



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.  
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

## **Goal**

Jesus made an incredibly bold statement one day, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” In this series, we will rethink the purpose of the church so that we can better understand why it should be a priority in our lives.

At the beginning of each gathering take a few minutes to connect with one another and get updated on the week. Then the discussion questions will begin with a few reflection notes about the message and progress into a discussion of the biblical text. Finally, there is a concluding prayer, which can be read aloud in the group after having discussed prayer requests from those attending.

## **Introduction**

**03/05/2017**

There is a growing trend within American society that not only devalues the church but identifies the church as *the* problem. This week, we'll begin a discussion that will seek to differentiate the “institution” of the church as classified by Harris, Hitchens and Dawkins from the movement that Jesus began.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Take a few minutes to recount John's message from Sunday. What things stood out?
2. Is there something from this past week's message that you would like to get feedback from the group about?
3. Was there any one thing that you most agreed with or disagreed with from last weekend's message? What was it and why?
4. What do you think of the argument “religion poisons” that Harris, Hitchens, Dawkins and others have leveled?
5. From your experience, what elements of the church do people accept or reject?
6. Which element(s) of the message seem most challenging to apply? How would your life change if you applied this message?
7. How would you define the mission of the church? Have you seen deviations from this mission and what were the impacts?



Read Isaiah 58:6-9

- <sup>6</sup>“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
<sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
<sup>8</sup>Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.  
<sup>9</sup>Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

8. Reflecting on these verses, what strikes you most? Why?
9. How does this image of God's mission to Israel align with the effect the church has today?
10. How does the message and person of Jesus impact or inform the message of Isaiah 58?
11. What is your role in this passage? What barriers or challenges stand in the way of seeing this message applied in your life?

### **Prayer Requests**

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.