

## Exploring Membership at Cornerstone Church of Knoxville

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### I. What is the purpose of this class?

This class is designed to introduce you to Cornerstone Church of Knoxville (CCK). We want to provide you with a clear and informative overview of this church, seeking to answer important questions like, “What does it look like to follow Christ at CCK?” “What does this church believe?” “What can I hope to experience by being a member of CCK?”

Discovering what church God wants us in is an important matter. To help you in that decision this class will cover the following areas:

- 1. The Local Church: What it is and why membership matters.**
- 2. Our Doctrine: The core beliefs of our church.**
- 3. Our Priorities: The values that shape our church.**
- 4. Our Community: The commitments we make to each other.**

Ultimately, we want to encourage you in your relationship with Jesus Christ. A critical part of that relationship is finding your place in His body, the church. Participation in a local church is never meant to be a mere obligation. It is a joyful privilege in which we glorify God through fruitful service in the context of meaningful relationships with other believers. Therefore, we want to give you all the information you need to help you determine if God is leading you to become a part of this church. We are excited to see what God will teach you and how He will lead you through this membership class.

### II. What is the church and why is it important?

When it comes to the Christian life, the question of the church’s importance is perhaps one that is too often overlooked. The idea of “church” is often just assumed: churches persist, church members regularly (or not so regularly) attend, and things proceed on course. But how often do we stop and think, “Why is the church so important? What is the purpose of the church?” The answer to such questions will provide us both direction for how churches should build and encouragement to be faithful as we play our part in the body of Christ.

In this session, we will explore the “big picture” of God’s purpose in the church *at large*, the critical role that the *local* church plays in God’s purposes, and the importance of formal membership in the local church. In so doing, we will hopefully see more clearly the glorious purposes God has for His church and the unspeakable privilege our participation in this journey truly is.

- A. God’s intentions for the church span from the beginning of creation until its consummation, as he works out his eternal purpose to dwell among a people he has made his own.**

1. Genesis 1-2 lay the foundations for the rest of human history. In the beginning, God's creative activity reached its pinnacle with the creation of man who, created in God's image, was made to enjoy unhindered fellowship with his Creator (Gen 1:26-28; 2:7, 15-17; 3:8)
  - Of all the blessings Adam enjoyed in the garden—safety, provision, human companionship—the greatest was divine companionship.
  - Even after man sinned and lost the privilege of intimate fellowship with God (Gen 3:24), God pledged to vanquish the evil that had spoiled his creation, thus restoring mankind to his rightful place in creation in fellowship with God (Gen 3:15).
2. God gave specific expression to his promise by revealing himself to Abraham and calling Abraham to himself.
  - God's promised blessings to Abraham included making of him "a great nation" (Gen 12:2). God pledged himself to Abraham and his offspring, promising to be their God and to make them his people.

*"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." (Gen 17:7)*

3. After Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, God delivered them and forged them into a nation—the nation of Israel—among whom he would dwell, and who would represent him in the earth.

*"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Exod 19:4-6)*

4. Despite receiving many blessings from God (his presence in the tabernacle and temple, possession of the promised land, and the glories of Solomon's reign), Israel's rebellion and idolatry finally brought judgment upon the nation. Nonetheless, God did not abandon his people, but remained faithful to his covenant promises.
  - During the exile, God pledged to restore the nation to the land and renew the hearts of his people.

*"Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name . . . . And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name . . . . And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all*

*your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you . . . You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezek 36:22-28).*

- After the return from exile and the partial fulfillments of his promises, God promised to act again to dwell personally with his people.

*“Behold, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek, will suddenly come into His temple.” (Mal 3:1)*

5. In the incarnation, God revealed himself most fully and dwelt among his people in the most personal way possible through his son, Jesus Christ.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)*

6. After Jesus’ ascension to the Father’s right hand and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the church—in union with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit— now becomes the divine sanctuary on earth where God dwells.

*“Do you not know that you [pl.; i.e., the church] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16)*

7. When Christ returns, God’s people will once again dwell with him and experience unhindered fellowship in his presence. God’s eternal purpose to dwell among a people he has made his own finds its consummation in the New Jerusalem.

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”” (Rev 21:1-4)*

**B. At this stage in salvation-history, the people of God exist as *the church*—joined to Christ by faith and indwelt by the Spirit.**

1. The church exists as the people of God, belonging to him and representing him on the earth.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Pet 2:9-10)*

2. The church is the unique dwelling place of God on earth.

*“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” (2 Cor 6:16)*

3. The church is the Body of Christ: deriving its life from him, vitally united to him, and finding its identity in him. As a result, members of Christ’s body are intimately related to each other as well.

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Cor 12:27)*

### **C. The exclusive role of the church.**

The church is God’s chosen means for carrying out His purposes until He returns. He has ordained no other organization or structure for this purpose.

*Matthew 16:18: “. . . I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

*1 Timothy 3:15: “. . . if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (NIV)*

### **III. Why should I join a local church?**

Why go to all this trouble to learn about this church? Does it really matter if I actually join a church? Am I not already a member of “*the church*”? Isn’t my personal relationship with Jesus what really matters? Such questions are common, and not altogether surprising given our individualistic culture and natural tendency towards independence. However, such questions also reveal a misunderstanding about the church and God’s purposes in and through the church. The Scriptures make it clear:

**God’s specific purposes for His people are accomplished as individuals join themselves to and participate in local churches. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this tangibly through membership in a specific local church.**

#### **A. Church membership is biblical.**

1. Theologically, Christian conversion implies *incorporation*: incorporation into the Body of Christ—the church. Conversion by definition creates community.

*Rom 12:5: “. . . so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*

2. Membership—the recognition of a clearly defined community of people—was the clear practice of the early church.

*Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."*  
(Converts were "added" to a specific group of fellow believers that was numerically defined).

*Acts 5:13: "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem."*  
(Believers were a discernible group of people to which other believers "joined" themselves).

*1 Cor 14:23: "If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?"*  
("the whole church" implies a totality comprising specified individuals).

3. An identifiable membership is the necessary condition for pastoral care.

*Acts 20:28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."* (Pastors are responsible to care for an identifiable group of people, and they will give an account for those committed to their care)

*1 Tim 5:9: "Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband . . ."* (a specified "widows' list" indicates that the church had responsibility for a specified membership)

4. Membership is the necessary context for the sacraments.

- The sacraments given by Christ to the church—baptism and the Lord's Supper— are "signs and seals" of the covenant of grace, pointing to Christ and his benefits, and confirming his promises to us. As "marks of the church," they are only to be received by those who have trusted in Christ and are continuing in fellowship with him and his people.
- Rightly administering the sacraments requires an awareness of the spiritual condition of those who are participating. This requires identifiable, committed relationships between believers which is expressed through church membership.

"These outward signs mark out a visible fellowship; they structure Christ's church as a community with membership. Baptism requires a decision about admission to the community. The Supper, a sign of continuing fellowship, implies the exclusion of those who have turned away from the Lord. . . . the sacraments testify that the church must have organized form as well as organic life." Edmund Clowney

5. Membership is the assumed context for church discipline.<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5 both describe situations in which believers are to confront other believers who are persisting in a sinful way of life. This can only refer to a situation in which Christians are

<sup>1</sup> See our statement on Church Discipline in the Commitments Booklet

joined together in an identifiable membership that is committed to live a godly lifestyle distinct from the world. Moreover, the final stage of church discipline (“excommunication”) involves the removal of an unrepentant person from formal membership in a visible, organized group (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:2, 9-13; cf. 1 Tim 1:19-20; Titus 3:10-11).

6. Committed members are the primary source for the regular funding of gospel ministry.

Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and equipping.

*1 Tim 5:17-18: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”*

*1 Cor 9:13-14: “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”*

7. The commitment represented by membership is the clear implication of Biblical metaphors describing the church.

The primary NT metaphors for the church—body (1 Cor. 12:27), temple (Eph. 2:21), household (1 Tim. 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28)—have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals *joined together* into a single, identifiable entity.

“God has given us four pictures of the church, not one. This is not just to emphasize and prove the point by repetition, but also to say four different things about what it means to be a member of a church. To be a stone in his temple means to belong to a worshipping community. To be a part of a body means to belong to a living, functioning, serving, witnessing community. To be a sheep in the flock means belonging to a community dependent on him for food, protection, and direction. To be a member of a family is to belong to a community bound by a common fatherhood. Put together you have the main functions of an individual Christian. Evidently we are meant to fulfill these not on our own but together in the church. Now can you see the answer to the question why you should join a church?” Eric Lane

### **B. Church membership identifies us with Christ and His people.**

*Mark 8:38: “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

*1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

### **C. Church membership is vital to our spiritual health and growth.**

Without being joined together with other believers, we will lack the strength and nourishment that each member—including ourselves—is to supply to the whole body.

*Ephesians 4:15-16: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

*Heb 3:12-13: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."* (We need other believers to help us in our fight with sin)

*Heb 10:24-25: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* (We each have a role to play in encouraging other believers)

#### **D. Church membership enables us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of others.**

The Holy Spirit has given every Christian spiritual gifts that are to be used in service of the church and its mission. The ordering of believers within the church to deploy their diversity of gifts for the good of the body is by divine design.

*1 Cor 12:4-7: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

*1 Cor 12:18: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."*

*1 Peter 4:10-11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

#### **E. Church membership enables us to be spiritually nourished through the preaching and teaching of God's word.**

God calls pastors to care for and equip his people, and the primary way they do this is through the teaching of God's word.

*Eph 4:11-14: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by*

*the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*

*2 Tim 3:16-4:2: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”*

“We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the Church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors. . . . Many are led either by pride, dislike or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. This is like blotting out the face of God which shines upon us in teaching.” John Calvin

**F. Church membership enables us more fully to glorify God: the church as a distinct and separate people proclaims the gospel, cares for its own, and through its life and witness displays the character of the One who saved us.**

*1 Peter 2:9-10: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

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All Christians have the privilege and responsibility to be a vital member of a specific local church.

“I know there are some who say, “Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.” Now, why not? “Because I can be a Christian without it.” Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.” Charles Spurgeon

**IV. Why should I join *this* church?**

We don't automatically assume that you *should*! However, we're grateful to God that you are



interested in exploring this, and we want to do all we can to help you make an informed decision as to whether God would have you join us at CCK. Over the next three sessions we'll be surveying specific beliefs and practices of this church, along with exploring what membership at CCK should entail.

While it does involve a process, becoming a member of CCK involves a few straightforward requirements:

1. A clear testimony of personal faith in Jesus Christ
2. Completion of the "Exploring Cornerstone Church of Knoxville" class
3. General support of the church's statement of faith and priorities
4. Regular participation in the Sunday morning meetings
5. Active participation in a Care Group
6. A meeting with a pastor to discuss church membership
7. Affirming your commitment as a member of Cornerstone Church by signing the Membership Agreement.

Although we do hope that you will find in CCK a church home where you can thrive, our primary concern is not that you become a part of *this* church, but that you become a part of *some* church. It is our desire that you develop a Biblical, enthusiastic conviction about the importance of active involvement in the local church, and with this conviction find a church home where you can worship God, grow in your relationship with Him, and serve in ways that glorify Him. If that church home proves to be CCK, then it will be our joy to serve with you. In any event, we count your presence here a privilege, and look forward to serving you as you consider membership at CCK.

