

# The Grad Experience Week 2



## ***Is Church Really for Me? What if I Don't Feel God?***

*Key Lesson: Church is like family, sometimes messy, but critical to our spiritual life.*

Starting off this Grad Experience lesson **our goal is for you to spend some time discussing topics that are extremely present in your world today** – and if they are not present in your high school, they will eventually be present on a college campus, workforce, or military ... or just in the general culture of the world you live in.

**Our goal** isn't for you to leave here each week with a definitive answer to some of life's tough questions when it comes to living and our faith, but to get you at least **thinking about the topic and determining how that connects with whatever faith you claim to have.**

**A second goal is for this to be a safe place** and for people to feel the freedom to disagree in love.

- We want you to be honest as we discuss these subjects because that's the only way we work through finding answers that strengthen our faith.
- Don't just "go along with the crowd" – if you have questions or doubts/disagreements, step up and share them.

Last week we talked about dealing with doubt and our faith.

This week we are going to look at the church and what it means for your life.

**Isn't Christianity just a personal thing between me and God? If so, why do I need the church?**

**Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?**

**"I don't think you need a church to be a Christian. And if you do, I don't even think you need to go to church every single weekend to feel God in your life."**

**SHOW VIDEO: THE CHURCH (2:18)**

Show this statement on screen:

**"At its core, Christianity is a relationship between God and his people. While everyone comes to God as an individual, it is impossible to belong to Jesus without also belonging to other Christians."**

**Do you agree or disagree with this statement? If you agree, what do you think it means that we belong to other Christians too?**

God calls the Church a body with different limbs (or members). – **HAVE STUDENTS READ THESE TWO VERSES FROM SCREEN**

**It's a family** and when God calls us "into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9), He also calls us into **fellowship with the whole family** of believers (Rom. 12:4-5).

God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. – 1 Corinthians 1:9

<sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and **individually members one of another**. – Romans 12:4-5

**Let me share this statement with you and you tell me what it means to you:  
Believers in Jesus need the church because they are the church.**

We belong to the church like humans belong to the human race.  
We're adopted and made a member of his family.

**But is this statement regarding the church a "universal" one (all Christians, everywhere throughout history) OR referring to the local church (people you meet with consistently in your community) OR both? Why?**

As a church, how do we display the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that we cannot on our own?

- More generosity and charity
- Accountability and encouragement
- Instruction and fellowship
- UNITY – shows the Gospel (*John 17:20-23 ... then the world will know ...*)
  - All of these are hard to do individually (by yourself)

**Together, by God's grace (since we are all just a bunch of fellow sinners who will fail and disappoint each other) we are more than the sometimes-messy sum of our parts.**

**Even in the Bible there were some pretty messed up people in the church, right? Can I love Christ and not like Christians, or love Jesus and not like the church?**

- Have you ever seen this statement before: **SHOW ON SCREEN: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."**
- **Anyone know who said this?** Comes from the Hindu, **Mahatma Gandhi**: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

**What do you think about this statement?**

**"God compares the church to family a lot. The church can be full of health or sickness. Members we love, and members that get on our very last nerve. ... Which is all to say - church people are still just people. But we are called to be a family, not runaways. And I'd rather go to church with messed-up people who love God than go to church with religious people who don't love messed-up people."**

When you really belong to Jesus, you are going to grow to love what He loves – and He loves the church, made up of all kinds of broken, not perfect followers.

**Who are some messed up people in the Bible that did some really broken things?**

- **The patriarch of Israel, Abraham** – twice passed his wife Sarah off as his sister to avoid harm.
- **The greatest king of Israel, David** – committed adultery, then plotted a murder to cover it up.
- **Jonah** – was racist towards the Ninevites and ran from God's call to speak a message to them.
- **Peter** – publicly denied Jesus three different times in His greatest moment of need.
- **Paul** – hunted down Christians and had them jailed and even killed

Today, “big name” Christians make the news when they dishonor God by their behavior. In fact, **the sins of Christians are far more newsworthy than their acts of faithfulness.** So yes, there have been, are, and will always be “messed up people in the church.”

Let me share with you a truth that you need to hold on to for the rest of your life about the church:

**You should not be surprised at the sin you see in people in the church – even leaders. We're all broken sinners.**

**What happens when there feels like there is this lack of connection with God at church? If church doesn't help me feel connected with God or fill me up, why go at all?**

- **Why do we need the church?**

Church is where heaven comes down to Earth.

- It's crucial for our own discipleship and growth, and crucial for the evangelistic witness of Jesus' Gospel.
- It's where we learn to grow in real community.
- It's a needed community – even when it has messed up people in that community.

The Christian life is more than private Bible reading, prayer, and personal acts of service. Let me share with you something that should rebut any thought you may have about not going/meeting together with the church:

- **The New Testament alone has 59 references urging believers to do something with or toward “one another.”**
  - Love one another, serve one another, be devoted to one another, honor one another, instruct one another, care one another's burdens, etc. – none of which you can do alone (and these are called for believers to do for other believers.)
    - Why would the Bible encourage this if it didn't prioritize community together as a body of believers?

**Do you agree or disagree with this statement:**

**SHOW ON SCREEN: “It is simply impossible to obey what God has said in the Scriptures if we are not a part of a real, local body of other disciples.”**

- Think about it, exercising these “one another's” is how God helps to grow and shape us to be more like Christ.

**The church is also where our gifts are revealed and put to use. (1 Cor. 12)**

- God's Spirit has distributed various gifts among his people--gifts like hospitality, mercy, healing, preaching, administration, evangelism and others--but no one person has all of them.

**Church is also more than feeling “filled up” by good music, teaching, or preaching.  
What happens if we are coming to church for this reason?**

The girl in the video said this:

“Like other cultures before us, we've been taught to chase certain feelings. Whatever makes us feel authentic, or feel worshipful, or just plain feel good. Our world tells us this life is all about us, and what we get out of it. And it seeps in to how we feel about church. If the vibe isn't right for us, if we don't feel like we're getting the right things there, or whatever, we feel a right, or even an obligation, to bail. But the primary purpose of the church is not to get a warm fuzzy feeling about Jesus.” – Agree or disagree? Why?

Let's jump gears for a second ...

**What about divisions in the church? Can that be a good thing? Why or why not?**

**Can the parts of the body not work in synchronicity and still work?**

**ILLUSTRATION:** Think of your body. You might be hungry, but your limbs might be too tired to get up and make a meal. Or your legs might begin to tighten on a long run, but your mind tells you the feeling will pass if you press on.

- This isn't a flaw. The parts may not always operate in perfect synchronicity.

**So how does the church operate when it's not in sync all the time?**

Listen to how Jesus wants to answer this question: **(HAVE STUDENT READ)**

*<sup>20</sup> “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. <sup>21</sup> I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us **so that the world will believe** you sent me. <sup>22</sup> “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. <sup>23</sup> I am in them and you are in me. **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them** as much as you love me. – John 17:20-23*

Disunity within the church is one of the single biggest killers of evangelism.

Yet, disunity/division is not the same as diversity.

Look at the diversity of the church in eternity:

*<sup>9</sup> After this I saw a **vast crowd**, too great to count, **from every nation and tribe and people and language**, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they were shouting with a great roar, “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!” – Revelation 7:9-10*

Show Quote on Screen:

“...gathering with the church can be inconvenient, but so is love. Relationships are messy, but so is love. Vulnerable conversations are scary, but so is love.” - *There's No Such Thing as Virtual Church*, by Jonathan Leeman, The Gospel Coalition, 8.18.21

## So, can you have diversity in the church without division?

- The church's diversity has always - and will always - demonstrate the Gospel's power to unite us.

## What about this statement?

*I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. **Let there be no divisions in the church.** Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. – 1 Corinthians 1:10*

Look at how people outside view the church as:

anti-homosexual (91%)

judgmental (87%)

hypocritical (85%)

old-fashioned (78%)

too involved in politics (75%)

out of touch with reality (72%)

insensitive to others (70%)

boring (68%)

not accepting of other faiths (64%)

confusing (61%)

- Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman

## You can have diversity of thought – but be careful about too much diversity of theology.

Truth to remember: **We do not have authority to change scripture. Regardless of how it may make us feel, we can't change what the truth of the Bible says.**

## If the church has so many broken people in it, did God have a reason for establishing the church? If He did, what was it?

- The gathered community of every Christian church is **to be a witness to the redemptive love of God in Christ**, and a living invitation to “come and see” what life in Him can be.

I want to leave you with this quote from a historic theologian – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*“The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

## What are your thoughts on what he said?

**Remember: Church is like family, sometimes messy, but critical to our spiritual life.**

QR Code for the church Darkroom website

## Close with possible prayer for your church community:

God, thank you for your Church and our community where we can gather as fellow believers and encourage one another. Help us to love and serve each other well, and experience strength and unity in diversity. When we slip up and hurt others, convict us and forgive us, help us make amends and extend one another grace as You do to us. Shine your light in us, through us, and over us so that we can make a difference in this world, for your glory and purposes. In Jesus' name, Amen.