

Connecting to His Church

The Church is a 'Community of Faith'—a divinely instituted body that serves as the primary vehicle for God's redemptive mission. Because of this, every Christian is called to actively participate in the life and ministry of a local church.

Jesus' Great Design for His Church

Ephesians 5:25 ... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

The Church was the heart cry of Jesus' redemptive mission. A people for Himself of all nations, tribes, and tongues, (Revelation 5:9) whom He purchased with His own blood as His:

- Bride, of which He is the Groom Ephesians 5:25-27
- Body, of which He is the Head Colossians 1:18
- Field, of which He is the Planter 1 Corinthians 3:9
- Branches, of which He is the Vine John 15:5
- Temple of living stones, of which He is the Cornerstone 1 Peter 2:4-5, Eph 2:20
- Family, of which He is the Firstborn Romans 8:29

Ephesians 1:22-23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Jesus isn't simply with His Church—He is *in* His Church, and His Church is in Him. The Church is the living manifestation of Jesus Christ. It is an intricate, unified whole where every single part is essential, woven together in a beautiful harmony of connection and function. Simply put: the body cannot function if the parts are disconnected. People sometimes say, 'I don't want to be a part of what the Church has become.' But Jesus never does! Jesus never says, 'I'm going to disconnect.' A head cannot separate itself from its own body, and Jesus will never separate Himself from His Church.

The Foundation of His Church

Matthew 16:13-18 "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

An Immovable Foundation ("*On this rock...*")

- Built on an eternal foundation, giving the Church forever relevance rather than a passing fad.
- Established not on *Petra* (a movable stone) but on the immovable truth of Peter's confession: "Jesus is the Christ."

A Personal Builder ("...I will build...")

- Jesus is personally, actively involved in constructing His Church; this is *His* primary work on earth.
- His confident assertion guarantees that the Church will be completed; since He promises "*I will*," we must not bail on it, but persevere and participate in it.

An Absolute Owner ("...My church...")

- Jesus bought and owns the Church; we have no personal claim to ownership.
- The Church does not belong to any pastor or congregation—it is strictly *His*.
- We are simply servants within His house; while we might prefer things small or comfortable (like at AMC), *He* is the one who decides its growth.

A Redeemed People ("...My church [gathering]...")

- The core purpose of the Church is people: an assembly called out of darkness and into His marvelous light.
- It is a gathering of those rescued from bondage, idols, death, hopelessness, and enmity with God.

A Glorious Future ("...The gates of hell shall not prevail...")

- Ultimate victory is guaranteed over death, hell, and the powers of darkness.
- The Church is an unstoppable force that will outlast every earthly empire.

Moving from Attending to Connecting

Ephesians 4:15-16 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.

Attending a church service is not the same thing as being *in* the Church. There's a massive difference between simply coming to a building and being connected to a people.

Think of Sunday mornings like a **Greenhouse** versus a **Garden**. Our Sunday morning service is a nurturing, protective environment where we learn to connect with Jesus and one another. But the ultimate purpose of a greenhouse is to grow plants so they can survive out in the garden! The garden is our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods where we make a kingdom impact. If we don't connect with one another in our greenhouse, we will never effectively reach our garden.

Our Next Steps This Summer:

1. Gather: Assemble with one another to build real fellowship
2. Serve: Actively participate in ministries together to impact our community
3. Grow: Choose into Discipleship and support one another as we grow closer to Jesus

Discussion Questions

- Looking at the metaphors of the Church (Bride, Body, Vineyard, Temple, Family), which of these images helps you understand Jesus' deep love and commitment to the Church the most? Why?
- In your own life, what does it look like to shift from just relaxing in the "greenhouse" on Sundays to actively planting yourself in the "garden" of your community during the week?
- *"A head cannot separate itself from its own body."* What are the spiritual dangers when a believer tries to have a relationship with Jesus (the Head) while avoiding the local church (the Body)?
- How does remembering that the Church is completely His (and not ours) change the way we view church growth, transitions, or program changes that might make us uncomfortable?
- Discuss the three connection points: **Gather, Serve, and Grow**. Which of these three areas do you feel God is challenging you to strengthen this summer? What is one practical step you can take this week to do it?

Family Discipleship Ideas

Each part does its work

Ephesians 4:16

Have your family try to do everyday tasks (like tying a shoe or pouring a glass of water) using only one hand, or with their eyes closed.

Talk about how hard it is for a body to work when its parts aren't working together. Remind your kids that they are a vital part of God's church family, this family, and the church and our family needs their unique gifts, joy, and presence to function completely!

The "Living Stones" Jenga Challenge

1 Peter 2:4–5 (*"...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house..."*)

Get a Jenga game or a set of building blocks. Gather the family around the table. Before you start pulling blocks, use a dry-erase marker (or small pieces of tape) to write Peter's confession, *"Jesus is the Christ"* on the bottom-most foundation blocks. On the other blocks, write the names of family members, friends, and church leaders.

Play the game normally. As blocks are removed and the tower gets shaky, point out how the building relies on every single block staying connected.

- What happens when individual blocks are pulled out of the tower? (It gets weaker and falls).
- Why is it vital that our foundation blocks say "Jesus"?
- Reiterate that we aren't meant to be lone blocks sitting by ourselves; God designed us to be built tightly together into a strong temple.

The Missing Pieces Puzzle Race

1 Corinthians 12:21–22 (*"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'..."*)

Take a simple 24- to 100-piece jigsaw puzzle. Before your kids come into the room, secretly hide three or four crucial pieces in your pocket. Give the family the box and tell them to work together to complete it. Let them build until they realize they are missing the final pieces to finish the picture.

Once they express frustration about the missing pieces, pull them out of your pocket and let them finish the puzzle.

- How did it feel to have an incomplete picture just because a few tiny pieces were missing?
- Explain that the local church is exactly like this puzzle. When someone chooses to stay disconnected or says, "*I don't need to be involved,*" the whole church misses out on the unique piece God created them to be. Every person changes the final picture.
- How can we play a role in our Church and not be a missing piece?