

PROGRESSING TOGETHER



COURSE 104

THE CHURCH



They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

They broke bread in their homes
and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

Acts 2:42 and 46b

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COURSE 104: The Church

Course Objectives

1. *To gain a biblical vision of the glorious nature of the Church of Jesus Christ.*
2. *To understand the role and practices of the local church.*
3. *To join with others in Christ's mission of building His Church*
4. *To commit to maintaining unity in the local church.*

Lessons

❶	The Founding of the Church
❷	The Nature of the Church
❸	The 'Ordinances' of the Church
❹	Church Leaders
❺	Preserving Church Unity

Introduction

When God called Abraham (Genesis 12), He revealed His wonderful plan to redeem the human race and to win it back to Himself. He promised to bless all the families, the tribes, of the earth through Abraham's 'seed', his own descendant. When Jesus redeemed humanity through his sacrificial death and resurrection, He established a new community that would unite all who believe in Him from all those tribal families into one family, as members of His Body, the Church (Ephesians 3:6,10).

The true Church of Jesus Christ is made up of believers from every tribe and nation who have put their faith in Jesus and have joined themselves together to worship God and encourage one another.

We pray that as you study these lessons you will grow in your understanding of God's design for the Church and commit to Christ's mission of building His Church.

Testimony

The group leader will have you watch or listen to a testimony related to the topic of this course.



Lesson ①: The Founding of the Church

Acts 2:1-47

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand how the Church was first formed, and particularly the role of the Holy Spirit and the Apostles.
2. To understand the role of faith in becoming a member of the Church.
3. To review the principal activities of the Church and evaluate one's own participation in a local church body.



At the feast of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the new Church of Jesus Christ was officially inaugurated. How did 12 apostles become such bold witnesses and so instrumental in starting the Church of Jesus Christ? How do the activities and focus of the first church serve as a model to the Church today?



Read Acts 2:1- 47 carefully.



Explanation of certain numbers:

- **50:** The feast is called 'Pentecost' (verse 1) because it comes 50 days after the Jewish Passover feast. ('Pentecost' means 50th in Greek.)
- **11:** 'The eleven' (verse 14) are the other 11 apostles beside Peter.
- **3:** It was about the third hour (verse 15) when Peter began to preach that is nine o'clock in the morning.



In Acts 1:4-8, we find the last words the risen Jesus speaks to his disciples. He commanded them 'not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father' (v.4), which was the Holy Spirit (v.5). Then, he tells them once they have the Holy Spirit, they will 'receive power' and will be His 'witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (v.8).



In what ways are the events recorded in Acts 2 a fulfilment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:4-8?



Peter quotes from the Old Testament prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21) and from king David (Acts 2:25-28). What point is he proving in each case?



What was required to join the new community of faith, the Church? (Verses 21,37-41)



Verses 42-47 describe daily life in the very first church. List and describe the primary activities of the first Church in Acts 2. (Refer to lesson 5 of course 103 'Growing in Christ'.)



What was the impact of this first local church's witness on the community observing them? (Verse 47)



In your own words, what part did the Apostles play and what part did the Holy Spirit play in establishing the Church?



All church doctrine and practice are based on the teaching of the word of God. The teaching of the apostles contained in the New Testament completed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, giving us our Bible today.



Optional activities

1. Watch the first 14 minutes of the video [The Book of Acts](#), retelling the events mentioned in Acts 1 and 2. As you watch, think of the question: What do you find astonishing or different about the early church? Discuss this as a group. Then, thank God for the miracle of the birth of the Church.
2. From what you learned about the early church, what is your dream / desire for the church in your context? Discuss this as a group. Then, pray for her.



Applications

1. Review the activities of the early church from question 4. Evaluate how you are doing in each of these areas in the chart below. What may you need to change? (Note that you can also answer these questions for your church community as a whole.)

Church Activity	What am I already doing?	What do I need to change?
The apostles teaching: <i>Learning God's Word</i>		
Fellowship: <i>Encouraging and helping others in the church</i>		
Holy Communion: <i>Participating in group worship</i>		
Prayer: <i>Praying with and for others</i>		

2. In the coming week, pray about your church, its leaders and your personal involvement in the church. In particular, pray about the changes that you identified in the previous application activity and take action to put them into practice.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson ②: The Nature of the Church

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To be able to explain how each of five images helps us to better understand the Church of Jesus Christ.
2. To realize more of the glorious nature of the Church and the wonderful privilege to be a part of it.
3. To commit to helping the local church fulfil her high calling to glorify Christ in this world.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read carefully Ephesians 5:22-33, Romans 12:1-13, and Ephesians 2:19-22.



① THE CHURCH IS COMPARED TO A BRIDE (Ephesians 5:22-33).



How did Jesus show his love for the Church?



What is Jesus' desire for his 'Bride'?



② THE CHURCH IS THE 'BODY OF CHRIST' (Romans 12:1-13).



Since we belong to the 'Body of Christ', what should be our attitude about our own bodies? (Verses 1-2)



What should be our attitude towards the other members of the 'body'? (vv.3-5, 9-13)



What are some of the gifts that God gives to different members of the 'body'? (vv.6-8)

③

CITIZENS OF A COUNTRY, MEMBERS OF A FAMILY, STONES OF A TEMPLE



In Ephesians 2:19-22, we find 3 images used to describe the Church. What does each image teach us about the nature of the Church and our relationships to one another?

Citizens of a country

Members of a family

Stones of a temple



The Church is a 'temple' for God's dwelling place. What are the different elements that compose this holy temple?



According to this text, describe what is the function of this temple.



Optional activities

1. Draw one of the five pictures used in Scripture to represent the Church. Then, represent yourself within the picture. Meditate on what that teaching means for you as a member of the Church. Then, share with the group.
2. Sing a song about the Church, for instance:
 - [He reigns](#) by the Newsboys
 - [O Bride of Christ](#) by Taylor Agar
 - [The body of Christ](#) by Taylor Agar



Applications

1. What do you do that shows you are a member of the Church, which is the 'Bride', 'Body' and 'Temple'?
2. How can your community better reflect these realities of the Church's nature? Discuss as a group what it means practically that the Church is 'the bride of Christ' and 'the body of Christ' and that its members to be 'citizens of Christ's kingdom, 'members of Christ's family' and 'stones in Christ's temple'.
3. In the coming days, choose one of the pictures representing the church. (If you drew them as an optional activity, take your drawing home and put it in a place where you can see it often.) Pray for your church to become more like this. Then, reflect on your own commitment to your church as part of the body.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson ③: The 'Ordinances' of the Church

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. Understand the meaning of the ordinances of Christ and their importance in the life of the local church.
2. Understand one's responsibility in observing these commands.
3. Evaluate one's own current observance of each ordinance and take any necessary steps to fully participate in them.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Definitions:

- Ordinance: A rite, instituted by Jesus while on earth, for all believers to participate in. There are 2 ordinances: Baptism and The Lord's Table. They are outward actions that physically show what God has done spiritually inside the believer.
- Covenant: A solemn agreement between two parties that defines each one's roles and obligations.
- Passover: A feast to celebrate the deliverance of God's people from death and slavery in Egypt through sacrificing a spotless lamb.
- The Lord's Table (also called Holy Communion): It is a solemn observance instituted by Jesus while eating the Passover with his disciples. The elements remind us of his body broken for us and his blood shed for us.
- Baptism: A public testimony of one's new birth in Christ by faith. It symbolizes cleansing from sin and union with Christ's death and resurrection.



The events of Pentecost in Acts 2 marked the beginning of a new community of believers with an intimate, dynamic relationship to God through the Holy Spirit. This new 'covenant' relationship was foretold 600 years before, by the Prophet Jeremiah.



① THE NEW COVENANT



Read carefully Jeremiah 31:31-34.



How would the promised New Covenant be different from the relationship of God and his people in the Old Covenant (Old Testament)?



When Jesus established the New Covenant community, the Church, he gave us 2 new rites (ceremonial practices) that explain God's new working among his people. These ordinances are 1) The Lord's Table and 2) Baptism.



THE LORD'S TABLE



Read carefully Luke 22:7-23.



For what reason has 'The Lord's Table' been instituted according to verse 19?



What is the meaning of the bread (verse 19) and the cup (verse 20)?



What does this teach us about our 'New Covenant' relationship (to God) as believers in Christ? (Reread Jeremiah 31:34.)



When we take the elements of Holy Communion together in worship, we remember and proclaim that our sins have been fully forgiven and we have access to God in prayer thanks to Jesus' dying in our place. It is a time to reflect on his accomplished work, fellowship with Him and one another, and look forward to His glorious return. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)



BAPTISM



Read carefully Acts 8:26-40.



Like Communion, the ordinance of Baptism is designed to proclaim and illustrate the new spiritual realities of our New Covenant relationship with Christ and with His Church.



As we saw on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it was necessary to believe the Gospel message and repent to be baptized. In Acts 8, Philip the Evangelist meets with an Ethiopian eunuch reading from chapter 53 of the prophet Isaiah on his way home from worshiping God in Jerusalem. According to the text of Acts 8: 32-35, what is the gospel of Jesus, 'the Good News', announced to the Ethiopian? (See also Isaiah 53:4-12.)



From the indications that are given in the text, what would have convinced Philip to baptise the Ethiopian right there, after he had shared the good news with him and heard his desire to be baptised?



What does the practice of water baptism illustrate about our new relationships under the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34?



According to Matthew 28:18-20, who ought to be baptised, and in whose name?



Optional activities

- Water baptism serves as a public testimony to Spirit baptism. Read the New Testament verses below and match each one to the definition or description it provides for baptism: Romans 6:1-14 – 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – 1 Peter 3:21.

Bible Reference	Definition/Description of Baptism
	A pledge or commitment of a believer whose conscience has been purified to make sure that what baptism symbolizes becomes a reality in his life
	Identification and union with Christ in his death and resurrection unto a new life of righteousness
	Identification and union with all believers through the Holy Spirit's joining us together

5. When is the right time for someone to be baptised? Read each statement below and write 'True', 'Sometimes true', or 'False', according to its relevance for determining when to be baptised:

_____ At the earliest opportunity after confession of faith in Christ to ensure the person is saved for eternity.

_____ Once it is certain that the believer has understood the gospel message and the meaning of the act of baptism.

_____ After having received careful, systematic instruction on the Christian life

_____ Once there is a local church community ready to receive the candidate as a member.

_____ On the condition there is a pastor or an official representative of the church present.

_____ Once there are no members of the family who oppose baptism.

_____ If the candidate is a minor, not until both parents are in agreement. Otherwise, wait until the youth becomes of legal age.

_____ Once the spouse (husband or wife) has also believed and requested baptism.

6. Identify some superstitions / false beliefs related to baptism or communion.



Applications

1. If you are a follower of Jesus-Christ but have not yet taken part in Holy Communion, re-read what you learned in this lesson. Then, go and find a leader in your church to talk about participating in Holy Communion.
2. If the leadership of your church agrees, take communion as a group at the end of this lesson.

3. If you have not been baptised yet, re-read what you learned in this lesson about baptism and prayerfully consider whether you should take this step of obedience. If so, go and find a leader in your church to talk about it.
4. In the coming days, if you know of a believer who has not yet been baptised, pray for them and encourage them to take this step of faith.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson 4: Church Leaders

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To know what character traits are required of a deacon and an elder and what their respective roles are.
2. To appreciate the servant attitude that must be present in a deacon and elder and in ourselves.
3. To commit to a servant attitude and honouring the leaders in the local church.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 carefully.



Definitions:

- Deacon: A church member appointed to carry out a particular service in the local church.
- Overseer or Elder: A recognized leader responsible for teaching and overseeing the affairs of the local church in keeping with God's word.



The first 'deacons' appear in Acts 6:1-7. As the number of disciples grew in the Jerusalem Church, the Apostles could not manage the daily needs of its members and disputes arose. They consulted the members to appoint seven men to manage the physical needs of the church (verse 3) which would allow the Apostles and elders to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (verse 4). In this lesson, we will examine the characteristics and roles of deacons and elders and how we as believers are to relate to them.



PREREQUISITES FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS



Re-read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and fill in the chart below ticking the box if that characteristic describes an elder and/or a deacon.

Qualifications	Elder	Deacon
He must be above reproach	✓	✓
...the husband of one wife		
...a sober-minded/sincere individual		
...be self-controlled		

...be respectable		
...be hospitable.		
...be able to teach		
...never get drunk.		
...be gentle.		
...not seek quarrels.		
...not seek worldly wealth.		
...manage his own family and household well.		
...be respected by his own children		
...be capable of leading the Church.		
...be a mature Christian.		
...have a good reputation with outsiders.		
...seek to live by God's word		
...be put to the test.		



Christians through the ages have taken different views as to whether women can be deacons in the church. 1 Timothy 3:11 could refer either to the wives of deacons or to the office of female deaconesses. Whichever the interpretation, these women must exhibit the following characteristics: they must be worthy of respect (have a good reputation), not talk maliciously about others, control their behaviour, and be trustworthy in everything.



② CHURCH OR HOUSEHOLD: WHICH COMES FIRST?



Re-read 1 Timothy 3: 2-5,12. See also Titus 1:6.



Based on the teachings of this passage, write 'True' or 'False' before the following statements about the believer's responsibility in managing his family.

_____ The believer must focus first on caring for his family adequately before seeking to manage the church's affairs.

_____ Leaders need to be willing to give up leadership responsibilities when their own family requires extra attention.

_____ A leader's family should not have to make any sacrifices for church ministry.

_____ Leaders should put the needs of the local church above those of their own wife and children.

_____ An important role of a leader is to be a model of how to manage and care for one's family.

③ COMPARING THE 2 LISTS OF QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS AND DEACONS.



Do any of these characteristics surprise you?



What key qualities are emphasized? manage



What are some similarities between Elders and Deacons?



What are some differences between Elders and Deacons?



What qualifications from 1 Timothy 3.1-13 show that both overseers/leaders/elders and deacons are meant to be servants in the Church?



Most qualities enumerated above apply to every disciple who wants to follow after Christ. Refer to the list above and note 2 or 3 qualities that the Lord has given you since your new birth.



What 2 or 3 qualities that you would like to develop, with His help, for his glory?



All believers are called to use their spiritual gifts to serve in the church (see 1 Peter 4:10). They do not need a title to do this. The position of 'deacon' and 'elder' should not be sought simply for the title, to get a position or increase one's status.

④

HOW ARE WE TO TREAT ELDERS IN THE CHURCH?



Read 1 Timothy 5:17-19.



According to this passage, how are we to treat elders in the church?



Is it proper for an elder to receive pay for his work?



Who should pay the elder's salary?



Optional activities

1. Ask each participant to mention 2 qualities that they see in the person next to them. Then, ask them to pray for one another, thanking the Lord for these qualities and asking Him to continue to help each one grow in Christ's likeness.
2. Read together Mark 10:42-45. As a group discuss how leadership should be exercised in the church and compare it with the way rulers behave in the world. Why is this a challenge? What changes when leadership is exercised in the way Jesus modelled it?



Applications

1. Thank God for the leaders and servants in your local church and in your context. What are some of the qualities that you see in them and that serve as a model for you? Pray for them to remain faithful.
2. Think of your responsibilities as a church member. 1 Thessalonians 5:13 says that we are to hold leaders in 'highest honour' because of their work. What are some ways you can put this into application with your own leaders? This week, put this into practice.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson 5: Preserving Church Unity

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand how church members can encourage and support their leaders.
2. To understand how leaders can serve their fellow members effectively.
3. To grow in humility and appreciation of all who serve in the church family.
4. To recognize and commit fully to one's present role in serving the church.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Definition:

Biblical Submission: Christians should submit first and foremost to God (James 4:7), and then to one another. It can refer to a voluntary decision to respect others as being higher to oneself in rank or to the placing of others' interests above one's own to honour Christ. (This most often requires obedience with regard to leaders (see Hebrews 13:17) but not always (see Acts 4:18-21)).



Read Psalm 133.



How sweet the blessing of Christian unity. Unity is an important theme throughout the Bible.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be 'one' (John 17:20-23), Paul encourages The Ephesians who were arguing among themselves to be 'eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit' (Ephesians 4:3), and 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that, although there are many members in the church with many differing gifts, the church is 'one body'.

How are we as Christians to be 'one'? How is the church to maintain unity with so many different types of people with different backgrounds and viewpoints? How are we to interact with one another and our leaders in ways that brings honour and glory to God and maintains church unity?



Read carefully 1 Peter 5:1-11.



UNITY WITH CHURCH LEADERS (Verses 1-5)



What does Peter encourage elders to do? (Verse 2)



Fill in the chart below regarding the attitude required of the person who desires to serve in the church as an elder. (Verses 2-3)

An elder with the right attitude, watches over the church...	An elder with the wrong attitude, watches over the church...
Willingly	
	For personal gain
By being an example that the church can follow	



In your own words, describe what it means for an elder to be 'an example to the church'?



What does Peter encourage the younger members to do in support of their elders (v.5)?



It is a great joy and advantage for you to be under the care of a loving elder. The elder's job is to watch over your souls and to care for you like a shepherd caring for his own sheep. Submitting to the elders is a way of honouring God, growing in your Christian walk, and helping maintain unity in the church. Elders have a very serious job and will one day have to give an account for their work. Submitting to them helps them to do their job with joy. (Hebrews 13:17)



Re-read verse 5. What attitude is Peter encouraging the younger members to display in their submission to the elders?



Is Peter only addressing the youth here?



Who does Paul specifically say should clothe themselves with humility towards one another?



Based on what we have just learned, fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

_____ should clothe themselves in _____ as they shepherd and oversee

the church with a _____ spirit.

Christians should _____ to their elders in a spirit of _____ knowing that it

is a great _____ and to their _____ to have an elder shepherding them.



Re-read verses 6-11. According to verse 8, what is our adversary trying to do to us?



How are we encouraged to resist the enemy?



How do you suppose the exhortation to resist the devil (verses 8-9) relates to humility and unity in the church? (Verses 5-7)



UNITY WITH OTHER BELIEVERS



Read carefully 1 Thessalonians 5:12-21.



What are the expectations of good leaders in verse 12?



How should they deal with the following weaknesses of people in their care? (Verse 14)

For those who are:	Leaders should:
Idle	
Timid	
Weak	
For all	



Spiritual leaders need discernment to know how to patiently accompany each one under their care. We can all help them by praying that God would give them wisdom in this task.



How does Paul expect Christians to treat their leaders for peace to reign among them? (Verse 13)



What do you think would happen in a church if people stopped showing respect for their leaders?



Paul urges the church at Thessalonica to be at peace with each other (verse 13). He then gives a list of good habits/ characteristics that a healthy unified church would have. In the table below, for each verse give the practice we are encouraged to develop, and then show how it could contribute to the unity of the church. Complete the table below. The first verse (14) is given as a model.

Verse	Healthy Practice to Develop	Benefits in building church unity
14	Patiently address problem behaviours	Problems caused by bad behaviours will only get worse if they are not addressed. All need to be willing to accept and give counsel to help each other grow in Christ and live together in peace.
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		Be attentive to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Confess and renounce sinful activities or attitudes as soon as He reveals them to us.
20-21	Don't despise prophetic teaching, but examine it carefully before accepting it .	



Optional activity

1. Sing a song about unity in the church, for instance:

- [We are one](#) by Emu
- [Oh, how good it is](#) by Keith & Kristyn Getty
- [The servant song](#)

Then, pray for your own church members to be increasingly one in Christ.

2. Compose a poem or a song based on Psalm 133. Start with verse 1, keeping it as it is. Then, in place of verses 2-3, provide images from your own cultural context to express your thanksgiving to God for the beautiful fellowship that exists between brothers and sisters who are united in Christ.



Applications

1. What are some attitudes and actions that are obstacles to unity in the church? Pray and ask God to show you if these attitudes are found in you or if any of your actions are hindering unity of your own church. If this is the case, ask for forgiveness. In the coming days, keep praying for this to change.
2. What are some attitudes and actions that contribute to unity in the church? In the coming days, keep praying for God to help you develop these attitudes and take actions that build church unity and help all to grow spiritually.
3. We began this course introduction with God's glorious purpose for the Church: to unite people from different tribes, languages, social and cultural backgrounds through faith into one body in Christ (Ephesians 3:6). How do you see this unity expressed in practical ways in your local church? Discuss this as a group. Then, pray that God would show you how you can do more to reach out to and embrace those from all tribes and cultures. Keep a record and remind one another what ways God reveals to you.



Review of Course 104

Review the five lessons of this Course. Then, as a group, prepare and perform a drama showing what you have learned and illustrating how this has affected the way you see the Church.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.

