



UPSTATE GROUP GUIDE

Through the Bible

September 8 - 14

Matthew 16

Things to Know

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Gospel Connections and Conversations

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Studying God's Word *In Community*

*Reminder: Seek to understand and apply God's word, **not** rehash the sermon.*

Sermon Recap

The Church is Built on Christ's Confession — Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This confession is the foundation of our faith and the rock on which the church stands.

The Church is God's People on Mission — The church is not a building but the people of God. Jesus promises His church will be built, and He calls us to join Him in advancing His mission, not retreating into comfort.

The Church is Empowered for Victory — With the keys of the kingdom, Christ has given us authority to proclaim the gospel, push back the darkness, and storm the gates of hell.

Discussion Questions

1. In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asks, *"Who do you say that I am?"* How would you answer that question personally, and why does that confession matter so much for the church?
 2. Jesus calls the church *"my church"* (v.18). What difference does it make in your life to remember that the church belongs to Jesus and not to us?
 3. How does it challenge you to think of the church as people on mission instead of a building or weekly event?
 4. Jesus promises that *"the gates of hell shall not prevail"* against His church (v.18). What does it look like for us to live with that kind of boldness and confidence in our faith?
 5. Jesus gives the church "the keys of the kingdom" (v.19). How can you personally use the gospel to unlock hope and freedom for others this week?
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Read

Read Matthew 16:13-20 and make observations about the text.

- What is God teaching us in the passage?
 - What does this reveal about who God is, what God has done, and how I should respond?
 - Which part of the text was most meaningful to you and why?
 - What do you need help understanding about this passage?
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Scripture

Matthew 16:13-20

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” **20** Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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Matthew 16:13-20

Living on Mission In Community

The call of Jesus in Matthew 16 is clear: the church is not a building to sit in but a people sent out. If the church is built on the confession that Jesus is the Christ, then our lives must reflect that confession daily. We are not called to play church, to coast in comfort, or to treat faith like a hobby. Instead, Jesus gives us the promise that His church will be built, the mission to storm the gates of hell, and the power of the gospel to set captives free. The question is not whether Christ’s church will advance—the question is whether we will step off the sidelines and join Him in His mission. So, how is God calling you to stop playing church and start being the church this week?

How is God leading me to respond to His Word this week?

Optional Breakout Questions

Consider making time at the end of the group to break out into groups of 2-4 (keep them gender specific). Have them answer these three questions about their weeks:

1. How did you feed yourself?
 - *(What have you been doing to feed your spiritual life, and how is it going?)*
2. How did you feed others?
 - *(How did you share the gospel or gospel truth with someone this week?)*
3. How did you feed your flesh?
 - *(What sins did you struggle with this week? How can your friends hold you accountable?)*

Leader Resources - September 8-14

Small Group Curriculum

Text: Matthew 16:13–20

Theme: *The Church Ain't No Hobby: Living as God's People on Mission for God*

1. Session Overview

In Matthew 16, Jesus defines His church for the very first time. At the heart of the church is a confession: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” From this confession flows the identity, mission, and power of the church. The church is not a building or a hobby; it is the blood-bought people of God advancing the mission of Christ.

Main Idea: The church is the people of God, built on the confession of Christ, advancing with the power of God—and there is no room for retreat.

2. Opening

- **Prayer:** Begin by thanking God for His church worldwide and locally. Ask Him to open hearts to understand what it means to truly *be* the church and not just *play* church.
- **Icebreaker Question:** “When you hear the word *church*, what’s the first thing that comes to mind? A place? An event? People? Why?”
- **Accountability Prompt:** In groups of 2–3, share one way God has been at work in your life this week and one area where you need prayer to grow in your personal walk with Him.

3. Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 16:13–20 aloud together.

4. Teaching Points

A. A Foundational Confession (vv. 15–17)

- The church is built on the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- Peter’s declaration is the “What We Believe” statement of Christianity.
- Without this confession, there is no Christianity, no salvation, and no church.

Commentary Note: Jesus is not building His church on Peter's personality but on the proclamation of Christ. Peter himself later identifies Jesus as the true cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6–7).

B. The Church is Built (v. 18a)

- Jesus calls the church "*my church*"—it belongs to Him, not us.
- The church is people, not a place; Christ gathers us as His blood-bought family.
- Jesus promises His church will be built. The question is whether we will join Him in His mission or sit on the sidelines.

C. The Enemy is Defeated (v. 18b)

- Gates are defensive, not offensive. The church is meant to storm the gates of hell, not hide behind walls.
- The mission of Christ is advancing and unstoppable—so the church must be advancing too.
- Retreat, comfort, and consumer Christianity are not options.

D. The Power of God is Given (v. 19)

- Jesus gives His people the "keys of the kingdom," representing gospel authority.
- Through gospel proclamation, we open the kingdom to those who believe and declare closed the kingdom to those who reject Christ.
- The church has real spiritual power—not to play games, but to bind the enemy's works and set captives free.

5. Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, why is Peter's confession the foundation of the church? (v. 16)
2. What are some ways people today "play church" instead of *being* the church?
3. How does remembering that *we are the church, not the building* change the way we think about Sunday gatherings?
4. Jesus promised His church would be built. How does this promise encourage you personally when you think about the mission of Upstate Church?
5. What does it practically look like for the church to "storm the gates of hell"? How can you personally participate in this mission?
6. How have you experienced the "keys of the kingdom" at work in your life—either in sharing the gospel, in prayer, or in spiritual breakthrough?

6. Application Points

- Personal: Stop playing church. Examine your life: is Christ your personal confession, or are you riding on someone else's faith?

- **Relational:** Identify one person in your workplace, family, or neighborhood who needs Jesus. Pray and make a plan this week to share your faith or invite them into community.
- **Missional:** Commit to serving and advancing the mission of the church—not as a hobby, but as the call of God. Ask yourself: *Am I a spectator or a participant in building Christ's church?*

7. Closing Reflection and Prayer

- **Reflect:** “What step is God calling me to take so that I stop playing church and start storming the gates of hell?”
- **Pray in groups:** Thank God for the confession that Jesus is the Christ. Ask Him to build His church through you, to give boldness in mission, and to empower you to use the keys of the kingdom faithfully this week.

8. Memory Verse

Matthew 16:18 — *“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

9. Leader’s Notes

- Encourage honesty in the accountability section. Lead by example in vulnerability.
- When discussing statistics or urgency, remind the group that this isn’t meant to overwhelm but to awaken us to the reality of the mission.
- If the group stalls on application, push gently with questions like: *“Who do you know personally that you could share your confession of Christ with this week?”*
- Close with urgency but hope: Jesus *will* build His church—the privilege is that He invites us to be a part of it.