



Study 1 - Church: it's nature and purpose

Main Point: The church is central to God's purposes in history. The physical gathering itself is foundational and beautiful, it glorifies God and it is good for us.

Introduction to the series

This is a topical series looking at the place of church in God's purposes and also giving us information about the strategic place of our facilities in our disciple making ministry.

- **Explain** EV Grow is a series we do every three years and share the reasons we do it from page 4 of the booklet.

Over the next three weeks we want to:

1. Turn to the scriptures and be reminded of the mission and purpose Jesus has given us.
2. We want to be reminded of the wonder of the Church and its place in God's purposes.
3. We also want to take the opportunity to consider the place of our property and facilities in our mission and life together and recommit ourselves financially to secure our loan repayments and reduce the principal.

- **Explain** that for this series it is really essential that group members have the booklet.

- **Read together** with the group the message from Andrew Heard on Page 2 and 3

- **Watch** the video for study one.

This is a compilation of reflections from members of the church family on church and its place in their life.

- After a little **discussion**, invite people to turn up the **study** on page 14 and 15 of the book.

Opening Question

Invite everyone to contribute to this discussion.

Imagine a soccer team was prevented from coming together physically

- What could the player and coach continue to do separately?
- What couldn't be done separately?
- What about Church?

Imagine a church was prevented from coming together physically

1. *What could a church member continue to do separately?*
2. *What couldn't be done separately?*

Separately we can read our bibles, pray, live lives that serve others

When gathered we can glorify God together, show the outworking of his salvation in uniting us, encourage and love one another, be lead and taught, serve god's people , be accountable to and for the community

The Nature of Church

1. The Greek word for church is ekklesia. Here are a few places this word is used - what can we learn about the nature of church from these verses?

- Acts 19:32 - *"The assembly" (NIV) is ekklesia, the word often translated as church - helps to see that this is an ordinary word for a gathering of people.*
- Matthew 16:18 - *Jesus will build his gathering. A cosmic building project but is about him gathering his people to himself.*
- Acts 15:41 (note an typo in the book) - *here ekklesia refers to gatherings of Christian in various town and cities*
- Eph 1:22-23 - *here the reference seems to be a gathering of all God's people for all time.*

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared that he is determined to build his church and that the gates of Hades will not overcome it. The greek word for church is ekklesia. and it simply means gathering or assembly. Jesus' great concern is to gather a people to and for himself

It is helpful to note that church is the ordinary word for gathering but in the Bible is most often referring to a gathering of God's people in a local church and less often the heavenly church. Important to note it never refers to a building or a denomination i.e. Anglican Church.

In Ephessians chapters 1 - 3 Paul speaks of his special role in salvation history as the apostle to the Gentiles. And how it is God's intention to reconcile Jew and Gentile together and make one new humanity.

Read Ephessians 1:3-10

2. What is God's grand purpose in our world?

1:10 to bring unity to all things under Christ. This has been made possible through the blood of Christ bringing forgiveness, redemption and adoption as sons.

Read Revelation 7:9-12

3. How does this gathering reflect the vision of Ephesians?

Here is the ultimate church/gathering, the diverse nations and races of the world united in worship of their God, king and redeemer (lamb).

4. What has caused such disunity and dislocation in our world?

Consider Genesis 3 and Genesis 11:1-9 the tower of Babel.

The rebellion in the garden starts an avalanche of sin. Read the Babel story. Here is rebellion of humanity against the rule of God. The judgement that comes is to confuse and scatter the people.

Scattering comes as a result of sin and judgement. Gathering comes through grace and salvation

Through the church (the physical gathering of God's people) we see the visible outworking of God's unifying, gathering work of salvation.

Read Ephesians 3:10-13

6. What purpose for the church is described here?

The gatherings of Christian people speak to the heavenlies of the manifold wisdom of God. Our gatherings are the evidence that Jesus is continuing to build his Church. Our gatherings bring him praise and honour.

7. Why is gathering/ church so fundamentally important for Christians?

- *it is what we were saved for and evidence that the curse of Genesis 3 has been reversed.*
- *it is the expression of Jesus' rule over our lives.*
- *It is the way we show the unity that Christ has brought through his sacrifice.*
- *etc.*

8. Share within the group how the Lord uses church in our life together

- this is a question everyone could contribute to with a view to reflecting personally on the blessings of gathering as God's people.

Pray together

- Praise God for his grace and mercy in gathering us to himself
- Praise him for the privilege of being counted as members of his church
- Pray that he might cause us to love him and his people such that we would not neglect to meet together
- Pray that our gatherings would bring him glory
- Give thanks for the facility we have to meet in and the generosity of those who have made it possible.
- Pray that the impact of Covid would be that God's people here and throughout the world would value the gathering around Jesus all the more and be strengthened in their commitment to meet together.