessing and kingdom growth is the reward of choosing wisely and obeying the directions of the Holy Spirit. This applies to your personal life and your church family. A bountiful spiritual harvest becomes reality when you love and serve Christ faithfully.

Q13 How do you make sure you are sowing good spiritual seed?

5. Every church member must do their part of the ministry

No one is indispensable in God's work, but everyone is needed. All activities of the growing process must be taken care of so that the harvest is not compromised. Like all ingredients are necessary to bake a cake successfully, so all the church body parts must be involved for maximum spiritual growth.

6. Every member matters to God in his kingdom work

There are no superstars in God's kingdom. Jesus is the centre of everything we do and the one to get the attention. We are all equal in God's eyes and have different gifts, abilities, and resources. Everyone is responsible to play their role regardless of its perceived importance.

Q14 How do we ensure that every member understands and accepts their role?

7. God is the one who grows things

What you make happen on your own will not have lasting kingdom impact. Only what God does endures. He is committed to growing his kingdom by transforming lives one at a time in his way.

8. Do your part in kingdom work with the enabling of the Holy Spirit

Always give your best effort to kingdom service as a dependable partner with God and your church family. Continually ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with his power to stay godly and serve Christ well.

Q15 How do you stay full of the Holy Spirit's presence and power to serve well?

Remember that making disciples of Jesus is the goal of ministry. Are you ready to grow spiritually and produce good fruit? Have you made yourself available to God to use for his kingdom mission? Do you have a willing attitude and determination to give your best effort in your ministry assignment? Are you part of a healthy and unified church family that is planting good seed, watering with prayer, and cultivating with nurturing care? You will facilitate your spiritual growth as you participate in church life serving God who is transforming lives in Christ to be his disciples.

Life Application

Review the lesson and make sure you understand how God's kingdom grows.

What will you do to ensure that your church is producing bountiful spiritual fruit?

Final Thoughts

You have completed *Get Churched* and have a better understanding of church life and why it matters to you and all believers. You have learned from Scripture that church is the body of Christ, and you have an important part to play in cooperating with all the members. Participating in a local assembly facilitates your spiritual growth, maturity, and ministry effectiveness. You have a place to belong where you are taught, encouraged, supported, and equipped for living life to the full. You join with others to obey the great commission of Christ to make disciples in your community and world.

Keep investing yourself in increasing your Biblical knowledge and practical application in everyday living. Consider working through another *Life Transformation* course for your ongoing development as a Christ follower. Check out the catalogue of available studies at freedomkw.com/next and find one to do on your own or with a group. Continue to have your mind renewed by the Holy Spirit and the Word so that you live a transformed life every day.