

# The Church

By W. Madison Grace II

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Use an online Bible dictionary such as the one at [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com). Or use a printed Bible dictionary from your pastor or church library. Look up the word *church*. Prepare to share what this Bible term means.

### Assignment Two

Read Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Ephesians 4. Prepare to share a consolidated list of the various spiritual gifts believers use in the church.

### Assignment Three

Read Acts 2:41–47 and make a list with two columns. On the left, list the activities the church in Acts performed. On the right, list corresponding activities performed by churches today. Prepare to share your lists with your group.

### Scripture to Memorize

*So those who received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Acts 2:41–42*

### Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand what the church is and how they are a part of it.

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

Picture yourself walking up to friends at work. They are discussing their plans for the weekend. Some are going shopping, some playing in a tournament, while others are going on a trip. They ask you what you are doing, and you reply, "I don't know, but Sunday we're going to church." One of them says, "Most churches I've seen are old and empty." You reply, "Well, I don't mean the building when I say the church. It's more than that." They turn to you and ask, "Then what is it?" How do you reply?

Read Matthew 18:17 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 17. tell it to the church.** Jesus addressed the issue of a fellow believer who has fallen into sin. Jesus presented the method for helping restore that sinner. The last step in this method is to tell it to the church. This is the first time the word *church* is used in the New Testament.

What is the church? This is a term found throughout the New Testament and used by Jesus, Paul, and others. The term refers to a body of those who believe in Jesus Christ and have been baptized.

### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share what the word *church* means.

### Discussion Question

Do these definitions of *church* from the Bible seem at odds with the way we typically use that term in conversations today?

### On Your Own

In the space below, write how the biblical definition of *church* confirms or changes your understanding and use of the word.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 27. you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.** In 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed his concern about divisions within the church at Corinth. In chapter 12 he used a metaphor for the church—the body. This concept of the church teaches that the members not only all have value, but also are important for the church to function.

At the time of belief and baptism, one becomes a part of this body. It then becomes that person's privilege and responsibility to perform their function as a part of the body. This means God wants to use all of us in the church, and especially the local church, to do God's work.

In verse 27, Paul was saying, “You have a specific job in this community. Now do your part.”

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share a list of the various spiritual gifts believers use in the church.

### **Discussion Question**

Which of these gifts do you have that God wants you to use for the building up of His church? Has anyone ever guided you in discovering the gifts inside you?

### **On Your Own**

Choose one of these two assignments:

1. Write below the spiritual gift(s) you believe you have and a fresh thought about how you can better use them in the church.
2. Write below the name of a person you will ask to guide you in discovering your spiritual gifts.

**Read** Acts 2:41–47 out loud.

### **Studying the Passage**

In this passage we see the beginning of the church. Previously the Spirit was given at Pentecost, and then Peter preached a sermon to help clarify all that this meant.

**Verse 41. three thousand souls.** Upon hearing this gospel proclamation, many came to be saved and were baptized. This is the birth of the church.

**Verse 42. the apostles’ teaching . . . fellowship, . . . the breaking of bread, and . . . prayers.** Immediately following this beginning of the church is an explanation of what the church did. As these believers were gathered together (that is, being the church), they are engaged in teaching (or preaching), fellowship, breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper), and prayer (worship). To add to this list, previously we saw that they were baptized (v. 41) and later on we find them taking care of one another (v. 45).

**Verse 47. added to their number.** In addition, this report means they were evangelizing. These are the things the first church did, and these are how the church functions throughout the New Testament.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share a list of the activities the church in Acts performed and a corresponding list of activities performed by churches today.

### **Discussion Questions**

About how many members does your church have? If you had to guess, how many of your members are using their gifts in the ministries of your church? Are you using your gifts?

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

## **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

## **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

## **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

## **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

In the lesson this week we discussed what the church is. The word *church* means “gathering.” The word is used more than one hundred times in the New Testament, with most of the instances referring to local congregations. Those who are part of the church are those who have believed in Christ and then have been baptized, as seen in Acts 2:41.

We also discussed from 1 Corinthians 12 that the church should be seen as a body. Seeing the church as a body helps us understand that we all have an important part to play in the church. Some roles are not as visible as others, but all are necessary for the church to function properly.

Finally, we discussed the activities the church performs as seen in Acts 2:41–47. We saw that the church:

- practiced baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
- experienced preaching and teaching.
- enjoyed fellowship.
- participated in prayer and worship.
- cared for one another.
- continually shared their faith with the lost.

In the power of the Spirit, the church grew daily. Disciples of Christ pray and serve to see that happen today.

### **Follow up Question**

*What is the church, and what is your role in it?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.