

LOCAL CHURCH

God established the family, the civil government, and the local church as three unique institutions on the earth. Each one has been ordained with leadership, blessings, and accountability. God has commissioned the local church to carry out his purposes in reaching the lost and perfecting the saved. It is important to understand that God's plan for your life can only be fulfilled when you are connected with the local church.

The key word of this lesson is:

EDIFICATION

The key question this lesson answers:

What is the purpose of the local church?

The key purpose of this lesson:

To explain the importance of the local church in the everyday lives of believers.

The key point of this lesson:

God intends for the local church to educate, equip, and edify the saints of God for the work of the ministry.

MEMORY VERSES:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." – Ephesians 4:11-12

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." – 1 Corinthians 12:27

WHAT IS THE LOCAL CHURCH?

It is important to understand what the local church is NOT...

1. The church is **NOT** a denominational group of congregations. The churches mentioned in the New Testament were all individual groups of believers serving together.
2. The church is **NOT** a building. Our bodies are the temples of God, and we worship God in spirit and in truth. – **1 Corinthians 6:19-20; John 4:24**
3. The church is **NOT** replaceable. There are many good things (*TV and radio preachers; podcasts, electronic media, commentaries; conferences, etc.*) that believers try to use to fill a need that only a local church can biblically provide. God's work in your life is accomplished through the local church, and nothing should replace it in your life.

A. The “Church” the entire body of Christ made up of born again believers from every nation and from all time both in heaven and on earth.

*“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:
– Ephesians 1:10*

“... and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” – Ephesians 1:22-23

B. The “Local Church” is the visible body of Christ on this earth that is made up of born again, baptized believers who have agreed to worship and serve God together in a specific location under clear biblical leadership.

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:” – Philippians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse...” – Colossians 1:1-2

C. God has ordained two offices to provide structure and leadership within the local church.

1. The office of pastor.

The role of a pastor is to oversee, lead, feed, and care for the church according to the bible. He is to protect the church from false doctrine by preaching and teaching the truth of God's word. He must also be committed to pray for the church body.

1 Timothy 3:1-7; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 6:4; 20:28-31

2. The office of deacon.

Deacons are spirit-filled ministers who are chosen out of the congregation to serve the church. They are to help and assist the pastors with anything that might distract them from the ministry of the word, prayer, and oversight of the church.

1 Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-10

THE WORD OF GOD COMPARES THE LOCAL CHURCH TO A HUMAN BODY.

After his resurrection and ascension into heaven, Jesus replaced himself on the earth with the indwelling Holy Ghost (his spirit), the complete word of God (his soul), and the local church (his body). The Holy Spirit will guide you through the word of God to help you fulfill your role within your local church.

- **Each member has a different function.**

“For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.”

– **1 Corinthians 12:14-20**

- **No single member can function on its own.**

“And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” – **1 Corinthians 12:21**

- **Each member’s contribution is vital.**

“Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:” –

1 Corinthians 12:22-24

- **A properly functioning body will operate in unity.**

“That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” – **1 Corinthians 12:25-27**

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

THE KEY POINT OF THIS LESSON!

The local church is the only institution ordained by God to fulfill the Great Commission. God intends for the local church to educate, equip, and edify you for the work of the ministry and to provide a place for God's plan to be realized in your life. God's plan for you can only be fulfilled when you are connected within the local church.

A. The local church provides you the environment to help you grow through three general stages of spiritual growth.

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." – Ephesians 4:12

1. Become a **LEARNER** as you are **EQUIPPED** in the word of God.

There is a time to observe and learn as you are being perfected. Your first priority should be to submit to the teaching of the word of God and learning to be who God desires you to be.

Matthew 11:28-30

2. Become a **LABORER** as you are **ENGAGED** in the work of the ministry

As you grow in your relationship with Christ, there will be a time for you to begin serving through the ministries that are already established within the local church.

Matthew 4:19; James 1:22-25

3. Become a **LEADER** as you are **EDIFIED** within the body of Christ

As your spiritual growth continues, you should reach the point where you are able to minister to others in the same way that you have been ministered to.

2 Timothy 2:2

IMPORTANT NOTE:

These three stages can be roughly compared to the child, youth, and adult stages of physical growth. This process of spiritual growth takes time, so it is important to be patient. As you grow, be sure to remain faithful to God's established institution of the local church.

B. The local church helps to conform you to the image of Christ.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:"
– *Ephesians 4:13*

C. The local church provides a guard for doctrinal purity.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” – Ephesians 4:14

D. The local church helps you to discover and fulfill your vital role within the body of Christ.

*“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”
– Ephesians 4:15-16*

DISCUSSION:

How has this lesson changed your understanding of the local church?

Which stage of spiritual growth would you say that you are in?

What do you believe your role is within this church?

HOW DO YOU FIND A GOOD LOCAL CHURCH?

There may be a time in your life when God will direct you to another location to further accomplish his plan for you. It is important for you to find a good local church to serve the Lord through. Remember, God’s plan for your life will always be connected to a local church. He will never take you from a local church to a place that does not have one.

Many people choose a church based on external matters such as location, quality of the building, the style of music, and available programs. However, it is more important for you to observe the spiritual qualities of a particular church and compare them with the biblical qualities of what a good local church should be. It is important to be patient and trust God to lead you!

A. According to Acts 2:41-47, the early church was focused on...

1. Observing the two ordinances of the church
 - a. Baptism – *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:” – vs. 41*
 - b. Lord’s Supper – *“... in breaking of bread...” – vs. 42*
2. Teaching the word of God – **vs. 42**

3. Fellowshiping with other believers – **vs. 42**
4. Praying together – **vs. 42**
5. Testifying to God’s grace and power – **vs. 43**
6. Ministering to each other’s needs – **vs. 44-45**
7. Having a good testimony within the community – **vs. 46-47**
8. Glorifying and praising God – **vs. 47**
9. Bringing the lost to salvation in Jesus Christ – **vs. 47**

B. The following questions will help you to determine if there is evidence of the biblical qualities that should be present within any local church.

1. Is the main emphasis on demonstrating and declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Matthew 7:20; Acts 2:47

2. Does the church teach that salvation is a free gift that is not earned through religious rituals or good works?

Ephesians 2:8-9

3. Does the church leadership believe and teach that the bible is the word of God, and the perfect guide for your life?

Titus 1:9

4. Does the church send out and support missionaries?

Acts 13:1-3

5. Are both the congregation and the leadership, encouraged to read and study the bible personally?

Acts 17:10-12

6. Do people genuinely care for others, and minister to their physical and spiritual needs?

Galatians 6:10

7. Does the church recognize the office of pastors and deacons as defined by scripture?

1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between “church” and a “local church”?

2. The local church is compared to the human body in *1 Corinthians 12:14-27*. List four ways that the human body compares to how the local church body should function.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3. What roles and ministries do you believe God may have planned for you within your local church?

4. What are the three general stages of spiritual growth you should grow through within your local church?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

5. List some of the Biblical qualities a Christian should be looking for when considering a local church.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

6. What is the key purpose of the lesson, and what has it taught you?

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Who are the pastors and deacons within your local church? Explain in your own words what *1 Peter 5:1-4* and *Hebrews 13:17* teach us about our relationships with our pastors.

Read *Hebrews 10:24-25*. This passage teaches us that it is important for the members of a local church to gather regularly. According to this passage, what are you missing out on when you do not faithfully attend a local church service or gathering? Is there anything in your life that you are choosing to give more importance to than your regular attendance to your local church?

We learned in this lesson that the local church is compared to the human body in *1 Corinthians 12:14-27*. Please read the following passages and write down some of the other comparisons the Bible makes to the local church.

1. *Acts 20:28; John 10:1-18; 1 Peter 5:1-4*

2. *Ephesians 2:19-22*

3. *Ephesians 5:25-32; 2 Corinthians 11:1-3*
