

The CHURCH and the WORLD

In the Periphery



At the centre of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence - Ephesians 1:20-23 (MSG)

Take a moment to think of that phrase of Paul's - 'He fills **everything** with His presence.'

Everything. Our hearts, homes, workplaces, communities... and the world. We can often find ourselves 'on the periphery' of life asking (whether it's inwardly with ourselves or outwardly with our world); *Why are things so messed up? Why are our relationships messed up? Why does society get so messed up? God, what are You doing?*

God is alive and active in both us and the world — His Holy Spirit abiding in us and working through us, we as His Church, a representation of heaven on earth.

In the Old Testament, God's presence abided in the tabernacle and then the Temple — For humanity to be in His presence was something God desired from the very beginning of time. In the Gospels, Jesus' way was not about gaining political power, but rather of love, grace and servanthood - "he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." **(Philippians 2:7 NIV)**. Paul's message to the Ephesians of the nature of Jesus' Church was that of a faith-filled people fueled by His Holy Spirit — a thriving, transforming power, not of force, domination, or compliance, but a beautifully engaged power, serving the world with example and witness of the 'Servant King'.

EXPLORE AND SHARE

We are called to fill everything with His presence: How we impact our hearts, homes, workplaces, and our communities.

1. Filling everything within ourselves (Philippians 4:13, Ephesians 3:19) Jesus is our starting point and our source - He is able to fill all our needs. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit for empowerment, maturity, boldness, and perseverance as we engage and serve our world. We need to 'fill' ourselves through the Word. In Philippians 4, Paul testified that he could live either in need or in plenty with the strength that God supplied. And in Ephesians 3:19, during a powerful prayer, he prays, "... that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Discuss: *What types of activities can we do to be filled, dwelled-within, and strengthened daily? In what ways could we do this more consistently?*

2. Filling everything together (Acts 2:42-47) We can mature in unity and become strengthened through seeking the Holy Spirit together, studying the Word together, unpacking its meaning and increasing our knowledge of God and His ways, authentically sharing our experiences and growth in God with one another, and being generous with each other as we each have need.

Discuss: *How can we support each other as a Connect Group in becoming more of a community that radiates Jesus' way?*

3. Filling everything in our world (Isaiah 42:6-7) God's desire and design for His Church is to be a part of God's presence filling the world with all He is. We have been called and blessed to be His presence in the farthest reaches of people's lives and the world - just like Jesus.

Discuss: *How can we be more like Jesus in the way we share our faith? In the way we share His presence in our lives?*

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You are our Lord and our King. Come fill us - our hearts, minds, and strength. Draw us together as a people filled with Your presence. Inspire us to fill the world around us generously with your Kingdom-ways in the ways You desire. Amen

SUGGESTED RESOURCES on The Church and the World:

The Mission of God, Christopher J.H. Wright
Kingdom Conspiracy, Scot McKnight
Letters to the Church, Francis Chan
The Jesus Way, Eugene H. Peterson