

GRACE HOME GROUPS - 2026/27

LOVE YOUR CHURCH

CHAPTER
SUMMARIES
& QUESTIONS

TONY
MERIDA

INTRODUCTION — WHAT YOUR CHURCH IS

Every time you walk into your church's gatherings, you can say of the people around you, "All of these people are our family." Some of you may be tempted to add "Unfortunately" — and that, too, illustrates the church. Every church has people who are difficult to love. You may be one of them from time to time. But that is the church: the household of God, "a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). God purchased the church with his own blood. Jesus so identifies with his church that when Paul was persecuting believers, Jesus asked, "Why are you persecuting me?" — to persecute the church is to persecute him.

Too many professing Christians love the idea of the church — they admire Christ, engage with theology, maybe even follow Christian podcasts and speakers — but don't have real fellowship with a local congregation. They exist on the margins. Yet the New Testament knows nothing of disembodied Christianity. Paul doesn't write to lone believers; he writes to churches. This book draws attention to eight key responsibilities of church members — each also a privilege: belonging to a local church, practicing hospitality, valuing corporate worship, caring for one another, serving the body with spiritual gifts, relating well to pastors, bearing individual witness, and impacting communities and the world as a local church. We all benefit by recapturing the New Testament's vision of Christ's church, and we can all learn to love our church as Christ calls us to.

CHAPTER 1 — BELONGING: A GOSPEL-CENTERED FAMILY

God has given us a need for community — and he has given us the place where that need is met: the church. Belonging to a church means investing your life in a gospel-centred community of believers who joyfully serve one another and advance Jesus' mission together. The Bible knows nothing of "lone ranger" Christianity. Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). The metaphors for the church — stones in a temple, members of a family, citizens of a kingdom, members of a body — all speak to membership and belonging. You are not an independent stone; you are fitted into a building. You are not an isolated organ; you are a member of a body. The metaphors resist individualism at every angle.

Four obstacles stand between us and this vision. Sensationalism draws Christians to the dramatic — huge conferences, the latest controversy — rather than the unglamorous work of local church life: caring for the elderly, restoring a wayward member, serving in childcare.

These acts may not be sensational, but they would turn the world upside down if we began to live them out. Mysticism leads people to seek Jesus in private inner experiences, when in fact you encounter him most powerfully not in a desert perch but in a church pew. Idealism — the “wish dream” Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned against in *Life Together* — destroys community: “He who loves his dream of community more than the community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter.” Real life together involves highs and lows, frustration and struggle. And individualism keeps us in isolated lives, where we know many people but go deep with very few. John 2 John 12 says it plainly: “I would rather come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” There are limits to texts and video calls. Embodied presence cannot be substituted.

The church is imperfect but indispensable to faithful Christian discipleship. Consider the picture of a rock concert: thousands of people gathered together, having purchased expensive tickets, sharing an experience in physical presence rather than through a screen. Concerts can't be fully replicated online. Neither can the church. Being present with one another — eating together, studying Scripture together, weeping and rejoicing together — is something God has designed for physical bodies.

Locally, the church is a gift to extend Christ's welcome, to gather corporately for worship, to share life together, and to live on mission. Globally, it is a gift to stand with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Pray for your church regularly — its people, its leaders, and the advancement of its mission.

1. BELONGING Read Ephesians 2 v 18 – 3 v 19

1. What images does Paul use to describe the church in 2 v 18–22? What does he want us to see about the church's identity?
2. Paul's mission is to preach to the Gentiles. What is his ultimate purpose, and the purpose of the church (3 v 1–13)?
3. What does Paul pray for his readers (v 14–19)? Why do you think he includes the phrase "together with all the Lord's holy people"—and how does that change your understanding of his prayer?
4. In your church, what does it look like to commit and belong? How could you encourage one another to do this? What rewards do you hope to reap?
5. What's the danger in not belonging to a specific local congregation?
6. What will you pray for your church, based on this passage?

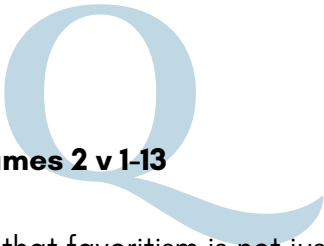
CHAPTER 2 – WELCOMING: GRACE-CENTERED HOSPITALITY

We are tempted to show partiality based on appearance, accent, age, affluence, ancestry, affinity, or achievement. The tendencies are deep and mostly invisible to us — we gravitate toward people who look and think and earn like us, and we call it chemistry or comfort. James exposes this plainly: if you pay attention to the one in fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “Sit down at my feet,” you have become “judges with evil thoughts” (James 2:2-4). God outlines four compelling motivations for not discriminating. First, partiality doesn’t reflect God’s grace — God has chosen many of the poor to become “rich in faith.” Second, it doesn’t reflect God’s kingdom, in which everything is turned upside down and a poor custodian may receive more honour than a big-name pastor on the last day. Third, it violates God’s royal law of loving your neighbour as yourself — Jesus taught that neighbours include foreigners and enemies. Fourth, it fails to reflect God’s mercy toward us: cursed are those who show no mercy, for they will not receive it.

Our proper response to the grace shown us in Christ is the extension of grace to others. Think practically about what this looks like at a Sunday gathering. Someone in your church is there for the very first time — perhaps dragged by a friend, perhaps a bit nervous. Who is going to speak to them?

Who will make sure they don't eat their lunch alone? Author Rebecca McLaughlin offers three rules for gatherings: "An alone person in our gathering is an emergency. Friends can wait. Introduce a newcomer to someone else." Don't attend corporate worship as a consumer watching a show but as a minister eager to welcome and to bless. The posture of a welcoming church is this: to all who are weary and need rest, to all who mourn and long for comfort, to all who sin and need a Savior — this church opens wide her doors in the name of Jesus, the friend of sinners.

Paul's vision of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 is directly relevant here: the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you," and the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you." The seemingly weaker or less honourable parts of the body are indispensable. We are to treat one another accordingly, showing honour to those who often receive less of it. The most important person to welcome in your church may be the one who least resembles you.



2. WELCOMING Read James 2 v 1-13

1. How does James show that favoritism is not just unhelpful but wrong (v 4-7)?
2. Why is it such a serious thing to do (v 8-13)?
3. Why does favoritism dishonor not only other people but God himself? And conversely, why is acting without partiality a reflection of God's own character and actions?
4. What types of favoritism are particularly tempting in your setting? What are you and your church most likely to discriminate on the basis of?
5. In what ways is your church strong at welcoming outsiders? Where could it improve?
6. How can you personally be a part of that? What might need to change about the way you act or speak, both at church gatherings and during the week?

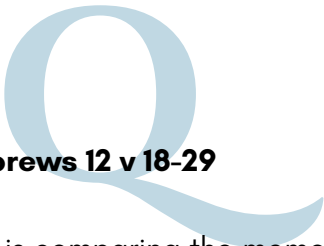
CHAPTER 3 – GATHERING: VALUING THE CORPORATE MEETING

Hebrews instructs us not to neglect meeting together “as is the habit of some” (Hebrews 10:25) — but to assemble regularly, encouraging one another as we see the Day drawing near. Notice that you have a role: not sitting and soaking, but strengthening others with meaningful words, presence, and prayer. Come ready to study the Scriptures, to seek the Lord’s presence, to confess sin and repent, and to welcome those who are guests. Receive the word “with meekness” (James 1:21) — sit under Scripture rather than standing over it as a critic. Come to be personally addressed by God, not to evaluate the pastor’s performance. Think of specific applications for your own life. The sermon is not a performance to be rated; it is a gift to be received. The congregation is not an audience; it is a body of ministers gathered to be equipped and sent.

Paul emphasizes that singing is both vertical and horizontal — “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). Both the variety of song and the condition of the heart matter. Psalms give us a complete emotional vocabulary — lament, praise, confession, joy, bewilderment — which means corporate song should not be limited only to triumphant declarations. We need the full range of human experience before God. If someone walked into your worship service and saw you singing, would they think from your expression and posture that you believe what you’re declaring? Let the answer be yes.

Corporate prayer is itself a form of witness. When the early Christians prayed together in the upper room, they did not merely inform God of a list of requests. They sought his presence, declared his greatness, confessed their helplessness, and waited in expectation. There is something irreplaceable about praying together with believers who share your hope and your struggles — voices united, petitions intertwined. Don't arrive at Sunday worship having never prayed about it in advance, expecting the service to ignite some feeling. Come with fuel already lit.

Make sure the question you bring on Sunday is not "Shall I go?" but "How can I make the most of this gathering?" Sanctify Saturday nights — get rest, pray with your family, consider reading the sermon text around the dinner table. And build joyful Sunday traditions: a particular meal, time with others, an afternoon of rest. Make these times so enjoyable that your children will look back on them with delight. Build holy and happy habits around the day of corporate worship.



3. GATHERING Read Hebrews 12 v 18-29

1. The author of Hebrews is comparing the moment when the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai (v 18-21) to the state of affairs now (v 22-24). What's different and why? How does this serve as a motivation to gather as a church?
2. The description of verses 22-24 is in one sense looking to the future gathering of all God's people in heaven. But it's also describing something of what happens in our gatherings now. Who are we gathering with? How should that impact the way we think about our Sunday meetings?
3. Why is it so urgent to listen to God's voice and to worship him together (v 25-29)?
4. On a Sunday, do you think of yourself as being there to contribute to and build up others in your congregation? How could you do this more?
5. What aspects of church gatherings do you personally find most precious? Why is it so valuable to gather to hear God's word, share the Lord's Supper, sing, and pray together?
6. What could you do to prepare well for Sunday? What "holy and happy habits" could you build, and how could that make a difference to your experience of corporate worship?

CHAPTER 4 – CARING: DISPLAYING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

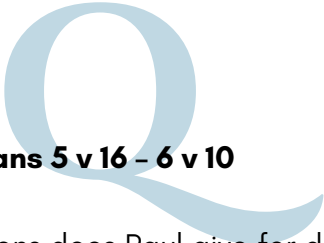
One of the most remarked-upon aspects of the early church was how its members cared for one another. The pagan writer Tertullian recorded non-Christians saying of Christians: “See how they love one another.” This was not primarily a reference to their theology. It was a description of their behaviour — how they treated the sick, visited prisoners, welcomed strangers, and supported widows. If someone spied on your church today, what would they say — “Behold, how they love one another”? Or “Behold, how they gossip”? The “one another” passages in the New Testament are non-negotiable: love one another, honor one another, bear one another’s burdens, encourage one another, confess sins to one another, show hospitality to one another, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. Paul moves directly from the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) into church care (Galatians 6) — Spirit-filled life is about faithful Christians living in joyful devotion to Christ and to one another in ordinary familial care.

Galatians 6 opens with a specific call to restore the fallen “in a spirit of gentleness.” Tim Keller notes that the word translated “restore” was used in Greek for setting a dislocated bone back in place — a healing pain that aims not at condemnation but at restoration. What makes this hard is that we often swing to extremes: we abandon the fallen brother and let him wander, or we confront him harshly, more interested in being right than in helping him heal. Paul charts a third way: firm, gentle, restorative. Paul then turns to burden-bearing: he wisely distinguishes between heavy burdens that require community support and ordinary loads that are each person’s own responsibility.

The single mother with four children has every right to expect care from her church. If you are the burdened believer, make sure someone in your community knows — Christians often don't help simply because they don't know. Biblical community requires both the transparency to express our burdens and the humility to help carry the burdens of others.

The list of “one another” commands is worth pausing over. The New Testament instructs believers to love one another (John 13:34), honour one another (Romans 12:10), accept one another (Romans 15:7), instruct one another (Romans 15:14), bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2), be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32), submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), confess to one another (James 5:16), and pray for one another (James 5:16). These commands aren't soft suggestions. They are a program for community transformation, and they require actual community — people who know each other well enough to honor, bear with, forgive, confess to, and pray for.

Our personal lives directly affect our relational lives; we never really sin in isolation. The books you read, the people you spend time with, the entertainment you choose — these are all acts of sowing. “Do not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (v. 9). Keep loving one another. Keep bearing burdens. Keep resisting bickering. “As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (v. 10).



4. CARING Read Galatians 5 v 16 – 6 v 10

1. In 5 v 16–25, what reasons does Paul give for doing good to one another? What makes it possible to be caring and not selfish?
2. What dangers might we fall into as we seek to care for one another (6 v 1, 3–4, 9)? What ideas do you have on how you can avoid those while not holding back on caring for others?
3. What is our aim and ultimate hope as we do good to one another? How does this help us to persevere?
4. What is the greatest challenge in these verses for you personally?
5. Is your church one in which restoring, burden-bearing, sharing, and doing good take place? Which one is your weak point? What could you do to step up in that area?
6. What steps could you take to educate or train yourself (whether personally or as a congregation) in how to care for others effectively?

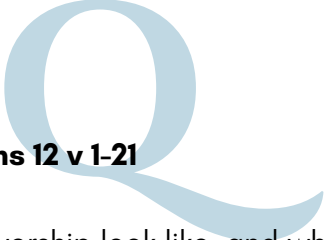
CHAPTER 5 — SERVING: USING THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE GOOD OF THE BODY

As a Christian, you shouldn't think of your church as "the place where I listen to sermons" but as "the place where I serve." Church members are contributors to the ministry of the church, not consumers of it. Three motivations from Scripture can fire up our desire to serve: God's mercy — what he has done for us; the Spirit's gifts — we are empowered and enabled; and the Son's return — our serving is not in vain. When you look hard at God's mercy toward you, offering yourself is the logical, reasonable response: Romans 12 calls believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, wholly consecrated worshipers committed to God in every realm of life, as if placing themselves in the offering plate.

The Spirit distributes gifts for the good of the body. Speaking gifts include teaching and exhorting. Serving gifts include practical help, generous giving, leadership with zeal, and mercy extended to the poor — all offered with cheerfulness rather than a begrudging spirit. God cares about hearts and motives, not merely external behaviors. Note that 1 Corinthians 13 was not written for weddings; it was written to correct spiritual gifts that had become self-promoting rather than church-serving. To discover your gifts, Tim Keller points to two pathways: self-examination (what do you enjoy? what feels fulfilling? what problems do you notice instinctively?) and experience (simply try things). But don't limit service to your specific gifting — someone without the specific gift of mercy is still called to show mercy (Micah 6:8).

Part of the genius of the gifts-and-service model is that it decentralizes ministry. A church doesn't thrive because one gifted pastor does everything well; it thrives when members discover and exercise their gifts for the common good. The person who shows up early to set up chairs, the one who sends a card to a grieving widow, the one who volunteers in the nursery for a decade without recognition — these are the ones whose service holds the body together. Don't wait for someone to ask you. Don't wait until you feel adequate. Begin. Practice. Adjust. Spiritual gifting is often revealed through faithful engagement, not through waiting for a bolt of certainty from heaven.

The return of Christ sharpens all of this. The nearness of the end in 1 Peter 4 produces not fanaticism but basic Christian living: self-controlled prayer, earnest love, gracious hospitality, and faithful exercise of gifts. When you see Christ and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," you will be glad you served — not only in convenient moments, not only in ways likely to be noticed, but in ordinary, faithful, often unseen obedience.



5. SERVING Read Romans 12 v 1-21

1. What does whole-life worship look like, and what motivates it (v 1-2)?
2. How should we see our own identity (v 5)? How does this help us to serve well?
3. Verses 9-21 contain some challenging instructions. Why is doing these things hard? What difference can they make (v 21)?
4. What gifts has God given you? How can you use them with excellence, passion, and humility for the good of your church?
5. What needs do you see in your church? How could you meet them?
6. Is there anything in Paul's instructions that is lacking in your church's life or in your own life? How will you pray in response to this passage?

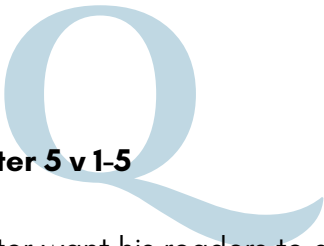
CHAPTER 6 – HONORING: FOLLOWING HUMBLE SHEPHERDS

Scripture is clear-eyed about the reality of bad leadership: Paul tells the Romans to “watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (Romans 16:17). But Scripture is equally clear about faithful leadership and the call to honour it. Most pastoral qualifications are about character, not skills — pastors are called to do their work willingly, to live holy lives, and to be humble servant leaders like Jesus. John Stott modelled this beautifully. When asked what his ambition was, Stott replied simply, “To be more like Jesus.” His long-time secretary marvelled that “he emptied my office wastepaper basket every day for many, many years.” On finding a muddy pair of his colleague’s shoes, Stott cleaned them, explaining: “My dear René, Jesus told us to wash one another’s feet.”

First Peter 5 outlines what we should expect from a pastor under three headings: task, heart, and reward. The task is to shepherd the flock through careful and skillful oversight. Shepherding is a demanding job — it requires knowing the sheep individually, noticing the sick and the wandering, protecting the flock from danger. The heart: pastors should serve willingly and not under compulsion, eagerly and not for shameful gain, as examples and not domineering over those in their charge. The desire for power and control produces toxic church environments; Christian leadership is not lordship but the laying down of one’s life. The reward is not earthly applause but the unfading crown of glory when the Chief Shepherd appears. A plurality of elders is the New Testament norm — because all leaders are sinners, concentrating power in a single person carries real danger.

Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” That final clause is quietly important: when pastors lead with groaning — weighed down by complaints, drained by gossip, demoralized by cynicism — everyone suffers. You benefit directly from a healthy, joyful pastor. You contribute to that health or undermine it.

In concrete terms, members should respect faithful pastors by being attentive to their teaching and refusing to participate in rumors and backbiting. They should love their pastors with warm affection, imitate their faith and way of life, and be a joy to pastor rather than a burden. And above all, they should pray for their pastors. When someone asked C. H. Spurgeon what the secret to his effectiveness was, he said simply, “My people pray for me.”



6. HONORING Read 1 Peter 5 v 1-5

1. What dangers does Peter want his readers to avoid—both elders and other members of the church?
2. What is the purpose of elders and pastors seeking to lead in the way Peter instructs?
3. What is the purpose of church members being “subject to the elders”?
4. In what areas might people find it especially hard to submit to their elders? Have you had experiences of this kind of tension in church? What would humility, respect, and love look like in those situations?
5. In what ways are your elders and pastors a good example to you? How could you follow their example?
6. What might encourage each of your elders and pastors this week? How could you help them keep in mind Peter’s vision for leadership? What will you pray for them?

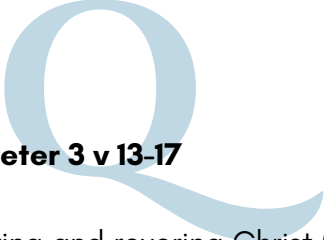
CHAPTER 7 – WITNESSING: DOING GOOD DEEDS AND SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

“If you build it, they will come” is a terrible evangelism strategy. Most unbelievers have no interest in joining you on a Sunday morning. Those who do show up are almost always there because someone loved them enough to bring them. And evangelism isn’t reserved for pastors — it’s the responsibility of all of God’s people. Some believers have memorized presentations and read every book on evangelism and still aren’t engaging non-Christians. That’s because evangelism is first and foremost about the heart, not the method. Consider a young woman who has just gotten engaged — she shows off the ring, she shows pictures, she doesn’t go days without talking about the man she loves. Guilt won’t sustain faithful witness. Beauty will. Hope will. Love will. Awe will.

Three timeless priorities shape faithful witness: practical goodness, Christ-centred reverence, and daily readiness. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission are not in competition — they represent the integrative model of mission: proclaiming good news and doing good deeds together. Peter’s model is live so well that the conversation starts itself — live an attractive life under the lordship of Christ that provokes questions. Peter’s answer to fear is reverence: “In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Two words in that passage are easy to miss: “always” and “anyone.” Faithful witness is for every day, with every person God places in your path.

The word translated “defence” is the Greek apologia — but Peter is thinking about ordinary conversations about our hope, not formal academic debates. Hope in the New Testament is not wishful thinking; it is a settled confidence in future glory that shines especially brightly in seasons of suffering. This hope is so rare that people will ask you about it — particularly when they see you navigate hardship with visible peace and confidence. The woman at the office who watches you walk through a cancer diagnosis without bitterness, the neighbour who sees you grieve without losing your footing, the colleague who observes genuine joy in someone who has every reason to despair — they will ask. Peter assumes they will ask. And when they do, be ready: not with a perfected five-step argument, but with a simple, honest account of where your hope comes from. It is more about adoration than argumentation. You need more than logical answers; you need a heart captivated by Jesus.

Network evangelism is a lifestyle of gospel intentionality within the ordinary rhythms of your existing relationships. Think of your relational web in five categories: familial, geographical, vocational, recreational, and commercial. In each of these spheres, you already have proximity, trust, and shared experiences — the raw materials of gospel conversations. C. S. Lewis kept two lists of names in his prayers — “those for whose conversions I pray and those for whose conversions I give thanks.” Pray for the people in your networks. Invite them into your home, your activities, your life. Serve them with practical kindness. Share the gospel. Remember that everyone is already evangelizing about something — the gospel is too good and too important to keep to ourselves.



7. WITNESSING Read 1 Peter 3 v 13-17

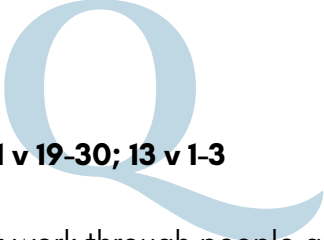
1. Why do you think honoring and revering Christ (v 15) makes it easier to avoid fearing others (v 14)?
2. What results should there be from doing good (v 13, 14, 16)?
3. As we engage with others, why is it important both to articulate a reason for our hope and to speak with gentleness and respect, as verse 15 directs us to?
4. Are you full of hope? What can you do to cultivate this virtue? How would you explain the reason for it?
5. What does it look like to speak with “gentleness and respect”? In what kinds of relationships is doing so particularly easy or particularly challenging? How can you help one another to grow in this area?
6. In what ways are you currently pursuing obedience to the call to make disciples (Matthew 28 v 19) both individually, as a group, and as a whole church? How could you be most effective as witnesses to your particular community?

CHAPTER 8 — SENDING: CONTINUING THE MISSION AND PLANTING HEALTHY CHURCHES

Consider what a grand story you are part of. The unfolding narrative of God gathering a people for himself stretches from Jerusalem through Antioch and Rome and across twenty centuries to your local church. The book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome — a cliffhanger. If you were reading a novel with such an unresolved ending, you might think a chapter was missing. You would be right: the story is still in progress. The church today is living out what we might call Acts 29. The same Spirit who moved in Jerusalem and Antioch and Corinth is moving now, in the churches where you live. The same commission — to make disciples of all nations — has not been revoked. Every generation of the church has been entrusted with the same task: advance the mission, plant healthy churches, send workers into the harvest.

The church at Antioch offers an early and formative model. It was in Antioch that disciples were first called “Christians” — not a name they chose, but one given by unbelieving neighbours who observed that these believers identified so thoroughly with Jesus that they seemed like little Christs. That identity produced both mercy and mission. Mercy ministry meets needs through practical deeds — the Antioch church gave generously to believers elsewhere during a famine, demonstrating that the gospel had genuinely transformed their relationship to money and neighbour. The gospel that unites believers across economic lines — that makes rich and poor genuinely one family — produces generosity as its natural fruit. Your church can reflect this same model through ministry to orphans, widows, refugees, prisoners, the sick, the hungry, and the oppressed.

When it comes to sending, the church at Antioch also set the pattern: while they were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). The church fasted and prayed over them, then sent them off. Missionaries are directed by the Spirit and sent and supported by the church. The sending is as essential as the going. Be a Barnabas — when you see the Lord working through fellow believers, speak words of life-giving encouragement. When you see someone flourish in ministry, say so, tell others, champion their gifting. Get involved in church planting through prayer, giving, support, or going.



8. SENDING Read Acts 11 v 19-30; 13 v 1-3

1. How do we see God at work through people as the Antioch church is established (11 v 19-25)?
2. What different roles do Barnabas and Saul play?
3. What attitude do the Antioch Christians have toward other churches, toward Saul and Barnabas, toward unreached people, and toward God himself? What does this teach you as a local church today?
4. How outward-looking are you as a church? What would be one step you could take to grow in this area together?
5. In your church, what could you do to follow the example of Barnabas? How could you encourage others to do the same?
6. What will you pray for your church, your community, and the world in the light of this passage?

CONCLUSION — A VISION OF YOUR CHURCH

What we sometimes fail to consider is that the church is at the heart of God's plan for the world. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:10 that it is "through the church" that God makes known "the manifold wisdom of God" to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The church is God's demonstration project to the cosmos. When your church gathers together to praise the Redeemer, you are getting a foretaste of coming glory — a partial picture of the vast multitude from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation that will one day stand before the throne. Future reality is breaking into the present in your local church. God has given you your church as the place where you are formed to look more and more like the Savior — reminded in his word, in baptism, and at the Lord's Supper of what he has done for you; where you respond to his love in song, in prayer, and in service; where you find family who share your joys and walk with you through your valleys.

This vision is not utopian. Every local church will disappoint you at some point. Leaders will fail. Members will wound you. Gatherings will sometimes feel flat. The church has never been free of scandal — the New Testament itself is largely a corrective letter to churches in trouble. And yet the church remains Christ's body, his bride, his plan for the world. There is no substitute and no upgrade. Every generation must receive this gift afresh, take it seriously, and invest in it generously.

So pursue faithfulness to Christ and his church. Belong, welcome, gather, care, serve, honour, witness, and send. The Lord of the church loves you with an undying love. So love your church.



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