

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.
Sunday May 27, 2018 "I Love My Church-Gathering".

A. Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message on Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still go thru it to help you dig deeper in your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

B. Sunday's message.

Lamar began his 3 week series; "***I Love My Church***", with an indepth look at what the church actually is, and why we have it. You may have your own specific history or experience with church, that most likely formed your understanding and opinion about the church, either good or bad. But the original idea to create a body of diverse really different people with a singular focus and purpose was a radical idea. Most gatherings before the church Jesus started were formed around specific similarities. Everyone was exactly alike.

The early church was different. The church was a '***gathering***' of very ordinary people who were given an extraordinary task, and infused, filled, with a supernatural power...the Holy Spirit.

Now we have seen the church over the years drift from its original intent and purpose. It gets focused on itself, overly consumed with rules, and deciding who's in and who's out.

So there is this constant call and work towards moving the church back to what it was created for.

So let's start with a few questions uncovering your feelings about the church.

What does 'church' mean to you?

What kind of experiences have you had in your participation/involvement in church?

Lastly, how have those experiences shaped your understanding of God?

Lamar's primary point was the church was to make disciples. And in order to do this, the church had to **embrace full inclusiveness** and **break down any barriers** that previous expressions of faith and society built up that kept people out. Even more, this has to be an intentional thoughtful commitment to continually recognizing barriers would emerge even unintentionally, that would keep people out, and knock them down. The church could not represent God well if it did not **welcome EVERYONE...ALWAYS.**

However, this has not always been the history of the church. For the most part, the church has practiced a 'who's in and who's out' mentality more than it has welcoming everyone. And obviously this has hurt the church's ability to connect with people it was created to reach.

How have you experienced the church not welcoming everyone?

Where do you think the church still struggles to in welcoming "the stranger", or certain people?

C. Scripture.

One of the scriptures Lamar referred to was **Ephesians 2:14-16**. Take a moment and read this passage.

Paul seems to be saying the purpose of the gospel, the good news, this message of Jesus, is to break down anything that divides us, that creates hostility, that separates and isolates others. And the work of the church is to continue what Jesus started in creating a community of one. Not because we all believe alike, feel the same things, but rather we are a **diverse community united only by Christ**. *Unity over uniformity*. We are one, not because we all agree or see things the same way. But because in the **beauty and wonder of our divine differences** we are united by a God who loves us.

But, it is our role and purpose to continue this work. Of reaching out to all people and bringing them into the body.

So...where do you see the church reaching out to all type of people well?

What do you see the church doing that creates a welcoming, 'you're one of us' feel?

On the other hand the church still has a long way to go.

Where do you see the church doing this poorly or struggling to include everyone?

Who is being excluded and why?

What can the church do to "knock down barriers", and be a safe place for all types of people?

What can **YOU** do to be an influence, a force, within the church to help knock down barriers and create a safe place for all types of people?

D. Challenge.

In order for the church to become what Jesus created and called it to be, we have to be a kind of people that practice radical diversity in our own private lives. We have to have close friendships with people who don't look, believe, vote, act like us. The change in church in being an inclusive place can only happen when we can practice this same kind of **radical inclusiveness** in our own lives.

So...

Who do you spend your free time with?

Who can you say is one of your closer friends who is different than you, (politically, race, religious beliefs, economic status, etc.).

Who do you let into your life that is not like you?

In order for the church to be radically inclusive, and be open to all types of people, we have to live that way ourselves first. So, we must live lives, as Ephesians 2 states, that **destroys barriers** and **dividing walls of hostility** and **welcomes and embraces all types of people**. Because the church isn't the building...it's each one of us. And if we don't welcome all people...where will they go?