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SESSION HANDOUT

Come and See: The Church in John's Gospel

SPEAKER Neil Hudson

DATE November 2026

THE BIG IDEA Discovering the community Jesus calls into being

GOT A QUESTION?

Submit it for the Q&A

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The Church in John’s Gospel

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THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of community does Jesus call into being, and what is it sent into the world to do?

THE BIG IDEA

The Church abides in Christ, loves one another, and is sent to bear witness.

SETTING THE SCENE

Read John 15:1–17. What holds this community together?

Five dimensions of the Church in John

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A community shaped by its relationship with Jesus

1 MISSION

Encounter Jesus → draw others to him → be sent into the world

John 1:35–51; 4:28–42; 17:18; 20:21

2 CULTURE

In the world, but not simply shaped by its values

John 1:9–14; 4:4–42; 17:14–18

3 UNITY

One in love and truth; shared life becomes witness

John 13:34–35; 15:1–17; 17:20–23

4 LEADERSHIP

Authority expressed through service, nurture and care

John 10:1–18; 13:1–17; 21:15–19

5 FORM

Relationships and shared life come before structures

John 1:35–39; 15:1–17; 20:19–23; 21:1–17

Identity leads to mission • Love gives credibility to witness • Community reflects the life of God

Mission & culture

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A community sent into the world, shaped by the way of Jesus

1. MISSION: SENT TO BEAR WITNESS

Disciples encounter Jesus and draw others towards him.

- Andrew brings Simon Peter (John 1:40–42)
- The Samaritan woman tells her community (John 4:28–30)
- The risen Jesus sends his disciples (John 20:21)

KEY INSIGHT: MISSION

Mission is not simply an activity organised by the Church. It flows from encountering Jesus and participating in his sending.

Questions to explore: Is mission primarily something we do, or something we are as a community?
What does it mean to be sent into our neighbourhoods, workplaces and families?
What can the Samaritan woman's witness teach us about who Jesus trusts?

2. CULTURE: IN THE WORLD

God loves the world, and Jesus sends his disciples into it—even when they do not belong to its values (John 3:16–17; 17:14–18).

Jesus crosses social, religious and ethnic boundaries in speaking with the Samaritan woman.

KEY INSIGHT: CULTURE

The Church should neither withdraw from the world nor simply mirror its values. It is called to engage the world in the way of Jesus.

Questions to explore: Where should the Church challenge the culture around it, and where should it listen and learn?

How can Christian communities cross social, ethnic or generational boundaries?

What might it mean to love the world without being shaped by everything the world values?

Unity & leadership

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The Church's shared life reflects the character of Jesus

3. UNITY: LOVE AND TRUTH

Jesus prays that his followers may be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17:20–23).

Disciples love one another as Jesus has loved them (John 13:34–35). Unity is more than agreement or the absence of conflict: it is self-giving love.

KEY INSIGHT: UNITY

Unity is both a gift rooted in relationship with God and a responsibility expressed in how Christians treat one another.

Questions to explore: What makes Christian unity distinctive?
How do we hold together unity and legitimate differences of conviction, tradition and practice?
Can a church be organisationally united yet fail to embody the love Jesus commands?

4. LEADERSHIP: AUTHORITY AS SERVICE

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:1–18). He washes his disciples' feet (John 13:1–17).

Peter is entrusted to feed and care for Jesus' sheep (John 21:15–19).

KEY INSIGHT: LEADERSHIP

Christian leadership nurtures, serves and cares for people in the pattern of Jesus—not status, control or personal importance.

Questions to explore:
What distinguishes Christian authority from leadership based simply on power?
How should leaders balance care, accountability and direction?
How might foot-washing challenge the expectations of leaders and congregations alike?

What kind of community is the Church?

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John offers relational pictures—and criteria for discerning structures

JOHN'S PICTURES OF COMMUNITY

- Disciples following Jesus (John 1:35–39)
- Sheep gathered around a shepherd (John 10:1–16)
- Branches abiding in a vine (John 15:1–17)
- Friends sharing Jesus' love
- A community gathered around the risen Lord (John 20:19–23; 21:1–17)

JOHN'S CRITERIA

Abiding in Christ • Mutual relationship • Recognised and servant leadership • Witness shared beyond formal leaders • Gathering around the risen Jesus

DISCUSS · Is the Church an institution, a family, a community of disciples, a mission movement—or some combination?

Small-group exercise: led by the Bible

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Read one passage and identify practical outcomes for the life of a local church

YOUR TASK

1. What does this passage reveal about the community Jesus is forming?
2. If we took it seriously, what might change? Name three practical outcomes.

GROUP	BIBLE PASSAGE	FOCUS
1	John 4:28–42	Mission and witness
2	John 17:14–18	Church and culture
3	John 17:20–23	Unity and witness
4	John 13:1–17	Servant leadership
5	John 10:11–18	Shepherding and care
6	John 15:1–17	Abiding, community and fruitfulness
7	John 20:19–23	The risen Jesus sends the Church
8	John 21:15–19	Leadership, love and responsibility

Write three practical outcomes: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

What is distinctive about John’s vision?

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Identity, love and community belong together

IDENTITY → MISSION

Disciples abide in Jesus and receive life from him (John 15), then bear fruit and are sent into the world (John 20:21).

LOVE → WITNESS

The love disciples show one another becomes a sign by which others recognise them as Jesus’ disciples (John 13:34–35).

COMMUNITY → GOD

Jesus’ prayer for unity (John 17) is rooted in the relationship between the Father and the Son and has a missional purpose.

REFLECT

What kind of community does Jesus call into being?

- What should change in the life of our church in light of these passages?

Church as an Institutional Form

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Possible forms :

- Episcopal — Bishop/Leader
- Presbyterian — Elders
- Congregational — Church

John offers theological criteria for discerning church structures, rather than a complete blueprint for those structures.

John's concerns:

A community of disciples: People are called to follow Jesus and learn from him (John 1:35–51).

A community of mutual relationship: The vine and branches suggest dependence on Christ and fruitfulness together (John 15:1–17).

A community with recognised leadership: Peter is entrusted with the care of Jesus' sheep (John 21:15–19).

A community in which witness is not confined to formal leaders: The Samaritan woman becomes a witness to her town (John 4:28–42).

A community that gathers around the risen Jesus: The disciples are gathered, given peace and sent in the power of the Spirit (John 20:19–23).

The main question:

How well does our form (whatever our form) of church embody abiding in Christ, mutual love, faithful witness, servant leadership and participation in mission?

My Reflections

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What struck me most from this session

Questions I still have / one thing to take away