

10 Churches Serve People

Some visitors went into a fine cathedral. They took time to marvel at its beauty, its architecture, and its treasures. Local church leaders remarked to their guests, “Long ago Peter said to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, ‘I have no money at all.’ Now we need no longer say that we have no silver and gold!”

“Ah,” replied one of the visitors, “unfortunately, neither can you any longer say with Peter, ‘what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’” (Acts 3:6).

Churches today must minister to the needs of people as the New Testament churches did! Wealth, education, and prestige are no substitute for the power of God. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). May we minister to people in His Name!

The Plan

- A. Churches Nurture Believers
- B. Churches Help the Needy
- C. Churches Evangelize

The Goals

1. Give reasons why churches must nurture believers.
2. Discuss how churches can help the needy.
3. State the urgency of evangelizing the lost.

A. CHURCHES NURTURE BELIEVERS

Goal 1. Give reasons why churches must nurture believers.

True church leaders are like faithful shepherds who look after the sheep. Jesus told a story about a good shepherd and a hired man. He said,

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11–15)

Soon after Timothy and Mary’s wedding they were received into their church as members. Besides attending Bible studies, they have been going to leaders’ training classes and have taken several correspondence courses. Because of this, and the times of prayer they spend together, they have both grown rapidly in the Lord.

Serving as a youth leader has taught Timothy many lessons too. He has discovered how the Holy Spirit helps him speak when he seeks God and depends on Him. Mary has been teaching a Sunday School class. She also has been practicing the piano and now plays for their youth meetings. They really enjoy their church!

Timothy and Mary's church illustrates ways that a church can nurture its believers. The word nurture means to supply with nourishment, to train, and to educate. Church leaders are to nourish the flock of God, helping new converts to feed on the Word of God. The church provides opportunity for people to pray and seek the Lord; it encourages them to be filled with the Holy Spirit; it is there to pray for the sick and to comfort in time of sorrow. The church is the visible expression of the body of Christ.

Application

1 List five ways in which a church nurtures its members.

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2 Perhaps you would like to write one or two ways in which the church has already nurtured you or your family.

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B. CHURCHES HELP THE NEEDY

Goal 2. Discuss how churches can help the needy.

At the beginning of Christ's own ministry He stood up to read the Scripture in the synagogue (house of worship) at Nazareth, His hometown. Unrolling the scroll He read:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19)

Jesus is called the Christ, meaning “Anointed One.” God anointed His Son with the oil of the Holy Spirit and power. “He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Like Christ, people of His church must be anointed with the power of the Spirit to tell the good news. You studied about this in Lesson 2.

Jesus came with good news for the poor. The poor represent needy people everywhere. The message of salvation and deliverance must be given to them in a way that they will understand and respond to. Jesus also spoke of the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. These words may describe people either spiritually or physically, but Christ came to meet every need. The gospel offers complete salvation for the whole person—body, soul, and spirit!

The Bible tells us to balance our faith with our actions:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:14–17)

In some countries large populations live in makeshift shacks, wondering where the next meal will come from. They face desperate shortages of food and clothing. In other places refugees face starvation. How can God’s people help them?

Churches can give through organizations that know how to reach these distressed areas. Many church denominations also have relief programs and the local churches can send money, food, and clothing through these agencies.

At the same time we must not neglect the needy people in our own communities. The women’s group or another arm of the church often takes on this responsibility. Perhaps a child coming to the church school lacks proper clothing or shoes. Someone can visit the family and with understanding and tact find ways to help.

And we must not neglect the rich and needy! Many people rich in this world’s goods carry heavy burdens of confusion and emptiness. They, too, need the message of salvation and hope!

Application

3 Consider each of the needs below and suggest a practical action you might take in ministering to the needy.

a) A car with a family of six breaks down. They are a long way from home and have little money.

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b) An earthquake destroys a city in another country.

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c) A nearby community is flooded.

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d) A child comes to church barefooted on a cold winter morning.

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4 Complete the following statements.

a) According to James 2:14–17, faith must be accompanied by

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b) The Bible says that Jesus came with good news for the

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C. CHURCHES EVANGELIZE

Goal 3. State the urgency of evangelizing the lost.

Jesus spoke of His own life and ministry as coming to “seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). The lost are people in spiritual need of salvation and forgiveness of sins.

The churches’ primary task is to evangelize the lost. They do this by telling the good news of salvation to all, by witnessing of the power of Christ, by winning people to the Lord, and by making disciples who will evangelize others.

Three years have passed since Mary and Timothy’s wedding.

“What are you thinking about?” Mary asks Timothy, who has been very quiet all day.

“You know those four families who were saved last month—the ones who live on the other side of the city?”

“Yes. What about them?”

“They aren’t able to come regularly to church from such a distance. And there is no church at all in that area though it is heavily populated.”

“I know what you are going to say,” offered Mary earnestly. “God has been speaking to me about that too. We have to help them.”

“Praise the Lord!” exclaimed Timothy. “I’m so glad you are willing to do that, but do you realize what it will mean? We will have to give up attending the services we love so much.”

“Yes, I know,” assured Mary. “That was the hardest part. But I have finally surrendered and said yes to the Lord. I knew He was dealing with you about it too.”

“That confirms it to me, then, that it wasn’t just my imagination. I feel that God wants us to have a branch church there under the supervision of our pastor. I can keep my job and we can minister on weekends. The four families could form the base to start with. We will talk it over with Pastor and see what can be done.”

The preaching Timothy and Mary have heard about the field being ripe and ready to be harvested has challenged their hearts. And the training they have had in evangelism and church leadership along with actual experience in outreach has been preparing them. Now they feel that they have been nurtured by their church for a purpose—to put into action what they have learned.

Timothy and Mary are right! A church nurtures new converts and believers through the pastor’s messages, Bible teaching, and meaningful activities. But if all of this is merely flowing into people’s hearts, it will stagnate. Believers should be channels through which the blessing can flow out, and the more they give out, the more they will receive.

A church thrives on evangelizing the lost, as a fire blazes by burning wood. Our Lord before His ascension into heaven said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came like fire; He provided power for the church to expand.

Today, churches around the world are being revived by the fiery power of God’s Spirit. As they obey Christ’s command to evangelize to the ends of the earth, they will become blazing fires in a world of darkness, chill, and gloom.

Of all the things that churches do, this is the most important—for when the Savior’s gospel has been preached

and taught to all peoples of the world, Jesus Christ himself will return for His own!

Application

5 In a spiritual sense, those who are lost are those who

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6 Circle the letter in front of each activity that is part of evangelizing the lost.

- a)** Sharing the good news of salvation
 - b)** Witnessing and giving our personal testimony
 - c)** Winning people to Christ
 - d)** Making disciples who will in turn win others
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CONGRATULATIONS

You have finished this course. We hope that it has been a great help to you. Remember to complete the second Unit Evaluation and return the answer sheet to your instructor.

Check Your Answers

- 1** You might have listed teaching, praying for the sick, training, educating, encouraging people to pray and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, comforting, and giving opportunities to minister.
- 4** **a)** actions (or works).
b) poor.
- 2** Your answer.
- 5** are in sin, or those who have not accepted Christ as their Savior.
- 3** Suggested answers:
 - a)** You might prepare a meal for the family and get help from a mechanic.
 - b)** Send financial aid.
 - c)** Organize a work crew to help make their homes livable again.
 - d)** Visit his or her home and then help according to the need.
- 6** You should have circled them all, as each is important in evangelizing the lost.