



He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, "You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem! You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses. – Luke 24:45-48 (*The Message*)

When you talk about the "church" today, people have all kinds of reactions and opinions about what church "is" or what church "should be". This month, we're going to focus on who we are as Clay Church. With a foundation in the Bible and a new strategic plan for Clay Church that is being developed in prayer and study by a dedicated group of leaders, we're going to talk about what draws us and holds us together. We'll explore who God calls us to be as the church, and how there is a place and a role in the church for you and for everyone.

# WHO ARE WE?

**SEPTEMBER 11**

**EMBRACING EVERY PERSON**

**Luke 24:13-35**

Jesus meets Cleopas and the other disciple in the midst of their despair and confusion, and they recognize him only when they offer the embrace of warm hospitality. What does it mean to be a church of embrace? How can we both experience and offer the embrace of God's love?

**We are a church who seeks to embrace all people in the love of Jesus.**

**SEPT 12-17**

Monday	Read Luke 24:13-16. What can prevent us from recognizing or knowing the presence of Jesus in our lives?
Tuesday	Read Luke 24:17-24. What things are causing people to be downcast, to question, and to lose hope in our world today?
Wednesday	Read Luke 24:25-31. How can offering hospitality and the embrace of God's love to others help reveal Christ's presence?
Thursday	Read Luke 15:11-20. How can we, as followers of Jesus, offer God's embrace to those who are lost or hurting?
Friday	Read Genesis 33:1-4. As Jacob and Esau experienced, how can embracing someone in the love of God provide healing in relationships?
Saturday	Read Isaiah 40:9-11. How would you describe the power of the embrace of God's love in someone's life?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Describe the best hug you can remember in your life.
2. When have you felt God's embrace in your life, perhaps through the church or the actions of a follower of Jesus.
3. Pastor Brian spoke in the message about how easy it can be to give into despair, to think we're alone, to give up or bail out. In those moments we can lean out or lean in. What does it look like as a follower of Jesus to lean in?
4. What are ways that you, or your Clay Circle or small group, could share the embrace of Jesus beyond our church family?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Reach out and embrace someone this week who you know could use a reminder that he or she is loved. A few ideas: take someone to lunch, offer a dinner invite, share a coffee, deliver a meal, or visit a shut-in.

# WHO ARE WE?

**SEPTEMBER 18**

**IGNITING PASSIONS**

**Luke 24:13-35**

After Cleopas and the other disciple recognize Jesus and he disappears, they speak of their hearts burning as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. In other words, once they better understood the Good News, their passion to share that news was ignited. Their lives, in that moment, were transformed. So what about us? Today, how is the Holy Spirit igniting our passions to share the Good News of Jesus?

**We are a church where the Holy Spirit ignites passions and we serve where God leads.**

**SEPT 19-24**

Monday	Read Luke 24:32. How has God's word or a faith experience in your life moved you, or caused your "heart to burn" (NIV)?
Tuesday	Read Luke 24:33-35. What keeps us from going "at once" (NIV) when the Spirit nudges us to step out in faith and share the love of Jesus?
Wednesday	Read Romans 12:10-11. What does it look like to always be passionate about serving Jesus, "never...lacking in zeal" (NIV)?
Thursday	Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Do you think being a passionate follower of Jesus is more about emotion or more about discipline? Why?
Friday	Read 2 Timothy 1:6-12. How can you fan into flame the gift God has given you in your life?
Saturday	Read Mark 12:28-30. How does Jesus describe the life of a passionate follower?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What would people who know you say you are most passionate about?
2. Who is someone who inspires you because of their passion for following Jesus?
3. What problems in our community move you, or cause your heart to ache or burn?
4. What ministries of the church, and/or their impact, make you most excited?
5. What are your dreams and hopes for your life as a follower of Jesus? For Clay Church?
6. What ideas do you have about how you could use your gifts with others to make an impact for Jesus in our community?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** In a time of prayer, make a list of dreams for how Clay Church could be making an impact in the community with the sharing of your passions, talents, and gifts, and the gifts of others. Choose one dream from your list and share it with another member of the church or your Clay Circle.

# WHO ARE WE?

**SEPTEMBER 25**

**EXPANDING CHRIST'S LOVE**

**Luke 24:36-49**

Once Cleopas and the other disciple know Jesus is alive, they are no longer afraid of what lies ahead. They join the other disciples, and Jesus appears again and calls them to be witnesses of everything they have seen. And they do. Despite the risk. Despite the challenges that lie ahead. They are fully committed to expanding the love of Christ into a world that doesn't always want to hear the message of grace and forgiveness.

**We are a church committed to expanding the love of Jesus Christ into our families, our community, and our world.**

**SEPT 26 – OCT 1**

Monday	Read Luke 5:17-26. What stories of the healing and hope of Jesus can you share with others?
Tuesday	Read Luke 10:1-16. How are the instructions Jesus gives to His followers relevant for us today?
Wednesday	Read Luke 14:15-24. Why do you think gathering at the table is so central to the ministry of Jesus?
Thursday	Read Luke 24:36-43. What are the range of reactions and emotions that come from encounters with Jesus?
Friday	Read Luke 24:44-49. What does it mean to you to be a witness for Jesus and His love?
Saturday	Read Acts 26:19-32. What have you learned from the Bible about expanding Christ's love?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Share a time when someone snuck up and scared you.
2. What do you think the disciples experienced when Jesus suddenly appeared to them? What do you think they felt when He called them one more time to be witnesses?
3. Why does the message of Jesus matter? Why does the church matter?
4. As followers of Jesus, how are we called to be witnesses? How can you be a witness?
5. With inspiration from all the meals shared by Jesus, and stories about meals, how could we expand the love of Jesus at our gatherings around tables?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Read through the draft of the Clay Church Strategic Plan presented in worship today. In each of the 3 areas of focus, reflect on how God might be calling you to take one step as a witness for Christ, helping us live into our vision of embrace, ignite, and expand.