

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

In order to make the most of this study and to ensure a richer group experience, it's recommended that all group participants read through the teaching and discussion content in full before each group meeting. As a leader, it is also a good idea for you to be familiar with this content and prepared to summarize it for your group members as you move through the material each week.

Each session of the Bible study is made up of three sections:

1. THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE.

An introduction to the theme of the session and its connection to everyday life, along with a brief overview of the primary Scripture text. This section also includes an icebreaker question or activity.

2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

This comprises the bulk of each session and includes the primary Scripture text along with explanations for key words and ideas within that text. This section also includes most of the content designed to produce and maintain discussion within the group.

3. LIVE IT OUT.

The final section focuses on application, using bulleted summary statements to answer the question, *So what?* As the leader, be prepared to challenge the group to apply what they learned during the discussion by transforming it into action throughout the week.

For group leaders, the *Connected* Leader Guide contains several features and tools designed to help you lead participants through the material provided.

QUESTION 1—ICEBREAKER

These opening questions and/or activities are designed to help participants transition into the study and begin engaging the primary themes to be discussed. Be sure everyone has a chance to speak, but maintain a low-pressure environment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each "What Does the Bible Say?" section features at least four questions designed to spark discussion and interaction within your group. These questions encourage critical thinking, so be sure to allow a period of silence for participants to process the question and form an answer.

The *Connected* Leader Guide also contains follow-up questions and optional activities that may be helpful to your group, if time permits.

DVD CONTENT

Each video features Eric Geiger interviewing Dr. Thom Rainer about the primary themes found in the session. We recommend that you show this video in one of three places: (1) At the beginning of group time, (2) After the icebreaker, or (3) After a quick review and/or summary of "What Does the Bible Say?" A video summary is included as well. You may choose to use this summary as background preparation to help you guide the group.

The Leader Guide contains additional questions to help unpack the video and transition into the discussion. For a digital Leader Guide with commentary, see the "Leader Tools" folder on the DVD-ROM in your Leader Kit.

SESSION ONE: CONNECTED IN CHRIST

The Point: Church membership is a privilege made possible through Christ.

The Passage: Ephesians 2:17-22

The Setting: Paul penned the Letter to the Ephesians from prison, probably in Rome. He had invested a great deal of time in Ephesus, having visited there briefly near the end of his second missionary journey and spending three years in the city on his third journey. In Ephesus, Christianity confronted both other religions and Greek philosophies. Paul wrote to clarify “church”—what it is, how one enters it, and how one behaves as part of it.

QUESTION 1: When have you been interested to join a group or a cause?

Optional activity: Instruct participants to look through their purses and wallets for membership cards. These can be library cards, club memberships, grocery store discount programs—anything that grants a person access to a specific place or service. Have group members display their cards as they feel comfortable, and then conclude the activity by asking for volunteers to share which membership cards they have found most useful, and why.

Video Summary: This first video message focuses on the background of Ephesians 2. Paul wrote this passage as a reminder that not only have we been made one with Christ, but we have been made one with one another. At the time these words were penned, the concept of oneness was new to the Jews and Gentiles who had never viewed themselves as connected with each other. This concept is also foreign in our day in many ways. We are a disconnected society, but as believers we are united with Christ as well as with others. This is both a privilege and responsibility provided to us through Christ.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 1, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- Are there times when connecting with others in Christ feels foreign or awkward to you? Explain.
- Truly connecting with others in the body of believers points us back to what it is to be like Christ. How have you seen this to be true in your life, either through serving others or through being served?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 2:17-22.

Response: What’s your initial reaction to these verses?

- What do you like about the text?
- What questions do you have about these verses?

TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 2:17-18.

QUESTION 2: What emotions do you experience when you think about having direct access to God?

The idea behind this question is to move group members to consider the power and awe behind this access. It is immediate and direct but only possible through Jesus. Before group members can identify any associated emotions they must understand the reality of the passage. That is, Jesus has made access to God possible for all of us—both near to and far from Him.

Optional follow-up: How have your emotional reactions to God’s presence changed over time?

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 2:19.

QUESTION 3: How is being part of a church like being part of a family?

This is an interpretation question included to help group members examine the aspects of being part of “God’s household” and its implications. This encourages discussion around a concept familiar to most people—family—that also has application to church membership.

Optional follow-up: What are some of the primary differences between being part of a church and being part of a family?

CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 2:20-22.

QUESTION 4: What prevents us from viewing church membership as a privilege?

This application question asks group members to examine their own motivations for membership and what stands between them and understanding church membership as a privilege. We are called to serve the body, minister to others, and encourage one another, yet many of us see this as anything but a privilege. This question will help your group become more aware of the conclusions that prevent them from being connected in Christ.

Optional follow-up: How have you recently been blessed, uplifted, and encouraged as a member of your church?

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled “Your Ideal Membership” on page 9. Ask for volunteers to describe their ideal membership card.

QUESTION 5: Jesus remains the foundation of the church. What is our role in continuing His work?

The purpose of this question is to help group members identify their roles in continuing His work. Be sure to point out Jesus as the cornerstone and what this means to each of us as members of a church body that is alive and active—not stagnant.

Optional follow-up: What obstacles have hindered you from participating more fully in the work of the church?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: Dr. Rainer says, “Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down” (*I Am a Church Member*, p.6). What actions can we take as a group to help define or redefine church membership as a gift and a privilege within our own congregation?

This is an application question for the group to answer as a whole, rather than as individuals. Encourage participation from each member in not only listing ways to define or redefine church membership but acting on it. This is not only asking *how* to live it out, but also *why* your group might change.

LIVE IT OUT

Ephesians 2 helps us understand what the church is. Encourage group members to consider these three options for how to apply this truth:

- **View church membership as a gift.** Thank God daily for the opportunity to be included in His family, the church.

- **Ask the right question.** John F. Kennedy famously challenged Americans, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” This week, ask your pastor, “What can I do for my church?”
- **Invite others in.** Identify those around you who need to be introduced to the gospel and included in Christ’s church. Invite at least one of these individuals to church this week.

Challenge: Church membership isn’t about our needs. It’s about meeting the needs of others. And it’s about serving the one true God. But church membership does have privileges. Spend some time this week thinking about what those privileges are. Consider writing them down somewhere as a reminder. Allow those privileges to be a part of what drives you as you serve Christ through your church.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by committing the members of your group to the Lord and asking Him to help each of you remember that church membership is a privilege and to help you treat it as such.

SESSION TWO: CONNECTED IN UNITY

The Point: Unity is a given, but staying unified takes work.

The Passage: Ephesians 4:1-6

The Setting: Many of Paul’s New Testament letters include two broad sections: a theological section where Paul deals with his subject from a doctrinal perspective, followed by a behavioral or ethical section elaborating on how the theology addressed impacts the believer’s practice of lifestyle. The ethical/practical section of Ephesians begins at 4:1 and addresses the application of redemption. Paul began the section with an emphasis on the unity the Holy Spirit brings to the church.

QUESTION 1: When have you been in a situation where working together was a necessity, not an option?

Optional activity: Lead participants in a team-building exercise designed to help them experience teamwork. Find two images (at least 8.5 x 11 inches) that are distinct from each other. Cut each image into 10 pieces, and then mix the pieces together in a container. (Note: if you have more than 20 group members, cut the pictures into more pieces.)

Instruct participants to select pieces by passing the container around the group. Each person should have multiple pieces of the pictures. When the container is empty, challenge participants to re-assemble both pictures in less than 5 minutes.

Video Summary: This week’s message examines Ephesians 4:1-6, most specifically the use of the word “one” in verses 4-6: “There is **one** body and **one** Spirit—just as you were called to **one** hope at your calling— **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” The repetition Paul uses here serves as a reminder that we are one in Christ. Paul understood the importance of unity to the health of the church at that time. And the message he delivered centuries ago remains true in the church today.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 2, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- Why do you think unity is important in the church today? Give specific examples.
- How are we unified yet unique?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 4:1-6.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What do you hope to gain from studying about unity in the church?

TURN THE GROUP'S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 4:1-2.

QUESTION 2: What in these verses do you find most difficult to apply?

The importance of unity in the church has always been stressed. This self-revelation question is designed to ask group members to identify personal barriers to church unity and explore the reasons behind those barriers.

Optional follow-up: How would you describe the "calling" we have received as followers of Jesus and members of the church?

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled "Have Patience?" on page 19. Encourage participants to compare their methods for demonstrating patience in difficult circumstances.

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 4:3.

QUESTION 3: Why does staying unified require so much effort?

It's important to allow notions of sin, our worldly nature, and how our culture tends to cater to these aspects of our humanity in this discussion. The "effort" referenced is in place because we must overcome these obstacles.

Optional follow-up: Based on your experience, why is unity worth the effort?

CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 4:4-6.

QUESTION 4: Since churches are diverse, what unifies us as the body of Christ?

This interpretation question asks group members to unpack the use of "one" in this passage. You may want to remind them that any time you see the same word so frequently within a passage it requires attention.

Optional follow-up: What actions threaten to interrupt unity?

QUESTION 5: What steps can we take to model unity in our church and community?

Challenge the group to be specific in answering this application question.

Optional follow-up: What is one specific step we will take this week to work for unity within our church and community?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: What has our church recently accomplished by working together?

Be prepared to offer some examples of answers to this question.

LIVE IT OUT

You have a choice. Your actions this week will contribute to unity or division in the church. Invite group members to consider these practical ways they can apply what they've learned:

- **Don't participate in gossip.** Stop gossip when it's shared with you and look for ways to encourage people instead.
- **Forgive.** We've all been wronged. Identify any grudges you've been harboring and forgive the people involved.
- **Seek forgiveness.** Work with the Holy Spirit to identify ways in which you have contributed to division within your church. Confess your actions and seek forgiveness.

Challenge: Sometimes conflict and disharmony hit when we least expect it. It's important for us to be prepared when those conflicts come. Spend some time this week devising a game plan for what actions you can take when you see unity being threatened in your area of influence.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by committing the members of your group to the Lord and asking Him to help each of you contribute to a spirit of unity in your church.

SESSION THREE: CONNECTED IN GROWTH

The Point: Church members need one another in order to grow in Christ.

The Passage: Ephesians 4:11-16

The Setting: Accompanying the unity from the Holy Spirit (session 2) comes the gifting of Christians by Jesus Christ. The gifts given to believers are not, however, for the personal gratification or comparative boasting of the recipients. Instead, He desires that His gifts go toward the mutual growth of the church with the aim that each person reach maturity as measured by Christ's fullness.

QUESTION 1: What do you like best about being a fan?

Optional activity: Bring a collection of DVDs in their cases (or request that group members each come with one of their favorite films). Display the movies so they are visible to participants and then ask for volunteers to answer the question: If you had a chance to star in one role from these movies, which would you choose? (*Note: Be sure to select movies that will not be offensive or distasteful to other group members.*)

Video Summary: Many people think pastors are responsible for doing all the work of ministry in the church when, in fact, Ephesians 4:11-16 shows us that their responsibility is to equip us to join in the work of ministry in and through our churches. As a church we come together for a purpose—to learn the truth, to get to know Him, and to become more like Him. As a result of this equipping, we can go out and do the work we are called to do. A fully-functioning body of Christ is one where everyone is involved in ministry.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 3, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- What are the dangers of being involved in the "busyness" of the church versus the business we are called to as a part of the church?
- Why is being grounded in the truth critical for our connectedness to Christ and others?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 4:11-16.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What new application do you hope to get from this passage?

TURN THE GROUP'S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 4:11-12.

QUESTION 2: When have you felt fully equipped to carry out an important task?

This question is included to prompt discussion about modeling, training, and teaching. Answers should describe instances during which each group member felt suitably equipped and what made the equipping effective.

Optional follow-up: What emotions do you experience when you don't feel equipped to carry out important tasks? Why?

QUESTION 3: What obstacles keep us from equipping others or being equipped ourselves?

This question is included to fight the notion that church membership is "easy" and doesn't require something from us. As the leader you will want to stress that individual spiritual growth both in ourselves and in other members is a responsibility that belongs to each of us.

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled "Who Helped You Grow?" on page 31. Ask for volunteers to share about individuals who were especially meaningful in their spiritual development.

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 4:13.

QUESTION 4: What does it look like to measure spiritual maturity based on the fullness of Christ?

Ask the group to look closely at Ephesians 4:13 to consider what the author of Ephesians is revealing about maturity and unity as they engage this question. Specifically examine "unity in the faith," "knowledge of God's Son," "growing into a mature man," and "measured by Christ's fullness."

Optional follow-up: What are some other indicators we often use to assess our spiritual maturity as members of the church?

CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 4:14-16.

QUESTION 5: What advice would you give someone seeking to balance speaking truth and showing love?

When answering this application question, keep in mind that speaking truth—even when it is difficult—is crucial to being connected in unity. You might consider asking the group to discuss the many and varied applications of what "speaking truth" in love can mean.

Optional follow-up: When did someone speak the truth to you in love? How did you respond?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: How would you describe your role or function within the body of Christ?

You might want to revisit Ephesians 4:11-12 as a part of this discussion. Pay particular attention to ways each group member can be an equipper in addition to being a growing disciple. Be sensitive to visitors, new believers, and non-believers who might not have any frame of reference for responding.

Optional follow-up: How do your God-given gifts and talents support that role or function?

LIVE IT OUT

We have a responsibility to equip others for ministry or engage in ministry ourselves. Encourage group members to consider these practical ways to fulfill their role in their church and join the movement toward spiritual growth:

- **Be a participator, not a spectator.** Identify a specific and practical way to serve others in your church and community.
- **Get equipped.** With the Holy Spirit as your guide, seek out someone older and wiser you can ask to pour into your life as a spiritual mentor.
- **Balance your speech.** When issues or conflicts arise during the week, make a conscious effort to speak the truth in a way that also demonstrates love.

Challenge: What's your role in the church? Answering that question is key to getting on the field and helping your team—the body of Christ—strive for growth and spiritual victory in the world today. Spend some time this week in prayer, asking the Lord to give you a clear vision of His role for you in your church. Consider journaling thoughts and questions you have as well as anything you sense Him telling you through this time.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to show each of you your roles and responsibilities in your church.

SESSION FOUR: CONNECTED THROUGH WORDS

The Point: Our words matter.

The Passage: Ephesians 4:25-32

The Setting: As Paul developed the ethical ramifications of the theology of redemption—of being the church—he began with corporate implications (sessions 2 and 3). While all Christians have responsibility for group unity and group maturity, they also have responsibilities for themselves. In this passage Paul pointed out a series of choices each believer should adopt to better facilitate the group unity and maturity.

QUESTION 1: What is your favorite way to share good news?

Optional activity: Help group members pay close attention to their speech by emphasizing the words *good* and *bad* throughout the discussion. Instruct participants to clap once whenever someone says the word *good* at any point. Whenever someone says the word *bad*, participants should clap twice.

Video Summary: This week's video message begins by examining an important aspect of how believers are connected or disconnected through words—the aspect of anger and how we choose to handle it. Righteous anger can be defined as anger toward the things that anger God. Righteous anger holds no grudges, harbors no bitterness. Unrighteous anger camps out in selfishness and personal preferences. Unrighteous anger disconnects and divides churches. Our words are powerful. And it is with our words we either destroy or we build up.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 4, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- In what ways does a right understanding of the gospel motivate you to treat others well?
- It was mentioned in the video message that “Christ is our pattern” for how to treat others as well as “Christ is our power.” What do those things mean to you?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 4:25-32.

Response: What’s your initial reaction to these verses?

- What do you like about the text?
- What new application do you hope to receive about the power of your words?

TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 4:25-28.

QUESTION 2: What is your initial reaction to Paul’s commands about honesty and anger?

This question asks group members to look deeper into the passage and respond to this call to watch our words, emotions, and reactions. Prompt the group for specific instances or examples in their answers.

Optional follow-up: Do you find it easy or difficult to “Be angry and do not sin”? Explain.

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled “Be Angry. Don’t Sin?” on page 39. Ask volunteers to share any insights gained or questions considered while completing the activity.

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 4:29-30.

QUESTION 3: How does a church benefit when its members speak with integrity?

This is an observation question that asks the group to discuss the benefits to the church when we are disciplined about the integrity in our words. You might also engage a short discussion associated with how a lack of discipline in words affects church unity.

Optional follow-up: How have you recently benefitted from others who speak with integrity?

QUESTION 4: How does technology amplify the impact of our words?

This question addresses the role social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and technology like texting play into our connection through words. Many times it’s instant, in print, and very public.

Optional follow-up: What are some additional aspects of modern culture that impact the way we communicate with one another?

CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 4:31-32.

QUESTION 5: What habits, routines, and choices will empower us to make the changes commanded here?

You will have group members who struggle with these reactions at varying levels. For some it’s a life problem and for others it may be more situational. This question is asking both groups for real steps that can be taken to protect our connection through words.

Optional follow-up: “To follow Jesus Christ requires that we relate to others the way He relates to us.” Using Ephesians 4:31-32, give specific examples of what this looks like when lived out in day-to-day life.

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: What obstacles have the potential to hinder us from speaking with integrity each day?

This question requires some transparency. Because of this you’ll want to be ready with an example of your own.

LIVE IT OUT

Choosing to speak in a positive way seems easy, but it can be difficult to accomplish. Invite group members to consider these three options for being wise with their words:

- **Speak positively.** Look for opportunities where your words can encourage, motivate, give hope, provide guidance, or even just make someone smile.
- **Memorize Psalm 19:14.** Pray this verse every morning as you prepare for the day ahead. Let it guide your speech.
- **Resolve your dishonesty.** Identify a person with whom you’ve been dishonest in recent months. Confess your deception, request forgiveness, and affirm your commitment to honest speech moving forward.

Challenge: Words can hurt. But words can also be a powerful force for good. Start each day this next week with a plan for something you will do to bring hope into darkness and connect others with Christ through your words.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to help each of you use your words to motivate, encourage, and inspire.

SESSION FIVE: CONNECTED IN SERVICE

The Point: Serving in the church is not about what I want.

The Passage: Ephesians 5:15-21

The Setting: Living out the theology of redemption encompasses much more than observing a brief checklist of “bad” behaviors to replace with “good” ones. It involves a complete lifestyle change—how you walk or live. It means living as wise people rather than continuing to follow the foolish walk of the non-Christian. It means choosing to submit to the Holy Spirit rather than fleshly appetites. It means interacting with other Christians in a manner consistent with your connection to them, that is, the person of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION 1: What’s something you always wanted but never got?

Optional activity: Divide participants into two or three subgroups. Instruct each subgroup to design a not-for-profit ministry that could impact the world in a positive way. Use the following questions to help group members think through the different aspects involved in creating such a ministry:

- What would be your ministry’s primary purpose?
- How would your ministry be financed?
- What kinds of employees or volunteers would your ministry require?
- What obstacles would you need to overcome in order to get your ministry off the ground?

Call the group back together after 5-10 minutes. As time allows, encourage group members to share the key elements of their ministry ideas.

Video Summary: This week's video message speaks to how we use the time we have to connect through service. The word used in verse 16 for "time" is *kairos*. This word choice is significant because Paul was communicating that we have a finite amount of time and we need to make the most of it. This passage should communicate to us that we need to approach our service as a part of the body with a sense of urgency.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 5, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- In what ways does the sense of urgency communicated in this passage change the way you view your responsibility to connect with other believers through service?
- You have a limited amount of time. What will you do with it?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 5:15-21.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What new application do you hope to get from this passage?

TURN THE GROUP'S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 5:15-17.

QUESTION 2: Who has been a model of wisdom in your life?

Be sure the group is responding in a way consistent with Ephesians 5:15-17. This question allows group members to unpack their definition of wisdom by describing an individual in their lives.

Optional follow-up: How would you define or summarize the concept of wisdom?

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 5:18.

QUESTION 3: What are the implications of being filled by the Spirit on a daily basis?

The emphasis in this question is on the regular, or "daily," practice of being filled by the Spirit. Group members should discuss what this implies about how they should use their time and energy.

Optional follow-up: Every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit, but not every Christian heeds the direction and instruction of the Holy Spirit. What are the implications when we don't allow Him to fill us on a daily basis as it relates to serving through the church?

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 5:19-21.

QUESTION 4: What changes must we make in order to serve the way God wants?

Encourage group members to examine the text more closely as they consider changes they can make to become more effective at serving. Point out the differences between an impulse that originates in the heart and a sense of obligation.

Optional follow-up: What benefits might you expect personally when you make these changes?

QUESTION 5: What does it mean to submit to one another in the context of a local church?

This question reinforces the point that as church members we must put aside personal stake and gain and submit to one another. You may ask the group to explore the application of “submitting” in their relationships with one another within the body.

Optional follow-up: What actions or attitudes empower us to submit in this way?

Optional follow-up: What actions or attitudes hinder our ability to demonstrate mutual submission?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: What benefits have you received from serving in your local church?

This is an opportunity for group members to share experiences. These experiences are both testimony and teaching moments.

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled “Spending Time” on page 49. Encourage participants to share practical tips for serving others throughout the day.

LIVE IT OUT

Are you a giver or a taker in the body of Christ? Encourage group members to consider these practical ideas for engaging their church the right way:

- **Assess yourself.** Look again at the patterns of self-centered churches listed on pages 48-49. Take a moment to consider whether you contribute to any of these patterns in your church.
- **Accentuate the positive.** Make a list of everything you like best about your local church.
- **Jump in.** Work with leaders at your church to identify a ministry in which your service will meet a need. Then take the plunge and serve with wisdom.

Challenge: Submission is countercultural in the world today. It can be tough to bend our will to God’s Spirit—and especially to other members in the body of Christ. But it’s worth it. Consciously practice submission this week. Each morning, ask the Lord to guide your thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. At the end of the week, evaluate how being sensitive to His leading and choosing to submit made a difference in the way you lived.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to show each of you how you can more selflessly serve your church.

SESSION SIX: CONNECTED THROUGH PRAYER

The Point: Support your church with prayer.

The Passage: Ephesians 6:18-22

The Setting: As Paul wrapped up his Letter to the Ephesians, he had one last word of instruction before saying his goodbyes: pray. Competing religions and philosophies had not left Ephesus just because Paul wrote to the church there. To successfully stand in their faith and against the evils around them, believers must pray. They must pray at all times. They must pray with perseverance. They must pray for each other. They must pray for those who lead and guide them.

QUESTION 1: What do you miss most when the power goes out?

Optional activity: Begin the group discussion by giving a AAA or AA battery to each participant as a reminder that prayer grants us access to God's power. When each person has a battery, lead the group in an extended time of prayer. Be sure to include a time of praise and thanksgiving directed toward God, as well as a time of intercession where group members share needs and pray for one another.

Video Summary: This last message focuses on how we can connect with others in the body through prayer. Healthy churches are churches made up of members who are praying in the Spirit, at all times. They are directed by God and are always asking Him to help them know how to pray. Prayer reminds us of the needs of others and connects us to others. And as we pray, we are submitting to others and submitting to Him.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 6, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- What does it mean to "pray at all times in the Spirit"?
- In what ways does prayer help us stay connected?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 6:18-22.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about how you can best support your church through prayer?
- What new application do you hope to get from this passage?

TURN THE GROUP'S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 6:18.

QUESTION 2: How does the command to pray at all times influence our daily routines?

This is an interpretation question asked so that group members will better understand the effect of prayer as well as the act of prayer as it relates to their daily lives.

Optional follow-up: What methods or techniques have helped you incorporate prayer into your everyday life?

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled "Time to Pray" on page 61. Encourage participants to share ideas for more fully incorporating prayer into their routines each day.

MOVE TO EPHESIANS 6:19-20.

QUESTION 3: What keeps us from being more aware of our church leaders' prayer needs?

This question asks the group to consider the ways they can pray for the leaders of their church. Because not all pastors and church staff are openly transparent, church members must be discerning in praying for their leaders.

Optional follow-up: In what areas do you think your leaders need the most prayer support? How do your thoughts compare to the list on page 61?

CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 6:21-22.

QUESTION 4: How do we determine and prioritize our prayer needs?

Church members need a process for developing an intercessory prayer life. This includes listening with discernment, asking people how we can pray, and carefully monitoring the people in our lives.

Optional follow-up: Where do we draw the line between seeking how to pray for others and sniffing for gossip?

QUESTION 5: How can we use the tools at our disposal to more fully support each other through prayer?

This question is application in nature. You might first begin with a quick list of the available prayer “tools” for communicating prayer needs i.e. email, personal visit, phone call, Internet. Also discuss ways your group can make better use of these tools in remaining connected in prayer.

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: How do you think transparency and authenticity within your community of believers play into being connected through prayer?

These questions ask group members to consider the role honesty plays in a church’s level of connection through prayer. We can’t support one another if we don’t know what’s going on in the lives of each other. You may ask about levels of transparency and challenges to greater levels of authenticity as a part of this question.

Optional follow-up: What are you doing to be sure your community of believers knows how to pray for you?

LIVE IT OUT

God works through the prayers of His people. Encourage group members to consider these practical ways to pray for their brothers and sisters in Christ:

- **Pray for salvation.** Many people miss the benefits of church membership because they are not part of the church. Pray for the salvation of at least one person who needs it.
- **Pray for church leaders.** Commit to pray five minutes each day for your pastor(s) and church leaders. (*Note: this works best when you ask them for prayer requests.*)
- **Become educated about at least one missionary’s needs.** Pray for that missionary and his or her work every day for at least one month.

Challenge: Prayer grants us access to the power and presence of God. Praying for others is a solemn responsibility and a life-changing promise within the body of Christ. Identify two or three new people you will begin praying for this week. Start by contacting them to ask how you can pray specifically for their needs.

Pray: As the leader, close this final session of *Connected* in prayer. Ask the Lord to help each of you as you move forward to discover or rediscover the joy and privilege that comes from being a committed part of a local church.