

OCTOBER 4, 2026

SERIES 2: CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

LESSON 2.1: WE ARE THE CHURCH

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God is building His church.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will be a faithful, active member of Jesus' church through my local church.

LESSON TEXT MATTHEW 16:13–20; LUKE 5:1–11

KEY PASSAGE MATTHEW 16:18

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

TEACHING OUTLINE

ICEBREAKER: If you were to draw a picture of a church, what would it look like?

TEACHER TIP: Connect the group's answers to point out Jesus' definition of a church focuses more on the group of people than the building where they meet. This difference emphasizes we are the church everywhere, including when we come together to worship each week.

CONNECT: Share the Connect segment. **(I)**

I. JESUS WENT LOOKING FOR DISCIPLES

- A. The Boat as a Pulpit
- B. Peter's Faith

DISCUSS: *Think of a time you felt like God challenged you to do something that seemed counterintuitive. How did it turn out?*

- C. The Miracle of Fish
- D. I will obey and worship Jesus.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Jesus waited until the cost was high to call the fishermen to follow Him? How do you think they felt when Jesus asked them to leave all those fish behind?*

II. JESUS CAME LOOKING FOR US

- A. Jesus' Mission
- B. Jesus' Church Built upon Him
- C. The Church Is People, Not a Building **(V)**

DISCUSS: *When you think of what the church is, what stands out to you? How should we refer to the building versus the people who meet there?*

D. I will be a faithful, active part of Jesus' church through my local church.

APPLY: Share the Apply segment.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer for God to help us appreciate being part of His church and to be faithful to Him and His church. Pray for God to use us to reach our world around us with the good news of the gospel.

CONNECT

EVER SINCE THE famous Gold Rush of 1849, the citizens of Marin County dreamed of a faster way to connect the San Francisco Peninsula to their county. The best solution they had was using ferries, which steamed eight million passengers and two million vehicles across every year. The ride was as comfortable as possible, but it still took an average of thirty minutes to ferry approximately seven miles. Traffic jammed, commuters grew impatient, and soon citizens were clamoring for a bridge.

But the naysayers listed plenty of reasons a ferry was still the safest, cheapest, most reliable way to cross the strait. The deep waters and high tides made it nearly impossible to build a bridge. Couple those challenges with the sixty mile-per-hour winds and dense fog, and construction was more than just difficult; it was dangerous. The site also sits near the San Andreas Fault, so the bridge would also have to withstand the threat of deadly earthquakes. Without today's technology, that would have made the engineers' and builders' jobs much harder.

(I) DISPLAY IMAGE NOW

For all those reasons, it appeared the ferries would continue full steam ahead in the Golden Gate strait. But during the Great Depression, when much of America was scraping by for a bowl of soup, Joseph Strauss emerged from the San Francisco fog and pitched the idea to build the longest suspension bridge in the world to join Marin County with San Francisco. But he did not work alone. He marshaled a skilled, determined team of engineers, consultants, architects, ironworkers, divers, and laborers to build the iconic 8,981-foot-long, 746-foot-high bridge we know as the Golden Gate Bridge, which opened in 1937.

The names of Strauss's team are chronicled in history, but most of us have never heard of structural engineer Charles Ellis, consultant Leon Moisseiff, architect Irvin Morrow, or the hundreds of others on his team. But without them, we would still be ferrying across the Golden Gate strait. When God came in flesh to the earth, He could have saved the world by Himself. But He chose to marshal a team. He chose to invest Himself into twelve inexperienced young men He called as disciples to follow Him. They were unlike Strauss's dream team of experts; Jesus' team included a handful of fishermen with little-to-no experience leading people. Yet Jesus was willing to pour into them, invest in them, and build His church with them as the leaders.

Although naysayers in Acts 4 considered them "ignorant and unlearned," Jesus considered them the perfect candidates to succeed Him in making disciples who make disciples, all the way until Jesus returns. The church Jesus began building in the Gospels continues to help bridge the gap between God and humanity. As the church, we point our broken world to the one who will heal them, our sinful world to the one who

will forgive them, and our lost world to the one who will save them. This is our calling. We are called to be His ambassadors of the only kingdom that will never fade away and evangelists of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We point our world to the answer they are looking for. We are the community of the Cross, the fellowship of the redeemed—we are the church.

LEARN

I. JESUS WENT LOOKING FOR DISCIPLES

When Jesus launched His ministry, His first order of business was to gather a community of disciples. These companions would walk close to Him, learn from His teaching, and participate in His work. It is notable that Jesus did not strike out on a solo mission, even though He was singularly equipped to do the work that needed to be done. His example establishes the importance of community, demonstrating that we need one another. As Jesus sought out these faithful companions, four of them were huddled together on the shores of Lake Gennesaret. These exhausted fishermen had labored all night long without catching a single fish. Now they were engaged in the menial task of mending their nets. As the muscles in their backs ached from a night of hard but seemingly worthless work and their tired fingers fumbled with tedious knots, they may have been a bit frustrated with their career choice. Surely there were jobs that required much less and yielded much more.

A. The Boat as a Pulpit

Jesus walked into the lives of these fishermen—Simon Peter, James, and John (and likely Andrew)—at what may have been their lowest moment professionally, when they may have been primed to forever leave their nets behind. But Jesus did not call them to follow Him at that low point in their professional lives; He commissioned their boat as a pulpit. A great crowd of onlookers accompanied Him. They had followed Him out of Capernaum where His influence was growing. Jesus sought a platform from which to teach, as well as relief from the pressing crowd, so He stepped onto one of the boats and asked them to push back from the shore. Since Jesus' fame was spreading, Peter, Andrew, James, and John may have been a little interested in what Jesus had to say; plus they probably welcomed the break from their dreary, disappointing task of mending their nets. Simon gladly lent his humble fishing vessel to Jesus to use as a platform to teach.

B. Peter's Faith

When Jesus was finished teaching the crowds, He told Peter to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a great catch. Initially, Peter objected, saying, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." Ultimately, though, he yielded, saying, "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5). Jesus may have been a phenomenal teacher and was even rumored to work wonders, but Simon and his friends were fishermen. They had fished those waters all night, but they had nothing to show for it but empty nets and stomachs.

DISCUSS: *Think of a time you felt like God challenged you to do something that seemed counterintuitive.*

How did it turn out?

C. The Miracle of Fish

Although Jesus' request seemed futile, something about Jesus sparked an unexplainable faith in Peter's heart. Despite his doubts, Peter obeyed and tossed one net into the water one final time. As James and John watched from the other boat, Peter and his crew wearily let their net fall into the sea. When it reached the end of its fall, they pulled together to haul the empty net back to the boat. Suddenly, the impossible happened. This time was different from last time. This time there was an unfamiliar weight, even more than a successful effort should have yielded.

Perhaps they thought the net had gotten hung up on something below the surface. Then the strangest thing happened. As they hauled in the net, fish began breaking the surface. Their nets were overflowing with fish. Peter and Andrew frantically called for James and John to come and help, but the catch was too much. Their two boats together could not contain it. Desperately they headed for the seashore, hoping their boats would not capsize from the weight of the catch. In just moments they were propelled from their worst night of fishing ever to their greatest catch of all time. But Jesus wasn't finished. After the nets overflowed and the boats nearly sank, Jesus made a life-changing call: He invited those humble fishermen to leave it all behind and follow Him.

D. I will obey and worship Jesus.

Jesus found prospective disciples after an unproductive night of fishing. It was an opportune moment. Those exhausted fishermen were probably as ready as ever to leave it all behind for a career change. Jesus could have called them then, when their decision would have been easier. Instead, He invited them back on the water where He compelled them to try one more time. He waited until their nets were full and the income and ingathering were beyond their wildest imaginations. Then, in their most successful moment ever, when the cost was greater than it had ever been, Jesus challenged them to leave it all behind to follow Him.

The same faith that compelled Peter to experience the miraculous also empowered him to step into the unknown. It always takes faith to obey Jesus and follow Him. Just like Peter, we must exercise faith that is greater than our fears and follow Jesus when He calls. Only by obeying Him, regardless of what He asks of us, will we ever experience the wonder of worshiping God in the aftermath of the miraculous.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Jesus waited until the cost was high to call the fishermen to follow Him? How do you think they felt when Jesus asked them to leave all those fish behind?*

II. JESUS CAME LOOKING FOR US

Fast-forward to the end of Jesus' ministry. The disciples had been following Jesus for about three years. They had witnessed nearly every possible miracle, including seeing Jesus raise the dead. Matthew records a deeply

christological conversation between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus asked, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matthew 16:13). The disciples responded with a variety of opinions, connecting Jesus to John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. Jesus then asked a more personal question, “But whom say ye that I am?” (verse 15). Peter excitedly provided the revelatory answer: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 16). Building on the significance of that confession, Jesus proclaimed, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (verse 18). With those words, Jesus defined His mission.

A. Jesus’ Mission

Jesus began His ministry by selecting twelve disciples, but His mission was abundantly larger than the small group of individuals He initially called to follow Him. He came to establish a community of believers that includes you and me—He came to build His church. Jesus only mentioned the church one other time. (See Matthew 18:17.) In that passage, He discussed how the body of believers should confront a sinning believer. While this text deals with church discipline, it serves to illustrate that Jesus envisioned a structured community of believers who would remain in the world to continue His ministry long after He laid down His life.

The mission of Jesus involved seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). He came seeking ordinary men and women who were caught in the grip of sin. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, He broke the bondage of sin and made a way for the lost to be found. Jesus invites sinners to become part of His church—the community of disciples living as His ambassadors to a lost world. The church continues to this day. The church is more than an organization, more than the grand buildings where it worships; it is the community that continues Jesus’ mission of reaching others and inviting them into fellowship with Him.

B. Jesus’ Church Built upon Him

Jesus told Peter and His disciples He would build His church on the revelation of who He is: He is the Son of God, or God in human flesh. In a poetic play on words involving Peter’s own name (a reference to a small rock), Jesus established the fact that He is and always will be the Rock upon which His church is built. We are His church, bought with His own blood and empowered by His Spirit (Acts 1:8; 20:28). The church that is built on the revelation of Jesus Christ is the most powerful force in the world. Jesus declared that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it, and He assured Peter that He endued His church with the power to bind and loose in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 16:18–19).

According to Ephesians 3:10, the very existence of His church reveals the wisdom of God. The church is the plan of God to reach a lost world. The joy that compelled Jesus to endure the pain and suffering of the cross is embodied in the community of believers He has redeemed by His blood. This faith community joins Him in His mission to reach the world with the good news of salvation. In a world where organized religion is villainized by many, we must recognize that the church is not a human creation; God envisioned the church from the beginning, and Jesus built the

church on the firm foundation of Himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19–22).

C. The Church Is People, Not a Building

In our world a variety of opinions swirl about what a church is and should be. To some the church is a magnificent cathedral or ornate building. To others the church is a benevolent society, an organization that exists to feed, clothe, and help the poor and needy. For many the church is nothing more than a social group with all the benefits and advantages of belonging to a special club. However, none of these captures the reality of what, and who, the church is.

The church is more than a building. It is more than the sum of what it does as an organization or the benefits it brings to those who identify with it. The word *church* appears over a hundred times in the New Testament. Almost every reference uses the same Greek word, *ekklesia*. According to a reputable Greek lexicon, this word refers to an assembly of people. Nevertheless we often say, “I’m going to drive by the church” when we mean we are going to drive by the campus where the church meets. Although we are often referring to a building or campus, the Greek word was never used in that manner. Instead, it referred to the community of believers. The church is the community of the Cross. The church is a living, breathing organism composed of Spirit-filled believers like you and me.

(V) PLAY VIDEO NOW

DISCUSS: *When you think of what the church is, what stands out to you? How should we refer to the building versus the people who meet there?*

D. I will be a faithful, active part of Jesus’ church through my local church.

God has a purpose and plan for each member of His church. He works through each life individually to accomplish the larger purpose of the church collectively. Each of us is called to be a faithful, active part of His church through our participation in a local congregation. Let us be faithful to our local church in our serving, giving, attending, worshiping, discipling, and helping one another get from here to Heaven. Together, we are the church.

TEACHER OPTION: *Tell the story below, or share one of your own to illustrate the church as the people, not just a building.*

APPLY

AN ANCIENT STORY describes a Spartan king who boasted to another ruler about the walls of Sparta. He talked at length about how strong and impenetrable they were. The monarch wanted to visit Sparta to see these walls for himself. How tall were they? How thick were they? How were they made? How were they maintained? He planned his trip; then he and his entourage made the journey until they finally saw the city of Sparta. He was surprised and

even confused to discover that the city had no walls at all.

Legend says the confused visitor asked the Spartan king what happened to the renowned walls of Sparta. The Spartan king took the arm of his guest and turned him toward the legions of soldiers training in the fields alongside the city. Pointing at that army of skilled warriors, he explained that the soldiers practicing together in that field were the walls of Sparta. This profound statement that resonates through history captures the profound idea that every man was a brick in the walls that protected the famed city of Sparta.

This story serves as a good illustration of the church. Paul described the church as a holy temple that is “fitly framed together” to serve as a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19–22). First Peter 2 refers to believers as living stones built together into a spiritual house. Both writers referred to the church metaphorically as the temple of God, while acknowledging it is constructed of individual lives rather than building materials like brick and mortar. Like that Spartan king, these inspired writers proclaimed the truth that God’s church is not a building like the Temple of old. Rather, it is a community of believers.

Collectively, the church is the dwelling place of God, but individually, each member is the church. The calling is personal. God calls each of us individually, but the results are corporate. God fits us together into the church, a community where He can minister to a lost world. God has filled His church with His Spirit and works through each of us to fulfill His divine purpose. The church is the place where Heaven meets earth, not in a geographical location but in the lived experience of each believer. Each of us is a brick in the wall, a stone in the building, put together by God for the purpose of calling others to become part of His church. Let us pledge today to do our part to fulfill our personal calling so the church might accomplish its corporate purpose in this world. We are His church. May God use us as His church.