



What Is Church?

Focus Church is where we make a connection with God, where we have a conversation with God and where we fulfill our commitment to God.

Open What was the last sporting or musical event that you attended?

Read We learn from the story of Jacob about what we can expect when we come to church to worship in the house of God (Genesis 28:10–22). At Bethel, Jacob had a dream where he saw a ladder connecting heaven to earth. Jesus is our ladder, or connection to heaven (John 1:51), and when we come to church, we make a connection with God. Just as Jacob became aware of the presence of God (Genesis 28:16), we can experience God’s presence every time we have church.

Once we have made a connection with God, God wants to have a conversation with us. He wants to speak to us, and He wants us to respond (Exodus 25:22). There are three ways God speaks to us. Sometimes He speaks *correction* to us for our good. Other times, He speaks *direction* to show us which way to go and to help us with decisions we’re making. He also speaks *inspiration* and gives us encouragement to keep going. God wants to speak to us every time we meet with Him—as a church and as individuals.

When God speaks to us, our response requires a commitment. After his encounter with God, Jacob built an altar and made a vow to follow God and to give God his tithe (Genesis 28:16–22). God knows that we struggle; that we aren’t perfect. But if we’ll invest ourselves in committing to Him, specifically with our tithe, our hearts will be turned toward Him (Matthew 6:21). Getting involved in church can also help us grow in our commitment to God.

Talk

1. Did you attend church as a child? If yes, what was it like? If no, what was your perception of church? In either case, share a funny story if you have one.
2. Have you ever experienced God's presence in church? How would you describe it to someone who doesn't know God?
3. Read Exodus 25:22. There are many ways we hear God speak. For example: We may have a dream or maybe a Scripture verse suddenly comes to our mind. What are other ways we can perceive what God is saying?
4. Of the three ways that God speaks—correction, direction and inspiration—which are you needing today?
5. As we begin this new year, many of us are evaluating our commitments. What is God asking you to commit to this year? Is there something in church you want to be more committed to?

Live

Think about the three words used to express what happens when we come to church—connection, conversation, commitment. Ask God to help you grow in all three aspects. Ask Him to help you be aware of His presence more often and in new ways. Ask Him to enable you to hear His voice more clearly. Ask Him to help you deepen and live out your commitment to Him.

Pray

Thank You, God, for church. Thank You, Jesus, for becoming the ladder between heaven and earth so we can be connected to God. We praise You, God, because You are a loving Father who wants to have a conversation with us. Please help us to respond when You speak by committing ourselves to You. Empower us to fulfill our commitment. Amen.