

Stop Going to Church Be the Church

Church is not where we go but who we are (1 Peter 2:4-10). In the midst of the hopelessness that so many are experiencing right now, we as followers of Jesus have a *living hope* through His resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Christ in us is our hope of glory, and through Him we are more than conquerors (Colossians 1:27; Romans 8:37-39). But walking in that hope does not happen automatically. We must lay hold of and possess that which we have been given. The way we lay hold of hope is to do it together as a church, as a people firmly planted. Church is not a temple, synagogue, building or event. Instead, it is an imperfect group of people worshipping together and living in community with the aim of encountering the presence of God and encouraging one another in our relationship with Jesus.

GETTING STARTED

As we enter the New Year, what is your outlook, mindset, and attitude about 2022? What is shaping or heavily influencing your perspective? What challenges are presenting themselves? What opportunities are on the horizon?

GO DEEPER

1. According to 1 Peter 1:3 and Romans 8:35-39, what is our hope as followers of Jesus tied to? What makes that hope a *living hope*, and why is that significant?
2. From 1 Peter 2:4-10, who is being built up into a spiritual house? Why was this truth a powerful shift for the early church and particularly Jewish Christians, whose lives and worship were oriented towards the temple in Jerusalem (or towards a synagogue)? What makes this truth important for us today?
3. How does Proverbs 14:4 apply to how we live and operate in community as a church? How are we as Christians supposed to approach the messiness and weaknesses of our community, according to 2 Corinthians 12:9?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What does community look like for you right now? What do you think needs to change within you (and within your group) to make your community stronger and more of what God intends? What does it mean for you to not go to church but to *be the church*?
2. Being the church is a messy endeavor. How have you navigated the messiness and weaknesses of others in church? Is there a particular situation where you either were hurt or caused hurt within a church community? What does forgiveness and grace look like for you in that situation, and what steps do you need to take to foster healing or restoration?

PRACTICE IT NOW

As a group, purposefully pray for your group and community. Ask God to make it a place where you bear one another's burdens, listen to one another, and pray for each other, speaking words of encouragement, truth and life to one another. Pray that you will spur one another on to live out the purposes God has for you in Jesus. Ask God to shape your heart and perspective towards your group, especially if you have been hurt by someone (or caused hurt) in a church community in the past.