

groups.

— Notes | April 26, 2026

Church Unbranded: The Bride of Christ

A culture that is deeply divided desperately needs a Church that is deeply united.

The world seems to thrive on competition and division, yet Jesus went to the Cross asking the Father, *“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be ONE, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* Jesus prayed for unity in Him, a unity that doesn’t *deny* darkness, but *declares* that *darkness shall not overcome*.

From Genesis to Revelation, God’s vision of unity was revealed through Jesus, who gave His life for His BELOVED—The Bride of Christ, also known as the Church. Not a building or a religious institution, the Church is a Bride at the center of a love story, in which the measure of Jesus’ love is the Cross.

Yes, Jesus loves the Church, despite all her flaws and imperfections. And if we are to be a Church deeply united, *we will not only love Jesus but also love what He loves*.

Key Scripture | Matthew 16:18-21

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Related Scriptures

— John 3:29, John 17:20-26, Romans 12:15, Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Icebreakers:

— Q: If you had to participate in the Summer Olympics, which sport would you choose?

groups.

Key Thoughts and Reflections: ---

I. The Church is present and visible.

Q: What does it mean to be the Church? How have you seen the Church be present and visible?

Q: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11. What does Paul call us to do? What are some practical ways the Church can follow this instruction?

Q: Read Romans 12:15. Why does Paul call this love in action? Share a time when you have experienced such love.

II. The Church embodies hope and healing.

Q: Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever. Does this truth differ from our cultural traditions of teamwork and tribal identity? Why or why not?

Q: Healing is about finding freedom from your past, and Jesus is the essence of both. How does sharing Jesus bring hope and healing to others?

Q: The Church is called to pray continually and in faith. What is the difference between a Church that prays and a praying Church? What does this look like in practice?

III. The Church lifts our heads and reminds us of what is true and real.

Q: The Church is a Bride at the center of a love story. What are some distractions that can pull us off-center, drawing us away from Christ and toward culture?

Q: Considering the above distractions, why is it important for the Church to remain unified?

Q: Read Ephesians 5:25-27. Why did Jesus give Himself up for the Church? We are called to imitate His great love. When you think about what people are willing to sacrifice when they are in love, is there anything that God may be calling you to lay down for the sake of truly loving Him?

Get Practical ---

On Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Son of the living God, the Church was built. As a unified Church, we, too, have the opportunity to declare who Jesus is and who we are in Him, both in word and in action. This week, write down the names of your group members and commit to praying for one each day. Spend time in prayer and ask the Lord to give you eyes to see His Bride as He sees her. Journal moments when you have seen His love in action through the Church and ask God to reveal ways you can love as He loves. Join us in praying for God to continue to unify His Church as one as He prepares to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle, but holy and blameless. If you need prayer, reach out to your small group leader or text prayer to 37748 so we can pray with you.