



HEART FOR THE HOUSE

A SEVEN-DAY DEVOTIONAL
BY HILLSONG CHURCH UK

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A SEVEN-DAY DEVOTIONAL

The Church still stands. In the midst of a cultural moment where church doors have been shut physically for months and are gradually reopening, this short devotional reminds us that the Church of Jesus Christ still vibrantly remains. She is the hope for humanity! Drawing us back to scripture – in repentance and hope – these next seven days encourage us to contemplate what the Church is and could be as we build again with faith and expectation. It draws out the beauty and truth embedded in the concept of Jesus' Church and asks us to reconsider how we see it and our part to play within it. No matter what comes against the Church, she will prevail. The future is bright!

Day 1: The Cornerstone

Day 2: The Bricks

Day 3: The Head

Day 4: The Body

Day 5: The Gathering

Day 6: The Scattering

Day 7: The Source

DAY 1: THE CORNERSTONE

Scripture

Ephesians 2:19-22

Thought

"Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"
(Ephesians 2:20)

Over the course of these next seven days, we are going to meditate daily on one facet of what it means to understand and be the Church. As we reflect on Christ's beauty, we will also allow that reality to confront our own lives, asking how we might be better participants and servants in Jesus' mission.

When engaging with this devotional, allow yourself to be simply guided by the following four words: **Read. Think. Pray. Live.**

Today, we consider the image of a building and remember that the Church is like a living and breathing temple for God's presence to dwell. However, the Church is not a physical building, but a spiritual one! It consists of people like you and me.

Crucially, that building is not founded upon clever strategies, innovative ideas, charismatic personalities or even lots of hard work. Rather, it is founded upon Jesus Christ. Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church. Without Him, the Church is nothing. With Him, it can be the most beautiful movement on the planet: A symphony of human experience conducted by the living God. God gave Jesus as head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22).

The Church is designed to help showcase and reveal that Jesus is better than anything else in this world. Often, it does not live up to that reputation. We become what we behold - for our ruin and our restoration. Living as the Church depends on constantly considering and engaging with Jesus Christ - the cornerstone. Only by meditating on Christ and enjoying daily communion with Him will we be able to form into His likeness, both individually and corporately.

As we remember Jesus is the cornerstone, we must simultaneously acknowledge that we are not. Recognising Christ's Lordship in the Church confronts our pride and sense of entitlement. We are not the hero of the Church's story. Jesus is. Amazingly, He chooses to work through us and invites us into His work of building His Church.

Prayer and Application

Today, find a few moments and simply sit in intentional silence. Embrace communion with God. Meditate on the security and relief that comes from knowing Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church.

Pray: Jesus, you are the cornerstone of your Church. Thank you that your Church is built not by human might or power (Zechariah 4:6), but by your Spirit. I submit to your ways and your will today.

DAY 2: THE BRICKS

Scripture

1 Peter 2:5

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

"You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5)

Yesterday, we considered the image of the Church as a building. Today, we continue with that picture. If Christ is the cornerstone of the House, we are the bricks. Bricks are not much to look at by themselves. However, when gathered and arranged according to the design of a skilled architect, they can combine to produce something majestic, glorious and wonderful. Many bricks, connected and conjoined in order and unity, can constitute a beautiful masterpiece. The Church can be that masterpiece.

One of the joys of participating in God's house is the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. As living stones, we find our God-given purpose as we play our part in building Jesus' beautiful spiritual building. Meaning, one of the deepest desires of the human soul, is discovered within the contexts of Church.

Being a "spiritual brick" helps us to find perspective. We do not need to build this thing all by ourselves. We cannot. Nor do we need to search for personal recognition or glory. Instead, our glory comes through what we are a part of – a movement that points people and nations towards the Glorious One.

We are a holy priesthood, stewarding the presence and blessing of God to a world that is broken and hurting. As bricks, we are servants not masters. We are stewards not owners. We are pieces, not the whole. As a result, we need each other and we look best together! It's a perspective that challenges us to live with humility and compassion in relation to those around us.

As we remember we are stones, our selfishness is confronted. The Church is not about us. At the same time as we meditate on that, we find relief. We do not have to do everything and be everything. The often-crushing burden of self-achievement is lifted. Our strength is not found in our self-sufficiency but in our surrender. We yield to Jesus and one another and allow the Master Architect to place us wherever He needs us. He wills it; we obey it. There is joy in having Jesus lead and being a meaningful part of His people!

Prayer and Application

Meditate on what it practically means to be a "living stone". What do you think that means for you today?

Pray: Dear Jesus, I thank you that you have built me into your spiritual house. As I recognise my place in the Church, help me to submit my selfish desires to your will. Help me to deny myself and follow you (Matthew 16:24).

DAY 3: THE HEAD

Scripture

Colossians 1:18

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

“And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”
(Colossians 1:18)

From buildings to bodies. Scripture uses many images to help us picture what it means to be God's people. The past two days, we have been thinking in terms of a building. For the next two days, we will think in terms of a body. God's people are like a body. Jesus is the head of that body – the brains, the command centre, the eyes, the ears, the mouth. You get the idea! He's in control.

As we think of Jesus as the head, we are reminded that He is first. The verse today speaks of Jesus as being *“preeminent”*. As God's people, we can never get ahead of ourselves. Jesus must always take centre stage – above any Church system, process, idea or leader. We inquire of Him. We meditate on Him. We listen to Him. We obey Him. As the body devotes itself to the head, everything finds its place.

If anything else takes first place in our lives – both as individuals, or as a community, the Bible calls it 'idolatry'. Idolatry is essentially putting something that is not God in the place of God. This can be subtle. Our careers, our relationships, our busy lives, our desire for recognition or our pursuit of money can all quietly take up centre stage within the deepest parts of our being. Tragically, we lose our purpose and power when we give our devotion to idols. Jesus offers to restore our purpose and give us His power.

When we acknowledge Jesus as the head of the Church, it confronts the idols that may have crept into our lives - both personally and as a community. When Jesus is made first then everything else is back in order. A Church that is distracted by other pursuits or operating within its own strength will quickly fade or fall. A Church that is fully submitted to the headship of Christ will grow and flourish.

“The perfect Church service would be one we were almost unaware of. Our attention would have been on God.” - C.S. Lewis.

Prayer and Application

Consider where Jesus may have fallen from being number one in your life. Acknowledge that, and make a simple plan to turn and prioritise Christ in that area. This is the biblical idea of repentance. For example, if your screen time is out of control, put boundaries in place. Make a plan to pray, walk or journal when you would usually be looking at a screen.

Pray: God, I am sorry for where I have not honoured you as King and Lord. I choose to put you back as the Head of my life. Help me to be formed by you, and not by the things of this world.

DAY 4: THE BODY

Scripture

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

The Church is not an institution. It is a movement. It is dynamic, organic, real, imperfect, revolutionary and ever-shifting. Through our broken humanity, it supernaturally shines Christ's piercing light into every cultural moment and situation. For this reason, Paul compares God's people with a body. The Church is meant to be flexible and on the move, while also encouraging us that we all have different and valuable roles to play.

Crucially, a body is not functional unless it operates in unity with itself. One of the key distinctives of the Church is meant to be its unity. So often, this is sadly not the case. But just imagine for a moment. Imagine a movement of people obsessed more with what united them than what divided them. Imagine a community so focussed on the headship of Christ that it found itself internally harmonised. Imagine a Church so symphonically defined by God's love and forgiveness that the world could not help but stop and take notice. This is the power of a unified body.

In today's cultural moment, living the Way of Jesus will stand out in sharp contrast to the world around us. We can become givers in a world of takers, truthful in a world of lies, loving in a world of violence and cruelty. Quite simply: we can be transformed, together. Transformation is a community process made up of repentance, obedience and the unifying and powerful work of the Spirit. We need each other and cannot do this journey alone. What does it mean for you to play your part in this?

The image of a unified body confronts our Western culture of individualism. The Church radically defines love as unconditional, sacrificial and servant-hearted. It submits our own wills and desires to those of other people. It calls us to humble repentance. It encourages the use of spiritual gifts to serve the community rather than promote ourselves. It paints a picture of a glorious, others-focussed community basking in Christ's love and light. Can you see it?

"The Church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ himself who has taken form among people." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Prayer and Application

A heart of servanthood is fundamental to a unified community. Ask yourself the simple question today: How can I serve someone in my world? Commit a random act of kindness.

Pray: Jesus, just as you prayed earnestly for unity amongst your people (John 17:21), so I pray the same. Show me how to live in unity with my Christian brothers and sisters. Help me to resist individualism and live with an "others first" mentality.

DAY 5: THE GATHERING

Scripture

Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42-47

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Screens only go so far. Even in a world full of digital connection, there is no substitute for the real thing. Community involves lives meshed with each other - close, personal, gritty, real and intimate. There is no doubt that online Church communities and services have great benefits. They will absolutely play an important part in the future of God’s people and have produced beautiful fruit across the globe, reaching people that could not have otherwise been reached. But the Church cannot *solely* be online.

We are not designed to do life alone. Don’t run from community. Spiritual formation is not a lone pursuit. As Rich Villodas notes, *“Jesus lived in perpetual communion with the Father, but still needed a community of brothers and sisters.”*

The NT examples of Church are a great place to start getting inspired about the power that comes when God’s people gather to worship and share life together. The picture of the early Church is vastly different from the contemporary notion that “Church” is a place where members go, usually once a week. Back then, Church always referred to *people*, never to *buildings*. By making the *Ekklesia* run on existing social tracks (mealtimes), Jesus turned tables into pulpits and homes into assembly halls. The Spirit-filled legacy of their gatherings still resonates today. The Lord exploded in their midst. Communities were reached. People were healed. The poor were cared for. The glory of the Lord was on full show amongst His people. There is power in gathering.

Acts 2, one of our passages today, speaks of a “devotion” to fellowship. It’s a good challenge for us today. Are we happy operating on the fringes of a Church community, keeping relationships superficial and “attending” when it is convenient for us? Or can we learn to be devoted to true fellowship - gathering with Christ’s people to encourage each other, worship His name and stir one another to live a life of mission and purpose. Where two or three are **gathered** in Jesus’ name, there He is.

“Church must become a thick web of interdependent relationships between resilient disciples of Jesus deeply loyal to the way.” - John Mark Comer

Prayer and Application

If it is possible for you, make a plan to attend and participate in a gathering of God’s people (perhaps a small group or Sunday service) over the next few weeks. Remind yourself of the value of the Church gathering.

Pray: God, I thank you that you value community and encourage us to put down deep relational roots within your House. Show me the joy of gathering with your people. Help me to connect deeply with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Give me courage to reach out. I do not want to do this life alone. Amen.

DAY 6: THE SCATTERING

Scripture

Matthew 28:18-20

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."
(Matthew 28:19-20)

More than an organisation, the Church is a living organism. Yesterday, we reflected on the importance of the Church gathering. Today, we will consider why the Church also needs to "scatter". The Church is not an insular organisation, keeping itself to itself. No. It is an outward facing, loving, inclusive people who are in love with Jesus and committed to sacrificial mission. The Church is called to go "out" into the world and make disciples of all nations. We each have a part to play, a sphere to reach, a people to love and a community to help.

The historic objective of Jesus' Church has always been the transformation of people and of society. Reaching individuals, yes, but also nations. Followers of Jesus are encouraged to be a missional presence wherever they go, asking the question "where is God working and how can I join in?". The beauty of the gospel message is that we are filled with Christ's spirit, empowering us to be a light and an ambassador in our own spheres of influence. Ed Silvano writes that *"Jesus' objective was not to reproduce or expand religious institutions. It was to see nations discipled by inserting the leaven of His Kingdom into their social fibre through His Ekklesia."* The Church is a discipleship movement, and discipleship is the future of the Church.

The kicker is this. We are **all** called to make disciples of people and nations. This isn't just a select calling for pastors or theologians. As Christians, we are all equipped to reach people. It's a calling that confronts the idea of "consumer Christianity" where the Church is just a place where you come to be entertained or to have your needs met. Rather, we are all on mission - to reflect and demonstrate the love of Christ to a lost and broken world and to lead people on a journey of spiritual formation into the beautiful likeness of Jesus. Are you up for it?

"A scared world needs a fearless Church." - A.W. Tozer

Prayer and Application

Meditate on the "mission of the Church" today. Why does the Church exist? Why are you a part of it, and what role do you think you are called to play?

Pray for specific people in your world today who do not know Jesus. Ask God to use you to reach them.

DAY 7: THE SOURCE

Scripture

1 Corinthians 3:16; Acts 1:8

Thought: Read. Think. Pray. Live.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

As we come to the end of this short devotional, let us reflect on the source of our Christian life and endeavours: The power of the Holy Spirit at work within us. Remember, this is not a life to be lived in our own strength.

"At the heart of every cry for revival today, there is always a deep longing to find the way to the majestic, all-powerful Ekklesia that Jesus launched, free from any form of restraint or containment and overflowing with power." - Ed Silvano

The early Church is a beautiful subject for study. If you have a few moments, read the first few chapters of Acts. It is an overwhelming story when you think about it. From a group of confused disciples in a small room in Jerusalem, the growth of Jesus' *ekklesia* explodes at a phenomenal rate - tearing through Jerusalem, then Judea and then out into the entire interconnected world in a shockingly small amount of time.

What caused this? It is fair to say that it was not some carefully curated and well presented "Church growth strategy". Rather, it was the awesome and incomprehensible power of the Holy Spirit. If we want Church to feel exciting and explosive again, perhaps it is time to stop trying to fashion our own maps and strategies to grow the Church. Instead, we need to submit to the Source and surrender to the Holy Spirit.

The Church is called to be explicitly Christ-like, not just generally. For that to be the case, we desperately need the Holy Spirit to help us, guide us and counsel us as we undertake this corporate life of counter formation - becoming a distinctive people that confronts the culture of the world around us. We need to be filled with, led by and obedient to the Holy Spirit.

The Church relies on the power of the Spirit. Meditate on that today. It's a reality that encourages us to embrace our weaknesses, live in humility and confront the idea that we can achieve anything for God in our own strength. Rest in His power today. God loves you and wants to use you. Be filled with His Spirit.

"Without God's Spirit, there is nothing we can do that will count for God's kingdom. Without God's Spirit, the Church simply can't be the Church." - N.T. Wright

Prayer and Application

Engage in a few moments of quiet and contemplative prayer. Simply be present with God today and ask Him: *"Where are you working and how can I join in?"* Ask God to fill you with His Spirit. Surrender your desire to do things in your own strength. With Jesus, the burden is light and the yoke is easy (Matthew 11:28).