
Why Church?

Part 1 - Family Gathering

Feeling lonely after all this isolation? We were made to be in relationship, in family. This is the power of love and community – this is the Church.

A couple of thousand years ago Jesus called a group of people together, a group of people who loved God so deeply, and loved each other so irrationally, and served the world so passionately that miracles happened.

Things that had separated and divided people now were put aside, and they became a part of God's family through Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:28)

Do you think God can still do that? Do you think it could happen today? Do you think there could be a community so relentlessly loving that people who thought they had given up on the church, felt welcomed and loved? Do you think God could do that here at Riverlife? Do you think God could do that in you?

Our idea of community is being challenged. Our crisis is more than a global health pandemic and a financial crisis. There is a very real crisis going on in people's sense of isolation and their need to find community.

Mark Sayers, pastor, and author says that crisis precedes renewal.

Three elements of crisis:

1. **Disruption** – 'What's just happened?' 'We want this to end quickly'
2. **Disassembling of the parts** – we are being invited by God to take a closer look at what and why we are doing what we are doing.
3. **Corporate and personal renewal**

What does that mean as far as church goes?

- + Is there hope that the church is alive and well?
- + What if it doesn't look like it used to?
- + What is the future of the church?
- + Why church?

This becomes then the invitation of who God is calling us to be. The church He has always envisaged.

There is an opportunity to re-define and explore the part we all play in the role and purpose of the church in preparation of positioning ourselves for the invitation from God to enter into renewal.

The Bride (Revelation 21:9-10 and Ephesians 5:21-30)

Jesus loves us as intensely as a groom loves His bride.

We are His bride and, if we adorn ourselves for Him, His eyes will be on us for good. Our identity is a glorious one, we are His beloved. When we remember who we are, we can act on who we are. We can fulfil our destiny and live purposeful, satisfied lives.

The Soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

Timothy describes us as soldiers of Christ.

Under Christ's leadership, we are an elite group of soldiers. Christ our captain, the epitome of courage, honour and valour. Again, the point is that when we remember who we are, we are able to act on who we are.

The Family (1 Peter 2:9)

The church is called out, chosen and valued. A royal family—esteemed and set apart for service. God’s love for us is strong, and Christ is eternally committed to the church, His people.

It doesn’t matter which biblical metaphor we use to remember our identity and then act on it. The metaphors all point to the same thing—the church is loved and chosen, empowered by God, and set apart for His glory and service. Our identity is an attractive, empowered, purposeful one.

At Riverlife we are not trying to be a perfect church. What we want to be is a people who constantly align ourselves to pleasing God. It is a people who position their hearts carefully and deliberately with the Kingdom of God in mind, that God is pleased to work in unrestricted ways.

The Wrong Trajectory

We can often forget that the local church belongs to Jesus, not us. Forget this, and we begin to market ourselves for more members rather than posture ourselves for His manifest presence.

- + A forgotten identity is when a church becomes busy doing the wrong things.
- + A forgotten identity is when a church becomes an end rather than a means to an end.
- + A forgotten identity is when a church becomes too focussed on a Christian subculture

Family Gathering

What scandalised Jesus in the eyes of many, particularly the religious leaders, was how He would welcome, love, accept, embrace and include anybody who came to Him. (Matthew 9:10-13)

The ecclesia in the New Testament is a group of people who have been called out of the world and to God; it is the church.

We must be careful in how we understand being called out, that we don't forget our true identity. God never intended that we be a subculture unto ourselves. Rather, He asks that we be countercultural, a culture that does what's true and right and good even when darkness is all around it. Jesus said we are to be as salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13–16). He asks that we remain in the culture, that we be in the world and yet not of the world, so that we can be influencers in “a crooked and depraved generation, in which we shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:14–15).

The good news is that we can remember our true identity and then act on that identity (Hebrews 10:23–25). We come in so we can go out! We are to love people as God does, share His invitation to salvation with them, and pray that they, too, will hear His call and join His family, His church.

Discussion Questions

1. In our current environment our concept of community and a gathered family has been challenged. What have you found difficult?
2. Have you been challenged during this season about your motivation for attending a Sunday service? How is the church so much more than Sunday?
3. In what areas have we perhaps headed on the wrong trajectory? What needs to be done to bring us back on track?
4. Which of the metaphors in scripture do you most associate with? How does this challenge you to live in such a way that you are aligning yourself to be constantly pleasing to God?
5. What can you do, to play your part in the Riverlife family being an inclusive open family that is light to the wider community?