

I Believe: What We Believe & Why It Matters

The Church is Essential

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Sunday, March 22, 2026

I Believe: The Church is Essential

Matthew 16:13–19 NLT

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

1 Timothy 3:14–15 NLT

I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Romans 12:4-5 NLT

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

Matthew 12:48–50 NLT

Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!”

Luke 19:10 NLT

For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.

Matthew 16:19 NLT

And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

1. The Church is the active community of believers submitted to the Lordship of Jesus, carrying out the will of God in the Earth.**Matthew 28:16–20 NLT**

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Ephesians 2:1–10 NLT

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our

very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

2. The Church is essential because She is God's primary vehicle to bring Jesus (the message of hope) to the world.

3. The Church exists to bring people to saving faith in Jesus, and to then train and equip them to live on earth as obedient, mature disciples reflecting Christ's life and love, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Small Group Guide: The Church Is Essential

Opening Question

Think about the last time someone's presence made a hard moment easier to bear — a friend who showed up, a community that stood with you. What was it about being with people, rather than just knowing they existed, that made a difference?

Built on Belief, Sent on Mission

Jesus asked His disciples the most important question anyone can answer: "Who do you say I am?" When Simon Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, something remarkable happened. Jesus didn't just affirm the answer, He reoriented Peter's entire identity around it. Simon, whose name in Hebrew meant "one who hears," became Peter, the rock. The transformation was the point. Belief doesn't just inform us; it reshapes us from the inside out.

The same moment that named Peter also named the Church. "Upon this rock I will build my church," Jesus said, "and all the powers of hell will not conquer it" (Matthew 16:18). This was not an afterthought. Jesus was describing something He intended to construct — a body of people whose corporate identity would be grounded in the confession Peter had just made. The Church is not an institution that accumulated around Jesus over time. It is something He said He would build.

What the original Jewish listeners would have understood — and what tends to get lost in modern readings — is the weight of the word Jesus used. *Ekklesia*, often translated "church," carried the sense of a governing body: people called out and assembled with authority to act on behalf of a king. It was a community with keys. When Jesus spoke of binding and loosing, He was describing the Church's role as an agent of heaven on earth — using the message of who Jesus is to unlock people from the kingdom of darkness and open them to the kingdom of God.

That is why the commission Jesus gives in Matthew 28 is so deliberately structured. He stands on a mountain — a detail Matthew’s readers would have recognized immediately as echoing Moses at Sinai. But where Moses descended with commandments about what not to do, Jesus sends His people with a commission about what *to do*. And where the law was written on stone tablets, this new covenant would be written on hearts by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The mission flows from the resurrection: because Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, His people go — not in their own power, but under His.

The five elements of discipleship that shape this mission (discipleship is commissioned, committal, directional, communal, and transformational) are not a checklist. They describe the life of someone whose identity has been caught up in Jesus the way Peter’s was at Caesarea Philippi. The disciple becomes like the Rabbi. The Greek word for “make disciples” in Matthew 28 is itself active and relational. It means to cause others to become disciples while remaining one yourself. We are not the origin of the mission. We are participants in it.

The lie our moment is particularly susceptible to is that the Church is non-essential — that you can follow Jesus privately, quietly, without the mess and cost of actual community. But a body without connection to its parts does not function. The Church is not a building or a program. She is the bride of Christ, the pillar and foundation of truth in the world (1 Timothy 3:15), and the primary vehicle through which a watching world sees what grace can actually do to broken people. What we are tempted to call a mess, God looks at through the blood of Jesus and calls a masterpiece.

For Discussion

1. The church can be defined as “the active community of believers submitted to the Lordship of Jesus, carrying out the will of God in the Earth.” How does that definition compare to how you’ve thought about the Church before? Where does it expand or challenge your view?

2. “You don’t need the Church to follow Jesus” and “The Church is too messy and imperfect” are two common lies the enemy tells about the Church. Which of those has felt most true to you personally, and what has shaped that feeling?
3. Discipleship is described in your notes as commissioned, committal, directional, communal, and transformational. Which of those five feels most alive in your life right now, and which feels most underdeveloped?
4. Ephesians 2:10 says we are God’s masterpiece — created for good works planned long ago. What would it mean for your community to live into that identity together rather than as separate individuals?

For Reflection

Jesus is still building His Church — and He is still building you. Sit quietly for a moment with this question: In what part of your life have you been trying to follow Jesus alone? What might it look like to bring that part into community? Share whatever surfaces with the group.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the one who calls, commissions, and sends. Thank You that we do not follow Jesus in isolation, but as part of a people You are gathering from every nation and generation. Jesus, You are the cornerstone of everything we are and do. Holy Spirit, empower us to go where You are going, to carry the keys You have given, and to be the kind of community that shows a watching world what grace can make of broken people. May we be on mission together, for Your glory and for the sake of those who have not yet heard. Amen.