

Why?

Week 1

DAILY THOUGHTS AND SMALL GROUP GUIDE
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Why?
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?
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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?

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