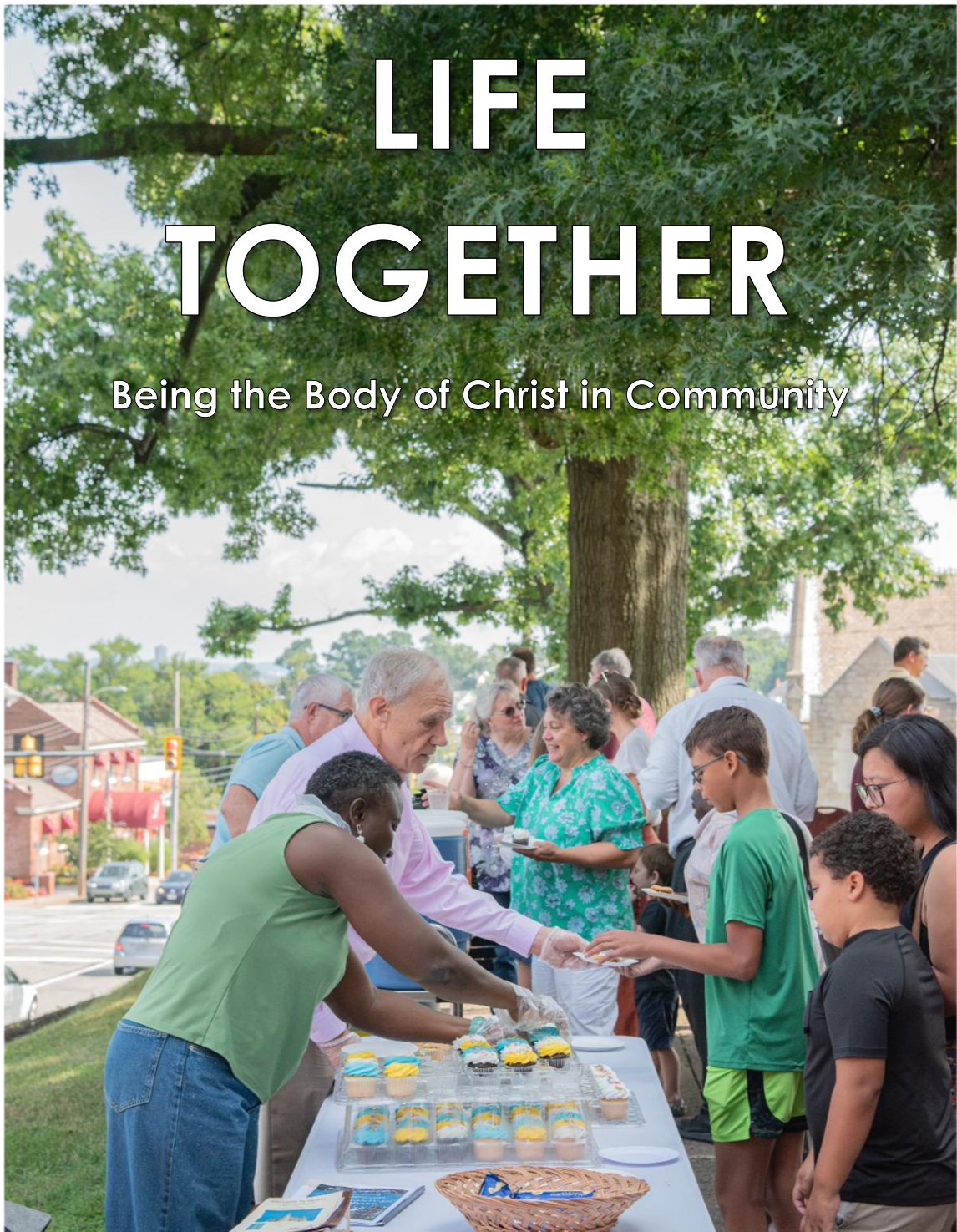




Study Guide for September 13-October 4, 2026

Mt. Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church
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mlepc.org

Welcome to Life Together!

September 2026

Dear MLEPC Family,

We are excited to offer our Fall Kick-off Sermon Series on Life Together. As our session has prayed through our hopes and dreams for our church, we have sensed that God is guiding us to invest in helping our church family draw closer together. As you will find in this study, we were literally created to be in community. That is how God wired us, and it is also how Jesus modeled ministry for us. We need each other.

In my dissertation research, one of the strongest threads I found was that the pandemic exposed our need for connection. We may spend our time being busy (inside and outside the church), but have we built abiding relationships that will last? We may have hundreds of friends on social media, but how many of them really know the deep parts of our hearts? Our dream is for MLEPC to be full of meaningful relationships that support us in the good and bad times, so that we can grow to be more like Christ.

I am especially thankful for Ben Kendrew, our new Discipleship Director. Hiring him was our first priority in building connections here, and he is off to a great start. He actually wrote this Life Together study for his former church, and we know it will be a blessing for MLEPC as well.

We are confident that as we grow in our love for God and love for our neighbors, we will find healing and new life. Let us be the body of Christ together here in the South Hills and far beyond, to God's glory!

Blessings,
Pastor Carolyn

MESSAGE 1: DESIGNED TO CONNECT

September 13, 2026

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 1:1-2, 26

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Genesis 2:18

¹⁸The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

John 1:1-4

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Use these questions to explore the message and Scripture together. Select the questions that best serve your group's conversation, while making time for both reflection and practical response.

OBSERVE: WHAT IS THERE?

1. In Genesis 1:26, what do the words "Let us make human beings in our image" reveal about God and about us?
2. What contrast do you see between God's repeated declaration that creation was good and His statement in Genesis 2:18 that it was not good for the man to be alone?

3. According to Matthew 22:36-40, how are loving God and loving other people connected?
4. What images or phrases from the sermon best illustrate the difference between merely being around people and truly connecting with them?

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

5. What does the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit teach us about the relational character of God?
6. Why does being created in God's image include a desire and a responsibility to live in meaningful community?
7. Today's sermon says there is both a God-shaped void and a people-shaped void in us. What does that mean, and why does one not replace the other?
8. How can isolation lead to spiritual vulnerability, fear of intimacy, selfishness, or poor health? Which consequence seems most significant to you?

APPLICATION: NOW WHAT?

9. Where in your life are you currently connected in a deep and meaningful way, and where are you simply bumping into people?
10. What has made connection difficult for you: busyness, past hurt, fear, independence, or something else?
11. Who is one person with whom God may be inviting you to build a more honest and intentional relationship?
12. What specific step will you take this week to make time for connection with God and with another person?

PRAY

Ask God to reveal any patterns of isolation and to give each person courage to pursue meaningful, Christ-centered relationships. Ask the Lord for healing in relationships that are strained or broken.

MESSAGE 2: HOW JESUS CONNECTED

September 20, 2026

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Mark 3:14

¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.

John 13:1-17, 34

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Luke 24:48-49

⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Use these questions to explore the message and Scripture together. Select the questions that best serve your group's conversation, while making time for both reflection and practical response.

OBSERVE: WHAT IS THERE?

1. In Mark 3:14, what two purposes did Jesus have when He appointed the twelve apostles?
2. What actions of Jesus in John 13:1-17 show the kind of relationship He wanted with His disciples?
3. What practices marked the new community of believers in Acts 2:42-47?
4. Who did Jesus welcome and value that the surrounding culture often ignored, devalued, or rejected?

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

5. Why was being with Jesus foundational to everything the disciples would later do for Him?
6. What did Jesus communicate by washing the disciples' feet, and why did He call this an example for them to follow?
7. How does Jesus' command to love one another make Christian community part of our witness to the world?
8. Why was the mission of Jesus entrusted to a Spirit empowered community rather than to isolated individuals?

APPLICATION: NOW WHAT?

9. Which pattern of Jesus do you most need to imitate right now: welcoming people, sharing life, serving humbly, or building community? Why?

- 10.** Where might you be tempted to value the crowd while overlooking the few people God has placed close to you?
- 11.** What would it look like for you to serve someone in a practical way this week without seeking recognition?
- 12.** How can this group reflect the fellowship, generosity, prayer, and shared life described in Acts 2?

PRAY

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help the group follow Jesus' example by welcoming, serving, and loving one another well.

MESSAGE 3: CONNECTING THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

September 27, 2026

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Matthew 18:20

²⁰“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Ephesians 4:15

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

1 Peter 4:8-9

⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Use these questions to explore the message and Scripture together. Select the questions that best serve your group’s conversation, while making time for both reflection and practical response.

OBSERVE: WHAT IS THERE?

1. What promises and commands do you notice in Matthew 18:20 and Hebrews 10:24-25?
2. What repeated “one another” actions from the New Testament were emphasized in the sermon?
3. According to Ephesians 4:15, what two qualities must remain together as believers help one another grow?
4. In 1 Peter 4:8-9, how are sincere love, forgiveness, hospitality, and attitude connected?

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

5. Why can meaningful connection happen more naturally in a small group than in a large worship gathering?
6. How do small groups challenge the idea that ministry belongs only to a few gifted leaders in a church building?
7. Why do care and accountability work best when relationships are formed before a crisis occurs?
8. How can learning to love people who sometimes annoy us become a pathway to spiritual maturity?

APPLICATION: NOW WHAT?

9. Which benefit of small groups do you most need in this season: a place to serve, care, accountability, growth, or practice in loving others?
10. What gift, experience, or ability could you use to encourage or serve the people in this group?
11. Do you have people who can speak truth into your life with love? What helps make that kind of honesty safe and fruitful?
12. What proactive step will you take to join, strengthen, or faithfully participate in a small group community?

PRAY

Thank God for the people He has placed in your life. Pray for deeper love, honest accountability, and faithful participation in community.

MESSAGE 4: ENEMIES OF CONNECTING

October 4, 2026

KEY SCRIPTURES:

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Galatians 5:17

¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

1 John 2:15-16

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Romans 12:2

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Ephesians 5:15-16

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Use these questions to explore the message and Scripture together. Select the questions that best serve your group's conversation, while making time for both reflection and practical response.

OBSERVE: WHAT IS THERE?

1. What warnings and instructions does Peter give to believers in 1 Peter 5:8-9?
2. How does Galatians 5:17 describe the conflict between our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit?
3. In 1 John 2:15-16, what desires and attitudes squeeze out love for the Father and isolate us from Him?

4. What responses to the devil, the sinful nature, and the surrounding culture are commanded in the sermon passages?

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

5. Why are the devil, our sinful nature, and the culture around us all enemies of genuine connection?
6. How did sin turn Adam and Eve's focus toward self protection, hiding, and blame, and how do those patterns still damage relationships?
7. How do individualism, isolation, and competitiveness reinforce one another in everyday life?
8. What does Romans 12:2 teach about resisting culture and being changed from the inside out?

APPLICATION: NOW WHAT?

9. Which enemy of connection is most active in your life right now, and what evidence helps you recognize it?
10. Where has self protection kept you from being open, honest, or willing to risk meaningful relationship?
11. What needs to change in your schedule so that your use of time reflects the value God places on relationships?
12. What would it mean for you to commit to the struggle, commit the time, and commit to win in the area of connection this week?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit for strength to resist isolation, reorder your time, and pursue authentic community with courage and perseverance.