

BIG IDEA SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Small groups that focus on the Big Idea for the week can use this guide to apply the message to life and take action. Feel free to use whatever parts of this guide best fit your group personality and time frame. All verses, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

2.7/2.8.09 // THE STORY OF EVERYTHING – CHAPTER V: CHURCH

BiG iDEA: I become part of the story as I take my place as a committed, connected, contributing member of the body known as the church.

// Ice Breaker _____

Option 1: What was your favorite team/group you were ever a part of growing up? What made that “community” experience so powerful?

Option 2: Did you go to church when you were young(er)? Without mentioning church names, what kind of experience was it?

// Questions for Discussion _____

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?

Why do so many people feel that spirituality is a private thing, and that church isn't needed—that church is optional at best, and detrimental at worst? Why is this contrary to what God has said?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

“24Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25Let 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.”

Why do you think Jesus went to the trouble of starting the church? Why not just leave us to ourselves to have a personal relationship with Him, without the bother and messiness of other relationships?

When you were looking for a church to attend and become involved in, what were some of the things you were looking for? What do you think ought to be the most important things in choosing a church to call “home”? What are the “non-negotiables?” What are “negotiables” or optional?

When people search for a church, it's often called “church shopping.” What are some ways that people can end up becoming “consumers”—making church “about me” instead of about God and His purposes?

Why is it such a serious thing to distort or divide the church? What are some ways church has been corrupted or taken off purpose?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

16Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

What are some good things you can think of that church has done for the world? Do you believe that the church can truly become “the hope of the world”? Why or why not? What does the church have to offer that nothing else in the world can?

Creating 3C Christians (Committed, Connected and Contributing) is the mission of our church. How would you rate yourself in each “C” (be honest)? What can you do to improve yourself in each “C” and encourage each other to do the same? Read the descriptions below.

COMMITTED = Loving God. It's the church gathering together to love and worship God. It's like a

family reunion. Not only do I need that to stay spiritually alive and growing, God wants and cherishes that like a parent whose kids are all coming home for his birthday. Weekly worship does great things for us, but it's what it does for God that matters most.

Do you approach church services as a "celebration"? Why or why not?

CONNECTED = Loving Each Other. It's how we experience community...especially fellowship in small groups—our mini-churches. It's about the encouragement, love, support and prayer that I need that I can't get on my own, or even in a crowd.. and that I need to give. I need to give those things as much as I need to get those things, because giving them strengthens me and encourages me as much as getting them does.

Can you share a time when being able to connect in your church community has made a real difference in your life?

CONTRIBUTING = Loving the World. God calls us not be consumers, but contributors. It's the church reaching out to love and help anyone and everyone get reconciled to God. We do that when we contribute our talents in serving; when we contribute our treasure in offerings; when we contribute our testimony in sharing our faith.

The church is often described in God's Word through the metaphor of the human body. The church makes Jesus physically and actively present in the world as the Spirit of God lives within it. 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?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-23, 27

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 14Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

// Application _____

Read and commit to memory Romans 12:5

"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Reflect on your responses to today's questions and think about what changes you may 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. You may want to commit as a group to an activity that will further the cause of God's kingdom. 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
- Something else?

Encourage each other as you continue on your spiritual journey.

// Prayer _____

Pray that you encourage others to come to church.
Pray that God shows you how you can serve.