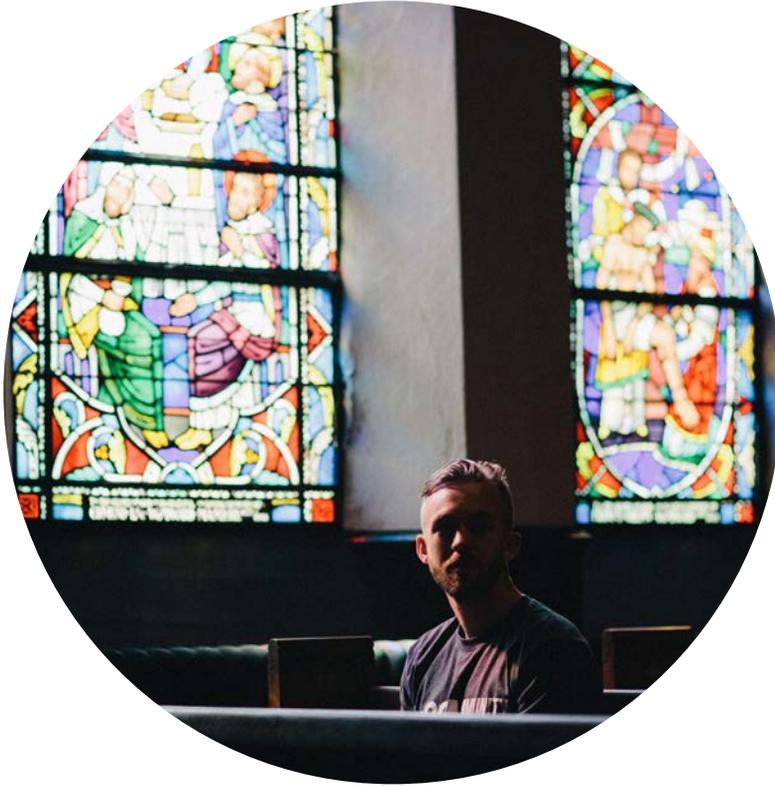
An aerial photograph of a town with a church tower and autumn trees. The image is used as a background for the session title.

SESSION

2

LIFE IN THE CHURCH



**WHAT HAS BEEN
YOUR MOST
MEMORABLE
CHURCH
EXPERIENCE?**





THE POINT

WE LOVE CHRIST BY SERVING HIS CHURCH.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

FACT:

REFERRED ITCH IS THE PHENOMENON OF SCRATCHING ONE PART OF YOUR BODY AND FEELING IT IN ANOTHER PLACE.¹ NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY WHY THIS HAPPENS, BUT IT'S A SURE SIGN THAT ALL THE PARTS OF OUR BODIES ARE INTERCONNECTED.

Today's American culture places a heavy focus on the individual. We've all heard of the American dream that says every person, through initiative, hard work, and personal sacrifice, can be and do anything he or she wants. This allows for diversity as each person is free to explore his or her talents and personality. However, it also means we aren't as concerned with the greater good and often aren't aware of the needs of others.

➤ **Describe a time when you noticed a need but did nothing about it.**

The Christian life is much different than that of our culture. When a person comes to Christ, life's primary emphasis is no longer the individual, but the church. Jesus' body on earth is the church, and every believer is a part of the body.

Think about this. When walking down the sidewalk, do your eyes look out for obstacles only for the sake of the eyes and leave the knees to worry about themselves? No way! The eyes serve their purpose for the well-being of the whole body.

The responsibility of each Christian is the same, to look out for the good of the whole church. As Christians, we are called to serve Jesus, and serving Him means serving others.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

▶ 1 PETER 4:7-11

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.

⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins.

⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

¹⁰Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.

¹¹If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.



THE SETTING

As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, Peter followed, served, and lived with Jesus. Peter knew what it meant to be connected with Jesus in a meaningful way. All believers are connected to Jesus, which means we are connected to one another. This is all by God's design. We all face difficult things, and we need each other to live well. Peter wrote this letter to a group of churches to remind them to love one another, to focus on the hope they had in Jesus, and to stand strong together in the face of persecution.

▶ 1 PETER 4:7

What the Bible refers to as the end times, or last days, began at Jesus' death and resurrection and is characterized by terrible difficulties for Jesus' followers. The language points to the fact that we'll soon stand before the Judge, give an account of our lives, and enter into eternity.

➤ **Describe a time you stood before an authority figure (a parent, principal, etc.) and were judged according to your behaviors.**

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN PRAYER IMPACT SOMEONE'S LIFE?

?

Peter wanted to encourage the church, in light of the coming judgment, to remain faithful to Jesus. During difficult times, the temptation to flee hardship and turn away from Jesus is especially strong. That's when we need support from our friends the most.

One of the biggest ways we can strengthen and encourage fellow believers is by praying for them, and in order to pray effectively, we must be:

- **Serious: not carried away by emotions and mindful of the eternal importance of our choices**
- **Disciplined: continually anticipating Jesus' return**

In order to live well in a culture that tempts us to turn away from God, prayer is essential in encouraging others and being encouraged. What steps will you take to be more disciplined in your prayer life?

"A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses."² —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Praying earnestly for our friends naturally implies that we care deeply for them. Honestly describe the way you pray for others.



▶ 1 PETER 4:8-9

Friendships come in all shapes and sizes and are based on any number of reasons. List three things that characterize your relationship with a close friend.

- >
- >
- >

Every relationship is different, but friendship by nature assumes a few things: a general appreciation and care for each other, time spent together on some level, and dealing with conflict. That's right. Because people are imperfect, in even the best of relationships, there's going to be conflict at times.

When we're treated unkindly, it's natural to respond in a similar way. But this only makes things worse. Because the church consists of imperfect people, there will be conflicts, but our love for one another leads us to overlook personal offenses.

Peter says if we're going to help our fellow believers endure difficult times, beyond praying, we need to be hospitable. Christians are to be ready and willing to share our homes for the sake of ministering to others, even strangers, in times of hardship.

The Christian life isn't just wishing good things for others. It's loving others deeply, refusing to be easily offended, and practically doing all we can to encourage others for the sake of the gospel.

In order to live well in a culture that tempts us to turn away from God, prayer is essential. #ChristID



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF MAINTAINING LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER OVER TIME?



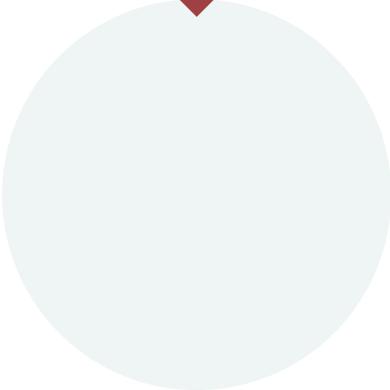
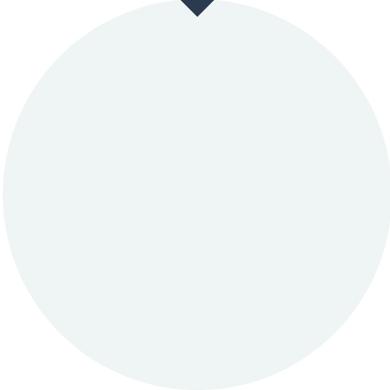


ACTION POINT

Contrast today's culture with that of the church described by Peter in each of the categories below.

CULTURE

CHURCH



PRIVACY



SHARING



TAKING OFFENSE

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT OUR SERVICE RESULTS IN GLORIFYING GOD RATHER THAN OURSELVES?



▶ 1 PETER 4:10-11

God gives us instructions to pray for and love each other, but He doesn't stop there. He gets much more specific. Each one of us has been given specific abilities, talents, and gifts for the sake of serving others.

What are two things you're good at?



Every person in the church brings something unique to the table, and a church functions best when each member contributes according to his or her gifts. On the other hand, when people don't serve, the church suffers.

In our culture, it can sometimes be tough to remember, but the things we're good at aren't given to us for our own benefit. Our abilities are a gift of God intended to serve others out of the love we have for them.

What are two ways you can use your gifts to serve the church?



When we recognize that God gifts us according to His grace and we grow in love for fellow Christians as well as for the lost, the church functions as God intended, and He receives the glory He deserves. We all have unique gifts, but every child of God is a servant of God. This is our identity.

ACTION POINT



According to the Center for Disease Control and

Prevention, more than one-third of Americans are obese.³ Many people today are not active and would rather be entertained by sitting in front of a TV or computer than spend time exercising.

Imagine if the body of Christ functioned this way. God wants us to be active in life, as well as in serving His church.

List five areas in which your church currently needs people to serve. How do you see yourself fitting into one of these areas?





LIVE IT OUT

“HAS IT EVER OCCURRED TO YOU THAT ONE HUNDRED PIANOS ALL TUNED TO THE SAME FORK [PITCH] ARE AUTOMATICALLY TUNED TO EACH OTHER? THEY ARE OF ONE ACCORD...”⁴ — A. W. TOZER

BIBLE READING PLAN



- DAY 1**
ACTS 4:1-12
- DAY 2**
ACTS 4:13-31
- DAY 3**
ACTS 4:32-37
- DAY 4**
ACTS 5:1-16
- DAY 5**
ACTS 5:17-42
- DAY 6**
ACTS 6:1-7
- DAY 7**
ACTS 6:8-15

▶ CHRIST

You may see yourself as having many talents, or you may think you're not good at much. Either way, if we see our gifts as a way to serve our own interests and to get ahead in life, our strengths (or perceived lack of strengths) can lead us to either pride or frustration. However, as we understand that God has given the exact talents He desires for us, and that we're to manage those for the sake of His glory, we find satisfaction in serving Him.

Pray that God would help you understand the ways He's gifted you. Record how you're using those gifts and talents to serve others, and how you could improve in using them for God's glory.

Gifts and Talents	Currently Using Them	Ways to Improve



► COMMUNITY

Many of our gifts function best when used within a community context. For instance, if you're hospitable, you can host a great party for God's glory. But if you work with a friend who's also hospitable, the party would be out of this world. Talk with three friends this week about how you can work together to make an impact for the kingdom. Then, prayerfully, get to work!

► CULTURE

We read that the end of all things is near. As we think about our friends who don't have a relationship with God, this should create a great sense of urgency to share the gospel. As we anticipate Jesus' return, let's pray not only for our fellow believers to be encouraged, but also for the lost to be brought into a relationship with God. Write down the names of three lost friends, and pray every day this week that God would invade their lives as you commit to sharing the gospel with them.