

OCTOBER 3, 2021 • LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE •



Why Church?

Rediscovering the
Meaning and Mission
of God's People



PART 4 | *Sent*



Why Church? Sent

Why Church? Part 4: Sent

John 20:19-23

“Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you!”
“As the Father has sent me, I am
sending you.” And with that he
breathed on them and said, “Receive
the Holy Spirit.” - John 20:21-22

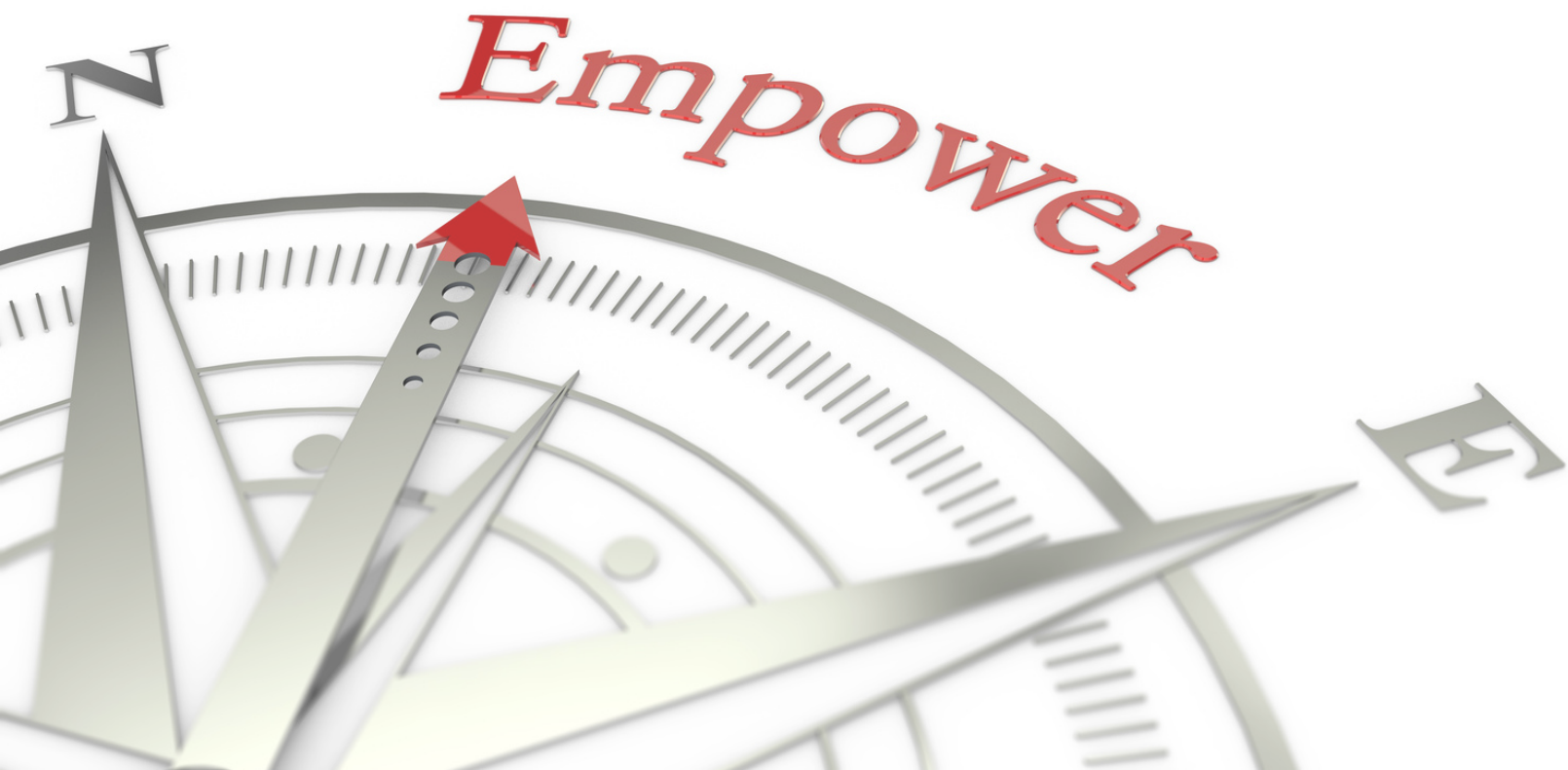
I. Sent by Jesus

The Church is a people who are
gathered around Jesus, and a people
sent by Jesus.

“For God so loved the world that he
sent his one and only Son, that
whoever believes in him would not
perish but have everlasting life.”

What does it mean, then, for us to be
sent *in the same* way as Jesus was?

- A. We too are sent as a means of
demonstrating Jesus’ love for his
world
- B. We too are to be a “gift” for the
sake of others
- C. Just as Jesus was “enfleshed” – as
he came near us, becoming part of
our world – we too are sent *into*
the world, to be present and near
our community; to enter our
neighborhoods with missionary
intent.
- D. Jesus’ wins the world, not by
claiming power for himself, but by
laying down his life for the sake of
others. We too are given this costly
calling, giving deeply of ourselves to
bring others back to God.



II. Empowered by the Spirit

Jesus' "breathing" on his disciples, and offering the Holy Spirit, is an echo of Genesis 2, where God 'breathes' into the human, and Adam becomes a living being. This scene is meant to bring our minds back to that moment, telling us that the work of Jesus is bringing the "new creation", and disciples of Jesus are now empowered to bear witness.

God's mission includes restoring his lost and broken world, but particularly focuses on accomplishing the goal he set out to "from before the foundation of the world," to create a people for himself, "to be holy and blameless in his sight," as Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:4.

- A. That the church doesn't just *have* a mission, or that God's mission is simply what we join in with. You could say that, but we are even more accurate, I think, to say: **God's Mission Is The Church.**

Jesus says in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church..."

Jesus says in Luke 19:10: "I have come to seek and save the lost."

- B. To be "sent" requires us to be the Church in all our uniqueness, our distinctness – which is what the word 'holiness' is all about. That's the primary means of bearing witness to the life-changing power of the Gospel.



Larry Hurtado in *Destroyer of the Gods* seeks to explain why the early church flourished and grew, even at a time and in an environment where it was greatly persecuted. Part of the reason was the uniqueness of the community, especially their social vision.

III. Five Key Factors of the Early Church

1. Multi-racial and Multi-ethnic

Jesus sends his followers to make disciples of “all nations” (Matt 28:18-20) – this means that when a person puts their trust in Jesus for their salvation and life, they gain a new, multi-racial, multi-cultural family – the Church. And Christianity is the first religion to ever do that – to transcend race and culture, and bring people together in this way.

“Politics and pandemic have stressed many congregations past the breaking point. It might seem easier to look for a church where everyone thinks, votes, and sins the same way you do. It’s better for your spiritual growth, however, to hunker down in a fellowship of ‘differents’. To honor people whose abilities differ from yours. To hope all things in love. To maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To respect the zealot or tax collector sitting next to you. You want to find a church that grabs this world’s attention? Find a church that looks like the world to come.”

–Colin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman,
Rediscover Church

We, as a church, need to be as flexible around merely cultural issues as possible, being *multi-ethnic and learning from the global church*.

2. Highly committed to caring for the poor and marginalized

The pagan emperor Julian famously remarked that the radical Christian practice of “caring not only for their own poor, but for ours as well.” This was seen as both offensive and attractive.

It was normal in the ancient world to care for those within your own family, or tight-knit tribe or community. But no one felt obligated to care for all of the poor and needy – especially not those of another race or culture. Yet, based on Jesus’ teaching – as we see in the parable Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan, where it is the social and religious outsider to the Jewish people, seen as an enemy really – it was the Samaritan who demonstrated the neighbourly love and care for the needy that Jesus says his followers are to emulate.

3. Non-retaliatory, marked by a commitment to forgiveness

Early Christians were notable in that if you attacked or killed them, they did not organize to get revenge or retaliation. They were famous for experiencing death in arenas, even as they prayed for their persecutors.

4. Strongly and practically against abortion and infanticide

In the ancient world it was common that if a child was born into a family and it wasn’t wanted. Yet the early Church was dead-set against the taking a human life – either through abortion or infanticide. They found these children, adopted them and raised them as their own. “The church was “pro-life,” especially” – as Keller puts it – “in the sense that they recognized no gradations of human value. In a tribalized, socially-stratified shame and honor culture, that was shocking.”

- Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*

5. Revolutionizing the sex ethic

“Therefore, sex was not for self-gratification, but for giving one’s whole life in a consensual marriage covenant that fosters deep unity across the difference of male and female and combined their non-reproducible excellencies.



This was a high, attractive vision of the character of sex, and it took enormous power away from men and the upper classes. Christianity was immensely attractive to women, who saw it as an equalizing and empowering religion.”

- Tim Keller

IV. Gospel and Table

“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (Jn 20:23).

“At minimum it means that a Christian can, on the basis of what Christ has done, pronounce to people that when they have exercised repentance and faith in Jesus, their sins are forgiven! This is the heart of the gospel.”

-Ross Hastings. *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West*



Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up: James Neil Hollingworth writes: “*Courage is not the absence of fear, but the judgement that something else is more important than one’s fear.*” What do you think of that? How might it be helpful as we think about what it means to be the Church that takes on Jesus’ own way of engaging with the world?

Read John 20:19-23

1. Notice the repetition of Jesus’ offer of “peace” to the disciples. Why do you think that is important to them? Why might it still be significant for us as the Church today? What encouragement might you draw from these words?

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions ... (cont)

2. The disciples are locked behind closed doors in this scene, afraid of the Jewish leaders (v.19).

- a. In what ways does Jesus address and transform their fears?
- b. In what ways might you, or others within the Church, feel fearful when it comes to being “sent” by Jesus?
- c. How might the same things be true (your answers to 2.a.) for us as for Jesus’ first followers?

3. Pastor Dave pointed to five key social factors (above) that the early Church adopted and practiced. All of these factors were held together within the Church (defying our typical ‘right’ or ‘left’ political categories) and were both attractive and offensive at the same time.

- a. Which of these do you gravitate toward? Which do you shy away from? Why?
- b. Why might the same factors continue to be important for us today?
- c. How might you and/or your group need to reconsider how to hold all of these together?

4. The final phrase of this passage has been interpreted in differing ways throughout Church history. Read John 20:23 again. Consider and discuss this quote from Ross Hastings: “At minimum it [this phrase] means that a Christian can, on the basis of what Christ has done, pronounce to people that when they have exercised repentance and faith in Jesus, their sins are forgiven! This is the heart of the gospel.”

Pray: Take time to pray into those areas that you or your Life Group need to grow into more deeply. Share your requests and items of praise with each other and pray for one another.

