

LEADERTREKS **SERMON SERIES****MARK OF A DISCIPLE**

Disciples of Christ prioritize meeting together with other Christ-followers.

SCRIPTURE

ACTS 2:44–47, HEBREWS 10:19–25

SERMON OVERVIEW

When Sunday morning comes around, it can be tempting to catch some extra rest rather than make an effort to attend church. We think to ourselves, “I already know that Jesus loves me—what’s the point of going to church just to hear it again?” But the first Christ-followers modeled a radically different attitude, where gathering together in community was fundamental to their faith. They knew living life with other Christ-followers was essential for their spiritual growth. Students will understand the importance of meeting with other believers and be challenged to commit to doing so. Christ-centered community is not just an encouraging get-together but a vital component in our pursuit of Jesus.

OPENING**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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ICE BREAKER QUESTION

- How are you currently involved in a Christ-centered community, or how would you like to be more involved?

MESSAGE

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.

READ ACTS 2:44–47**POINT 1: Christ-centered community is beautiful**

When you really care about something, it’s instinctive to seek out other people who share that value. All of the fandoms on social media or cliques at school highlight the fact that we seek out others who share our passions. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the people who knew him did exactly that—they gathered together in their shared love of Jesus and began to lead lives of radical generosity and community.

Acts describes a wonderful picture of Christ-followers living life together in fellowship, generosity, and worship. This template is profoundly welcoming and is meant to be at the heart of all Christ-centered gatherings. The early believers set the tone for how to live counter-cultural lives of love for each other and Jesus.

READ HEBREWS 10:19-25

POINT 2: Christ-centered community is not superficial

It's not based on an arbitrary shared interest but instead in the revolutionary person of Jesus Christ. With Jesus and his sacrificial love for us as the foundation, a Christ-centered community should be a life-altering reality for each of us. Together with other believers, we're invited to confidently step into a relationship with our great high priest, Jesus, and be changed forever.

ILLUSTRATION: Fandoms are everywhere. Potterheads discuss everything related to the Harry Potter books and movies, Trekkies are passionate about everything *Star Trek*, Beliebers adore Justin Bieber and his music, while Swifties go crazy for Taylor Swift and her music, and Cheeseheads cheer for the Green Bay Packers with pride.¹ These are just a few examples of fandoms: groups that form based on a shared love of a movie, television show, book, sports team, celebrity, or other passion. When people really care about and enjoy something, they tend to look for others who share that interest so they can celebrate it together.

Fandoms are a community of people who have bonded over a common passion. In that way, they're similar to the church. But we, as the church, share a passion for something much more powerful and true than any show or celebrity. The church is a community centered around the very person of Jesus Christ.

POINT 3: Christ-centered community is not optional

Turning your life over to Jesus means committing to the Church. This is often uncomfortable and hard work but choosing to live alongside other believers is fundamental for your health as a Christ-follower. Meeting together creates the opportunity to encourage each other in the pursuit of Jesus. Without this, it's easy for our faith to become purely intellectual and not a lived reality.

ILLUSTRATION: In recent years, sociologists have identified a new group of Christ-followers who they call "dones." They identify "dones" as believers who have an active faith in Jesus but say they are "done" with institutional religion. These "dones" have stopped going to church on Sundays and are no longer members of any specific denomination. They often cite community as what drew them to church in the first place and disillusionment with that community as what pushed them away. To "dones," the church often came to feel rigid and judgmental, even if it didn't seem that way initially. With the desire to have more flexibility and informality, they decided to stop gathering in a church setting. Although they no longer attend church, they are still active spiritually and continue seeking God.²

Although it is often imperfect, a Christ-centered community is a fundamental survival tool for us as we seek to stay rooted in our salvation. Without the encouragement and witness of other believers, it's all too easy to forget who Jesus is and who we are in him. And Jesus himself modeled this type of community with his disciples. If he valued it so highly, shouldn't we do the same?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Use this prompt to wrap up your message and leave your students with a challenge to apply.

- Think about the community of Christ-followers available to you. What is one tangible, intentional way you can be more involved in or committed to it?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Pick a few questions from below to discuss. Close with prayer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When was a time in your life you really needed other people?
- Why do you think people seek out others to share their interests and passions?
- What is surprising to you about how the early church operated?
- What themes do both the Acts and Hebrews passages emphasize about a Christ-centered community?
- Why is community so important?
- How have you experienced (or not experienced) Christ-centered community like those described in these passages?
- Are you committed to your church? Why or why not?
- How can you keep practicing this biblical picture of community?

PRAYER

Close by praying or invite someone to pray for your group.

Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.

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¹ List of fandom names," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 1, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_fandom_names&oldid=954155308.
² Harry Bruinius, "Why these Americans are 'done' with church, but not with God," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 19, 2015, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2015/1219/Why-these-Americans-are-done-with-church-but-not-with-God>.