

Seminar 5 – The Church

This seminar is designed to give a biblical vision of the church and its essential practices. In doing so, it will lead you to consider where you might personally get involved in its mission and assist others to do the same. The outcome of the seminar will be seen in how you and others partner to form a fellowship of Christ-followers that impacts your community, nation, and the world through lives transformed by God’s grace. In the Seminar we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What is the Church?
2. What does the Church do?
3. What are the Essential Practices of a Healthy Church?
4. What is your place in the Church?
5. What are some vital applications that need to be adopted in your local church?

Session 1-The Living Church

As we begin, it is important to have a clear biblical understanding of what the church is and what the church is called to do.

What Is the Church?

Small Group Assignment 1 – Answer the following question with two other people and list your answers in the space below. **When you think of the church, what images and ideas come to your mind?**



Biblical Ideas: It’s common for people to think of the church as a building. When asked, “Where do you go to church?” we often answer with a place or the name of a building. However, the biblical understanding of the true church is not a building but a people. The word “church” comes from the Greek word “*Ekklesia*” which is defined as “an assembly” or “called-out-ones.” The root meaning for the word “church” is about people not buildings.

The early Christian church did not have church structures as some of us do today. They would meet in homes and sometimes even in secret places when they were being persecuted. In Romans 16:5, Paul says, “Greet the church that is in their house.” He refers to the people in their house, not to a building. The different practices of the church such as fellowship, worship, discipleship, etc. are all conducted by people. However, buildings may be important as they can help people accomplish their calling as Christians.

Today the “church” can be described in several ways:

1. *It can be all Christians*, living and dead, through all time.

2. It can also be reported to be everyone, everywhere in the world who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through faith; *this is the “church universal.”*

3. *The church may refer to one of the large Christian denominations* around the world today like Baptists, Pentecostals or Roman Catholics.

4. *There is also the “local church.”* This would be the body of believers that make up a church in a certain town or village. The local church is where a small group of believers can teach, fellowship, pray and all the other things that allow them to grow as the body of Christ.

5. And, of course, a church can also be thought of as a **building**.

So, a better question might be “**who is the church?**” not “what is the church?” Derek Thomas said, “*The church, then, consists of those whom the Lord has called out of the world into union and fellowship with Christ and into communion with each other.*” *We are the church! We don’t “go to church.”* We gather together as the church and scatter into our community to live for God in everyday experiences of life.

Small Group Assignment 2– Let’s think about how Scripture describes the church. In addition to being the “called out ones”, we discover that vibrant biblical metaphors give us a better understanding of the nature of God’s people as **a new society** so that through his Spirit, the church becomes “the presence of Christ on the earth.” Study the following Scripture passages and summarize the meaning behind the **biblical images of the Church**.

The Body - Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:15-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

God’s Household - Family- Ephesians 2:19-22

The Bride of Christ – Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7-8

A Chosen People..... – 1 Peter 2:9-10

How would you describe the church?

Sheep - John 10:11-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4

Living Stones – 1 Peter 2:4-5

What other biblical images can you add to describe the church? Are there any other images that you might use to describe the church?

What Does the Church Do?

The church is not a building, and not just people, but a body of believers with a specific nature and purpose. In order for a church to truly thrive and to complete its call and its mission, it needs to engage in several “essential practices.” So, let’s break this down. Discuss what it means to be “essential?” and what, generally, is a “practice?”

Something that is “essential” is extremely important or absolutely necessary. It is indispensable. It is a “must have” in order to function or carry on.

A “practice” is the action or process of doing something. It is carrying out the ideas and beliefs of an organization. **So, “essential practices” are the “necessary actions” of a church.**

Essential, biblical practices are what the church is built on, often distinguishing the church from other organizations. If a church fails to fulfill key essential practices, then the church is probably not functioning as God intends.

Read Acts 2:42-47. What essential practices do you find the early church practicing?

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved.”

What are some other essential practices that are key to a church’s life? What does it mean that they “devoted themselves to” these practices? Jot down one thought below:

4 Big Ideas

John Stott in his book *“The Living Church”* highlights four ideas from Acts 2:42-47 which were part of the early church. These principles are carried out by God’s people today. **Read each idea mentioned below and discuss why is each one important to God’s people.**



A Learning Church Acts 2:42-43 – Teaching, Preaching and Discipleship *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.”*

A Caring Church – Acts 2:44-45 - Fellowship and Care- *“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”*



A Worshipping Church – Acts 2:46 - *“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.”*



An Evangelizing Church - Acts 2:47- *“And day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved.”*

Read Acts 6:1-7- What is happening in this text? Carefully examine the text. Did the disciples regard their pastoral ministry as more important than social ministry? How do the apostles resolve this problem? What might we learn from this text about what is important to the church?

John Stott tells us that a vital principle of ministry is imbedded in this text namely that *“everybody cannot do everything.”* He expresses this principle saying that *“God calls all his people to ministry. God calls different people to different ministries. And, God expects those called to the ministry of the word to concentrate on their calling....”* (p. 73 *The Living Church*).

God has called you and he has called others to carry out the essentials that allow a church not only to function, but to grow and thrive. You and others have a place in the church and you have been gifted by the Holy Spirit with the abilities to carry out your calling. So, where is that place? How do you fit into God’s plan for his church in your particular community? You may have some ideas now, but as we continue, hopefully you can develop a keener sense of yourself, how God has gifted you, and a desire to step into some areas you may or may not have considered.

Application to Life

Now that we have gone through this study, how would you answer the question – “What is the church?”

What biblical images would you use to describe the unique church where you serve?

Of the **4 big ideas** mentioned above, which one is a strength in the church where you serve? Which one needs more development in the coming months?

How has this Session encouraged you to pray for the church?