

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

### LESSON 4: WHAT A HEALTHY CHURCH LOOKS LIKE

#### 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](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).



# THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

## LESSON 4: WHAT A HEALTHY CHURCH LOOKS LIKE

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand the characteristics of a healthy, Biblical church family.

### LEADER'S NOTE

God loves the Church, and Jesus gave His life to redeem her. The Scriptures refer to the Church as the Bride of Christ, and she is beautiful and precious to Him! But the Church can also be imperfect, since it is comprised of imperfect people. We must be aware of the dangers of selfishness, abuse of power, and even false teachers who will try to lead the faithful away from the truth. While there are no perfect churches, some are healthier than others! A healthy church requires committed and faithful members, and humble, wise leadership. It also requires work! This lesson explores the characteristics of a healthy church, and will instruct your participants how to help their own church community. This lesson should not create a critical, accusing spirit of discord, but rather a loving and caring church (locally and worldwide).

## INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ What might a visitor think if they stepped into your church for the first time this Sunday? What kind of impression would they get about its people, its program and its purpose?
- ❖ How do the events of a worship service express the values and mission of your church?
- ❖ Have you been a part of an unhealthy church environment? What made it feel that way? What was the result?
- ❖ *If you are leading this study within a church and the participants are members, take a few minutes to review its mission or vision (if there is one). Walk around the premises and try to see things from a visitor's perspective. What would they learn about the Church from signs, posters, decor, the set up of the worship space, or fellowship area? What would you like them to know, and how could you communicate this?*



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **The Church's Relationship to Jesus:** The writers of the New Testament used several different pictures to explain who the Church is, and what the relationship of Jesus Christ is to the Church. While imperfect at the present time, the Church will be made perfect by Christ and presented as spotless at the end of time. Thus, while we may now have disagreement and conflict within our church assemblies, we must ask Jesus to change and heal us so we can build a healthy, unified, joyful body.
  - The Church is described as :
    - **The Body of Christ** (Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12,27, Ephesians 4:12-16)
    - **The Flock** (Luke 12:32, John 10:16, Acts 20:29, 1 Peter 5:2)
    - **The House of God** (1 Peter 4:17, Hebrews 3:3-6, 1 Timothy 3:15)
    - **The Bride of Christ** (Ephesians 5:22-32, Revelations 19:7-8)
  - Jesus is described as:
    - **The Head of the Church** (Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 2:19)
    - **The Cornerstone** (Ephesians 2:20-22, Matthew 16:18, 1 Peter 2:4-6)
    - **The Bridegroom** (John 3:29, Mark 2:19-20)
  - Jesus' involvement with the Church:
    - **He loves the Church** (Ephesians 5:25).
    - **He cares for the Church** (Revelations 7:17).
    - **He provides growth for the Church** (Colossians 2:19).
    - **He prays for the Church** (John 17:20-26).
    - **He judges the Church** (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 11:32).
    - **He will present the Church blameless before God** (Ephesians 5:27).
  - Because the Church belongs to Jesus and exists for Him, He will protect and care for her. God will help the Church to endure to the end of time and to fulfill her mission. The Church is comprised of people whose true citizenship is heaven. They are holy, set apart, purchased and redeemed by Jesus Christ for Himself.
- ❖ **Disagreement and Dissent within the Church:** Even though we have been redeemed, we are still sinners. Inevitably there will be dissent and discord within the body of believers. Many of the epistles written to early churches include instructions for dealing with this problem. Disunity in the Church is as serious as illness in the body. Discord is like a cancer, and conflict is like a broken bone.

**TASK:**

Assign each of the following verses to one participant to read aloud. While each one reads, the others should listen and make a list of the commands given to the Church on how we relate to one another.

- o [Philippians 2:1-8](#)
- o [1 Corinthians 1:10](#)
- o [2 Corinthians 13:11](#)
- o [Ephesians 4:3,29](#)
- o [Romans 14:19](#)
- o [James 5:9](#)
- o [Philippians 1:27](#)
- o [Romans 15:5](#)
- o [Titus 3:1-11](#)
- o [2 Timothy 2:22-26](#)

**ASK:**

Use the following questions to discuss what we can learn from the previous verses.

- o What is the ideal church atmosphere described in the verses?
- o What might have been going on in those churches to require these constant reminders?
- o Is the ideal church easy or difficult to achieve?
- o Why is this important for us to remember today?

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **An Example of How to Handle Disagreement:** The early Church was not immune from disagreements, quarrels, gossip or struggles for power.
  - It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church has survived these obstacles. God gives wisdom to leadership in the Church to deal with issues as they arise, if the leaders are faithful in seeking God's will. God produces the fruit of the Spirit in every believer so they can meet with one another in unity and peace.
  - In [Acts 6:1-7](#) we see an example of how one issue was resolved. At that time, the Church took on the responsibility of feeding widows who had no one to care for them. The Greek widows complained that they were receiving less than the Jewish widows. So the Apostles had the congregation appoint overseers and leaders to see that this problem wouldn't happen again. We learn a few things from this example:
    - o **They dealt with the issue immediately (vs. 1-2).**
    - o **They involved the whole congregation in choosing overseers (vs. 2-5).**
    - o **They appointed new leadership to share responsibility (vs. 6).**
    - o **They addressed the issue in a peaceful, respectful manner (vs. 7).**

The result of these actions was that God's work continued to increase because enough leaders were in place to address different concerns. In addition, outsiders would have seen the peaceful way that disagreements were handled. The way we deal with difficulties today is a powerful witness to others.

- ❖ **Fifteen Characteristics of a Healthy Church:** There are many characteristics of a healthy church body, just as there are physical markers of a healthy person. In any given group of believers, there may be areas of strength and weakness. For the purposes of this lesson, we will discuss 15



attributes of a healthy church. If any of these is missing or is weak, it could be an indication of potential problems that must be worked through in order to have a fruitful, functioning Church body.

- 1. Teaches the Word of God:** A church must be primarily concerned with teaching the Word of God. This will include reading the Word of God together, preaching from the Word of God during worship services, providing Bible Studies and classes, as well as encouraging personal study by members. A healthy church will not change the message of the Bible, will not preach only part of its message, nor preach 'good advice' instead of the truth of God's Word.
  - o [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)
  - o [1 Timothy 4:13](#)
  - o [Acts 17:11](#)
  - o [Acts 2:42](#)
  
- 2. Exalts God in Worship and Prayer:** A church must be engaged in worshiping and praying together. This worship should be focused on exalting God. The lyrics of worship songs and hymns should be directed towards God, proclaiming His greatness. Our corporate prayers should demonstrate trust in God and expectancy of His answers. Faith-filled prayers and passionate worship are signs of a group of devoted believers who know and love their God.
  - o [Isaiah 12:5](#)
  - o [Hebrews 13:15](#)
  - o [Psalms 29:2](#)
  - o [Philippians 4:6](#)
  
- 3. Observes the Lord's Supper and Baptism:** Both of the sacraments of Communion and Baptism were commanded to all believers by Jesus Himself. They were to be carried out in community with one another, and must therefore be vital and regular practices in the Church. New converts to Christianity should be baptized by an individual in the Church (often a pastor or elder). The Lord's Supper, or Communion, should be practised regularly (perhaps every week, but in some places monthly or at other intervals). A church who denies, changes, or does not practise one or both of these sacraments must examine whether they are a true Church.
  - o [Mark 16:16](#)
  - o [Acts 2:41](#)
  - o [1 Corinthians 11:26](#)
  - o [Luke 22:19-20](#)
  
- 4. Engages in Missions:** The mandate given to all believers by Jesus was to go and make disciples. This could mean leaving our home to go and find those who have



not heard the Gospel. Today, each individual Church should be engaged in evangelism outside their own community. A healthy church will not only seek to evangelize their own community, but also financially support and send missionaries to other places in the world, or support organizations that exist for that purpose.

- o [Mark 16:15](#)
- o [Acts 13:47](#)
- o [Psalms 96:3](#)
- o [Romans 10:13-15](#)

**5. Is Committed to Discipleship:** The goal of church is for every member to grow in the fullness of their faith. This requires intentional discipleship of every believer. Whether this happens in small groups, mentor relationships, or by other means, the church must be committed to nurturing spiritual growth and Christlikeness in every believer. It requires commitment from the whole Church.

- o [Matthew 28:18-20](#)
- o [2 Timothy 2:2](#)
- o [John 15:1-17](#)
- o [Titus 2:1-8](#)

**6. Demonstrates Love for One Another:** The love the people of God have for one another will be visible when you enter a church. Are they enjoying the company of one another? Is anyone left out? Are needs being met? Are people displaying loving gestures (embracing one another, etc.)? Do they speak lovingly to one another? Jesus said the world would know us by our love, and a healthy church will display this love for all to see. People who visit will sense this love.

- o [John 13:34-35](#)
- o [1 John 4:8](#)
- o [Colossians 3:14](#)
- o [1 John 4:7-21](#)

**7. Impacts their Community:** A church that has no impact on their community is not fulfilling their role in the world, which is to be salt and light and a visible presence of God. This may go beyond the role of evangelism to providing services such as helping the poor, feeding the hungry, or helping children or the elderly. When a community has a positive view of a church group, they are more likely to listen to their message.

- o [Matthew 5:13-16](#)
- o [Acts 2:44-47](#)
- o [Hebrews 13:16](#)
- o [Luke 14:12-14](#)



**8. Joyful, Grateful Members:** When we gather together as a Church, our joy should be evident. When we display genuine gratitude for all God has done for us and all we do for one another, it will show in the way we worship, serve, and fellowship with one another. Where there is grumbling, criticism, complaining and gossip, there is no joy or gratitude.

- o [Galatians 5:22](#)
- o [Romans 14:17](#)
- o [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)
- o [Philippians 2:12-18](#)

**9. Humble, Empowering Leadership:** All churches must have appointed leaders to keep order. These may be officially designated pastors (even paid positions), or they may simply be individuals chosen as elders or overseers. If leaders abuse their authority and are harsh to their followers, they will not have a healthy church. However, if they lead with humility, they will have joyful followers. Biblical guidance for who is fit to lead should be followed, and leaders must be held to that Biblical standard.

- o [Philippians 2:3](#)
- o [Matthew 20:25-28](#)
- o [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)
- o [1 Peter 5:5](#)

**10. Biblical Church Governance:** In addition to the Biblical guidance about who is fit to lead, the Bible also instructs us about how to deal with sin in the Church, and those who do not submit to leadership. This is known as Church Discipline, and every healthy church must exercise it when needed. Correction is to be done in love. However, willful repeated sin is not to be tolerated among God's people. It is the responsibility of the elders, pastors and overseers to deal with problems as they arise, to seek God's wisdom, and to lead their congregation accordingly.

- o [Matthew 18:15-20](#)
- o [Titus 3:10](#)
- o [Galatians 6:1](#)
- o [Romans 16:17-18](#)

**11. Members are Involved:** In every healthy church, most of the members are actively serving in some way. There should be enough ministries, programs and work for everyone to get involved. The ministry of the Church is not only for appointed pastors, paid staff or those who appear most spiritual! There is work for everyone to do.

- o [Ephesians 4:28](#)
- o [Galatians 6:2-5](#)
- o [James 2:26](#)
- o [1 Peter 4:10](#)



**12. Diverse Population:** It may be a sign of an unhealthy church if everyone in it looks the same! A Church that welcomes all people will be made up of such representatives. In the body of Christ, children, youth, elderly, disabled, those of different nationalities, classes and background are all welcome. Children and youth are not 'the future church'; they are part of the Church today and should not be excluded. The Church should reflect the type of diversity in the community in which it meets- racially and economically. This unity of differences is what makes the Church 'one'. Look at the diversity of leaders in Acts 13:1!

- o Matthew 19:13-15
- o Romans 12:16
- o 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
- o Revelation 7:9

**13. Good Stewardship of Resources:** When a church owns property, the way that property is taken care of can speak volumes about the people who meet there. Are they grateful for what God has given them? Do they give to the work of God? Does a church use the money given to it to advance the Gospel, spending every dollar carefully, taking care of the needs of their people as well as planning for future needs? When money given makes church leadership wealthy at the expense of congregational, missions or property needs, it is a sign that the Church has lost her purpose. Each individual member should look after what belongs to the Church collectively, and give cheerfully.

- o Titus 1:7
- o 1 Timothy 6:7-19
- o Proverbs 3:9
- o 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

**14. Has a Vision and Plan:** While all church assemblies share a common mission, each one is unique in its areas of service, opportunities and gifts. Healthy churches know their specific mission and purpose, and mobilize their members with that vision and plan. This makes it easier for every member to carry out the unique roll God has for them.

- o Proverbs 29:18
- o Proverbs 21:5
- o Proverbs 16:3
- o Matthew 6:33

**15. Spiritual and Numerical Growth:** This is never the only characteristic of a healthy church. Churches that faithfully teach the Word of God should see spiritual growth in their members, and churches that are diligent in evangelism should see their numbers increase. However, do not be discouraged if numerical growth doesn't



happen at the rate you desire – that is in God's hands. But we must be faithful and pray to that end.

- o [2 Peter 3:18](#)
- o [2 Corinthians 9:10](#)
- o [Galatians 6:9](#)
- o [Acts 2:47](#)

- ❖ **Conclusion:** No assembly of believers will be perfect, but we can be a healthy church that seeks the Kingdom of God and His will for our lives. It is the responsibility of every believer to nurture a healthy church, refusing to allow a critical spirit, grumbling, complaining, and discord among the congregation. These markers of a healthy church can be used to assess where you can help your own church grow stronger.

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ In what area of a healthy church is your church very strong? What is one area in which they are weak?
- ❖ How a church deals with difficulties reveals a lot of about how healthy it is. Why is that?
- ❖ Have you experienced division or discord within a church, or a church splitting due to disagreement? What was the result?
- ❖ What impression should the Church give to the community around it? How is Jesus Christ reflected by the way we conduct church affairs?

## PRAYER

*Close with a time of prayer. Pray that the local churches would be strong, healthy and that members would live at peace with one another. Pray that the church would continue to grow locally and in its outreach around the world. Pray that God's name would not be tarnished by unhealthy churches, but that good would overcome the evil. Pray that each participant would commit themselves to building a healthy church.*