

Group
Discussion
Guide

IMPACT

Welcome to the Impact C5 Experience!

Our hope is that over the next five weeks your group will learn, grow, and stretch together recognizing and living into the places you've been impacted by God to impact the world.

As a church, we're going to be exploring how God has impacted us and how He is calling us to impact Holland and the world beyond. We'll explore a few assumptions about where we believe culture is headed, and then offer some values we'll aim to embrace as we move forward into the future.

A few thousand years ago, the people of God (the Israelites) also had to navigate a critical transition season. This story is recorded in the book of Joshua*, which we'll use as a lens through which we view the current chapter of our story.

Thanks again for being part of this C5 experience. We look forward to learning with, and from, you.

Sincerely,

Steve & Craig

*If you're new to the book of Joshua, check out this link and article. It provides context for the story and a helpful explanation for one of the book's challenging themes: the conquest of the Promised Land.
<https://thebibleproject.com/blog/judgement-cruelty-conquering-promised-land/>

How to use this discussion guide

This guide is designed to help facilitate conversation as your group walks through the material. You will find several sections within each week:

Values

Our values are the core of who we are as a congregation, how we impact the world. As we move ahead in the next three years, stating what we value helps us clarify how, and why, we do what we do.

Assumptions About the Future of Ministry

These are conclusions we've drawn based on our observations and experiences about the future of the Church in our cultural context. These assumptions, along with our values, have helped us determine how we do, and plan to do ministry and impact the world we live in. We share these assumptions so that we share a common map as we move forward.

Scripture

The account of the Israelites moving into the Promised Land has been a guiding text for us for years. We hope you will consider examining the whole text - but we've provided you with relevant excerpts that we will dive into each week.

Discussion Questions

We have provided more discussion questions than you could possibly cover in a single week. Why? Because every group is different. We encourage group leaders to look at the questions before the group meets and determine which questions will be the most beneficial for your group.

September 8

Preparing for IMPACT

It takes a village
to take a city.

At Central, we are committed to the value of Whole-Hearted Engagement.

This week's ministry assumption:

In a post-Christian context, coming to Christ means more than attending church in a set location at a set time. Churches who thrive will build a community around engagement, not attendance.

When I was growing up, our family attended a small Baptist church in suburban Chicago. Every Sunday our family would drive, or walk the half mile if the weather was nice, to church and file into a pew near the back of the sanctuary. We'd sing the hymns along with the choir, or whoever was directing the music.

Then we'd pass the offering plate and Rev. Dr. Brown would deliver the sermon in a kind and stately manner. This was followed by a closing prayer and benediction. And then we'd all leave to go home, until it was time to do it again.

If your experience was at all like mine, participating in a church meant there was some singing, and some financial giving, but mostly just watching and listening. It was passive attendance and compliant worship.

But for the people of Israel, being a part of a faith community looked significantly different.

First of all, there was no church building, no synagogue to gather in. Even if one had existed, it wouldn't have been big enough to hold the over two million men, women and children who trekked through the desert together.

Every day, they had an opportunity to put feet to their faith. They woke up to manna, the miraculous bread God provided from heaven. When they took just enough for that day, they were declaring their trust in God's goodness.

When the Sabbath came, they all ceased from work to remind themselves and each other that they could trust God with whatever was left undone.

When God led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, they all moved, in unison, together. This had been their routine for as long as they could remember. Except for a handful of people, all of the Israelites we read about in Joshua were born in the desert. This “gather manna, eat, travel, sleep and rest on Sabbath” routine was all they knew.

Eventually, however, they came to the edge of the Promised Land, Canaan, standing at the edge of the unknown. Just like their ancestors crossed the Red Sea into freedom, so they crossed the Jordan River into the new future God had for them.

A significant obstacle remained though. The land is inhabited with people who didn’t welcome their arrival. And the strategic stronghold city, Jericho, stood between them and their destiny. Joshua, the leader of Israel, sent spies to scout out the opposition.

During their mission, they met a woman, Rahab, who offered to help them in exchange for protecting her and her family.

It was an encounter that reminds us God didn’t just command the indiscriminate destruction of Canaanites. Just as it was with the Egyptians, God called the Israelites to give even their enemies a chance to follow and worship God with them. On occasion, some people did, in fact, “change teams.”

The story picks up here in chapter 6:

Joshua 6:1-20 (NIV)

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

² Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it.”

⁷ And he ordered the army, “Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.”

⁸ When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them. ⁹ The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. ¹⁰ But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" ¹¹ So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. ¹³ The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. ¹⁴ So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!" ¹⁷ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. ¹⁸ But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. ¹⁹ All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."

²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

The Jericho story was a continuation of God's incredible intervention on Israel's behalf.

When Israel couldn't find their way, God led them.

When they couldn't find food, God fed them.

When they couldn't win a battle on their own, God fought for them.

But this passage doesn't just remind us of the faithfulness of God, it reveals how God mobilizes entire communities to impact the world.

Joshua 6 gives a model for a fully and actively engaged community of faith. Joshua 6:3 says **ALL** the armed men were to march, even though for the first six days of this mission, they didn't really do anything other than march. In

theory, God could have just sent the priests with the holy ark, accompanied by a front and rear guard. The text doesn't say exactly why everyone had to march, but the fact that they did created an emotional bond, a sense of shared ownership of the task at hand.

Joshua 6:5 instructed the **WHOLE** army to give a shout. Verse 20 indicates that they did. When the wall collapsed, the text says, "**EVERYONE** charged in."

ALL.

WHOLE.

EVERYONE.

The entire community participated.

There were no spectators.

God's expectation is for everyone to have an impact together.

And because the entire community participated, that wall was destroyed and Jericho was taken.

The impact of their faith was their first victory in the new territory.

Our hope for this Impact Experience is that everyone at Central will engage in what God is doing in each of us personally in this unique chapter in our history. The challenge for the next five weeks is to:

Join us for the weekend services.

Get into a C5 Group and commit to participating.

Choose to prayerfully discern what impact God is asking you to make as an

September 15

Impact through Relational Networks

Joining Hands
or Writing
Handbooks?

At Central, we are committed to the value of Relational Networks.

An assumption about Church Attendance:

The next generation of leaders will think relationally, in terms of networks, before they think theologically, in terms of denominations.

Brand Loyalty is low. Four out of five global companies didn't exist forty years ago. People are increasingly favoring brands and products that are younger. This is huge because the church represents a 2000-year-old faith and Central is 123 years old! While Central is committed to the Wesleyan Denomination we are also building our relational network, the Water's Edge Network. This allows us to think relationally while we hold fast to our theological foundations.

This is the first week you will be meeting with your C5 group. Maybe you have known each other a long time, or maybe you are basically perfect strangers. Over the coming weeks you will be digging into some tough conversations, and it's important to start from a place of relationship and trust.

Relationship and connection are critical within the body of Christ - but even when we all basically believe the same things and are working toward the same goals, misunderstanding can occur.

Take a look at this week's passage from Joshua:

Joshua 22:9-34 (NIV)

So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the Lord through Moses.

¹⁰ *When they came to Gilead near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan.* ¹¹ *And when the Israelites heard that they had built the*

altar on the border of Canaan at Geliath near the Jordan on the Israelite side,
¹²the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

¹³ So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. ¹⁴ With him they sent ten of the chief men, one from each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.

¹⁵ When they went to Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh—they said to them: ¹⁶ “The whole assembly of the Lord says: ‘How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now?’ ¹⁷ Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the Lord! ¹⁸ And are you now turning away from the Lord?

“‘If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. ¹⁹ If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. ²⁰ When Achan son of Zerah was unfaithful in regard to the devoted things, did not wrath come on the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.’”

²¹ Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: ²² “The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the Lord, do not spare us this day. ²³ If we have built our own altar to turn away from the Lord and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the Lord himself call us to account.

²⁴ “No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, ‘What do you have to do with the Lord, the God of Israel?’ ²⁵ The Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the Lord.’ So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the Lord.

²⁶ “That is why we said, ‘Let us get ready and build an altar—but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.’ ²⁷ On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the Lord at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no share in the Lord.’

²⁸ “And we said, ‘If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the Lord’s altar, which our ancestors built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’

²⁹ “Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the Lord our God that stands before his tabernacle.”

³⁰ When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of the Israelites—heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. ³¹ And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, “Today we know that the Lord is with us, because you have not been unfaithful to the Lord in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the Lord’s hand.”

³² Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. ³³ They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived.

³⁴ And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us—that the Lord is God.

The Reubenites and the Gadites faced a challenge none of the other tribes faced. They were separated from their fellow Israelites by a natural, physical boundary: the Jordan River. Joshua 3 tells that at certain times of the year, the river was impassable—a situation that threatened to cut off the Reubenites and Gadites from the rest of the faith family.

When those two tribes built an altar on the Israelite side of the Jordan, on the border of Canaan at Gelliloth, the other tribes mistakenly believed they were creating a worship site to compete with the one at Shiloh. The altar at Shiloh was the only sanctioned site for sacrifices and burnt offerings in all of Israel. To worship anywhere else would have been an act of spiritual treason. Any other altar would open the door for anyone, anywhere to build an unsanctioned place of worship. And this increased the chance that the Israelites would fall into worshipping the Canaanite gods, undermining the entire effort of taking the Promised Land.

Fun history fact: From 1921-1946, the nation that is now known as Jordan, used to be called the Emirate of Transjordan.

But the Reubenites and Gadites only constructed a symbolic altar-not an operational altar-so that future generations on the west side of the Jordan wouldn't forget that the Transjordan tribes were a part of their spiritual heritage.

So what does this have to do with us?

Like the tribes of Israel, we can agree on fundamental theology while our strategy for ministry is unique to our specific landscape. In the biblical account, the misunderstanding between the two groups nearly led to war. The only thing that stopped thousands from dying was an existing relationship that was leveraged to clear up a misunderstanding.

Historically, religious denominations have existed to promote the ideology, identity and personality of a particular spiritual "brand." Most denominations started as a part of another denomination and, in time, broke away over a contentious issue.

Denominations usually have their own infrastructures, policies, central headquarters, educational institutions, and guidelines for certifying pastors or clergy. Denominations can be useful for mobilizing and distributing resources (people, money and educational materials) for ministry.

The challenge can be that, as denominations grow in their geographic scope and size, the relational distance between local churches and the denominational center can grow; but building that close relationship becomes more difficult.

So how have churches responded? They have developed *networks built on relationships*.

Some larger churches have started campuses or regional sites, in effect, creating mini-denominations that are connected by relationships rather than regulations.

This isn't unlike the Transjordan tribes creating a mock altar to address needs and concerns within their specific context. They created their own little "Water's Edge Network" within Israel. Yes, they fully respected the other tribes and considered themselves to be a part of them. Even so, they believed their network was better equipped to make strategic decisions for their region.

As we discuss this week's questions please remember...

1. What is said in the group stays in the group.
2. You don't need to feel pressured to answer every question, as a participant or as a group.
3. We want everyone to have time to participate - so please keep your comments to 2-3 minutes per person.
4. Can't make it? We understand! We hope to see you next week, but please be sure to let your leader know so they can plan accordingly!
5. We hope that in your prayer request time you will be respectful of the time, as well as of the privacy of those who are not present.
6. If you happen to miss a sermon you are still welcome to attend your C5 group, and there is no doubt you will still be able to contribute to the discussion. We hope you will attend your group time anyway!

Questions to Discuss

Give each person in your group 2-3 minutes to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable about themselves. Specifically...

1. Where do you find yourself in your faith journey?
2. How have denominations and/or relational church networks positively impacted your life?
3. What are the key points of impact (specific places) God has shown up and used to make an impact on your life?
4. How has God used your relationship with Him to impact others?
5. How might God be calling you to impact others at work, with family, and in your community?
6. Share with your group an example of when the strong relationship you had with someone helped the both of you navigate a sticky situation, misunderstanding, or disagreement.

September 22

Impact through Inheritance

Best
Grandparents
Ever

At Central, we are committed to the value of Legacy Giving.

An Assumption about Church Financies:

Future generations will have less giving potential than their parents. This, coupled with changes in giving patterns and tax laws, means churches will need to diversify beyond check and cash to receive offerings. Additionally, church leaders will have to do more ministry with fewer resources. If this is true, there are things we can do that they won't be able to. For example we can improve spaces to meet the needs of a world very different from the world these spaces were created to meet. In this way we can leave a lasting legacy that will bolster generations to come.

When we think of inheritance and legacy we are generally thinking about one thing. Money. Are you or members of your group uncomfortable talking about money? You aren't alone. But interestingly, the largest single section of the book of Joshua describes each tribe's inheritance. It runs from Joshua 14-21, a full eight chapters.

Joshua 14:1-2, 6-15 (NIV)

Now these are the areas the Israelites received as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel allotted to them. ² Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine and a half tribes, as the Lord had commanded through Moses.

⁶ *Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. ⁷ I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, ⁸ but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. ⁹ So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.'*[a]

¹⁰ "Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.¹² Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

¹³ Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. 14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.¹⁵ (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war.

When the Israelites initially left Egypt, God gave them an opportunity to enter the land of Canaan. Moses, their leader, sent twelve spies into the land to survey it. The group returned with good news: The land was lush and vast. The bad news? The inhabitants of the land were a formidable foe. The consensus from the group was: "Don't go. It's too dangerous. Success is unlikely, let's live to fight another day".

There were only two dissenting voices: Joshua and Caleb. God honored their faith and tenacity by allowing them to survive the full forty years in the wilderness and finally settle into the very land they walked before.

Joshua 14:9 *So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.'*

God's reward to Caleb was multi-generational; his inheritance was to be a gift to his children's children. As a result, Caleb has a vested interest in claiming the land from the Anakites.

If he didn't, his children wouldn't be able to fully appreciate it and the Anakites would have been a constant threat and thorn to them.

Caleb was going to do what they could not, so they would one day do what he could not.

Caleb had seen the horror of war and the aftermath of violence. Yes, he had already paid his dues as a combatant. He had every right to hang up his sword and call it a day. After all, he was eighty-five, so he deserved to sit by the pool and play golf in retirement, right?

But Caleb knew that was easier for those with combat experience to finish what they started than it was for the next generation to learn how to do it on their own. Because he was gifted at fighting battles, he was going to fight for his children. His dream for them was to focus on passing faith in God to his descendants.

Joshua 14:15b says, “Then the land had rest from war.”

Caleb’s commitment to leverage his resources (in this case his military skill and experience) on behalf of the next generation, including his children and grandchildren, gave them a great gift. There are many things Caleb couldn’t give them, but he gave the one thing he could: “rest from war.” He gave them peace of mind so they would have one less issue to worry about going forward.

Caleb couldn’t guarantee they would choose to follow the Lord, but he could remove an obstacle that threatened their ability to do so.

The best grandparents ever are those who are leveraging their wisdom, their insight and their financial resources to impact a future generation to know and serve God.

Questions to discuss:

1. Have you encountered a time where you felt you needed to walk into a situation, while others were urging you to walk away from it? What did you do? Would you make the same choice if you had it to do over again?
2. What inheritance has been left to you, the current Central family, by believers who came before us?
3. How has God used this inheritance to impact us as a church?
4. How has God used this inheritance to impact you and your family?
5. How has God used this inheritance to impact Holland and the world?
6. What legacy and inheritance do you think God is calling you to leave

September 29

Impact through Rites

Welcoming
Mat Weddings,
Front Door
Funerals.

At Central, we are committed to the value of hosting Rites of Passage as opportunities for outreach, which requires we invest in Variable and Flexible Space.

An Assumption regarding Church Architecture and Building Use:

Rites of passage will need to become increasingly more evangelistic, and facilities increasingly more flexible, to maximize all of the moments that bring people through our doors “naturally.” [In an uncertain future variability and flexibility are critical. Our new spaces meet this criterion, other critical spaces do not.]

The church landscape in America is changing, rapidly and literally. I’ve seen and heard of historic church buildings being repurposed as lofts, restaurants, or art galleries. About ten years ago, I was touring a massive new church building that was under construction. My tour guide for the day marveled, “Just think... this building will be here in one hundred years.” I immediately remember thinking, “As what? A mall? A movie theater? Something else?” The style and use of places of worship seems to be ever-evolving.

The same is true of many of our homes. I recently heard a realtor explain that certain layouts of high-end homes in suburban Chicago were no longer holding their market value. He explained that younger families aren’t looking for maximum total square footage, they were looking for maximized usable space. They aren’t looking for formal dining rooms or living rooms anymore. They tend to favor open layouts with rooms that can serve different purposes in different seasons.

I remember being a part of a building project for a church years ago. The architect designed a modern, fixed-seat, sloped floor auditorium that could eventually be converted into a gym. Over time, however, the church leaders realized the building lacked an intimate space for weddings and funerals that felt more traditional. Eventually, they built a beautiful chapel with simple, stained glass panels, a high ceiling with skylights, understated padded pews and an exquisite hand-carved wooden cross at the front.

Whenever there was a wedding, funeral, or baby dedication, family and friends would enter in the lobby and move straight to the chapel entrance. I think you could make the case that more unchurched, de-churched, and post-churched people came to hear about Jesus at services in the chapel than they did in the auditorium. And vice versa, there were people who attended services in the auditorium for years before they ever realized the church had a chapel.

This example shows the value of churches having different kinds of spaces that they can use in different ways, at different times, for different reasons. When they wanted to use the chapel for a youth event, they could close the blinds on the skylight, cover the stained-glass panels and use concert lighting for the stage. Conversely, the auditorium was sometimes used for larger memorial services. The production team used lighting and drapes to make the room feel appropriate for the occasion. Just as younger families don't want to invest in a formal dining room they might only use three or four times a year, many modern churches are opting for a flexible and variable use plan when it comes to their buildings.

What, you may ask, does this have to do with the story in the book of Joshua? The answer lies in Joshua 5. This episode occurred after the people entered the land, but before they approached the city of Jericho. It describes how this generation of Israelites was called to make the faith of their ancestors their own. God called them to follow already prescribed rituals, namely circumcision and Passover.

God directed their forefather, Abraham, to formalize his relationship with God through circumcision*. He did this as an alien living in Canaan.

Genesis 17:9-14 (NIV)

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Now, Joshua's generation was called to make the same covenant, this time as residents and stewards of the land.

Joshua 5:2-12

² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

⁴ Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the Lord. For the Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰ On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. ¹¹ The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. ¹² The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

God invited an entire generation of Israelites to re-establish their identity as the people of God. He gave a concrete ritual to remind them of their connection to God, their ancestors and each other. For as much as culture has changed, one constant has been our desire to mark milestones in our lives: Births, marriages and deaths.

Not everyone chooses to have their children baptized or dedicated in a church.

Not everyone opts for a church wedding anymore.

Not everyone decides to be memorialized in a church setting these days.

But many still do, especially in towns that have a rich spiritual heritage and a plethora of religious buildings.

And when these milestone moments happen at a church, the wedding serves as a kind of “Welcome Mat,” the funeral acts as a type of Front Door. The goal, then, for churches like ours, is to recognize that these moments are critical and valuable opportunities to declare the person of Jesus and goodness of

God to people who are open to spiritual truths, but might not otherwise come to church.

Christ-centered rituals, then, create a spiritual space to impact others through experiencing hope, joy and comfort in the person of Jesus. And flexible and variable use rooms offer us the physical space for these moments to happen.

*Circumcision is a controversial and much-debated topic among new parents these days. For this discussion, it's important to recognize why circumcision mattered to the people of God. God created a physical ritual in order to cement Israel's identity as people who were unique and distinct from their neighbors. Circumcision was a visceral reminder for the entire community to anchor all of who they were: Spirit, mind, and body, in their faith in God.

Questions to Discuss:

1. Have you had your children dedicated? Was that a rite of passage for you as a parent? If you've never considered child dedications as a rite of passage, how might you see that they could or should be?
2. Consider weddings, graduations, "big" anniversaries, birthdays, baptisms or funerals. How could we be intentional about recognizing them as spiritual rites of passage that are very much reflections of our faith in God?
3. What has been the most impactful rite of passage in your life so far?
4. Has God ever silently asked you to re-establish your identity as a person of God? What did that look like and how did you respond?
5. In what ways are weddings "Welcome Mats" and funerals "Front Doors" to those who are open to spiritual truths, but might not otherwise come to church?
6. What ways could we use celebrations and rites of passage to impact our communities in the next year?

October 6

Impacted through Environment

Larger and
Smaller:
Landing in
the Land

At Central, we are committed to the value of Larger Numbers of Smaller Gatherings.

An Assumption Regarding Church Size

(The Larger and Smaller Principle)

The church will become bigger and smaller at the same time. Churches will grow in size not necessarily because they gather thousands together in one space, but because they gather thousands together through multiple smaller venues under shared leadership.

Until this point in the story, all the tribes of Israelites had been traveling through the wilderness. When they fought at Jericho and Ai, they fought as a whole group. Eventually, every tribe settled into their own respective territories. In some ways, this must feel like high school graduation, everyone who had experienced so much together is preparing to go their own way. Each tribe would have their own land to grow and flourish. As a result, this once-centralized nation was being dispersed.

At the end of the story, Joshua brings all of Israel together for his farewell speech. He wants to remind them of where they've been, of who they are and of what's coming next.

Joshua 24:1-15 (NIV)

¹ Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

² Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

⁵ “Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen[a] as far as the Red Sea.[b] ⁷ But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

⁸ “I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. ⁹ When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

¹¹ “Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. ¹³ So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

¹⁴ “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:25-28

²⁴ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

²⁷ “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

It had to be a strange sensation for the Israelite tribes to go back to their respective territories. But Joshua reminded them that even though they may have felt smaller in number, they were uniquely positioned to grow as tribes. And healthy, growing tribes make for a healthy, growing nation.

Many churches are realizing it's impossible to scale multi-thousand person gatherings, facilities and staff-teams. So, rather than having a centralized model, they are redirecting resources to impact smaller, local, decentralized models that can flex, adapt and thrive in their contexts.

Joshua reminded the people that no matter what configuration they would gather in going forward, they would always share: A common God, a common story, and a common covenant.

Questions to Discuss:

1. What is the “larger and smaller” principle? In what contexts have you seen this applied?
2. How has gathering in a smaller context, such as this C5 Group, benefited you in ways that perhaps meeting in a larger context, such as Sunday worship, cannot?
3. Read Joshua 23:14-15. What would you consider “gods” in Holland, MI, that this generation might “worship?”
4. In your life, what would you consider as “territories the Lord has given you?” How have you used those for His glory?
5. What does it look like for those in your group to share a common God and a common story? What, if any, are the benefits of sharing these things in common?
6. How might we miss out on those benefits if we aren't leaning into relationships where sharing our common God and our common story are not integral?
7. Do we emphasize the importance of sharing a common God and a common story within our families? What does that look like? How might we do that in an increasingly deeper way.

October 13

Impact through Diverse Community

A preview of
Heaven

At Central, we are committed to the value of Worshiping in Diversity.

An Assumption on Changing Demographics:

Future generations will embrace diverse churches because they represent what is normal to them. By 2042 the United States will be minority white – preschools by 2021. Future church attendees will gravitate towards diverse churches.

Sometimes, when we read the Bible, it's tempting to think that whenever the people of God came together to worship, they were a homogeneous group. We can easily get the sense that everyone, because they are ethnically Jewish, looked the same. The truth is: This wasn't the case. Diversity is not some newfangled idea; God designed His Body to be diverse and desires for us to worship together across lines of race, class, gender, and nationality.

Look at who was represented when Joshua called Israel to renew their covenant with God at Mount Ebal.

Joshua 8:30-35 (NIV)

³⁰ Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses—an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the Lord burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. ³² There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the law of Moses. ³³ All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing the Levitical priests who carried it. Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

³⁴ Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them.

The community included every class of Israelites: Elders, officials, judges, priests (8:33).

It affirmed the presence of both genders (men and women).

It celebrated the value of all generations (adults and children).

It embraced a plurality of nationalities (native-born and foreigners).

Who are these foreigners who joined Israel?

Exodus 11:3 (NIV) says, *(The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people.)* So, it's likely that some of the Israelites Egyptian neighbors joined them before they fled from Egypt.

Also, it's possible the Israelites picked up some converts from the Amorites as they traveled through the wilderness. The books of Exodus and Numbers describe God's undeniable and miraculous provision for Israel in the years leading up to their move into Canaan.

In fact, the Hebrew word for "foreigner" appears more in the book of Deuteronomy (the book with instructions for how to live in the Promised Land) than any other text in the Old Testament. From the very beginning of their story as a nation, God made it clear that he intended them to honor, welcome and worship with those who didn't look like them.

Later in the Scriptures, God reminds Israel of His desire for them to worship, not just with individuals who are outsiders, but entire groups of non-Jews, even their sworn enemies. God envisioned a worshipping people that were more than just ethnic Israel with a few outsiders sprinkled in, but entire nations lifting up His name together. The center of worship will not be a place or one people, the center of worship will be God Himself. All those He calls are welcome to worship Him together.

Isaiah 19:23-25 (NIV)

²³In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. ²⁴In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. ²⁵The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

At Pentecost, God gave the first followers of Jesus a foretaste of a multinational, multi-ethnic and multilingual worship experience.

Acts 2:5-12 (NIV)

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

While those gathered in Jerusalem were religiously Jewish, many of them were ethnically from other people groups. In fact, depending on how you interpret the list in Acts 2, there were at least sixteen distinct language and/or regional groups represented there. God’s commitment to each group was so strong that, even though all spoke a common language, He chose to communicate the gospel to them in their “heart languages.”

In the last few decades, the travel and information revolution have made the world feel smaller. Through social media, we can “friend” people on the other side of the world. With modern air travel, we can travel to the other side of the earth in less than twenty-four hours.

We are living in a unique era in human history that allows us to imagine, or even experience, what it feels like to have many ethnicities gathered in the same place to worship.

The Book of Revelation tell us this is what eternity will look like: *Revelation. 7:9-10* ⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

God is folding the corners of the world into West Michigan. War and crisis have brought refugees from Asia and Africa. Economic opportunity and industry have brought people from Canada, Mexico, Europe and Asia. We are deeply committed to being the kind of worshipping community that reflects the diversity of our zip code. We look forward to creating initiatives and opportunities to connect with others, whose backstories and languages are different than ours, so we can with one voice cry out, “Salvation belongs to

Questions to Discuss:

1. According to Joshua 8:33, who did Joshua include, affirm, celebrate, and embrace with these words? *“All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing the Levitical priests who carried it. Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.”*
2. In conjunction with Question 1, why would he have done that?
3. God designed His Body to be diverse and desires for us to worship together across lines of race, class, gender and nationality. Why do you suppose that is His desire?
4. Through technology, how are we uniquely positioned to reach people we might never have reached before? Have you ever used technology to connect with someone regarding Christ who wasn't a friend or relative? What was that experience like for you?
5. How is God folding the corners of the world into West Michigan? How has that impacted you personally?
6. How has God used you through this “folding of the corners of the world into West Michigan” to impact others?



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