

Leader Guide

Bible Study: *Am I Just Offended?*

Theme: Understanding the difference between hurt and offense, and how God meets us in our pain.

Objective:

- Help participants identify when they are hurt versus offended.
 - Guide believers in processing hurt in a healthy way through Jesus.
 - Encourage reflection on how the church can respond to hurt without dismissing it.
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Before You Begin (For the Leader)

This topic may surface:

- Church wounds
- Unresolved relational conflict
- Deep emotional pain

Create a safe environment:

- Remind participants that sharing is voluntary.
- Avoid correcting emotions.
- Validate experiences without validating sin.
- Keep the conversation focused on healing, not blame.

If strong emotions arise, pause and pray.

1. Opening Prayer

“Lord, open our hearts and minds to Your truth. Help us discern between hurt and offense, and teach us how to bring our pain to You, so we can experience freedom and healing. Amen.”

2. Scripture Focus

Read Together:

- **John 11:33–35** – Jesus wept.
 - **Mark 9:42** – The seriousness of causing another to stumble.
 - Optional: **James 1:19–20** – Quick to listen, slow to anger.
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Leader Notes

John 11:33–35

Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus. Yet He still wept.
This shows:

- God does not dismiss grief.
- Validation comes before solution.
- Presence precedes power.

Mark 9:42

Jesus takes harm seriously. Causing someone to stumble matters to Him.
This reminds us:

- Hurt is real.
- Accountability exists.
- Pain should not be minimized.

James 1:19–20

Anger is not automatically sin.
But unchecked anger can become offense.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it tell you about God that Jesus wept with Mary and Martha?
2. Why is it important that God validates our pain before acting?
3. How does knowing this shape how we treat others who are hurting?

Leader Tip:

If someone says, “God just wants us to forgive and move on,” gently redirect to Jesus’ example of empathy.

3. Reflection: Personal Story (Journaling Time – 5–10 minutes)

Ask participants to write privately:

- Have you experienced a time when someone’s words or actions wounded you, and you were told, “Don’t be offended; forgive”?
- What happened?
- How did it make you feel?

- Looking back, was it hurt... or did it become offense?

Allow silence. Silence is uncomfortable. Silence is also where the Spirit works.

Key Teaching Point

Hurt is an emotional reaction to a wrong done to you.

Offense is a choice to take on resentment, anger, or bitterness.

Hurt happens to us.

Offense grows in us.

4. Defining Hurt vs. Offense

Hurt	Offense
Emotional pain caused by a wrong	Anger or resentment in response to a perceived slight
Passive experience	Active choice
Requires healing	Requires perspective & surrender
Can draw us closer to God	Can lead to sin if unchecked

Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a situation where hurt became offense?
2. How did it affect your relationship with God or others?
3. What might surrendering that hurt to God have looked like earlier?

Leader Note:

If conversation shifts toward gossip, gently bring it back to personal reflection rather than naming others.

5. Group Exercise: Reflection and Sharing

Invite (not require) participants to share:

- A time they felt wounded in a church or faith setting.
- How they responded internally.
- What helped or did not help.

Optional: If referencing *The Bait of Satan* by John Bevere, briefly summarize its main point: offense is a trap that can isolate believers from spiritual growth.

Facilitator Guidance

Watch for:

- Shame language
- Defensiveness
- Generalizing (“The church always...”)

Redirect toward:

- Personal growth
 - Christ-centered healing
 - Ownership of internal response
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6. Application: Healing and Forgiveness

Have participants:

1. Write down one hurt they've been carrying.
2. Ask themselves privately:
 - Have I been treating this as offense?
 - Have I allowed resentment to grow?
3. Lead a guided prayer moment.

Guided Prayer

"Lord, I bring this hurt to You. You see it. You understand it.
Help me surrender it before it becomes offense.
Teach me to forgive—not to excuse wrong—but to walk in freedom.
Heal what still feels tender. Amen."

Group Discussion

How can we, as a church community, respond to the hurt of others in a way that brings healing rather than shame?

Encourage practical ideas:

- Listening before correcting
 - Avoiding spiritual clichés
 - Making space for grief
 - Following up consistently
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7. Closing Reflection

Encourage journaling:

- What did I learn about hurt versus offense today?
 - Is there someone I need to forgive?
 - Is there someone I need to speak to honestly?
 - What step toward healing can I take this week?
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Scripture Reminder

- **Psalms 34:18** – The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.
- **Matthew 5:23–24** – Reconciliation matters before worship.

Remind participants:

God does not rush healing.

But He does invite surrender.

8. Closing Prayer

“Lord, thank You for meeting us in our hurt. Teach us to surrender our pain to You, to forgive, and to walk in freedom. May we be agents of healing in the lives of others, reflecting Your heart. Amen.”

Final Leader Encouragement

Some participants may need follow-up conversation. Reach out within the week if someone shared deeply. Healing often requires community, not just insight.

Leader Guide

Bible Study: *Spiritual Abuse & Misusing Matthew 18*

Key Scripture: Matthew 18:15–20

Theme: Understanding how Scripture can be misapplied to silence the wounded—and how to restore it to its true purpose.

Objective:

- Clarify the proper context of Matthew 18.
 - Distinguish ordinary sin from spiritual abuse.
 - Center God's heart for the wounded.
 - Equip leaders and communities to prioritize protection over image.
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Before You Begin (Critical for Leaders)

This topic may surface:

- Personal trauma
- Church betrayal
- Authority wounds
- Legal or safety concerns

Establish Safety

- Make sharing voluntary.
- Do not pressure anyone to confront someone.
- Do not require reconciliation in this session.

- Avoid minimizing statements like:
 - “We’re all sinners.”
 - “Just forgive.”
 - “You should have gone privately first.”

If someone discloses ongoing abuse, prioritize safety and encourage them to seek appropriate support (pastoral care outside the accused structure, counseling, or legal authorities if necessary).

This is not a debate space. It is a discernment and healing space.

1. Opening Prayer

“Lord, thank You that You are the Good Shepherd. You never abandon Your sheep, and You never minimize our pain. Teach us to discern the difference between healthy leadership and spiritual abuse. Give us courage to protect the vulnerable, humility to repent when we’ve caused harm, and faith to walk in the freedom You offer. Amen.”

2. Scripture Focus

Matthew 18:15–20

Context Reminder for Leaders

- Jesus is addressing conflict between believers.
- The goal is restoration.
- The passage assumes relatively equal standing between parties.
- It does not address:

- Criminal behavior
- Abuse of authority
- Power imbalances
- Coercion

Matthew 18 is about reconciliation, not containment of scandal.

Teaching Point 1: Misuse of Matthew 18

Clarifications

- Forcing victims to confront abusers alone can retraumatize.
 - Power imbalance changes the application.
 - Protecting institutional image is never the priority of Scripture.
 - Shepherds are called to protect sheep, not each other's reputations.
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Reflection Question

Have you ever seen Scripture used to protect someone in power rather than to care for the wounded?

Leader Tip:

If someone becomes defensive, redirect gently:

"We're not attacking the Church. We're asking how to align it more closely with Christ."

3. Teaching Point 2: Sin vs. Spiritual Abuse

Definitions

Sin

- Broad category
- Personal rebellion
- Requires repentance

Spiritual Abuse

- Misuse of spiritual authority
- Manipulation using Scripture or position
- Control, intimidation, coercion
- Damages trust in God's character

Spiritual abuse is not merely “someone messed up.”
It distorts the image of God in the eyes of the wounded.

Reflection Question

Why is it important to name spiritual abuse as more than just “sin”?

Leader Note:

Naming something accurately is not rebellion. It is clarity.
When harm is minimized, healing is delayed.

4. God's Heart for the Wounded

Read aloud:

- **Ezekiel 34:2–4** – Shepherds who exploit.

- **Ezekiel 34:11–12** – God rescues His sheep.
 - **Psalms 34:18** – Near to the brokenhearted.
 - **Isaiah 61:1** – Healing for the brokenhearted.
 - **Matthew 11:28–30** – Jesus offers rest, not burden.
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Leader Insight

Ezekiel 34 is crucial. God does not only comfort the sheep. He confronts abusive shepherds.

That matters.

Reflection Question

Which of these verses speaks most deeply to how God responds to the wounded?

Allow silence here. Survivors often need time.

5. Responsibility of Leaders

Core Truths

- True reconciliation requires confession and demonstrated change.
 - A quick apology without accountability is not biblical repentance.
 - Sometimes stepping down is the most Christlike response.
 - Leadership is stewardship, not ownership.
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Reflection Question

What would it look like for leaders to take full responsibility for harm they have caused?

Encourage practical answers:

- Transparent investigation
- Independent oversight
- Public repentance
- Restitution
- Counseling
- Temporary or permanent removal from leadership

Avoid vague language like “pray about it.”

6. Application

Break into three categories:

If You’ve Been Wounded:

- God sees you.
- You are not rebellious for naming harm.
- Healing does not require proximity to your abuser.
- Forgiveness does not eliminate boundaries.

If You Are a Leader:

- Image is not your savior.

- Humility is not weakness.
- Accountability is biblical.
- Authority exists to protect, not dominate.

If You Are Part of a Community:

- Believe the wounded.
 - Advocate for transparency.
 - Do not rush reconciliation.
 - Safety before unity.
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Reflection Question

What step can you take this week—personally or in your community—to create safety and healing for the spiritually wounded?

Encourage specific, realistic actions:

- Checking on someone
 - Recommending trauma-informed counseling
 - Reviewing church policies
 - Inviting outside accountability
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7. Guardrails for Discussion

As leader, gently intervene if:

- Someone demands immediate reconciliation.

- Someone minimizes abuse as “just offense.”
- The conversation becomes accusatory toward unnamed individuals.
- A survivor begins reliving trauma in overwhelming detail.

Offer breaks if needed.

8. Closing Reflection

Invite journaling:

- What did I learn about Matthew 18 today?
 - Have I ever misapplied it?
 - Where might God be asking me to bring healing rather than protection of image?
 - What does the Good Shepherd look like in my life right now?
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9. Closing Prayer

“Lord, thank You that You are the Good Shepherd. You never abandon Your sheep, and You never minimize our pain. Teach us to discern the difference between healthy leadership and spiritual abuse. Give us courage to protect the vulnerable, humility to repent when we’ve caused harm, and faith to walk in the freedom You offer. Amen.”

Final Leader Encouragement

This is heavy material. If people return next week quieter than usual, that doesn’t mean failure. It often means truth is settling.

You're not stirring rebellion. You're restoring Scripture to its rightful place. That's shepherding work. And it takes courage.

Bible Study: The Christian Mission Statement

Theme:

Rediscovering the True Blessed Life in the Upside-Down Kingdom

Objective:

To understand the Beatitudes as the true “mission statement” for followers of Christ, exposing counterfeit versions of Christianity that focus on self, status, or comfort rather than surrender and grace.

Opening Prayer:

“Lord, open our eyes to see as You see. Teach us to walk in the upside-down Kingdom, where humility is honor, and dependence on You is the greatest wealth. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Scripture Focus:

Matthew 5:3–10 (The Beatitudes)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs...
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted...”

Section 1: The Upside-Down Kingdom

Read: Matthew 5:3–10

Teaching Overview:

The Beatitudes describe the Kingdom of God — not a list of rules to achieve blessing, but a revelation of *what a blessed life truly looks like*.

Jesus flips our definition of success upside down. The world calls the powerful, rich, and self-sufficient “blessed.” Jesus calls the humble, broken, and dependent the truly blessed.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you heard the word *blessed* used in modern Christian culture?
 2. Which of the Beatitudes challenges your current understanding of what it means to live a “successful” Christian life?
 3. How does this passage shift your view of what God values most?
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Section 2: The Two Ditches — Poverty and Prosperity Gospels

Read: Philippians 4:11–13; Colossians 2:20–23

Teaching Overview:

The Church has often fallen into two extremes:

- **The Prosperity Gospel:** “God’s favor looks like wealth and success.”
- **The Poverty Gospel:** “True holiness means rejecting any form of prosperity.”

Both focus on *self-performance* rather than *grace*.

True discipleship lives in surrender — trusting God to provide, while seeking first His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

Discussion Questions:

1. Which “ditch” do you see more commonly in the modern church?
 2. How does focusing on grace free us from both extremes?
 3. What would it look like for your life to reflect Kingdom contentment instead of worldly success or false humility?
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Section 3: The Beatitudes as the True Mission Statement

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9; James 4:6–10

Teaching Overview:

When you encounter Jesus, your heart begins a divine transformation that follows the pattern of the Beatitudes:

- Poverty of spirit produces mourning.
- Mourning produces meekness.
- Meekness hungers for righteousness.
- Righteousness births mercy.
- Mercy purifies the heart.
- A pure heart makes peace.
- Peacemakers suffer persecution for His name.

This is the *order of transformation* — the disciple's path.

It's not a checklist but a progression of spiritual growth under grace.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which step in this progression do you most identify with right now?
 2. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit” in a culture that values self-sufficiency?
 3. How can persecution be a mark of blessing rather than punishment?
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Section 4: The Counterfeit Church

Read: Matthew 23:1–12; Revelation 3:14–22

Teaching Overview:

The modern church often mirrors the systems of the world — measuring success by numbers, buildings, and programs.

But Jesus measures success by obedience, love, and transformed hearts.

The true Church looks outward — serving, giving, and loving the least of these.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we recognize when a church (or our own hearts) have shifted toward self-focus?
 2. What are practical ways we can bring the Kingdom into our community this week?
 3. How does living the Beatitudes confront the “church industry” mindset?
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Section 5: Living the Mission Statement

Read: Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 12:1–2

Teaching Overview:

The Great Commission calls us *outward* — to go, make disciples, and serve the world.

Living the Beatitudes means embodying the character of Christ wherever we go.

When we stop seeking to “look blessed” and start *living blessed*, the world sees the true Gospel.

Application Challenge:

This week, intentionally serve someone who cannot repay you.

Reflect afterward: How did that moment align with the Beatitudes?

Personal Reflection:

- Which Beatitude do you feel the Holy Spirit inviting you to embody more deeply right now?
- What false beliefs about “the blessed life” do you need to surrender?

- How can your home, work, or ministry begin to reflect the *upside-down Kingdom*?
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Closing Prayer:

“Lord, strip away our false measures of success. Teach us to walk humbly, love mercy, and live as peacemakers in Your name. Let Your Beatitudes become the mission statement of our lives. Amen.”

Leader Guide

Bible Study: *The Narrow Path*

Theme: Walking the narrow path is not religious performance or comfort. It is dying to self, living by the Spirit, and following Jesus step by step.

Objective:

- Clarify what Jesus meant by the narrow way.
 - Expose common spiritual extremes.
 - Call participants into Spirit-led surrender.
 - Encourage practical obedience rooted in grace, not performance.
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Before You Begin (For Leaders)

This study challenges:

- Comfort
- Cultural Christianity
- Religious systems
- Personal control

Guard against:

- Legalism
- Shame-driven motivation
- Competitive spirituality

The narrow path is not about trying harder.
It is about surrendering deeper.

Create a tone of humility, not intensity.

The Golden Rule & the Narrow Path

Read: Matthew 7:12–14

Encourage someone to read slowly.

Leader Teaching Notes

Jesus connects:

- The Golden Rule (v.12)
- The narrow gate (v.13–14)

This is not random placement.

The narrow path is relational before it is doctrinal.
Loving others sacrificially is costly.

The wide path:

- Self-protection
- Retaliation
- Convenience
- Emotional avoidance

The narrow path:

- Humility
- Forgiveness
- Restraint
- Active love

“Few find it” because ego resists it.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Golden Rule shape your understanding of the narrow path?
2. Why do you think Jesus says “few find it”?
3. What makes this path difficult in everyday life?

Leader Tip:

If conversation drifts toward “those people out there,” redirect inward. The narrow path begins with self-examination.

Application

Choose one intentional act of living out the Golden Rule this week, especially toward someone difficult.

Encourage participants to write it down.

The Pendulum of History

Read:

- Proverbs 4:27
 - Galatians 5:24–26
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Leader Teaching Notes

Throughout history, the Church swings:

- Law → License
- Authority → Rebellion
- Rigid control → Chaotic freedom

Extremes feel safer because they are predictable.

The narrow path requires:

- Discernment
- Dependence
- Ongoing surrender

Walking in step with the Spirit means resisting both reactionary swings and stubborn entrenchment.

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you see the pendulum swinging in the church today?
2. Why does settling in a “ditch” sometimes feel safer?
3. What would it look like to walk in step with the Spirit instead of reacting to extremes?

Leader Guardrail:

Keep discussion broad and reflective. Avoid naming specific churches or movements.

Application

Journal:

- What ditch am I tempted toward?
- Is it performance?
- Is it comfort?
- Is it control?
- Is it apathy?

Invite honest reflection.

Dying to Self

Read:

- Romans 6:1–14
 - Matthew 16:24–26
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Leader Teaching Notes

The narrow path is not rule-keeping.
It is identity transformation.

Dying to self means:

- Releasing control
- Surrendering entitlement
- Letting go of reputation
- Trusting God with outcomes

The flesh seeks:

- Comfort
- Recognition
- Security

The Spirit leads:

- Surrender
- Obedience
- Eternal perspective

Resurrection hope makes self-denial possible.

Discussion Questions

1. What does “take up your cross” mean in your own words?
2. Why is dying to self essential for the narrow path?
3. How does resurrection life give hope when obedience feels costly?

Leader Note:

Watch for self-punishment language. The cross is surrender, not self-hatred.

Application

Fast from something that feeds comfort this week:

- Social media
- Entertainment
- Convenience habits

Replace it with prayer and Scripture.

Remind participants:

This is training, not earning.

Living by the Spirit

Read:

- Romans 8:12–14
 - Galatians 5:24–26
-

Leader Teaching Notes

The narrow path cannot be sustained by willpower.

Living by the flesh:

- Reactionary
- Defensive
- Impulsive

- Self-centered

Living by the Spirit:

- Responsive
- Patient
- Convicted
- Peace-filled

“Keep in step” implies ongoing attentiveness.

The Spirit guides moment by moment, not just in major decisions.

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you see flesh vs. Spirit in your daily rhythms?
2. What practices help you stay in step with the Spirit?
3. How can we help one another stay on the narrow path?

Encourage practical answers:

- Accountability
 - Confession
 - Community
 - Silence and prayer
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Application

Commit to pausing before decisions this week and asking:
“Holy Spirit, lead me.”

Small decisions count.

The Cost and the Reward

Read:

- Matthew 16:24–26
 - Hebrews 12:1–3
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Leader Teaching Notes

The narrow path feels:

- Unsafe
- Slower
- Less visible
- Often lonely

But Jesus walked it first.

Hebrews 12 reminds us:

- Fix your eyes on Him.
- He endured for the joy set before Him.

The cost is real.

The reward is eternal.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do most people avoid the narrow way?
2. What comforts or securities are hardest for you to release?
3. What encouragement do you find knowing Jesus walked this path first?

Application

Ask:

What one area of my life is Jesus asking me to surrender right now?

Encourage sharing with a trusted friend for accountability.

Series Reflection (Optional Final Week Add-On)

Invite participants to reflect:

- Where has my understanding of discipleship shifted?
 - Where do I still resist surrender?
 - What practices will help me remain on the narrow path long term?
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Closing Prayer

“Lord, I confess the narrow path is too hard for me to walk alone. Teach me to die to myself and live by Your Spirit. Keep me from the ditches of pride, fear, and comfort. Let me follow Jesus closely, step by step, until I see You face to face. Amen.”

Final Leader Encouragement

This study will not produce hype. It will produce depth.

If participants leave quieter, more thoughtful, and slightly unsettled in a holy way, that is not failure. That is formation.

You're not teaching them how to look Christian.

You're inviting them to actually follow Jesus.

Leader Guide

Bible Study: *The “Other” Gospel*

Scripture Foundation: Galatians 1:6–9

Theme: Guarding the true Gospel from subtle distortions that shift trust from Christ to self.

Objective:

- Understand Paul’s urgency in Galatians.
 - Identify modern distortions of the Gospel.
 - Discern the difference between obedience and self-reliant striving.
 - Anchor participants in Christ alone.
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Before You Begin (For Leaders)

This study may:

- Challenge long-held theological assumptions.
- Surface defensiveness.
- Trigger past church hurt.
- Stir strong opinions.

Set the tone:

- We are not attacking denominations.
- We are examining the Gospel itself.
- The goal is clarity, not controversy.

Keep the discussion focused on:
Christ's sufficiency.

1. Opening Prayer

“Lord, guard our hearts from distortion. Help us recognize truth clearly and reject anything that competes with Your finished work. Anchor us in grace alone, through Christ alone. Amen.”

2. Scripture Reading

Read Galatians 1:6–9 aloud.

Consider reading twice, with different voices.

Leader Teaching Notes

Paul's language is:

- Astonished.
- Urgent.
- Severe.

This is not disagreement over preferences.
This is salvation-level seriousness.

Paul distinguishes:

- *Allos* – another of the same kind.
- *Heteros* – another of a different kind.

The “other gospel” is not a slight variation.
It is a counterfeit entirely.

Background Overview (Condensed for Teaching)

1. The Judaizing Distortion

Christ + Mosaic Law = Salvation

Circumcision, rituals, dietary laws were added as requirements.

The result:

Grace was undermined.

The cross was treated as insufficient.

2. The Motive Problem

The teachers were not only doctrinally wrong.

They were driven by:

- Cultural pressure
- Control
- Boundary-setting around belonging

False gospels often protect power structures.

3. The Ongoing Warning

Modern distortions appear as:

- Performance Christianity

- Moral superiority
- Self-empowerment spirituality
- Cultural Christianity
- Nationalistic faith
- Self-help wrapped in Bible verses

Wherever grace is mixed with self-effort for acceptance, the danger resurfaces.

Modern Example: Word of Faith (Leader Guidance)

If using this section:

- Avoid mocking language.
- Speak from testimony, not accusation.
- Focus on the theological shift, not personalities.

Key issue:

Faith becomes a force to manipulate outcomes.

God's blessing becomes activated by human performance.

The subtle shift:

Christ → Me

Grace → Technique

Trust → Control

False gospels are dangerous because they look close to truth.

Core Theological Contrast

False Formula:

- Christ + Law = Salvation
- Christ + My Words = Blessing
- Christ + My Performance = Acceptance

True Gospel:

Christ alone
By grace alone
Through faith alone

Read Ephesians 2:8–9 aloud.

Emphasize:
Faith is the instrument, not the achievement.

Discussion Questions

1. What “other gospels” have you seen in churches or teachings today?
 2. How can we distinguish healthy obedience from self-effort striving?
 3. Where have you felt tempted to rely on yourself instead of Christ?
 4. Read Galatians 2:20. How does this reshape your understanding of faith and works?
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Leader Tips for Discussion

If conversation becomes accusatory:
Redirect to self-examination.

If someone says:
“But obedience matters,”
Affirm it clearly.

Obedience flows from grace.
It does not earn grace.

The difference is motive and foundation.

Teaching: Where the Trap Lies

Both legalism and self-empowerment share a root:

Self at the center.

The Gospel removes boasting.
Counterfeit gospels subtly restore it.

Ask:
Who gets the credit here?

Application Section

1. Know the Real Thing

Counterfeits are detected by familiarity with the original.

Encourage:

- Regular reading of the Gospels.
 - Meditating on Christ's finished work.
 - Measuring teaching by Scripture, not charisma.
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2. Guard Against Subtle Additions

Invite participants to ask:

- Does this teaching increase dependence on Christ?
 - Or does it increase pressure on me?
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3. Rest in Finished Work

Faith is not:
Straining harder.

Faith is:
Leaning fully.

Encourage participants to identify one area where they are striving instead of trusting.

Personal Reflection Time (5–7 Minutes)

Have participants write:

- Where have I subtly added “Jesus plus” to my faith?
- What am I trying to control?
- What would resting in Christ look like in this area?

Allow silence.

Optional Teaching Clarifier

Healthy Christianity includes:

- Discipline
- Repentance

- Obedience
- Spiritual growth

But these are fruit of salvation, not payment for it.

Keep repeating:

Grace first. Always grace first.

Closing Prayer

“Lord, protect us from subtle distortions. Keep us from adding to what You have finished. Teach us to rest fully in Christ alone. Remove striving, pride, and fear. Anchor us in grace. Amen.”

Final Leader Encouragement

Galatians is sharp because love guards what saves.

If participants leave unsettled but relieved, that is good.

Relief often comes when striving is exposed.

You’re not just teaching theology here.

You’re helping people breathe again under grace.

That is worth doing carefully and courageously.

Leader Guide

Kicking the Holy Cow

Theme:

Are we worshiping God—or have we built a golden calf out of church structures, business models, and traditions that feel safe and familiar?

How to Use This Guide

This study is designed for **five sessions** (60–90 minutes each). As a leader, your role is not to lecture but to **facilitate reflection, foster honesty, and guard unity**. The topic may surface strong opinions about church culture, leadership, and personal experiences. Keep discussion grounded in Scripture and centered on spiritual growth rather than criticism.

Leader Posture

- Model humility and openness.
 - Keep conversations Scripture-focused.
 - Redirect church-bashing toward self-examination.
 - Encourage application, not just analysis.
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Fear or Faith?

Objective

Help participants identify how fear can lead to counterfeit solutions instead of patient trust in God.

Read

Exodus 32:1–6

Key Emphasis

Fear often pushes people to create something tangible and controllable when God feels distant.

Opening Icebreaker (Optional)

Ask: *What do people tend to do when they feel uncertain or out of control?*

Teaching Notes

- The Israelites had just witnessed miracles, yet fear overrode memory.
- They did not reject God outright; they replaced Him with something visible.
- Fear often disguises itself as “taking action.”

Discussion Guidance

Encourage personal reflection rather than abstract critique.

If discussion stalls, prompt with:

- What might have been going through their minds while waiting?
- What fears feel most common in today’s church culture?

Watch For

Participants shifting blame entirely to “church leadership” or “modern culture.” Gently bring focus back to personal responsibility.

Application Emphasis

Encourage participants to:

- Identify one area where fear drives decisions.
- Pray specifically for faith to replace control.

Close in prayer for increased trust in God’s timing.

Leaders and the Crowd

Objective

Explore leadership pressure and the shared responsibility between leaders and followers.

Read

Exodus 32:2–6; Hebrews 4:14–16

Key Emphasis

Aaron yielded to pressure. Spiritual leadership requires courage rooted in access to God.

Teaching Notes

- Aaron was not ignorant; he was pressured.
- Leaders are accountable, but crowds influence outcomes.
- Hebrews reminds us we all have access to grace through Christ.

Discussion Guidance

Keep tone respectful toward real-life leaders.

Helpful Prompts:

- What makes compromise tempting for leaders?
- How can church members support integrity instead of demanding comfort?

Leadership Insight

Remind the group:

- Criticism is easy.
- Prayer and encouragement are harder and more transformative.

Application Emphasis

Have participants name (privately or aloud) a leader to pray for this week.

Close by praying corporately for pastors and spiritual leaders.

The Golden Calf of Today

Objective

Discern the subtle ways modern systems can replace dependence on God.

Read

Exodus 32:7–10; Romans 12:1–2

Key Emphasis

The Israelites labeled their idol with God's name. The danger was distortion, not abandonment.

Teaching Notes

- Idolatry can look religious.
- Success metrics can quietly replace spiritual fruit.
- Transformation requires renewed thinking.

Discussion Guidance

Avoid attacking specific churches or denominations.

Reframe when necessary:

Instead of "Churches today are..."

Encourage "I have noticed in myself..."

Practical Angle

Discuss:

- Programs vs. presence

- Branding vs. holiness
- Growth vs. maturity

Application Emphasis

Encourage one practical step toward seeking God personally beyond structured systems.

Invited to the Mountaintop

Objective

Encourage direct relationship with God rather than over-reliance on intermediaries.

Read

Exodus 19:18–21; Hebrews 12:18–24

Key Emphasis

God invited proximity; fear created distance.

Teaching Notes

- The people preferred representation over encounter.
- Christ removes the barrier to access.
- Spiritual maturity involves drawing near personally.

Discussion Guidance

Ask participants to reflect on their own devotional habits.

Helpful Prompt:

- What keeps us from meeting God directly?

Sensitive Area

Some may struggle with prayer or spiritual dryness. Affirm that intimacy grows over time.

Application Emphasis

Encourage the silent, direct time with God suggested in the study. Stress simplicity: Scripture and prayer.

The True Church

Objective

Reframe identity from consumers of church to participants in the body of Christ.

Read

Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Peter 2:9–10

Key Emphasis

The church is people formed, gifted, and sent—not a product to attend.

Teaching Notes

- Leadership exists to equip, not perform.
- Every believer carries identity and mission.
- Growth is collective and active.

Discussion Guidance

Ask participants to define “church” in one sentence before reading. Compare definitions afterward.

Encourage:

- Ownership

- Participation
- Service

Application Emphasis

Challenge each participant to take one tangible action that reflects being the church.

Handling Difficult Moments

Because this study critiques church systems, you may encounter:

1. Personal Hurt from Church Experiences

Respond with compassion.
Acknowledge pain.
Redirect toward healing and biblical vision.

2. Cynicism or Anger

Affirm concern for purity and faithfulness.
Refocus on constructive change and personal obedience.

3. Defensive Reactions

Remind the group:
The goal is not tearing down the church but refining it.

Suggested Weekly Flow (75 Minutes)

1. Opening Prayer – 5 minutes
2. Scripture Reading – 10 minutes
3. Teaching Summary – 10 minutes

4. Group Discussion – 30 minutes
 5. Application & Reflection – 15 minutes
 6. Closing Prayer – 5 minutes
-

Final Encouragement for Leaders

This study is not anti-church. It is pro-faithfulness.

Lead with humility.

Guard unity.

Keep Christ central.

If your group leaves more dependent on God than on systems, more prayerful than critical, and more committed to being the church than consuming it, you have led well.

Leader Guide

The Counterfeit Community

Theme: Discovering True Biblical Community

Objective: Explore God's design for community, recognize counterfeit fellowship, and cultivate authentic, Christ-centered relationships.

How to Lead This Study Without It Turning Into a Complaint Session

You're guiding people through something personal. Community wounds run deep. Some participants may have been burned by church culture, others may be sitting quietly in loneliness. Your job is to:

- Keep Scripture central.
- Invite honesty without enabling bitterness.
- Encourage ownership instead of blame.
- Model vulnerability first.

Authentic community begins with leaders who go first.

God's Design for Community

Objective

Help participants understand that community is not optional. It is foundational to God's design.

Scripture

- Genesis 2:15–23

- Genesis 2:18

Teaching Emphasis

- “Not good” is the first negative statement in creation. Let that sink in.
- Adam had perfect environment and unbroken fellowship with God, yet still needed human relationship.
- Community is for joy and accountability. Both matter.

This is not about social preference. It is theological design.

Discussion Guidance

If people treat this as a light topic, gently steer deeper:

- What does “not good to be alone” reveal about God’s character?
- Why do some believers still treat isolation as spiritual maturity?
- How does accountability protect rather than restrict us?

Watch for participants who equate independence with strength. That idea sounds noble but rarely survives real life.

Application Focus

Encourage reflection on:

- Hidden isolation
- Avoided vulnerability
- Relationships that lack depth

Invite them to take one step toward relational openness this week.

The Danger of Isolation

Objective

Expose how spiritual isolation creates vulnerability to pride and distortion.

Scripture

- Ezekiel 28:14
- Exodus 25:17–22

Teaching Emphasis

- Lucifer operated in proximity to glory yet fell into pride.
- The Ark's design includes two cherubim facing one another. Shared glory, shared posture, shared humility.
- God's presence is revealed in relational context.

Isolation distorts perspective. Community corrects it.

Discussion Guidance

Encourage thoughtful responses:

- How does isolation amplify pride?
- What happens when no one has permission to question us?
- What would it look like to “face one another” in humility?

This may surface discomfort. That's fine. Growth often feels inconvenient.

Application Focus

Ask participants to identify:

- Areas of hidden spiritual independence

- Relationships lacking accountability

Encourage prayer for God to send trustworthy, mature believers into their lives.

The Church as a Body

Objective

Reframe community from optional involvement to spiritual interdependence.

Scripture

- 1 Corinthians 12:14
- Romans 12:4–5
- Ephesians 1:22–23

Teaching Emphasis

- A body only functions when connected.
- Diversity is intentional, not accidental.
- Christ is the head. Not the pastor. Not the board. Not the program.

The metaphor eliminates consumer Christianity. Bodies are living organisms, not event venues.

Discussion Guidance

Encourage reflection:

- What changes when you see yourself as a member, not an attendee?
- How do your gifts strengthen others?
- How did Jesus model relational depth in His ministry?

Remind the group that spiritual maturity is communal, not private.

Application Focus

Have participants identify:

- People who strengthen their faith
- People they are strengthening

Encourage reciprocal investment.

Recognizing Counterfeit Community

Objective

Discern the difference between activity and authentic fellowship.

Scripture

- 2 Timothy 3:5
- John 13:35

Teaching Emphasis

- Counterfeit community looks religious.
- Activity does not equal intimacy.
- Love, vulnerability, and transformation are the markers of authenticity.

Programs can support community. They cannot replace it.

Discussion Guidance

Be careful here. This section can drift into cynicism.

Redirect statements like:

“Churches today only care about numbers.”

Toward:

“How have I contributed to shallow relationships?”

Ask:

- What are signs of surface-level fellowship?
- How can we tell if love is genuinely present?
- What keeps us from vulnerability?

Application Focus

Challenge participants to:

- Evaluate the depth of their current relationships
- Initiate one meaningful interaction this week

Depth rarely happens accidentally. It requires intention.

Building True Community

Objective

Move from critique to construction.

Scripture

- Acts 2:42–47

Teaching Emphasis

The early church was marked by:

- Devotion to teaching
- Fellowship
- Shared meals
- Prayer
- Generosity
- Joy

Notice what is missing: branding strategy.

True community is relational, sacrificial, and spiritually centered.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- What practices from Acts 2 are most lacking today?
- What barriers prevent this kind of fellowship?
- What would change if we prioritized presence over programming?

Encourage realism. Community takes time. It also requires inconvenience.

Application Focus

Have participants:

- Identify a small group for intentional investment
- Develop a simple rhythm: meet, pray, share, serve

Keep it practical and sustainable.

Navigating Sensitive Moments

When Someone Shares Hurt

Listen without fixing.

Affirm pain.

Gently redirect toward healing and hope.

When Cynicism Surfaces

Acknowledge legitimate concerns.

Shift toward personal responsibility.

When Silence Fills the Room

Allow it.

Silence often means reflection is happening.

Leader Reminders

- Authentic community begins with honesty.
- You cannot force vulnerability, but you can model it.
- Keep pointing back to Christ as the head.

True community is not accidental. It is cultivated through humility, shared commitment, and love that costs something.

If participants leave desiring deeper relationships rather than merely better programming, the study has done its work.

Leader Guide

Unity, Not Uniformity

Big Idea: The church is not a factory producing identical parts. It is a living body under Christ. Unity is spiritual alignment under one Lord. Uniformity is cultural sameness enforced by fear.

Your task as a leader is to protect both **truth and tenderness**. Conversations about church culture can get personal fast. Keep Scripture central. Keep tone gracious. Keep Christ as the standard.

How to Lead This Study Well

- Model appreciation for diversity in the room.
- Don't allow critique to drift into cynicism.
- Redirect comparison toward calling.
- Emphasize participation over spectatorship.

Unity is cultivated. Uniformity is imposed.

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

Scripture

Ephesians 4:5–7

Objective

Understand that spiritual unity is rooted in shared allegiance to Christ, not identical personalities or preferences.

Teaching Emphasis

Notice the repetition of **one**:

- One Lord
- One faith
- One baptism
- One God and Father

Paul grounds unity in doctrine before he celebrates diversity in gifting. Unity is theological. Diversity is practical.

Verse 7 matters. Grace was given to **each one**. Unity does not erase individuality. It redeems it.

Discussion Guidance

If discussion gets abstract, anchor it:

- Why does Paul repeat “one” so deliberately?
- What is the difference between shared faith and shared style?
- Where have you seen pressure to conform culturally rather than spiritually?

Encourage honesty without targeting specific churches or leaders.

Application Focus

Have participants write down:

- One unique trait, gift, or experience God has given them.
- One way that uniqueness can serve the body this week.

Affirm that difference is not disruption. It is design.

Many Parts, One Body

Scripture

1 Corinthians 12:4–20

Key Verse

“For the body does not consist of one member but of many.” (v. 14)

Objective

Reinforce interdependence and dismantle comparison.

Teaching Emphasis

Paul uses physical imagery because it is obvious:

- An eye cannot be a hand.
- A foot cannot pretend to be an ear.
- A body made of only one part would be monstrous.

Uniformity creates dysfunction. Diversity creates strength.

Some churches unintentionally elevate certain gifts. When that happens, quieter or less visible gifts shrink back. That is not biblical order. That is cultural preference.

Discussion Guidance

Invite reflection:

- Which metaphor resonates most with you and why?
- Have you ever felt sidelined or undervalued?
- What happens when everyone tries to be the “visible” gift?

Keep this from becoming a therapy circle about past hurt. Acknowledge pain but steer toward growth.

Application Focus

Ask participants to identify:

- A gift they have minimized.
- A fear that has kept them quiet.

Encourage them to pray and take one concrete step this week to use that gift.

When the Church Becomes a Business

Objective

Discern the subtle shift from disciple-making to brand-building.

Teaching Emphasis

Programs are tools. They are not the mission.

When numbers become identity:

- People become metrics.
- Leaders become executives.
- Church becomes performance.

Jesus built disciples through meals, conversations, correction, and presence. His ministry was relational before it was organizational.

This is not anti-structure. It is anti-substitution.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- Where have you seen business thinking overshadow spiritual care?
- What effect did it have on people's hearts?
- How can we prioritize people without rejecting structure entirely?

Redirect criticism into responsibility:
“How can I personally choose people over preference?”

Application Focus

Challenge participants:

- Identify one overlooked person.
- Act personally instead of waiting for institutional solutions.

Unity grows relationally, not administratively.

Unity, Not Fear

Scripture

John 17:20–23

Objective

Understand that Christlike unity flows from love, not control.

Teaching Emphasis

Jesus prays for unity patterned after the Trinity. That unity is:

- Relational
- Loving
- Secure
- Distinct yet perfectly aligned

Fear-based unity says:

- Blend in.

- Don't question.
- Protect image.

Love-based unity says:

- Stay connected.
- Speak truth.
- Protect people.

Perfect love drives out fear. Fear enforces uniformity.

Discussion Guidance

Invite honest self-examination:

- What does Trinitarian unity look like practically?
- Has fear or love shaped your church experiences more?
- Where might you be conforming out of insecurity?

Keep tone hopeful. Unity is possible because Jesus prayed for it.

Application Focus

Have participants write down:

- A fear affecting their church life.
- A prayer asking God to replace it with courage and love.

Encourage quiet reflection time before closing prayer.

Closing Challenge

The early church endured persecution, cultural diversity, and doctrinal tension. Yet they remained unified because Christ was central.

They were:

- Devoted
- Relational
- Sacrificial
- Courageous

They did not thrive because they were identical. They thrived because they were anchored.

Leader Reminders

- Unity is not the absence of disagreement. It is shared submission to Christ.
- Celebrate diversity in your group actively.
- Protect space for quieter voices.
- Model humility when discussing church culture.

If participants leave with deeper appreciation for their uniqueness and greater commitment to loving others who are different, the study has done its work.

And if even one person stops shrinking to fit and starts serving boldly, that is a win for the body of Christ.

Leader Guide

Going Out of Business

Text Focus: Matthew 5:3–10

Theme: The true “blessed life” vs. the distortions of prosperity and poverty gospels

Big Idea for Leaders

This study confronts two deeply rooted distortions:

- The **prosperity gospel** that equates blessing with gain.
- The **poverty gospel** that equates holiness with deprivation.

Both replace grace with performance. One performs to gain. The other performs to suffer.

Your role is to guide people back to the narrow center: **grace-driven kingdom living**.

Keep the tone pastoral, not combative. This topic can surface strong opinions.

Session Goal

Participants should leave:

- Understanding what Jesus means by “blessed.”
 - Able to identify cultural distortions of blessing.
 - Rooted more deeply in grace rather than effort or entitlement.
-

1. Opening Reflection: Redefining “Blessed”

Scripture

Matthew 5:3–10

Objective

Disrupt comfortable assumptions about what blessing means.

Teaching Emphasis

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by overturning worldly definitions of success.

The blessed are:

- Poor in spirit
- Mourning
- Meek
- Merciful
- Pure
- Peacemakers
- Persecuted

This is not a marketing strategy. It is a kingdom manifesto.

The Beatitudes describe:

- A posture, not a paycheck
- A heart, not a highlight reel

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- What comes to mind when you hear “blessed”?
- How does that compare with Jesus’ list?
- Why do we drift toward equating blessing with comfort?

Allow silence if needed. This question exposes assumptions people rarely examine.

2. Word Study: “Blessed” (Makarios)

Key Term

Makarios – supremely blessed, fortunate, flourishing in God’s favor.

Teaching Emphasis

Jesus does not say:

“Become this and then you will earn blessing.”

He says:

“This is what the blessed life looks like.”

That distinction matters.

The Beatitudes are descriptive before they are prescriptive.

They reveal what grace produces.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- Why is it important that Jesus describes who is blessed?
- What dangers arise when we treat the Beatitudes as a ladder to climb?

Steer away from self-improvement language. Keep bringing it back to grace.

3. The Ditches: Poverty Gospel vs. Prosperity Gospel

Objective

Help participants identify theological extremes without turning this into a culture war.

Teaching Emphasis

Both extremes distort the gospel:

Poverty Gospel	Prosperity Gospel
Holiness equals deprivation	Favor equals wealth
Self-denial proves faith	Abundance proves faith
Can become legalistic	Can become materialistic
Focuses on self-punishment	Focuses on self-glorification

Both shift focus from Christ to performance.

Kingdom Truth

We are blessed because of Christ's righteousness, not because of our bank account or our suffering.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- Which extreme do you see more influencing churches today?
- Why are these messages appealing?

Encourage honesty without mocking others. Many believers are shaped by these ideas unintentionally.

4. Church History Example: Asceticism

Scripture

Colossians 2:20–23

Teaching Emphasis

Early ascetics like the Stylites and Desert Fathers sought holiness through extreme deprivation.

Their sincerity does not automatically validate their method.

Paul warns that harsh treatment of the body:

- Appears wise
- Feels spiritual
- Lacks power against sin

External severity cannot cure internal rebellion.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- Why do extreme practices often look spiritually impressive?
- How does legalism masquerade as devotion?

Be gentle here. Some participants may come from very strict church backgrounds.

5. The Other Extreme: Worship of Comfort

Scripture

Philippians 3:18–19

Teaching Emphasis

Modern distortions often idolize:

- Influence
- Platform
- Growth
- Comfort

When success becomes the metric, discipleship becomes optional.

Discernment requires asking:

- Does this message exalt Christ or the individual?
- Does it call people to surrender or self-fulfillment?

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- How can we recognize when comfort has become an idol?
- What does spiritual discernment look like in a consumer culture?

Encourage thoughtful answers rather than reactionary critiques.

6. The Narrow Way: Grace

Scripture

2 Corinthians 12:9

Objective

Anchor the entire study in grace.

Teaching Emphasis

Grace is not:

- Permission to indulge
- Pressure to perform

Grace is empowerment.

It enables:

- Poverty of spirit without self-hatred
- Meekness without weakness
- Mercy without burnout
- Purity without pride

Grace keeps us from both extremes.

Discussion Guidance

Ask:

- How does grace protect you from legalism?
- How does grace protect you from entitlement?

Encourage participants to articulate practical examples.

7. Closing Challenge

Reframe the Beatitudes as a mirror.

This week, encourage participants to reflect daily:

- Where have I pursued comfort over Christ?
 - Where have I tried to earn what can only be received?
 - What would it mean to live truly poor in spirit today?
-

Leader Cautions

- Avoid caricaturing theological positions.
 - Keep focus on Scripture, not personalities.
 - Be sensitive to participants shaped by either extreme.
-

Final Leader Reminder

The goal is not to criticize churches.

The goal is to clarify the Kingdom.

If participants walk away:

- Less impressed with performance
- Less anxious about status
- More anchored in grace

Then you have helped them see the blessed life as Jesus defined it.

And that kind of “going out of business” is exactly what the Kingdom requires.

Leader Guide – The Organic Church

Theme: Returning to God's Original Design for His Church

Big Idea for Leaders

This study explores the biblical vision of the Church as a **living, relational organism** rather than an institution, program, or brand. The goal is to help participants:

- Recognize the difference between **organic, Spirit-led community** and institutionalized or comfort-driven structures.
- See the Holy Spirit as the true leader of the Church.
- Identify ways to live and gather as a **living, multiplying body of Christ** today.

Keep the conversation **invitational**, not judgmental. Participants may come from diverse church experiences—some rigid, some overly structured, some casual.

Section Guides

1. The Question That Changed Everything

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24–25

Key Thought: Church is a **Body, not a building**.

Discussion:

- How has “church” been defined in your experience?
 - Which parts of that definition come from Scripture vs. culture?
Leader Tip: Emphasize that organic church is not a rejection of gathering—it's a return to God's design.
-

2. What Is the Organic Church?

Scripture: Ephesians 4:15–16

Key Principle: When structure replaces Spirit, the church begins to die.

Discussion:

- Differences between an organism and an organization?
 - Why did God design the Church to be alive and relational, not mechanical?
Application: Encourage participants to think of ways their gatherings could reflect life, not just management.
-

3. History Confirms the Pattern

Scriptures: Philippians 4:22 (Rome), modern examples

Teaching Point: Persecution purifies, multiplies, and strengthens; comfort can stagnate.

Discussion:

- What does persecution accomplish that comfort never can?
 - How can we “return to simplicity” without external pressure?
Leader Tip: Focus on principle, not politics—highlight patterns of growth under pressure.
-

4. The Covering of the Holy Spirit

Scriptures: John 14:26; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

Key Point: The Holy Spirit is **our true Leader**; human hierarchies often replace Him.

Discussion:

- Fears in releasing control to the Spirit?
 - How have we substituted man-made systems for Spirit-led leadership?
Application: Invite participants to identify one area to trust the Spirit’s guidance this week.
-

5. The Call Back to Life

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:26

Teaching Point: Organic church is family-led, Spirit-filled, mission-minded, and participatory.

Discussion:

- What would it look like for a group to live this way today?
- How can we prevent even organic models from becoming another “system”?

Application: Brainstorm practical steps to gather in small, Spirit-led communities.

6. Who the Holy Spirit Is

Scriptures: Various (John 14:26; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, etc.)

Teaching Point: The Spirit is God, a person, truth, sanctifier, and leader.

Discussion:

- Which role of the Spirit do you most relate to or need to rediscover?
 - What does it mean that the Spirit, not man, is our covering?
Leader Tip: Emphasize relational intimacy with the Spirit over dependence on human authority.
-

7. Reflection: Trading Our Birthright

Scripture Reference: Genesis 25 (Esau)

Teaching Point: Comfort often substitutes for calling; we trade intimacy with God for predictability.

Discussion:

- Where have we chosen comfort over calling?
 - How might your community look if the Spirit truly led everything?
Application: Personal reflection and group sharing if appropriate.
-

Closing Scripture & Prayer

Scripture: Romans 8:14 – “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

Prayer Prompt:

“Holy Spirit, teach us to trust Your leadership again. Strip away everything built on comfort and control. Make us Your living Church — simple, faithful, and alive in Your power.”

Leader Tips

- **Facilitation:** Keep discussions experiential and relational. Invite stories, examples, and personal reflections.
- **Sensitivity:** Participants may feel challenged about their current church experience. Emphasize learning and restoration, not condemnation.
- **Actionable Takeaways:** Encourage participants to consider small groups, home gatherings, or personal steps toward Spirit-led fellowship.
- **Reinforce Theme:** Continuously return to the idea that church is **organic, relational, and Spirit-led**, not mechanical, hierarchical, or comfort-driven.

Leader Guide – The Structure of the Church Jesus Intended

Session Title: Family, Not Hierarchy — Returning to the Organic Church Jesus Established

Big Idea for Leaders

This study explores the **biblical design of the Church** as a living, relational family led by Jesus rather than a hierarchical institution. The goal is to help participants:

- Understand the difference between **institutional vs. organic church models**.
- Recognize Jesus as the **functional Head** of His church.
- See every believer as a **priest and active participant** in God's mission.
- Reflect on practical ways to cultivate **family-like, Spirit-led community** today.

Maintain an **invitational tone**—acknowledge participants' church backgrounds without condemnation. Encourage curiosity and reflection rather than guilt.

Section Guides

1. The Institutional Church Model

Objective: Understand the common hierarchical structure and its impact.

Key Points:

- Authority flows top-down.
- Ministry is often centralized among a few leaders.
- Congregation often functions as attendees/supporters.

Discussion Questions:

- Which parts feel comforting?

- Which parts feel disconnected from the simplicity of the gospel?
Leader Tip: Emphasize observation and reflection, not criticism.
-

2. The Early Church Model in Scripture

Scriptures: Acts 2:42–47, Acts 4:32–35, 1 Corinthians 12–14, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1

Key Points:

- Leadership was **plural and participatory**.
- Believers ministered in homes, using spiritual gifts.
- Focus was on **community, generosity, prayer, and discipleship**.

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you see family-like leadership in the New Testament?
 - How does hierarchy change relational dynamics?
Application: Compare personal church experience with biblical patterns.
-

3. The Organic Church — A Biblical Design

Scriptures: Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 4:15, 1 Peter 2:9

Key Points:

- Jesus is **the functional Head**.
- Plurality of elders enables shared leadership.
- Every believer participates in ministry and decision-making.
- Life is relational, not event-driven.

Discussion Questions:

- How would shared leadership change your local church?
- How does understanding every believer as a priest impact your personal ministry?

4. The Ministry Model of Jesus

Scriptures: Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 4:14, Matthew 23:8–12

Key Points:

- Jesus ministered in small circles.
- He modeled discipleship through **life-on-life interaction**, not programs.

Discussion Questions:

- Would Jesus' ministry be recognized as "legitimate" today?
- Why did we reinvent His model?

Application: Consider ways to disciple in relational circles rather than through events.

5. The Shift After Constantine

Key Points:

- Safety institutionalized the church.
- Structure replaced intimacy; doctrine often overtook discipleship.

Discussion Question:

Where do you see fear disguised as "protection" in church culture today?

6. The Remnant — The True Church Throughout History

Key Points:

- The church persisted underground, unnoticed, unstoppable.
- True church is **Spirit-led, free, and multiplying**.

Discussion Questions:

How does this give perspective on freedom from structures?
What can we learn from remnant churches?

7. Modern Example: The Church in China

Key Points:

- Millions of believers, no mega-churches, deep fellowship, explosive growth.

Discussion Question:

- Are we willing to pursue Jesus with this depth, even without programs or comfort?
-

8. Anchoring Scripture

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9

Key Point: You don't need a system to protect you—you have **Jesus, the Word, and the Spirit**.

9. Closing Prayer

Prayer Prompt:

“Jesus, take Your place as our High Priest. Lead Your church as You did from the beginning. Teach us to make disciples while You build Your church. Strip away anything that keeps us from Your design. Make us a family—submitted to You, submitted to one another, walking in power and humility. Amen.”

Leader Tips

- **Facilitation:** Keep discussion **relational and reflective**, allowing participants to share personal experiences.
- **Sensitivity:** Participants may have strong attachments to institutional church experiences—acknowledge their value while introducing biblical patterns.
- **Application:** Encourage participants to identify **small practical steps**—house gatherings, mentoring, shared ministry, relational discipleship.

- **Reinforce Theme:** Emphasize **family-led, Spirit-led, participatory church** over hierarchical models.
- **Optional Activity:** Map participants' current church experience vs. early church patterns on a whiteboard or paper.