



ChristCommunity
an Evangelical Free Church



THE CHURCH

- 3 [INTRODUCTION](#)
- 3 [WHAT IS THE CHURCH?](#)
- 3 [WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO?](#)
- 4 [SO WHAT IS STOPPING YOU?](#)
- 5 [NEXT STEPS](#)



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INTRODUCTION

We believe the primary context in which we are to experience the life God designed is the local church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Before I became a Christian, the concept of church was a bit confusing to me. Is church a building? Is it a glorified support group? Is it Catholic? Is it Protestant? The word just seemed ambiguous to me. One thing I knew: whatever church was, I did not feel particularly inclined to join one.

Obviously, now that I'm a pastor, things have changed. But I think the way I felt about church as a young man is an increasingly popular sentiment in our culture today. Many people, in fact, remain very interested in Jesus but want very little to do with the church.

When you actually begin to listen to Jesus, however, you notice that he never allowed this dichotomy. In fact, you begin to see just the opposite: the more you want to know and belong to Jesus, the more you must know and belong to His church.

The Bible has much to say about the relationship between Jesus and His church. The church is, at various times, called Jesus' home (Ephesians 2:19-22), Jesus' family (Hebrews 2:10-13), and Jesus' bride (Revelation 21:9). But perhaps the most illustrative description of the church is as Jesus' own body:

[God] put all things under Christ's feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:21-22).

Eugene Peterson, in his translation of the Bible called The Message, puts the passage this way:

[Christ] is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence.

In other words, to know Jesus in a real and meaningful way, one must know His church, which is His physical representation to the world. Jesus fills the church to the brim with His presence, His character, and His priorities. And Jesus' presence is to so transform the people who make up the church that Paul says in this passage the church is Jesus' body: the tangible, living, breathing, moving, and working expression of Jesus to the world. There is simply no way to follow Jesus without belonging to His church. And it was Jesus who designed it that way.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO?

As Jesus' representative, the church is supposed to do what Jesus did on earth. And Jesus, more than anything, came to save humanity from one way of life – which leads to pain, confusion, isolation, and



death – into a new way of life, the life that God designed for us in the first place. Put simply: Jesus came to transform us.

The church is the place where this transformation is visible for the whole world to see. When we believe in Jesus, when we trust in His death and resurrection as the very foundation of our lives, we are transformed. The church, then, is where this transformed identity in Christ is nurtured and practiced together.

It is nurtured by the regular, weekly preaching of the Bible, God's Word, and design for our lives. It is nurtured by rhythms of corporate worship of our Lord Jesus. It is nurtured by engagement with a community of other people, just as in need of God's grace and truth as we are. It is nurtured through service to one another as Jesus taught us to do.

It is practiced in the way the church interacts with the world throughout the week. It is practiced in the way we love our families, even when such love is difficult. It is practiced in the way we seek to serve our neighbors, even if they do not share our faith, our ethnicity, our political affiliation, or our socio-economic status. It is practiced in the way we work, not simply for compensation or self-promotion, but for the good of the community and to God's glory.

Here's another way of looking at it: the church, just like Jesus, models to the world a brand new way to be human, to live the life God designed for all to flourish. This is what the church does. This is what it is all about.

SO WHAT IS STOPPING YOU?

Even knowing that *authentic Christian spirituality* cannot happen without the church, many are still hesitant to visit one, to commit to one every week, and to share this Christian life with other people there.

But if the church is truly the presence of Christ on earth, why do we hesitate? Probably because no church has ever modeled this calling perfectly. There's always a current event in the news, a hypocritical person we know, or a past pain we can point to that excuses us from moving forward.

I don't imagine the blatant imperfections of church to go away anytime soon. That's because every church, though always growing in her identity in Christ, is still full of people who are sinning, who are struggling, who are weak, who are broken. Dysfunction happens. But this has never stopped Jesus from loving, nurturing, and equipping his body. It shouldn't stop us either. Because when we're honest, we know that if we ever found the perfect church, we couldn't join it. We would ruin it.

If you want to get to know Jesus, sooner or later, you're going to have to get to know His church. And, yes, no church is perfect, including this one. But neither are you. I think that's the whole point. So what's stopping you?

No matter where you are in your faith journey, Jesus wants you to know Him. His design for your life is better than anything the world has to offer. But you can't find it alone. You need other people. You need the church. And the church needs you.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » *How would you define the church in your own words?*
- » *In your experience with church (or with Christians), what has made you feel frustrated, skeptical, or misunderstood? What has made you hopeful, interested, or excited?*
- » *What do you think Jesus really wants from His church? Why?*

NEXT STEPS

- » If you've never visited a church, come to Christ Community. I promise we won't bite. Try to say hi to someone. Don't remain anonymous. What do you have to lose?
- » If you've visited our church and want to get plugged in with other people, come to a Newcomers' Coffee. This is a first step in getting to know us and learning more about how we live this new life together.
- » If you want to learn about God's heart for His church and to grow in your love for the church consider reading Tom Nelson's *Ekklesia: Rediscovering God's Design for the Church*.
- » If you've been coming to our church for a while, think about how you can deepen here. What are you good at? How could that serve the body here? How could you invest your time, money, training, and other resources more effectively?
- » No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, invite other people to speak into your life, people who love Jesus, who know Him. It can be scary at first. Keep at it. You'll know Jesus (and yourself) better for it. Consider joining a Community Group where you can engage with others on a more personal level.