



A Well-Defined  
**FAITH**

*[fāth] (noun)*

Biblical words used in church...  
Discover what they really mean.



Sunday  
May 17, 2026

# Example Teaching Rhythm

## **Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes**

This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.

## **Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes**

Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.

## **Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes**

This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.

## **Prayer: 10 Minutes**

Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

# Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond**. Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

**Highlight** - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.

**Explain** - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

**Apply** - This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

**Respond** - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? - Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

# “Church - A Group of People Who Follow Jesus and the Way of Jesus Together”

## Introduction

Most people who have been in church for any length of time have a complicated relationship with the word itself.

They have seen the Church at its best – the meal dropped off after a surgery, the person who stayed when everyone else left, the community that held someone together through something they could not have survived alone. And most have seen it at its worst – the politics, the hypocrisy, the ways institutions protect themselves instead of the people inside them. Both things are true, and most honest churchgoers carry both.

Which means the word arrives loaded. And loaded words are hard to examine.

But the word Jesus uses in Matthew 16 does not carry any of that weight yet. Ekklesia – the Greek word translated 'church' – was not a religious term at all. It described a people, not a place. And that distinction matters more than it might first appear.

That is what Jesus is announcing in Matthew 16:18 – not an institution, not a weekend gathering, but a people. Built by Him, belonging to Him, held together by the same confession Peter has just made, moving against the very strongholds of death.

Whatever your history with the word – whatever you have seen the Church be at its best or its worst – this passage is worth sitting with honestly. Because Jesus is not describing what the Church has always been in practice. He is describing what it is, what He is building, and what it is ultimately for.

Before we go further: What has shaped your picture of the Church more – what you have experienced, or what Scripture actually says it is? And is there a gap between those two things worth examining?

## Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- When you hear the word "church," what image comes to mind – and where did it come from?
- What's the difference between attending a church and belonging to one? Which is more true of you?
- Has the church ever been the means through which God did something significant in your life? What does that tell you about what it's for?
- What makes a group of Christians a community rather than a crowd in the same room?
- Is there someone in this group whose faith has shaped yours – and have you ever told them?

In 1940, 330,000 Allied soldiers were trapped at Dunkirk – sea behind them, German army closing in. The military's large vessels couldn't reach the shallow beaches. So the call went out to anyone with a boat. Fishing vessels, pleasure cruisers, lifeboats – civilian owners crossed the channel under fire because they were the only ones small and numerous enough to do what the fleet couldn't. What none could do alone, all of them did together.

- That is the shape of the Church in Matthew 16 – not a single impressive institution, but a people called out together for something none of them could accomplish alone.

## Highlight | Read Matthew 16:13-18

Matthew 16 sits at the hinge of the Gospel. Jesus has been teaching, healing, and feeding thousands – and now, near Caesarea Philippi, He pauses to ask the question the entire first half of the Gospel has been building toward: Who do people say the Son of Man is?

The location matters. Caesarea Philippi was a center of Roman imperial worship and pagan religion – a place covered in temples and shrines to competing gods. It is here, of all places, that Peter makes his confession: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And it is here that Jesus responds by announcing the Church – not in a synagogue, not in Jerusalem, but in the shadow of every competing claim to power and allegiance the ancient world could offer.

Jesus' declaration has two movements. First, He names Peter – petros, a stone – and says that on this petra, this rock of confession, He will build His Church. Second, He promises that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. The Church is not a fragile human institution being protected from outside attack. It is an advancing people pressing against the very strongholds of death.

- Why does it matter that Jesus announces the Church here – surrounded by every competing religious and political claim of His world?
- What does it mean that Jesus says I will build my Church – and what does that imply about who the Church ultimately belongs to?

## Explain | Consider the Context

Jesus doesn't merely borrow the word *ekklesia* – He transforms what it points to. Where it once described civic obligation, He fills it with something costlier: a shared life oriented around Him, held together not by proximity but by allegiance.

When Jesus takes that word, He is not founding a religion. He is calling a people – out of isolation and into a shared life oriented around Him. Not a building. Not a service. A community, with all the cost that word implies.

Peter's confession is not the ceiling of the passage. It is the foundation. The Church exists not to produce correct theology but to live out what that theology demands: people under Christ's lordship together, forming one another in His way, carrying His presence into the world He is reclaiming.

Gates do not attack – they hold ground. The promise about Hades is not a defensive image. It is a people on the move, pressing into the places death has claimed, finding those doors cannot hold. The Church is not the building you enter on Sunday. It is the people you are sent with on Monday.

- Where have you treated the Church as something you receive rather than build?
- Jesus builds the Church – we don't manufacture it. What would it look like to trust that when the Church has let you down?

## Apply | Discuss as a Group

It is possible to be present without truly participating – to show up week after week and remain, in the ways that actually matter, unknown.

The New Testament has almost nothing to say about going to church and an enormous amount to say about being it – bearing one another's burdens, confessing sins, spurring one another on, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice.

The "way of Jesus together" is not a spiritual aesthetic. It is a concrete pattern of life: humility over status, forgiveness over grievance, generosity over accumulation, presence over efficiency, honesty over performance. These things cannot be practiced alone – they require the friction and the gift of actual community.

That friction is not incidental. It is the point. The people hardest to love are often the ones most responsible for forming you. Patience is not learned in the abstract. Forgiveness is not practiced in private. You cannot become who Christ is forming you to be without it.

The people who stay the course over decades are almost never the ones who pursued their faith alone.

- What would it cost you to move from attending this community to genuinely investing in it?
- Where is the "way of Jesus" hardest for you to walk – and how might doing that in community change anything?

## Respond | How should I live/pray?

Matthew 16:18 does not end with a description. It ends with a promise – and promises require someone to receive them. Jesus says He will build His Church, and He says the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Neither of those statements asks anything of you in the first instance. They announce what is already true and already underway. The appropriate first posture is not effort. It is trust.

And that trust moves. The Church Jesus is building is not a community that manages its own interior life – it is a people pressing outward into neighborhoods, workplaces, and relationships that feel beyond reach, carrying the same confession Peter made in the shadow of every competing claim the ancient world could offer.

The question this passage finally asks is not whether you belong to this community. You've been sitting with that. The question is whether this community – you, together – is actually moving. Not inward, tending to itself, but outward into the world Jesus is reclaiming. The "way of Jesus together" exists not just to form you, but to send you. And the people you are sent to are already in your life – in the next cubicle, across the street, on the other end of a relationship that feels like it has run out of road.

That is where the promise lands. Not in here. Out there.

- Where is there a person, a place, or a situation in your life where death has claimed ground – and what would it look like to press toward it rather than away from it this week?
- What would it mean for this group to pray not just for one another, but for someone outside this room by name?

## Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead – not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

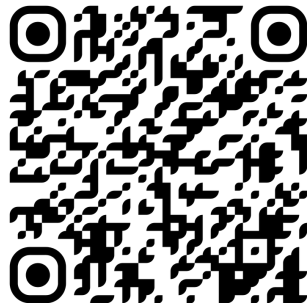
## Additional Commentary

- On ekklesia (v.18) – "church": Before the New Testament, the word described a civic assembly – citizens summoned out of ordinary life to act on behalf of something larger than themselves. Jesus takes that word and fills it with entirely new content: a people called not by civic obligation but by shared allegiance to Him. The Church is not a religious subcategory. It is a new kind of human community.
- On Caesarea Philippi – the location: The choice is not incidental. This city was home to a shrine to Caesar and a pagan sanctuary to Pan cut into the rock face – widely called "the gates of Hades" in local tradition. Jesus announces His Church in the shadow of the most concentrated competing claims to lordship in the region. The Church is not born in safe religious space.
- On petros and petra (v.18) – the wordplay: Centuries of interpretive debate surround the Greek distinction between Peter's name (petros, a stone) and the word for rock (petra, bedrock). What is not debated is the confession Peter has just made. The Church is built on that declaration, not on Peter's virtue or authority. Peter will deny Jesus soon. The confession stands.
- On "the gates of Hades" (v.18) – the image: That trust has a direction. If the strongholds of death cannot hold, then the Church is not a community that waits to be found – it is a people sent into the places death has claimed.
- On "I will build" (v.18) – the subject: The subject is Jesus, not Peter, not any institution. The Church's confidence comes from knowing it is sustained by someone beyond itself. Its limit is that it cannot manufacture itself through effort or personality. It is received before it is expressed.

## Community Group Resource Page

Visit our website to view our **leadership resources**.

From Community Group training and resources to Discipleship Group starter guides, we want to equip you to make disciples.



# Additional Study

## Watch/Listen

### Bible Project - Matthew



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into **Matthew** and its themes.

### Bible Project - Why Church?



In these podcasts, we look at the **Church** and why it matters.

## Overview

### Enduring Word - Matthew 16



Text commentary, written materials, and audio/video recordings over **Matthew 16**.

### Got Questions - The Church



Biblical Q&A, articles, translations, audios, videos, apps, social media, podcasts, and more on the **Church**.

## Expand

### Bible Ref - Matthew 16



Explore chapter and verse commentaries to deepen your understanding of **Matthew 16**.

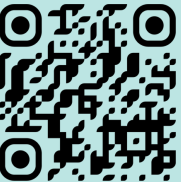
### Bible Hub - Matthew 16:18



Parallel translations, language tools, commentaries, and much more on **Matthew 16:18**.

## Deepen

### Logos Factbook - The Church



Logos Factbook shares information resources and articles about the **Church**.

### Blue Letter Bible - Matthew 16



Original texts, Translations, Cross-Refs, Commentaries, Dictionaries + more on **Matthew 16:18**.

