

church

introduction

CELL: What is church? What is its purpose? Is it a meeting? A building? Something we go to? Or something we're part of? Is it something we are *in* on a Sunday and *out* of on a Monday? Is it something we try and get our friends into? Or something that can be expressed where our friends are? The next four cell outlines will begin explore 'church'.

1: the kingdom and the church

welcome

CELL: What was your first experience of church?

worship

CELL: Write down one word on a piece of paper that you are most thankful to God for in the Church. Hold on to your piece of paper. Put on some worship music and pray out loud, thanking God for what you have written down. When the facilitator gives the signal, pass your paper to the left and receive your neighbor's piece of paper from the right. Thank God for what your neighbor has shared. Continue on until all of the pieces of paper have made full circle (as time allows).

word

FACILITATOR: *We are starting off this series by looking at the bigger picture - God's kingdom, and will then focus on the role of the church, which is an important part of the Kingdom.*

Choose someone to write down ideas on a large piece of paper or white board. Make a large quadrant the size of the board. In the upper left quadrant, write down what people might perceive the church to be. On the right side, write down what church is. On the lower left quadrant, write down what people might perceive the Kingdom to be. On the lower right, write down some definitions of the Kingdom.

People often confuse the Kingdom with the church. Even though they are related, they are two separate things. The Kingdom is much bigger than the church as it encompasses all of God's activity, both inside and outside the church community. The Kingdom was the central theme of Jesus' message – it's both what he preached and what he demonstrated. Give these verses out to different people and have them read out, one after the other:

CELL: Read Matt. 4:17, Matt. 4:23, Matt. 6:10, Matt. 6:33, Matt. 11:12, Matt. 13:11, Luke 17:20-21, John 18:36.

We can see from these verses that Jesus was obsessed with the Kingdom - only twice does he refer to church. His focus is the Kingdom of God. He ushered in the Kingdom, pronouncing that the 'Kingdom of God is here' and then showed what the Kingdom looked like with healings, deliverance, freedom, restored relationships with God, etc.

Is the Kingdom of God something that is already here or something we are still waiting for? Read these two parables about the Kingdom in Matt. 13:31-33, then discuss.

FACILITATOR: *The parables show something of the expansionist nature of God's kingdom. It starts off small and continues to grow and fill out, ending with it affecting every area of creation. The best way to answer this question is to use the phrase; 'here, but not yet in fullness,' for example, we see aspects of the Kingdom advancing as Kingdom values are outworked, but we are by no means living as though the Kingdom is fully here (ex. peace, justice, restoration of life as it was meant to be).*

Ask the cell members how they would describe the relationship between the Kingdom and the church? Discuss. Add these statements in as the discussion progresses and see what people think:

The Kingdom is God's reign; the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced and actively place themselves under that reign in their lives.

The kingdom creates the church, and the church proclaims the kingdom.

The church is the community of the Kingdom; an audio-visual demonstration of redeemed humanity and kingdom life.

The church is a showcase of the Kingdom, displaying to the world what God's reign is like.

One of the best descriptions of the church is as an 'agent' or 'instrument' of the Kingdom, for example, the church is – the people/community of God that expresses and extends the kingdom of heaven on earth with their lives and actions.

Photocopy this quote and give it out for people to read and then discuss the following questions.

CELL: "The church gets into trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the kingdom business. In the church business, people are concerned with church activities, religious behavior and spiritual things. In the kingdom business, people are concerned with Kingdom activities, all human behavior and everything that God has made, visible and invisible. Church people think how to get people into the church, kingdom people think how to get church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church. Kingdom people work to see the church change the world." - *Howard Sydner*

What areas of society should the church be involved in?

(FACILITATOR: *Every area - we extend the kingdom when we are salt and light in the arts, politics, media etc.)*

Can people be just as equally called into a particular career/workplace, as they are called into church leadership or overseas mission?

(FACILITATOR: *Yes - God's Kingdom is bigger than the church, therefore he wants men and women to be leaders and influencers in every area of life, so extending Kingdom values into every sphere.)*

witness

CELL: Choose one person this week, pray for them, and meet a need they may have. Follow up with a note or phone call of encouragement. Pray for one another in your cell for boldness and be prepared to share next week what responses you had.

what now?

CELL: In what ways can you ensure that you are a Kingdom minded person?

Do you have a dualistic concept that being called into 'church work' is more spiritual than being called into other vocations? Is that because of a lack of understanding on Kingdom? Think and plan how you might extend the Kingdom in your daily life.

2: church - the community of the kingdom

welcome

CELL: What thoughts come to mind when you hear the word “community”? Share with the group.

worship

CELL: Read Eph.4:1-6 and meditate on the following phrases and think about what they might mean to your individual daily situations:

Live a life worthy of the calling you have received – *What is your calling?*

Be completely humble and gentle – *Is there an area of pride in your life?*

Be patient, bearing with one another in love – *Is there a time where you should show patience?*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

word

FACILITATOR: Guide your cell group through the following exercise and discussion.

Write the word ‘church’ in the middle of a big piece of paper and around it write down all the things that from the group’s experience, constitute church life.

Now using what has been written, decide as a group what is the irreducible minimum that you would need to be “church.” Distinguish what is absolutely necessary and put a line through what is dispensable, for example, you could cross out church building, but hopefully keep community, friendship, prayer, worship, learning, etc. Look at what is left and see what you think church would look without some of the trappings we are used to.

The word for church in Greek is ‘ekklesia’ which means ‘called out ones.’ It was a common Greek word that simply described any group that came together for a common purpose. It had nothing to do with Sunday meetings or special buildings. For the first 300 years of the early church, it was based in homes and around community. Church life simply imitated what Jesus had modeled with his disciples - shared lives, eating and drinking together, on-the-move community. Church was no one-day-a-week meeting. It was seven-days-a-week whole-life discipleship. The early years of the church were never about an organization or program of activities. It was the fabric of relationships in which fellow learners lived out their lives together.

CELL: It is obvious that church is primarily about us, *God’s people and the right relationships between us.* Therefore we cannot go to church because we *are* the church.

If we are the church, does that necessarily mean that church just ‘happens’ whenever we gather together? Discuss this thought.

What pictures and images do the Scriptures use to describe church? (It is interesting that there are so many illustrations used – a systematic statement, though neat, would never be able to contain or summarize something so living and dynamic as the church community.)

Here’s some you might expect:

1 Cor. 3:16-17 - *A temple*

1 Cor. 12: 12-31 - *A body*

1 Timothy 3:15 - *A household*

1Cor. 3:9 - *A field*

Eph. 2:19 - *An new race/humanity*

Heb. 2:11 - *God’s family*

All these pictures speak of ‘togetherness’ - interdependency on each other.

If church is a visual demonstration of the kingdom and redeemed humanity, how do we model the age to come in our relationships? You might look out for values that should be part of redeemed humanity -- the way men and women treat each other with honor and respect, acceptance, encouragement, commitment.

What can church look like in everyday life?

- During a meal?
- In the Student Lounge?
- Walking in the halls?
- In your dorm?

FACILITATOR: *Break the cell into 2 groups.*

Have group #1 brainstorm to answer this question: What are the values that build community?

(Ideas if they need help... Openness & honesty, Patience, Fun & laughter, Accountability, Love, Not holding grudges, Servanthood, Ready to forgive, Ready to say sorry, Sharing, Generosity, Hospitality, Responsibility, Investing time, Acceptance of differences, Preferring others, Addressing conflict, Commitment to each other, Humility, Respect, Encouragement, Listening, Grace towards others, Vulnerability, Truthfulness, etc.)

Have group #2 brainstorm to answer this question: What are the values that destroy community?

(Ideas if they need help... Greed, Pride, Selfishness, Lack of respect for others and their belongings, Apathy, Avoiding conflict, Independence, Mistrust, Holding grudges, Insensitivity, Gossip, Not taking an interest, Lack of communication, Laziness, Lack of time to invest into house, Jealousy & comparison, Prejudice, Secrecy, Sarcasm, Judging, Self-righteousness, Individualism, etc.)

After some time, regroup and have each group share their answers. (Maybe list the answers on a big sheet of paper with community listed at the top and a line drawn down the middle. List the first group's answers to the left of the line and the other group's answers to the right of the line.)

CELL: Based on our answers to these questions, take a few moments of reflection and prayer to honestly identify both positive and negative values which you can recognize in yourself.

witness

CELL: If church is primarily about being part of a community, there needs to be a priority made in everyone's lives to 1) find a discipling community to belong to as a student - don't drift or church-hop, and 2) choose to invest yourself in the friendships there.

Find a friend and determine to meet once a week and develop a relationship. Pray for those friends who don't yet know God but enjoy being part of the cell community. Pray they will make the next step in their journey.

what now?

CELL: Make a conscious effort to "have church" in non-traditional settings. Think about ways that you can worship God in your everyday life, outside of the church building. Share your thoughts with your group at the next meeting. Make church a lifestyle as opposed to what you do on Sunday mornings.

3: church and the future

welcome

FACILITATOR: Allow each person in the cell to respond to the following questions:
How do you see yourself contributing to the church in the future and what role do you want to play in the ministries of the church?

worship

CELL: God is not fazed by the future, and change does not cause him distress. Spend some time in prayer and thank God that he is in control. Be open to the Holy Spirit, and allow God to speak to you and encourage you about the future and church. Thank God for the body of believers to which you belong, naming several individuals that have had a positive impact on your character.

word

FACILITATOR: *Does the group think that the church in this country will look the same in 20 years time? If not, what will be different about the future shape of church? List the differences. Is the list primarily positive changes or primarily negative?*

We need to understand God's view of the church. However, we might be tempted to dismiss or despair of some aspects of the church in this country. God sees the church as something he loves and something that he is refining into 'the bride of Christ' – something worth coming back for.

CELL: Read the following and then discuss. Eph. 5:25 and Eph. 1:22-23, Rev. 21:2

God has a glorious future and destiny for the church and the Holy Spirit helping prepare her by shaking some of the structures, methodologies, and programs so the church is positioned to fulfill her destiny. As huge changes are taking place in our culture and in the church, what does that mean for the church and how we respond?

Consider the following two scenarios.

(FACILITATOR: *You might want to photocopy them to give out. See whether the groups can see this happening in your setting.)*

Scenario 1

As many churches today are working more together, praying more together, and taking responsibility for their locality together, there will be a natural progression in the understanding of one church in a town or city with multiple congregations. For many congregations, their first allegiance will be to their town/city-wide church and not necessarily their denomination. As the leaders meet together to strategize and pray, town/city-wide leaderships could emerge. In turn, the city leaders would then invite various ministries into their city to address the whole, gathered church, not just one specific congregation.

This scenario could actually be a spirit-led restoration to how the local church was always meant to operate (1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:1). Discuss what you think about this first scenario. Should we begin changing our language to "I belong to the church of (your town/city)" rather than identifying ourselves only with our particular denomination or congregation?

Scenario 2

There are already many youth churches/congregations that have sprung up in the last 10 years. As society becomes more fragmented and work and family patterns dictate that fewer and fewer people are able to make Sunday mornings, expressions of church will emerge that are able to adapt to the needs of a particular people group, children's church, church in the workplace, church in student/club culture, church in the football/tennis club, church on the street or in the neighborhood.

These expressions of church will meet at times that suit the people group and in ways that are culturally relevant. These gatherings will be much more interactive and participative with everyone sharing and contributing in different ways to reflect a visual rather than word based culture and different learning styles. The content of these meetings will also be much more focused on the everyday issues people face that reflects the desire to lead a spiritual life and not just have a spiritual day. They are likely to be based very strongly around friendship (relationships) and community and allow for great mystery and creativity. It is appropriate to note that Jesus had a very narrow and homogenous starting point as his primary input was into 12 young, male, Jewish students!!

FACILITATOR: *What is the group reaction to these scenarios and others being a normal part of the church in the future?*

witness

FACILITATOR: *As a group, develop a simple questionnaire for some of your friends and others at school, asking their perception and opinion of what the local church should be or do. Note their thoughts and share them at the next group meeting.*

(If you are concerned about time constraints, consider having this questionnaire ready before the cell meeting and have blank copies available to hand out for the cell members to take with them and ask their friends this week.)

what now?

CELL: This week, use your questionnaire as a bridge to ask at least 3 of your friends what the church in the future would have to look like if they were to be a part of it.

Brainstorm ideas about how you would like to have church in your community. Consider starting a group that is relevant to your community or culture in a manner and location that would benefit the most people. Continue to pray for the church community of which you are part.

4: church in student culture

welcome

CELL: Share the information you gathered from talking to others about what the local church should be and do. Share what your friends said about the future of church and how they would like to be a part of it.

worship

CELL: Thank and worship God for who he is, for the fact that the church belongs to him, he bought it at a price and is totally committed to seeing her succeed and become all that he intended. Move into prayer and intercession for God's plans to be fulfilled through the church.

word

CELL: Many "youth" and "student" congregations are springing up across the country. How does this model of church compare to others? Is it biblically valid?

Read some or all of these scriptures together. 1Cor. 12:12-31, Acts 2:42-47, Rom.12:4-5, Matt.28:19-20, 1Cor.9:19-23.

Jesus and his disciples were the first example. Their objectives were:

- Being a mobile church
- Spending large amounts of time together
- Sharing lives together not just "holy days"
- Being together to serve God's kingdom

It is interesting to note that Jesus and his disciples were all Palestinian, Jewish, working class, young men - a homogenous people group and certainly not a very broad one! It's also fascinating that *in no place does the Bible give us a blueprint of how to do church*. There is no standard or outline of a meeting written down, no expository Bible teaching, and no suggested format of worship or response. Instead, the Bible gives us some principles and guidelines to be applied in that church's culture (whatever that may be). So a church that expresses God's principles will do that through the culture of which they are part. (ex. A largely illiterate church made up of people from rural Nigeria will have a very different look, feel, and worship style, to a white, middle class, Western city church.)

Read Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 9:19-20, Matt. 28:19-20.

What can we learn about extending God's kingdom from these verses?

Jesus tells us to be witnesses to the end of the earth, but gives a strategy as to how to do it. He needs us to start where we are, our Jerusalem, which at the moment might be students. We are also taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria (other students and the workplace) and as time goes on we will begin to impact other people groups and even other Nations.

Paul recognizes the importance of cultural relevance when seeking to reach people and build church, and is prepared to adopt culture to win people. The New Testament churches, for example, varied significantly. Some were very Jewish (ex. Jerusalem) others were very Gentile (ex. Colossus). It is important to realize that *cultural awareness is not only important for evangelism, but also for discipleship*.

FACILITATOR: *Work through the following section as a group. Give out these 3 main objections one at a time and see how the group can answer them. Allow opportunity for response for each objection before discussing the given answers provided in these notes.*

CELL: Discuss together the following main objections to church in student culture (or any monoculture) and how can we answer them.

Objection #1 Churches should include all people.

FACILITATOR: *Potential Answers...*

- Student/Youth churches should not exclude those outside a culture but inclusion shouldn't compromise the mission to that culture.
- There is very little biblical basis for the above viewpoint.
- Jesus and his disciples were in a monoculture.
- In practice, this doesn't happen anyway. There is no such thing as a church that is truly representative of one specific culture group?
- Effective mission is more important than a balanced expression, as culture continues to spawn new subcultures and society continues to fragment and diversify.
- In heaven we will be all people, tribes, tongues, and colors worshipping God. That is the ideal, but we have limits on how much it can really be expressed now.

Objection #2 What about unity?

FACILITATOR: Potential Answers...

- Unity not the same as uniformity, but exists best in diversity.
- Unity happens when we love one another...simple, but not easy.
- Unity is relational – it isn't dependent on the same style or even being in the same meetings.
- Unity will not happen through reducing the gospel to its lowest common denominator, rather respecting and allowing for views and expressions that aren't as doctrinally pure as your own!

Objection #3 What's wrong with 'normal' church as it is?

FACILITATOR: Potential Answers...

- Nothing in a lot of cases.
- Despite youth and students attracting more church workers than any other subgroup, they are still the worst represented numerically. Church for the emerging culture is about reaching those who can't identify with the God in the current culture of church expression.
- All churches have a culture whether they realize it or not. We need to accept this and shape our church culture so it fits the people we are trying to reach.
- Culture is usually neutral, mostly good and only sometimes bad. We need to become more comfortable with the neutral and the good and challenge and redeem the bad things rather than throw away the whole lot.
- Useful quote - "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody" - Bill Cosby.

witness

CELL: There is a growing spiritual hunger out there. Many people are very open, in fact, spirituality is becoming trendy, but the church is not seen as providing the depth of spirituality that people want. We must find ways that church becomes accessible to the many who are searching for reality and truth by stripping away empty tradition, antiquated methodologies and dead religion. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

There is a massive cultural shift that is taking place in our society that is happening very quickly and evolving very fast as we make the shift from modernity to post modernity. This means that what used to work and seemed relevant as little as five years ago no longer fits. Styles of church have to adapt to become: less institutional, more flexible; less hierarchical, more inclusive; less performance based, more participative; less individualized, more community orientated; and less cerebral, more experiential; less word based more visual.

How can you respond to the challenge of creating church for the culture you are in and trying to reach? Think creativity what you can do as a cell so the good news of Jesus is not obscured by a church/Christian subculture.

what now?

CELL: The church is losing people like never before, and new creative measures are needed to not only reach but keep people. Investigate the student culture in which you live. Become familiar with what is relevant to those around you and use that to strike up conversations on a daily basis this week. Develop relationships with others based on a common interest.