

 for the week of January 17, 2016: I still believe in the Church

You are part of a global enterprise that began before there ever was a Fortune 500. In fact only 12% of Fortune 500 companies from 1955 are still in business today. In contrast the global enterprise you are a part of continues to grow. Our enterprise has outlets in nearly every country of the world. We are urban and we are rural. The enterprise you are a part of has hospitals, hospices, homeless shelters, orphanages, schools, universities, farms, counseling centers, factories, entrepreneurial businesses, and public housing for the poor.

Our global enterprise cares for the whole person while we seek to accomplish great work that will improve lives. We counsel marriages, transform lives by addressing self-destructive behaviors, care for children at risk, provide rehab opportunities, educate, lend money for micro-enterprise, dig wells, provide medical services and restorative surgeries, build homes, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and provide for widows and orphans. In addition we advocate on behalf of the poor, we are involved in international justice and reconciliation work, we confront evil (i.e. child trafficking, sex trade, institutional poverty, famine, and slavery), we care for refugees and the socially discarded, and we endeavor to represent the least represented.

Our global enterprise does not exist to drive profit but to express a gracious and compassionate love. Across the earth our associates make daily sacrifices, expect no compensation or return, speak almost every known language, and celebrate innovation, the creative arts, science, and letters. Despite this our enterprise is frequently misunderstood and, in some parts of the world, violently attacked.

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are a member of this global enterprise. Together we are “The Church”. While we use the word, “Church”, to refer to a location, campus, building, or organization, strictly speaking the "Church" is always a people — a called forth movement of God. In fact, the Greek word we translate, “church” (Gk. ekklesia), was the word Jewish translators of the Hebrew Bible chose when they translated the Old Testament into Greek. It has continuity with the Old Testament understanding that Israel was a "called out people" who shared a common faith, call, and purpose together. This word for “church" richly describes a dynamic, living, and united people movement gathered around God, birthed by His redeeming work, held together by His merciful love, and commissioned to express and extend God’s righteous and redemptive Kingdom presence in our world.

The Church is us! We are orthodox, catholic, Scripture-inspired, and Spirit-filled. Our ranks reflect diverse traditions with differing perspectives that we may never agree on — nor need to. Nevertheless, we are one people under one God who so loves our world that He continues to send Jesus to redeem and save in order that He might continue to grow His people numerically, spiritually, and relationally. If this is not honor enough, then consider this: Our God desires to accomplish his magnificent mission with us and through us! This “us” includes and involves you!

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

 Mark

 on the Church…

*The Church is never a place but always a people; never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The Church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be the church than your clothes can be you.*

Getting to know one another…

What is one behavior people do that really annoys you?!

 reflecting on 1 Corinthians 12.12-26…

Read 1 Corinthians 12.12-26

Make a list of the words Paul uses the most… why do you think these are so important to him?

What is the dominant metaphor Paul uses to describe the Church? Why do you think he finds this so instructive?

What emotion or attitude do the hand and foot express in verses 15 and 16? Have you every felt this way? Explain!

In verses 17-20 Paul makes 2 points for the foot and the ear… what are they?

If your LifeGroup is a “body of Christ” what part or parts are you? Why do you feel this way?

Read again verse 19 and 20. What is the point of these verses? How might these verses encourage you or allow you to encourage others?

What attitude does the eye and the head express in verse 21? Have you ever felt this way? Explain — be honest!

When you evaluate a local church is the primary measure “what you can get” or “what you can give”? Explain.

 reflecting together on 1 Corinthians 12.12-26…

What are the two main points in Paul's response to the "eye" and the "head" (vv. 22-25)? What does Paul say about the parts of the body that seem to be weaker (v. 22)? In light of this, how we should treat church/LifeGroup members who do not seem impressive to us?

According to verses 25 and 26, God seems to have two goals for arranging the parts of the body as he does. What are they? How does verse 26 illustrate these two goals?

Take time for everyone to share their answer to the question above: what part or parts are you? Was there diversity? What does your collective response indicate or teach you about your LifeGroup?

How does or can your LifeGroup intentionally celebrate the diversity of her “body parts”?

Imagine that you are moving to another city, and you don't know any Christians there. Your first order of business is to find a church. List five to ten things that you would look for in a church.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Review your list. Is your list weighted more to “what you want/will get” or “what you can give”? Does this matter? Why or why not?

Do you think Paul’s understanding of the Church challenges our consumer approach to the local church? Why or why not?

There is a lot of talk today about “body image” — its impact and how people address/compensate for their “body image” as they compare themselves to an “ideal image". Here in 1 Corinthians 12 we have a presentation of a “body image” we can compare our LifeGroups with. What are you celebrating about your “body image”? How might Paul’s “body image” of the Church challenge and/or encourage your LifeGroup?

How can your LifeGroup encourage you to be an engaged and effective “body part”? How you more deliberately encourage other members within your LifeGroup?

 My prayer requests (think of what you want to share in advance)

Praying for my group…

