

# I Love My Church

## Life Group Leaders Guide

### Objective

This guide contains the information and questions you will need to lead a life group study during our current sermon series. Our aim is to spark Spirit-led, Bible-centered conversations that anyone can participate in regardless of how biblically literate they may or may not be. **The win** that we want you to experience is when your group members **connect** more closely with each other and with God so that they are encouraged to move forward in living out their faith.

### Directions

The *Purpose* and *Move* sections are for the leader to read to the group to provide clarity. **Do not feel pressured to cover all the questions.** Decide which ones may work best for your group. You will see brief notes interspersed between groups of questions to help give the group context for their answers. The *Notes and Commentary* section (when included) is optional reading for the leader to get background information and better understanding of the passages before leading the discussion.

### Series Overview

While there is no perfect church, the church of Jesus Christ plays an essential role in God's plan for redeeming and restoring his world. In this series, we will see the part the church should play in our lives as followers of Jesus.

### I Love My Church Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of Sermon & Life Group
1	3/31	Love the Church
2	4/7	(Socials)
3	4/14	Devoted to the Church

# The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

## *Love the Church*

### The Big Idea

We are called to love the Church.

### Flow of Study

**Icebreaker:** Who is the quirkiest person in your extended family?

**Move #1:** Let's begin the discussion with some unpacking questions from this Sunday's sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the message this weekend?
2. Is there anything from the message this weekend that you want to apply?

**Move #2:** Next we'll explore the relationship between loving God and loving one another.

#### **Read 1 John 4:19-21 (NIV)**

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

3. What stands out to you from this passage?
4. Is there a difference between hating and not loving? Why or why not?
5. According to this passage, how important is it to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and what are the consequences of not doing so?
6. How would you describe the level of closeness you experience in your relationships within our church family?
7. Have you ever found it difficult to love someone within your church family? If so, how did you work through that, and is there anything you wish you had done differently?
8. What are some of the barriers to growing closer to our church family, and how might we overcome them?

**Move #3:** In this next passage, we'll see how Christ models the ideal husband in the way he fiercely loves the church and discuss how one way we love Jesus is by loving His bride.

### Read Ephesians 5:25-33 (NIV)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”<sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

7. What stands out to you from this passage as it relates to the church?
8. How do you respond to the statement: “You can’t love Jesus and hate his bride?”
9. Reread v. 31-32. Many people think it is possible to have a healthy relationship with Jesus separate from his church. How do these verses speak to that idea?
10. According to this passage, how does Christ love the church?
11. What are some practical steps we can take to love an imperfect church?

**Next Steps:** The following are things you could challenge your members to do in order to take what you studied in this curriculum farther.

1. Treat your church like God’s family.
2. “Erase the red” by meeting an important need in our church family. Sign up to serve!

**Prayer:** End your study with a time of praying with and for each other. Take requests, but be sure to pray also about what you’ve discussed today.

## Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

### On Ephesians 5:25-33:

Often overlooked in this passage is Paul’s mature reflection on salvation and the church. The marriage relation is seen as an analogy of Christ’s love, his saving work, and his ongoing care for the church. Imagery from the Old Testament about the relation of God and Israel stands behind this use of the marriage analogy. Israel was viewed as God’s marriage partner (see esp. Isa. 54:5–7; 62:4–5; the book of Hosea). Ezekiel 16:1–14 may provide the background for Ephesians 5:26–27, for it describes God as caring for, washing, marrying, and adorning Israel with splendor.

In addition to the sacrificial language of 5:25, Christ's saving work is described in terms of sanctifying, cleansing, and presenting. The choice of the language "to sanctify" (niv, "make holy") a bride may seem strange, but these words were especially appropriate for Paul. The main emphasis in the word "sanctify" means "to set apart," which is exactly what one does in marriage—one's partner is set apart from all the rest. There are overtones here of Christians' being set apart to God. In other words, the act of sanctifying does not refer here to Christian growth, although the "sanctify" word group can be used that way (cf. Rom. 6:19, 22). Here it is used as general description of salvation as a whole.

Nor should the "cleansing" in verse 26 be seen as action prior to salvation. Christ sanctifies and saves by cleansing; they are one and the same act (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5). Most scholars assume that Paul is referring to the cleansing of baptism in 5:25. But references to water or washing do not necessarily point to baptism, and a reference to baptism is unlikely, especially if Paul is drawing his language from Ezekiel (esp. Ezek. 36:25). Nowhere else in the New Testament is the church baptized. While "cleansed with washing of water in a word" (lit. trans.) is a difficult expression, two ideas are in view: (1) cleansing brought about by the Holy Spirit, and (2) the role of preaching the gospel in bringing about this cleansing. The association of cleansing, washing, and the Holy Spirit is frequent in both Old and New Testaments.

The purpose of Christ's cleansing the church is "to present her" to God without blemish. In 5:26 Christ presents the church to himself, whereas in 2 Corinthians 4:14 God will present us with Jesus (to himself?). In Colossians 1:22 Christ presents believers either to himself or to God. Elsewhere Paul describes himself as presenting the Corinthian church as a holy virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Obviously Paul could use the language of "presentation" in several ways and in reference both to the church in the present and at the end time. Future eschatology is clearly in mind in 2 Corinthians 4:14, but this passage and 2 Corinthians 11:2 seem to refer to the present.

The language about the church in this section is unusual. The church is given a focus as an entity prompting the work of Christ, not merely (as elsewhere) being viewed as the result of Christ's work. Here Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. This does not mean the church is viewed as already in existence at Christ's death; rather, it is a way of reflecting on the significance of his death.

One of the most startling and powerful ideas about the church is expressed in 5:30–32. The union between believers and Christ is so real that Christians are members of Christ's body. In 4:25 Christians are said to be members of each other, and this mutual joining provides a theological motive for telling the truth. In 5:30 Christians are assumed to be so intimately joined to Christ that they are part of him. (Klyne Snodgrass, *NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*)