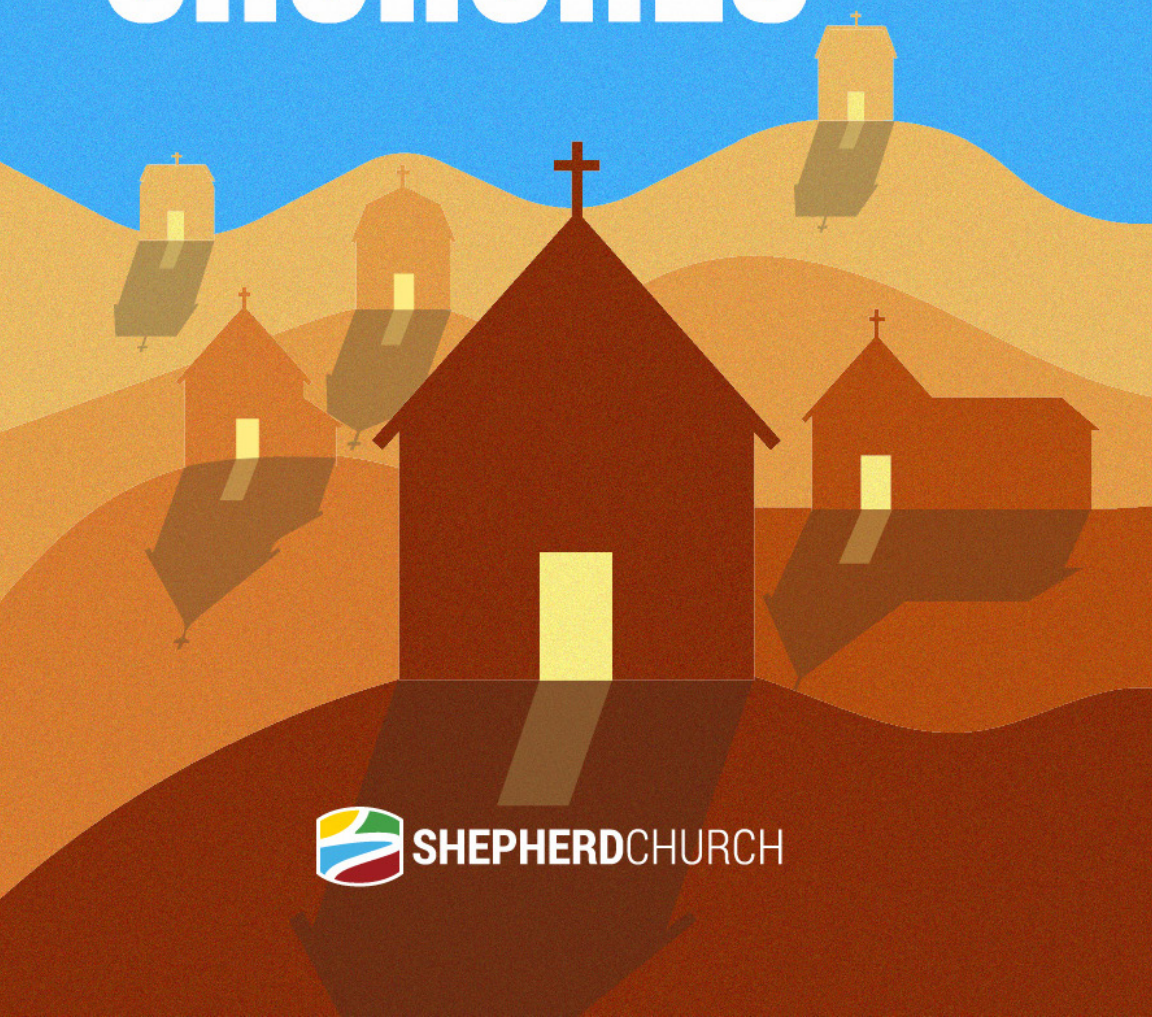


A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

FOLLOWING UP ON SIX CHURCHES



SHEPHERDCHURCH

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

Welcome

Choose one of the following to answer:

- What's one of the best thank-you note you've ever received and why did it mean so much?
- How did you begin attending Shepherd Church and how did you begin attending this Life Group?

The WELCOME section of each lesson is designed to be fun and bring lightheartedness to your Life Group. It's a great way to break the ice, ease your fellow Life Group members into the lesson, and set a tone of openness and reflection. Please do not skip this section of the lesson. It helps your brand-new and returning Life Group members get to know each other, catch up on the week, share random thoughts, and more. Keep in mind that each WELCOME section ties into the theme of the overall lesson. When it comes to engaging the WELCOME section, as the Life Group Leader, consider going first to model vulnerability and set the tone for sharing.

Worship

Have someone read [2 Corinthians 5:17](#). You are a new creation and you have a new identity in Christ. As a Life Group, watch or listen to and sing with "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong Worship on YouTube, Spotify, etc. As you worship through this song, focus on the truth of your identity in Jesus. Take some time for prayer and thank God for freeing you from sin and making you into a new person.

Budget about 7-10 minutes for this section of your Life Group time

There are 10 questions/prompts in the WORD section. Your Life Group doesn't have to cover every question below. Life Group Leaders may select the ones that best fit your group. You can also use the remaining questions as personal reflection throughout the week.

Word

Please watch the video lesson before your group meets.

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to many churches during his missionary journeys, but some of the most theologically rich and pastorally passionate were addressed to the 5 churches in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae. These letters—1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians—were written between A.D. 49 and A.D. 62, during Paul's travels and imprisonments. Together, they offer a sweeping view of early Christian theology, church life, and what it means to live out the gospel in a complex world.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

The Corinthian letters (written around 55-56 A.D.) were sent to a divided church in a morally chaotic city. Paul addresses issues like factionalism, sexual immorality, spiritual gifts, and confusion about the resurrection. He urges them to pursue love and unity under the lordship of Christ. In contrast, Galatians (likely written around 49-50 A.D.) was Paul's first letter and is his urgent response to believers who were being influenced by legalism. He reminds them that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law.

Written during Paul's Roman imprisonment (around 60-62 A.D.), the letters to Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae form part of what are often called the "Prison Epistles." Ephesians casts a grand vision of God's eternal plan in Christ—highlighting themes of identity, unity, spiritual maturity, and the armor of God. In Philippians, Paul writes with warmth and joy, encouraging the church to live humbly, press on toward Christ, and rejoice even in hardship. Finally, Colossians focuses on the supremacy of Christ over all creation and false teachings that threatened to diminish His sufficiency.

What ties the letters to all 5 churches together is Paul's deep commitment to discipleship, not just conversion. He doesn't merely plant churches and move on—he follows up, writes back, corrects, encourages, and intercedes. These letters reflect a leader who was both theologian and shepherd, passionate about helping believers grow in maturity and stand firm in their faith. Even today, these letters continue to disciple us, showing what it looks like to walk with Christ and be His Church in every generation.

1. Each of Paul's letters to the 6 churches reveals a different challenge or theme. Which of the letters (1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians) stood out to you most in the video lesson, and why?

While this is a subjective question, it's very important. Try not to rush past this question because it helps to get your Life Group members to hear each other and learn from one another. One person might have something to say about 2 Corinthians while another might share their thoughts about Philippians. In a sense, everyone who shares will be taking some role in teaching the Life Group lesson.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

2. In the video lesson, Daniel said Paul didn't just start churches—he stayed involved in their lives. Why are follow-up and ongoing care such a crucial part of discipleship?

Follow-up and ongoing care are crucial in discipleship because people don't grow spiritually from one moment or one conversation. Paul understood that faith develops over time, and new Christians need encouragement, equipping, and clarity as they learn to follow Jesus. Such is why Paul wrote letters, sent leaders like Timothy and Titus, and even revisited churches when he could. He knew that spiritual maturity takes consistent investment. Just like a new believer can feel confused, discouraged, or unsure of what to do next, Paul's presence (whether in person or through his letters) helped anchor them, answer questions, and keep them aligned with the gospel.

- Ongoing care also creates the kind of relationships discipleship is meant to produce. When Paul checked in on these churches, he wasn't just monitoring their behavior; he was showing genuine love and commitment. People grow best when they feel supported, known, and guided.
- Discipleship thrives on trust and consistency, not one-time interactions. Following Jesus is a lifelong journey, and Paul modeled that by walking alongside believers long after they first heard the gospel.

Paul's example reminds us that staying connected brings stability, encouragement, and accountability. These are all essential ingredients for lasting spiritual growth.

By the way, we believe that Life Groups can be and are one of the greatest avenues of ongoing care and discipleship.

3. Read [1 Corinthians 1:10-13](#) and [6:18-20](#). What issues was the church in Corinth facing, and how do these issues compare to challenges that churches face today?

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Paul addresses the problem of division in the church. The believers in Corinth were aligning themselves with different leaders, saying things like, "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas." Paul urges them "to agree with one another" and to avoid being "divided."

- The Greek word he uses for "divided" is *schizō* (σχίζω), which means to "tear or split."

The use of this word, "divide," in Paul's argument reflects the deep relational fractures that were forming in the church. Corinth was a wealthy, influential city known for competition and status, and that culture had crept into the congregation. Instead of finding unity in Christ, they were drifting toward personality-driven loyalties, something that still happens today when churches rally around charismatic leaders or preferred styles instead of keeping their focus on the gospel.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

In 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, Paul confronts another major issue: sexual immorality. Corinth was famous for its permissive sexual culture, and many believers struggled to separate their new faith from old habits.

- Paul tells them to “flee from sexual immorality,” using the Greek word *porneia* (πορνεία), which refers to any “sexual activity outside God’s design.”

He reminds them that their bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit” and that they were “bought at a price.” This means their lives, including their physical choices, belong to God. Churches today face similar challenges, as confusion about sexual ethics, cultural pressure, and personal temptation continue to test the commitment of believers. Just like ancient Corinth, modern churches must navigate division, cultural influence, and moral compromise by returning to the truth that unity and holiness flow from belonging to Christ.

4. Paul writes that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). Where in your life do you currently feel weak and how might God use that for His glory?

Encourage each Life Group member to answer this question as it not only provides a chance for people to be vulnerable, but it gives everyone a chance to minister to one another.

5. How would you define *legalism*? In Galatians 3:1–3, how did Paul confront legalism? How can we help each other avoid legalism’s trap?

Let Life Group members come up with their own definition. Only share the following definition if it helps your conversation.

- Legalism is believing that God’s approval can be earned by following rules, practicing rituals, personal performance, etc. rather than through God’s grace.

As such, legalism places human effort at the center of salvation or spiritual growth, often leading to pride, judgment, or a distorted view of God’s character.

In Galatians 3:1–3, Paul confronts legalism head-on by challenging the Galatians with strong and honest questions. He asks, “After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?”

- Paul uses the Greek word *sarx* (σάρξ), meaning “flesh,” to describe human effort apart from God.

His point is that the Christian life begins with the Spirit’s work, not with personal ability or rule-keeping, and it cannot be sustained by human effort either. The Galatians had been influenced by teachers who insisted that obedience to the law was necessary for full acceptance by God. Paul reminds them that their experience of salvation, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the miracles among them all came through faith, not through observing the law.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

This correction was necessary because the churches in Galatia were drifting toward a mindset that said faith in Jesus was not enough. In the first century Jewish context, the law had been central to identity and community life for centuries. The pressure to adopt these practices was strong, especially for Gentile believers who felt like outsiders. Paul steps in to remind them that returning to law-based righteousness would undo the very freedom Christ secured for them. He confronts the problem not by shaming them, but by pointing them back to the truth of the gospel and their own experience of God's grace.

Helping one another avoid legalism today requires the same kind of reminders. Believers often drift toward measuring spiritual worth by outward performance, comparison, or religious habits rather than the work of Christ. Encouraging each other means continually pointing back to the gospel, where acceptance is based on Jesus' righteousness instead of personal success. Conversations about faith should highlight grace, not pressure or competition. When people celebrate what God is doing rather than focusing on what they think they must earn, legalism loses its grip.

Ultimately, avoiding legalism's trap happens best in community. When churches create environments where believers can be honest, receive grace, and remember that spiritual growth is a work of the Spirit, they protect each other from sliding into rule-based faith. Paul's message to the Galatians still speaks clearly: what begins by the Spirit must continue by the Spirit, and helping each other stay centered on grace keeps the gospel at the heart of the Christian life.

6. How does *Ephesians 1:3-14* affirm your identity in Christ? What part of this passage do you need to hold onto this week?

In Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul gives a sweeping description of what it means to belong to Christ. He begins by saying that God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ," reminding believers that their identity is rooted in what God has already done, not in what they achieve. Paul emphasizes that believers were "chosen" before the creation of the world, adopted into God's family, and redeemed through the blood of Christ.

- The Greek word for "redeemed" is *apolytrōsis* (ἀπολύτρωσις), which carries the idea of being released through a costly payment.

This was familiar language in the ancient world, where slaves were often bought out of bondage. Paul uses that imagery to show that believers are no longer defined by sin, shame, or their past. Their identity is wrapped in God's love and Christ's finished work.

Paul also explains that believers have been "sealed with the Holy Spirit," a phrase full of meaning in the first-century context. A seal in the ancient world marked ownership, protection, and authenticity.

- The Greek word for "seal" is *sphragizō* (σφραγίζω), indicating "a permanent mark" that signifies belonging to God.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

This means that the identity of every believer is secure, protected, and affirmed by the Spirit's presence. Paul's language paints a picture of believers who are deeply valued and intentionally chosen, not by accident or random chance, but according to God's purpose and pleasure.

Many people wrestle with feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, or pressure to prove themselves. This section of Scripture pushes back against those lies by grounding identity in something unshakeable. Being chosen, adopted, forgiven, and sealed means that worth does not come from performance, appearance, or the approval of others. Paul's words remind believers that God has already spoken a greater truth over their lives.

One part of this passage worth holding onto this week is the assurance that Christians are fully accepted and deeply loved by God. In a world that constantly measures people by success, productivity, or comparison, Paul's reminder that God chose and redeemed His people can bring peace and confidence. Remembering that identity is anchored in Christ gives strength for whatever challenges arise, knowing that nothing in the week ahead can undo what God has already established.

7. Even though Paul was imprisoned while writing to the Philippians, his letter is full of joy. In *Philippians 4:4-9*, what advice does Paul give for experiencing joy?

In Philippians 4:4-9, Paul offers practical guidance for experiencing joy, even in difficult circumstances. He begins by urging believers to "rejoice in the Lord always," repeating the command to emphasize that joy is rooted in God, not in changing situations. Paul then encourages them to present their worries to God through prayer, petition, and thanksgiving. The promise that follows is that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding," will guard their hearts and minds.

- The Greek word for "guard" is *phroureō* (φρουρέω), a military term that describes "soldiers standing watch."

Such is vivid image for the Philippians, who lived in a Roman colony familiar with military presence. Paul's point is that God's peace actively protects believers from being overwhelmed by anxiety.

Paul also instructs them to focus their minds on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy. He knows that joy is closely connected to the direction of one's thoughts. By choosing to dwell on what reflects God's character, believers strengthen their emotional resilience. He concludes by reminding them to practice what they have learned from his example, promising that "the God of peace will be with you."

For a church facing pressure and for a leader writing from prison, these words carry weight. Paul teaches that joy comes from turning worries into prayer, aligning thoughts with God's truth, and trusting that God's presence brings peace in every situation.

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

8. How does Paul's description of Jesus in *Colossians 1:15-20* challenge or expand your view of Jesus? What does it mean that Jesus is supreme?

In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul presents one of the most powerful descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament, showing that Christ is far more than a moral teacher or spiritual guide.

- He writes that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God," using the Greek word *eikōn* (εἰκών), which means "exact representation."

In other words, Jesus perfectly reveals God's character and nature. Paul goes on to say that all things were created through Him and for Him, placing Jesus at the center of creation itself. For believers in the first century, surrounded by competing spiritual claims and philosophies, this teaching was a bold reminder that Jesus is not one option among many. He is the One who holds everything together and the One through whom God is fully revealed.

Paul also explains that Jesus is "the head of the body, the church," and that God chose to reconcile all things through His blood shed on the cross.

- The Greek word for "reconcile" is *apokatallassō* (ἀποκαταλλάσσω), meaning "to restore or bring back into harmony."

This highlights not only Jesus' authority over creation but also His unique role in salvation. His supremacy is not just about power but about His unmatched ability to bring peace between God and humanity. In a world where spiritual leaders come and go, Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus stands above every ruler, philosophy, and authority because He alone creates, sustains, and redeems.

To say that Jesus is supreme means He holds the highest place in every category of existence. His authority is ultimate, His power is unmatched, and His role in the universe is central. This challenges smaller views of Jesus that reduce Him to a helper, advisor, or inspirational figure. Paul's words expand the understanding of Christ by showing that He is Lord over creation, Lord over the church, and Lord over redemption. Recognizing His supremacy invites believers to trust Him fully, worship Him deeply, and place every part of life under His leadership.

9. Come up with a slogan/tagline for each of the 5 churches (e.g., Gifted but Divided). You can write more than one slogan for each church.

Below are examples of slogans for each church. However, be slow to share these because you want the Life Group members to think of their own. Again, it is another way of getting them to study the Bible by reflecting on what they've learned.

The Church in Corinth

Gifted but Divided

Talented but Troubled

Where Gifts Collide and Grace Prevails

A Messy Church with a Mighty Calling

Lesson 16: Following Up on 6 Churches

The Church in Galatia

Drifting from Grace, Called Back to Freedom
From Law-Bound to Grace-Filled
Holding the Line on the True Gospel
Gospel Clarity for a Confused Church

The Church in Ephesus

Rooted in Christ, Armed for Battle
The Church That Knew Much but Forgot Love
Rich in Doctrine, Called Back to Devotion
Standing Strong in a Hostile World

The Church in Philippi

Humble Hearts, Heavenly Focus
Joy in Every Circumstance
A Church That Chose Joy
Joyful Even in Chains

The Church in Colossae

Keeping Christ First
Fullness in Christ Alone
Grounded in Truth, Growing in Wisdom
Rooted in Christ, Resisting Deception

10. In the video lesson, Daniel said that discipleship is more than a moment—it's a journey. How have you grown in Christ so far this year?

This is a subjective question that is designed to help your Life Group members to begin reflecting on what they've learned in this series. It's better they start reflecting and processing on this series now rather than only during the final lesson.

Witness

This week, think of someone in your life who has recently taken a spiritual step—maybe they've started coming to church, asked questions about God, or expressed a desire to grow. As a group, pray for them. Then commit to reaching out this week to encourage them, invite them to Life Group, or simply check in. Your follow-up could be a turning point in their journey.

Also, pay for someone's drink or meal behind you in line, then ask the cashier to give them a small card or note from your Life Group with a verse from Acts.

Budget about 7-10 minutes to discuss and answer this prompt. Also, follow up with your Life Group members about who they shared their story with this past week.