

# Why?

## Weeks 1-5

DAILY THOUGHTS AND SMALL GROUP GUIDE  
BY: NIC COX

## **Week 1**

### **Day 1**

Early in life we learn how to ask questions to gather information. Perhaps the most essential of these questions is "why?" Everyone knows what it's like to have a conversation with a four-year old where the main line of discussion is the question "why" repeated over and over again.

Why is the sky blue? Why is the grass green? Why are giraffes so tall and mice so little? Why do I have to eat my vegetables when chocolate tastes so much better?

The question why, at its core, seeks to determine the reasons or purposes behind the things around us. Yet, when we get older, we stop asking why and instead simply embrace things in our lives without question.

We are starting a new series here at Community Christian Church called "Why?" where we will be taking a closer look at things that we do and believe here at CCC. We don't want to embrace something because "that's the way we've always done it," but instead we want to know very clearly why we do what we do. We hope you'll join us as we take a closer look at why throughout this series.

The place to start when looking at why we do specific things here at CCC is to look at why the church exists in the first place.

Have you ever wondered why there is something called "church" where people gather together? I mean, what's the point? This week we'll be taking a closer look at why the church exists as we set the stage for taking a closer look around CCC and ask ourselves "why?"

**How often do you ask "why?" when it comes to the church?**

**Why?**  
**Week 1**  
**Day 2**

**Read: Luke 5: 27-32**

Church. Say the word and a host of images come to mind. Some people may picture a small building with a characteristic steeple, a large cross emblazoned on top, and a loud bell held within. For others, the images that come to mind are not entirely positive or welcome. Some will, no doubt, picture a group of people who sit in a circle wearing sweater vests and casting judgment on others. Some people picture a place where they are sure they don't belong and, to be completely honest, they don't really want to. Regardless of what images of church may come to your mind, we will be looking at the picture of the church we read about in the Bible.

The Bible was originally written in Greek, a language that is sometimes difficult to translate into English cleanly. The word that is normally translated to 'church' in the Bible is the Greek work ekklesia (pronounced eck - lay - see- a). This word is not a term that was originally used in a religious context, but was a term of politics. Ekklesia is one word made of two, ek which means "out" and kaleo which means "to call." So the ekklesia literally means "those that are called out" or "those that are set apart." This ekklesia in classical Greek writings was an assembly that was called together by the ruler of the city-state.

Those of us that are part of the church are the ekklesia of God, who are gathered together at the calling of Jesus.

If you look at the life of Jesus it's interesting to note that when he meets someone his invitation to that person is to come and follow him. Jesus meets the blind, the lame, the sick and he invites them all to follow him. Jesus meets the outcasts, the outsiders, the ostracized and the marginalized and invites them to follow him. There was a woman caught in adultery and a man possessed with demons and people suffering from leprosy, and Jesus invites them all to follow after him.

Church, this ekklesia, is a group that gathers at the calling of its leader. It is not our Church, but it is Jesus'. It's not our gathering, but his. And it's not strictly our invitation that welcomes others in, but it is an invitation from Jesus. The doors are open to all that Jesus calls and Jesus calls all who listen to his voice. The ekklesia is God's.

**How is the church (ekklesia) "those called out?" Is this a different from what you normally think about when you hear church? Do you normally picture church as a place that Jesus invites people into? How might this change the way you think about church?**

**Why?  
Week 1  
Day 3**

**Read: Matthew 9:10-13**

There are certain appearances that people sometimes feel need to be kept up. You see it around sometimes. Some people want to not only *be* rich but to also *look* rich. Intelligent people sometimes are not content to have knowledge but feel compelled to display it as well. There is a temptation in all of us to look important, to look strong and impressive. This is sometimes the case with religious types as well; those who want to preserve the appearance of their own righteousness.

The same was true back during the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were the religious elite in the first century and were recognized as being the most righteous of all people. The Pharisees set a high mark when it came to being blameless, having established hundreds of regulations and codes that were not to be broken. Each of these regulations was an attempt to keep anyone from even coming close to breaking a law. What these regulations really did was decide who was in and who was out. The Pharisees had created lines in the sand, lines that they had decided only the unclean or the ungodly would cross.

The main area that the Pharisees were concerned about was remaining clean, or more to the point, keeping from becoming unclean. Cleanliness was not about dirt or being hygienic, but was about being free from any blotch of imperfection. And there were countless ways to become unclean. You could eat the wrong thing, or at the wrong time, or with the wrong company. You could become unclean if you were around someone who was unclean. And so the Pharisees did not associate with those who were not also Pharisees. The Hebrew word for Pharisee actually means "separatist" or "separated ones," and they decided who was in and who was out. After all, there were appearances that needed to be kept.

This is exactly what is taking place in this passage in Matthew. The dinner table in Jewish culture was seen as an almost sacred place, a small representation of the temple in each person's house. It was a serious thing to eat with someone and it was something that the Pharisees took very seriously. Jesus took it seriously as well, but for a very different reason.

"Your teacher eats with all the wrong people. He eats with people who are traitors to our people, with those that are the worse sort of people. He eats with the unclean." The Pharisees were so sure of themselves and spoke with a note of condescending confidence.

And Jesus hears it all.

"You are right. I am eating with the sorts of people you wouldn't be caught dead with. I invite to dinner the sorts of people you wouldn't invite to take out your trash. But I did not come for those that are self-righteous, those that think they know it all and have it all figured out. I came for the broken, weary and worn down. I have come for the sinners, the offending ones, the sick and the shamed."

Jesus did not come for the righteous but for the sinners. He did not come for the religious. His church was not made for those who were 'clean' but for those who were 'unclean.' Jesus did not come for the 'insiders' but for the 'outsiders.' Jesus came to heal the sick, not the well.

**Have you ever found yourself acting like these Pharisees - considering yourself better than someone else or a whole collection of people? Why do we have a tendency to think of ourselves so highly (clean) and others not (unclean)? What can you do to help those who are apart from God know His love and his invitation to His church?**

**Why?  
Week 1  
Day 4**

**Read: Luke 18:9-14**

There are certain perceptions about church, but also about the people who go to church. Who is welcome to come to church? Who is longed-for by God? We sometimes think we have the answer to this question. And even if we don't say so out loud, we can act in ways that make it clear what we are thinking. Jesus tells a story to make it clear what God thinks about the topic.

There was once a tax collector and a Pharisee. Tax collectors were traitors. The Roman Empire held the Jewish

people under its thumb and the tax collectors decided to align with them. Being Jewish themselves, tax collectors were defectors against their own people, making a profit by extorting money from other Jewish people and skimming a profit off the top. They were ostracized and reviled. Of all people, tax collectors were seen as the most unclean, and were the most hated and loathed by their fellow countrymen.

Pharisees were quite the opposite. They were the clergy, the religious elite. They were faithful to their religion and expected everyone else to be as well. They were the caretakers of what was right and holy. They were the custodians of the lines that separated people. Of everyone, they were seen as the most respected, valued, and blessed.

There once was a tax collector and a Pharisee. Rarely would these two be seen together, but here they are at the same place. They are at the temple, a place of worship. They both have come to say prayers to God.

"God," the Pharisee began, his voice clear and strong. "I thank you that I am an exceptional man." His smile beamed wider. "I do not steal, I do not lie. I am not given to adultery. I thank you that I am not an evildoer, like this wretched tax collector." Giving a sidelong glance to the tax collector standing well behind him, the Pharisee sighed delightfully. He was quite pleased with himself.

Standing in the darkness toward the back of the temple, the tax collector stared at the ground. He looked miserable. His brow was creased and his hands were held in small fists at his sides. "I am a sinner," his voice was husky and cracking. Beating his chest in anguish, the tax collector swallowed back tears that were growing at the edges of his eyes. "God," his voice barely a whisper, "Forgive me. Have mercy on me, Lord." His eyes never rose from the floor, shadows falling deep over him.

In life, we often think that we know who are the heroes and who are the villains. We often think we know who has a

right to be in the presence of God and who doesn't. But it was the contrite heart of the 'sinner' that walked away justified before God. And while the Pharisee thought that the tax collector had no right to be in the temple, remember that Jesus made it clear that God made no such restrictions.

**Why do you think the tax collector acted the way he did?  
Why do you think that the Pharisee acted the way he did?  
When have you been the 'tax collector' and when have you  
been the 'Pharisee?'**

**Why?  
Week 1  
Day 5**

**Read: Luke 14: 15-24**

"This is just too good," he said, looking over a table that was so full of food that it nearly buckled under the weight. "Too good," he repeated rubbing his hands together excitedly. He had sent out invitations months ago and had received all the RSVP's. He had all the decorations in place, his house looking like the very picture of merriment. The food smelled delicious. All that was left was for the guests to arrive.

"Is everything ready?" an attendant asked, standing in the doorway looking over the impressive room.

"Yes," the host said, a wide smile of his face. "Everything is ready." The host walked over to the attendant and unfolded a piece of paper. "I have a task for you. There are many who are waiting for our word, waiting for us to call them to this banquet." The host smiled and placed his hand on the attendant's shoulder. "You have the honor of telling them that everything is ready."

The attendant took the folded piece of paper, which was covered with names, and left the house.

Coming to the first house, the attendant knocked on the door. The door opened to reveal a smallish man. "Oh," he said, recognizing the attendant.

"The time has come," the attendant said, trying to control his excitement. "Come, for everything is ready."

"Yes, well, here's the thing," the small man stammered. "I've bought a field, quite nice actually, but I must go and check on it. So," he said with a note of finality, "I simply can't come with you."

"You have had the invitation for months," the attendant said incredulously. "And surely you have already inspected the land if you have purchased it. Surely this invitation comes first."

The smallish man shrugged and shut the door. The attendant moved on to the next name on the list. Coming to the house, he once more felt excited. A man opened the door, dressed, not for a party but for work.

"Come, for everything is ready."

"I can't," the man said shaking his head. "Just bought some tools for work and I'm going to give them a try."

"But this is a celebration. You have known about it for months. Today is not a day for work, but a day for the great banquet."

"Yes, yes," the man said as he walked out of the door. "I know. But I really must be going to see to my work. Good luck at the party," the man said over his shoulder as he walked away.

The attendant was confused and discouraged. He reached the next house on the list and knocked on the door. A young woman answered.

"Come, for everything is ready."

"Oh, the party. I had almost forgotten. But I can't come, I've just gotten married." The young woman closed the door without waiting for a reply. The attendant went back to the host feeling defeated.

One by one, they all made excuses.

"Sir," the attendant said hesitantly, "Those that you have invited will not come." The host was angry and hurt.

"Go to the streets and alleys. Go to the crippled and blind and broken. Invite in all of the outcasts, the losers, and the down and outs. Fill the house with those who will rejoice with me, with those who will join me at the banquet. Then go out to the lanes and roads and invite in all of those who are far from home, those that are

lonely and that are strangers. Invite in all who will come."

**What do you think this parable means? What can the church learn from this parable? Who are you in the story?**

**Why?**

**Week 1**

**Small Group Guide**

1. Church. There are many things that come to mind when you hear the word. What are some of the general characteristics that come to your mind when you think of a church (building type, people who attend, attitudes of, etc.)?
2. There are places where we feel welcome and others where we are 'out of place.' What are some places where you feel 'at home' and what are some places where you do not?
3. The way that we picture church can often effect how we think about church, both positively and negatively. How have your experiences and perceptions effected how you think about church?

4. Have you ever wanted to attend something and not been invited? What was the experience like?

**Bible: Read Matthew 4:19, Luke 5:27, Matthew 9:10-13**

5. Jesus' invitation to his followers was to 'follow him.' It is from this invitation that the church was born. How is this still the case? How has this been the case in your life?
6. We often have a perception of who 'belongs' in church. Jesus has a very different perception of who belongs. Who does Jesus seem to think belongs in church? How has this been consistent or inconsistent with your experience?
7. How can we as a church and you as an individual help people feel welcome? What might a church look like that was really for people who were not yet a part of it?

**Why?  
Week 2  
Day 1**

**Read: John 3:16-17**

We are in the second week of our series called "Why?" where we've been looking at the reasons behind some of the things we do and believe here at CCC. This week we'll be looking at why

we serve. This week we will be looking at the reasons behind why we serve, why we take our own time and energy and devote them to people and causes beyond ourselves. While individual reasons may vary, the core reason why we serve here at Community Christian Church is because of the love of God. It is because God first loved us that we serve and love others.

For God so loved . . .

Love has a strange effect on people. It makes people do things that they might not normally do. Men will find themselves at ballets, musicals, and other places where they would have never found themselves before. Women attend sporting events and car shows where they would have never set foot prior to this point. Love has a strange way of changing people.

For me a change that took place in the face of love was cleaning. I don't think I had ever cleaned a bathroom before I had met my wife. Yet, now I can be found (every now and then) scrubbing a shower and scouring the toilet. While I would have never taken free time to clean a shower or a toilet before, love has a way of changing the way we make decisions. Love can have a profound effect on people.

God also had his decisions effected by love, it seems. God sent his son to earth to save those who believe in him. This includes those of us who sometimes only half believe and find ourselves more rebellious than obedient. God sent his son to earth to save those of us who are too silly to know we need saving and those of us who forget what that saving cost. But why?

For God so loved . . .

God did not send his son to condemn the world, but to save it through him. This dark and broken world that would just as soon spit on God than worship him, it is this world that God is saving. I doubt that anyone needs to be convinced that the world needs saving, just watching the evening news should be enough to prove that well. But there is a question that remains. Why would God send his only son to save a world as busted and depraved as this one?

For God so loved . . .

We not only recognize the world as broken, most see this same darkness and brokenness in our own bathroom mirrors. Our own lives are full of mistakes, of wrong paths and wrong choices. We find ourselves making decisions that we don't even understand ourselves, when we do the wrong we do not want to do and find ourselves ignoring the good that we wish to do. No one is immune to the corruption of this world, a corruption that we find deep within our own bones, our own lives. Why would God send his perfect son for people such as this, for people such as you and me?

For God so loved . . .

Love. It is all out of love. God, whose love is powerful and strong, breaks through all the darkness, cracks through all the evil, ruptures through all the sin to send his beloved son to the world. Love, bright and mighty and great, enters the world. It is a love that is divine. It is a love that is from God, is of God, and is God.

It is no wonder that we look for ways to turn around and give up our own lives to serve God and to serve others. It is a way of acknowledging the great love of God and making that love visible and tangible to others.

For God so loved . . .

**How are God's love and our service of others tied together?**

**Why?  
Week 2  
Day 2**

**Read: 1 Corinthians 2:8-10**

In order to understand why we serve, we must first understand the deep love God has for us. I was always a bit of a snoop when it came to Christmas time. It's not that I didn't enjoy a

good surprise, just that I was always the curious type. And so every year as Christmas approached I would become the keenest of sleuths, rivaling even the great Sherlock Holmes (or all of the Hardy Boys put together!). I would peek in closets; sneak around in the darkness of night, and more or less make a nuisance of myself. Every year I would make mental predictions about what I would find, what wondrous gifts or what good things I would encounter. Under beds, on high shelves, in the basement, and in the garage, I would always find some of the presents. But, I would never find them all. Every year there would be something that I hadn't found and every year I would be surprised by something.

It's a strange thing that people often daydream about the very best and very worst things that can (but most likely won't) happen to them. Rarely do we daydream about the mundane things in life, about taking our sweaters to the drycleaners or going grocery shopping. But we may often find ourselves thinking about winning the lottery (even if we never buy tickets), throwing a touchdown pass in the super bowl (no matter our physical prowess), or rocking out to our hit single in front of a crowd of thousands (mostly in the car with the windows safely rolled up).

Just as every Christmas I would try to guess at all the presents that I would receive, we sometimes find ourselves daydreaming about the good things we wish we had or hoped to soon obtain. And I must say that we are able to dream up some pretty good stuff! Yet, God makes it clear that our wildest dreams and most fanciful wishes are absolutely nothing compared to the things that God has in store for those who love him.

No eye has seen what God has in store, and our eyes have seen some amazing things. Think of all the beautiful things there are to look at in this world. Think of a sunrise over the ocean, the brilliant greens of a forest, the cool white of a full moon, the smile on the face of someone we love. No eye has seen what God has in store.

No ear has heard what God has in store, and our ears have heard sounds of wonder. Whether it is great works of music, the gentle whisper of a creek, or the laugh of a child, our ears have heard fantastic things. No ear has heard what God has in store.

No mind has conceived what God has in store, and our minds have thought of incredible things. Works of art and poetry, mathematics and science, our minds are capable of remarkable things. No mind has conceived what God has in store.

Now why would God store such things for those who love him?

Because God loved us first.

Because God loves us last.

Because God is Love.

**If God is love, how does that effect the way we think about others and serving them?**

**Why?  
Week 2  
Day 3**

**Read: Ephesians 5:1-2**

She walked into the living room where her young daughter was watching TV. "So," the mother began, the same conversation she had been revisiting for the past several weeks. "So," she began again, "what do you want to be for Halloween?"

The little girl heaved a sigh from the very bottom of her toes and threw a weary gaze at her mother. "You know," the little girl said very dramatically, "I've been thinking about that a lot lately. Everything that I come up with just doesn't seem, well, big enough." She shrugged her shoulders emphatically, adding physical punctuation to her sentence.

"Nothing's big enough?" the mother asked, trying to hide a smile behind her folded hands.

"That's right, nothing's big enough. I mean, I was thinking about animals, but none really seem to do the trick." The little girl rose from the couch, preparing to act out each of the proposed costumes. "I was thinking about an elephant, but while elephants are large in size they don't strike me as very smart." The little girl held her arm in front of her face and lifted it as an elephant trunk, but ended again with a shake of

her head and a shrug. "I just don't think it's big enough. But I do have an idea of what I can be."

"You have an idea? What is it?" The mother was trying to swallow back her impatience.

"Well, I was thinking about being a doctor, which would be a lot of fun," the little girl began to pantomime listening to someone's heartbeat with a stethoscope, "but I'm not sure if it's big enough."

"Yes, I know you want to be something big," the mother added, "But what was the idea you had?"

"Well, I was thinking about being a *dinosaur*," the little girl said the word with a bit of growl as a flourish, "but they seem kinda, well . . . extinct."

"Yes, that is true, but what do you want to be?"

"I was thinking about being God," the little girl said with a note of casual finality.

"God?" the mother asked, taken aback and momentarily dumbfounded. "Why . . . how . . . you want to dress like God?"

"Yup." The little girl found this conclusion rather natural and also found her mother's confusion somewhat annoying. "Should be easy enough. I mean we're all trying to be like Him anyway, aren't we?"

"Well, I guess that's true but . . ." The mother ended her sentence with a shake of her head.

"Don't worry, mom. I'll explain it all on the way to the fabric store."

What would it look like if we were to dress up like God? What would it look like if we were to imitate God? What would we do, how would we act? It would look like love. It would look like the love of Jesus. And only as a child is able, we would throw ourselves fully into the imitation, wardrobe and all. As dear children, love like God loves, live a life that is marked and defined by love. Just as Jesus lived. Just as Jesus loved.

What it would look like to dress up like God? It would look like people loving and serving each other selflessly. We serve so we can more and more resemble God in our lives.

**What would it look like in your life if you more and more resembled God?**

**Why?**  
**Week 2**  
**Day 4**

**Read: Psalm 17:7-8**

We live in a world that admires great power. The people who find themselves with their faces printed on our money are people who were powerful. The people who lead teams to championships are powerful people. The CEO's of the world who guide and control corporations are powerful people. From military to economic to physical, we admire and praise people with great power.

We live in a world that admires great intellect. We prize people who are well educated. The people we look up to often have letters both before and after their names. We mock people for their lack of education, for slowness of speech or of thought. We admire people of great intellect.

We live in a world that admires great personality. We enjoy being entertained by people with a healthy sense of humor. We like to be around people who make us laugh. We want to be the sort of people who can 'work a room' or people who are savvy in social situations. We want to be able to speak without hesitation, to be smooth and suave and charming. We admire people of great personality.

We live in a world that admires great attractiveness. The people on the covers of our magazines and on our TV shows are all people of great attractiveness. We desire to have flat stomachs, muscled bodies, tanned faces and white teeth. We will

spend great time and money to gain such things. We admire people of great attractiveness.

This is the world we live in, a world that look up to those with power, intellect, personality and attractiveness. These are the sort of people who lead us, who entertain us, who we look up to and desire to be ourselves. It is easy to fall into the mindset that it is only these qualities that matter in our world, and they really do matter. Let us not be dishonest, these traits can make life a good bit easier, can make people react to us differently, can ease some of the troubles that will undoubtedly come. And these qualities are not evil or wrong. It is not wrong to be in a position of power, or to get a good education, or to have a winsome personality, or to be physically fit. These things are useful for our world.

But these characteristics are not the only things, either. And when we look at God we see that he is described as having great love. God is indeed powerful, being able to create all things and holding the power of the dawn in his palm. God is indeed intelligent, he is the author of all knowledge and wisdom.

Yet, above all of this, above everything else that God is, God is marked by his great love. His great love. We live in the shadow of the wonder of God's great love. And all the powerful, intelligent, charming and attractive people of the world live in the shadow of God's great love. And it makes all the difference.

While the world may be attracted to power, in God's economy it is love acting itself out in the service of others that counts. Its easy to get caught up in the idea that power is what matters in life, but in the end, it is how we express love in service of others that makes the difference.

**Why do you think it is so easy to focus on power and not on love and serving others?**

**Why?**  
**Week 2**  
**Day 5**

**Read: John 13: 1-17**

Washing feet is something that in our lives would take place in the shower or bath. It's not that washing our feet is a terribly personal thing, but it's certainly not a public event either. I mean, after all, its feet. And feet are not the most glorious or beautiful parts of the human body. They tend to get covered with dirt and grim and perspiration and other nastiness. This is even more the case if you wear sandals or flip-flops.

Now imagine walking all day with sandals on dusty and dirty roads. It wouldn't take long to get you feet pretty nasty. Actually, foot washing was seen as so disgusting and below human standards that you were not even allowed to require your slave to perform the task. Foot washing was something that was fairly common to do once you entered a house, but normally water was offered for the guest to wash their own feet.

So this account of Jesus washing the feet of his followers is somewhat troubling. It might not seem so at first, but I think that this story is one of the more difficult ones to accept. I mean, we all want to think about God being powerful, capable, almighty, and he is. But there is normally very little room in our concepts of God for one who willingly and openly embarrasses himself. This is especially true when the embarrassment and humility comes at the benefit of those significantly lower than He is. Jesus, who is a perfect image of God on earth, takes off his outer cloak and adorned the clothing of a servant. He then took the water for washing, knelt, and began to wash the feet of his followers.

I can understand and identify with Simon Peter's reaction. You're going to wash my feet? My feet? I know what my feet are like and I also know the person that those feet are attached to. I'm not sure that's a very good idea. Maybe we should just move along and pretend this never happened.

But Jesus will have nothing of these excuses. The reason that Jesus seems so adamant about washing Simon Peter's feet is the

same reason that Jesus washes their feet in the first place. Jesus kneels to wash his follower's feet to show the full extent of his love. Jesus also wants Simon Peter to know this love as well. It is a love that we are free to turn down, a love we can actively avoid if we so choose.

Yet, once we receive this love, once we receive this cleansing at the hands of the Lord Jesus, then we no longer have a choice. Not really. Once we have received the love of God, we are to carry that love off to others. We are to take on our own servants cloths, whatever forms those might take, and go out into our world, wherever that may be, and serve. Once we have received, we are to give. Once we have been served by God we are to become servants of others.

To show the full extend of his love, God serves in the most humble way possible. To show the full extend of our receiving God's love, we go and love also.

**As we carry the love of God with us, why should that make it easier to serve others?**

**Why?**

**Week 2**

**Small Group Guide**

- 1.If you could never do one task again, what task would you choose?
- 2.In what ways are love and serving others tied together?
- 3.When have you done something you wouldn't have done otherwise because of love?

**Read: John 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 2:8-10, John 13:1-17**

4. In what ways do you think the love of God and our willingness to serve are tied together?
5. If God's very nature is to be love, how should those who are following him serve?
6. In what way does Jesus' example of serving others display the love of God?
7. Is the love of God in evidence in your life because of how you are serving others? What can you do this week to make this more the case?

**Why?**  
**Week 3**  
**Day 1**

**Read Genesis 2:15-24**

Life moves faster than ever before. Faster cars, faster access to information, faster computers, faster food (which normally tastes as good as it sounds): add them all up and we are living faster lives. And maybe that's one reason why it is so hard to have real authentic relationships. Yet, people are constructed in such a way that we need (and crave) interaction with each other.

We see this exact principle at work in Genesis. The beginning of Genesis is an account of God's work in creating the heavens and earth, as well as Adam, the first person. God then takes Adam and places him in the Garden of Eden and Adam enjoys a time of great closeness with God. And yet, even here all is not right. Before there was sin, before Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, before evil entered the world; there was something wrong. The problem: Adam was alone. There were no other humans for Adam to interact with, no one with whom he could share his life. God looks down and says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

So God attempts to create a helper for him. God creates all the animals of the world and all of the birds of the air and brings them to Adam. But these animals and birds could not fill the space in Adam's life. This is a strange addition to the story. Surely God knew that animals and birds and livestock could never fill the void in a life that is missing human relationships. And I am convinced that God did know. But he wanted to be sure that Adam knew as well. Nothing, not a pet, not a beautiful distraction, not livestock or the work of your hands; none of these things can replace human relationships. And now Adam knows it as well. Adam now is beginning to see the depth of the issue before him. Adam wants a human relationship as much as God does.

God now creates a woman, Eve. Eve is not a helper; Eve is the perfect fit for Adam. Eve was built in the image of God, in the same way that Adam was. Adam knows now what he was missing all along, real relationship with another person. Even with a perfect relationship with God, Adam was missing something. We are built the exact same way.

We need genuine relationships. We need interactions with other people. We need people to share our successes and struggles with. Nothing can fill that space except relationships. Nothing. Not work, not distractions, not even our relationship with God. No magazines or books can fill this need. Nothing but relationships with other people can make it so that God will not look down and say, "It is not good for people to be alone."

**Think about the things that you allow getting in the way of authentic relationships. What things do you use to try to replace relationships? Television? Work? The internet? In what areas of your life can you create more space for authentic relationships?**

**Why?  
Week 3  
Day 1**

**Read Mark 3:13-18**

When we watch movies we are sometimes drawn to the lone wolf character, the person who seems to be able to handle anything without any help. We find this sort of attitude attractive in our leaders or those in power. So we might expect this same sort of approach with respect to Jesus. Yet, this is not what we see at all.

When we read Mark 3, we see Jesus going out and intentionally spending time with people. He then takes twelve of these people and begins building deep, intimate relationships with them. So why does Jesus form these relationships? Some may answer that these relationships are a means of training these men, which is certainly a portion of the reason. But, this is not the entire story. Mark 3:14 makes it clear that one of the main reasons that Jesus forms relationships with these twelve men is so that "they might be with him." Jesus, the Son of God, invests his life in others because he knows that's how humans were meant to live. He knows that he needs these relationships. He needs these friends.

In case you have any doubts about the nature of the relationship between Jesus and these twelve men, allow me to give a little bit of historical information. Jesus was a rabbi, which means that he was a religious teacher. Literally, rabbi means 'great one' and they had a high level of respect and honor in the community. They would have a small band of followers who would be his students, just as these twelve men were with Jesus. Yet, the twelve were not the traditional students that a rabbi would have taught. Normally, a rabbi would teach crowds, but would only take the best and brightest students to be his inner most pupils.

A quick look at the list of students that Jesus selected reveals that these are not the best and brightest, actually far from it. Some were fishermen, a profession for the uneducated. Another was a political revolutionary. Another made his living extorting taxes from his own countrymen. We do not know the full details of the lives of these twelve men, but it is clear that they are not typical students of a rabbi. T

These inner most pupils would then spend every minute with the rabbi, learning as much as they could during this time. And so it was with this twelve as well. Every minute of everyday they spent with Jesus, so much so that Jesus developed playful

nicknames for several of them: Peter he calls Rock while James and John he calls the son's of thunder. In the center of this diverse and unexpected group is Jesus. He is their teacher. He is their friend. And they are his friends. Even the very Son of God needs friends with which to share life.

**Think about the people in your life. Jesus gathered this group around him because he needed them near him. In what ways do you need the people who are in your life to be near you? What areas of your life do you need people to be near you that are not near you now? In what ways can you seek out and intentionally invest in the lives of others? Do you find it frustrating or encouraging that Jesus picked such an unlikely band of people to be his students? What does that mean for your life?**

**Why?  
Week 3  
Day 3**

**Read: Mark 2:13-14, Mark 3:18-19**

Walk into any cafeteria in any high school and a certain truth becomes clear. People normally spend most of their time with those who are very much like they are. Whether it's the jocks swapping stories of sports glory, the nerds obsessing over grades, or the stoners dozing on the stairs; people like to associate with others who think and act like they do. And what's more, people tend to look down and criticize anyone who does not belong to their particular group.

The same dynamic was at work during the lifetime of Jesus. There are a variety of groups, each with a certain set of beliefs and each one looking down on all the others. There are the Romans, who occupy and control the majority of the world through power and the edge of a sword. This occupation includes the lands traditionally controlled by the Jewish people, which is where Jesus lives. This occupation has not been peaceful; in fact it has been particularly bloody in Jerusalem and other Jewish lands. The occupation gave birth to several other groups of people, the first of which are the Zealots. Zealots (as the name implies) mean someone who is zealous on behalf of God. In reality, they were political and religious fighters who believed that the Romans should be removed from Jewish lands by force. They were subversive to the ruling government and despised

everything Roman and were unconcerned over who their attacks on Rome effected.

On the other hand, there is a group of people called the Sadducees (pronounced sad-u-seas). Sadducees were the conformist, those who decided that since you couldn't beat the Roman Empire you might as well join them and make a profit along the way. One way that the Sadducees conformed was by doing the dirty work of the Romans for them; collecting taxes. If this wasn't enough to illicit hatred (I'm sure any IRS official will tell you it is) the way that tax collectors made a profit was to extort more money than was required for the taxes and then keeping the excess. As you might imagine, the Zealots and Sadducees did not normally hang out together watching football on Sunday. The Zealots saw the Sadducees as traitors and deserving of death. The Sadducees saw the Zealots as brutes and small-minded people who couldn't accept change.

With this in mind it might be surprising to find both a Zealot and a Sadducee in Jesus' inner circle of friends. I wonder what Simon (known as the Zealot) was thinking as Jesus walked past the tax collectors booth. I wonder if he was hoping Jesus would take this moment to teach a lesson, a lesson that would never be forgotten by anyone who sympathized with Rome. Here's your chance, he must have thought, here's your opportunity to strike a blow for all of us, a chance to show what a real Jew looks like. And Jesus did have a lesson to teach, but it wasn't the lesson Simon had hoped. Jesus invited Levi (also known as Matthew) the tax-collector to become a follower. He invited Levi to become a student, a follower, a friend. And so we find Simon and Levi following together, the only thing they have in common is the invitation of Jesus. And it's enough. Jesus is enough common ground for these two to stand together. It wasn't Simon the Zealot's job to call followers, but only Jesus.

It's the same with us. Any Sunday you can look around the church and find people who would never associate together, except for the call of Jesus. It is not our job to call, only to answer the call of God. And Jesus is enough common ground to create a family.

**How well do you handle diversity? Is it a challenge for you to have a lot of different types of people with lot of different viewpoints surrounding you? How can you help create the kind of openness that fosters the invitation of Christ? How**

**can you make it difficult for others to come to church? How can you make it easier?**

**Why?  
Week 3  
Day 4**

**Read: John 13:34-35**

Have you ever watched a sporting event on TV? Every now and then the camera will pan across the crowd and as far as the eye can see, everyone is wearing one color (say, purple, maybe?). And right in the middle of it all, in the middle of the monochromatic sea, a small cluster of opposing colors are huddled together. Just a quick glance and it's pretty clear who is supporting each team. So what marks us out as a community?

Jesus addresses this question head on. John 13 is set during the last days of Jesus' life. He knows that his time is short and that soon he will be facing all the evils the world has to offer. He knows that soon this small band of followers will not have his direct guidance as they have over the past three years. Jesus knows that soon they will have to rely on each other in ways they never have before. And so Jesus teaches another lesson.

"A new command I give you: love one another." We hear about love so much in our society it becomes so easy to get confused about what it really is and what it really looks like. You can almost picture the twelve followers shrugging their shoulders, wondering what he meant. Didn't they love each other already? Weren't they all friends? Hadn't they spent the last three years together? Maybe they were nodding along, thinking that they already had this commandment licked. But Jesus isn't

finished yet. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus had called each of them to follow him, had spent all of his moments with them for the last three years, had spoken words of life to them and had changed all their lives. And soon he would die for them. They may have still been shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulder, but it seems fair to assume that none thought the task was going to be easy anymore.

Jesus continues by saying it is this very act of love that will separate them from the world. It is by this that all men will know that you love me, that you follow me, and that you hear my voice and obey. And as obvious as a fan of the visiting team, you will stick out like a sumo wrestler in a kiddie pool. This is how Jesus' community of faith should act, in love for each other. The world will not understand it, but it will notice.

What would that look like in your life? What would that look like in your community? What would happen if we all began to sacrifice for each other, if we began to go out of our way to help each other, if we began to truly love one another? The world would take notice. Relationships would strengthen. Community would grow. And God would be pleased.

**Who do you think Jesus is referring to when he says "love one another?" Who are the "one another's" in your life? In what ways would the world take notice if a community was truly loving each other as Jesus loves us? What would that look like in your life?**

**Why?  
Week 3  
Day 5**

**Read Acts 2: 42-47**

Different areas of the county have different ways of acting. Anyone who has traveled knows that you do not have to venture far from home to experience new things and new people.

Just ask someone from the Mid-West how to pick a crab if you doubt me (if your experience is anything like mine, you might find more fear than joy at having a pile of crabs before them). And so communities are sometimes formed and distinguished by some of the practices that become important to them. The same has always been true of the church.

Acts is a book that talks about the life of the early church as it began to spread throughout the world. This early church is filled with all sorts of people, most of whom had little if any interaction with Jesus. Even beyond that, three thousand brand new followers had just become a part of this fledgling church. And so Acts tells us what actions became important for this community.

They were devoted to the apostles teaching, that is, the teaching given by those who were the original followers of Jesus. They would tell about the things Jesus did and said, so that even those who did not meet Jesus in person would get to know who Jesus was. They also gather together to break bread together. For the early church this meant more than communion as we participate on Sunday morning, but was the sharing of a meal together. Those who had excess feed those who had little or no food. It was during these times that they shared fellowship. This is the same as saying that they shared their lives together. This was not a collection of passive interactions but a real sharing of success and trials. Finally, they would be sure to pray when they gathered.

So what is the best setting for all of these things to take place in our lives? Sunday morning is a great time to gather together, to hear teaching and to share communion together. But it is difficult (maybe impossible) to do all these things on a Sunday morning. This is why Community Christian believes so strongly in small groups.

Sunday morning is a perfect time to gather together and celebrate together but it is not the right setting to do everything that the early church held as a vital. This is why small groups focus on spending time sharing life together, sharing meals, sharing joys and burdens. There is time and space in small groups for focused prayer, for fellowship and for walking together with Jesus.

And the church in Acts enjoyed "the favor of all people." Do you wonder why? Maybe when people live like they were living, it benefits everyone. Maybe when people love each other it trickles over onto everyone else around it. Maybe the rest of the world just saw that something amazing was taking place. Doesn't that sound like the kind of thing you might want to be a part of?

**What do you think 'the people' around us think of our community? What would an ideal small group look like to you? Of all the things that took place in the church at Acts, which do you think is the most important? Which do you want more of in your life?**

**Why?  
Week 3  
Small Group Guide**

**Open: (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits)**

1. If you could move anywhere in the country to live, where would you live?
2. Where did you grow up? What type of community was the one in which you were raised? (Urban, Suburban, Farming, etc.)
3. What are some of the distinguishing characteristics of the community in which you now live?
4. How can you tell if someone is a Christian? How do they dress? How do they talk? What are some of the distinctive elements that make this the case?
5. What is different about a church than other groups of people, like clubs or teams?

**Bible: Read John 13:34-35 and Acts 2: 42-47**

6. In light of John 13:34-35 passages, how should Christians be distinctive from the world around them? How does this fit with what you have experienced in your life?
7. What are some of the distinguishing characteristics (that you don't find anywhere else) within the Church from Acts 2:42-47? Where do these normally take place?
8. Which of these elements would you find to be the most helpful during a small group session? The most distracting? Why?
9. How can we pray and support each other within this small group?

**Why?**  
**Week 4**  
**Day 1**

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Romans 5: 6-8*

Over the past several weeks, we've been asking the question "why" with regard to what we do and believe here at CCC. Three weeks ago we looked at why church exists, two weeks ago we looked at why we serve, and last week we looked at why we gather together.

This week, as we celebrate the fourth birthday of Community Christian Church, we'll look at why CCC. Why choose to call CCC home? Why make this community of followers of Jesus *your* community?

It comes down to the mission and goals of Community Christian Church. The mission of CCC is to help people find their way back to God. Our dream is that people who are far from God will begin to draw near to him. One of the first steps to making this happen is to help people understand God's love better.

There is a myth that persists that God loves us in proportion to how good we are. If I have a bad week, God loves me less. If I am impatient, if I say something particularly nasty, or if I'm unkind, God makes a note next to my name and I can be sure that bad things are coming my way. On the other hand, when I am extra nice, when I eat all my vegetables and when I drive the speed limit, God puts a gold star next to my name and I get a prize. We live our lives in the shadow of this myth that the love of God is contingent to our behavior.

The effects of this myth can be drastic and far-reaching. People live their lives waiting for the hammer to drop, waiting for the punishments that is either getting good grades or detention.

But the Bible teaches us that the love of God has nothing they are sure they deserve. Or they live their lives with their hands out, anticipating good things that they feel they have earned. And so life becomes one huge classroom where everyone to do with us. It has nothing to do with our actions. It has nothing to do with how we lived last week or last year. It has everything to do with God.

God shows his love for us by dying for us because we were good enough and deserved it. God showed his love for us by dying for us because we are perfect people. God showed his love for us by dying for us after we decided to turn around our lives and live right.

Nope.

God showed his love for us by dying for us while we were sinners. God's love is the same when we are at our lowest. God's love is the same when we are at our highest.

And there are many things we can do with that love. We can embrace it, ignore it, accept it or reject it. But the love never changes. God's love for us never changes.

What would it look like for a community of people to live in light of this unconditional love? It is our dream that CCC will be just such a place.

**How might your view of God change if you knew that his love is unconditional?**

**Why?  
Week 4  
Day 2**

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Romans 8:38-39*

It is essential for people to know about the amazing love of God. In order for Community Christian Church to reach people who are far from God, this is an essential thing we must all learn.

What can separate us from those we love?

Death has a way of ending love. Death separates us from those we love and creates a distance that we cannot travel. And so we are sometimes left with an emptiness, or bitterness, or sorrow. Death has a way of ending love.

Life has a way of ending love. The faults and failures that come naturally to us have a way of hurting and injuring others. Love is often the first victim of the lives we lead.

The things of good can sometimes end love. There can be times when doing right and being "good" becomes an ends in and of itself. And love can complicate this and is discarded in the name of expedience or productivity.

The things of evil can sometimes end love. Evil has a way surrounding us and trying to overpower us. Evil has a way of turning our eyes inward and love is forgotten.

The present has a way of ending love. Our busyness of our lives can consume every second of our time, making us so hectic that love simply gets left by the wayside.

The future has a way of ending love. We fret and worry and press about the things to come, about the infinite possible futures that may or may not take place. And love is a dangerous future and becomes the one untaken.

Power has a way of ending love. The strong, the mighty, the powerful; these often do not see their need for love. Love is a weakness or a crutch, and is abandoned.

Things that are higher than us have a way of ending love. The things that are above us, that are out of our reach and beyond our attaining can make us jealous and angry. And when we reach for high things we can leave love on the floor.

Things that are lower than us have a way of ending love. When we look downward at things below us we can be tempted to feel righteous, superior and arrogant. And with these, love dies.

Yet, none of these things can separate us from the love of God. Death does not create a distance between God and us. Nothing in our lives is ugly enough to push God away. Things of goodness and righteousness bow before love in the eyes of God. The things of evil have been defeated by the love of God. God created 'now' and every second in it. God holds the future in his hands. None are more powerful than God. Nothing is higher than God. Nothing reached lower than Jesus reached.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

What can you do to make God love you less? Nothing.

**What would it mean to have the love of God in your life? In what areas of your life could this love spill over more? How should this love be expressed at CCC?**

### Day 3

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

*Ephesians 2: 8-10*

Grace. It's a word that gets kicked around in a bunch of different settings. To have grace or to be graceful can mean that you are elegant or refined. To grace something can mean to be an embellishment or decoration. Before people eat they sometimes say 'grace,' which is a prayer of thanks. People even take vacations to Graceland! But God has something different in mind.

What does grace mean when it comes to God and the church? What does it mean with regard to CCC? The reason CCC exists is to help people understand and embrace God's grace for themselves.

We are a fallen people living in a fallen world. But you probably already know that. It doesn't take too much looking around to see it. We hear it on the daily news. We see it in our families. We feel it in ourselves. We are a people who are in need of saving.

And God sent a savior. Jesus Christ, the son of God came to earth to save us. And the way that he saves us is a work all his own. God does not save us by leaning into our strength or reading over our résumés. The salvation that comes from God is through grace.

This salvation is completely a gift from God. It has nothing to do with our good works. It has nothing to do with our personalities or our appearance. There is nothing that we can brag or boast about. It is all the work of God.

And what about those good works that we are sometimes tempted to show off? Those were set aside for us to do from the very beginning. We are God's workmanship, designed and intended to do the good works God set out for us. But notice that these works were prepared by God as well.

Every step along the way we are the recipients of the grace and work of God, given freely for us. This is grace. This is the gift of God.

**What is your understanding of grace? What has it meant in your life?**

**Why?  
Week 4  
Day 4**

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

*Galatians 5:6*

One of the ways that churches can trip up is with regard to rules, both written and unwritten. Here at CCC, we want to remove all obstacles so that people can either accept or reject God because of who God is and not because of any manmade obstacle.

The book of Galatians in the Bible is a letter to a church that was facing some issues. This was a newly formed collection of people who were trying to align their lives with the will of God. And these people fell into two distinct groups; Jewish people and non-Jewish people. The differences between these groups was deep and went into how they identified themselves. Yet, both are now trying to live as one group and, as you might expect, issues arise.

The Jewish followers of Jesus were used to having some very strict and rigid definitions of what it meant to be "inside" and what it meant to be "outside." And so the Jewish believers set up requirements for those who were not Jewish, a set of things that they must do in order to be included among the people of God.

The idea is this: there are requirements before you can gain the love of God. There are requirements before you can be a part of the community. There are requirements before anything else can take place with regard to your spiritual life. And one of the main requirements was circumcision.

Paul, the author of this letter, makes it clear that these are not the requirements to receive the love of God. These are not the requirements to be a part of the community. God loves us before we even take a step toward him. God loves us without any requirements.

And the church is the place where this unconditional love of God is lived out and given to others. The requirements mean nothing, Paul is saying. What matters is faith acting in love. And just like the love of God poured from him down to us, so we are to become the sort of people who live and love each other in the same way.

**Have you ever felt a lack of grace at church? What would a church look like that loved like God loved?**

**Why?  
Week 4  
Day 5**

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

*1 John 4: 9-11*

He sat in his normal chair. It was in the middle of the row near the back of the room. The first time he sat there because there wasn't that many seats left and this one was available, but it was a good location, offering a decent view. And so the next week he sat in the same chair. After that, it was just his seat. And so he sat in it this Sunday like he did every week.

It was a crowded Sunday and the seats were quickly becoming filled. A woman sat to his left, a woman who was much older than he was. He wanted to scoot away from her for no other reason than she was closer than strangers normally are to one another, but the seat to his right became filled as well. A boy of about ten sat in the seat, the youngest of his family that were trying to hurriedly get into the row before the service started. He readjusted himself to sit in the center of his seat, looking pointedly forward, avoiding eye contact with anyone and pulling his elbows in close so he wouldn't brush against those sitting on either side of him.

He shook his head. *Don't they know what time it is?* he thought as looked at his watch. The music was starting, someone standing at the microphone welcoming them. The boy beside him took off his coat, slapping him with each arm as he did so. *Unbelievable! Some people are so disrespectful!*

Everyone is asked to stand. He does so, still grumbling deep in his chest. There was a song being sung, something about God's love being amazing. The song says God's love is unchanging, steady and perfect. He liked that idea, enjoyed singing and thinking about God's love.

The older woman beside his began singing now, loud and wildly off-key. He closed his eyes, trying to ignore her but to no avail. He turned and glared at her, his look far from kind. She looked back and smiled warmly, clapping her hands softly as her voice warbled through the song. *If you can't sing, don't!* he thought with a snarl. *Why is she here anyway?*

"God loves you," the speaker from the front says. "We do not deserve it, we can not earn it, but God loves you."

Yes, he thinks, *I know I don't deserve the love of God and I am so thankful - what in the world is he doing now!* The boy beside him unwrapped a candy, the wrapper crinkling loudly. *They shouldn't let kids in here.*

"God showed his love in Jesus, who died to prove his love to us," the speaker continued from the front. Yes, he thought distractedly. *The love of God, the sacrifice of Jesus, the - you've got to be kidding me!*

The older woman beside him was turning in her Bible, rifling through the well-worn pages, which were unyielding and noisy. "Amen, Jesus, amen." The woman whispered under her breath. "Amen, Jesus, amen."

He gritted his teeth, his jaw clenched. Angry words were bubbling to his lips and he swallowed them like acid. *I can't believe the people I have to put up with here!*

"How do we respond to the love of God?" the speaker asked from the front as the service ended. **When have you had to respond with love at CCC?**

**Why?  
Week 4  
Small Group Guide**

**Open (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits):**

1. How did you first hear about Community Christian Church?
2. What have been your experiences with church? How has your experience with church influenced your life, both positively and negatively?

**Think about it:**

3. We normally live our lives with a cause and effect relationship with our actions. What are some ways that you receive what you 'earn' in your life?
4. The mission of Community Christian Church is to help people find their way back to God. How does someone's understanding of God's love effect this?

**Bible: Read Romans 5: 6-8, Romans 8:38-39**

5. How does the love of God, as described in these passages, compare with the love that we normally see in the world?
6. "While we were sinners, Christ died for us." This is the ultimate display of unconditional love. Have you ever felt this love in your life? How would knowing this sort of love change the way you lived? What are ways that a church like CCC can help people experience this love?

7. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Is this how you normally think about God's love? Is this how you normally hear love talked about at churches?
8. At CCC we want to remove obstacles between people and God. What are some of the written or unwritten rules that act as obstacles? What are ways we can remove these obstacles so people can encounter God in their lives?

**Why?**  
**Week 5**  
**Day 1**

**Read: 1 Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27**

We are in the final week of our series "Why?" where we've been taking a closer look at some of the things that we believe and do here at Community Christian Church. Throughout this series, we've looked at things you might see at church any Sunday at CCC, including serving and gathering. This week we are going to take a closer look at something you might not see every week at Community Christian Church, but something that is very important nonetheless. This week we are going to take a closer look at baptism.

It is our hope that during the daily readings for this week we'll be addressing questions about baptism in such a way to make baptism something that is more understandable and meaningful in your life.

When it comes to baptism, there are essentially three questions that arise. The first question is why be baptized or why is baptism important. The second question that often arises is when should a person be baptized or at what age is baptism appropriate. The third question that is often debated with concern to

baptism is what form should baptism take. The questions surrounding baptism can cause a good deal of confusion, especially if you were raised in a different church tradition than that of the CCC.

Community Christian Church is a part of a stream of churches associated with what is called the Restoration Movement. One of the main goals of the Restoration Movement was to restore Christianity back to the way it is described in the Bible and to help the church regain a "Biblical" faith. What this means is a shift away from creeds and traditions and toward living out faith the way we read about in the Bible.

This is essential to understand as we begin to engage with the topic of baptism, since we rely on what the Bible teaches about baptism and how the early church lived out baptism to inform our faith and practice. Throughout this week we'll be looking closely at what the Bible says about baptism.

**What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about baptism? What questions or concerns do you have about baptism?**

**Why?  
Week 5  
Day 2**

**Read: Matthew 3:13-16, Matthew 28:16-20**

Perhaps the best place to begin when investigating baptism is to ask a basic, but very important, question: why be baptized? After all, why take this step of baptism in the first place?

There are several ways to answer this question.

The first, and most straightforward way to answer this question is by looking at the life of Jesus. Why be baptized? Because Jesus was baptized. This step of baptism is so important to a life of faith that Jesus made sure that being baptized marked his own life. It is interesting to note that the step of baptism in the life of Jesus was a turning point for him. It was shortly after his baptism that Jesus enters into what is know as his earthly ministry. For thirty years Jesus lived a life in relative obscurity. After his baptism Jesus devotes himself to his mission of trying to draw people closer to God. The same is true for us as well. Baptism can be a turning point in our lives.

Not only does Jesus get baptized himself, he also commands for people to be baptized. One of the last things Jesus commands his disciples to do is to teach about him and to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Why be baptized? Because Jesus set the example by being baptized himself and because it is something that Jesus commands for us.

There is some debate among people as to whether or not baptism is required for a person to be "saved" or to receive the salvation of God. This is a fairly complex question. The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is very important and it says in several places that baptism washes away our sins. There are other places where the Bible states that we are saved by faith and not by our own actions. These conversations are

important, but possibly moot, because Jesus commands us to be baptized. Why, if we are able, would we not want to be baptized simply to fulfill a command of Jesus.

## **Why do you think people should be baptized?**

**Why?**

**Week 5**

**Day 3**

Read: Acts 8: 12, Acts 8:36-39, Acts 22:14-16, **Acts 22:16**

Yesterday we looked at the life of Jesus to answer the question of why be baptized. Today we'll look at the early church and their understanding of baptism. When we read through the book of Acts, a history of the birth and early years of the church, what we encounter are multiple incidents of people being baptized.

It's vitally important to pay attention to the life of the early church, since we are following in their footsteps. It is also important to look at how the people closest to Jesus and who heard Jesus teaching in person interpreted and lived out what he said.

What we see in the book of Acts is that the early church understood baptism as a vital step in their faith. Over and over again, when people come to learn about Jesus and when they put their faith in him, they are baptized.

This addresses another question that often arises with concern to baptism: when should I get baptized. What we see all throughout Acts is that when people come to faith they immediately are baptized. There is urgency. Even when it was inconvenient, people wanted to be baptized immediately. There are no restrictions or requirements or prerequisites other than belief in Jesus

as the Son of God who died for the forgiveness of their sins and to accept that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

I am sometimes asked when they should a person be baptized. If you believe Jesus died for your sins and you want to make him Lord and Savior of your life, then the time for you to be baptized is now.

In the book of Acts we see a similar situation, where Philip, a follower of Jesus, was teaching a foreign dignitary about Jesus. The dignitary wanted to put his faith in Jesus and makes this remarkable comment:

"Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"

What is keeping me from being baptized right now, he is asking. I understand. I believe. And he is baptized in the first body of water they pass.

People can sometimes put off the decision to be baptized. I hope if you have faith in Jesus and want to follow him with your life that you will not delay to take the step of baptism in your life.

**Why do you think someone might hesitate to take the step of baptism? What has the step of baptism looked like in your life?**

**Why?**  
**Week 5**  
**Day 4**

**Read: Acts 16:30-34, Acts 18:8, Acts 2:38-41**

Perhaps the most heated arguments about baptism concern the age of the person being baptized. Some traditions baptize babies. Some believe in baptizing only adults. So at what age is it appropriate for a person to be baptized?

Once again, we will go to the Bible to determine the answer to this important question.

The first thing to note is that there are no examples of children or infants being baptized in the Bible. The closest thing we have to the mention of a child being baptized is the statement that "an entire household" was baptized. Yet, the usage of the word household in ancient times does not mean exactly the same thing that it does for us today. A household is more than the family, but also the servants and workers that lived at the house and that served the family. This statement does not imply that children were involved.

Yet, what we do see prior to every single baptism recorded in the Bible is a person coming to believe and have faith in Jesus. This is an important point to understand. It is impossible for an infant to have faith of their own or to make a choice of their own volition. What we see in the Bible is that those who were baptized had the ability to choose to be baptized.

This is why here at CCC we practice only what is known as "believers baptism", or the baptism of people who are old enough to make a choice of faith on their own.

The choice to have a baby sprinkled is a choice made by the parents. It is a choice that speaks loudly of that parents desire for the child to grow up knowing Jesus and following him. It is a choice that speaks of the parents desire for the child to become a person of faith.

When someone decides for themselves to take the step of baptism, it is, in many ways, a fulfillment of those wishes the parents had in mind when the child was sprinkled. I know how much tension it can cause in a family when someone wants to be baptized as an adult, because it can sometimes appear that they are contradicting the desires of the parent who sprinkled them as a baby. The truth is that they are fulfilling the desire and purpose their parents had in the first place.

**What has been your understanding of baptism as it relates to the age of when a person should be baptized?**

**Why?**  
**Week 5**  
**Day 5**

**Read: Romans 6:2-4, Matthew 3:13-16**

The final question that is raised about baptism is what form should the baptism take. Should the person be sprinkled? Should water be poured? Should the person be dunked? What form should baptism take?

The way that baptism is described in the Bible makes the answer to this question fairly clear. The word used for baptism is the word *baptizo*, which literally means to submerge or to dunk. The word baptism itself gives us a key idea to the form baptism should take.

When read about Jesus (and others) being baptized in the Bible they are described as coming up out of the water. This, too, implies that Jesus was submerged in the water.

Perhaps one of the most important passages with regard to the form of baptism is found in Romans. Paul, the author of this letter, is teaching about baptism. He reminds the church in Rome that in baptism we are identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Just like Jesus was buried (in the ground) and then raised back to life, so we too in baptism are buried (submerged in water) and then raised back up (out of the water). This is a beautiful picture that shows the reality of what baptism really is: our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**What form of baptism are you most familiar with?**

**Why?**

**Week 5**

**Small Group Guide**

1. What do you think of when you hear the word baptism?  
What is your first reaction?

2. What are some of the debates that normally take place about baptism?

**Read: Matthew 3:13-16, Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 8: 12, Acts 8:36-39, Acts 22:14-16, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:2-4**

3. What is your understanding of what age a person should be baptized? What has been your experience with this in your life?

4. What has been your experience as to the form which baptism takes?

5. From the readings above, why do you think someone should be baptized?

6. In what ways does baptism draw a beautiful picture of being buried into the death of Jesus and raised into new life with him?

7. Have you taken the step of baptism? If so, what was the significance to you? If not, do you think that baptism is a step you'd like to pursue?