

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 2: MEETING TOGETHER: WHY AND HOW

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.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 2: MEETING TOGETHER: WHY AND HOW

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The purpose of this lesson is to explore the identity of the Church, the Biblical purposes of meeting together, and why we should belong to a local church.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Consumerism and persecution are two barriers hindering people from belonging to a church. Consumerism, the culture of getting what we want in the form we want and whenever we want it, is so at odds with belonging to a church that many people find church experiences difficult; they could even demand that church conform to their needs. They may have been hurt by people in the past, or feel afraid of being accountable to other believers ; as a result, they attempt to live their Christian life alone rather than in community. Secondly, in some areas persecution has made it dangerous for believers to meet with one another in large groups, and churches are reduced to only a few believers meeting under cover. In this case it is important to explore ways of connecting with the universal Church to which all Christians belong.

GETTING STARTED

1. Other than church, what are some structures or institutions that give people identity and a sense of belonging?

2. What are some reasons people might be reluctant to meet together with other believers? What are some of the benefits of meeting together?



STUDY

❖ **BELONGING TO AND BEING THE CHURCH:** If we live in a place where there are many Christian churches, we might make a statement like “I belong to this church”, or “I attend that church”. The Bible does not use the word ‘church’ like that – it is never referred to as a building. Instead, the Church is people who are born again Christians. We don’t attend church – we are the Church!

- **You Are a Member of the Universal Church:** When we become Christians (that is, when we believe, repent and receive salvation), we join the worldwide, invisible, living Church. There is no such thing as a Christian who is not part of the Church!
- **You Belong to your Local Church:** Being part of a local assembly of believers is exactly where God wants you to be and to serve. You also belong to the Church that consists of the combined church assemblies in your city or region.

Read the following verses and write down how believers were addressed in the New Testament epistles:

1 Corinthians 1:1-3	
2 Corinthians 1:1-2	
Galatians 1:1-5	
Romans 1:7	
Philippians 1:1-2	

❖ **THE BLESSINGS OF THE CHURCH:** God’s intention for His people was that they would come together and be unified. He did not want them to isolate themselves and try to follow Him on their own! In fact, most of His commands involve how we relate to others. It is impossible to obey these if we separate ourselves from others!

- **We Were Designed for Community:** God has always designed people to need one another. He gave Eve to Adam, as He saw it was not good for Adam to be alone. He placed us in families to care for each other, He made His people a nation, He initiated the Church which gave identity to His followers, and commanded that they care for one another. God created us to need each other, as together we rely on Him. What do the following verses tell us about our God-given need for other people?

Genesis 2:18	
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Romans 12:3-13	
Ephesians 4:2-6	

- **We are Stronger Together:** A lone sheep is a target to predators, and a solitary Christian is vulnerable to deception (Satan's attack which can lead to sin). When we remain in community with others, we are held accountable. This helps to protect us from spiritual errors, defend us when under spiritual attack, and enriches our faith. We are stronger together than we are alone. According to the following verses, what is the benefit of uniting with others?

1 Thessalonians 5:14	
Proverbs 27:17	
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12	

- **Our Work Prospers:** We are the light of the world, but our light is stronger when we shine together. The work God has given us is more fulfilling when we work together. Some tasks can be overwhelming for one because they are meant for a community to accomplish. We are only fruitful as we stay close to God and to one another. Read the following to see how our work prospers when we work together:

Matthew 5:14-16	
1 Peter 2:9-10	
John 15:1-12	

❖ **THE PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH:** God refers to His people, the Church, as the called ones, the assembly of the redeemed, those who follow Jesus Christ. The reason churches exist is to carry out God's plans for individual people and for all of us as a worldwide faith community. Each of the following purposes cannot be carried out alone.



Purposes of the Church in Community		
Purpose	Description	Verses
<i>Proclaim the Truth</i>	Preaching, teaching and studying the Word of God, proclaiming the Gospel to all people	<i>Mark 16:15 1 Timothy 4:13 Romans 10:14 2 Timothy 3:16-17</i>
<i>Worship God Together</i>	<i>Lifting up the name of the Lord God together with other believers, and living a life of sacrifice and worship, including partaking of sacraments</i>	<i>Psalm 95:6 John 4:23 Matthew 18:20 1 Peter 2:5-9</i>
<i>Grow in Holiness</i>	<i>Helping one another to become the holy people God desires us to become, encouraging, admonishing, training and leading one another</i>	<i>1 Peter 1:14-16 1 John 3:6-10 Ephesians 4:12-13 1 Corinthians 11:1</i>
<i>Serve in Love</i>	<i>Serving and loving one another and the world around us, being compassionate, full of grace and mercy</i>	<i>1 Peter 4:10 1 Corinthians 16:14 James 1:22 John 13:34-45</i>

- How do you see the above purposes enacted in the Church around you? If you walked into an assembly of Christians, would it be obvious that these are the purposes for which they meet?

❖ **WHY WE SHOULD BELONG TO A LOCAL CHURCH:** While all believers belong to the worldwide Church, whenever possible we should attach ourselves to a specific local group of believers – a local church. We need to be committed to such a group that will hold us accountable as we give our time and talents (spiritual gifts) to strengthen one another.

- **Shepherds Must Know their Flock:** Leaders and Pastors are told to be ‘shepherds who care for their flock’. In order to carry out this role of caring, protecting, and guiding, the shepherds must know their sheep. Even though we can come to Jesus without the mediation of another person and do not require a priest to intercede for us, God planned for Christians to have ‘shepherds’ (those who guide and protect).

Read 1 Peter 5:1-5 and Acts 20:28. What does the Bible say about Shepherds?



- **Leaders Keep Us Accountable:** There are many warnings in the Bible about Church members who sin and continue to sin. They should be chastised, and even removed from the assembly of believers if they do not repent. This is necessary to keep the Church holy, and free of sin. Church elders and leaders are responsible to keep members accountable by showing people their errors and sins.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:11-13, James 5:19-20 and 2 John 1:9-10. What does the Bible say about accountability in the Church?

- **Submit to our Leaders:** We are commanded to submit to our leaders in the Lord – that is, if our leaders are living in submission and obedience to God. They have been appointed by God for this purpose. But who are our leaders? They are those whose leadership is recognized by the local church body. They may be pastors, elders or teachers (deacons, bishops or other official ‘titles’ are given, depending on varying church governance structures). These leaders must fit the Biblical qualifications and be recognized by the Church. Once appointed, members should submit to them and follow them. Having spiritual leaders enriches our lives and is one great benefit of being involved in a local Church.

What does the Bible tell us about who our leaders are, and how we should follow them? Read Hebrews 13:7,17, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

- **We are Designed to be Part of the Body:** As Christians we are part of the ‘body’ of Christ, existing for the good of the whole. It is nonsense to imagine a hand being able to accomplish its purpose apart from the arm, or the legs apart from the body. We are only a part of the whole and need the remainder of the body to properly function (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

What are some things that a Christian cannot do effectively alone?



❖ **BELONGING TO THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH:** We must always remember that we are members of the universal Church – the Church of all believers around the world. While we may not agree about certain practices or points of doctrine, we should love, uphold and pray for believers everywhere.

- **When There is No Local Church:** In some places where there is no established local church due to political oppression, isolation, or other factors, individual believers may feel alone. They must do what they can to remain connected to the worldwide Church. Some ideas include:
 - Praying for the worldwide Church.
 - Listening to Christian radio broadcasts, podcasts, online sermons.
 - Writing letters to Christian organizations to share their story and ask for prayer.
 - Studying God’s Word alone until other believers are found.
 - Communicating with other believers via the Internet.
 - Praying diligently that others would come to Jesus, and that other believers would be found in their area.
 - Sharing the Gospel with anyone they can.

What other factors might hinder a Christian from being able to join a local Church?
What would you suggest that they do in that case?

- **When you Yourself are Isolated:** Sometimes illness or other situations prevent an individual from attending church gatherings. Ideally, people from the Church could come to visit them in order to serve communion, encourage and pray with that person. The activities listed above may keep a person connected to the Church.
- **Where Two or Three are Gathered:** Jesus promised that where only two or three are gathered in His name, He is there with them (Matthew 18:20). The Church can be even a few people gathered to read God’s Word, or to pray and worship. As you spread the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, you may see the Church grow from a small group meeting in a home to a large number needing larger facilities.

Conclusion: There are many reasons why Christians must gather together. We should be committed to Christ by upholding and supporting the work of our local church. While it is vital to be connected to a local body of believers, we are also a part of the worldwide Church, and must remember what we have in common with believers around the world.



IN SUMMARY

- ❖ We do not just 'belong' to a church, we are the Church! When we become Christians, we join the worldwide, invisible, living Church.
- ❖ Belonging to a church has many blessings, and fulfills who we were designed to be. We were made for community, to be stronger together and to see our work prosper with one another.
- ❖ The purposes of the Church are to proclaim the truth, worship God together, grow in holiness and serve in love. Each of these requires community (believers working together) to be done effectively.
- ❖ Belonging to a local church holds us accountable to others, and gives us opportunity to use our time and talents (spiritual gifts) to strengthen one another.
- ❖ Belonging to a Church is ideal whenever possible. However, sometimes obstacles prevent meeting with other believers.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Are people you know reluctant to place themselves under Church authority and commit themselves to a local church? What would you tell them about the necessity of meeting with others?

2. Why do you think God designed us to need one another and work together to complete the mission of the Church?