



The Story of EVERYTHING

Big Idea Discussion Guide / Session 5 - The Church

Big Idea

The church is not an institution or organization—it is a main character right now in the ongoing *Story of Everything*. I become part of the story as I take my place as a celebrating, connecting, and contributing member of the body known as the church.

Ice Breaker

What was your favorite team/group you were ever a part of growing up? What made that community experience so powerful? Was there a team or group that you wanted to be part of? Why?

A.W. Tozer wrote in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

If we modify this slightly to “what comes into the Christ-follower’s mind when they think about church...,” it can become a very revealing statement about ourselves and our relationship with God.

1. What words or phrases come to your mind when you hear the word “church”? What do you think this reveals about you? How do you think the next generation will answer this question?

A group of prominent Christian leaders got together to distribute a large sum of money that would make a significant difference in the world. They decided not to use the local church. They said they had their reasons for not trusting the church to get the job done. Many people have a very limited view of the church—they either criticize it for its failings or trivialize it for its irrelevance. It’s an extremely popular idea that spirituality is primarily an individual pursuit, and that being a part of a church is optional at best and detrimental at worst.

The church is the hope of the world. To see why this is true, we need to look at the whole story. We have already discussed how before the world was even created, God was living in community as the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. After the world was created, this community grew to include God, humanity, and the rest of creation. Then sin entered the world to break this perfect community. However,

God didn’t give up on his creation, but instead worked to restore the broken relationships. He revealed Himself to the world through the community of the 12 tribes of Israel, through which Jesus eventually came. Then, Jesus called His 12 apostles and modeled community with them. The church is now the continuation of God’s created community in which He reveals Himself to the world. As the church lives out God’s purposes, it restores God’s dream and becomes the hope of the world for the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan.

2. Do you believe that the church is “the hope of the world”? Why or why not?

The church is often described in God’s Word through the metaphor of the human body.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” -1 Corinthians 12:27

The church makes Jesus physically and actively present in the world as the Spirit of God lives within it. The church is the center of *The Story of Everything* right now. It is God’s plan A for the world. He has no plan B. Our own church is just one chapter in the story.

So what does the church which God dreams of look like? Devotional blogger Bridget Willard writes,

“Church isn’t where you meet. Church isn’t a building. Church is what you do. Church is who you are. Church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s not go to Church, let’s be the Church.”

Three core experiences here at COMMUNITY describe life within our church: celebrating, connecting, and contributing. These experiences are about so much more than “things we do.” Another way to express these three C’s is relationally: LOVING GOD, LOVING EACH OTHER, and LOVING THE WORLD. The three C’s are an expression of what the church is that we could never fully be on our own as individuals.

Celebrating is primarily about our relationship with God. It often begins with the church gathering together to love God and worship Him. Celebration services are like a family

getting together for a birthday. Celebrating doesn't end here; it becomes a life-long pursuit of discovering new ways to celebrate, hear from, and worship God.

3. Do you approach church services as a "celebration"? Why or why not? What other experiences have you had of celebrating your relationship with God?

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Connecting is primarily about our relationship with each other. It's about doing life together. It's loving, encouraging, and challenging each other. It's praying together. We need to be givers of these things as much as we need to receive them, because giving strengthens and encourages us as much as receiving does. Our connection to God leads us to be connected with each other.

4. Share a time when being able to connect in your church community made a real difference in your life.

Contributing is primarily about our relationship with the world in which we live. It is about the church acting as a steward of God's world. The church needs to be reaching in love to help all people find their way back to God and set the world back to right. God wants us to play a vital role in His work of redeeming and restoring this world back to how He meant it to be. We are a community of people called to bless the world and *The Story of Everything* is the mission we live.

5. Do you feel like you are a part of God's mission to bless and restore the world? If you don't, what steps would you like to make in order to change that? If you do, share with your group how God is using you in your day-to-day life.

In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark describes the growth of the early church in the Roman Empire. It was a dynamic community with a lifestyle in clear contrast to the rest of society. Church members looked after the weak and downtrodden. They took in the people that no one else wanted. As a result, the church grew rapidly and changed the course of history.

When we become part of the church as God means it to be and we get beyond attending a once-a-week event, we engage the church in a way that will change the world. We will be part of a redemptive, restoring community. We will be a radical force

making a real difference. When we work together we can do the things we could not hope to do on our own.

"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5)

Imagine a hand that could stay alive on its own (like Thing in the Addams family). It could do lots of useful tasks, but imagine what it can do as part of a whole body with arms and legs and eyes and all the other parts of a body. The church is like a body. It needs everyone—with all their different gifts and talents—to function according to God's design.

6. What do you think are the advantages to carrying out God's mission in community rather than on your own? What challenges come with that?

Each of us is called to respond to God's story at a personal level, but we need to remember that though we can be spiritually alive apart from the Body of Christ, on our own we can never fully be what we were meant to be. Apart from God's church, we can never fully play our part in *The Story of Everything*.

What's Next

When we are part of a church with the mission of helping people find their way back to God, we are part of the whole story of God. Reflect back on some of your responses to today's questions and think about what changes you need to make in your life to play your part in God's dream for the world. Be ready to share these ideas as you connect with others in His church. Commit as a group to an activity that will further the cause of God's kingdom here on earth. This could include ideas like:

- Serving together as a group in a ministry at church.
- Serving together as a group in the community, either through a church-organized event or on your own.
- Start praying as a group every single week for a specific list of people (whom people in the group are somehow connected to who are far from God.) Encourage each other as you continue on your spiritual journey.
- Commit as a group to BLESS the world and participate in your campus' next commissioning service.

Next week we celebrate 25 years at COMMUNITY!

What a great week to celebrate with so many in baptism. As you prepare to lead your group, consider having someone share their story of what led them to be baptized. Make sure that people know that next week during the weekend service, they will have the opportunity to be baptized. They always do, of course, but next week will be an incredible week to join with their church on its 25th year anniversary!

Leader's Guide

1. This will be a great way to learn about people's church backgrounds. You should be able to learn a lot about people from this question!
2. Depending on what people's experiences have been, some may not believe the church is the hope of the world. Perhaps ask, "Do you believe church the way God desires it to be is the hope of the world?" Remind people that there is nothing like the church when the church is working right. No other organization entity does what the church is designed to do! It is alive! That is why Scripture refers to it as the body of Christ.
3. Here is another question that should give you some insight. Try not to let this question lead the discussion into a negative, consumerist attitude of church services. Remember that when we go to a birthday party, the gifts are for the person who we are celebrating! We may not like the gifts, but ultimately they are for God.
4. Your small group coach and director would love to hear these stories! This is why they do what they do. So, pass along these stories!
5. Don't skip this question! It's one thing to "talk church." It's another to "be the church." This question will help you do that! So don't skip it. If you are running low on time, assign it as homework to discuss throughout the week on Facebook or when you resume next week.
6. This is also a great question to help your group engage in the mission of Jesus. Remember that Jesus sent his disciples out two by two to bless the world. If your group agrees that it's too difficult to go bless others when you are all together as one group (which, it can be bulky for sure! Especially with kids...), then make plans to go out two by two to bless others.

Community Christian Church

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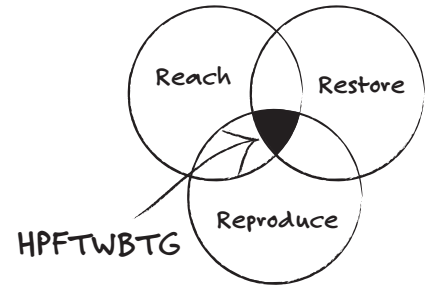
Small Group Mission

Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



Missional Practices: B.L.E.S.S.

- B - Begin with prayer:** We will pray for the people or place to which we are sent.
- L - Listen:** We will listen to the people or place to which we are sent.
- E - Eat:** We will share meals with those to whom we are sent.
- S - Serve:** We will respond to the needs we discover among those to whom we are sent.
- S - Story:** We will share the story of Jesus and what he is doing in our lives with those to whom we are sent.



Type of Small Group On Mission

- One Mission:** The entire small group commits to going after the same mission. This can be a new idea originating from the group, or it can involve plugging into an existing ministry or program in the community.

The place or people our group has been sent to is:

- Multiple Missions:** Each member of the group has a specific mission they are following God in. The group provides a place to celebrate individual stories, wrestle through questions and challenges and provide support and encouragement.

The place or people our group members have been sent to is:

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Group Dynamics

- Confidentiality:** Everything shared in group stays in the group.
- Participation:** Everyone participates in our discussions and our mission.
- Empty Chair:** We always keep an "empty chair" as a sign of our openness to new people joining us.

Group Leadership

Coach _____

Leader _____

Apprentice Leader _____

Host _____