

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 1: MEETING TOGETHER: WHO, WHAT, WHERE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled The Church and Worship. This series of lessons examines what the Bible teaches concerning the purpose of the Church and how it came into being. Church leaders need to be grounded in their understanding of why Jesus Christ established the Church to function as His Body (His ambassadors in the world) after He ascended into heaven. The Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, has been instructed to spread the Gospel around the world and to serve in its local community. It also meets regularly to worship God, be instructed in His Word, and to support and encourage one another.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is emerging leaders who are preparing for specific ministry within the Church.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 1: MEETING TOGETHER: WHO, WHAT, WHERE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to explore the identity of the Church, and the Biblical purposes of meeting together.

LEADER'S NOTE

The history of Christianity reveals a series of divisions resulting from disagreements within the Church. However, Jesus desires that the Church be unified. A clear Biblical understanding of the nature and purposes of the Church will help us. This lesson explores 'who' should call themselves a part of the 'Church', what happens when they meet together, and where and when they should meet. We will explore these ideas on a practical level, realizing that there is a wide variation even when we are unified in our beliefs. The Church will look different in locations where Christians are not allowed to meet publicly.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ How would you define the word 'Church'? What makes a 'true' Church?
- ❖ If you have been a part of or visited different church congregations, what are some of the biggest differences between them? What were some of the similarities?
- ❖ What is the difference between a church and any other group of people who come together to learn or accomplish something?
- ❖ Who really belongs to a church? How do we know who belongs and who doesn't?

STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH

- ❖ **What is the Church?** When we come together to worship as a church, it is awesome to know that we are not alone. Many millions belong to this family of believers all around the world, as well as millions who have lived before us. While there are some ways in which each unique



group of Christians differs, the worldwide Church has much in common and has been meeting together since Jesus was on earth.

- **The Church is God's Plan:** We must remember when we talk about the Church that it wasn't our plan; it was always God's desire to assemble for Himself a group of faithful and forgiven people who love Him.
 - In the Old Testament, the gathering of faithful people were referred to as a 'congregation' ([Acts 7:38](#), [Psalm 22:22](#)).
 - The word 'church' means gathering or assembly of people, and was originally used to refer to any collective group with a purpose.
 - In the New Testament, the word 'church' refers to the assembly of both Jews and Gentiles who, in Christ, belonged to the New Covenant ([Ephesians 2:11-22](#)).
 - Church was not invented by men for men – but rather by God for God (though there are many benefits to us!). Jesus said, "I will build my church" ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

- **The Visible and Invisible Church:** We know that church is much more than simply a building where people gather, or a period of time in which we worship. The Church is the *people of God*. We might ask who belongs, or how we can know who the Church really is. The simple answer is that we can't. Not entirely. The Bible reveals that not everyone who looks or acts like a Christian, or even professes to be a true believer of Jesus Christ, belongs to God. They may be deceived or attempting to deceive others for some reason.
 - **Visible Church:** The visible church is the people who call themselves Christians and gather in buildings we call churches (or in homes, other buildings, or outdoors). Each of these people may or may not be a true believer, even though they adhere to the purposes of the Church, profess to be a Christian, and partake in the ordinances.
 - **The Invisible Church:** The invisible Church includes all for whom Christ gave up His life ([Ephesians 5:25](#)). Therefore, the true Church is comprised only of those who are truly saved by faith in Jesus Christ. We can be confident that God knows those who belong to Him ([2 Timothy 2:19](#)).

- ❖ **The Purposes of the Church:** God designed the Church to be a vehicle through which He accomplishes His purposes. God desires that this work be done through His holy and chosen people within community. The Church exists to accomplish the following:
 - **Proclaim the Truth**
 - **Worship Together**
 - **Grow in Holiness**
 - **Serve in Love**

- **What the Church is Like:** In addition, the Church is to have particular characteristics. The Bible refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ; therefore, we sometimes refer to the Church in the feminine form. She is to be:



- o **One:** unified in purpose (Acts 4:32, John 17:21).
 - o **Holy:** set apart and cleansed of sin through faith in Christ (Leviticus 11:44-45, 1 Peter 1:14-16).
 - o **Universal:** the Church is not confined to one geographic place, one family of people, or one race or nationality, but is comprised of diverse people with one Head, Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:11, Luke 9:6).
 - o **Apostolic:** The Church began with the Apostles, and has followed the teachings of the Apostles to this day, which includes the entire inspired Word of God (Acts 1:1-2, Acts 2:42, Ephesians 2:19-21).
- **Knowing the True Church from a False One:** Just as there are those who under false pretense call themselves Christians, there are also assemblies of people who look and act like a church but who do not belong to the true Church. A true Church faithfully proclaims the Gospel as described in the Bible. It does not add to the Gospel or change the Gospel message. The true Church also practises the ordinances of baptism and communion as laid out in God's Word. Otherwise, it is a false church, taught by a false prophet or teacher (2 Corinthians 11:1-15, Galatians 1:6-12, Mark 13:22, 2 Peter 2:1-3).
- ❖ **Who Meets Together?** Throughout the Bible there are references to different sized groups, all of which were called 'Church'. The community of believers at any level is called a Church.
- o **Small Groups or House Churches** (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19)
 - o **Regional Churches** (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:2)
 - o **National Churches** (Acts 9:31)
- **Membership:** Each church group may have a different set of qualifications for belonging to their particular assembly. Sometimes a membership class or interview with church elders is required. Usually a person is considered a member if they demonstrate:
- o Regular attendance
 - o Financial contribution to the shared work
 - o Commonly held beliefs
 - o Public declaration of personal faith in Jesus Christ through baptism, and declaration of continuing belief through taking of communion

It is important to be connected to a local church. While our faith in Jesus Christ makes us a member of the worldwide invisible Church, belonging to a specific group of believers is important because we are held accountable to them. We also learn from others, share resources, and work together proclaiming the Gospel.

- **Factors for Defining Individual Churches:** Each individual group of Christians that assembles together will have its own defining features. While they are each unique expressions of the Church, they belong to the worldwide invisible Church. Some of these defining factors include:



- o **Denominations:** These are groups of churches which identify with a particular set of church practices such as governance or worship, and occasionally particular doctrinal beliefs.
 - o **Language or Nationality:** Speakers of one language may choose to meet together to simplify teaching and worship. Sometimes believers from a specific nationality may choose to meet as a church, especially if they are ex-patriots or refugees.
 - o **Proximity:** Churches are usually made up of believers who live within close proximity to one another.
- **Beliefs in Common:** Which beliefs must be held in common? What are we allowed to differ on? This is where creeds and confessions have been helpful in the history of the Church. They set out the core beliefs of Christianity. Churches can agree on specific tenants of the faith even while church practice, location, and style may differ. One commonly used creed is provided here:

The Nicene Creed
<p>The Nicene Creed <i>English translation of the Armenian version</i></p>
<p>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible.</p> <p>And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the begotten of God the Father, the Only-begotten, that is of the essence of the Father.</p> <p>God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten and not made; of the very same nature of the Father, by Whom all things came into being, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.</p> <p>Who for us humanity and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made human, was born perfectly of the holy virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>By whom He took body, soul, and mind, and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance.</p> <p>He suffered, was crucified, was buried, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven with the same body, and sat at the right hand of the Father.</p> <p>He is to come with the same body and with the glory of the Father, to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there is no end.</p> <p>We believe in the Holy Spirit, in the uncreated and the perfect; Who spoke through the Law, prophets, and Gospels; Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and lived in the saints.</p> <p>We believe also in only One, Universal, Apostolic, and Holy Church; in one baptism in repentance, for the remission, and forgiveness of sins; and in the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies, and the Kingdom of Heaven and in the everlasting life.</p>

- **Members, Visitors, Guests:** At any given assembly of a church, a variety of people may be present. Except where there are concerns for the safety of believers, most churches open their doors to any visitor or guest who wants to join them to worship or hear from God’s Word. Visitors and guests who are present may include Christians



from other assemblies, as well as unbelievers who are exploring Christianity and seeking answers to their questions.

ASK:

Ask your participants the following questions and discuss together:

- o What are some of the denominations you are familiar with?
- o What are the differences between them? What are the similarities?
- o What are the disadvantages to churches separating into denominations?
- o Are there any positive results of denominations?

TEACH:

- ❖ **What Happens when they Meet?** After we understand who makes up a church, we might wonder what should happen when the members of a church meet together? What does the Bible teach about the activities of a church gathering?

- **The Earliest Church:** For answers to this question, we can look into the book of Acts to see what was happening when the church was just beginning. The first believers were Jews who met at the temple where they had always worshipped God. However, they now worshipped Him with a new understanding of salvation through Jesus Christ rather than their old sacrificial system. When the Church grew and included the Gentiles, believers met in homes and other locations. We can see in these verses some of what the earliest Church did:

TASK

Divide the participants into groups of 4 or 5, and have each group make a list of the activities of the early church found in this passage. (Alternatively, read it for the whole group of participants and make a list together.) Which of these activities do we still do within the church? How is this early church setting different?

- o Acts 2:42-47

Then assign to each small group one of the following 9 practices, and have them look up the verses. Make sure each point is covered by at least one group. Have them write down the activity described there. Make a list together as a class of what we learn about the early church from these verses.

- ❖ **Early Church Practices:** We can learn a few things about the early Church from the letters of the New Testament:

1. **They gathered on the first day of the week – Sunday** (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
2. **They read and taught the Word of God** (Acts 11:25-57, Acts 17:11, Acts 2:42).
3. **They partook of Communion** (1 Corinthians 11:17-33).
4. **They sang songs** (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19).
5. **They prayed** (Acts 1:14, Acts 12:5, Acts 12:12).
6. **They gave what they had to the work of the church** (Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-35).
7. **They used their spiritual gifts** (1 Corinthians 12:24-26, Romans 12:4-5).
8. **They cared for those in need** (Acts 6:1-6, Acts 2:45, Acts 4:34, 1 Timothy 5:16).
9. **They shared the Gospel** (2 Corinthians 8:18, Acts 5:42, 2 Corinthians 10:15-16).



TEACH

- **What We Do:** The activities of the Church today are very similar to the early Church. They include worshiping God, praying, proclaiming the Word of God, preaching and teaching, giving, serving, and spending time with one another. Communion should be a regular occurrence. Some churches use a strict liturgy or structure when they meet together. Others express more freedom in the organization of the activities. Some assemblies will have one regular teacher or preacher. In others, the members may take turns teaching one another. The important thing is to regularly meet and worship God together.
- **Order in Worship:** Regardless of the format, we are instructed that church meetings should be orderly and focused on the worship of God.
 - 1 Corinthians 20:26-33
- ❖ **Where and When do they Meet?** Now that we have explored who the Church is and what they should do when they come together, we might wonder when and where they should meet.
 - **Sabbaths and Sundays:** Under the Old Covenant, the Sabbath day was Saturday – based on the 7th day of creation. God's faithful people observed the Sabbath by doing no work, and by remembering how He had freed them from slavery and given them rest. The early Church began to meet together on the 1st day of the week (Sunday) to participate in the ordinance of communion and worship God (Acts 20:7). This was because the new Church wanted to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus, which occurred on Sunday morning. In the New Testament we are given freedom as to when we meet together. It is common for Christians today to come together for a time of worship on Sunday morning (Colossians 2:16-17, Romans 14:5-6, Galatians 4:9-10).
 - **Throughout the Week:** In the earliest days of the Church, believers met with one another every day. Today we may have times of meeting for prayer, special worship, Bible classes or teaching, or fellowship events that happen throughout the week.
 - **Where we Gather:** Unlike the practices of the Old Covenant, we no longer need a temple or synagogue as a place set apart to worship God. In the early Church, believers worshipped in each others' homes, in the synagogue (religious building), or even in the open air. Today, Churches often meet in buildings, but in reality believers can gather anywhere to worship God!
 - Matthew 18:20, Acts 16:13, 1 Corinthians 16:19
- ❖ **Conclusion:** The Bible answers our questions about who the Church is, what its purposes are, what believers should do when they meet with one another, and where the Church meets. We must remember that we do not go to church or attend church, but rather *we (as believers) are the Church*. Meeting together is an extension of living our life for God.



DISCUSSION

- ❖ How were the activities of the early Church like your church today? How were they different?
- ❖ What activities of the early Church are still done in the Church today? What is missing?
- ❖ Who is allowed to be a member of the church you belong to? Are there activities that exclude non-members? Why do churches define members and non-members?
- ❖ What is the danger of churches separating from one another based on age, social status, race or other dividing factors? Should a church have members from many demographics, or should all be the same? Why is language an important factor for a Church gathering to be effective?
- ❖ What is one thing you can do to help your church fulfill God's purposes for the Church?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Praise God for His holy Church, and all the believers who meet together in the name of Jesus in every corner of the world. Pray that the Church would be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one. Pray that churches will be unified in spirit and truth, and that they would remain faithful to God's Word, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the fellowship of believers. Pray for your local churches, that they would be strengthened by God's Spirit and with His power.