

# discipleship essentials

## Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study 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.

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



# THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

## LESSON 4: WHAT A HEALTHY CHURCH LOOKS LIKE

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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

### JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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 will prepare you to help your church be a healthy one. We should not have a critical, accusing spirit of discord towards our church, but rather a loving and caring attitude in obedience to God.

## GETTING STARTED

1. How does the worship service express the values and mission of your church?

2. 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?



# STUDY

❖ **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.

- Look at the following sets of verses which describe the Church. Write down what each set tells us about what the Church is to Jesus.

Romans 12:5 1 Corinthians 12:12,27 Ephesians 4:12-16	
Luke 12:32 John 10:16 Acts 20:29	
1 Peter 4:17 Hebrews 3:3-6 1 Timothy 3:15	
Ephesians 5:22-32 Revelations 19:7-8	

- Look at the following sets of verses to see how Jesus is described in relationship to the Church.

Ephesians 4:15 Colossians 2:19	
Ephesians 2:20-22 1 Peter 2:4-6	
John 3:29 Mark 2:19-20	

- Jesus is involved with the Church in the following special ways:
  - **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.

- The following verses describe how Church members should relate to one another. Read and then answer the questions below.
  - Philippians 2:1-8
  - 1 Corinthians 1:10
  - James 5:9
  - 2 Timothy 2:22-26
  - Ephesians 4:29

What is the ideal church atmosphere described in the verses?

What might have been going on in those churches to require these constant reminders?

Why is all this important for us to remember today?

❖ **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. For each characteristic, read the verse and write down what you learn.



**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, 1 Timothy 4:13

**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.

- o Isaiah 12:5, Hebrews 13:15, 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.

- o Mark 16:16, 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, Acts 13:47, 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, 2 Timothy 2:2, 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, 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, Hebrews 13:16](#)

**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, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, 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. If they lead with humility, they will have joyful followers. Biblical guidance for who is fit to lead should be followed.

- o [Matthew 20:25-28, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 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, Titus 3:10, 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 Galatians 6:2-5, 1 Peter 4:10

**12. Diverse Population:** It may be a sign of an unhealthy church if everyone in it looks the same! In the body of Christ, children, youth, elderly, disabled, those of different nationalities, classes and background are all welcome. Churches that reflect this become stronger and healthier. Children and youth are not ‘the future church’; they are part of the Church today. The Church should reflect the world around it in all of its diversity. This unity of differences is what makes the Church 'one'.

- o Matthew 19:13-15, Romans 12:16, 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, 1 Timothy 6:7-19, Proverbs 3:9, 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 21:5, Proverbs 16:3

**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, Galatians 6:9, 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.



## IN SUMMARY

- ❖ The Church is described as the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the House of God.
- ❖ Jesus loves, cares for and will protect the Church. He wants it to function in a healthy manner, and so would we. The Biblical ideal for how we interact with one another includes putting others first, and being gentle, loving and caring in our communication.
- ❖ There are many characteristics of a healthy church. Essentially, we can evaluate its health by the way the members worship and pray, how they interact with one another when they meet, and what the priorities of the meeting are.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what area of a healthy church is your church very strong? What is one area in which they are weak?

2. What impression should the Church give to the community around it? How is Jesus Christ reflected by the way we conduct church affairs?