

SESSION 3: CONNECTED IN GROWTH

SMALL GROUP MEMBER BOOK



# CONNECTED

MY LIFE IN THE CHURCH



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## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

In order to make the most of this study and to ensure a richer group experience, it's recommended that all group participants read through the teaching and discussion content in full before each group meeting. As a leader, it is also a good idea for you to be familiar with this content and prepared to summarize it for your group members as you move through the material each week.

Each session of the Bible study is made up of three sections:

### 1. THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE.

An introduction to the theme of the session and its connection to everyday life, along with a brief overview of the primary Scripture text. This section also includes an icebreaker question or activity.

### 2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

This comprises the bulk of each session and includes the primary Scripture text along with explanations for key words and ideas within that text. This section also includes most of the content designed to produce and maintain discussion within the group.

### 3. LIVE IT OUT.

The final section focuses on application, using bulleted summary statements to answer the question, So what? As the leader, be prepared to challenge the group to apply what they learned during the discussion by transforming it into action throughout the week.

For group leaders, the Connected Leader Guide contains several features and tools designed to help you lead participants through the material provided.

## QUESTION 1—ICEBREAKER

These opening questions and/or activities are designed to help participants transition into the study and begin engaging the primary themes to be discussed. Be sure everyone has a chance to speak, but maintain a low-pressure environment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each "What Does the Bible Say?" section features at least four questions designed to spark discussion and interaction within your group. These questions encourage critical thinking, so be sure to allow a period of silence for participants to process the question and form an answer.

The Connected Leader Guide also contains follow-up questions and optional activities that may be helpful to your group, if time permits.

## DVD CONTENT

Each video features Eric Geiger interviewing Dr. Thom Rainer about the primary themes found in the session. We recommend that you show this video in one of three places: (1) At the beginning of group time, (2) After

the icebreaker, or (3) After a quick review and/or summary of "What Does the Bible Say?" A video summary is included as well. You may choose to use this summary as background preparation to help you guide the group.

The Leader Guide contains additional questions to help unpack the video and transition into the discussion. For a digital Leader Guide with commentary, see the "Leader Tools" folder on the DVD-ROM in your Leader Kit.

## **SESSION 3: CONNECTED IN GROWTH**

The Point: Church members need one another in order to grow in Christ.

The Passage: Ephesians 4:11-16

The Setting: Accompanying the unity from the Holy Spirit (session 2) comes the gifting of Christians by Jesus Christ. The gifts given to believers are not, however, for the personal gratification or comparative boasting of the recipients. Instead, He desires that His gifts go toward the mutual growth of the church with the aim that each person reach maturity as measured by Christ's fullness.

### ***Question #1: What do you like best about being a fan?***

Optional activity: Bring a collection of DVDs in their cases (or request that group members each come with one of their favorite films). Display the movies so they are visible to participants and then ask for volunteers to answer the question: If you had a chance to star in one role from these movies, which would you choose? (Note: Be sure to select movies that will not be offensive or distasteful to other group members.)

Video Summary: Many people think pastors are responsible for doing all the work of ministry in the church when, in fact, Ephesians 4:11-16 shows us that their responsibility is to equip us to join in the work of ministry in and through our churches. As a church we come together for a purpose—to learn the truth, to get to know Him, and to become more like Him. As a result of this equipping, we can go out and do the work we are called to do. A fully-functioning body of Christ is one where everyone is involved in ministry.

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## **The POINT**

***Church members need one another in order to grow in Christ.***

### **The Bible Meets Life**

"Roll Tide!"

I am a fan of the University of Alabama Crimson Tide. Notice I did not say I am a member of the Crimson Tide—there's a difference. I don't go to spring practices and work out with the team. I don't study game films or discuss plays with the coaches. On game day, I don't get on the field and help the team move the ball across the goal line. That's not my job. I'm a fan—a spectator. I buy my ticket and cheer for my team from the stands or watch them play on television.

Thankfully, church membership is not like football. There should be no spectators. The body of Christ wasn't designed to operate as an organization where the supporters come and give their money and then watch the hired players do all the work. We're all participants. Everyone has a role to play. Everyone is needed. That's how the body of Christ grows and fulfills its mission.

As we'll see in this session, the question is not: "Do I have a role in the church?" The real question is: "What's my role in the church?"

**WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 3, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.**

- What are the dangers of being involved in the “busyness” of the church versus the business we are called to as a part of the church?
- Why is being grounded in the truth critical for our connectedness to Christ and others?

## What Does the Bible Say?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 4:11-16.

*Ephesians 4:11-16 (HCSB)*

<sup>11</sup> And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.<sup>16</sup> From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Response: What’s your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What new application do you hope to get from this passage?

## Key Words

**Fitted and knit together (v. 16)**—“Fitted” translates a compound word based in part on the root for harmony. Together the phrase reflects a properly working and smoothly functioning whole.

## TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 4:11-12.

Jesus supplies the church with people He has gifted in various ways to fill all the roles needed for the church’s mission. The roles mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 do not make up an exhaustive list of leadership positions within the church, but they are important.

- Apostles and prophets. These leaders made up the foundation of the early church. The apostles had been with Jesus during His ministry or had witnessed His post-resurrection appearances. The prophets preached the gospel.
- Evangelists. People in the church tasked with sharing the gospel and seeking a response to it.
- Pastors and teachers. These roles likely were combined or complementary; they involved nurturing, protecting, feeding, and supervising the flock.

## **Question #2: When have you felt fully equipped to carry out an important task?**

This question is included to prompt discussion about modeling, training, and teaching. Answers should describe instances during which each group member felt suitably equipped and what made the equipping effective.

Optional follow-up: What emotions do you experience when you don’t feel equipped to carry out important tasks? Why?

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## [MOVE TO EPHESIANS 4:11-12.](#)

Church leaders are not gifted to do all the work of the ministry themselves. They are gifted so that they can train the saints—that’s all the rest of us as believers—to do the work of ministry. Every member has a function in the body of Christ. Either you’re doing the work of the ministry or you’re equipping others to do the work of the ministry in some form or fashion. Those are the only options.

The word translated “training” in verse 12 carries the idea of restoring something to its original condition or making something complete. This kind of training, equipping, or perfecting is needed to prepare believers for service in doing God’s work.

Paul understood his role as an equipper of other believers. He wrote to the Colossians, “ We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Paul delegated tasks, enlisted people to pray for him, and relied on the help of coworkers.

In other words, Paul understood his role as a servant of Christ. He understood that every member has a role to play in the body of Christ.

### ***Question #3: What obstacles keep us from equipping others or being equipped ourselves?***

This question is included to fight the notion that church membership is “easy” and doesn’t require something from us. As the leader you will want to stress that individual spiritual growth both in ourselves and in other members is a responsibility that belongs to each of us.

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled “Who Helped You Grow?” in session three. Ask for volunteers to share about individuals who were especially meaningful in their spiritual development.

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## [MOVE TO EPHESIANS 4:13.](#)

Remember when you were a kid and couldn’t wait to grow up? Maybe you longed for the day you’d turn 13 and officially become a teenager. Or you dreamed of your 16th birthday and that prized driver’s license. But then you realized 18 was the age when society would finally recognize you as an adult. And then you yearned to be 22, finished with college, and on your way to the “real world.”

We should also strive for spiritual maturity as believers in the body of Christ. God provides His children with various gifts so we can help one another grow. In Ephesians 4:13, Paul said God’s goal in providing His church with workers—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—is to build up the church so that we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of Jesus and become mature.

How do we assess our spiritual growth? How do we measure maturity? The answer comes in verse 13: “ With a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.”

The life of Christ is our target. It was Paul’s consuming goal to know Christ more, to know the power of His resurrection, and to share in the fellowship of His suffering (see Phil. 3:10). He wrote, “ Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).



Therefore, we measure our spiritual maturity by gauging our actions and attitudes in comparison with the actions and attitudes of Christ. Jesus lived to please God. He put others above Himself. He patiently endured suffering. He loved the unlovable and forgave the undeserving. That's our goal for spiritual growth and maturity. Thankfully, we don't work toward that goal on our own. God equips His people with gifts that enable them to help one another grow to be like His Son.

***Question #4: What does it look like to measure spiritual maturity based on the fullness of Christ?***

Ask the group to look closely at Ephesians 4:13 to consider what the author of Ephesians is revealing about maturity and unity as they engage this question. Specifically examine "unity in the faith," "knowledge of God's Son," "growing into a mature man," and "measured by Christ's fullness."

Optional follow-up: What are some other indicators we often use to assess our spiritual maturity as members of the church?

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**CONTINUE WITH EPHESIANS 4:14-16.**

Having a poor foundation in the truth of Scripture makes you susceptible to all kinds of false teachings that can lead you away from God. This is another reason we need one another within the church. Paul constantly battled false teachers who infiltrated churches and led people astray. His remedy, identified in Ephesians 3:11-14, was to ensure churches were built up with mature believers grounded in the truth. Knowing the truth is key to discerning falsehood. In Ephesians 4:15, he contrasted the lies and deceit of false teachers with the importance of believers speaking the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love means being honest with people about realities such as sin and how God views our rebellion against Him. It means we communicate that message with humility, but it also means we don't compromise the teachings of Scripture when it comes to essentials of our faith—essentials such as:

- Jesus is the only way to salvation.
- We can't save ourselves by our own good works.
- We can only be made righteous by repenting of our sin and trusting in Jesus for our forgiveness.
- God expects His children to live holy lives.

With Christ as the head of the church and with each member working together in submission to Him, the whole body gets stronger.

***Question #5: What advice would you give someone seeking to balance speaking truth and showing love?***

When answering this application question, keep in mind that speaking truth—even when it is difficult—is crucial to being connected in unity. You might consider asking the group to discuss the many and varied applications of what "speaking truth" in love can mean.

Optional follow-up: When did someone speak the truth to you in love? How did you respond?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

WHO HELPED YOU GROW?	
<p>Record the names of individuals who contributed to your spiritual growth during the following seasons of life.</p>	<b>Childhood:</b> <div>Type your response here</div>
	<b>Adolescence:</b> <div>Type your response here</div>
	<b>Adulthood:</b> <div>Type your response here</div>
<b>How are you currently contributing to the spiritual growth of others?</b> <div>Type your response here</div>	

#### QUESTION 6: How would you describe your role or function within the body of Christ?

You might want to revisit Ephesians 4:11-12 as a part of this discussion. Pay particular attention to ways each group member can be an equipper in addition to being a growing disciple. Be sensitive to visitors, new believers, and non-believers who might not have any frame of reference for responding.

Optional follow-up: How do your God-given gifts and talents support that role or function?

## Live It Out

You have a responsibility to equip others for ministry or engage in ministry yourself. Here are some practical ways to fulfill that responsibility and join the movement toward spiritual growth:

- Be a participator, not a spectator. Identify a specific and practical way to serve others in your church and community.
- Get equipped. With the Holy Spirit as your guide, seek out someone older and wiser you can ask to pour into your life as a spiritual mentor.
- Balance your speech. When issues or conflicts arise during the week, make a conscious effort to speak the truth in a way that also demonstrates love.

What's your role in the church? Answering that question is key to getting on the field and helping your team—the body of Christ—strive for growth and spiritual victory in the world today.

***Challenge: What's your role in the church?***

Answering that question is key to getting on the field and helping your team—the body of Christ—strive for growth and spiritual victory in the world today. Spend some time this week in prayer, asking the Lord to give you a clear vision of His role for you in your church. Consider journaling thoughts and questions you have as well as anything you sense Him telling you through this time.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to show each of you your roles and responsibilities in your church.