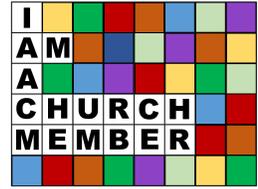


I Am A Church Member (Small Group Bible Study)



Session 1: "I Will Be A Functioning Church Member"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

A man was coming out of church one day and the preacher was standing at the door as he always did ready to shake hands.

The pastor grabbed the man's hand, pulled him aside, and said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord!"

The man replied, "Preacher, I'm already in the Army of the Lord."

The preacher quickly asked, "How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?"

The man whispered back, "I'm in the secret service."

This may be a humorous conversation but it helps set the tone for our discussion this morning about church membership. Membership in a local church is important in the life of every believer and it is necessary for us to consider what it means to be a functioning church member. God's Word will help guide our discussion as we seek to understand better our responsibility and call to use our gifts to serve in the body of Christ.



What does it mean to be a member of a church? How is it different from being a member of a civic organization or the country club?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that churches will operate like they should only when every member is functioning within the body. We will see that every member has received different spiritual gifts that need to be used in service to the church. Ultimately, the foundation for exercising these gifts is love.

1. Membership Means We Are All Necessary Parts Of The Whole

If you think about it, there are a number of things made up of various pieces that operate as a whole – cars, computers, cell phones, etc. You would not expect a car to operate in the way it was intended if it was missing the steering wheel. In the same way, the body of Christ does not operate as it was intended if it is missing a key part of the body (namely YOU!).

Scripture speaks clearly to the fact that every member of the body is needed for the church to be built up and to grow. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-16:

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Paul reminds the church in Ephesus that God has given them pastors and teachers to equip them to carry out the work of ministry. This work of ministry is primarily the call to make disciples. He emphasizes the reality that when each member in the body works together properly, the result is very clear – the body grows.

? *Is it possible that the primary reason churches do not grow (numerically and spiritually) is that the members in the church are not working properly? Do you feel that you are using your gifts to build up the body? Why or why not?*

It is easy to look to specific programs, great ministries and amazing worship experiences as the things that will grow a church. However, this passage we just read makes it clear that growth in the body (numerically and spiritually) has less to do with what we offer and more to do with whether we are functioning as the body of Christ, with all members doing their part. Rainer wrote,

"God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel. Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down."



How do you view your membership at this church? Do you focus on the privileges and perks you receive or on how you can serve?

2. Membership Means We Are Different But We Still Work Together

One of the beautiful things about the body of Christ is that it is made up of unique members with different spiritual gifts. Often, churches do a disservice when we emphasize the particular importance of certain gifts (preaching, teaching, etc.) to the exclusion of others. This should not be the case because Scripture is clear that every believer's gift is necessary for the body to function as it should. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:1-26, emphasizes this truth:

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have

the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Spiritual gifts are given to believers at the moment of salvation. These gifts are not chosen by us but given to us by the Spirit according to His discretion. The gifts we receive are to be used to build up the body of Christ and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.



What is your spiritual gift? How have you tried to exercise that gift within the body of Christ? If you do not know what your gift is, would you like to find out?

In this passage, we also see that we need to celebrate every gift as it is exercised within the body of Christ. Paul stressed that we should not devalue the gifts of others because they are needed for the body to grow. In the same way that our armpit is a needed part of our physical body, we need to see that every member and their particular gifts are vital to the health and growth of the body of Christ.



How can you encourage other members as they use their gifts within the body of Christ? Why do you believe some members are hesitant to use their gifts?

Rainer wrote, “With a country club membership you pay others to do the work for you. With church membership, everyone has a role or function. That is why some are hands, feet, ears, or eyes. We are all different, but we are necessary parts of the whole.” As different gifts are exercised, the body is built up in the same way that a weightlifter’s body is built up as he lifts weights. If he were to only lift weights with one arm and not the other, one arm would grow and be strengthened while the other would atrophy. In the same way, if one member of the body does not use their gift, that part of the body will atrophy and the body will not be able to grow as it should.

3. Membership Means Everything We Say And Do Is Based On A Biblical Foundation Of Love

Most of us have heard 1 Corinthians 13 – the “love” chapter but we need to understand these verses within their immediate context. Even though these verses are read at weddings, they must be understood within the context of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts. He wanted people to understand that the foundation of using our spiritual gifts within the body of Christ is love, both for God and for one another. Consider the following verses – 1 Corinthians 12:27 – 13:13:

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire

the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

13 *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

As we consider these verses we must recognize that Paul was writing these words to a church that was experiencing conflict. The specific conflict, detailed in chapter 14, surrounded the exercise of spiritual gifts within the body. Some gifts were recognized as being more important than others and some people were being regarded as better Christians because they had particular gifts. Paul told them this should not be the case. Paul emphasized that the conflict the church was experiencing was a result of lacking something – love!

? *How is the “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, related to church membership? What happens if love is not present within the church? What if it is present?*

Love must be the foundation of everything that happens within the church. It was love that caused Jesus to step onto this planet to rescue us from our sin (John 3:16). He reminded us it will be love that distinguishes the church from the world (John 13:35). Rainer wrote,

“We are not to love fellow church members just because they are lovable. We are to love the unlovable as well. We are not to pray for and encourage our pastors just when they are doing things we like. We are to pray for and encourage them when they do things we don’t like. We are not to serve the church only when others are joining in. We are to serve the church even if we are alone in doing so. Church membership is founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.”

? *Do you love your church and the people in it? Does that love drive you to serve, give, and pray? If not, can you really call it love knowing love leads to action?*

4. Church Membership is Functioning Membership

The only thing you have to do to be a member of a country club is to pay your dues. Biblical church membership is completely different. Rainer wrote, “Do you know how to remain a biblical member of a church? Give abundantly and serve without hesitation.” You can be a member of a church and not do this but you cannot be a *biblical* member of the church without giving abundantly and serving without hesitation.

 *What would it look like if every member of our church gave abundantly and served without hesitation? What would it take for that to happen?*

Rainer emphasized, “The concept of an inactive church member is an oxymoron.” The idea that you can be a church member without serving and giving cannot be found in the Bible. “One of the ongoing questions you should ask yourself and God in prayer is: ‘How can I best serve my church?’ You should never ask yourself if you *should* be serving your church.”

 *Are you willing to ask the question, “How can I best serve my church?” Better yet, are you willing to write the Lord a blank check, allow him to fill it out, and serve and give whatever he writes?*

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

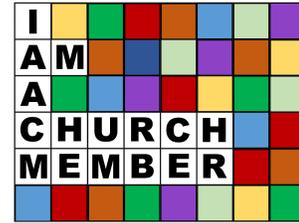
The First Pledge

I am a church member.

I like the metaphor of membership. It’s not membership as in a civic organization or a country club. It’s the kind of membership given to us in 1 Corinthians 12: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Because I am a member of the body of Christ, I must be a functioning member, whether I am an “eye,” an “ear,” of a “hand.” As a functioning member, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will evangelize. I will study. I will seek to be a blessing to others. I will remember that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

Sign and Date

I Am A Church Member (Small Group Bible Study)



Session 2: "I Will Be A Unifying Church Member"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier time. Those who did not faced harsh persecution. In almost every family of those who resisted, someone died in a concentration camp.

When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension. Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For several days, each person spent time in prayer, examining his own heart in the light of Christ's commands. Then they came together. Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there, "What did you do then?" "We were just one," he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred.

When love prevails among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, it presents to the world an indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ (*Our Daily Bread*, October 4, 1992).



Can you describe a time when you were in church that was not unified? What about a time when you were in a church that was unified?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that church members have a responsibility to create and maintain unity within the church. We will discuss the various ways to create and maintain unity as well as concerns that threaten unity within the church. Ultimately, unity in the church will impact the culture around us. Rainer wrote:

"God desires for Christians to get along. In fact, He is emphatic about it. Jesus was clear when He said: 'By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). Did you get that? The world will know if we are Christians or not by the way we who are believers act toward one another."

1. Unity Is Not Optional In The Church

Most of us have been involved in churches where, at some point in time, unity was not present. It may have been during a church split or a business meeting but we have seen fellow believers act like...well, let's just say they weren't acting like Jesus! This breaks the very heart of God because His church should be characterized by love and unity.

One of the greatest pictures of unity in the church can be found in the book of Ephesians. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 1:15-16:

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers...

Churches can be known for many things but we see in this passage that the church in Ephesus was characterized by love and unity. In fact, Paul wrote that their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love for all the saints" was being talked about all over. The love and unity in the church was so extraordinary that people could not help but talk about it!



What is our church known for in our community? What would it take for our community to know that we loved one another and were unified?

You would think that Paul's praise of these believers would be sufficient to encourage them to continue in love and unity but he emphasized again in Ephesians 4:1-3 that they needed to continue to pursue unity:

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Have you ever pursued something with laser-beam focus and unbelievable intensity? That is the picture that Paul paints for the believers in Ephesus here in this text. They had a responsibility to pursue, with great intensity, unity within the church. That is the same responsibility we have today as church members. In Paul's mind this is not an option! Rainer wrote:

"You have a responsibility as a church member. You are to be a source of unity. You are never to be a divisive force. You are to love your fellow church members unconditionally. And while that doesn't mean you agree with everyone all the time, it does mean you are willing to sacrifice your own preferences to keep unity in the church."

 *What can you do to pursue unity in this church? What happens if we don't pursue unity in the church?*

Paul, in his letter to the church in Colossae, gives us a glimpse of what it takes to create unity in the church. He encourages the believers in this church to “put on” something that will lead to unity. In Colossians 3:14, Paul wrote:

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

We saw in our last session that love serves as the foundation for just about everything in the church. For the church in Corinth, they needed to be reminded that their spiritual gifts were useless without love (1 Cor. 13). For the church in Colossae, they needed to be reminded that unity (“perfect harmony”) in the church is only possible when love is present.

 *Why do you think love is so important in the church? How can you demonstrate love for other believers in the church and how can that help create unity?*

2. Gossip & Negative Talk Will Destroy Unity In The Church

It is clear that unity is important in the church but we must be acutely aware of how unity can be destroyed in the church. In the same way that cancer will destroy the physical body, gossip and negative talk will destroy the church if left unchecked. Is gossip really that big of a deal? Consider the various sins Paul outlines in Romans 1:29-31:

29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

The context of these verses focuses on what happens when people refuse to worship God as their Creator and instead worship themselves. Paul identifies a pretty nasty list of sins that will characterize people who fail to worship the God as their Creator. We must never lose sight of the seriousness of the sins of gossip and slander! Both will destroy the church if they are not dealt with appropriately.

 *What is a good definition of gossip? Why is the sin of gossip so damaging in the church?*

Rainer wrote, “This chapter is about unity. And few things can destroy the unity of a church like gossip. A unified church is powerful. Gossip tears apart that unity and

renders a church powerless.” We must deal with the issue of gossip in the church and Rainer offers two helpful responses:

1. “Don’t be a source of gossip. If you have any doubt whether something is gossip or not, don’t mention it. Keep your tongue under control.”
2. “If someone in the church begins to share gossip with you, gently rebuke him or her. You don’t have to be harsh in your response to them. Kindly say that you would rather not hear any gossip and you would hope it wouldn’t continue to spread.”

It is easy to overlook gossip and slander in the church but we must realize the cost of doing nothing. Consider James’ words to the believers in James 3:6:

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Also, consider Peter’s encouragement to his readers in 1 Peter 3:10-11:

10 For, “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”



What happens if gossip is not dealt with in the church? What is the best path to take if someone brings gossip to you in your church?

3. Forgiveness Will Foster Unity In The Church

Unity can be destroyed easily by gossip in the church but forgiveness will foster unity in the church. Every person living on this planet has experienced hurt in some capacity. It is even possible that this hurt has come at the hands of fellow believers and even fellow church members. So what does forgiveness have to do with unity in the church? Paul gives us some perspective in Colossians 3:12-13:

12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Forgiveness is a central component of believers living in harmony with one another in the local church. In fact, the way we forgive says something about the way we understand our own forgiveness. Jesus said, in Matthew 6:14-15:

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

According to this verse, it is impossible to have a right relationship with God if we are not willing to forgive others. Forgiveness is so important to Jesus that he tells his disciples that they need to be willing to forgive others without hesitation. They are so bold as to ask him how many times they are to forgive a brother if he sins against them (7 times) and Jesus responds that they are to be willing to forgive this brother 490 times (Matthew 18:22)!

? *How is forgiveness related to unity in the local church? What does the Bible say about forgiving one another?*

Rainer wrote:

“Each local church is made up of imperfect members and imperfect pastors. We will make mistakes. We will all sin. Yes, we are all hypocrites. Church unity is torn apart when members refuse to forgive, when any member is too prideful to grant forgiveness. Remember, Christ loved us so much that He died on a cross to forgive us. And now, as He has forgiven us, so we must forgive others. It is essential to the unity of your church.”

? *Are you still holding onto an offense against you by a fellow believer? What keeps you from being willing to forgive them?*

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

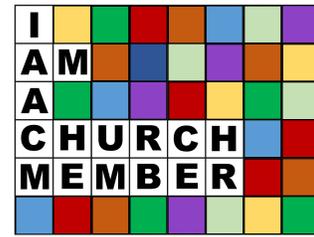
The Second Pledge

I am a church member.

I will seek to be a source of unity in my church. I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, or other church members. But neither am I. I will not be a source of gossip or dissension. One of the greatest contributions I can make is to do all I can in God's power to help keep the church in unity for the sake of the gospel.

Sign and Date

I Am A Church Member (Small Group Bible Study)



Session 3: "I Will Not Let My Church Be About My Preferences & Desires"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting in the stands of a high school football game. Here is what you see:

The team breaks out of the huddle but instead of lining up against the opposing squad, they break into groups of two or three, arguing with each other. Soon they start shoving, and two of them actually get into a fight. One of the players storms off the field and you can hear him say, "That bunch of idiots can't agree on anything." He continues, "Those two over there are arguing over the color of the uniforms. A couple of others are fussing over the right way to kneel in the huddle. Those two guys are arguing because one believes in what he calls 'personal' football, and the other believes in 'social' football. They can't agree whether the individual or the team is more important. Some of the players say the less talented players should go play on their own field, and some of the guys don't like the music played by the band. A few are fighting over whether the other football team has more players. And I'm quitting because I can pass a lot better than that other guy, and they won't let me be the quarterback."

This situation seems absurd and yet there are times when this is exactly what happens in the local church. People, who are on the same "team," spend more time focused on their preferences and desires than playing the game.



Can you describe a time when someone (maybe you) was more focused on their own preferences and desires than they were the best interest of the group?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that church members must be willing to yield their preferences and desires in order to serve others. We will encounter Jesus' challenge to his disciples to seek to serve instead of being served. Ultimately, we are called to recognize that church membership is not about our preferences and desires; it is about serving others! Rainer wrote:

"The strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join. Don't get me wrong; there may be much about your church that you like a lot. But you are there to meet the needs of others. You are there to serve others. You are there to give. You are there to sacrifice."

1. The Call To Serve Others

Serving others is probably not something we think about often but it was at the very heart of Jesus' ministry. In fact he said that he did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). One of the clearest pictures of Jesus' servant heart can be found in John 13:1-17:

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

I'm not sure about you but feet are not my thing. In fact, I think feet are only appropriate when socks and shoes cover them! Take some time to think back to the dirtiest your feet have ever been at a particular point in time. Do you think someone would have been willing to touch your feet...much less wash them with their bare hands? Don't forget that the disciples' feet would have been absolutely disgusting. They would have been sweaty and caked with dirt. They most likely would not have smelled too good. But, Jesus took each of their feet into his hands and washed them.

Washing someone's feet back in New Testament times would have been the ultimate picture of humility and service. That is why Peter makes such a commotion about what Jesus is doing. He recognizes that his Teacher should not be doing anything close to this. This was the job of a servant, not a respected Rabbi.

? *Why do you think it is so difficult to serve? How does Jesus example in this passage help you think about the call to serve others?*

Jesus was not the only person in Scripture that discussed the idea of serving others. Paul saw himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and was willing to do whatever was necessary to spread the gospel. After he became a Christian he wrote, in Ephesians 3:7

1 Of this gospel I was made a servant according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

? *Why do you think Paul was willing to call himself a servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you have that same perspective?*

The willingness to serve others is not natural in our world and it was not natural for people in Jesus' day either. In fact, the focus on position and authority had crept into the minds of several of his disciples. Consider the ironic story in Matthew 20:20-28:

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. 21 And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." 22 Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." 24 And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The mother of two of Jesus' disciples (James and John) actually had the audacity to come to Jesus and ask him to show favor towards her two sons. Just imagine if your mom showed up at your place of work and asked you boss to show favoritism towards you. This may work in little league but it would most definitely not work in your career.

Let's be honest, Jesus was very gracious with this well-meaning mom. He does not rebuke her or chastise her. He simply says that she really doesn't comprehend the scope of what she is asking. For Jesus, this is a great opportunity to remind his disciples that they have been called to serve and not to be served. Whose example are they to follow? Jesus' example – the King of kings came "not to be served but to serve." Rainer wrote:

“We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way. But paradoxically, we will find the greatest joy when we choose to be last. That’s what Jesus meant when He said the last will be first. True joy means giving up our rights and preferences and serving everyone else. And that’s what church membership means as well.”



Why does the world view the idea of serving in such a negative light? How can we combat the prevalent ideas of being first and being served in the church?

2. Serving Others Should Push Us Outside The Walls Of The Church

I’m sure all of us have heard the church referred to as a “holy huddle,” a place where believers can gather together and focus on one another. Recently, I heard a pastor say that the only problem with this idea is that the world around us has a very different perspective of a huddle. When they see a huddle they see a bunch of backsides and the view is not pretty! The church was never called to be a holy huddle or a hotel for saints. The church and its members were called to be a hospital for sinners. To accomplish this mission we must be willing to serve someone beside ourselves. Consider the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Jesus’ commission to the church and to believers is that we are to go and make disciples of all nations. We must realize that making disciples does not take place primarily within the walls of the church. In fact, the early church did not have a building where they met each week (they usually met in homes or in the temple) and most of their time was spent fulfilling their regular responsibilities. It was in fulfilling these responsibilities (work, etc.) that they were to make disciples. The same is true for us. However, we often think of making disciples only in the context of the gathering of the church. Rainer, as a result of his research, offered ten dominant behavior patterns of churches that are inward focused:

1. **Worship Wars.** One or more factions in the church want the music just the way they like it. Any deviation is met with anger and demands for change. The order of service must remain constant. Certain instrumentation is required while others are prohibited.
2. **Prolonged minutia meetings.** The church spends an inordinate amount of time in different meetings. Most of the meetings deal with the most inconsequential items, while the Great Commission and Great Commandment are rarely the topics of discussion.

3. **Facility focus.** The church facilities develop iconic status. One of the highest priorities in the church is the protection and preservation of rooms, furniture, and other visible parts of the church's buildings and grounds.
4. **Program Driven.** Every church has programs even if they don't admit it. When we start doing a ministry a certain way, it takes on programmatic status. The problem is not with programs. The problem develops when the program becomes an end instead of a means to a greater ministry.
5. **Inwardly focused budget.** A disproportionate share of the budget is used to meet the needs and comforts of the members instead of reaching beyond the walls of the church.
6. **Inordinate demands for pastoral care.** All church members deserve care and concern, especially in times of need and crisis. Problems develop, however, when church members have unreasonable expectations for even minor matters. Some members expect the pastoral staff to visit them regularly merely because they have membership status.
7. **Attitudes of entitlement.** This issue could be a catch-all for many of the points named here. The overarching attitude is one of demanding and having a sense of deserving special treatment.
8. **Greater concern about change than the gospel.** Almost any noticeable changes in the church evoke the ire of many; but those same passions are not evident about participating in the work of the gospel to change lives.
9. **Anger and hostility.** Members are consistently angry. They regularly express hostility toward the church staff and other members.
10. **Evangelistic apathy.** Very few members share their faith on a regular basis. More are concerned about their own needs rather than the greatest eternal needs of the world and community in which they live.



Do you think our church struggles with any of these behavior patterns? What are some ways that we can focus our attention outside the walls of the church?

3. Cultivating The Mind Of Christ (“He Came To Serve”)

As we have said before, serving others is difficult and it is not usually our natural response. Paul understood this perfectly, which is why he encouraged the believers in Philippi to cultivate the mind of Christ. Consider Philippians 2:1-11:

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind,

having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Rainer wrote:

“So what did Jesus do?”

1. He “did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.”
2. “He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave.”
3. “He humbled Himself.”
4. He became “obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross.”

“Keep in mind that Philippians 2 is not only a description of the obedience of Christ; it is an example for us to follow. We are to be servants. We are to be obedient. We are to put others first. We are to do whatever it takes to keep the unity in our church. So if we approach church membership from the perspective of entitlement, we have it upside down. You always ask first what you can do for your church.”



Describe someone in our church that best fits the description of having the mind of Christ and a servant attitude?

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

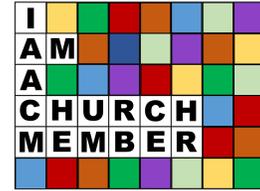
The Third Pledge

I am a church member.

I will not let my church be about my preferences and desire. That is self-serving. I am a member in this church to serve others and to serve Christ. My Savior went to a cross for me. I can deal with any inconveniences and matters that just aren't my preference or style.

Sign and Date

I Am A Church Member **(Small Group Bible Study)**



Session 4: “I Will Pray For My Church Leaders”

Opening Illustration & Introduction

The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development has been studying the lives and ministries of pastors since 1989. Here are some of their findings:

Hours and Pay

- 90% of pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 70% of pastors feel grossly underpaid.

Training and Preparedness

- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 90% of pastors said the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.

Health and Well-Being

- 90% of pastors stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis.
- 80% of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastor.
- 71% of pastors are burned out (beyond normal fatigue).
- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Only 23% of pastors report being happy and content in their identity in Christ, in their church, and in their home.

Spirituality

- 72% of the pastors we surveyed stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons. This left only 38% who read the Bible for devotions and personal study.
- 26% of pastors said they *regularly* had personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spirituality.

Marriage and Family

- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is overworked.
- 80% of spouses feel left out and under-appreciated by church members.

Church Relationships

- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 40% report serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.

Longevity

- 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates will leave the ministry within 5 years.
- Only 10% of pastors will actually retire as a minister in some form.
- Over 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month.
- Over 1,300 pastors are terminated by the local church each month.
- 50% of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.



Do these statistics concerning pastors surprise you? Why or why not? Do these statistics concerning pastors concern you?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture calls church members to be vigilant to pray for the pastor and other church leaders on a consistent basis. Pastors and church leaders have a difficult job and yet shepherding souls is a huge responsibility. Satan knows that if he take out the pastor, the sheep will scatter. Your pastor and church leaders need your prayers more than you could ever know.

****Take some time to read through the introduction of this chapter in the book.**



In light of the story in this chapter, why do you think pastors and church leaders need prayer on a consistent basis?

Church Members Are Called To Pray For The Pastor And Church Leaders

The biblical commands to pray for pastors and church leaders are subtle. Paul is the greatest champion of this idea and it appears several times in his letters to churches. Consider these verses:

Romans 15:30-31

30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

Colossians 4:2

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:18

16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

25 Brothers, pray for us.

2 Thessalonians 3:1

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

Hebrews 13:18

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.



As you consider these verses, what are the primary reasons that Paul asks for prayer?

When you take inventory of these verses, you recognize quickly that Paul covets prayers from these church members for boldness and opportunity to proclaim the gospel, protection as he deals with hostile non-believers and integrity as he fulfills his God-ordained ministry.

As we consider the responsibility church members have to pray for their pastor, it is helpful to consider the three practical areas of a pastor's life, which Rainer noted in the book, that should be lifted up in prayer:

1. Pray For The Pastor And His Family

It has often been said that a pastors and their families are a lot like fish living in a glass fish bowl. Everyone pays attention to see if the pastor and his wife ever have an argument and whether or not their kids are well behaved. This is understandable when we consider the biblical responsibility pastors have to manage their household well (1 Timothy 3:5). But, this is immense pressure and pastors and their families feel the weight of this pressure constantly. Rainer wrote:

“I have heard countless pastors worry about and struggle over their families. They worry that they neglect their families because of the demands of the church. They worry about their families living in a

glass house. They anguish when critics direct barbs at family members. You get the picture. We are church members. We must be the prayer intercessors for pastors and their families. Few families face the kinds of pressures and expectations as the families of pastors.”



What are your expectations of the pastor and his family? Are these biblical expectations? Do you pray for the pastor and his family on a regular basis?

As you look at the role of pastors and their family, consider this open letter, written by Thom Rainer on his blog, thanking the pastor’s wife:

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most thankless roles in the world. You receive no compensation, but there are many expectations of you. At times you are expected to be omnipresent; and other times you are expected to be invisible. Rarely at any of those times does anyone express gratitude to you.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most selfless roles in the world. You are expected to be at the beck and call of church members, regardless of your own schedule. You are expected to adjust your life to the life of the pastor, who just happens to be your husband. You really have no independent life of your own.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most challenging roles in the world. You are the only person in whom your husband can truly confide. When he is down, you are expected to encourage and exhort him. You try to provide balance for your family and children, especially since some of the church members expect them to be perfect.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most painful roles in the world. You have discovered how hurtful some church members can really be. You listen to criticisms of your husband, and you are expected to be stoic. And when you are hurt, you think you have to keep it to yourself. You internalize it and hurt even more.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the loneliest roles in the world. People in the church seem afraid to get too close to you. Friendships are rare, if not non-existent. There are times you want to cry out in your need and pain, but there is no one to listen to you. In your darkest moments, you wonder if it's all really worth it.

Thank you pastor's wife.

We who stand on the sidelines may not know your hopes, hurts, and needs. We may not realize the depth of your times of pain and loneliness. But we know Someone who does. And He is with you. He is your strength. He is your comforter. He is your confidant.

And one day you will see that Savior named Jesus face to face. One day you will get your rewards for your labor, sacrifice, and love. One day He will look at you with unstoppable love and piercing eyes. One day He will say, "Well done good and faithful servant. Well done."

And then you will know it was all worthwhile.

Thank you pastor's wife.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Pastors and their families are under spiritual attack constantly. Satan would love nothing more than to bring discouragement and discord into the life of the pastor. One of the easiest ways for this to happen is to attack his family. Pray for the pastor and his family!

2. Pray For The Pastor's Protection

To say that pastors have a target on their back is an understatement. We have all heard of stories of pastors who have failed morally. This is usually followed by great distress in the church and discord in the community. Consider this passage from 1 Timothy 3:2-4 regarding a pastor's qualifications:

2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive...

Pastors are called to be "above reproach" in their life and ministry. When we consider what is meant by these words, we recognize just how important it is to lift our pastors up in prayer. Rainer wrote:

“Just to get past ‘the above reproach’ part is an accomplishment! The word reproach means ‘to find fault.’ So to be ‘above reproach’ means to be above finding fault. While the pastor is certainly not expected to be perfect, he is to have a reputation above most everyone else. When people in the community speak or think about the pastor, the thoughts and words should be positive and encouraging.”



What does it mean for the pastor to be “above reproach?” Is that standard even possible?

It is important for us to recognize that Paul continues, concerning the qualifications of pastors, by stating in 1 Timothy 3:7:

7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

In the same way that we might set a mousetrap out to catch a mouse in our house, we must recognize that this is the same kind of language used by Paul concerning the activity of the devil. He is skillfully setting out traps to try and catch pastors. Rainer wrote:

“If we understand the full implications of that word (trap), we wouldn’t hesitate to pray for our pastor’s protection. A trap is something that is set intentionally. It means that the devil has devised a plan to bring the pastor down. He has set a trap. It means that the devil sees the pastor as a threat, and one of his highest priorities is to take him down and take him out. And the text is clear. The nature of this trap will be temptation where the pastor’s reputation will be harmed.”



Why do you think the devil is setting traps for pastors? Knowing this, how much more of a sense of urgency do you feel to pray for your pastor?

Even though the devil is working overtime to try and pick off pastors and shipwreck their ministries, we can be certain that our prayers are powerful. God is much more powerful than the devil and he works in amazing ways through the prayers of his people. Pray for your pastor’s protection!

3. Pray For Your Pastor’s Physical And Mental Health

If you have ever had responsibility to care for someone else, maybe a child or elderly parent, you know how much of a burden that can be. Pastors experience this same burden in the care for the souls of those under his ministry. In fact, James warns that not many should become pastors/teachers because they are held to greater accountability for those under their care and

teaching (James 3:1).

Rainer wrote:

“Serving and leading a church well expends all of a pastor’s energy. He is on call every day and every hour. Because the demands are so great on him, the pastor often neglects his own health and well-being. While no one is invulnerable to sickness and accidents, we can pray for the protection of our pastor’s health. We should also pray for our pastor’s mental health. In this regard I’m not referring to the opposite of mental sickness as I am to wisdom. The pastor has to make dozens of decisions each week that require discernment and wisdom. He needs wisdom to know what to preach and teach and how to present God’s Word. He needs wisdom dealing with us church members each week so he can best discern how to respond to the plethora of demands upon him.”

Pastoral ministry is a burden and it is also a great joy. Pray for your pastor’s physical and mental health as he seeks to care for your soul and the souls of other church members!



Why do you think pastors often overlook their own physical and mental health? What are some practical ways you can pray for and encourage your pastor in these areas?

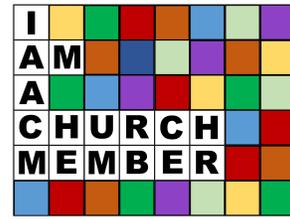
Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

The Fourth Pledge
I am a church member.

I will pray for my pastor every day. I understand that the pastor’s work is never ending. His days are filled with numerous demands that bring emotional highs and lows. He must deal with critics. He must be a good husband and father. Because my pastor cannot do all things in his power, I will pray for his strength and wisdom daily.

Sign and Date

I Am A Church Member (Small Group Bible Study)



Session 5: "I Will Lead My Family To Be Healthy Church Members"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

Three pastors got together for coffee one day and found all their churches had bat-infestation problems. "I got so mad," said one, "I took a shotgun and fired at them. It made holes in the ceiling, but did nothing to the bats." "I tried trapping them alive," said the second. "Then I drove 50 miles before releasing them, but they beat me back to the church." "I haven't had any more problems," said the third. "What did you do?" asked the others, amazed. "I simply baptized them and let them join the church," he replied. "I haven't seen them since."

Rainer noted that there is an unhealthy pattern for many church members. He emphasized that many people "Get excited about church. Get more involved. Discover the imperfections of the church. Get discouraged about the church. Leave the church."



Have you see this unhealthy pattern in people's lives? Has this pattern been evident in your own life?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes the need for families to instill healthy church membership into the fabric of their family's DNA. We have already seen, as we have worked through this study, our responsibility to serve within the church, check our preferences and desires at the door, and pray for its leaders. This week we are going to examine what it means to lead our families to worship, love, pray for, and serve in the church together.



What are some hindrances that prevent families from being more involved in and committed to the church?

Church And Family

Paul, in Ephesians 5 & 6, compares the family with the church. Rainer wrote, "It's no surprise that we are taught in Scripture that families are analogous to the church." Consider these verses:

Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in

everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” **4** Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.



How does this text describe the relationship of our immediate families and the church family?

Isn't it interesting that Paul compares the family and the church in this way? Husbands and wives should relate to one another in the same way that Christ and the church relate to one another. Parents and children should relate to one another in the same way that we, as God's children, relate to our heavenly Father.

Rainer offered this insight into the text:

“These passages remind us that, just as we are supposed to sacrifice and love our families unconditionally, so are we to love those churches where God has placed us. Our family members are not perfect, and neither are the members of the church. We are to find our joy in serving both our families and the church. We are further reminded of the importance of the family to the church. We are to encourage our family members to be faithful to the church. We should pray together as family members for our churches. Indeed, as we are to strive to love our families more deeply, so should we exhort our family members to love the church more deeply.”

As we consider the responsibility to lead our families to be biblical church members, we will examine three specific ways that we can accomplish this task:

1. Pray Together As A Family For The Church

Last week we considered the urgent need to pray for church leaders. They are under physical, spiritual, and mental strain all the time and church members have a responsibility to pray for them regularly. But, have you ever considered praying for your church and its leaders together as a family? Rainer offered several specific areas where you, as a family, can pray for church leaders:

- For spiritual protection
- For protection from moral failure
- For the preaching of the Word
- For their families
- For encouragement
- For physical strength
- For courage
- For discernment
- For wisdom in their leadership

Here are some specific ways that you can pray for the church:

- For the gospel to change lives
- For unity in the body
- For impact in the community
- For a heart for the lost
- For sound doctrine
- For specific ministries
- For scheduled times of worship

There are fewer things that will cultivate a love for the church and its leaders within your family than praying for them on a regular basis. While this may seem awkward at first, it can often prove to be one of the most beneficial ways to keep your family involved in the church. Rainer wrote:

“Part of the opportunity and honor of being a church member is the teaching of our family to love the church. And that teaching often begins by praying together as a family for the church where God placed us.”



Do you pray regularly with your family specifically for the church and its leaders? If not, what practical steps can you take to begin doing this?

2. Worship Together As A Family

Another way to lead our families to be healthy church members is to worship together as a family. Rainer wrote:

“As a church member, I am responsible for encouraging and leading my entire family to worship together in the church. If I am married, I seek to include my spouse. If I am a parent, I seek to include my children. My family must see my love for the church. Many church members are single. They have no immediate family with whom they can worship in the church. Regardless, there are still people watching them and how they love the church. They are to be an example to others.”

The writer of Hebrews emphasized the need for believers to assemble together for worship. He wrote:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

He challenged the believers to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” It is evident that some believers had begun neglecting meeting together for worship and it was negatively affecting the church. We, as families, should strive to worship together as often as possible, both corporately and privately.



What hinders your family from worshipping together? What steps can you take to emphasize, to your family, the importance of attendance and participation in weekly worship services?

As we consider the importance of families worshipping together, it is necessary to consider that church members may have family members who are not Christians or not part of the church. This is not a new scenario! In fact, Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 7. Take some time to read through verses 10-14 and consider Paul’s admonition to spouses of unbelievers – they are to be an example to their unbelieving spouse. Rainer emphasized this when he wrote:

“It can be lonely to be the believer in an unbelieving family. It can likewise be lonely going to worship at your church alone, while your spouse remains behind. But God has given such people a mission field: their families. Like the missionary who travels thousands of miles to

tell the good news to the unevangelized people, this church member is to tell the good news in his or her own home.”

As church members, we need to encourage fellow church members who are attending without their spouses and families and we need to consistently pray for them and their families.



What is the role of a believing spouse to an unbelieving spouse? How does that manifest itself in church membership?

Worshipping together as a family is important. Take some time to read through this anonymous poem and consider what would happen if this is the way we approached the church:

If You Want to Kill the Church

Never go to your church or meetings held there,
If you do go, be late, it's no one's affair.
If the weather is bad, either too hot or snowing,
Just stay home and rest, for there'll be others going.

But should you attend, be sure and remember
To find fault with the work, each official and member.
Be sure to hold back on your offerings and tithes,
The bills will be paid by the rest of the guys.

And never take office if offered the post,
But eagerly criticize work of the host.
If not on a committee you're placed, be sore!
If you find that you are, don't attend any more.

When asked your opinion on this thing or that,
Have nothing to say, just turn 'em down flat.
Then after the meeting, shine out like the sun
By telling the folks how it should have been done.

Don't do any more than you possibly can,
Leave the work for some other woman or man.
And when you see faithful ones work themselves sick,
Then stand up and holler, "It's run by a clique!"

3. Love The Church And Encourage Your Family To Do The Same

Have you ever heard someone say, “I love Jesus but I don’t like the church.” That would be the same thing as someone coming to you and telling you they

love you but hate your spouse! The Bible does not give us the option of loving Jesus and not loving the church. If we love Jesus we will love His church!
Rainer wrote:

“As a church member, I am not merely to like my church or serve my church well. I am to fall deeply in love with my church. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride. My commitment is to love that bride with an unwavering and unconditional love. Unconditional love is not always easy. If someone is perfect and meets our every perceived need, it’s easy to think we love that person. But such love is one-way. It’s all about me and my needs. Unconditional love means I will continue to fall more deeply in love regardless of the response. It means my love for the church will grow even as I may disagree with something or encounter disagreeable people.”

 *Do you love your church? Why is unconditional love such a challenge, especially as it applies to church membership?*

We are only able to love our church unconditionally when we understand that Jesus loved us unconditionally. Paul described Christ’s love for us in Romans 5:8: “But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We were God’s enemies and yet Christ died for us. Jesus loved his church so much that he willingly laid down his life to redeem her out of her sin.

 *How is Christ’s death on the cross an example for us as church members relating to one another?*

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

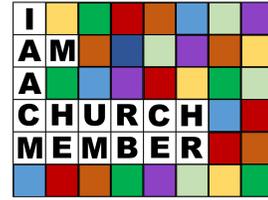
The Fifth Pledge

I am a church member.

I will lead my family to be good members of this church as well. We will pray together for our church. We will worship together in our church. We will serve together in our church. And we will ask Christ to help us fall deeper in love with this church because He gave His life for her.

Sign and Date

I Am A Church Member (Small Group Bible Study)



Session 6: "I Will Treasure Church Membership As A Gift"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton was overseeing the work of the Red Cross in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her; he wanted to buy food for his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him any. Roosevelt was perplexed. His men needed the help and he was prepared to pay out of his own funds. When he asked someone why he could not buy the supplies, he was told, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood--the provisions were not for sale. All he had to do was simply ask and they would be given freely (*Our Daily Bread*, October 11, 1992).

For all of us who are in Christ, we too have received a gift – the free gift of salvation. This free gift was costly; it cost Jesus his very life. Yet, it did not cost us anything!



Why is the free gift of salvation such a precious gift? What did you do to receive this gift?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that church membership is also a precious gift that should be treasured. When we treasure this gift, it will greatly affect the way we love, serve, give, and pray for our local church.

Rainer noted the two very different perspectives of church membership:

Option 1

"In the first option we approach church membership similar to country club membership noted in chapter one. We are joining the church to see what we can get out of it. The pastor is to feed us through his sermons. We have specified an acceptable range for the length of the sermon. The music is to fit our style exactly. Any deviations are not acceptable. The programs and ministries are for our benefit. We will determine what we like and don't like. We are members who expect perks, privileges, and service."

Option 2

"But there is a second option to church membership. It's the biblical option that sees membership as a gift, something to be treasured. Membership means we have the opportunity to serve and give rather

than the legalistic option to do so. Our entire attitude is different when we approach membership the biblical way.”



What is the greatest gift (outside of salvation) that you have received? Why do you consider it such a great gift?

1. Church Membership Is A Gift

Scripture is clear that salvation (the prerequisite for church membership) is a gift. Numerous verses give evidence of this truth and we are going to take some time to consider several of these verses:

Romans 3:21-26

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Acts 3:18-21

18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Ephesians 2:1-9

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in

*kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Even though we were dead in our sins, we were made alive in Jesus Christ. He paid our sin debt and made it possible for us to have a right relationship with God. This is a priceless gift! It is important for us to recognize that our salvation means that we are part of the body of Christ. The free gift of salvation affords us another gift – being part of the body of Christ. Rainer explained:

“Do you see what’s taking place? You received a gift, the free gift of eternal salvation. That gift includes eternal salvation. It includes forgiveness of sins by Christ’s death on the cross. It includes adoption by God the Father. It includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And it includes becoming a part of the body of Christ. That’s right: membership in the body of Christ, the church, is a gift from God. It’s not a legalistic obligation. It’s not country club perks. It’s not a license for entitlement. It’s a gift. A gift from God. A gift that we should treasure with great joy and anticipation.”



How does the gift of salvation relate to the gift of church membership? Why is it important to recognize this connection?

2. The Universal Church vs. The Local Church

Throughout the New Testament, the term “church” is used in two ways. One way the term is used is to describe the universal church – that is “all believers everywhere for all ages.” Consider these passages that talk about the universal church:

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the*

apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:22-33

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. **25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Another way the term is used is to describe the local church – that is a specific group of gathered believers in a specific place at a specific time. Consider these passages that talk about the local church:

Galatians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— **2** and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

Ephesians 1:1

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, **2** To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **(Notice the reference to the universal church in verse 2 – “all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”)**



Explain how Christians are in both the universal church and in the local church?

It is important to recognize that the New Testament knows nothing of a person who is in the universal church and not a local church. Local church membership is vital to the growth of believers. It is the place where they are able to serve and use their gifts as well as the place they are held accountable. Some believers have attempted to say that their inclusion in the universal church is sufficient but this is problematic. Rainer stressed this when he wrote:

“It’s a lame and invalid excuse to say you will limit your involvement to the universal church. The Bible is clear that we are to be connected to a specific church in a specific context.”



Why is it so important to be a member of a local church? Why do you think some people do not see this as important?

3. Understanding & Cherishing The Gift Of Church Membership

How do you usually respond when you receive a gift that you absolutely love? You likely respond with sincere gratitude to the giver. Rainer wrote:

“Church membership is a gift. A gift must be treasured. It should not be taken for granted or considered lightly. Because it is a gift, we must always be thankful for it. And when we are thankful for something, we have less time and energy to be negative. When we receive a gift with true appreciation, we naturally want to respond to the Giver. We, therefore, see service to God as a natural outflow of the joy of our salvation and the consequent joy of our church membership. We consider it a privilege to serve the King, so we look for those opportunities at the church where we serve.”



How should we respond to God knowing how precious the gift of salvation is that we have received?

When we receive the gift of salvation and church membership with a grateful heart, we will naturally desire to serve within the body of Christ. We will recognize that our local church is composed of people just like us – sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. They were once enemies of God but have now become his sons and daughters. When we have this mindset, we will seek to love, serve, and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.



Read the entire story of Jesus rebuking His disciples in Matthew 20:28. How could that story relate to church membership?

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

The Sixth Pledge

I am a church member.

This membership is a gift. When I received the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, I became a part of the body of Christ. I soon thereafter identified with a local body and was baptized. And now I am humbled and honored to serve and to love others in our church. I pray that I will never take my membership for granted, but see it as a gift and an opportunity to serve others and to be a part of something so much greater than any one person or member.

Sign and Date



For your last question, look at each part of the entire membership covenant you have reviewed to this point. As you look at the entire covenant, what areas will be your greatest challenge? In what areas can you make immediate changes?