

Featuring Jay Kesler



Jay Kesler is the former Chancellor and current President Emeritus of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. He is also currently serving as the preaching pastor of Upland Community Church, in Upland, Indiana. Dr. Kesler was president of Youth for Christ from 1973–1985 and president of Taylor University from 1985–2000. Dr. Kesler is also the author of nearly 30 books.

Jay Kesler on God and Us

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God Is Majestic

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

God Is Majestic

God is more powerful than we imagine and sufficient for all our needs.

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J. B. Phillips wrote a book titled Your God Is Too Small. His chapter titles include: "The Resident Policeman," "The Parental Hangover," "The Grand Old Man," "Meek-and-Mild," "Absolute Perfection," "The Heavenly Bosom," "God-in-a-Box," "The Managing Director," "Second-Hand God," "Perennial Grievance," "The Pale Galilean," "The Projected Image." How many of these chapter titles have become orthodoxies in our beliefs about God?

Scripture: Psalm 19:1–6

Based On: The sermon "Our Majestic God," by Jay Kesler, PreachingToday.com



God Is Majestic

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Years ago, when I was filling a pulpit, a young man came up to me, and just a little bit antagonistically said, "I don't want to insult you, Jay, but I come to this service mostly because it's a good place to meet some beautiful, young, professional women who come to this church. I don't want you to feel insulted, but I don't even believe in God."

I think he thought I was going to get a nosebleed or something over this particular statement, so I said, "Tell me what God you don't believe in. Maybe I don't believe in him, either."

Then he began to tell me about an aunt of his. Every time their family wanted to talk about ball scores, she wanted to talk about death. Every time someone was having a good time, she wanted to bring up questions of hell and so on, and so he associated God with his aunt.

After I spent 15 or 20 minutes listening to him tell me these ideas he had heard about God, I said, "I'm very glad you took the time to challenge me, and I'm also glad I took the time to listen to you, because, in fact, if I thought God was like you've described him to be, I wouldn't believe in God, either. I'd be insulted that you would think I'd have trivialized my life to believe in a God that spends all his time on how long's long, how short's short, and how shiny's shiny—involved in all sorts of minor, micro-ethical issues that don't really matter, in the long run, at all."

[Q] Describe God as you see him.

- What is stuck in your head about God that you are pretty sure isn't true?
- Where do you think those ideas came from?

[Q] What are some ways popular culture sees God?

- How close are those ideas to the truth?

[Q] Is it necessary to define God before we can state our belief in him? Why or why not?



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Leader's Guide

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: The psalmist looked at the sky and was amazed by God's greatness.

We see David's view of God in Psalm 19. This young shepherd, looking into the expanse of the universe, wrote a poem to remind us of the danger of limiting God to the size of our own understanding, or even to a group of doctrines that we may have put together. Read Psalm 19:1–6.

We know that we are living in a galaxy that is moving like a great, oblong pinwheel through time and space. At the point where we're riding in this great galaxy, on planet Earth, we're moving along at about 136 miles per second, or 490,000 miles an hour. Moving at 490,000 miles an hour in our galaxy, we make one rotation in 200 million years. If we just hang on, we'll go around one full time every 200 million years.

Now, our galaxy is a fairly expansive place. If you want to go across it the short way, and you move at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), you can cross the narrow expanse of our galaxy in 20,000 years.

Our sun is a relatively minor star. It is roughly 110 times the size of Earth in diameter, or about 860,000 miles in diameter. There are about one billion other galaxies like our own. Now, a billion should be easy for modern Americans—just a little piece of the national debt. If you took a billion dollar bills and sewed them end-to-end with a sewing machine, they would go around the equator two-and-a-half times.

The number of stars in the universe exceeds the number of grains of sand on all the beaches of all the seas on the entire Earth.

We read in the Scriptures that the things that are seen were made of things that are unseen. That God, in his creative ability, threw into existence all that we have today with a single thought. Scripture even goes so far as to say that the whole thing is glued together by Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17).

[Q] How do the heavens declare God's glory? Give specific examples.

[Q] What does the majesty of creation tell you about its creator?

[Q] What do you think it means that Jesus Christ holds all things together?



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[Q] If you were to describe God's majesty to someone who knew nothing about him, what would you say?

[Q] How might we make it a habit to praise God more for his wonders?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us realize how glorious our creator God is.*

Activity: *We know far more about the glories and majesty of the universe than David did. Form groups of three or four, and together write a psalm praising God for the way he has woven his universe together. It doesn't have to be great poetry, but get the ideas down. When finished, share what you wrote with the whole group.*

Teaching Point Two: We learn of God's power and might through the amazing things we read in Scripture.

When modern man looks into the skies and knows things that David couldn't even imagine, he should begin to understand that our God is great and powerful and mighty—beyond the kinds of things that trouble us in the media and the things that people say about God. Why? Because the Scripture begins with a simple phrase: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Suppose we could escape the kinds of things that are said, or the sneers that we hear on the evening news, or the little articles almost daily in the paper that degrade the gospel (or at least people's understanding of the gospel). And for a moment, suppose we could believe that there is no limit to the God we say we worship when we say, "I believe in God, who is much larger than his creation. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And that God has chosen to communicate with little, two-legged things down on some insignificant dust speck just a little distance from a dying spark called the sun." What would it mean if that God who made the heavens and the earth was the God we address when we say, "Our Father, which art in heaven"? If he weren't limited to some ideas we may have picked up along the way, what would it mean?

I'm banking my eternal soul on the Bible. Now, I don't believe in God because I believe in the Bible; I believe in the Bible because I believe in God. If he's as powerful as I understand him to be, he can surely speak and be understood with veracity and authority.

[Q] If God is more powerful than anything we've experienced, what does that tell us about the hard-to-believe passages of the Bible?



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[Q] What does believing in such a powerful God do to the way we pray and relate to him?

[Q] What does it mean for my life if he is more powerful than I can imagine?

Teaching Point Three: God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is just and holy and keeps track of every one of us.

When the injustices and difficulties of the world seem beyond control, God is just and holy, the protector of the weak and the oppressed and the poor. When I am troubled by these things, I turn to the God who made the heavens and the earth, not to somebody's idea of God on this earth, lest I find myself in despair.

I've visited Christ's church in about 55 countries around the world. I've seen things that, in the words of Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, would cross a rabbi's eyes. But I will tell you, they do not cross the eyes of the God who made the heavens and the earth. He is keeping track, and he understands.

[Q] How does dwelling on the fact that God is just and holy help us when we see injustice around us?

A Negro spiritual says, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen/nobody knows but Jesus." That particular theology is real and true, and God is able to reach to the uttermost of people's needs. When sin and guilt rule in our lives, we understand that the God of the Scriptures is a redeemer, revealed perfectly in Jesus Christ. To get a glimpse of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, read Philippians 2:5–11.

[Q] What does this passage tell us about God's love and care for us?

[Q] What does it tell us about both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus?

There's such a lack of understanding of the forgiveness of God in this culture that even Christians seem to want to seek vindictiveness and destruction rather than forgiveness and life. Without forgiveness and without a Redeemer, where would this world go?

When I feel lonely, deserted, misunderstood, grieving, or sick, I know that the God of Scripture is my companion, comforter, and friend. The New Testament calls him *paraclete*—the Holy Spirit, the one who walks alongside, who is with us.

[Q] What difference should it make in our everyday lives that we have the Holy Spirit present with us at all times?



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[Q] How do we need Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to know and experience the true God?

How does this relate to me? Is it possible for me to come up with a problem too big for the God who made the heavens and the earth? God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

[Q] Think about a problem that you have been struggling with. What problem has so consumed your mind that you can't even concentrate on your family or your work? Is the problem, perhaps, that you're bringing it to a God who's too small, and you need to bring it to the God who's big enough to handle it? Take a few minutes of silence to think about this.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

We tend, by a secret law of the soul, to move toward our mental image of God. I commend to you the God of the Scriptures—the creator God; the compassionate, caring God; the redeeming God; the companion God; the consummator God; the God who can handle every human problem. The God who made the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1 is the same God to whom David looked with his naked eye toward the heavens, and he's the God to whom you and I can come every day and say, "The heavens declare the glory of God."

This God sees beyond the events, situations, motives, anguish, and needs of our lives, and says, "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Action Point: Have you been coming to the wrong God? Be sure your faith is hooked to God—the adequate God, the full God, the whole God, the holy God, the righteous God, the God of Scripture. Take time this week to search the Scriptures and check your view of God against them.

—Study by Jay Kesler, with JoHannah Reardon



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Participant's Guide

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Teaching Point Two: We learn of God’s power and might through the amazing things we read in Scripture.

Teaching Point Three: God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is just and holy and keeps track of every one of us.



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—Study by Jay Kesler, with JoHannah Reardon



We Are Lost

Leader's Guide

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We Are Lost

Humans are unique creations because only we can choose to love God.

Modern man's greatest dilemma is that we are caught in an identity crisis brought on by the tremendous amount of information available about who we are and our place in the vast universe. David, caught in that same identity crisis, said, "When I consider your heavens ... the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" Then, he answers his own question by saying, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings."



Very few of us, naturally speaking, think of ourselves as a little lower than the angels. We think of ourselves as a little higher than the animals: an ascendancy of primates, eventually humped over with knuckles dragging and finally standing erect. The central statement of Scripture about mankind is that we have been infused by God with a nature that is not a little higher than the animals, but one that is, in this poetic terminology, a little lower than the angels.

Scripture: Psalm 8; Luke 15

Based On: The sermon "Lost in Space," by Jay Kesler, PreachingToday.com



We Are Lost

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

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We read in Genesis 1 about how humans were created in God's image. It's this image of God that makes the distinction between people and animals. It causes David to describe people as being not a little higher than the animals, but a little lower than the angels.

Reading world literature, you often see the phrase, "the prodigal." That simple phrase communicates a story to all educated, aware human beings. The Bible story called "The Prodigal Son" is a story of estrangement between father and child.

This theme of estrangement between father and child is a profound communication of central truth for modern people. That truth is tied to us being created in the image of God. In Luke 15 it's put into context. Verse three says, "Then Jesus told them this parable," and he tells three stories. I would contend that these three stories are really one parable. Read Luke 15.

Note this interesting thing about these stories: When a sheep is lost, the shepherd goes and finds it. When a coin is lost, the lady sweeps the house and puts the coin back where it belongs. When a human being is lost, the father just stays home.

[Q] Isn't a boy as helpless as a lost sheep, or as valuable as a lost coin? Why did Jesus tell these stories of things that were sought, but let the boy be lost?

[Q] Why do you think he linked these three stories together?

[Q] Can you identify with any of these stories? If so, which ones, and why?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: The story of the prodigal son is written from the viewpoint of God as a heavenly parent.

There's not a parent who doesn't understand this story. The father in this story was a wealthy man. He had servants, influence, and clout. He had power, papers to sign, people to meet. He could make things happen and send pink slips. He was an important person. He could have called his servants together and said to his most trusted servant, "Big Servant, Junior has gone off with everything he had coming to him. He went to a far country where he's wasted the whole business, made a fool of himself, and ruined our family name. Go get him."



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So Big Servant goes to the far country and finds Junior there, a good Jewish boy feeding pigs. Big Servant says to the son, "You smell like swine. Your dad is very concerned about you. Come home."

"I'm not coming," says the son.

"Yes, you are," says Big Servant. Putting a hammer lock on the son, Big Servant marches him home and tosses him on the living room floor. "Here's your son."

"Look at you!" the father says to his son. "I spent my whole lifetime earning the money I gave to you. In a few weeks you wasted the whole thing. Get in the bedroom! You sit on the edge of your bed and think about what you've done. When you're ready to fly right, you can come out. Get hold of yourself, young man."

So the boy goes to the back bedroom. What does he do? He sits there on the bed, like boys from time immemorial, and says, "Dad's right. Wow! Isn't it wonderful to get insight, to have your elders tell you the truth! Things that escape you are pointed out by those who are older and more experienced."

No, he does what all boys do. He sits on the edge of the bed and says, "That's my dad. Wouldn't give me enough rope; couldn't give me enough slack. I'll show him. I'll do what I want to do because I want to do it. I don't need his help; I'll make it on my own."

All fathers understand this story. They know there's a difference between a coin and a sheep and a man. People are created not a little higher than the animals, but a little lower than the angels, and we have the image of God in us.

[Q] What insight does this scenario give you into why God often lets us go our own way?

[Q] What does the story of the prodigal son tell you about what God is like?

Teaching Point Two: God created male and female beings whose response to him is voluntary.

God created the heavens and the earth. But on the earth there are those who say, "I know the cosmos works in harmony. I know about the universe. I know about the physical laws. But I'll do what I want to do, because I want to do it."

Can you imagine what the God who made the heavens and the earth will do to someone who says, "Leave me alone?" He will leave him alone. In the scriptural scheme of things, the whole world glorifies God with its complexity and its obedience. But God created, in his own image,



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male and female beings whose response to him is voluntary. The word we use to describe this voluntary response is a common word often misunderstood in our culture. It's the word love. Love is voluntary. Love is reciprocal. It can't be forced.

What do we have in this story? The boy has gone to a far country. He's wasted everything. What does the father do? He watches. The father is hard to understand. Birthday after birthday he lights the candles and waits.

The sovereign God who made the heavens and the earth could write a message in the sky three thousand miles high, each digit five hundred feet wide, saying, "Folks, quit messing around. Repent!" But the father waits. He waits for the son to come home.

When the son comes to himself, what does he do? He makes up a speech. Most people have a little religion in their mind, and they can think up religious speeches: "I'll go to my father, and I'll say, 'I've sinned against heaven and before you.'" True. "I'm not worthy to be called your son." Perhaps. Next, it's a real phrase: "Make me as one of your hired servants." That'll get him!

When he comes home, his father sees him a great way off. The father doesn't wait for the boy to cross the threshold. He's been watching and waiting. He runs to the boy, throws his arms around him, and kisses him. The boy has his religious speech ready: "I've sinned against heaven and before you." Right. True. "I'm not worthy to be called your son." Perhaps. Then comes his best one, the one he's saved up, the groveling one: "Make me as one of the hired servants"—and the father, in typical fatherly fashion, doesn't even hear.

Before the son finishes his sentence, the father says, as if distracted, "Bring a robe for him. Put shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger." The son pawned the family ring, for goodness sake. Put a ring on his finger? Then the father exclaims, "Kill Spotty Calf. Let's have a barbecue. My boy's home!"

[Q] How does this story show God's extravagant love for us?

[Q] How does God's love motivate you to love him back?

[Q] Have you been a prodigal who turned from God, or do you know someone who has? If so, tell us about it. What brought the prodigal back?



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Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us realize how the story of the prodigal son reflects our relationship with God.*

Activity: *Ask for three volunteers to act out the above version of The Prodigal Son instead of simply reading it. Give them this script to follow:*

Prodigal Son: *What am I doing? I'm so hungry I want to eat the pig slop. I've got to see if my dad will take me back. I'll go to my father, and I'll say, "I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm not worthy to be called your son." No, it will take more than that. I know! "Make me as one of your hired servants." That'll get him!*

Narrator: *He heads home. When his father sees him, he comes running to throw his arms around him.*

Prodigal Son: *I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm not worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of the hired servants.*

Father: *(waving him off) Bring a robe for him. Put shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger. Kill Spotty Calf. Let's have a barbecue. My boy's home!*

Teaching Point Three: We have to guard against feeling that we deserve God's love, but others don't.

This dad is absolutely thrilled because his boy has come home. The older son, who has no concept of fatherhood or of grace, doesn't understand fathers and sons. "What's going on? Music and dancing?"

"Well, Junior's home. He's safe."

"But he wasted everything. I've been a good boy. I mean, I fed ol' Spotty Calf, and now you've killed him. You never even gave me a thin little goat. I never even had a goat sandwich. I worked my fingers to the bone around here. I'm always good, and now you're showing forgiveness and . . ."

Dad says, "Hey, you don't understand, Son. This is your brother. It's not about how much or how little he wasted. The point is he is important, not our money. Your brother is home. It is important that we do this."

That is the method God chose to communicate his infinite nature and his relationship to mankind. There's a difference between sheep and coins and human beings. There's a principle



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at work in all of our lives. We can exercise that principle in obedience, in harmony with God's universe, so that when God raises and lowers the baton, his creation sounds like a symphony. Or there can be a little toot here and a little squeak there with a counter melody that says, "I will do it my way."

- [Q] How are Christians tempted to behave like the older brother in this story?
- [Q] How does believing that all people are created just a little lower than the angels change our relationships with each other?
- [Q] What harmony do good relationships bring to the scheme of things?
- [Q] What kind of person is hardest for you to love and to believe that God loves?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

God made the heavens and the earth, and he made us in his own image. God desires that every human being be in concert with his will. He is the waiting Father. People call this story "The Prodigal Son," but I call it "The Story of the Waiting Father." I pray that you'll begin to hear God's voice. Exercise your uniqueness as a human being and come home. Come home to God. Live under his roof and acknowledge him as your God, your Creator, your Lord, and your Savior, through Jesus Christ.

Action Point: Do you identify most with the prodigal son or the older brother? In light of that, what should be your next step toward God? Ask the group to pray for you in this regard.

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Participant's Guide

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Scripture: [Psalm 8](#); [Luke 15](#)

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Teaching Point Two: God created male and female beings whose response to him is voluntary.

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The Church Is Vital

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guide

The Church Is Vital

Christ's church serves a unique, valuable purpose for humanity.

Nations are increasingly becoming societies of options. We speak more today of pluralism than we ever have before. Many countries of the world that were initially one race, with one ideology, have become pluralistic in race and ideology.



However, that pluralism reaches beyond ethnic distinctions and becomes a description of our religious lives as well. Is the church relevant, or has it become an outdated, outmoded relic of the past? Can the church offer practical help, or is it merely a keeper of philosophy and ideas? This study states clearly why Jay Kesler believes in the church.

Scripture: [Matthew 16:13–18](#)

Based On: The sermon "Why I Believe in the Church," by Jay Kesler, [PreachingToday.com](#)



The Church Is Vital

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

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Many see the church as a subgroup in society, not unlike the Amish in Pennsylvania—sort of quaint. In the words of the late great American theologian Frank Sinatra, “I’m for whatever gets you through the night.” The opinion is that people obviously need something, and if some folks want to be quaint and come to church and listen to some religious music and get themselves jazzed up about God and it helps them, fine. If other people want to get what they want through drugs, or golf, or whatever, that’s fine too.

I don’t know about you, but one thing I don’t want to be is quaint. I don’t want some busload of tourists pulling up in front of my house to take pictures of me, like I’m an outdated relic. In Matthew 16, Jesus promised us that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. Read Matthew 16:13–18.

[Q] Do you ever wonder if the church is relevant? Why or why not?

[Q] Do you ever wonder if your own faith is relevant to the world around you? Why or why not?

[Q] What should be timeless about the church? What is not timeless and needs to change periodically?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: The church deals with eternity.

The church deals with the ultimate issues of life, death, eternity, judgment, and forgiveness. It’s important to deal with subjects like the gross national product, the balance of power, and the balance of trade. It’s important to deal with issues of world health and hunger. A thousand political problems are very important. But if one deals with those and does not deal with issues like, “Where will I spend eternity? How will I please a holy God?”—if we have no answer to our sin problem or the problem of our souls—we’ve missed the point.

[Q] Give examples of how we might discuss all of life’s problems without dealing with the root of sin in a person’s life?



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Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century French mathematician, physicist, and religious philosopher, put forth a proposition that went something like this to his atheist friends:

Suppose you are right and I am wrong. Suppose God didn't make the heavens and the earth. Suppose mankind is just a coincidental cosmic joke and has no purpose or reason on the earth. Now, I've believed otherwise. I've believed that the earth was made by God, that mankind is God's creation, that man has fallen away from God in sin, and God has sent his Son, Jesus, who visited the planet and died on the cross and shed his blood for my sin. And by faith in him and through his grace, I've been forgiven my sin. I'm a new creature, and I'm on the way to heaven. I've believed that, but it's all false. Therefore, we both die. None of the promises are true. You die. I die. Annihilation.

But suppose that's not the way it is. Suppose I'm right and you're wrong. Suppose there is a God and all these things I've described are true. We both die. Then you find yourself in eternal damnation in a sinner's hell, because there is a God in heaven who is just and holy. In both cases, you have everything to lose and nothing to gain, but I have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

[Q] Is there any value in Pascal's argument? Why or why not?

We live in a society that doesn't like to think about death. But the church of Jesus Christ exists in the midst of society to remind us we shall live for all eternity. There's a God in heaven, and I must please him and have a way to overcome my sin and know him. The church of Jesus Christ tells us how to be saved. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–7.

[Q] According to this passage, how are we saved?

[Q] What happens when the church abandons that core message and teaches only how to solve problems?

Teaching Point Two: The church gives individuals dignity.

We live in a society that thinks of mankind as a little higher than the animals, as if there is no qualitative distinction between humans and the rest of creation. As a result, a person's highest goal is seen in his societal efforts. Suddenly, society becomes more important than the individual. People become a means to an end.

The most extreme expression of that problem was given by Nikita Khrushchev, who succeeded Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. He told the United Nations, "You have to break eggs to make an omelet." What does that mean? Presumably, to him it meant: If I have a political purpose



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to achieve—if I want to bring a country into the 20th century and I have to kill a few million people to make it happen—then so be it. After all, people are not as important as society.

C. S. Lewis helps us deal with this issue by giving us a kind of fraction. A paraphrase of what he says is, “Think of a man 100 years old. Draw a line and then put below the line the combined dynasties of China—5,000 years. Man lives to be 100 years, society 5,000. Society must be 50 times more important than a person; therefore, people are expendable. You can use them up for society’s purposes.”

This is basically the argument that must be used by every politician, every great mover of people. C. S. Lewis says, “Suppose it doesn’t work this way. Suppose man doesn’t live to be 100, but suppose he’s eternal.” It’s a little hard to write eternity in a number. We’ll have to take something more limited for our purposes, such as a billion. A man lives a billion years; the combined dynasties of China, 5,000 years. What do we conclude? Man is infinitely more important than society.

The unique and distinct Christian truth held by the church of Jesus Christ is that individuals are more important than society. Read Matthew 6:25–26.

[Q] How can we maintain that the individual is more important than society while still working to better society?

[Q] What does knowing that we are more valuable than birds mean for the way we live?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us realize where devaluing the individual leads us.*

Activity: *As a group, brainstorm all the ways societies have devalued the individual for the common good. Record the answers on a whiteboard or poster board. Looking at each society listed, brainstorm how each society might have dealt with their problems while still promoting the common good.*

Teaching Point Three: The church provides a moral compass.

The church of Jesus Christ provides a moral and ethical compass in the midst of relativism. There are no absolutes in our world now. You can tell how well a person is educated not by his nouns but by his adjectives. An educated person never uses a naked noun. He says, “usually, sometimes, often.”

Every year, Youth for Christ has about 15,000 boys committed to them by the courts. These boys are guilty of everything from grand theft auto to murder. During one particular summer, I



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was standing by the shack where we sold pop to the kids. One kid snuck up behind another and hit him over the head with a pop bottle. It didn't knock him out, but it knocked him down. The attacker then jumped on him, put one knee on his Adam's apple and the other knee on his chest, and began beating him across the head with the pop bottle. I grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him up against the building. "What kind of kid are you? Sneak up behind somebody; hit him with a pop bottle. What kind of boy are you?"

He said, "Well, if you're going to hit him with a pop bottle, why would you come up in front of him? He'd see you. I mean, you ought to come up behind him, because if you come up behind him, you can get him." I realized this kid lived in a neighborhood where there wasn't a cat with a whole tail.

I replied to him, "You ought not hit somebody with a pop bottle."

I immediately realized, *How stupid! Why ought not? Why ought not steal? Why ought not murder? Why ought not commit adultery? Why ought not lie?*

Jesus Christ and his church have stood against that kind of relativism for all of history. Read 1 John 2:12–14.

[Q] Why do you think we work so hard to avoid making moral pronouncements in our everyday speech?

[Q] How might we make moral pronouncements in a manner that people can hear them and understand their sin? Give some examples.

[Q] What positive moral pronouncements do you see in the passage we just read?

Teaching Point Four: The church provides a loving community and has produced lasting, selfless contributions to humanity.

The church is a place to find community, healing, and love. We can belong to lots of things, but the church of Jesus Christ is an extended family beyond any of those. When my boy was small, he ran full speed through the basement of the church, and my good friend, John Horn, reached out and grabbed him by the collar. His little legs were still going, and John was holding him there, saying, "Bruce, slow down!" Bruce looked at him and said, "Put me down! You're not my dad." John replied, "No, I'm not your dad, but I'm your uncle. I'm your uncle because your daddy is my brother in Christ, and I love you as much as if you were my real nephew. I want to help you become the kind of man you ought to be, so you just slow down. Okay?" We need that in a church—to care for each other's sons and daughters.



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The church has provided motivation for the most lasting, valuable, and selfless efforts of mankind. From whence came schools, hospitals, orphanages, colleges, relief agencies, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, and the end of child labor? These came when men and women, moved by God against the backdrop of God's holy justice, decided to change the world.

If you were to put a syringe into the world today and pull from it the influence of Christian missions, the world would implode of its own moral weight. There's hardly a senior leader in all of Africa who wasn't taught to read by a missionary. I believe in the church.

Some of you have read Barbara Tuchman's great historical account, *The Distant Mirror*, in which she records that in one period during the Dark Ages, one third of the population from Moscow to Cairo died of the black plague. Who were those men in little brown outfits, out picking up the dead and caring for the sick and so on? Saint Francis wasn't just somebody with birds on his head. Saint Francis went out in the name of Jesus Christ to alleviate the greatest suffering this world has ever seen. Read James 2:14–25.

[Q] Give other examples of when the church has stood for good in society.

[Q] What do you think an effective Christian community should be like? Describe it.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Attending and being a vital part of the church of Jesus Christ is not just something quaint that we folks do who are hanging on to our ancient traditions. It's not some irrelevant chanting of ancient and dead religious phrases. Being part of the church of Jesus Christ is being part of something that Jesus Christ started, and he said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Aren't you glad to be part of something that is world changing, that has stood for 2,000 years, that makes a difference? Amen. I believe in the church.

Action Point: Look back at the four teaching points in this lesson. Of these four, which one do you most need to see God work in and through you? Ask the group to pray for you in this regard.

—Study by Jay Kesler, with JoHannah Reardon



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Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

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Christ's church serves a unique, valuable purpose for humanity.

Nations are increasingly becoming societies of options. We speak more today of pluralism than we ever have before. Many countries of the world that were initially one race, with one ideology, have become pluralistic in race and ideology.



However, that pluralism reaches beyond ethnic distinctions and becomes a description of our religious lives as well. Is the church relevant, or has it become an outdated, outmoded relic of the past? Can the church offer practical help, or is it merely a keeper of philosophy and ideas? This study states clearly why Jay Kesler believes in the church.

Scripture: [Matthew 16:13–18](#)

Based On: The sermon "Why I Believe in the Church," by Jay Kesler, [PreachingToday.com](#)



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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Many see the church as a subgroup in society, not unlike the Amish in Pennsylvania—sort of quaint. In the words of the late great American theologian Frank Sinatra, “I’m for whatever gets you through the night.” The opinion is that people obviously need something, and if some folks want to be quaint and come to church and listen to some religious music and get themselves jazzed up about God and it helps them, fine. If other people want to get what they want through drugs, or golf, or whatever, that’s fine too.

I don’t know about you, but one thing I don’t want to be is quaint. I don’t want some busload of tourists pulling up in front of my house to take pictures of me, like I’m an outdated relic.

In Matthew 16, Jesus promised us that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. Read Matthew 16:13–18.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: The church deals with eternity.

Teaching Point Two: The church gives individuals dignity.

Teaching Point Three: The church provides a moral compass.

Teaching Point Four: The church provides a loving community and has produced lasting, selfless contributions to humanity.



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