

## THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

This week you will need:

- Paper (ideally a piece of butchers paper, however a few sheets of A4 will do)
- Pens/textas
- Extra paper for the 'Involve' activity

### CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- Do you love winter or loathe it? (Ask them to give 2 reasons why they feel that way).
- What is one thing that makes you smile?
- Which animal would you love to have as a pet? (No restrictions – it doesn't need to be legal!)

### DISCUSS

*This 5-week series focuses on 'The Church' and will help your group grasp what the church is and its purpose on earth. Please note for this week there are no separate questions for 'New Christians' and 'Established Christians' – we hope everyone will be able to engage with the following discussion prompts, relative to their own level of maturity.*

Give your group the challenge of describing the 'perfect' or 'ideal' church. What happens within that church? What are the people like? Allow your group to be creative and imaginative in their response.

Give them paper and pens/textas, and give your group 10-15 minutes to brainstorm, organise their thoughts and create a mind map on paper. Push them to be specific – it's all well to say the church should 'love people', but what does that actually look like in practice? What kinds of things should be happening to show that love?

When your group thinks they are done, use the following questions to challenge their description:

- Is your church primarily focused on people inside the church, or outside the church?
- Are people likely to get saved in your 'ideal' church?
- Are people likely to feel genuinely known and loved in your church?
- Are people going to grow more and more like Jesus?
- Has your church 'remembered the poor', as the early church was so often told?

Give your group another 5 minutes to make any additions or changes they'd like to make to their mind map.



### THE CHURCH

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Once they're done, ask your group to open their Bibles to Acts 2:42-47, which describes the earliest form of the New Testament church. Prompt discussion using your choice of the following questions:

- How does your 'ideal' church compare to the one described in this passage? What is similar? What is different? How do you feel about your description after reading this one?
- What stands out to you most from this passage? What is interesting/confusing/unexpected?
- This expression of the church was recorded nearly 2,000 years ago. Do you think the church should still match that description today, or is it only natural that things change and evolve over time? Explain your answer.
- Based on the Scripture passage, what is one area you think God might be challenging you personally about?

### INVOLVE

Explain to your group that while it's good and healthy to think and talk about an 'ideal' church, we can't use those conversations as an excuse to be negative and critical about our current church. We want to be people of vision and hope, not complainers and whingers!

Give each member of your group a sheet of paper and a pen and ask them to write a letter of encouragement to the senior church leadership. The letter could be addressed either to the corps officer/senior pastor or to the entire church leadership team. Thank them for the work they do and follow the Spirit's leading with any specific encouraging words.

Your group may not know the senior leadership of the church personally, but encourage them that their words will still be appreciated and valued by the church leaders regardless. In this case, you might want to write a short note together and have everyone sign it.

Afterwards, spend some time praying for the church leaders. Collect the letters and make sure they get delivered to the right place!

### APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing they will do differently this week based on the discussion

OR

Challenge your group to spend time every day this week asking God to teach them about the church and about their role in it. You may want to have space next week for people to share anything that came from this.



## THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

This week you will need:

- Newspaper, sticky tape and scissors (if you choose to use the 'newspaper bridal gown' connect activity), or...
- A large piece of paper and pen

### CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- Give your week so far a rating out of 5. Why did you give it that score?
- [Girls] If you were getting married this weekend and could have any dress you liked, what sort of dress would you choose?
- What is your favourite part of the school day? (If your group members have finished school, encourage them to think back)
- What's one thing you've been learning lately?

OR

- If your group has 6 or more members, divide them into 2 groups, give each a pile of newspaper, some scissors and some sticky tape. Give them 5 minutes to dress up one of their members as a bride.

### INVOLVE

The church is referred to in Scripture as the bride of Christ. Take a black marker and write onto the 'newspaper bridal gown' all of the qualities you think Jesus would be looking for in a bride (e.g. Faithful, devoted, pure, interested in knowing more about him, loving, honest, willing to give time, puts him first). For each point that someone speaks out, encourage them to explain/elaborate.

If you didn't do the newspaper bridal gown activity, you can write the answers on a piece of paper that everyone can see.

### DISCUSS

*When we picture a bride we imagine a young woman dressed in white, ready to make a lifelong commitment to the man she loves. Apparently we – the church – are Jesus' bride. What does this mean?*

Ask for a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 11:1-3 and Ephesians 5:25-28.



### THE CHURCH

## THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

### NEW CHRISTIANS

- Do you find it strange to think of yourself as Jesus' bride? Why/why not?
- Why do you think the church is compared to a bride?
- What do these verses tell us about how Jesus feels about the church?
- If Jesus considers the church to be his bride, how do you think he feels when Christians criticise or tear down other denominations or churches?

### ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

In addition to the above questions you might like to ask...

Ask for a volunteer to read Revelation 19:7-9 and Rev 21:2.

- In Revelation 19:7 it says 'his bride has made herself ready'. What do you think it means for the church to make herself ready? In what ways are you doing this as a life group? In what ways are you doing this as an individual?
- There are references in all of the 4 verses we have studied to purity. Just as a bride should be pure and set apart for her groom the church should be pure and set apart for Christ. How do we become pure?

### APPLY

What will you do differently this week based on what you have discussed?

### LEADER'S NOTES

In biblical times there was a betrothal period – the bride and groom were separated until their wedding. In the same way the bride of Christ is separated from her Bridegroom in the present.

Revelation talks about the time when the wedding ceremony takes place and Christ is united with his bride for eternity.

In the meantime, the church must stay pure and devoted to him.

Remind your group that we are not made pure and acceptable by human effort – but through Jesus.

## THE FAMILY OF GOD

### CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- What's the best day you can ever remember having? What was so great about it?
- What's the worst thing you've ever tasted?
- What's one thing you appreciate about being in a life group?

OR

- If you have 'Happy Families' cards play a round or two.

### DISCUSS

*Some of us have massive families, for others it's just us and our mum. When we become a Christian God adopts us into his family – he becomes our Dad and immediately we have millions of brothers and sisters.*

Ask for volunteers to read John 1:12-13, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Galatians 3:28, and Romans 8:15

### NEW CHRISTIANS

- How does it feel to know that God is your father? In ways is he like a good dad?
- According to these verses from John, how do we become a child of God? Do you think anyone can be accepted into the family of God because of who they are related to by blood?
- Lots of people don't have a good real-life dad or don't know their dad at all. How would they feel about having a heavenly father?
- If God is our father we are all brothers and sisters. How do you think our heavenly father would want us to act towards each other? (see Hebrews 13:1-3.)
- What does Galatians 3:28 tell us about God's family?
- How would someone who has never had good family relationships feel to be welcomed into a church family?
- In what ways have you found your church (or life group) to be like a family?
- In what ways is there a 'family resemblance' amongst God's children?



### THE CHURCH



## THE FAMILY OF GOD

### ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

In addition to the questions above, you could ask:

- Has anyone in your church played the role of a grandmother, aunty, sister/brother to you? In what way?
- Consider Romans 8:15 again. What sort of father is he?
- Consider 1 Timothy 5:1-2. When this was written family members on the whole were treated with greater respect than they are today. How ideally do you think you should treat a parent, sister, grandparent?
- How do you think God would want us to respond to people in our church who do not have a natural earthly family? Are there any particular times of year when they would especially value support/love?

### INVOLVE

Who could you be a big brother or sister to? Identify someone, send them an encouraging text on the spot and decide on one thing you will do to invest into them (e.g. take them to the movies, give them a birthday present if their birthday is soon, go to their next soccer game).

### APPLY

As a group, organise a 'family dinner' for various people from your church. Decide where you will have it, what each person will cook, who you will invite, etc.

Make sure you invite some people who do not have a strong earthly family around them at the moment.

Come up with some ways to help your guests feel loved and valued on the night.

### LEADER'S NOTES

Membership in 'the family of God' does not depend on any earthly connection. It does not come by natural birth, but by new birth.

The Greek word for 'adoption to sonship' is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.



## THE BODY OF CHRIST

This week you will need:

- 3 x blank greeting cards
- Bibles
- Pens
- One sheet of paper big enough for everyone to look on.

### CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- What do you think is the best show on TV at the moment?
- What's one food that you would struggle to go without?
- What's one thing you have been praying for/about lately?

OR

Ask 2 people to try to butter and spread a piece of bread with vegemite with one hand behind their back. First to finish wins. Afterwards, ask the competitors how easy/difficult they found their task.

### DISCUSS

*When some people hear the word 'church' they think of an old fashion building with a steeple. Others picture a boring group of people bound by rules. In this series we are going to be exploring what the church is really all about.*

*This week we are going to look at what it means for the church to be the body of Christ. He is the head. I am an eye. You are an ear. What does all this mean?*

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 12:12-18.

### NEW CHRISTIANS

- As a group, brainstorm as many different roles within the church as possible. (Cleaner, Sunday school teacher, youth pastor, life group leaders, people who cook meals for the sick, prayer warriors, prayer pals, welcomers, pastoral care team, officer, treasurer, etc).
- Has anyone ever had a broken bone? How was the rest of your body affected by that? (Simple tasks become difficult; the surrounding muscles are impacted, etc.) In what way is it the same in the church? (See verse 26.)
- If the church is a body, does that mean everyone is meant to be equally involved and committed to it? Or is it ok that some do more work than others? Why?



### THE CHURCH



# THE BODY OF CHRIST

- What do you think is the coolest ministry or 'job' in the church? What would happen if everybody only did that thing and nothing else? What could go wrong if people who weren't the right 'part' tried to do that job?
- What advice would you give to someone who thought that their part of the body (role within the church) was boring or useless?

### ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- Which line stands out to you the most? Why?
- Do you think it is possible for someone to be the church on their own?
- What sorts of things do you think we can do to show value to the various parts of the body?
- Have you ever wished you had been given different gifts to what you have? Why do you think that is? What do these verses speak into that?
- Where do you see factions or divisions in the church (globally, locally, across the denominations in your community)? What can you do as a group or as individuals to help heal those?
- Has your youth ministry ever considered doing something in partnership with another corps or church? What might that look like?

### INVOLVE

Choose 3 people from your church who serve faithfully and consistently but maybe don't often get thanked or encouraged because they serve 'behind the scenes'. Use your greeting cards to send them an encouragement.

If you're not sure who to encourage, your group might want to call a senior church leader on-the-spot and ask for suggestions.

Pray together for those people, and for unity in your church.

### APPLY

Together, plan an activity you can do with another youth group in your area.

OR

Do you know what your part in the body is? Ask everyone to identify one skill/gift/treasure/passion they have that they could use to serve God.

Challenge each person to commit to doing one new thing to contribute to the ministry of the church this week.





## A PLACE TO GROW

### CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- Tell us about the new thing you did this week to contribute to the ministry of the church.
- Disney or Nickelodeon?
- Playstation, Wii or Xbox?
- Who is the person in your life who makes you laugh the most?

### INVOLVE

Spend some time encouraging each other and praying. One at a time, have everyone encourage the person on their left by completing the sentence 'Lately I've appreciated having you in my life because...'

Once everyone has been encouraged, have everyone (all at the same time) pray for the person on their right.

### DISCUSS

Read Ephesians 4:11-16 together.

#### NEW CHRISTIANS

- Make a list together of all the different things this passage tells us about the church. (There's a lot in there!)
- How would you summarise this passage of Scripture in one sentence? (Allow some time to discuss the different responses from your group)
- Read verse 13. What do you think this means? What does it mean for our everyday lives?
- This passage talks a lot about people growing. In what ways has being part of a church helped you grow? What ways mentioned in this passage do you think you still need to grow in?
- Verse 15 says we will 'speak the truth in love'. What does this mean? What would be some good examples? What would be some bad examples?



### THE CHURCH

## A PLACE TO GROW

### ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

In addition to the previous, you may like to use the following questions:

- What stands out to you most from this passage?
- Read verse 11 again. There are 5 'gifts' or roles mentioned. What do you think the purpose of each is? Are any more important than the other? Why/why not? Do you recognise any of these gifts in your own life, or in another group member?
- Verse 13 mentions 'measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ'. Does this mean we can be exactly like Jesus? Why/why not?
- Some young people get frustrated with their local church because they don't feel like they are growing. Has anyone in the group ever felt like that? What do you think causes this, and what is a healthy response?

### APPLY

Have everyone share one thing they will do differently this week based on what they've learned.

OR

1 Corinthians 12:31 teaches us that it is ok for us to desire Spiritual gifts. Spend time every day this week praying about this. Tell God about your desire to help the church grow strong and healthy and ask him to equip and empower you by his Spirit.