



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

A Small Group Journey
LEADER GUIDE

Introduction

To the family of God at New Albany Presbyterian Church,

Welcome to *What is the Church? – A Small Group Journey!* As the title suggests, your small group will be together for the next several weeks learning about this organization and movement Jesus said would be powerful enough to withstand even the gates of hell. (See Matthew 16:18) Does church feel that important to you? What is its purpose anyway? How we answer these questions and others like them will dictate how we engage in the church, both down the street and across the globe.

Each week of this study will follow the same format. We'll kick things off with some background in the "Let's Get Started" section, then "Focus Your Mind" with a general question to get on task. Next you'll dig into the questions of the "Roundtable" and finally "Takeaway" the main point of the week. Between group meetings, "It's Go Time" so you can put into action what you've just learned. Please read through the Bible passages and answer the questions each week before the next group meeting. This will enrich your discussion time.

Putting this Bible study together has been a blessing and a privilege. Special thanks go to my gifted team: Janet Dehmer, Shannon Holbert, Darrell and Carol Holmes, Andy and Tiffany Larned, Anne Liptak, David Milroy, David Mitchell and Karla Muzi. Their writing, editing (re-editing) and designing made this study possible. My prayer is that this small group journey deepens your love for and commitment to Christ's church.

Glory to God alone,
Ken Rathburn



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WHY GO TO CHURCH?

Week 1

/// BIG IDEAS

The “church” is two things: (1) a gathered group of Christians meeting for worship, and (2) God’s means of advancing his Gospel for the saving and sanctification of his people. It is for those reasons that we go to church.

/// GOALS

Participants will begin to see that common perceptions of church do not align with the Biblical description. Also, participants will examine the reasons they go to church.

LET’S GET STARTED

What image comes to mind when you hear the word *church*? Perhaps it resembles something with a steeple—a place you go on Sunday morning complete with pews, a pastor and a pulpit. It probably includes a group of people clothed in their niceties (metaphorically and literally). Maybe it’s a place where you invest an hour of your week until the following Sunday (or the next holiday, whether Christmas or Easter).

Alternatively, the word *church* may conjure up the vision of a big warehouse-style building with all sorts of amenities and a “show” inside that rivals the concert you went to the night before. And yet, to some, their idyllic picture of church is on a screen, while on their couch and in their jammies.

Does *church* mean all of those things, some of them or none of them? When we take a closer look at how our culture defines church compared to how it is Biblically defined, we might just be surprised to learn how different the two are. It is easy to be deceived as to what the *church* is, its true mission, and why it’s so vital for us to be a part of it.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• Why do you go to church?

The point here is for each participant to take stock of why he/she currently attends church? Articulating this will focus their thinking so that the person can then examine, through this study, whether that reason needs to change.

ROUNDTABLE

LEADER NOTE — The questions are divided into two groupings: “What is the Church?”, which is an overview and intro to the entirety of this study, and “Why Go to Church?”, which is the main thrust of this particular week.

What is *church*, really? The Biblical term for “church” actually has nothing to do with a physical structure of any kind. In the New Testament, the word translated “church” is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means a “called-out gathering” or “assembly.” Inside or outside, in a house or a public place—none of this defines a church. The Old Testament provides a foreshadowing of the church in Exodus 19. God’s people gathered at Mt. Sinai and the glory of God came down upon them. It is in the New Testament, however, where a church is formally established. There we learn that Jesus is the founder and the foundation of the true church.

/// READ MATTHEW 16:13-19 OUT LOUD.

• What was different about Peter’s description of who Jesus is compared to others? How does that relate to the foundation of the church? 🔗

Peter acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of the living God, far more than a mere man. Peter’s revelation came from God the Father, not man, and is not based on his own ideas and assumptions. Knowing who Jesus truly is forms the foundation of the church itself.

So, the word *church* in the New Testament is a gathering or assembly of believers called out of the world by God to live by faith under the authority and on the foundation of Jesus Christ. This can refer to all true believers across all places and times (universal/invisible church) or a specific congregation within a particular region (local church).

/// READ ACTS 2:42-47 OUT LOUD, which provides a beautiful picture of the first local church in Jerusalem around 30 A.D.

• **Discuss the fundamental differences between the reasons families gather versus audiences. Which should characterize the church and is that consistent with your experience?** 🗨️

Families gather for selfless reasons: to be a support system for each other, provide a sense of belonging, and to protect, comfort, love and serve one another, as well as share life's joys and sorrows. Audiences, however, gather to consume. They consist of passive strangers who gather to be entertained from up front. The church is not an audience, but our spiritual family.

LEADER NOTE — As a leader, be prepared to share your own experiences with passive consumerism in the church, even if it reveals something about your own heart. This will help others open up about this.

• **You may have heard of the term “Body of Christ,” which comes from Ephesians 1:22-23. Is your experience with church more like a family, a body, or something else?**

No right answer here. Just be sure you're leading in the honest sharing.

/// READ MATTHEW 28:19-20 AND 22:37-40 OUT LOUD.

• **Based on those verses, what is the mission of the church?** 🗨️

There are many ways to say it, but ultimately the mission of the church is this: love God, advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ and save and sanctify God's people.

• **The word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, which means “student, learner or follower.”**

How does the call to make disciples impact your view of the mission of the church?

Christ's call is not simply a call to make converts, which would involve evangelism alone. It is also not a call to increase attendance numbers. Instead, it is a call to make disciples. Discipleship is a life-long commitment and a process that happens inside (sanctification) and outside (representing the virtues of God and sharing his Gospel) of the church.

Still, even if this describes what the church is, why would any individual decide to go to church at all? For some, “going to church” is just another rule among the other dos and don'ts of Christianity. For others, it seems unnecessary and antiquated—replaced by podcasts or a good Bible app.

/// READ HEBREWS 10:24-25 OUT LOUD.

• **We are commanded to meet regularly. List some of the consequences of not meeting together, for us and for the church itself.** 🗨️

We would not be able to effectively encourage each other. We also would not “stir one another up” to love and good works.

We are a forgetful people. Think about the Israelites and how quickly they forgot all that the Lord had done for them. We need the repetition of God's truths in public together.

We learn holiness through imitation. We learn by seeing and imitating examples of kindness, compassion, love, justice, etc. This takes practice and repetition.

Fellowship within the church also communicates solidarity to the world. It points to God being the center of our lives above all else.

/// READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:15-16 AND EPHESIANS 2:8-10 OUT LOUD.

• **Describe God by using words from these verses or that come to mind after reading them. Is this how you see and think about him? How would seeing him this way impact your view of and experience in worship?**

Blessed, only, sovereign, King of kings, Lord of lords, immortal, dwells in unapproachable light, invisible,

grace, Savior, Creator, gift giver, and more. How amazing it is that God can be our loving Savior and yet dwell in unapproachable light. If we really thought of God in this way, as we rightly should, we would be overwhelmed by him and desire to worship him!

Bottom line: God commands us to worship him for who he is, but it doesn't stop there. Proper understanding of God leads to proper worship of God, by command but also by a growing desire. He and he alone is worthy of our praise, and we should do so exactly as he desires. And that takes us to another concept: *liturgy*.

The word *liturgy* means "work of the people." It is the order of worship that includes the more participatory portions of the worship service. Unlike consumers, these portions of the worship service allow everyone present to actively worship God together.

• **Whether you go to Traditional or Acoustic worship, NAPC follows the same liturgical practices. Can you name any or all of the sections of the liturgy?** ↗

See below for the list of liturgical elements, with a description of each.

LEADER NOTE — The prior question will be difficult to answer, but please let your group struggle through it (no pain, no gain!). We want all small group participants to discover why we do what we do each Sunday at NAPC.

• **Briefly describe each of the liturgical elements.**

CALL TO WORSHIP — Calling each other into God's presence.

SINGING OF HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS — Praising God and lifting voices to him.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION — Acknowledging our sin and asking for forgiveness in a spirit of repentance.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON — Confidence that God does forgive when we repent.

SCRIPTURE READING — Reading God's Word aloud, with a response from the people.

PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER — Talking to God together with unified hearts.

GIVING OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS — Cheerfully returning to God what belongs to him.

BENEDICTION — Blessing to the people as they go and represent Christ to the world.

SACRAMENTS — Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion), at certain worship services.

Week 1

WHY GO TO CHURCH

• **There is one more special aspect of the worship service not listed, which we will talk about in depth in a future week. Do you know which one it is?**

The Sermon, which is the preaching of the Word of God. This takes place right after the Scripture reading in the worship service.

• **Look back at the liturgical elements (with the Sermon as well). Why do you think the liturgy is set up and ordered this way? How does the liturgy make worship different than watching a sermon video or listening to a podcast?**

Worship begins by preparing our hearts and minds as we call each other into God's presence, just as he called us from darkness into light. Then, after acknowledging who God is through call and song, we are driven to our knees in acknowledgment of who we are and our need for forgiveness for our sin. Knowing that God pardons our sin when we come to him with repentant hearts, we rejoice in more singing and praises to him. Next, we listen to a reading from the Bible and affirm together that it is God's Word. After all of that, we are now ready to hear the Word preached because our hearts and minds have been prepared for conviction, encouragement and challenge after walking through the prior liturgical parts. We then respond in prayer and with tithes and offerings, with a heart overflowing because of what he has done for us and the way we are being changed. Lastly, we receive the blessing and are charged to go and do ministry in the world.

No video or podcast can possibly prepare one's heart in the same way that proper corporate worship does! This doesn't mean listening to teachings outside of worship is bad—it's a great thing to do—but it is no substitute for the totality of a liturgical worship service that takes place alongside fellow believers as part of the family of God.

• **Although not the same, how could the model and process of liturgical worship be a roadmap for how we approach each day of our lives?**

We can live out the liturgy every day. Monday through Saturday could begin with acknowledging who God is; asking him to guide us; confessing and repenting of our sins throughout the day; singing and praying to him; reading and studying his Word; and giving of our money and ourselves to those in need. In this way, corporate worship becomes the training ground for the rest of our lives.

TAKEAWAY

In the end, the church is not a building or structure of any sort. It is God's people gathered together to worship him, be transformed by him, and to be equipped to do the work he intends us to do.

“ The happy life is this – to rejoice to thee, in thee, and for thee.”

- Augustine, *Confessions*

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** – Tell someone this week how God's church has made a difference in your life. Invite them to experience that with you on Sunday at NAPC.
- **READ** – Meditate on the following passages about how the church enriches us: Encouragement (Hebrews 10:25), Serving joyfully (Romans 12:9-13), Humility (Romans 12:14-21), Leadership/accountability Ephesians; 4:11-13; Proverbs 27:17; James 5:16), Church health (John 15:2).
- **PRAY** – Thank God for his church, and ask him to reveal your particular part in it.
- **CHANGE** – What one thing can you do or approach differently after this week's study? Go and do it.





Week 1

WHY GO TO CHURCH

WHY BECOME A CHURCH MEMBER?

Week 2

/// BIG IDEAS

Every converted Christian is called to become a member of a local church. There should be no “Lone Rangers” or passive consumers in the flock.

/// GOALS

Participants will be challenged to push back on the consumerist, take-it-or-leave-it approach to church involvement. Biblical church involvement means commitment, and that means membership.

LET’S GET STARTED

When someone places their faith in Jesus we call this person a *convert*. Michael Lawrence provides a helpful definition in his book *Conversion*: “A *convert* is someone whose heart has been transformed by God’s grace, who is characterized by repentance and faith, who desires to be with God and know him more.” This person is now a Christian, but is not (yet) part of a local church.

Last week, we began to look at what *church* really is, and explored the reasons we attend. We learned the church is God’s people gathered together, growing in love and holiness, under the authority of Jesus Christ. This week, we take it a step further and examine the concept of committing to membership in a local church.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• Describe a club or organization you joined. Why did you join and was it a mistake or a joy?

This question should help participants begin to think about why we join any club or organization, whether to receive services or hold status or to “do

some good” and volunteer. As we study the Scripture passages below, we want participants to see that a Christian joins a church for very different motivations.

ROUNDTABLE

LEADER NOTE — The questions in this study are designed in part to challenge participants who have attended NAPC for a while but are not yet members. However, it is not our job to convince people to join NAPC. We simply want to show them that membership is Biblical and valuable, allowing the Holy Spirit to work on their heart in this matter.

For many, the concept of church membership raises many questions. Is the idea even Biblical? Isn’t being a *convert* enough without *membership* and the insider/outsider divides it seems to draw? Much of the New Testament actually teaches about and offers several metaphors (pictures) of active church membership, even without using the word itself. Let’s consider some of these passages together.

/// READ ROMANS 12:3-8 OUT LOUD.

• Put verse 3 into your own words. What is Paul saying about our value in and to the church?

The grace given to us in Jesus is the basis of our self-worth and value. We should not think of our value in or to the church too lowly or too highly because all of our value comes from him.

• This passage likens the church to a body with many members. How does the human body struggle if even one of its parts is not functioning as designed? Connect this to the local church. 🔑

The human body suffers pain, disease and potentially death from the malfunctioning of even the smallest member (consider a single cell becoming cancerous). Similarly, if the members of the church are not all fulfilling their roles together, the entirety of the church suffers in some way.

• **Look at the gifts listed in the passage. How are they similar or different from one another? Which of these gifts have you seen put to use at NAPC and in what ways?**

All of the listed gifts are given by God (not conjured up), but yet serve different purposes. Answers will vary regarding the use of gifts at NAPC, but hopefully people have seen it happen.

LEADER NOTE — The goal in the prior question is to have your participants realize the importance of all these different gifts at NAPC. The Body of Christ suffers if any member is absent, and there are no extra-important or unimportant gifts.

Quick FYI: “Prophesying” is not necessarily predicting the future. In Scripture, prophets also preach God’s messages for strengthening, encouragement, comfort and conviction. See 1 Cor. 14:3.

/// READ JOHN 15:1-8 OUT LOUD.

Jesus uses this vine-and-branches metaphor to explain how the people of God can bear much fruit, individually but also corporately.

• **What kind of fruit does a church produce if it remains in Jesus?**

Saved souls, joy, love and answered prayer. Have someone read Galatians 5:22 as well as a list of the fruit of the Spirit.

• **Put this metaphor together with the last one. In light of both, what does it mean to “abide” in Jesus?**

Abiding in Jesus means staying connected to him. If he is the vine or the head, and we are the branches or the body, abiding in Jesus will mean being an active member of a local church. This means praying together, discipling others, serving together and more.

/// READ 1 PETER 2:4-6 OUT LOUD.

• **Describe the metaphor Peter uses.**

The church is pictured as a living, spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone and each member as a living stone.

• **How does this metaphor further inform us about the interworking of God’s church?**

The building starts with the cornerstone—the building’s foundation—and is built upon that using living stones (church members). The church is a group of sinners connected in Christ and held together by the Holy Spirit.

LEADER NOTE — Help your group to really think through the picture: No single stone makes it a house and yet the removal of any single stone damages the house. So it is with the local church and its membership.

Peter refers his listeners back to the Old Testament sacrificial system, carried out through priests where special individuals held that title, allowing them to stand as mediators between God and humans.

• **What changed from the Old Testament view if we are now to think of the entire church as a “holy priesthood?”**

Instead of specially designated individuals, the entire church is a priesthood. This is because it is the members of the church working together (as one) that serve God and form a witness to the world of who he is. They function as if they are one.

• **Discuss how this relates to the idea of church membership.**

We are not to function as a single priest with a bunch of spectators. As members of one body, branches on one vine, stones forming one house, we are a single priesthood.

By considering these three metaphors, we now have some insight into the what and why of church membership. Now, let’s move from the theoretical to practical experience.

In his book, Church Membership, Jonathan Leeman defines it this way: “Church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s discipleship and the Christian’s submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.”

LEADER NOTE — The goal of the remaining questions is for your participants to consider their engagement and active involvement in the local church and how this relates to the concept of membership. This will be further developed in the coming weeks.

● **How does your involvement in the local church fulfill the definition above? How does it not?** 🗝️

Try to have everyone give some sort of an answer to this. If they need help, ask the group to consider the key terms: formal relationship, discipleship, submission and care.

● **Does a person need to be an official member of a church to be involved in a local church? Why or why not?** 🗝️

The answer is technically no, but there are caveats. A Christian can attend, participate in, and even give to a local church without being an official member—people do it all the time!

● **Are the three metaphors more akin to formal membership in a local church or just involvement?**

The metaphors are more like formal membership. Being part of a body, one of the vine's branches, and/or one of the house's stones represents a different level of commitment than mere involvement. Connected parts of the whole are in—there for the good, the bad and the ... well, you know.

● **How might the commitment of a “formal relationship” with a local church increase the possibility of fulfilling the remainder of the membership definition?** 🗝️

In formal membership, the member agrees to not only be affirmed but also challenged and taught, even corrected. This is what it means to have the person's discipleship under the care of the church. Without a formal commitment, there will always be some level of distance that can prevent the deepening of discipleship.

Week 2

WHY BECOME A CHURCH MEMBER

TAKEAWAY

We see the concept of church membership throughout the Bible, even absent the specific word. Similar to the church being a family (as we discussed last week), becoming a member of a local church is no small commitment—like how a finger is part of a body or a stone is part of a building. The formal relationship of membership ensures that the commitment is real and strong, resulting in deeper discipleship and engagement.

“ We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honor which can come [someone's] way in this world.”

- Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Talk to someone who is a regular attender but not a member at NACP. Explain what you learned about the importance of formal membership in a local church.
- **READ** — Go through the three metaphor passages again. Where does the Christian church today miss the mark?
- **PRAY** — Thank God for his church, and ask him to show you how to lovingly engage as a crucial member of Christ's body.
- **CHANGE** — If you're not a member, consider this your challenge to commit to NACP membership. If you already are a member, what one thing can you change to better fulfill the definition of membership?

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH?

Part I: Biblical Preaching

Week 3

/// BIG IDEAS

There are three characteristics (we will call them “birthmarks”) that make a group of people a church. The first and most important is Christ-centered, Biblical preaching.

/// GOALS

Participants will appreciate the place of preaching in the church, and they will understand why a proper sermon is not just the minister’s thoughts on some topic.

LET’S GET STARTED

For the next three sessions, we will examine what we are calling “birthmarks” of the church. These are the three characteristics that make a church, well, a true Christian church.

This week, we begin by examining the most important “birthmark” of the church: *Christ-centered, Biblical preaching*. Here is a definition that should help: *Christ-centered, Biblical preaching* is preaching that focuses on a passage of the Bible, what that passage means and how it points to the cross of Jesus Christ. This form of preaching is critical for two reasons: first, it consistently focuses us on the Gospel; second, it deepens our understanding of and respect for the Word of God.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• **If you have been part of NAPC (or another church that emphasizes Christ-centered, Biblical preaching), and part of a church that did NOT emphasize it, did you notice the difference? What were the main differences?**

We want participants to think about the churches they have attended, but not in the way people normally do. Instead of going through what they liked or disliked about the sermons, we want them to consider whether the sermons were Christ-centered and Biblical in approach.

ROUNDTABLE

Let’s begin by considering a passage from Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church. Corinth was a troubled church that Paul planted in a cosmopolitan city filled with all kinds of temptations. The advice he has for them is very instructive for our modern day churches as well.

/// READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-6 OUT LOUD.

• **Why do you think Paul chose to remind the Corinthians of the Gospel?**

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the Gospel because, in short, we ALL need to be constantly reminded of the Gospel. Corinth needed to be corrected regarding their sinful behaviors, encouraged to live faithfully, and reminded of the foundation of their lives.

The need to be reminded (regularly) of the Gospel was not unique to the Corinthians! Each letter of Paul begins with him re-explaining the Gospel to Christians who have already believed, and then goes on to the implications of belief—how we are to behave in light of the Gospel. We continue to preach the Gospel weekly at NAPC because we all need to be reminded. Our identity, our sense of worth, the meaning of our lives, our calling in the world—all of these flow from the content of the Gospel.

- List below several verbs Paul uses in verses 1 and 2. Do your best to define what each of them means in their context. (Hint: there are 5) 📌

Received = accepted, welcomed.

Stand = to continue firmly or well-established in a particular state.

Being saved = salvation from sin and death. Note the tense of this verb. In the Greek, it is passive, meaning the saving is happening to the person (God is doing it, not the individual).

Hold fast = continue to believe and act in accordance with your faith; to believe and practice.

Believed in vain = to believe with no discernible purpose or outcome, with no result, and to no avail.

- What is the content of the Gospel that Paul summarizes in verses 3 and 4? 📌

LEADER NOTE — Given the importance of your participants knowing the Gospel, please have your group recite the 4 points below together. Practice makes perfect!

The content is that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised from the dead. Throughout the New Testament, the meaning of the event of Christ's death and resurrection is developed.

The content of the Gospel can be summarized in 4 points:

Good News (God is good and created us in His image to know and obey Him);

Bad News (we are sinners who rebel against God);

Great News (Jesus died and was resurrected to redeem us); and

Our Response (we are commanded to repent and believe and walk in joyful obedience to Christ; or we reject the Gospel).

- What source predicted and explained this Gospel before it happened, and why is this important?

Paul mentions twice in these verses that this was all "according to the Scriptures," which means that Christ's coming and his death and resurrection to save us was all predicted in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is primarily about God's work to rescue his people through the coming Messiah.

Consider the following passages:

- Genesis 3:15 is the first time we see a reference to the offspring of Eve (Jesus) crushing the head of the serpent (Satan).
- Isaiah 53 is one of the clearest prophecies about Jesus's coming and his role.
- All of the ceremonial laws and sacrificial laws in the first five books of the Bible (called the Pentateuch) point to Jesus and were fulfilled in Jesus so that we no longer have to keep them.

- What in the text makes it clear that Paul is doing something different than developing a myth or telling a story? 📌

He references the fact that there were eyewitnesses, most still alive at the time, who saw and interacted with the risen Christ. This is very different than a myth. It is an historical claim that is either true or false.

LEADER NOTE — This prior question is an opportunity to point out that Christianity rests on something that either did or didn't happen, not on our feelings. Our feelings are part of our response to the historical fact. Many people do not think about "religion" this way.

- How does the weekly reminder of the Gospel in Sunday worship help you in your relationship with God? How does it help you in your life outside of church? 📌

Answers will vary, but please try to push your participants toward practical answers. For example, when I feel low because things aren't going my way, the Gospel reminds me that my value is found in Jesus and his redeeming work alone.

/// READ 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5 OUT LOUD.

Paul also wrote this personal letter to his protégé, Timothy, who was trained by Paul to take over his ministry. This is very likely his final letter, written from prison as he awaited execution. Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy contains some of the most important and poignant personal exhortations we have in all of Paul's writings.

- Why do you think Paul begins this chapter by reminding Timothy that Jesus is the One who will "judge the living and the dead?"

Paul does this to help Timothy to remain steadfast. If he can remember that he is not there to win the approval of other people and simply be faithful to Jesus, he will have the strength to honor him instead of worrying about pleasing other people.

• **The command Timothy receives is to “preach the word.” The Greek for “word” is *logos*, which has very rich and evocative meanings. It can be defined as word, speech, organizing principle, and of course it personifies Jesus Christ himself. Look up the following passages, each of which provide further context for the meaning of *logos*, and then discuss them briefly:**

- Genesis 1:1-3 (the entire chapter actually conveys importance of speech)
- Exodus 20:1-19
- Ezekiel 37:1-6
- John 1:1-5, 14
- Romans 10:17

Have a different person look up each passage and, after discussion, summarize them all via the Leader Note below.

LEADER NOTE — The above question and texts are meant to emphasize that the Word of God gives life to all of us, and that it is the foundation of everything we do at church—our preaching and teaching, our outreach, and our mission.

• **How does this kind of “preaching the word,” the *logos*, differ from sharing an opinion or one viewpoint among many?** 🦋

The Word of God preached is not an opinion, it is founded on God’s very words to us—his message and his truth. That doesn’t mean the preacher doesn’t err, but it means that the content of the Word itself is sure and true.

• **What does it mean to be ready “in season and out of season”? Can you give an example of each in your life when you were able to teach about Jesus in some way?** 🦋

“In season” — when we are ready; when we are prepared to discuss the Gospel, perhaps with our children or at church.

Week 3

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH:

PART I: BIBLICAL PREACHING

“Out of season” — when we are not expecting to talk about Jesus (on a plane, with a neighbor, etc.).

• **Define these words: reprove, rebuke, exhort. Then, discuss how they relate to one another.**

Reprove = to state that someone has done wrong.

Rebuke = strong disapproval of someone based on their sinful actions.

Exhort = console, encourage (the Greek word here is actually a name for the Holy Spirit).

• **As you read the instructions given to Timothy, especially in verses 2-5, describe an overall picture of what our posture should be as we preach and teach the Word, both as a church, and individually, in our lives and families?** 🦋

The overall picture is one of boldness balanced with humility. We should not waver on the truth of the message, even as we present the message in a personally humble way. We are compassionate towards people, and that compassion is precisely what leads us to share the message of the Gospel with people who desperately need to hear.

• **How do you prepare to worship and hear the Word of God on Sundays? If it is truly this important, does your preparation reflect this?** 🦋

Answers may vary, but this question sets up the It’s Go Time options below.

TAKEAWAY

Without Christ-centered, Biblical preaching, the church fails to be the church. Proper preaching begins with the Word and proclaims what it says, not our opinions on topics nor what we might wish it said. This takes discipline (both to preach it and to receive it), but the benefits are numerous—God’s Word will not return void or empty. (Isaiah 55:11)

“The preacher must aim to stand under Scripture, not over it, and to allow it, so to speak, to talk through him, delivering what is not so much his message as its.”

- J.I. Packer

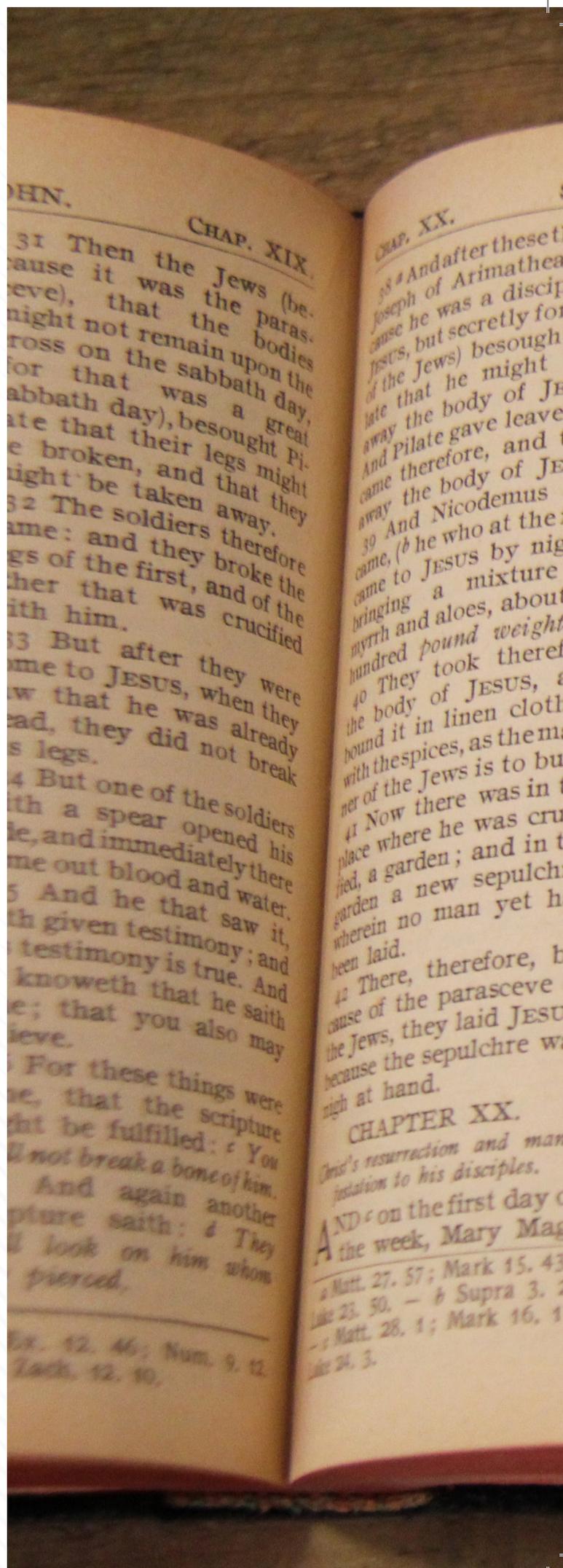
IT'S GO TIME

Richard Baxter, an English pastor of the 1600's, wrote about the role of the listener as the sermon is preached:

“Make it your work with diligence to apply the Word as you are hearing it ... Cast not all upon the minister, as those that will go no further than they are carried as by force ... You have work to do as well as the preacher ... you must open your mouths and digest [the Word], for another cannot digest it for you ... therefore be all the while at work, and abhor an idle heart in hearing, as well as an idle minister.”

Often, we seriously neglect the importance of preparing to worship and hear the Word of God in church on Sunday. This week, change your Saturday evening habits in these ways:

- **SHARE** — Decide with members of your small group to meet at church earlier than normal, sharing the effort to prepare for worship well.
- **READ** — Go through 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 again and remind yourself of the Gospel in preparation for hearing and applying it on Sunday.
- **PRAY** — Ask God to prepare you to hear from him, and that you would be sensitive and open to his Word.
- **CHANGE** — Decide what clothes you'll wear and which service you will attend. Go to bed early so you won't be tired in worship. Get up early and spend time in prayer. Get to church early, bring your Bible and pen, and be ready right when the service begins.



Week 3

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH:

PART I: BIBLICAL PREACHING

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dalen cometh early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre; and she saw the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

2 She ran, therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom JESUS loved, and saith to them: They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

3 Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre.

4 And they both ran together, and that other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

5 And when he stooped down, he saw the linen clothes lying; but yet he went not in.

6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and saw the linen clothes lying,

7 And the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but apart, wrapped up into one place.

8 Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre; and he saw, and believed.

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH?

Part II: Sacraments

Week 4

/// BIG IDEAS

The Sacraments of the church are special practices instituted by Jesus himself. Administering them properly obeys Jesus and presents the Gospel to the world.

/// GOALS

Participants will examine how they think about and approach the Sacraments, determining whether either should change to align with the Bible.

LET'S GET STARTED

The second “birthmark,” the *Sacraments*, are two special practices of the church: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (also called Communion). These were originally instituted by Jesus, but both have a connection to the Old Testament traditions as well.

The word “*sacrament*” refers to something sacred and mysterious, which helps explain why they are often confusing to Christians. Churches themselves tend to ascribe them either far too much weight (believing God’s grace comes only through the Sacraments) or far too little weight (believing the Sacraments are not special, but just a memorial). The Biblical perspective on the Sacraments is different than both these extremes. Sacraments are “means of grace”—they are special methods by which our God confirms his gift of grace to us and grows our faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is important that we understand the what and the why of the Sacraments in order to avoid their becoming solely rote, ritualistic practices that lose the grace-giving and life-transforming power that Jesus intended for them to have.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

LEADER NOTE — There are two Focus Your Mind activities this week, one for each Sacrament. Please have each participant answer at least one of the two.

- **When you participate in the Lord’s Supper in church, what goes through your mind while you do it? Is it different at NAPC than in your prior church(es)?**
- **Share your religious background related to Baptism (i.e. Infants or believers only, method used, etc.) and its level of importance to you.**

These questions should get participants to think about their starting point in a discussion on the Sacraments. We will later reference back to this as a way to see if this study changed their thinking.

ROUNDTABLE

Last week, we looked at Paul’s letter to the troubled church in Corinth—a church sitting within a city filled with commerce and on the leading edge of Greek society. This society had many pagan (i.e. “religious”) traditions mixed within its culture, and those practices inevitably found their way into the church, even to the Lord’s table. Let’s look at how Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to change their practice of and motivation for the Lord’s Supper.

/// READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-32 OUT LOUD.

- **From where (or whom) did Paul receive his knowledge and understanding of the Lord’s Supper? Why does this matter and what does it mean for us today?** 🗨️

In the beginning of the passage, Paul says he received it “from the Lord.” This means the institution of the Lord’s Supper comes directly from Jesus—either directly to Paul when Christ appeared to him or

through other Apostles, such as Peter. For us, this means that we share in Communion because our Lord commanded and calls us to do so. This makes it something special and different than many other good practices of the church. We take the bread and the cup because Jesus gives it to us.

• **This is the passage Pastor David most often quotes and paraphrases when we take Communion at NAPC, specifically verses 23-26. Do you notice anything new in reading those verses that you haven't in the past?**

Answers here may vary, but it may be interesting to note at least three things:

1. Jesus did this on the night he was betrayed, drawing a direct link between the symbols of the bread and the cup and his death on the cross;
2. Jesus first gave thanks for it, such that even as he prepared to die he thanked the Father for his gifts; and
3. We do this to proclaim the Lord's death while we wait for his return, because this age is not the end but Jesus is coming back.

/// READ MATTHEW 26:19, 26-28 OUT LOUD.

The Old Testament "feast" of Passover was a remembrance and celebration of God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12 & 13). All the Israelites were instructed to kill and consume a spotless lamb, spreading its blood on the doorposts of their houses. That night, God killed every firstborn child in all of Egypt, except for those who had taken shelter under the blood of the lamb. The Lord "passed over" those houses and spared the firstborn of each family.

• **Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the celebration of Passover. What are the similarities between these two "feasts" in terms of their significance and the people present?** 🗝️

Jesus meets with his disciples for the Old Testament feast of Passover, and he institutes the Lord's Supper at the end of that meal. There are a number of important parallels between the two:

1. Both are religious "feasts" to observe/remember a major God-ordained event.
2. Both focus on atoning (sacrificial) death—the Passover lambs and the perfect Lamb of God (Jesus).
3. Both are commanded by God.
4. Both are observed by God's covenant people only—first the nation of Israel, and now Jesus's disciples.

5. Both contain a "sign" and a "seal" of the covenant of God, which you should read about together below.

Each of the Sacraments contains the "sign" and the "seal" of God's promise to his people.

Every observance of the Passover and every lamb whose blood was spilled for sin was a *sign* that pointed to the final, perfect Lamb of God whose blood was spilled on the cross. In the ancient world, the owner of property would mark it by affixing his *seal* to it. In that way, the Passover was a *seal* of God's ownership of the Israelites—a mark that they belonged to him (see Exodus 13:1-2). The Lord's Supper is a *seal* that similarly marks us as belonging to God because it is only for Christians.

• **In verses 27-32, Paul speaks of not taking Communion "in an unworthy manner," that we "examine" ourselves first, and that if we fail to do so we are "drinking judgment on" ourselves. He even says some have died from doing so! Based on what we've already discussed, what might Paul mean by all this?**

Paul is reiterating that Communion is for believers in Jesus alone. Non-Christians should not be part of it (unlike the preaching of the Word, which is for all). But also, Paul warns that because Communion is a sign of the sacrifice made for the forgiveness of our sins, when we are harboring sin for which we have not repented and are not fighting, we should not take Communion. Instead, we should confess it and turn from that sin to prepare ourselves for the Sacrament. The sacrifice of Christ was of infinite significance, and we should treat its "sign" with respect.

• **Many people find limiting the Lord's Supper to believers alone to be too restrictive. Instead of looking at it that way, how does it actually present an opportunity for outreach to unbelievers?** 🗝️

Perhaps no time other than the Lord's Supper offers a better opportunity to present the Gospel. Ingesting the physical elements gives a tangible picture of the intangible grace offered in Jesus dying for the sins of all those who would take him by faith.

• **Churches differ as to how the body and blood of Jesus are involved in Communion. Jesus says "This is my body which is for you" in verse 24. What do Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believe about the bread and the cup? How does this differ from what Protestants believe?** 🗝️

Catholics take Jesus's words literally and believe in what is called *transubstantiation*—when the priest says his incantation over the elements, they actually become the physical body and blood of Jesus.

Some Protestants believe that Jesus is not present for the Lord's Supper in any way different than he otherwise is during worship. Protestants of the Reformed tradition (such as NAPC), however, believe that Jesus is spiritually present (not physically), but in a special way where God's intangible grace is communicated to his people through the (otherwise ordinary) tangible elements.

• **Discuss the implications this should have for how we think about and how we practice the Lord's Supper.** 🔑

There are many implications. Because the elements are not the literal body and blood of Jesus, we do not worship them—doing so would be idolatry because they are not God. And yet, because Jesus is spiritually present, we receive God's grace in a special way through the Sacrament that is different from normal worship or simple remembrance. This is also the reason we take Communion regularly, but not every week. It is commanded and necessary for spiritual nourishment, but not required for salvation nor his actual body and blood.

/// READ MATTHEW 28:18-20 OUT LOUD.

In what is known as the Great Commission, Jesus gives the church its mission: to make disciples of all nations. He includes within that the important Sacrament of Baptism. While baptisms were being done by others (including John the Baptist) prior to Christ's death and resurrection, it took on new meaning and was a command for the early church. Let's look at the Great Commission together and then examine what the Bible says about the practice of Baptism for us today.

• **Based on the passage, in which is Jesus speaking, why do we have the Sacrament of Baptism?**

Jesus commanded it in the Great Commission. He would not have included it in the church's mission had it not been important. Secondarily, Baptism is administered regularly in the New Testament, so it was a regular practice of the early church that we should also follow. Consider Acts 2, 8-11, 16, 18, 19, 22, and 1 Corinthians 1.

Week 4

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH: PART II: SACRAMENTS

• **This passage also provides guidance for how we baptize. What does it say about that?** 🔑

It says we are to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are not baptized into God generally or for our own sake, but in the name and to the glory of the one Triune God, who is forever three persons.

• **Like the Lord's Supper, Baptism also has a connection to an Old Testament practice: *circumcision*. I know, seems weird ... Now you'll do an exercise together to see the connection.** 🔑

LEADER NOTE — Divide the group into thirds (if possible) and assign one of the following passages to each group: Genesis 17:7-12, Acts 2:38-39 and Colossians 2:11-12. Have each group put the main point of their passage into their own words. Then have each group share their learning with the whole group. Putting it all together, ask them what they see as the connection between circumcision and Baptism.

The overall theme in their answers from this exercise should be the following: Circumcision was the personal mark of God that the people of God (Abraham and his offspring for all generations) use to mark their children. It shows God calls us, drawing us to him before we ever even think of him. Believers in Jesus are the New Testament version of the children of Abraham. The mark they receive is no longer a bloody sign pointing to death and pain (because Jesus has already died and risen), but a sign showing the washing away of sins (cleansed by Christ).

• **Paedobaptism is the practice of baptizing the children of believing parents, while *believer baptism* is the practice of baptizing someone who has already professed their faith in Christ. In thinking about the prior passages, which concept of Baptism do they support? (Extra Credit: Check out Acts 10:47-48, 16:15, 30-34, 18:8, and 1 Corinthians 1:16, 7:14.)**

The right answer is both. The link of the mark from Old Testament circumcision to New Testament Baptism is consistent, showing why believers in Jesus would baptize their children and raise them in the church. But at the same time, when people who have not already been baptized come to faith in Christ the promise is for them, too, just as Jesus commands in our passage for today and as the promise is for “all who are far off.” This is why at NAPC we baptize both types.

LEADER NOTE — People who did not grow up in paedobaptist traditions may struggle with this ideal, thinking that only new believers were baptized in the New Testament. Encourage them to read the Extra Credit passages, which show entire households being baptized. This is what we would expect to see in the continuation of the Old Testament practice of marking the children who belong to the Lord.

Like the Lord’s Supper, Baptism has both “*sign*” and “*seal*” components. Every circumcision among the Israelites pointed to the new *sign* of the washing away of sins pictured through Baptism. And, through Baptism, God marks his ownership of his people with a *seal* as he pledges current and future blessings to his faithful followers. This is in part why Baptism is not a private event, but a public proclamation made in front of the body of believers—the church.

• **When we baptize at NAPC (and in the EPC denomination), the congregation makes a commitment as well. What is your role toward newly baptized persons as a member of NAPC, and why is that important?** 📌

The congregation commits to support the newly baptized person as they grow in the faith, teaching them and guiding them to spiritual maturity. Think about what you’re really pledging when you say “We will.” You are agreeing to play a part in the spiritual development of this newly baptized person. God has given his church not just to make converts, but to baptize disciples. You are pledging to disciple this person in some way—a big responsibility.

• **Our church primarily baptizes by sprinkling. Is there a particular mode of Baptism (sprinkling, pouring or immersion) that you prefer? Explain.**

Answers will vary by the person. As a follow up question, you could ask this: *What is the Baptism mode of choice in the Bible? The answer is there really isn’t one.*

LEADER NOTE — While the word “baptizo” in the Greek means to dip or plunge, it is also used to explain ceremonial washings where plunging would be impossible (i.e. Mark 7:4—baptizo for a table). Many New Testament baptisms take place in areas where water would have been scarce, at a time in history when water was not readily available. We believe, for these reasons, that water is to be used but that the mode is not crucial. Some churches in the EPC use multiple modes of Baptism as authorized by the Book of Worship 3-2(B).

• **Think about Baptism, no matter the mode or whether it is for an infant or a believer. In any case, how does it provide a picture of and an opportunity to share the Gospel?** 📌

Like the Lord’s Supper, Baptism draws a distinction between those who are inside and those who are outside of the Body of Christ. This distinction, combined with the symbol of being washed clean and going from death to life, makes for a great opportunity to show what the Gospel actually does for a person. Also, consider that Baptism is usually attended by family and friends who may be non-Christians—affording a chance to witness for Christ.

TAKEAWAY

The Sacraments are far more than odd, ritualistic practices that we “just do” because we’re in church. They are special practices instituted by Jesus that function as both a sign of what God has done for us and a seal that marks our ownership by him. We should approach the Sacraments with reverence (because of what they represent) and also with joy (because Jesus is spiritually present in a special way).

““ Wherever we find the Word of God surely preached and heard, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a church of God.”

- John Calvin

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Discuss either of the Sacraments with another person this week (someone not part of your small group), and explain how it represents the Gospel.
- **READ** — Go through all the extra passages listed throughout the study this week. Consider how they inform your view of the Sacraments.
- **PRAY** — Thank God for the gift of his Sacraments, and ask him to overwhelm you with his spiritual presence the next time you take Communion.
- **CHANGE** — Think back to your answers to the Focus Your Mind section. Having now been through this study, in what ways do your beliefs about Communion or Baptism need to change?

Week 4

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH: PART II: SACRAMENTS



WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH?

Part III: Church Discipline

Week 5

/// BIG IDEAS

The church must practice two types of Biblical discipline: formative and corrective, which together form the basis of discipleship.

/// GOALS

Even though it is completely countercultural, participants will understand that it is Biblical and necessary to their spiritual growth to submit themselves to the discipline of the church.

LET'S GET STARTED

The past two weeks, we looked at two “birthmarks” of the church: Christ-centered, Biblical preaching and the Sacraments. This week we turn our attention to the final (and often most misunderstood) “birthmark” of the church: church discipline.

The word “discipline” raises pictures in our head that range from slightly uncomfortable to unduly cruel. Most of us do not jump at the chance to be disciplined for something, and many of us even try to avoid having to render discipline to another person. Discipline in the church is quite different than what lives in our minds, but it is absolutely necessary for our spiritual growth.

In this study we will examine the two types of church discipline. The first is *formative discipline*. Formative discipline is the process of bringing people to maturity in Christ through instruction and teaching. The second is *corrective discipline*. This type of discipline is used to correct a church member who is practicing unrepentant sin. We will see that rendering either type of discipline but abandoning the other fails to satisfy the purposes of the church.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• Share with the group a time when you received discipline in any context. Was it a positive or negative experience?

Hopefully the examples shared helped everyone learn something that was for their benefit.

ROUNDTABLE

Like the word discipleship, the word discipline comes from the same Latin word *discipulus*, which means to teach and instruct. So, although the word discipline may have a scary connotation, discipline is for the purpose of training us and is, therefore, ultimately for our good. Because we are sinners on a journey toward holiness, it is something we certainly need.

/// READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2 OUT LOUD.

• Paul is communicating to his protégé, Timothy. In light of that and what he says, which type of discipline is represented here? 🔑

This is formative discipline because it involves one Christian teaching another Christian the ways of the Lord. What God has shown us in the Bible and what we have learned from others, we need to teach such things to others.

• In what ways do we practice formative discipline at NAPC? 🔑

We practice and provide formative discipline in a number of ways. These include, Biblical preaching, EQUIP classes, small groups, membership class, HS and MS ministries, 1 on 1 discipleship and more.

• Consider the answers shared in the prior question. Which of these avenues of formative discipline have taught you the most?

Answers will vary, but the goal is to get the participants to consider how NAPC's formative discipline has shaped their lives.

In the passage, we can see four spiritual generations represented: (1) Paul, who teaches (2) Timothy, who should teach (3) faithful people, who will teach (4) others. Formative discipline involves the growth of a Christian for the sake of (in part) God using that growth to grow other Christians, and so on.

• **Time for a formative discipline exercise where you're the teacher. Turn to the person next to you and share one fact or statement you've learned that has helped in your growth as a Christian. How and where did you learn that?** 🗝️

This question is designed for participants to encourage and teach one another, not several years down the road but right now.

LEADER NOTE — As the leader, come ready to share your experiences. We want to encourage participants to try different options for formative discipline (discipleship), which they have not yet done. This shows them that they can begin to teach what they have been taught.

• **NAPC stresses the 4 disciplines expected of membership—called the “4 S's.” Does anyone remember them?** 🗝️

Show Up, Serve, Sacrificially Give, and Sanctification.

• **Have you been well disciplined to do the 4 S's? Which ones can you do better?**

The point here is not to embarrass people, but to have them open themselves up to challenge while celebrating what they're already doing well.

/// READ 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-5 OUT LOUD.

We will now switch our focus to the concept of corrective discipline. This form of discipline may be more difficult for many of us to discuss because it involves recognizing our sinfulness and submitting to the authority of the church.

• **Who is Paul speaking (writing) to in these verses?** 🗝️

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. He is not going after non-Christians to impose some standard on them—he is talking to believers who are mired in sin.

• **What sin issue does Paul address and what corrective discipline does he say should be rendered?**

A man is sleeping with his father's wife, apparently his stepmother. Paul says the son needs to be removed from the church.

• **Why is the church in Corinth told to do this? (Hint: see “so that” in verse 5)** 🗝️

He is to be delivered to Satan (which means removing him from the church) for the purposes of saving and sanctifying him. It is to make him understand the severity of his sin so that he will repent and return to the Lord.

LEADER NOTE — Really press your group to understand the prior question. We want the participants to see that the purpose behind removing the offender from the church—the family of God—is so he will repent and rejoin the family of God.

• **Think back to prior weeks when we saw the church was the Body of Christ and the branches of the Vine. How do these metaphors help us understand why Paul would instruct them to remove this man from the church family?**

To allow this unrepentant behavior to continue within the church would be to imply that such behavior can be inextricably connected to Jesus himself. That sends the wrong message to the rest of the congregation as well as to those outside the church. It is not a true witness to who Jesus is.

Carrying out corrective discipline can be very difficult. It requires humility coupled with consistency and careful, pastoral explanation. Because of that, many churches simply just avoid it.

• **Is it more caring and loving to exercise corrective discipline when appropriate or to simply turn a blind eye? Why?** 🗝️

While quite difficult to do and do well, it is infinitely more loving to exercise corrective discipline.

This is because the goal of corrective discipline is repentance, perhaps salvation, and then sanctification. Biblical love is wanting the best for someone, and that means caring for their soul enough to push through the awkwardness and difficulty.

/// READ MATTHEW 18:15-17 OUT LOUD.

• **Do you see yourself as having the ability to confront someone about sin in their life? Why is this so difficult for so many of us? (Extra credit: Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-12)**

On the one hand, it is difficult or uncomfortable because this confrontation feels like judgment, and we are told all the time not to judge others. Another reason for reluctance to confront is thinking that we cannot confront because we also are sinners, just in other ways.

LEADER NOTE —Help your participants see the scope of the judgment and confrontation we are to render. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-12, Paul instructs the church believers in the church about sin, not nonbelievers outside the church.

• **What would happen if we avoided confronting a brother or sister in sin because of the fact that we are all sinners?**

If the fact that we are all sinners prevented us from confronting one another when in sin, none of us would ever grow in holiness.

• **Put the process described here for confronting sin in your own words.**

First, confront the person yourself about the sin. If that fails, take one or two others with you. If that fails, inform the church (probably meaning leadership, not the whole congregation). If that still doesn't work, then remove the person from the church. Notice this doesn't involve gossip because we go to the person first.

• **Paul says the final step is to remove the person from the church, but he says to do this by treating the person as a "Gentile and a tax collector." What does that mean?**

Week 5

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH:

PART III: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

It means we still spend time with them, loving them and calling them to repentance, but that we do not let them act as part of the church. This means we would not let them teach or lead and we would withhold the Sacraments from them. Think about how much time Jesus spent with Gentiles and tax collectors.

• **Think back to the lesson on membership from Week 2. How does the church have the authority to remove someone, or to even exercise corrective discipline in any capacity? 🗝️**

Each person submits to the authority of church leadership when he/she commits as a member of the church. This is why formal membership is so important. The members make up the local church, and the local church provides both forms of discipline to its members (formative and corrective).

• **We have talked about the benefit to the individual member to experience corrective discipline. How does the rest of the congregation benefit as well?**

The congregation sees the seriousness of sin, is warned against it and called to holiness. Also, the congregation is charged to love the person enough by calling them to repentance.

TAKEAWAY

Discipline is difficult and uncomfortable. Yet, the truth is, both formative and corrective discipline are necessary for our Christian growth—repentance and sanctification. When believers commit to membership, they are to submit themselves to the discipline of the church, and the church owes it to them to render that discipline whenever appropriate in care for their souls.

“ Church discipline is neither popular nor a common practice in the church ... Its absence indicates that people have lost sight of the love and tenderness that is always to be behind it and of its necessity if those who err are to be restored.”

- Alistair Begg

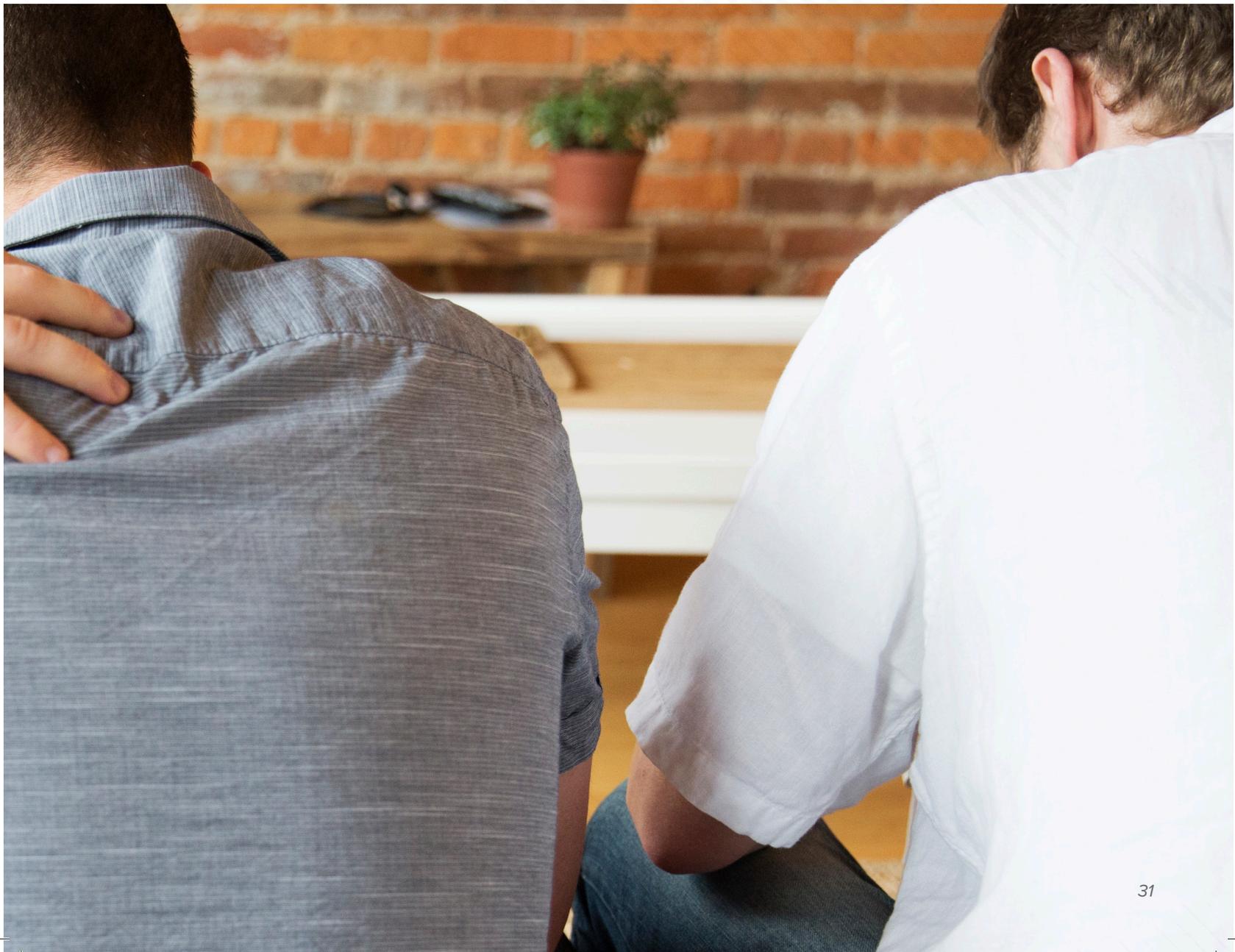


Week 5

WHAT MAKES IT A CHURCH: PART III: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Approach someone in the church you are close with and ask them to hold you accountable related to a struggle of sin in your life. If you don't have someone like this, approach your small group leader and have them help you find someone.
- **READ** — Go through all of 1 Corinthians 5, remembering that Paul was talking to a church. Consider how this should inform NAPC's practice of church discipline.
- **PRAY** — Ask God to reveal sin in your heart (whether un-Biblical beliefs or sinful habits) that if it continues should be subject to church discipline. Now repent and ask him for forgiveness.
- **CHANGE** — What attitude do you hold (toward either type of discipline) that needs to change after this study? Take a step to do that, such as coming to EQUIP or establishing a 1:1 discipleship relationship.



WHO LEADS THE CHURCH?

Week 6

WHO LEADS THE CHURCH?

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

/// BIG IDEAS

Elders and deacons are the officers of the church with the specific roles of servant leadership and compassionate care.

/// GOALS

Participants will understand the leadership offices (elders and deacons) and what they do. We want them to see why this is Biblical and how it dovetails with what the staff of the church does.

LET'S GET STARTED

Quality leadership is important. Without clear and effective leadership—whether in an organization, a group or a family—there will be no unity of purpose and direction. In God’s church, which is both an organization and a family, Jesus is the ultimate leader. We have already seen that Christ is the head and the church is his body (see Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18).

Underneath Christ, local churches take different approaches to their earthly leadership. Some are “top-down,” where national or global-level leaders set the direction of the church that filters all the way down to each local congregation. Others are fully “bottom-up,” where the members of the congregation vote on every decision for the local church (i.e. What brand of coffee for fellowship time?)

As a Presbyterian church, NAPC takes a different position than both of those. From the Greek word “*presbyteros*”—meaning “elder led”—Presbyterian churches have two primary offices of earthly leaders for Christ’s church, both of which are elected by the members: *elders* and *deacons*. Elders are responsible for direction and oversight. Together with the head Pastor (called the “Teaching Elder” in our EPC denomination), the currently serving elders exercise

spiritual leadership, governance and discipline. Deacons provide prayer and care for the church by reaching out to newcomers and those who are in need, both within and outside the congregation. Our deacons pray for our people and serve behind the scenes.

This week, we will see what the Bible teaches about each church officer role and learn how we as members and attendees can support these leaders.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• Give an example of a great leader from the world (business, political or otherwise). What made he or she a great leader in your mind?

This could be someone they have worked with or for, a mentor, or possibly someone famous. The point is for them to explore the characteristics that they define as “great” in terms of leadership.

ROUNDTABLE

• What would you think of as the qualities of a great church leader? 🗨️

Answers will likely focus on words like faithful, spiritual, humble, loving, forgiving and the like.

/// READ TITUS 1:5-9 AND 1 TIMOTHY 3:4-5 OUT LOUD.

• What are the Biblical qualities for elders (also called overseers)? List as many as you can. 🗨️

Here is a brief list: above reproach, faithful in marriage or else chaste in singleness, manages their household well, not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy or a lover of money, hospitable, lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined, holding to the Word, able to give

instruction, able to rebuke, gentle, not quarrelsome, well thought of by outsiders, and not a recent convert.

● **Compare these qualities with those you listed in the Focus Your Mind section. Is there overlap?**

Answers will vary, but try to point out both differences and similarities.

Paul is the writer of both of these letters, each written to one of his disciples (Titus and Timothy). As these younger ministers take up the task of leading their churches, Paul stresses, with almost the same words to each, the characteristics that should be present in any person who may be elevated to leadership.

● **Does anyone know what two types of elders we have at NACP? What are the differences between the two?** 🔑

We have one Teaching Elder and several Ruling Elders. Our Teaching Elder is Pastor David. He leads the people in worship, administers the Sacraments and oversees the education, nurture and mission of the church. The Teaching Elder is called to the church and serves for as long as the congregation and the Teaching Elder agrees. Ruling Elders watch over the spiritual welfare of the congregation, and are elected by the members to 3 year terms.

● **What is the name for the leadership group that includes the current Ruling Elders together with the Teaching Elder?**

This body is called the Session, and NACP's consists of the 12 current Ruling Elders and our one Teaching Elder.

LEADER NOTE — For the remainder of the study, your participants will need to have the NACP “Role of an Elder” and “Role of a Deacon” sheets. Please have copies of them ready, and distribute them at this time.

Take a few moments and review the “Role of an Elder” document. This is presented to every potential elder at NACP, along with the Titus and 1 Timothy passages, and they are asked to carefully consider the responsibility which they're assuming.

● **Looking at the Role of an Elder document, specifically the “Elder Responsibilities” and “Requirements of an Elder” sections, do you see anything that stands out or surprises you?** 🔑

Answers to this will vary, but the point is to help participants see the breadth and depth of what elders do.

/// READ ACTS 6:1-7 OUT LOUD.

Now we will turn our attention to deacons and their responsibilities. In this passage, we see the creation of the first group of deacons, the need for them and the important purpose they serve.

● **Who was it that identified the need for deacons? Why was there a need?** 🔑

The Apostles, who were the first elders of Christ's church. The Apostles were so busy with teaching, praying and shepherding the flock, they needed others to help with handling the cares of the congregation.

● **What key qualities did they look for in deacons?** 🔑

Good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wise.

LEADER NOTE — Remind your participants that this doesn't mean that deacons (and other members) do not teach and shepherd. It simply is not their primary responsibility, whereas for elders it is.

/// READ 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13 OUT LOUD.

● **What are the Biblical qualities for deacons? Please pull out as many as you can.**

Here is a brief list: dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy, understanding the faith, proven blameless, having godly spouses, faithful in marriage, and managing their children well.

Take a few moments and review the “Role of a Deacon” document. This is presented to every potential deacon at NACP, along with the 1 Timothy passage, and they are asked to carefully consider the responsibility which they're assuming.

● **Looking at the Role of a Deacon document, specifically the “Deacon Responsibilities” and**

“Additional Requirements” sections, do you see anything that stands out or surprises you? 🗝️

Answers to this will vary, but the point is to help participants see the breadth and depth of what deacons do.

• **There is one more leader (non-officer) group at the church. Do you know what it is and what they do?**

The last group of leaders is the Staff. Their role is to execute the vision and plan for the church set out by the Teaching Elder and Ruling Elders. This includes leading ministry areas such as Worship, Connections, Discipleship, Youth/Young Adult Programs, Children’s Ministry and Church Administration.

• **Do you find the idea of elders (including pastors) and deacons intimidating? How so? What can you do to move past this feeling? 🗝️**

Answers will vary, but if anyone is bold enough to admit feeling this way do your best to make them feel heard and understood. Then encourage them to form relationships with elders and deacons as a way to overcome this feeling of intimidation.

• **Can you name some of the current elders and deacons?**

All are listed on the website under “Leadership.”

• **Provide examples of your relationships and/or interactions with elders and deacons at NAPC. Describe your interactions. 🗝️**

Answers will vary.

LEADER NOTE —As the leader, come prepared with your own answers to the prior two questions. How open about this you are will help your participants do the same.

Being a leader of any kind in the church (especially an officer) is a difficult and demanding task. Every time a person takes a step closer to Jesus, he or she often finds that the attacks of Satan increase. This is because Satan cannot take away our salvation (that was made final by Jesus’s cross and resurrection), and so he will try instead to make us ineffective in ministry and to take away our joy.

Week 6

WHO LEADS THE CHURCH?

• **In what ways can you as a member/attender at NAPC support the leaders? 🗝️**

Pray for and with them, get to know them, love them by helping and caring for them so as to make it easier for them to carryout their responsibilities well. Also, as a member, you can take your responsibility to vote for your elected leaders very seriously. Finally, as you grow in your faith, you can help lead (i.e. consider teaching in JAM!, leading a small group, etc.).

/// READ HEBREWS 13:17 OUT LOUD.

There is another thing that can be done to support your church leaders. Consider what it means to submit to the authority of the leadership of the church. Think back to prior lessons on membership and discipline (Weeks 2 and 5) as you discuss the next few questions.

• **What does it mean to “submit to church leadership?” What are the challenges and advantages of doing so? 🗝️**

We can and should submit in humility and with trust. We can choose to believe that NAPC leaders have our best interests in mind (because they love the church). We can trust in the gifts of our leaders and the actions they take, knowing that ultimately our great God is in complete control of everything and he has called them. This is difficult when our nature is to fight for autonomy and overcome authority.

/// READ 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-3 OUT LOUD.

• **Why does it say we are to pray for our leaders (of all types)? How can you do that at NAPC?**

It helps our leaders to have peaceful lives, which are godly and dignified. You can be part of this by praying for our leaders during personal prayer, family prayer time, or by turning in a prayer card about that.

/// READ 1 JOHN 4:1 OUT LOUD.

There is one more thing we need to do for our leaders, and it is something we might not immediately guess.

• **What does this verse call us to do in relation to church leaders? Why is that important?** 📌

We should always examine what is being taught in the church to see if it aligns with Scripture. This is because God and his Word are the ultimate authority, above all earthly leaders. This is important so that we know what we are hearing is from God and is true.

TAKEAWAY

The leaders of the church—elders, deacons and staff—are crucial to setting and carrying out the vision of the church in line with the mission that God has set for us. As members and attenders, we must support the important work of our leaders by getting to know them, praying for them, submitting to them and checking what they teach against Scripture.

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Reach out to a leader at NAPC this week and encourage them, thanking them for what they do for the church. Let them know how their work has affected you.
- **READ** — Review the Elder and Deacon Role documents and consider serving as an officer at NAPC, examining which office best fits your skills.
- **PRAY** — Ask God to bless our leaders and to reveal to you how you can practically support them in their work and properly submit to their authority.
- **CHANGE** — Think about what you should do differently now after learning about the leaders of our church. Whether it relates to prayer, support, submission or otherwise, go do it.



Week 6

WHO LEADS THE CHURCH?

“ A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation.”

- A.W. Tozer



WHO DOES THE WORK OF THE CHURCH?

Week 7

/// BIG IDEAS

The work of the Biblical church is not done primarily by paid clergy, or even by elders or deacons. Instead, the leaders of the church are to equip all members to do the work of ministry.

/// GOALS

Participants will see they have a crucial part to play in the work of ministry. Leaders prepare and train the congregation (all of whom are “saints”) so that ALL who are part of the church engage in the work of the church.

LET’S GET STARTED

Way back in our first week together, we discussed that the work of the church is evangelism and discipleship. Then, in last week’s study, we talked about the many responsibilities of our church leaders, elders and deacons, as well as the staff. With all that the leaders of NAPC do, we might find ourselves wondering: Is there anything left for the members of the congregation to do? This is an important question, and the answer is yes.

Because we are the Body of Christ, every member of the church is called to play a role and do his/her part, whether that member is a leader or not. Every member should be deeply engaged in the work of the local church, so that there is not a “leaders-produce-while-members-consume” model.

This week, we will look together at how the Bible instructs us to carry out the important work of the church—evangelism and discipleship—through the lives of each and every member.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

• **What first comes to mind when you hear the word “saint?”**

Participants will likely mention the saints of the Catholic church, someone who they hold in high moral esteem, or perhaps a particular notable person like Mother Teresa. The point here is to get a baseline of where our minds go when we read the Bible.

LEADER NOTE — The prior question is an effort at getting participants to uncover that the word “saint” carries connotations of levels of spirituality that exceed that of the “normal” Christian. This is not true, but please do not correct your participants yet.

ROUNDTABLE

Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus is one of his most masterful works, covering topics from salvation to spiritual warfare and everything in between. In chapter 4, he unpacks how the church should function so that every member of the Body of Christ is involved. What he says may challenge our preconceived notions about the work of the church.

/// READ EPHESIANS 4:7-16 OUT LOUD.

• **In verse 11, Paul lists the titles of many leaders given by God to the church. What are they and what do they mean?** 📖

Apostles — Individual leaders of the church, chosen by Christ himself, and who witnessed the risen Christ. They were called by God to lay the foundation of the church, to declare and write God’s Word, and to perform miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prophets — Leaders called out of their ordinary lives (for a time or a special moment) to receive a message from the Lord to convey to God’s people. They speak practical wisdom or call people to repentance when God lays it on their heart, but everything said must align with the revealed Word of God we already have been given.

Evangelists — Preachers of the Gospel who proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus alone to unbelievers.

Shepherds and Teachers — Teachers of the Bible and those who train and shepherd (lead) others. At NAPC, these are Pastors and Elders.

• **Which one of those leadership categories is no longer around? Why do you think that is the case?**

Apostles are no longer because they were directly commissioned by the physically risen Christ. That does not happen today.

• **We have already listed what each of these leadership categories does in the church. But more generally, what do they all do?**

As stated in verse 12, they “equip the saints for the work of ministry.”

• **Consider this overarching purpose of leaders: to equip. Do you personally have other expectations for our pastors and teachers? Should you?**

Answers may vary, but the point here is for participants to examine what other expectations they place on our pastors and teachers.

LEADER NOTE — Be prepared to lead your group in the prior question by being honest about your own unwritten expectations for pastors and teachers. For example, maybe you think they should speak eloquently, have great leadership skills or something else.

The group of people who the leaders are supposed to equip are referred to as “saints.” Let’s see how the Bible describes who a *saint* truly is by looking at these verses together.

/// READ ACTS 9:13, PSALM 34:9 AND ROMANS 8:27 OUT LOUD.

• **Based on those verses above and considering its usage in Ephesians 4, describe the Biblical meaning of the term “saint” in your own words.**

The widespread practice of Catholicism is to venerate saints—considering it a special, holier status granted to certain people. In the Bible, however, the term “saint” refers to ANY believer. All who have trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are *saints*.

• **If every follower of Jesus is a saint, then according to verse 12 that means that every Christian should be doing the “work of ministry.” Is this how you think about the responsibility of every person in the church?**

Answers will vary, but for many people this idea may be surprising or overwhelming. That shows how deep the consumerist mindset affects the way we think about the church.

• **What does it mean to be “equipped?”**

In this case, being equipped is to be made fit or complete—ready for the designated task. This is what church leaders are supposed to do for the congregation: equip them.

Think about how this all ties together. When we understand that every Christian is supposed to be doing ministry—evangelism and discipleship—then it makes sense that every convert is called to become a member of a local church. Without the commitment of membership, which involves undergoing formative and corrective discipline, no person would be equipped to do such important work.

• **Read through verses 13-16 again. Pull out the words that describe a saint who has been equipped.**

An equipped saint is spiritually mature—no longer spiritually childish, not oscillating back and forth by whatever we hear, not falling for human cunning, craftiness or deceit. Also, equipped saints are to speak the truth in love, working as integral parts of the Body of Christ.

• **Look at how this applies to the church in those same verses. How does it describe an equipped church of saints?**

The church itself is the equipped Body of Christ, where all its different parts are joined together and which allow it to function as one unified whole. This is not unity in the sense of everyone being the same (quite the opposite as we are all complementary parts of one body), but unity of purpose in that we all are working for the same goal of the Gospel being proclaimed. Such a church is outwardly focused and is built upon love.

• **If you've ever been part of any team where people have different styles, approaches and gifts, then you know things get messy! Should we expect a different result in the church? Why or why not?** 🗝️

The answer is yes and no. Christians are people (sinners) trying to engage in the divine calling given to us by Christ. That will be messy! But on the other hand, as we are equipped and grow in spiritual maturity, we will begin to better speak the truth in love to one another and to function as a spiritual family. This will be increasingly beautiful.

LEADER NOTE — The next few questions will focus on stepping out in faith even when we feel ill-equipped. Be prepared to lead by sharing some of your experiences with this, such as leading a small group.

/// READ ROMANS 8:26-28 OUT LOUD.

Often times in our Christian life we find ourselves thrust into situations for which we don't feel prepared. The interesting balance of walking with Jesus is realizing two things are true at the same time: We must seek to become more equipped so that we are better prepared for the work of ministry, but we also must not wait to do ministry until we feel "fully" prepared. If we did that, we would always have a reason to wait. Remember, God trains the called; he does not call the trained.

• **Have you ever been asked to do something at church and not felt equipped for the task? How did you deal with that situation?** 🗝️

No right answer here, but hopefully someone will share how they overcame that initial feeling and stepped up to do it.

• **What does God really expect of us in order to be "ready" to do ministry?**

Week 7

WHO DOES THE WORK OF THE CHURCH?

Ministry is for all Christians, so the reality is that being a follower of Jesus is all that's required. Think of the man born blind in John 9 who Jesus healed. When Jesus miraculously healed him, he knew almost nothing, but what he knew became a powerful message to share Christ with those around him. Our lives are no different as we were spiritually blind but now we see.

• **Of the different options for equipping at NAPC, which have been beneficial to you?** 🗝️

Answers will vary. The point is for the group to see that many discipleship and service ministries help equip us and grow us. Often it is the doing that provides the training for future doing, and so on.

• **Go around the room right now and share with each other the gifts for ministry you see in one another.**

Sharing in this way may be a big step for your participants. Acknowledge that and thank them for it.

TAKEAWAY

Members of the church have relationships with people and are part of circles of influence that some church leaders may never reach. For that reason, ministry was never meant to be just for the paid clergy or the "super spiritual." God has brilliantly designed his church so that leaders equip all members to do the work of ministry—evangelism and discipleship. Glory be to God!

“ All believers are equally important to the healthy functioning of the church. In the final analysis, Christian ministry is 'every-member ministry.' ”

- R.C. Sproul

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Look back at the final question and think about the people in your group. Who now, after the lesson, comes to your mind? Call them this week or send them a note to encourage them by explaining the gifts for ministry you see in them.
- **READ** — Read the entire book of Ephesians this week. With all that Paul says about the church, meditate on how crucial it is that all the saints engage in ministry.
- **PRAY** — Ask God to place on your heart someone who you should minister to today. Reach out to that person and then pray for them.
- **CHANGE** — Now that you know that all Christians are saints and that all saints are to engage in the work of ministry, choose a new ministry avenue and step into it. Even if it feels scary, trust God by taking this step of faith.





WHAT IF
THERE
WERE NO
CHURCH?

Week 8

/// BIG IDEAS

The church exists to witness to God's glory in the world. It does not exist for itself. This witness to those outside the church should be most evident in our love for one another inside the church.

/// GOALS

Participants will see why we've done this study: The purpose of the church is different than every other organization or movement on earth. It is not a self-serving institution, but an outward focused one.

LET'S GET STARTED

Lots of organizations do lots of good. In just a few minutes searching the internet, you can find plenty of nonprofits doing really great things all over the world. With all this good being done, is the church even necessary? Is there anything unique about the church? Would the world be all that different if there never even was a church? These are fair and important questions.

Over these past seven weeks, we have read, studied, discussed and grown in our understanding of this thing we call the "church." We have learned it is not a building, but is the Body of Christ. We have seen that this requires some level of formal organization (membership and leadership), but it also requires that every member get their hands dirty and do their part (all engaged in the work of ministry). We have discovered what makes a church, well, a church: Biblical preaching, proper administration of the Sacraments, and effective church discipline.

This week, we are going to close out this study by examining the uniqueness of the church—that crucial element that would be missing from this world if the church never existed. The church's unique mission is

witness, which is driven by its unique characteristic of Biblical love. To witness is to give evidence of something by testifying to the truth of it. To love (as Jesus teaches in the Bible) is a commitment to care for and serve others (inside and outside the church). When the Body of Christ loves well it becomes a witness to the truth of the Gospel, and that shines the light of Jesus into a world in darkness.

FOCUS YOUR MIND

Here's an activity for everyone. Draw a large heart somewhere on your paper (bonus points for Valentine-level quality). Inside it, write down all the people, things or whatever that you love!

LEADER NOTE — After giving them a minute (yes, set a timer), have your participants circle the one thing on their paper they love the most. Then go around the room and have each participant share that one thing.

ROUNDTABLE

Christ's earthly ministry ended with his ascension back to the Father prior to the sending of the Holy Spirit. This was a special moment when the whole, fledgling church was gathered together, receiving their mission from the risen Savior. He tells them what to do and how to do it.

/// READ ACTS 1:6-9 OUT LOUD.

• **The disciples wanted to know when Jesus would restore the "kingdom of God" and deliver Israel from being ruled by the Romans. What is the difference between the kingdom they desired and the one Jesus was putting in place?** 🔑

They wanted Jesus to be king of an earthly kingdom, like David ruling on Israel's throne. Jesus, however, was creating the church—a spiritual kingdom that would carry out his mission on earth.

● **Have someone read Luke 17:20-21. Where does Jesus say the Kingdom of God is to be found?**

It is in the midst of us (within us, in some translations).

● **Connect the dots. Does it make sense to learn that the kingdom of God is within God's people based on what we now know of the church? Why?**

Yes, because the church is the Body of Christ. If we are the collective body of our Savior, then his kingdom (where he reigns) is in our very hearts and lives.

● **What mission does Jesus give his new church members before he ascends to the Father? 🗝**

They are to be his witnesses—proclaiming him as Savior and Lord.

● **List some adjectives describing how you think the disciples may have felt at this moment. Are there times in your ministry and service at NAPC when you feel the same way? 🗝**

Scared, inept, alone, disorganized, excited, confused, and many other feelings. Examples of times participants felt similarly may include participating in Bible study, reading or speaking in front of people at church, or maybe having a conversation with someone about Jesus.

LEADER NOTE — As the leader, be sure to share your own feelings from the last question. Your people need you to be vulnerable in order to be vulnerable themselves.

● **Given how the disciples probably felt at this moment, how were they qualified and empowered to do this?**

The short answer is that, on their own, they are not qualified at all. But, as Jesus says, they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. It is the Holy Spirit who will carry out this mission through them.

● **Look at where he tells them to be witnesses. What is the progression Jesus sets forth? 🗝**

They are told to be witnesses everywhere, but there is a progression to it. They start in Jerusalem, which is the city where they already are. Then, they are to go to Judea and Samaria, which are the nearby regions. And finally, to the ends of the earth.

● **What might it look like for NAPC to follow this model in our context?**

We should start in our existing community, a place we know well and in which we are already (hopefully) engaged. Then we should expand to nearby areas where we can have an impact—think Linden and the communities that surround us. And also, we should be engaged in global missions, such as Gulu, Ometepec or others.

We have considered where we are to be witnesses, so now let's turn our attention to how we do it. We know that it is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, but it also must be carried out in Biblical love.

/// READ JOHN 13:34-35 OUT LOUD.

● **In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples to love one another. There is a word we use for when God tells us to do something—we call it a *commandment*. Does the idea of being commanded to love sound strange to you? Why or why not? 🗝**

Most people will probably say yes. Because we naturally think of love as an emotion—something we “fall into” or just cannot help but feel—the idea of being commanded doesn't seem to square with that.

● **Look back at your heart exercise from Focus Your Mind. What is the reason you listed those things—because you are commanded to love them or because you just feel love for them?**

Probably the latter, not the former, for most of us.

This does not mean it is bad or wrong to feel closeness, romance or connection to someone. It simply means that is not the Biblical love that Jesus is commanding of us here. What he calls us to is something quite different when he commands that we love one another.

LEADER NOTE —Please make sure your participants really understand the prior point. Jesus is calling us to a different type of love for one another.

• **What standard does he give for how they should love one another?** 🗝️

He commands them to love one another just as he loved us. Christ's love for us is the standard by which we should love others.

• **In your own words, describe how Jesus loved us.** 🗝️

The sentiment should be something like this: Jesus loved by serving the lowest of the low. He did this by miracles, care and compassion. But most of all, Jesus loved us so much that he died for us when we were his enemies. His love for us was not based in what we could do for him, but in perfectly meeting our need that only he could meet—rescuing us from our sin.

• **How is this standard for love different from our typical conception of love, like from the Focus Your Mind section?**

Our typical idea of love is a feeling that grows out of liking the other person. Love becomes a two way street, so to speak. But the standard Jesus lays down is to love not only those who might love us back, but precisely those who may not—just as he loved us when we didn't love him.

• **Practically speaking, what might it look like to love one another as Jesus loved us?** 🗝️

It would look like loving and caring for people who would never be able to return the favor without any expectation of ever being “repaid.” It would involve responding to people in love, apart from whether we even like them and especially in cases where they do not like us.

• **Jesus says it is by loving one another that others will know we are his disciples. How do you think this could be the case?**

If we love one another and we do it just as Jesus loved us, people will see we are like Jesus. The more we are like Jesus—the more we love as he loved us—the more it becomes clear that we are his disciples (his followers).

Week 8

WHAT IF THERE WERE NO CHURCH?

Now, let's really try to put these two concepts together—*witness* and *love*—by putting these two passages together. Jesus says his disciples are witnesses to the truth of the Gospel and they are those who love one another. This means loving one another as Jesus loved us actually serves as a witness to the truth of the Gospel.

• **Discuss why it's not possible to be effective witnesses for Jesus if we fail to love one another. Also, discuss how loving one another well can serve as an effective witness for the Gospel.** 🗝️

The two are inseparable, going hand-in-hand. If we fail to love one another, the world will not recognize that we are his disciples, which will hinder if not destroy our witness. If, however, we love one another like Jesus loved us, it becomes a powerful witness of the Gospel. The world will see a community of people who love and care for each other despite any differences they may have. This will be attractive to those who don't know Christ.

LEADER NOTE — Reiterate the prior point for your participants if necessary. Love and witness go together. One magnifies the other, and one isn't fully present without the other.

• **Can you think of an example in our church where you have seen love for one another function as a witness for the Gospel? Share it with the group.**

Answers will vary, but this is an opportunity for participants to give an example of what we want to see happening at our church.

/// READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6 OUT LOUD.

To close out our study, we will talk about the Biblical concept of *unity*, thinking about how this relates to witness and love for one another. When we love one another well, we can present a unified witness for Jesus.

• **Based on the other passages we just read, what is the “calling to which we’ve been called” as the church?** 🔑

To be witnesses of the Gospel who love one another as Jesus loved us.

• **Paul tells us to be eager to maintain unity. What does he say are the things that unite us?**

There is one Body, one Spirit, one future, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism and one God.

• **How might loving one another tie into maintaining this unity?** 🔑

The more we strive to love one another, the more unified we will be. Loving one another as Jesus loved us, even when we don’t want to, even when we have little in common, even when it’s not easy and so on, will keep us unified in the right way and on the right things. We will avoid focusing on the differences between us that do not matter.

• **Think back over all our references to the Body of Christ. In light of that, does Paul mean unity in the sense of sameness or uniformity? How do you know?** 🔑

He does not. The Body of Christ, by definition, should be composed of very different people (different backgrounds, personalities, life situations, struggles, families, ethnicities, incomes, skills, gifts, etc.), but where each does their part for God’s glory.

• **What must he mean by unity instead?**

He means a unified witness evidenced by love for one another. We are not putting forth different messages and we are not driven by selfish motives.

TAKEAWAY

In many ways, the very idea of the church is counterintuitive. God the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, puts a bunch of people together from all different walks of life (even from different corners of the globe). He does it for the purpose of creating a unified witness to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, this witness is best evidenced in the way the members of the church love one another.



This is why, if we truly love Jesus, we will naturally love the church. The church should be in the middle of the heart we drew. The church is the Body of Christ. We cannot have the head without the body. Loving Jesus means loving, caring for, struggling alongside, witnessing with and growing together as the church. May the church never stray from its mission to witness to the love of our blessed Savior and Lord!

IT'S GO TIME

- **SHARE** — Share love and witness with someone else at NAPC by ministering alongside them in a context not natural to you. This could mean serving in Linden, joining the next session of EQUIP, or serving as accountability partners together.
- **READ** — Read 1 Corinthians 13 as you meditate on the study this week. Make a list of all the ways love should permeate who we are as a church.
- **PRAY** — Ask God to bring to mind someone at the church who you don't naturally love (whether personality differences or otherwise). Then, commit to loving them with one specific act this week.

Week 8

WHAT IF THERE WERE NO CHURCH?

- **CHANGE** — For many of us, the idea of being a witness seems daunting and difficult to do in a loving way. Write down the names of two people you love who need Jesus. Overcome your hesitation and share the Gospel with them.

“ People won't know you are a disciple of Jesus if you make no profession of faith in Jesus. But if you declare yourself openly to be a disciple of Jesus ... then your love for others will be decisive in showing that you are real.”

- John Piper



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