

ADVANCING THE GOSPEL

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The church exists to proclaim the name of Christ (Matt. 16:13-16; 2 Cor. 5:20).
2. The church exists to build up the body of Christ (Matt. 16:17-20; Eph. 4:11-12).
3. The church exists to grow in the faith of Christ (Eph. 4:13-16).

Background Passages: Matthew 16; 2 Corinthians 5; Ephesians 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The church exists to build up the body of Christ and to grow in the faith as it proclaims the gospel to the world.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The church's mission centers on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. The church recognizes Jesus as both Savior and Lord, professing the gospel to the world so that all others might trust in Jesus for salvation and live in subjection to Christ, growing as one body in one faith.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus is Lord and Savior, we seek to live in joyful obedience to the mission He has given us, professing our love for and faith in Him to the nations.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is something that you have built that you were very proud of?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: When we build something, we want it to come together so that it looks good to the eye, it functions properly, and others can enjoy it as well. God is building His church, and He is building up a people who love one another, forgive one another, and use their gifts so that we can know Christ and make Him known to the ends of the earth.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- The church exists to confess and proclaim Christ. He has revealed Himself to us so that we might know Him and love Him. As we grow in our knowledge of Him, we will grow together into complete maturity and not be shaken or tossed around by troubling trends in the world. People need help seeing who Christ is, and this is the role of the church. By using our spiritual gifts, we glorify Christ together and appeal to unbelievers so that they might turn from sin and believe in Jesus for their salvation.



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POINT 1

THE CHURCH EXISTS TO PROCLAIM THE NAME OF CHRIST (MATT. 16:13-16; 2 COR. 5:20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 16:13-16** from his or her Bible.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

DISCUSS: Review **PACK ITEM 7: WHO DO THEY SAY I AM?**, comparing who others compared Jesus to, understanding the similarities, and ask, “Who would you have said Jesus was?”

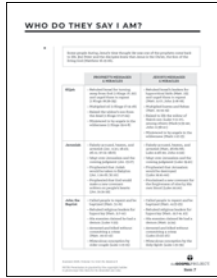
EXPLAIN: Use **verses 13-16** to help explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 46):

The confusion that people have about Jesus’s identity means that it is the church’s mission to proclaim to the world who He truly is.

- As Jesus and His disciples reached the northern community of Caesarea Philippi, a predominantly Gentile town, Jesus asked His disciples who people say the “Son of Man” is. The title “Son of Man” was Jesus’s humble way of acknowledging His kinship with humanity.
- The disciples’ answers show how divided people were about Jesus’s identity. Some people thought He was John the Baptist, raised from the dead. Still others saw Him as Elijah, the one who would come before the Messiah. And still others thought the prophet Jeremiah, or one of the Old Testament prophets. In each case, the names were associated with an expectation that the end was near and the Messiah had arrived.
- Jesus pressed His disciples by asking them who they believed He is. Peter answered boldly with “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In this response, Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who came to save His people.

ASK: (DDG p. 46)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **What opinions do people have of Jesus today?** (some will say Jesus is the Savior of the world, a good man, or a prophet; some might consider Him evil or mentally unstable; allow for the full spectrum of opinions that might be possible in our culture)



CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Area northeast of the Sea of Galilee, in the plain of the lower Jordan Valley, that was lush and abundant in water. After Herod the Great’s death, he passed it to his son Philip who named the town after Caesar and himself. It was an area where many Gentiles lived.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“It must not be your way of being saved, but God’s way. Your way is to try and live better. . . . God’s way of saving you is that you trust Jesus Christ, and then He will make you live better, old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new when Jesus Christ has you in His hands. Have done with yourself, and let Jesus Christ do the whole work, and He will save you. That is God’s way of salvation.”¹

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **2 Corinthians 5:20** from his or her Bible.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

TEACH: Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine. Use **verse 20** to support the key doctrine (DDG p. 46):

Key Doctrine #85: Mission of the Church: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

- The message of the church is a simple one: it is a plea, suggesting that coming to faith in Christ is not something that is done by coercion or manipulative tactics. Rather, it is an honest call to people to give an assessment of their lives.
- The role of the Christian is that as a representative. The work of Christ is communicated to people through the Word of Christ that He gives His followers. Christ's followers do not make up or modify the gospel. As ambassadors, we are to faithfully represent what God has said.
- By being representatives of Christ, it is not up to humans to save people. Rather, God is making His appeal through the gospel message. By proclaiming Christ, people are faced with the reality of their relationship with God.
- The gospel message is for sinners to be reconciled to God. This suggests that there is a conflict between God and humanity, and that this conflict can be addressed and reconciled only through Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 46)

What challenges do you face that prevent you from speaking about Christ more? (some might suggest that they do not have enough knowledge to respond to people's questions about Christ; they may need boldness for overcoming fear; they might not know how to start a conversation with someone about Christ)

TRANSITION: As the church proclaims Christ as Savior and Lord, people will come to faith and be built in to the family of God.

POINT 2

THE CHURCH EXISTS TO BUILD UP THE BODY OF CHRIST (MATT. 16:17-20; EPH. 4:11-12).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 16:17-20** from his or her Bible.

17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” **20** Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

EXPLAIN: In **verses 17-20**, explain the following idea (DDG p. 46):

God builds the everlasting church as people profess faith in Christ, giving His disciples the authority to proclaim entrance into heaven through forgiveness of sins through Christ alone.

- Simon, the son of Jonah, was blessed because he recognized and confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Son of the living God. This God-given insight was not merely for his benefit, but so that many would follow after God. Peter, whose name means “rock,” confessed that Jesus is Lord, and as a result, Christ will build His church upon that rock of confession. Just as the apostles are described as the foundation in Ephesians 2:20, the way to be built in to this structure is to confess that Jesus is Lord.
- Through Peter’s preaching, the gates of heaven are open for those who also profess Jesus as the Messiah, Son of the living God. And as an assurance, Jesus states that His church will never die.
- And as Peter, and all disciples, continue preaching, in relation to Peter getting the keys to heaven, they bind and loose people, declaring the terms (as given by God) by which people are forgiven, namely a true confession in Jesus Christ.
- Matthew 18:18 and John 20:22b-23 helps to clarify. In the former passage, Jesus spoke of going to your brother if he has wronged you. If he doesn’t ask for forgiveness or listens among witnesses, you can release him from fellowship in the church as someone unrepentant. In the latter passage, after Jesus’s resurrection, He proclaimed to the disciples that they have the authority to forgive or not forgive. Both verses are about forgiveness, in terms of binding and loosing. “Peter is only an instrument God uses, because God alone can grant forgiveness of sin and entrance to the kingdom. He is given authority to declare the terms under which God forgives or retains sins.”²

- Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone who He is because He has not yet been revealed in glory as the Resurrected One. After the resurrection, the disciples would be free to proclaim who Jesus is as there would be no confusion about His identity.

ASK: (DDG p. 46)

How do you view your responsibility to proclaim Christ, thus giving people an opportunity to enter heaven and why? (with urgency; with insecurity; with fear; answers will vary; give people time to share their personal feelings and thoughts)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 4:11-12** from his or her Bible.

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

LIST: List the roles mentioned in **verses 11-12**, then ask in groups of 3-4, “How are these types of people helpful in building up the church?”

HIGHLIGHT: Use verses 11-12 to highlight the following (DDG p. 47):

God builds up His church through giving them gifts and equipping them for the work of the ministry.

- God has given believers gifts so that the church would be built up. Paul listed several groups of people that are given to the church as gifts.
- Apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; 3:5) had the foundational role as those who received and passed on the Word of God. Evangelists are those who have been entrusted with the gospel to go out and preach good news to those who did not believe. Evangelists build up the body by bringing people who are outside of the faith into the family of God. Pastors and teachers are linked together, caring for the flock and teaching them in the message of the gospel, applying it in both the care of souls and the use of godly living.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 47)

Why is it important that we all build up the church together? (we all have different gifts; we’re all called to help one another and build up one another; we can’t do things alone; we can hold one another accountable)

TRANSITION: We are all the church to be built up into Christ, and that happens as people grow in faith in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

POINT 3

THE CHURCH EXISTS TO GROW IN THE FAITH OF CHRIST (EPH. 4:13-16).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 4:13-16** from his or her Bible.

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **14** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **15** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

CHALLENGE: In groups of 3-4, ask, “What today would be ‘every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes?’” (“Christian” teaching not based on studied Scripture; new age ideas; overly self-focused ideas and teaching; teaching that doesn’t place Christ first)

HIGHLIGHT: Use **verses 13-14** to highlight the following idea (DDG p. 47):

The church is not to be stagnant but growing, that the world would not toss us around by deceit.

- As a continuation of verse 11-12, we are reminded that everyone should use spiritual gifts not for personal fulfillment but for the entire church to be built up to reach unity in the faith. We are to use our gifts until we reach maturity, implying that we never stop using our gifts.
- The goal for every church and every disciple is unity in faith and knowledge of Christ. We cannot be stunted in our growth but need to plan and program all things in light of growth and maturity.
- The growth that unites us is “knowledge of the Son of God.” As we know more of Christ, we are all brought together in harmony and unity. This knowledge will cause us to grow to our full maturity, and that is nothing less than Christ’s fullness.
- If we don’t grow in maturity, the consequences are dire: tossed in the waves and blown in the wind. We will be shaken and fall if we fail to focus on growth in the knowledge of Jesus.
- The world is full of temptations that can easily steer the church and Christ’s disciples off course. And some have already crept in the church. They will be cunning, clever, and deceitful—so subtle, it will be hard to spot. Thus, we must be alert and aware.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 47)

How can believers grow in maturity? (corporate and individual prayer; corporate and individual passion for God's Word; corporate and individual focus on evangelism and discipleship; corporate and individual focus on missions; corporate and individual focus on reliance on the Holy Spirit)

ILLUSTRATE: Beforehand, find a plant that has filled its pot. It has grown into its pot, filling it up by its sheer size and root ball. Point out how the plant has reached its limit unless it is transplanted. Compare how believers grow into Christ. Illustrate how the pot, the soil, the water, and the light all function together to cause the plant to grow. When all the parts work together, they are just like spiritual gifts used for the common good.

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 15-16**, explain the following (DDG p. 47):

For the church to grow, we must speak truth in love, growing together with everyone doing his or her part.

- Growth happens as believers speak the truth in love. This may mean sharing the gospel to others. This may mean correcting someone teaching doctrine incorrectly. It could also mean encouraging others and praying with Scripture in mind. Or it could mean rebuking someone and helping them not stray from the ways of the Lord. This is why speaking the truth in love is so important. It encompasses so much of how we grow in the knowledge of God's Son.
- Because Christ "is the head," (v. 15) from Him, everything fits together to support one another to grow. That is us—the church—with the body and ligaments working together toward growth.
- All this is based "in love" (v. 16). Without love, we are nothing. Without love, our growth is nothing. Without love, we won't be able to truly grow in the way Christ intended.

ASK: (DDG p. 47)

When trying to speak truth in love, do you veer more towards truth or love, and why? (answers may vary; help your group understand that we need a balanced approach that is rooted in both truth and love)

TRANSITION: As the church proclaims Christ, we will grow together by building one another up and by knowing more of Christ who has loved us and given Himself for us. Together we can proclaim Christ to the world and fulfill our mission as believers until we all grow together in maturity.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: The church's mission centers on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. The church recognizes Jesus as both Savior and Lord, professing the gospel to the world so that all others might trust in Jesus for salvation and live in subjection to Christ, growing as one body in one faith. Because Jesus is Lord and Savior, we seek to live in joyful obedience to the mission He has given us, professing our love for and faith in Him to the nations.

HEAD:

The local church exists to make Christ known to the world and helps believers to grow together in maturity by their use of their spiritual gifts. These gifts are not intended to find their goal in our personal satisfaction but in the building up of the body in the unity of the faith.

What gifts have you received, and how might those gifts bless the church?

HEART:

We are to speak the truth in love to one another. Part of our mission to the world is to display the love of Christ by being sacrificial for one another. Knowing that we are a family that ought to show the love of Christ means that we should pray for our hearts to earnestly love our fellow Christians. Because He has loved us and given Himself for our sins, we should pray that His love for others would fill our hearts.

What has Christ done for you that made you love Him?

HANDS:

The church exists to bring the message of the good news to the ends of the earth. Our love for Christ compels us to go out and represent Him through the gospel and the actions of faithfulness. By representing Christ as our Savior and Lord, the world will have opportunities to respond to Christ in faith.

How can you support the work of global missions and the proclamation of the gospel to unreached peoples?

PRAY: Father, when we were dead in our sins and rebelled against You, You sent Your Son to rescue us. As we grow in knowing Christ, help us encourage one another to love You more and make Christ known by using our spiritual gifts so that the lost may seek and find You. We ask this for the glory of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Do you welcome another person's encouragement as a purposeful safeguard? Are you encouraging the people in your life with diligence? It's our privilege as brothers and sisters to exhort and encourage, build up and bear with, remind and reprove . . . and it's equally our privilege to receive the same."³

—Ruth Chou Simons

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE CHURCH EXISTS TO PROCLAIM THE NAME OF CHRIST (MATT. 16:13-16; 2 COR. 5:20).

+ COMMENTARY

“The focus of the ministry is the gospel of Christ’s death on our behalf. In our day of ‘decisionism’ and age of ‘easy-believism,’ it is essential that we recover our confidence in the power of the cross as the foundation of the Christian ministry and message.”⁴

POINT 3: THE CHURCH EXISTS TO GROW IN THE FAITH OF CHRIST (EPH. 4:13-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“These fundamental principles of genuine spiritual growth are the same for every church in every context. There’s nothing weird or complicated here. The prayerful and careful application of these principles will take time and sacrifice, but this is how God always grows his churches. The three themes clarified here are, simply, unity in ministry for maturity. This is how God gathers people into churches under Christ!”⁵

References

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 310.
2. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 567-568.
3. Ruth Chou Simons, *GraceLaced: Discovering Timeless Truths Through Seasons of the Heart* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017), 164.
4. Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 252.
5. Richard Coekin, *Ephesians for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, *God’s Word for You* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2015), 113.