

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 8: THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module entitled Christian Life and Worldview. This series of lessons examines the choices and practices that are essential for Christian living. To live as the Word of God teaches us means we understand that the choices we make each day affect our faith. It also means learning to pray, practising the commands of God and learning to serve others. These are important lessons for understanding the practice of Christianity. Include time to discuss these principles and how to effectively apply them to your life.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is new Christians, those who would like a refresher on the basics of Christianity, as well as those preparing to teach these Christian practices and beliefs. Also, those with an interest in Christian thought will find value in these lessons as they pertain to daily living and choices.

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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CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 8: THE CHURCH

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand the significance of the Church, and to look at how the early Church inspires the work of the Church today.

LEADER'S NOTE

This lesson addresses the purpose of the Church. Remember, there are two senses in which the word church can be used. Church refers to the universal body of all believers worldwide and church also refers to a local gathering of believers in one place. It is possible you are teaching participants who are not able to be a part of a local gathering of believers, due to persecution, isolation or lack of connection to others in the faith. A church group can be two or three people gathered together. Encourage participants to find others to meet with even occasionally who share their beliefs. Of course, we are meant to be a part of a growing group of believers who come together regularly. You may be able to help connect participants to others.

INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ What does the word church mean to you? Is it a building, a meeting place, a group of people, a specific denomination of Christianity?
- ❖ What is the responsibility of the Church? What is it in the world for?
- ❖ What is your local church like? How do the members of your church love and serve one another?
- ❖ How does your local church serve the community around them?

STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

- ❖ **What is the Church?** You may look in the dictionary and find that the word church is defined as a building for public worship, but the word actually came from the Greek word *ekklesia* which is defined as a gathering of people who have come together for a particular purpose.
 - In the Bible, the Greek word *ekklesia* is used 115 times and although most translations use the word church in its place, it would be more accurate to use the word assembly.



- More than that, in the Bible, *ekklesia* denotes an assembly of believers called together into the family of God.
 - The church has many 'members' or parts that belong to one another, just as a body is made up of members. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" Ephesians 2:19. The essential meaning of 'church' is that we are all one. That means:
 - No denominations
 - No discrimination among believers
 - No distinction based on country or region
 - The Church is not simply a building or room where believers gather. "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man" Acts 17:24.
 - God lives in us, and is present when we come together to worship Him. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.
 - **The Significance of the Church:** The above verses tell us that the Church is to be a unified group in which God dwells. The following verses tell us God's intention and the significance of the Church.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 *Unity in the body of Christ.*
 - Ephesians 4:1-4 *Bearing with one another in love.*
 - Ephesians 1:21-23 *Christ as the head of the Church.*
 - Ephesians 5:25-27 *The Church as the bride of Christ.*
 - Matthew 18:20 *Where believers gather together, Jesus is there.*
- ❖ **How the Church Began:** In the Old Testament we read that God's people were kept separate from other nations for Him. They were called the Nation of Israel (Jews) and they were a special people to God. After Christ came, God included the Gentiles as part of His family. (Gentiles are those not born Jews.) The Church now includes all believers from every nation.
- We read about the creation of the early Church in the book of Acts. Peter spoke to many who had gathered from various nations and who had travelled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. The Holy Spirit ascended upon the twelve apostles and caused them to speak in tongues. The people were shocked to hear about the works of God, each in his own language. They heard Peter speak of God's greatness and His promises. The Bible tells us that as many as 3000 souls were added to God's family that day. We read about this in Acts 2.
 - These people may have been devout Jews, or those of other religions before this event. But when they chose to put their trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins they joined a new family, and became the church.



- ❖ **The Purposes of the Church:** The church in the beginning operated like a family that cared for one another rather than a business or school. Read Acts 2:42-47 and as a group list the actions of the early Church.

- *Here are some of the activities of the early Church:*

- *Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*
- *Had fellowship*
- *Shared meals*
- *Prayed*
- *Provided for each other's needs*
- *Attended the temple together*
- *Spent time with one another*
- *Served their community*

- ❖ **The Church Today:** Meeting together is still as necessary and relevant as it was in the early days of Christianity. Each of the above activities can still be done in the Church today!

- The following verses outline the purposes of the Church:

- Colossians 3:16
- Hebrews 10:25
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Matthew 16:18
- James 5:14
- Ephesians 5:19

- The beauty of the Church was that everyone who believed in Jesus gathered as a family despite differences of status and backgrounds. The Church's mission was to share Christ's Gospel and make new disciples.
- The Church is not a building or location, but it is a group of people with one common belief and one common mission. The community of believers working together accomplishes its mission, and benefits each member as well as the community.
- As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we are able to live alongside one another and love one another. The Spirit helps us to accomplish the purpose of the Church in the world, and be in a unique position to care for one another, combat sin, and become the people God means us to become.



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Are you an active member of a local church? How do you serve others through the church?
- ❖ In what ways does the present Church differ from the early Church? What would need to change in your current church to make it more like the early Church?
- ❖ How can you work together with other believers to make a difference in the community around you? Why is it important that the church serve its members as well as those outside the church?
- ❖ How should a Christian approach differences in theology or ideas about Church practices between different church groups?

PRAYER

Close with a time of prayer. Thank God for providing the Church to support, teach, and encourage believers, and to support each other in the work of the Gospel. Pray that the Church would be unified, and would cease fruitless and selfish disputes in favour of working together to impact the world. Pray that participants would have opportunities to love and serve one another.