

LIVING STONES DISCIPLESHIP GROUP



THIRD SEMESTER
UNIT 4



"[Y]ou yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1Peter 2:5

UNIT 4:

The Local Church



IN THIS SESSION

- :: What is the Local Church?
- :: How important is the local church to a Christian?
 - :: What is lost without the local church?
 - :: Is church membership necessary/biblical?

UNIT 4: The Local Church

// OPENING SCRIPTURE

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Romans 12:4-5

// OPENING PRAYER

// FOLLOW-UP FROM PREVIOUS UNIT

Memory Verse :: John 20:21

Homework :: Unit 4 Completed | Written Testimony | Ministry Challenge

UNIT 4: The Local Church

// Review & Setup

:: In the previous units, we saw how God’s mission is worked out through His people—the church. We saw how God’s mission is (and always has been) to bring glory to His name by saving sinners from Hell. We saw how God accomplishes this mission: through disciples *of* Christ making disciples *for* Christ. This is done through the proclamation of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.

:: In this unit, we drill down. What does the local church have to do with God’s mission? We ask, what is the local church? What constitutes a church? Is being a part of a local church important to being a Christian? What is church membership? Finally, we see individual roles in the local church.

// What Is the Local Church?

:: The church is God’s people. The word means “*an assembly*”. In the New Testament, the word is used to describe the whole community of believers everywhere from all times. It is also used to describe a congregation of Christians in one particular location. That is the subject of this unit—the local church.

:: In the previous unit, we saw the birth of the church at Pentecost. In the second Semester, we saw the first church in Jerusalem was committed to four things. For the sake of review, read **Acts 2:42** and write them below:

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (4) _____

:: But that is not all the Jerusalem church did. Read verses 43 to 47 closely. List as many characteristics of the Jerusalem church you see in those verses. (There are at least 12 things listed)

:: Luke is careful to show that the growth of the church came not by human effort, but by the Lord, He says in verse 47, “**the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved**”. The church belongs to God; Jesus is building it.

:: Let’s look at another local church—the church in Antioch. Luke describes the planting of the church in **Acts 11:19-30**. Persecution against the church forced believers out of Jerusalem. As they begin sharing the gospel, a church forms in Antioch. He describes the same church a few years later in **Acts 13:1-3**.

:: Take these two passages together. Consider the statements below. If it’s true of Antioch, provide the scripture reference. If the statement is not true, write “FALSE”.

<i>Example: Antioch preached Jesus Christ.</i> <u>11:20, 13:1</u>	Antioch operated in the gifts of the Spirit.
Antioch disciples made disciples.	Antioch submitted to more mature churches.
Antioch did not really do much Bible teaching.	Antioch commissioned missionaries.
Antioch cared about missions.	Christians at Antioch skipped prayer meetings.
Antioch did not interact with other churches.	Antioch was ethnically diverse.
Antioch considered preached important.	Antioch had only socially unimportant members.
Antioch cared about the poor and oppressed.	Antioch knew their purpose.
Antioch did not have designated leaders.	Antioch Christians didn’t really ever fast.

:: Jesus Christ gave the church two visible signs of His gospel to His people—baptism and communion. These are called “ordinances” or “sacraments”. They are a physical portrayal of the Lord’s death and

resurrection. They testify to a believer's own spiritual birth and future resurrection. In the New Testament we see the early church committed to these two ordinances.

:: Putting all this together, we can define the local church as:

“a unified community of Christians who organize under godly leadership, gather regularly for preaching, worship and prayer, observe the biblical ordinances of baptism and communion, and are empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission.”

:: Martin Luther and John Calvin defined the church as “a congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered”. A church may be more than this, but it cannot be less.

// True Church; False Church; Para-Church; UnChurch

:: Maintaining a clear definition (like the one above) is critical to distinguishing true churches from false churches. Some organizations who meet for Bible study and prayer exist to serve the local church, but are not churches themselves. Take a few moments with your group and discuss which of the following groups should be considered a true church, false church, or something else. Explain why or why not.

CHURCH OR NO CHURCH?

- > A group of Christians meet in a home for a Bible study every week...
- > A Christian family watches their favorite preacher online from home and takes communion together...
- > Several families meet in one another's homes once per week, a man preaches, they take communion, people are coming to faith and being baptized.
- > Mormons gather in a building every Sunday, preach from the Bible, do water baptism and participate in the Lord's Supper.
- > A college group meets Sunday evenings in a campus bar, sings praise songs, preaches the gospel, takes communion, and baptizes new believers.

DISCUSSION NOTES:

// Do We Need the Local Church?

:: Is it wrong for a Christian with access to good churches to never attend one? Are there any requirements of Christians they cannot perform without being part of a local church? If so, what are they? List as many as you can think of below.

:: Read **Galatians 6:1-10**. How much of this passage is not possible without being involved in a local church?

:: It is possible to be a fish without water, but all fish live in the water. It is possible to be a Christian without the local church, but all Christians go to church.

// Every Part Has a Part

:: Complete the following verses from 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (ESV, esvbible.org):

“Now there are varieties of _____, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of _____, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of _____, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To _____ is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the _____ good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of _____, and to another the utterance of _____ according to the same Spirit, to another _____ by the same Spirit, to another gifts of _____ by the one Spirit, to another the working of _____, to another _____, to another the ability to _____ between spirits, to another various kinds of _____, to another the _____ of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one _____ as he wills.”

:: Notice verse 7. **“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”** Every follower of Jesus Christ is a necessary member of the local body. God manifests His Spirit to each person for the good of all.

:: The Apostle goes on in 1Corinthians 12 to explain the important role of every individual believer. There are no insignificant parts. In the local church, there is wonderful dependence on one another, God-glorifying unity with one another and sacrificial giving to one another. **“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”** (v.26-27)

:: The local church needs her members to discover their spiritual gifts, grow in them, and use them to the mutual benefit of all.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read 1Corinthians 12:8-11 & Romans 12:6-8. Go around the room and share with your group what you think may be some of the ways the Holy Spirit has gifted you to serve your church.

// Church Membership

:: Church membership is not *in* the Bible; its *all over* the Bible. Church membership is not like membership in a club, where you pay dues to receive benefits. Church membership provides confirmation of one’s salvation and oversight of his/her spiritual growth.

:: Imagine you were traveling in a foreign country and you lost your passport. Where do you go to prove that you are a citizen of the United States? The embassy. The embassy provides the confirmation of your citizenship. Likewise the church gives confirmation of your heavenly citizenship. The U.S. embassy does not make you an American citizen; it uses its resources to confirm you are. Same with the church. Church membership does not make you a Christian; it uses her resources to confirm you are.

:: This is accomplished through regular interactions with you, worshipping together, serving together, living in community together, for the mutual building up of the church and oversight of your spiritual maturity. This is how God accomplishes His mission—through individual members of the local church.

UNIT 4: The Local Church

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

:: Memorize the following verse(s):

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Romans 12:4-5

:: Complete the Unit 5 worksheets and activities (when applicable).

:: Pray for the needs of your brothers/sisters in your group.

:: Ensure you are able to attend the next session.