



Incarnate Community Bible Study Leader's Guide
Session IV The Body of Christ Incarnational Community



Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament,
with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.



Using Incarnate Community Leader's Guide

Welcome to Incarnate Community and thank you for your willingness to lead a group through this Northern Illinois District study. It is our prayer that our Lord will bless you and your group as you journey with us through this resource.

This leader's guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion of the materials with your group. In it, we've included the author's own responses to the questions with theological content to give you Pastor Kris' perspective on the questions your group will address in this study. Feel free to draw from this guide's content, making it your own, as you deem helpful for your group.

A few thoughts on your group:

- Ideally a small group consists of a leader and six to eight participants. This size allows for everyone to participate in discussion.
- The materials can be downloaded to a mobile device, printed for hard copy, or projected on screen.
- You may want to have a means of projecting the video portion of each session for ease of viewing and hearing for your entire group.
- Depending on the dynamic of your group's participation, you may not cover all the material in four one-hour sessions. If your group's goal is to work through the material in the course of four one-hour sessions, feel free to pick and choose sections and questions you think would be significant to your group and encourage participants to work through the remaining material on their own.
- It is the hope of your NID staff that many churches will participate together in this study during the Sundays of February 2022. If your group chooses to do this, you may wish to encourage them to then participate in the livestream discussion of the materials on our NID YouTube channel. (Go to the NID website at nidlcms.org to find the link.) This broadcast will feature President Buss and his panel of pastors and lay leaders who will go into more depth of discussion on each week's session.



Community Incarnate
Northern Illinois District Bible Study
Session IV The Body of Christ – Incarnational Community
Leader's Guide

Focus Verse: *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to live 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”* (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Welcome and Fellowship [15 – 30 minutes in a 90 minute time frame]

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, according to Your Word, one day Your Son, Jesus, will return in the flesh. It will be a joyous day for, as He returns to judge Your world, Jesus will raise us with glorified bodies like His own. Even as we long for this day, we praise You now for the certain hope of the resurrection of all flesh and the gift of eternal life that is ours in Christ. Until that day comes, dear Lord, give us, Your Church, a sense of hopeful anticipation for Jesus' return and an understanding of the witness He works through us to the world as Your Spirit gathers us together around Word and Sacraments ministry. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I Now Pronounce You ...

The flowers ... the beautiful music ... the rings ... the families gathering together ... the grand toasts and blessings ... the amazing food ... the laughter ... the tears ... the dancing ... and of course a dashing groom and the beautiful bride ... there are many wonderful details that make up a joyful wedding celebration! The fun, fellowship, and the celebration of committed love that a wedding brings for attendees reflects something greater ... a deeper need in us that our Lord fulfills in His committed relationship to us ... as well as a hope of a future, greater fulfillment.

1. What blessings do you receive in getting to attend a wedding celebration in person? What blessings do you bring by attending such a celebration?
2. On what would you miss out if you could not attend a family member or dear friend's wedding in person?
3. Why do you think the Scriptures often liken God's relationship to His people in imagery of a wedding celebration? What does such imagery communicate about our present life? ... about our future?

NOTE: Your participant's answers will vary here, but encourage as many as you have time for to share.

Video Segment [A three to four minute segment of a series of people making hopeful statements on the reality of eternal life.]

1. With what comments from the video did you identify?
2. What aspects of eternal life are you most anticipating?

NOTE: Again, allow participants to share as time allows.

An In Person Eternity

Throughout the Scriptures, our Lord paints an amazing picture of the eternal life He has won for us by His life, death, and resurrection and given to us as a free gift of His grace! Read the following Scriptures and discuss the related question about what those passage reveal about eternal life for the followers of Jesus:

Isaiah 25:6-9; I Corinthians 15:42-49; Luke 24:36-43; John 14:1-4; Revelation 7:9-17

1. What would seem to be the purpose of Jesus giving us a corporal body like His own resurrected body in eternity? What are some of the physical aspects of eternal life that are revealed in these passages?

NOTE: Eternal life will not be experienced as a disembodied existence. Jesus physically rose from the dead, and God's plan of salvation promises a similar resurrected, glorified body for all people. All people receive this resurrected body because of Jesus' victory over death. Yet, only those who trust in Him will take this glorified body into eternal life with Jesus. Encourage participants to draw into the "flesh and blood" details of our resurrected lives upon Christ's return. These passages note that our bodies will be like Jesus' resurrected body. This may mean that the laws that bind physical limitations in this world may no longer apply to us in the same way [like passing through locked doors without hindrance ... certainly the physical laws of this existence won't apply the same way as death will no longer be even a potential reality.] Yet, as Jesus Himself did, it seems we will still have common physical functions like eating. In fact, Scripture likens eternal life to a feast or wedding banquet. The saints of God in eternity are described with very physical attributes [wear robes, holding palms, etc.]. There is also the sense that the pain and sorrow this sinful world brought us is now gone. The passage in John's Gospel also likens eternal life to dwelling in the Father's house, which Jesus has prepared for us.

2. How do these passages reveal that our eternal life with Christ will be an “in person” eternity lived out with fellow believers?

NOTE: When the Scriptures reveal images of eternal life, they are not images of individuals living alone, in isolation, with Jesus. Rather, they are communal images; the gathering of God’s saints together with angels for Christ-glorifying worship, a feast, a wedding banquet where the saints of God are together, fed by the Lord, a Father’s house with many rooms where Jesus has prepared a place for His Bride, His redeemed. In eternal life, the redeemed of Christ are certainly gathered around Him, but they are gathered together, people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.” Even the intimate imagery of God wiping away tears from all faces lends itself to the reality that eternal life will be a life that is lived out in the flesh and in person with all the redeemed.

3. How do the images of eternal life, as they reveal an in person experience of it, influence and shape our experience of the community of faith here on earth?

NOTE: It is a blessing that the Church is able to use gifts of God such as various forms of media and technologies like the internet to communicate the Good News of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit uses these gifts to reach those who might not otherwise be able to assemble or draw near to God’s people who are physically gathered around God’s Word and Sacraments. Yet, knowing that one day (with sin and all the effects of sin gone with the second coming of Jesus) Christ’s Church will be together in one place, rejoicing in Jesus and the salvation He has won for us, this reality of eternity already begins to shape the Church of today. The Church is not only the place where our Lord brings us for our need of His grace. It is also the place where He uses us together, to care for one another, and to bring a witness to the world of His grace among us. That service and witness of His grace is most wonderfully played out when God’s people gather in person around His Word and Sacraments. This is the essence of the local faith community, the church.

4. What would be lost if someone did not regularly experience the life of the Church in person?

NOTE: For those who would lose the practice of regularly gathering with fellow believers, there is the temptation to drift into the belief which treats such gatherings in a transactional, consumeristic way. If I only occasionally join for worship [say, at major holidays in the year] or if I decide to absent myself from in person gatherings and opt only for engaging in worship services in isolation from the rest of the church, I may be tempted to think I'm simply getting my "God or grace" fix for my own personal needs and missing the communal nature and blessings of corporate gatherings of God's people. In turn, the local community of faith misses the mutual encouragement, witness, gifts, and blessings that I, as an individual and mutual follower of Jesus, bring to that local community when I show up in person. I, too, then miss out on how those experiences mold and strengthen my faith in Christ as well.

5. What is gained when we receive the gifts of God's grace together through in person community?

NOTE: Not only is each person blessed by the mutual encouragement and consolation, the prayers and praises to the Lord, and the confession of fellow believers, it is also our witness to the surrounding community that our Lord has brought us together to receive the important gift of His merciful, forgiving grace. It is also a foreshadowing witness to everyone who sees it of the eternity life that awaits the followers of Jesus. When we're not gathered in "in person" community, those blessings and that witness is more challenging to receive and see.

We Join this Celebration, Already in Progress

The victory of eternal life has already been won! Jesus has already accomplished everything that His creation will be restored, that we [and everyone who has ever existed] will receive a glorified body, and that we [and anyone who believes in Him according to the Scriptures] will be together, rejoicing before our Savior and enjoying life without sin and without end! All of this will be fulfilled with Jesus' return on the Last Day. Until that joyful day comes, our Lord leaves His Church in the dynamic of being gathered by Him around His gifts of grace, and, equipped by those same gifts, being sent by Him out to the world to welcome and gather others into the celebration of His grace. That dynamic is powerfully played out for us in Jesus' own life in the event Luke records in Luke 15.

Read Luke 15 and discuss the following questions.

1. What is Jesus doing at the start of the chapter?

NOTE: Jesus is hosting a dinner party. He has invited guests. He has a meal for them and is dining with them. Dining in Jesus' day in Israel was a special thing. If someone were invited to someone's home to dine with him/her, that meant that they were held in the eyes of the host of the banquet as beloved, as equal to family or even to the host of the meal himself. In many ways, Jesus is doing the very thing He describes in all three parables. Sinners have been found, they are alive because they are with Him. Now in His joy, Jesus has invited others to His feast to make merry at the Good News.

2. As this chapter describes an actual event in Jesus' ministry, what is the likely explanation for the Pharisees and scribes knowing that Jesus was "welcoming sinners and eating with them" on that given night? Discuss the details of which two "in person" audiences, then, hear Jesus' three parables.

NOTE: If we played this scenario out in real time, it is likely that on the night Jesus held this feast, the Pharisees and scribes knew He was "Welcoming sinners and eating with them" because the Pharisees and scribes had also been invited to the feast by Jesus. It's very possible that, as they arrived, they looked into the inner courtyard of Jesus' home, where such meals would commonly be held, and, seeing the other guests seated at Jesus' table, take offense that he'd bring such parties together. Thus, they'd be literally standing outside of Jesus' home that evening, refusing to join the feast and dine at Jesus' table because they took offense at the "quality" of the other guests at the party.

Now Jesus has two audiences that have gathered, in person, who will hear His stories. There are the "sinners" who are at Jesus' table, gladly hearing His word and feasting at His table. Then there are the "righteous," who stand outside the home, looking in and refusing to receive Jesus' hospitality. The scene looks very similar to the last scenes of Jesus' third story of the lost son, as the father hosts a feast and the older son refuses to join the party, angered that the father would make merry as the younger son has been returned home.

3. Discuss how the following details change from parable to parable and why you think Jesus makes those changes:
 - a. Who is the main character of each parable?
 - b. The percentage of what is lost in each parable.
 - c. What is lost in each parable?

NOTE: The leader may want to note the following items for each subsection of the question:

Point A: The main character of the first parable is the shepherd who has lost a sheep. The main character of the second parable is a woman who has lost a coin. The main character of the third parable is a father who has lost a son [and really he's lost both of his sons as the details play out].

Point B: In the first parable the percentage of loss is one in a hundred. In the second parable, the percentage of loss is one in ten. In the third parable the loss is one in two [or really both].

Point C: In the first parable a sheep is lost. While we may bring warm, pleasant imagery to mind when we think of little sheep, from a farming standpoint, sheep are merely livestock. They need to be cared for and then somehow processed in order to gain from them [either by sheering or bringing to market for their meat]. In the second parable what is lost is a coin. As the rhythm of the parables go, the coin may be perceived as greater value than the sheep in the first parable because it needs no processing to be used by its owner. It is readily available to be traded for goods and services. In the third parable, however, what is lost is a father's own sons. This is by far the greatest loss, not because of the "market value" of the sons but because they are beloved of the father as his children. If the first two parables could be merely pondered from an aloof, almost academic, consideration, the third parable makes Jesus' story-telling that evening unavoidably personal.

4. What does the main character do to find what was lost in each parable?

NOTE: The shepherd goes out in search of the sheep and when he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders to bring it home. The woman lights a lamp and sweeps the whole house until she finds the coin. Some Bible scholars have conjectured that if Jesus could be placed in the role of the shepherd in the first parable, might His Bride, the Church, be placed in the role of the woman in the second parable who lights the lamp of the Gospel in search of the lost. Finally, in the third parable, the father has been looking for the younger son. This is indicated by the fact that while the son is still a long way off the father sees him. The father also does the humiliating thing of leaving his house twice to seek to retrieve both of his sons. In the case of the younger son, the father runs to him. In Jesus' day and cultural surroundings this image is one of humiliation. No self-respecting man in Jesus' day would run anywhere because to do so, one would need to lift one's robes and expose some of their legs. In a culture that greatly values modesty, this would be humiliating. This image also foreshadows Jesus' willingness to expose far more than His legs to find His lost children, as He hangs stripped on the cross. The father also humiliates himself in coming out to entreat the older son to come join the banquet. In Jesus' day, it would have been the duty of the older son to come to a feast his father was holding in order to play the role of the banquet's head steward so that his father could mingle with the guests, unworried about the details of the meal. In coming out to the older son, the father again does not exact his right to demand the son come in, but humbly comes to graciously address him.

5. What "in person" communal aspects are found in each parable? How are those communal aspects reflective of what is going on in verses 1-2? How are they reflective of the Church throughout history and today?

NOTE: When the shepherd and the woman find what was lost in their respective stories, they invite friends and neighbors to come and rejoice with them. Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that these parables have heavenly application as He describes at the end of each of these parables what's going on in heaven over the repentant. In the third parable the further detail is revealed that the fattened calf is killed so that there might be a feast, and there is singing and dancing in celebration. These communal aspects of the parables are illustrative of what's going on that evening. Jesus has found the lost and brought them into his home [He welcomes them] and has held a feast in their honor [He eats with them], and He has invited others to join in the celebration. Throughout history, our Lord has welcomed and brought the lost into His home where He feeds us His rich banquet of His grace, even His own body and blood in Holy Communion. He rejoices when the lost are found and invites the entire community to His home to rejoice along with Him. And as Luke 15 describes, throughout history, there are always those outside who are not coming in to dine at Jesus' table whom Jesus also longs to welcome in to always be with Him.

6. What truly is being celebrated in the third parable [if not really all three]? Again, how is that reflective of the life of the Church as we gather around Jesus?

NOTE: The father in the third parable clearly states it; a brother of the family was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found. When anyone is brought to repentance by the work of Christ, life has been brought to the dead, the lost are found and found eternally. In this, our Lord and His Bride always rejoice and are glad!

7. Why do you think Jesus leaves the third parable somewhat unresolved? What lessons are there in this for His followers?

NOTE: Perhaps Jesus leaves the third parable unresolved [will the oldest son come into the party or not?] in part because on that very evening when this all took place, there was the hanging uncertainty of whether or not the Pharisees and scribes would enter the party and dine at Jesus' table with Him and with the "sinners." It may also be that Jesus leaves the parable unresolved because throughout time this image will be the reality of His work on earth. Jesus will gladly welcome sinners home, rejoice over them, and set a feast of His grace before them. Yet, He will also have His eyes turned toward those who are not at the table yet. Like the father in the third parable, He will continually leave His house and go out to find those lost and graciously invite them in. In love, Jesus invites His Church along on that journey to bring the lost to His feast and rejoice when they come to His home.

Final Thought

The most beautiful of worship services ... a feast, like a wedding banquet ... a tender homecoming ... our Lord reveals what awaits us in eternal life with wonderful, comforting, joyful imagery. It is all guaranteed for His children because Jesus has done all that is needed to make such a future our reality. He has fulfilled God's law with perfect obedience in our stead. He has died the death we deserved on the cross. He has victoriously risen from the grave! His resurrection also reveals a wonderful future reality. We too will rise and experience His gift of eternal life with glorified bodies; a physical, in person experience of salvation! We will get to do this together with all the saints ... the community of the redeemed, physically living together with Jesus at our center. Until that day is fulfilled, our Savior joyfully welcomes us into His home ... to care for us, to grant us His grace, to mercifully set us at His table to feast as He rejoices that He's found us lost children, alive in Him. And as He does all this, our Lord keeps a watchful eye outside the banquet hall seeking to welcome those not yet at the feast. He'll even go outside the house and bring us along, in person, to bring someone else in, because the feast He brings us to is the foretaste of the eternal joys to come.

