

PROGRESSING TOGETHER



COURSE 104

THE CHURCH

Group Leader Version with Notes and Answer Key



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

1	The Founding of the Church
2	The Nature of the Church
3	The 'Ordinances' of the Church
4	Church Leaders
5	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.

Note for the group leader:

The promise to Abraham to bless all nations (tribes) and how God fulfilled that promise through Jesus Christ is a central theme through the Bible. It is presented in the first course in this series: Overview of the Bible (101). You may consider studying 101 together before beginning this course (104). If you have already studied it, you could take some time asking students to recall and explain the promises and trace their fulfilment through the Old and New Testaments.

Testimony

Note for the group leader:

For each Course in the Progressing Together Level 1 program, a story has been provided that illustrates the impact of the Biblical teaching on the life of the disciple. The stories are based on real-life testimonies. They can be used to encourage faith and raise interest in the importance of studying what God's Word has to say on the topic at hand. You can use them in your church

fellowship to invite other participants to the Course, or as part of the introduction to the first lesson. Alternatively, you may read the story below to your students:

My name is Noor and I am 39 years old. Before I believed in Christ, I used to think, as most people in our society, that the church is a fine building, built to a special design, decorated with striking colours and beautiful pictures, with the cross of Christ in the centre, surrounded by old paintings and sometimes also statues. This was my mental picture of the church from the time when, as a child, I attended the Christian wedding celebration of one of my mother's friends.

As I grew up, I came to realise that there were different types of churches and church buildings. I got to know the Orthodox Church, the Catholics and the Protestants. I used to wonder, 'What is the difference between them?' And, even after I became a believer in Christ, I was still asking myself: 'What is the church?'

Then, I joined a group of believers led by a spiritual leader. I am still a member of that group now. I wanted to find out the answers to my questions. I began a journey of searching and learning. I discovered that the true church of Christ is not a building, but rather a group of believers and that Christ himself has used special words and pictures to describe the church. We can find them in the Bible: 'bride of Christ, body of Christ, temple or dwelling place of God.' But most importantly, the church is made of all believers from all peoples, nations and tongues. They are all living stones built on the foundation of Christ.



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.
Note to the group leader:
In Acts 1:26, we learn that Matthias had replaced Judas.
- **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?

- *The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and receive power to be Christ's witnesses.*
- *The witness has already begun to spread within Jerusalem, and from there, the good news will go out 'to the ends of the earth' through the testimony of those who came from many different countries (verses 9-11) to celebrate Pentecost.*



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?

- *In Acts 2:17-21, he is explaining that the peculiar behaviour of the Apostles the people were witnessing is a fulfilment of prophecy and not drunken behaviour.*

- *In Acts 2:25-28, he is explaining that Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy and those in Jerusalem can testify to that, having witnessed the events leading up to his crucifixion and everything that happened after his death.*

Both of these prophecies show how recent events confirm that Jesus in fact was the promised Messiah of the Scriptures.

Note for the group leader:

The passages cited in Acts 2 are found in the Old Testament in Joel 3:1-5 and Psalm 16:8-11. You can refer to them if it is helpful for your group.



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

First, they needed to call on the name of the Lord; i.e. acknowledge that Jesus is the only Saviour and Lord.

They needed to repent (acknowledge the error of their beliefs and ways and allow Jesus to save and transform them) and

They had to publicly confess their allegiance to Jesus Christ by being baptized in His name.

Notes for the group leader:

- *Salvation and reconciliation are available to all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.*
 - *One first needs to be saved by declaring one's faith in Jesus Christ.*
 - *Baptism is the public confession of that faith and of one's association with all believers in His Church. We will study baptism further in lesson 3.*
-



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'.)

The apostles' teaching – *The apostles were teaching that Jesus was the promised Messiah from the Old Testament and that salvation can only be found in Him. The church devoted themselves to knowing and understanding their teaching, confident that it was the Word of God.*

Fellowship – *They were giving and receiving help and encouragement from others. They were sharing life together, being mindful of others' needs in the group, and sharing time and resources.*

Note for the group leader:

See teachers' notes on fellowship and the section on giving in lesson 5 of course 103 'Growing in Christ'.

Breaking of Bread (Holy communion/The Lord's Supper) – *This was done in homes. By the sharing of the bread and wine (a symbolic representation of Jesus' body and blood), Christians remember Jesus's suffering and God's great loving sacrifice for them.*

Prayer – *Praying to God with others, in both worship and intercession.*



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

They found favour in the eyes of the people and many were attracted to join them as they glorified God.



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

Apostles:

- *The Church was founded on apostolic teaching. The apostles took the Old Testament teaching and applied it to Jesus’ saving work on the cross and to the life of the New Testament church.*
- *They were also God’s instruments by which many signs and wonders were done to confirm their message.*
- *Finally, they provided leadership to the Church helping resolve doctrinal and practical questions that arose as a result of this new institution.*

Holy Spirit: *The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles and subsequent believers to be witnesses to the world about Jesus’s saving work. He also convicts the world regarding their need to be saved.*



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.

Note to the group leader:

The qualifications of an apostle were spelled out in Acts 1:21-26. He must be:

- *an eye-witness to Jesus’ earthly ministry and resurrection*
- *designated by the Holy Spirit and*
- *recognized by the original apostles*



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.

The video uses the words of the book of Acts. The first 14 minutes takes you up to the end of chapter 2.

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?
<i>The apostles teaching: Learning God’s Word</i>		

<p>Fellowship: Encouraging and helping others in the church</p>		
<p>Holy Communion: Participating in group worship</p>		
<p>Prayer: Praying with and for others</p>		

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.

Note for the group leader:

Tell the students that there will be a revision activity at the end of this Course. They will be asked to perform a drama summarizing what they have learned and illustrating how this has impacted their lives. Ask them to start thinking about this.



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?

He is her Saviour who gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her, to present her to Himself as a radiant church, holy and blameless. He feeds her and takes care of her.



What is Jesus' desire for his 'Bride'?

That she be submitted to him in holiness, radiant, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.

Note to group leader:

The Church is described as a beautiful bride adorned to meet Christ her husband in Revelation 21:2 and following.



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)

We should consider them as a living sacrifice (we no longer belong to ourselves but to God). We should keep ourselves holy, (not giving in to sin). We should live to please God. In this way, our lives are in constant worship of God.



What should be our attitude towards the other members of the 'body'? (vv.3-5, 9-13)
'Not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought' means considering others as better than ourselves, or at least as equals. Since we are all members of one body (v 5), we should consider others as being intimately joined to us. Everybody must be respected. Each person has a place

and a role to play. Everyone must be encouraged to develop and use his gifts for the good of the body as a whole.

Everyone needs to understand that he should seek regular fellowship and be fully and intimately committed to a local body of believers.

Every relationship should be motivated by true brotherly love; this is demonstrated by clinging to what is good, being zealous, serving faithfully, being patient and offering hospitality. (vv. 9-13)



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

- *Prophecy (applying God's word to our situation today)*
- *Service (especially practical help - Acts 6:1-6)*
- *Teaching*
- *Encouraging or exhorting*
- *Providing for those in need (be it emotional or physical)*
- *Leading a service and/or being a leader in the Church*
- *Having a responsibility in a charitable work.*

Note to the group leader:

This list is not comprehensive, see also 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.

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

- *We all have the same King and all must serve and answer to Him. (We cannot judge our fellow servants/citizens or refuse them the right to citizenship in the Kingdom.)*
 - *We abide by the same laws and rules toward one another and encourage each other to follow them.*
 - *We have a common kingdom (national) heritage to defend and common enemies we must face together.*
 - *We are ambassadors of Christ our King and want to represent him honourably.*
-

Members of a family

- *God is our loving Father and Jesus the Son our devoted brother who made our adoption possible through His sacrifice.*
 - *We enjoy the privileges of royal family, including special access to the King.*
 - *We love and look out for the welfare of our brothers and sisters.*
 - *We share joys and sorrows and encourage one another.*
 - *We seek to represent the family well to those outside.*
-

Stones of a temple

- *We are aligned (set in place) in reference to Christ, the cornerstone.*
 - *We glorify God together (we are holy and must reflect His glory).*
 - *We are joined to one another - placed side-by-side - and strengthen one another.*
-



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

- *Jesus, the corner-stone on whom the whole building is built and stands*
- *the apostles and the prophets, whose teaching is the foundation of the Church*
- *the members, who are the stones in the walls.*



According to this text, describe what is the function of this temple.
It is the dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit.



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.

Note for the group leader:

Make sure all five pictures are being drawn by the participants.

2. Sing a song about the Church, for instance:
 - [He reigns](#) by the Newsboys
Modern worship song – 5 minutes
 - [O Bride of Christ](#) by Taylor Agar
Modern worship song – 4 minutes
 - [The body of Christ](#) by Taylor Agar
Modern worship song – 4 minutes



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'.

Open answer. Here are some possible answers:

- **The Bride of Christ**
 - ✓ *We always remind one another that Jesus is coming soon. (See also Matthew 25:1-13).*
 - ✓ *We want to keep ourselves pure so we can be pleasing to him.*
 - ✓ *We want to exhort each other to keep from entanglements to sin.*
- **The Body of Christ**
 - ✓ *We make sure that everyone is treated as equally important.*
 - ✓ *We try always to include everybody and encourage others to use their gifts for the benefit of all in the church.*
 - ✓ *We aid those who are weak or hurting.*

- **Citizens of Christ's Kingdom**
 - ✓ *We honour earthly authorities but our supreme authority is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.*
 - ✓ *We remind one another that we are ambassadors in this world but that our true citizenship is in the kingdom of God.*
 - ✓ *We realize that each one answers to the King directly.*
- **Members of Christ's family**
 - ✓ *We ensure that we carry His name and encourage close bonds between all members no matter what earthly family they come from.*
 - ✓ *We treat each other as brothers and sisters.*
- **Stones in Christ's temple**
 - ✓ *We assembling together (first step) and we remember that we are linked together to form a holy temple.*
 - ✓ *We ensure that we are always basing everything we do on Christ and build on him.*
 - ✓ *We don't allow Church factions, rules or other distractions destroy our unity.*
 - ✓ *We work with Christ's guidance to build the church He wants.*
 - ✓ *We avoid an emphasis on earthly buildings.*

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?

Note for the group leader:

It is recommended that before teaching this lesson you talk with your church leaders about the way your church practices baptism and communion.



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.

Note for the group leader:

Some church traditions call this ceremony the 'Eucharist', from the Greek word which means 'Thanksgiving'.

- 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)?

The people would understand and willingly obey God's law instead of rebel against Him. God would forgive their sins once and for all.



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.

Note for the group leader:

They are also called sacraments by some Christians. We prefer using 'ordinance' to avoid certain misconceptions held by many (though not all) traditions that call these rites 'sacraments'. For many of them, these 'sacraments' confer merit or contribute to one's salvation. Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to pay the full price of our sin once for all, and we have fully received salvation when we call upon him in faith.

②

THE LORD'S TABLE



Read carefully Luke 22:7-23.



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

In remembrance of and as a testimony to Christ's death.

Note for the group leader:

We see in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 that this was to be a regular practice of the Church until Christ returns.



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

The bread represents the body of Christ, which was 'broken' for us.

The cup represents the new covenant in his blood, which he shed on the cross for our sins.



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

Simple answer:

God will no longer remember our sin. We are free from the guilt and shame of sin because of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Fuller answer:

We learn that Jesus is the Passover lamb who takes away our sin. His body was broken and his blood was shed unto death, so that he could pay in full—once for all—the penalty of our sin.

There is no longer need to offer sacrifices for our guilt and shame. Instead, we now thank God for Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Note to group leader:

Depending on the students' level, you can develop the fuller answer based on background understanding and the texts presented.

For a fuller explanation of Jesus' fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrificial laws once and for all through his death on the cross, see Hebrews 9:1 to 10:22.



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.)

Jesus is the lamb of God who died to take away the sins of the world. (Acts 8:32-33, cited from Isaiah 53:7-8)

From Isaiah 53:

- *We have sinned and deserve punishment, but Jesus was pierced and died to bear our sins in our place and give us peace with God. (Verses 4-6,12)*
- *He died, was raised to life victoriously and highly honoured as a result of his willing sacrifice. (Verses 11-12).*



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?

- *He was clearly seeking God. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship God, purchased a copy of the Scriptures, and was trying to understand them.*
- *God had clearly led Philip to meet him on his way to take the Gospel to a far-off land.*
- *He now understood that Jesus was the servant sent by God as a sacrificial lamb to take away his sin.*
- *He requested to be baptised to testify to his faith in Jesus as Savior.*
- *Some manuscripts mention, in verse 37, that the eunuch was told in response to his request to be baptised: 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God' (the Messiah and Saviour).*

Note for the group leader:

We note in passing that of course it was necessary to have water nearby and a servant of the Church to baptise him.

Note that verse 37 does not appear in some of the early copies of the Greek New Testament.

For this reason, some of the English translations put the verse in the margin only. The question is: did an early scribe omit the verse or did someone add the verse along the way. It is not sound practice to base a doctrine solely on a verse which is of doubtful origin. However, the teaching of this verse (37) certainly finds support elsewhere. See Acts 2:41, Acts 18:8.

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

- *We are cleansed from sin, forever forgiven and now pure and righteous before God. (Jeremiah 31:34b - See also 1 Peter 3:21-22.)*
- *We die to our old life and are raised to a new life with a heart that loves God and seeks to obey Him. (Jeremiah 31:33; See also Romans 6:1-3.)*
- *The Holy Spirit now enables us to know God and guides us so that we understand the spirit of his law. (Jeremiah 31:34a. See also Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.)*

Note to the group leader:

You could refer here to the New Testament passages in this section or have students study them in the Optional Activities section. You could add 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 which explains how we, as believers, are all baptized by the Spirit and are united together to form one body in Christ.

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

All disciples - those who believe in Jesus as their Savior and who seek to follow Him - from all nations should be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Note to the group leader:

The command is to make disciples of all nations. Baptism is an early step of obedience of the new disciple. It is the outward expression of the inward reality of his changed heart that happened when he called upon the Lord and was saved. It is not necessary for salvation. Neither the water we are baptized in nor the obedience of being baptized saves us. We are saved by the grace of God through faith, not by obedience or the works of the law (see Ephesians 2:8-9). (For more on baptism and a study series to prepare for those being baptized, look on the Progressing Together website under additional resources.)

 **Optional activities**

4. 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
<i>1 Peter 3:21</i>	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
<i>Romans 6:1-14</i>	Identification and union with Christ in his death and resurrection unto a new life of righteousness

1 Corinthians 12:12-13	Identification and union with all believers through the Holy Spirit's joining us together
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Note to the group leader:

Discuss how each text enriches our understanding of baptism, and of God's wonderful new working in our lives as believers in Christ. You might also ask whether each verse speaks primarily about water baptism or Spirit baptism according to the context.

(Answers: first passage: water baptism; second passage: Spirit baptism; third passage: Spirit baptism)

In 1 Peter 3:20-21, Peter relates water baptism to the flood waters which 'saved' Noah and his family from his evil generation. Many similarities could be mentioned, but note this one: Noah understood that the flood waters would mean destruction for all, including himself and his family, unless they could take refuge in God's means for salvation: the ark. So, by faith he built (and preached) and then entered the ark and was safely brought through the flood waters. In similar manner, we understand that the waters of baptism symbolise our forgiveness and cleansing from sin, our death with Christ and resurrection to new life with Him. So, by faith we officially commit ourselves to Christ through baptism and publicly declare what He has done in saving us. The believer should not unduly delay fulfilling this solemn commitment.

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:

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

This is not a biblical belief, and we should reassure new believers of their salvation by grace through faith alone rather than accommodate their fears based on a faulty understanding of baptism or salvation.

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

Yes, indeed. Look for the earliest opportunity, taking into consideration the appropriate circumstances below.

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

This is a good idea if the training can be regular - if not intensive - and limited in time. It is a unique opportunity as believers are motivated to learn God's word and need to establish good habits to grow in Christ. It is not a requirement however.

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

Ideally it is good for the believer to request baptism of the church community he/she intends to join. Then, the community can joyfully welcome the believer as a full member. Where there is no church family nearby, try to involve believers from the region.

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

Since all believers are considered priests through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, this is not technically required (See 1 Peter 2:9). However, the presence of a

recognised church leader can help assure both the believer and the church community of the legitimacy of the faith of the believer and the act of baptism.

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

In some cases, allowing some time for the believer's family to recognise the genuine nature of their loved one's faith can be considered. However, we should never expect all to approve beforehand.

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

This is recommended, while considering this young person as a true believer and a trusted member of the church fellowship.

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

This is a valid consideration for a limited time. If the delay is prolonged, the believer should move forward if there is opportunity to do so.

6. Identify some superstitions / false beliefs related to baptism or communion.
 - a) *Some believe that baptizing children - often secretly - will magically protect them from sickness and evil spirits.*
 - b) *Some Christians view baptism as a last rite. They try to delay baptism as long as possible thinking that is a last cleansing opportunity before they meet God.*
 - c) *Some believe that the act of water baptism actually gives salvation to the one baptised (known as Baptismal Regeneration).*
 - d) *Some believe that, during holy communion, the bread and wine actually become Jesus's body and blood, bringing a special merit or blessing to the recipient (known as Transubstantiation).*



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.
7. If the leadership of your church agrees, take communion as a group at the end of this lesson.
8. 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.
9. 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.

Note for the group leader:

It is generally agreed that the words ‘Overseer’ and ‘Elder’ describe the same function. 1 Peter 5:1-2 says that overseers are also ‘shepherds’ (pastors).



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.

Note for the group leader:

The word ‘deacon’ generally means ‘servant’ but can be used in a more specific way to refer to the office of ‘deacon’. 1 Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1 are the 2 key passages that deal with the issue of women serving in the official office of deacon. In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is called a ‘Deacon’ of the Church at Cenchreae. There is no clear evidence one way or the other as to whether Paul meant to use the word ‘deacon’ in reference to Phoebe, in the specific sense of the office or in the general sense of simply a servant. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 3:11 the Greek word used could be translated ‘women’ or ‘wives’. There is no clear evidence as to whether Paul was using this word to describe the character of the wives of the male deacons or to refer to the character of the women who are called to the office of ‘deaconess’.

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.

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

As this is first priority (children have only one father or mother) and a requirement before taking on more responsibility.

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

Absolutely, and the church should encourage them in their decision rather than pressure them to continue serving in a demanding leadership role.

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

Not true. But the spouse and children must know that their basic needs and loving care will not be abandoned in order to manage other people's affairs. When they have this assurance, they often will willingly make sacrifices alongside the leader in ministry.

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

Temptation to do so comes from pride and pretension rather than godly sacrifice.

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

Yes, the leader is to be blameless and a model parent first within his own family, then before the church family and outside community. 'Blameless' does not mean he hides his faults, but rather he confess them, walk humbly in the truth, and has confidence in God's grace.

Notes to the group leader:

- *Rebellion in children is a sign of a problem that needs special attention to be addressed. It may not necessarily be the parents' fault, but church responsibilities could prevent the parent from adequately dealing with the rebellious child, especially if the rebellion is a cry out for attention.*
- *Titus 1:6 alone adds the expectation that the leader's children believe also. Caution should be exercised in applying this as a firm requirement. Some children may not make profession of faith early; yet they should have respect for their parents' faith.*

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

 Do any of these characteristics surprise you?

Open answer

 What key qualities are emphasized? manage

Purity of heart, love for God and passion for His Word, love for people

 What are some similarities between Elders and Deacons?

They must both be above reproach, not drunkards, be committed to and faithful to their spouse, and manage their own family well.

 What are some differences between Elders and Deacons?

Elders have more qualifications that involve dealing with people (self-controlled, respectable, gentle, not quarrelsome) as well as needing the ability to teach God's Word



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

They are gentle, not lovers of money or seeking glory, willing to serve (verses 3 and 8), hospitable (verse 2). They are given the task of caring for the church (verse 5) like their own family.



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.

Free answer



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

Free answer



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.



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?

We are to respect them all. Those who work hard at studying and teaching God's word are worthy of 'double honour' (respect socially and support financially).



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

Yes – the labourer is worthy of his wages.



Who should pay the elder's salary?

Normally, it is up to the group or church the elder serves to provide according to his needs, and according to the ability of the church.



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.
10. 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.

11. 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).

Note to the group leader:

- *The Greek NT word for 'submit oneself' (hupotassomai) was the term often used for a subordinate's role toward someone of higher military rank.*
- *It is possible to submit without necessarily obeying an authority when one is willing to accept the consequences for one's decisions (including fines, expulsion, imprisonment, death) with a godly heart attitude. (For an inductive study of Biblical submission, see PRAT 203 The Family: The Christian Model, Lesson 5A.)*



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)

To shepherd (to care for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep) and to exercise oversight over the church.



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	<i>Under compulsion</i>
<i>Eagerly</i>	For personal gain
By being an example that the church can follow	<i>Lording it over (domineering) the members of the church</i>



In your own words, describe what it means for an elder to be ‘an example to the church’? *Free answer, but should include that he is to be an example in his conduct, speech, and devotion. Christians should look up to the elder as a role model for how they want to be and act.*

Note for the group leader:

Refer back to Lesson 4 for a list of characteristics he should possess.



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

Peter encourages the younger men to be subject or submit to the elders.

Note for the group leader:

This does not mean that we should allow false teachers and abusive leaders to dominate the church. (See 2 Corinthians 11:12-21.)



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?

Humility



Is Peter only addressing the youth here?

No



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

'All of you' (the youth, all believers, and elders)



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

Elders should clothe themselves in humility as they shepherd and oversee the church with a willing/eager spirit.

Christians should submit to their elders in a spirit of humility knowing that it is a great joy and to their advantage to have an elder shepherding them.



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

Devour us.



How are we encouraged to resist the enemy?

- *By remaining humbly under God's mighty hand (v.6)*
 - *By not being anxious because He is the One watching over us (v.7)*
 - *By remaining vigilant at all times (v.8)*
 - *By resisting the devil with a firm faith (v.9)*
 - *By remembering that other Christians have gone through the same trials (v.9)*
 - *By having confidence that God is perfecting us through this experience, making us strong, firm and steadfast (v.11).*
-



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

The devil incites us to pride and exploits it to divide us. We must not give in to his provocations to destroy the Church of God.

When the Church stands together in unity and maintains healthy relationships in humility, its members strengthen one another and they stand firm together, in faith, resisting the devil.



UNITY WITH OTHER BELIEVERS



Read carefully 1 Thessalonians 5:12-21.



What are the expectations of good leaders in verse 12?

They are to work hard.

They are given responsibility for you (are 'over' you)

They are to admonish or warn you.

Note for the group leader:

Admonishing and warning is an important role for the elders because we all tend to stray as sheep from the sound teaching of Scripture and need to be encouraged constantly to remember and put into practice ways that are contrary to the ways of the world around us. (Recall the 1 Peter 5 passage above.)



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

For those who are:	Leaders should:
Idle	<i>Warn them (and be patient).</i>
Timid	<i>Encourage them (and be patient).</i>
Weak	<i>Help them (and be patient).</i>
For all	<i>Be patient with them.</i>



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)

They should show them the highest respect and love.



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

Free answer, but should include that the church would fall into division and disunity. Elders would not be able to properly oversee the church and the church would be in danger of falling away from God. People would soon stop showing respect for each other and instead of peace there would be hostility in the church.



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	<i>Always do good to others, even when they do not do so to us.</i>	<i>This frees relationships from enmity and vengefulness and fosters kindness and peace.</i>
16	<i>Always rejoice</i>	<i>Focussing on our blessings makes our problems and conflicts seem smaller.</i>
17	<i>Pray constantly</i>	<i>Prayer helps us to hear God's voice and to patiently await His intervention .</i>
18	<i>Give thanks in everything</i>	<i>No room for destructive murmuring and complaining here.</i>
19	<i>Do not quench the Spirit</i>	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 .	<i>When the members of a church are humble and have a teachable spirit, they will listen to what God has to say and be eager to apply it to their circumstances. They will also aim to discern wrong teaching that can so easily divide the church.</i>
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Note to group leader:

In verse 20, prophesy certainly refers to applying Biblical teaching to life situations. Some would also affirm that it includes predicting future events. In any case, it is important for all to discern and sort out when a brother or sister shares whether the message is their own personal opinion or a message from God in accordance with His revealed Scripture.

 **Optional activity**

1. Sing a song about unity in the church, for instance:
 - [We are one](#) by Emu
Modern worship song – 4 minutes
 - [Oh, how good it is](#) by Keith & Kristyn Getty
Modern worship song – 4 minutes
 - [The servant song](#)
Worship song – 4 minutes

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

12. 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.



End of Course Evaluation

Please note:

This End of Course Evaluation is there to help you improve your skills as a group leader.

Put a check next to the issues that you need to work on.

You may want to discuss some of these with your mentor/coordinator.

Number of the Course that you finished teaching:

Title of the Course:

Think about the following questions:

A. This course

Is there something that was not covered sufficiently or that you need to cover again in this course? What are you going to do about it?

B. Your role as a group leader

Is there anything you should change in the way you prepare your lessons?

Is there anything you should change in your teaching method? (Are you leading the students to discover the answers for themselves?)

Is there anything you should change in your attitude as a group leader? (Are you dominating or moderating the group?)

C. Preparation and participation

Are the students attending the meetings regularly? If this is not the case, why not? Is there anything that can be done to enable them to do so?

Are the students preparing their answers thoughtfully before coming and eager to share what they've learned? What can you do to encourage and further motivate them?

D. Group dynamics

Are there students who do not participate or do not feel free to share at a deeper level in the group? If this is the case, why?

Are there some who cause problems in the group? In what way? How can you deal with that?

Are the students taking responsibilities within the group and serving others using their gifts? If not, what can you do to encourage this?

E. Review & progress evaluation

Are you ensuring students can understand and express what they have studied? If so, how?

- Answers in class Review questions Oral exam Written exam

Are you keeping a record of the students' progress? If so, how?

- Attendance Students' workbooks Exams Course register Student register

Are students achieving in their evaluations? If not, why not? How can you help them improve?

F. Application

Are your students putting the biblical truths into practice? If not, why not?

What difficulties are your students facing on their spiritual journey? How could you help them overcome these difficulties?

Does anyone need personal follow-up? If you cannot do this, whom could you ask?

G. Multiplication

Are the participants sharing with others about what they learned? If not, how could you help them to do this?

Are others seeking to join a study group? If so, how can you best integrate the newcomers?

Have you identified any participants who could become future group leaders? How are you going to equip them?

H. Further group leader training & equipping

Note any areas you would like to receive further training in.

What else would you like to discuss with your mentor/coordinator?

What next?

- ✓ Praise God and intercede for each of your students.
- ✓ Pray for your own ministry as a discipleship group leader.
- ✓ Look at each of the issues that you want to work on. Decide what you have to do to address these issues. Then start implementing the necessary changes.
- ✓ If you want to discuss something, make an appointment with your mentor/coordinator.

We would love to hear about your experiences as you taught this Course.
Please contact the Progressing Together team: info@progressingtogether.com