

A black and white photograph of a lighthouse on a stone wall. The lighthouse is small and positioned on the left side of the wall. A bright beam of light emanates from the lighthouse, extending across the top right portion of the image. The wall is made of rough, textured stones.

EKKLESIA

why church?

Ekklesia Series | why church?

Week 1

Called to Ekklesia: "... a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..."

Understanding what Church is.

Week 2

Called to Participate: "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

Looking at how we operate as members of the body.

Week 3

Called to Authenticity: "one part suffers, every part suffers, one part is honoured, every part rejoices."

Realising the honesty, trust and shared experience of God's people.

Week 4

Called to Love: "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Pursuing the call of the two greatest commandments.

Week 5

Called to Grow: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

Obeying the great commission through discipleship.

Week 6

Called to Mission: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Listening to God's call on a people who are sent.

Ekklesia Series | about this series

Welcome to the Ekklesia Series Study Guides. Ekklesia is the Greek word used in the New Testament for church. It's exact meaning is that of the "called out" ones. A communal word for God's people who have been "called out" from the crowd. It's a word that embodies ideas such as gathering, family, holiness, togetherness and relationship with God.

There are common questions asked regularly of church by many (whether they profess faith or not). Questions such as "**Why do I as a Christian need to gather with other Christians to follow Jesus?**," "**Why do I have to meet with others and share life with others in my walk with God?**," "**Why do I have to be apart of the Church?**"

In 1 Peter 2:9-10 Peter expounds a definition for the people of God which greatly sums up what it means to be the Ekklesia, to be the Church. Peter raises five ideas in this passage.

First, that the Ekklesia are a people **called out of darkness**, works in process being transformed where we once were alongside everything that stands opposed to God.

Second, that this has come about **by God's mercy** found through the great sacrifice of His Son Jesus' death on a cross and subsequent resurrection.

Thirdly we haven't just been called out of darkness but also **called into his wonderful light**, set apart for something else and now in fellowship with God.

Fourth. The Ekklesia is God's **royal priesthood and holy nation**, being both part of the legacy, entered into the family of God and as an entire people have been set apart and given the task of mediating and ministering to the world.

And fifth we find that this task includes witnessing to these four truths by **declaring God's praises**, shouting out to the world and stepping back into those dark places to bring that same mercy, that same light, that same relationship to others.

These studies are designed to promote discussion, thought and further reflection on what it means to be a part of the people of God. As a result of this, you will find that these study guides are best used in a group setting as they allow for and encourage discussion amongst people and their (sometimes) differing opinions.

We hope you enjoy this series, that it helps answer the "why church?" questions but also beyond that, that through this series you may find the great comforts, joys and challenges that come from being apart of God's Ekklesia, being apart of the Called Out ones.

WEEK 1

CALLED TO

EKKLESIA

Discuss

- What metaphor would you use to describe the Ekklesia (church)?
- What do you look for in a church?

Finding what we really want has become an easy experience for us these days hasn't it? With the power of the Internet and the explosion of online shopping it has never been easier to find that particular item of clothing we want, or the right plumber who arrives on time or the mortgage deal that suits our lifestyle. We have become so conditioned to always look for the cafe, clothes, restaurant, car and services that suit us best that we don't even realise that we are doing it with the other things like relationships, neighbourhoods and even Churches.

Terms like "church shopping" or "hunting" are used regularly these days when we approach the subject of looking for a church and we often approach our ideal of a church with the mindset of what is best for me and/or my family.

But is that what Jesus had in mind when he established his church? Is it what Peter had in mind when he wrote the words of Peter 2:9-10? One of the ways to work out what both Jesus and Peter had in mind is to see what the earliest disciples did when it came to being the Ekklesia of Jesus Christ. There is a great description in Acts Chapter 2 of what the early Ekklesia looked like.

Read

Acts 2:42-47

Discuss

1. As you read through these verses, what do you notice are some of the activities of the early Ekklesia?
2. Verses 42 & 46 mentioned that the early believers broke bread together. What is meant by that this term? What do you think breaking bread together would have looked like for the early Jewish believers?
3. Even at this early stage 3000+ believers in Jerusalem would have come from a variety of different walks of life and status levels in society. How radical was it for them to meet together in each other's homes and have "everything in common" (v44)?
4. What impact did the believer new found faith in Jesus have to cause such radical behaviour?

Read

1 Peter 2:9-10

In the intro to this series we looked at Peter's description of the Ekklesia or "called out" ones of Jesus. He explores that our faith in Jesus and his work on the cross does more than just bring us out of darkness and into his wonderful light. Our faith in Jesus also calls us out as a royal priesthood and holy nation. Our faith in Jesus brings those together who would not normally associate with one another and unites them in a common purpose for the glory of God and the accomplishment of His mission in the world.

Discuss

1. What sense of a royal priesthood do you find in Acts 2:42-47? How much is it to do with status, title or selfish motivation?
2. What level of sacrifice is required to sell property and possessions to give to others in need (v45)?
3. Why do you think the early Ekklesia enjoyed the favour of all the people (v47)?
4. It has been said that the 4 elements required to be able to call a group of believers a church is WORSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, COMMUNITY & MISSION. How do you see the activities of the early Ekklesia fitting into these categories?
5. What type of metaphor would you use to describe the Ekklesia of Acts Chapter 2?

The early Ekklesia had but one purpose. United together in a common faith in Jesus they sought to declare in their words, deeds and relationships, the praises of the One who had brought them out of darkness and into His wonderful light. This included the radical steps of outrageous generosity, ardent discipleship, courageous mission, open hospitality and integrated worship. In their own sometimes faltering way, they were the Ekklesia of Jesus Christ. But what does it look like for us to be the Ekklesia of Christ today?

Implications

1. Grab a sheet of paper and draw the Ekklesia of Acts Chapter 2. Then draw what you see of the Ekklesia you are apart of today. What are the priorities of the two? What is different? What is similar?
2. What aspects of the early Ekklesia would you like to see more of in your church community and why?
3. What aspects would you find the most difficult to do and why?
4. What danger do you see in us acting as though the church is just a building, a service or an institution in society? What does and doesn't happen when we do that?
5. Who would you break bread with this week that you wouldn't normally break bread with?
6. Who can you sacrificially give to that has a need this week?

Pray

WEEK 2

CALLED TO

PARTICIPATE

Discuss

Think of a time when you worked in a team environment (i.e. Work, sport, ministry, short term mission trip etc.)

- What aspect of this experience made it rewarding for you?
- What were some of the difficulties you faced?

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, the apostle Paul shares what it is to be part of the Ekklesia, the called out people of God in the metaphor of the Body, sharing that we as God's people are different members of the body of Christ, each doing their part. However, as we come together as a body, what is it that we actually bring with us? What is our part that we are doing? Is there a difference between participating in and just attending church? Have you ever wondered whether you'd even be missed if you stopped participating in church? (You may unfortunately already know the answer from past experience and unfortunately past attendees!)

These are key questions that churches the world over are wrestling with at the moment. It seems that more than ever before people are seeing their church as a consumer product or event. Something that should suit their needs, fill their criteria and require the least amount of effort and input. Oftentimes, the concern that people have about how their church is run is more about them than it is about others.

Jesus didn't envision his Church to operate in this way. Nor do Paul, Peter and the other Writers of the New Testament from the sound of the instructions they gave to the early church. What does it look like to participate in the Ekklesia?

Read

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Discuss

1. What tension do you see present in vv4-6?
2. What do you think are some of the "different kinds of service"?
3. Describe what the different gifts in vv7-10 look like? Are these the only gifts?
4. What gifts do you think you have? What gifts do you think each other has?

The word that Paul uses when he writes about "gifts" in his letters is *charismata*, often translated "spiritual gifts". This is where the term charismatic comes from. At the heart of this term is the word *charis* which means "grace". This is something that is often overlooked when spiritual gifts are explored, the fact that they are... GIFTS! Our abilities and skills are not ours rather, God's. He is the one who has created them and has graciously given them to us.

Our spiritual gifts are not ours! We are just the caretakers or stewards of them and are made for a much greater purpose much like the servants in Matthew 25:14-30 (talents to be used and not buried).

Read

1 Peter 4:10-11

Discuss

1. What should our gifts be used for according to Peter in v10?
2. How often does the service of others factor into your thinking when you use your gifts?
3. Note the link between the idea of *charismata* and the second half of v10. To what extent are you being a faithful steward with the gifts or talents that God has given you?
4. What is the enabler of the gifts in v11?
5. What comfort do you take from knowing that God is the one who has given you your gifts? What scares you about that?
6. What is the purpose of the different gifts in v11?

After exploring these two passages you can't help but get the sense that our gifts are for the Ekklesia and ultimately for God's glory! (Not convinced? Then check out Romans 12:3-8 as well!) The picture of a church of consumers who only participate as long as it suits them is so far away from what Paul and Peter wrote of to the early Church!

As we have these gracious gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit, we in turn have the opportunity, nay, responsibility to become gracious gifts to the Ekklesia! We are meant to be a community of contributors, each one uniquely gifted and each one valued for the contribution that is made. In short, God has given us as gifts to another so that He might be glorified and the Ekklesia might be built up!

Implications

1. How are you applying your gifts in your church and your community? (Remember 1 Corinthians 12:7, the purpose of the gifts.)
2. To what extent have you sought to be a consumer rather than a contributor in your church community? Have you been keeping your gifts buried? What would it take to unearth them? Where would you share them in your life?

Pray

WEEK 3

CALLED TO

AUTHENTICITY

Discuss

- Does anyone have any funny fears or phobias that you would be willing to share with your group?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of being vulnerable with others?
- Is there a time that your trust has been betrayed by someone? If you are comfortable to, feel free to share with your group.

All of us have been betrayed at some point in our lives. At one point or other, we may have been betrayed after sharing something personal and sensitive with someone only to find that they had shared it with others (worse others in your church). You feel shocked, hurt and angry and afterwards find it hard to trust that person again and even find it harder to trust others.

Because of times such as this there can be a cost that comes to being authentic with others. To be real and authentic is to be vulnerable; it is a deliberate act to allow people to see us as we are and to potentially risk judgement, derision or even rejection. What does the Bible have to say about authenticity and vulnerability?

Read

James 5:13-16

Discuss

1. What do you notice about the different types of people that James describes in v13-14?
2. What are the other types of people that come to church that you could add to the list?
3. What is the command that is given to the different types of people?
4. How often do you share your troubles, joys, ailments or struggles with others so that they might pray, rejoice or struggle with you?
5. What holds you back from sharing these things?
6. There is a command in v16 to confess our sins to each other. What do you think is meant by this and what do you think would be a safe way to do this?

So often we can feel like Ekklesia is the last place where we can come as we are. What will people think about us if we are struggling or reveal our pain? What if people don't want to celebrate the milestone I achieved this week? What if people say inappropriate things to me in my grief? What if I reveal that sin I am struggling with and everyone rejects me?

These are just some of the concerns we can have about being authentic in the Ekklesia or anywhere for that matter. It isn't wrong to have these concerns Nor is it wrong to sometimes listen to them, but when our concerns override our call to be in an authentic community it would seem that we have allowed our fear, rather than our faith, to rule us.

Read

Hebrews 10:23-25

Discuss

1. What do you understand v23 to mean and encompass? What impact does holding unswervingly to the faith we profess have on our ability or inclination to be authentic and vulnerable?
2. What are some of the ways we might spur each other on to love and good deeds (v24)?
3. Have you ever wanted to give up meeting together (v25)? What do you think would happen if you took that feeling and transformed it into encouragement for others?

When we authentically involve ourselves in the Ekklesia there is always a risk that we can be hurt, judged and rejected but there is also the equal or even greater Christ empowered risk that we will be supported, prayed for and encouraged. The Ekklesia is not meant to be a community where false presence and superficiality rules, it is meant to be a community where we can be real and honest with each other. A place where people can come as they are and be lovingly encouraged to live more like Christ. A place where the joyous can hurt with the the hurting and the hurt can celebrate with the joyous. A place where authenticity is valued and not avoided. (Remember 1 Corinthians 12:21-26)

Implications

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe the current depth of relationships with the people in your church community? (1= talk weather & 10= bare your soul)
2. If they are on the more shallow side, why might this be?
3. What would it take for you to go to another level of depth with others in your community so that you might be in a position to pray, struggle, celebrate and do life together? (A good way is eating and studying scripture together each week!)
4. What will you commit to this week to seek to foster being as authentic as possible? (Eg. Have a coffee with someone, get involved in a ministry, share what is on your heart with those in your group, ask someone to pray for you and offer to pray for them,)

Pray

WEEK 4

CALLED TO

LOVE

Discuss

- How do you like to show someone that you love them?
- How do you like to be shown love?
- What are some of the biggest challenges that you face when it comes to expressing love?

Each and everyone of us has had experiences of love, and when we come to the topic in relation to God we learn three wonderful things about the love God shows us. His love is the love that we are called to. He shows us an unconditional, sacrificial and courageous love throughout scripture and in the person and work of His Son Jesus and because of this we are called to that same unconditional, sacrificial and courageous love.

As we've all experienced love, we've surely also experienced to greater and lesser degrees hurt, betrayal and frustration through our own and others failure to love. As we step into this study then, we encourage you to all pray together for clarity in communicating with each other, for courageous honesty to share and humility and understanding so that we may listen and love well as we step into God's word and share with each other. (Remember what we looked at last week!)

Pray

Read

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Discuss

1. What makes love necessary over and above the other giftings that Paul speaks of in v1-3? How are they nullified or made useless without love?
2. Which of these giftings do you see as easiest to do without needing to include love?
3. In v4-7 we find a definition of love which is described with verbs (doing words!). Which of these actions do you find easiest to do and which do you find hardest?
4. Which of these actions would you like to see more of in your church community?
5. Which of these actions would you say you see the least of?
6. What does v8-13 tell us about love? What separates faith, hope and love from other aspects of the Christian walk?
7. What does Paul mean by putting away childish things when one is fully grown (v11)?

Alongside being an authentic church, one which is able to share, be real, honest and open with each other, being a loving church is paramount to who we are as God's Ekklesia. In fact the two go hand in hand, you can't be authentic in an unsafe, unloving environment and the very act of love is one of vulnerability and real relationship. Do you have the balance between honest and authentic with unconditional and sacrificial love?

Aside from Paul's very helpful definition of love and its importance one of the defining fundamentals of Christian life, we find that many other parts of Scripture push us towards love as our centre. Paul's contemporary John also writes of love in his first letter to God's people.

Read

1 John 4:7-12

Discuss

1. What is John's reasoning in this passage for being a people of love?
2. What are the implications of v8 for us as the Ekklesia?
3. What do you feel about John's definition of love in v10?

We see around us a broken and failed Ekklesia at times, especially when we hold it up to the ideal of love. When others speak of you and others that follow Jesus, do you think their definition of us is as a people known for love? We realise we are all on the road towards our God but sometimes we sojourn, sometimes we amble, sometimes we do a good job and other times we don't. One thing is for certain, in pursuing a life of love, we at times will hurt others whether in ignorance, by accident and sometimes unfortunately on purpose.

Implications

1. In what ways have you failed to love and be a person of love?
2. How can you better love those around you in God's Ekklesia?
3. In what ways can you commit to being more loving this week to those around you?

Pray

WEEK 5

CALLED TO

GROW

We are called to grow as believers. Paul says in Romans Chapter 12 that we must be transformed by renewing our minds, moving closer to our God. This transformation takes place in many ways and stages - it is essentially positive but can at times be a negative experience. Not to grow is generally an impossibility as growth is an organic concept. What we are growing and how is the focus of this study.

We are Ekklesia, agents of God's work and a people who are added to, who move and age and so growth is about us! This isn't just circumstance but apart of God's intent for his people on both a personal level, growing our character and ability as well as corporately, growing as a community and people. This week is a week of reflection. Take the many facets that we explore in this study and find the biggest challenges to take with into your week and into your community.

Read

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Discuss

The book of Deuteronomy was shared by Moses to the Israelites on the cusp of the promised land. In Chapter 6 we find some helpful precedents set for God's people that they may continue to grow well and grow with their God on entry. Take some time to mull through the challenges of this passage. The questions below are to help fuel discussion.

Grow in Obedience [vv1-3]

1. What are the blessings recorded in this passage?
2. What blessings come from being the family of God? From your church family?

Grow in Relationship [vv4-9]

1. Love God with all your heart, soul and strength... What does this mean to you? When have you affirmed or distanced yourself from this?
2. Jesus added... And your neighbour as yourself (Mark 10:29-31)... Why is this important in the Christian Ekklesia?

Grow in Appreciation [vv10-12]

1. What are some under appreciated blessings of our church?
2. How might we abuse them & how might we better appreciate them?

Grow in Wisdom [vv13-19]

1. What words, actions, attitudes, cultural patterns or trends that hold us back?
2. How do we deal with sin or spiritual apathy?
3. What are the undeserved inheritances of our lives and our church? (i.e. things we didn't do but benefit from - sometimes neglect - or fail to nurture/maintain or develop and possibly lose?)

Grow in Righteousness [vv20-25]

1. There is a vertical plane (the people before their God) and horizontal plane (the people before their children) in this passage. What was their testimony of God?
2. What is our testimony of God? How do we express/demonstrate a life of faith and practice - that causes children/other people to ask why we live this way?

Read

Ephesians 4:11-16 & 2 Peter 1:3-13

Discuss

The early church was challenged to grow both through entrusting and charging its leaders to faithfully guide the people but also with the recognition that as the people matured in their faith that they would take on the challenges and responsibilities that arise.

Leadership Growth [Eph. 4:11-13]

1. Discuss in what ways the leaders of our church community can support and provide for the church to help us all grow in maturity in Christ?
2. Who are young and upcoming leaders in your community who you can encourage support and guide?
3. What have been the most significant growth accelerators for you?
4. Take some time to encouragingly and lovingly feed back to your leaders. It is helpful to use principles or topics rather than incidents with names.

Community Growth [Eph. 4:14-16]

1. How does speaking the truth in love assist growth? What are the blessings and what are the dangers?
2. Where is Jesus in our community? How does Paul's picture of where Christ is in his church hold up to our community at present?
3. What strategies can we put in motion to move Christ to the centre and move us closer to each other, to God and to our community at large?

Personal Growth [2 Pet. 1:3-11]

1. God's divine power gives us everything we need for a godly life. Do you see God as the one who can truly fulfill all your needs?
2. Which of Peter's list of qualities is the most challenging for you at the moment?
3. In enacting these qualities we will never stumble. How much do you trust that God's transforming of you can actually change you to be all that you can be?

Pray

WEEK 6

CALLED TO

MISSION

Discuss

- When you hear the word “Missionary” what image comes to your mind? Why do you think this is the case?
- What is one of the greatest memories you have of being involved in God’s mission?

When we think of mission and missionaries our thoughts can often go to a picture of people going to far off lands at the ends of the earth, learning different dialects and translating the Bible. While there is nothing wrong with this picture of the cross-cultural missionaries that we seek to support, is that all there is to mission and being a missionary? Is it a complete picture of what God has in mind for his mission to the world? And how does the Ekklesia fit in to this picture?

A good place to start to answer these questions is to have a look at some of the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples about his expectations for how they were to participate in Church and in mission.

Read

Acts 1:4-8

Discuss

1. In verse 4 Jesus promises a gift to his disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit. Why should we consider the Holy Spirit a gift to us?
2. What seems to be the main reason for the gift of the Holy Spirit in v8?
3. What do you think it means to be a witness for Jesus?
4. Going off what you know of the rest of the book of Acts and the New Testament, what do you think the disciples and early church understood “witness” to mean?
5. Jesus states that his followers will be his witnesses in 4 areas. Do a Google search if you are able and see a geographical map of these areas. Bearing in mind that the disciples were in Jerusalem when Jesus spoke these words, what do you think is the significance of the 4 areas that Jesus is talking about?

Jesus issues a command to his disciples that they are to be a witness to the good news of his salvation in their local area of Jerusalem, to the wider region of Judea, to their uncomfortable and avoided area of Samaria and to the very ends of the earth itself. The idea of mission for Jesus and the early Ekklesia was not just limited to a far off place at the end of the earth, it was also to be very local and everything else in between even the much hated and feared land of the Samaritans.

1. How often do you think of your local area as your mission field? Have you ever thought of yourself as a missionary before?
2. Who are you witnessing to in your “Jerusalem”?
3. Where is your Judea and who is God calling you to witness to there?
4. For the Jews, Samaria was the last place that they would ever want to go. It was full of sell outs, half-breeds and unclean traitors to God’s people.
5. Are there people that you would never want to go and be a witness to? Why do you think that is the case?

It is clear from the passage in Acts 1 that everyone in the Ekklesia is called by Jesus into mission. Jesus didn’t select some to be witnesses and some to be something else, everyone was called to participate in the mission of God to His world. This original call of mission for the early followers of Jesus is one that is still extended to us today – we are part of the missional legacy of the Ekklesia. The same Holy Spirit who filled those earliest believers fills us today and there is still a great need locally and globally for people to hear and see the good news of Jesus. But the question remains: What part are you playing in God’s mission to a lost, hurting, selfish and broken world?

Read

Romans 10:14-15

Discuss

1. Paul brings a challenge to the believers in Rome about living and sharing the Gospel message. How are you personally challenged by this?
2. Who in your life is someone that hasn’t believed in, heard of or seen Jesus as yet? What could you do to change that? Is there an opportunity to practice parts of BELLS in their life?
3. To whom do you think that God has sent you?

The call to mission and being a missionary is not an option for us when we choose to follow Jesus. A large part of the reason for this is because we serve the missionary God. As God the Father sent God the Son, as God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit, so too does God the Father, Son & Spirit send US to bring Good News. This is the mission of the Ekklesia, it is not just what we are called to do but why we exist in the first place.

Implications

1. What are some of the struggles you face in fulfilling your call to God's mission?
2. What is one thing that you can commit to over the coming weeks that takes a missionary step into your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria or the ends of the earth?
3. What accountability can you put in place to ensure this happens? Perhaps you can make a regular time in your small group to pray for those that you have been sent to.

Pray