Connection To Unit Theme: *Connected: My Life in the Church* is a six session study from the book of Ephesians, based on *I Am A Church Member* by Thom Rainer. These theme-based sermon outlines will cover the same topics as are being studied in the small groups, but with a different focal passage of Scripture. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about, without “stealing their thunder.” Session 3 of *Connected* is called “Connected in Growth,” and The Point is, “Church members need one another in order to grow in Christ.”

Sermon Series (options):
Church Life Is Kingdom Life
Your Kingdom Come: How Christ the King Builds His Church
Advancing His Kingdom: Why Healthy Churches Matter

As we live together sharing in redemptive community, we better understand the importance of building up each other as we use our God-given gifts. But sometimes we are selective in whom we chose to receive such spiritual encouragement. Who’s the expert in this subject? Who’s attended seminary with certified credentials? Occasionally we need to be reminded that everyone has a place in God’s kingdom; and it takes everyone participating (using their gifts) in the local gathering for everyone to receive the mutual benefit. But before this can happen, there needs to be a certain inclusive tone that resonates within the local church. In Matthew 20:1-16 Jesus teaches a kingdom parable that can easily repel a prideful, religious person. Jesus taught that, on several levels, there is no distinction between those who come to work early in the vineyard and those who come to work late. God pays each of them a full-day’s wage. Yes, this parable was originally intended for the nation of Israel to understand inclusive nature of the kingdom of God. But we long-abiding “church folk” (young and old), should apply this same kingdom notion to our church congregation as well. Remember, church life is kingdom life!

Introduction:
Say something like…
When expounding upon one of Jesus’ parables, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the Good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'

At the turn of the twentieth century, Booker T. Washington published his autobiography, entitled *Up from Slavery*. It chronicles his personal experiences from slave child during the Civil War to gaining an education at university. As a free man who tirelessly worked to help other blacks and disadvantaged minorities gain skills to become educated, he reflected back to this simple conclusion. Washington says, “Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.” In his freedom, Booker T. found his life’s purpose in serving and lifting up others. We are all created equal, and we should all have the chance to live our lives to the fullest. It is no different in the kingdom of God. And it should be no different in His church.

Read Matthew 20:1-14 and explain that even though this parable was originally intended for the nation of Israel to understand inclusive nature of the kingdom of God, the church would be the better for it if she embraced this notion, as well. Remind them that “church life” is “kingdom life!”
1. Everyone Has An Equal Promise Because God Sees The Potential (Matt 20:1-14).

Consider the backdrop and context of this parable. Land owners who needed workers used day laborers. This was a common practice. The normal daily pay for a laborer was one denarius, and the normal day’s work lasted twelve hours. They began their work early in the morning (6:00am). We know this because more workers came at the third hour (which is 9:00am). So about every three hours, the land owner went out and found more day laborers—the sixth hour (12:00pm), the ninth hour (3:00pm), and the eleventh hour (5:00pm). Regardless of the time that was left in the day, there was still more work to be done which means there’s always a place for more workers. God promises to everyone (1) a position in the field, and (2) a wage. This parable reveals so much about the heart of God and His sovereignty in His calling.

Application: God sees the potential harvest, but He sees the potential in the person as well. It is obvious that God cares about those who diligently work the harvest (partner with Him in ministry). *Do we have a place for everyone in our churches? If we do, does our attitude of inclusion compliment this reality? *Ask God to show you where the church needs to change to reflect this truth.

2. Everyone Has An Equal Payday Because God Is Generous (Matt 20:15).

We see from the very beginning that the landowner is fair. He hires men to work in his vineyard and agrees to pay them one denarius. This was the normal daily pay for a day laborer. But the land owner is more than fair, he is generous because he gives those who worked only a few hours the same full-day’s wage. Notice that the price was set for those who came to work in the morning, but for the other workers there was no stipulated wage. They only knew they would get “whatever was right.” Highlight verse 15 as the land owner asks, “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” The landowner argues that he has the right to do what he chose with his money. He reminds those who were jealous not to be envious of his generosity. Jesus was speaking directly to the religious elite of His day. The nation of Israel (as well as the Pharisees) had enjoyed a prominent place in God’s eyes for far too long. But the same generosity they had received for centuries was going to be offered to all people of all nations.

Application: Just because we have a prominent place in a local church doesn’t mean we have a prominent place in God’s kingdom. Just because we have been a life-long church member doesn’t mean we hold a special place in God’s eyes or in the church. We need to practice in our churches the reality of this kingdom truth. Everyone is worthy of God’s promises—no matter how long they have been a Christian. As long as they are “working” (partnering with God in ministry and abiding in Christ) they are considered co-laborers in the Lord. *Monthly, quarterly, or annually, celebrate those who have been at it for a long time, but also celebrate those who have only begun their journey with Christ.

3. Everyone Has An Equal Place Because God Is Unbiased (Matt 20:16).

Matthew 20:16 is the key verse for the entire parable. “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” This expression reveals a specific kingdom notion that guarantees equality. It is not a formula for how to finish first. It is not an imperative to indulge in self-deprecating behavior or attitude. This phrase means “we are all equal.” We do not need to think less of ourselves to apply this kingdom notion. We just need to value others as God does—placing value and equality on others in every way.

Application: God does not play favorites. He is not prejudice in any way. Yes, God desires ministry and work, but He values the workers more. This is consistent with so many other...
passages of Scripture that speak of equality in Christ (ex. Gal 3:28-29). *Ask this question, “Where do you think this isn’t happening in the church?” Pray and ask God to help you address that in your sermon preparation deliver. *Consider engaging in a ministry endeavor that would challenge the assumptions of cultural or spiritual bias.

**Conclusion:**

We should want and welcome newcomers, new members, and new converts into our church. But what are they going to experience when they get there? Prejudice and bias or an open invitation of acceptance wrapped in genuine love and respect? Church leaders, elders, ministry leaders and directors should set the same tone in their local congregations and ministries that the land owner set in his fields. We are in this together! In Luke 10:2 Jesus says, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”