

2 Workers in the First Church

As Kim learned what it meant for him to be a member of God's family, he began to understand what God's plan for him included. His desire to be part of God's work continued to grow, but he realized that there were many other believers too.

Kim started to study the church in the book of Acts more carefully. What was it that brought those first believers together? he wondered. What kind of people were they? What happened when they met with each other?

As he found the answers to these questions, he discovered why it was important for him to meet and work with other believers. He saw God's purpose for the church.

As you study this second lesson, I hope that you will make the same discoveries.

The Plan

- A. The First Church
- B. The Church Today

The Goals

1. Identify why the first believers met together.
2. Show similarities between the first church and today's church.

A. THE FIRST CHURCH

Goal 1. Identify why the first believers met together.

The first church comprised ordinary people who had needs, problems, fears, and burdens. Though these ordinary people had received Christ as their Savior, they were imperfect. For instance, Peter was a believer, who in one pressure-packed instance denied knowing the Lord (Mark 14:66–72). Thomas also was a believer, yet he doubted that Jesus had risen from the grave (John 20:24–25).

From the day that John the Baptist announced, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), many people followed Jesus. But just as quickly, He had enemies. His teachings did not always agree with the teachings of the rulers and priests. From the beginning they planned to do away with Him. The same people who ill-treated Jesus also mistreated His followers.

In Acts 9:1–2, we read that before he believed in Jesus, Saul (later called Paul) received permission from the priest to destroy the Christians. Why did Christians meet if they knew they might be imprisoned or beaten? They met because they needed each other.

Application

1 Suppose a friend tells you that he cannot be a believer because he has many doubts. What verses would be best to share with him to encourage him?

- a)** Mark 14:66–72
 - b)** John 20:24–25
 - c)** Acts 9:1–2
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In Acts 12 Peter had been put in prison for preaching. After he was set free by an angel, he found the believers together praying for him.

The need for teaching often brought the believers together. Aquila and Priscilla, for example, took Apollos to their home so they could explain the way of God to him more correctly (Acts 18:26). Paul told the believers in Colosse to teach and instruct each other (Colossians 3:16). And there were times that believers needed to be together to make decisions, as seen in Acts 6:1–6. These examples show that needs brought the believers together.

Application

2 Aquila and Priscilla met with Apollos to

- a)** listen to him preach.
 - b)** explain God's way to him.
 - c)** make decisions.
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It is rare for members of a family to refuse to help each other. When some of the widows in the church thought they were not receiving what was due them, the disciples found a way to take care of their need (Acts 6:1–6). Dorcas sewed clothes for the needy widows (Acts 9:39), and others shared their hospitality (Acts 16:15). The church consisted of believers who helped others.

Paul was one of the best-known apostles of the church. When he had material need, the church at Philippi shared with him, and Paul thanked them for it (Philippians 4:14–16). These people were ordinary believers who reached out to help. But what awesome ministry they had to Paul!

Paul told the Corinthians that God comforted them in their sorrows, so they could do the same for someone else (2 Corinthians 1:4). This was another way the believers helped each other. The book of Acts records that the believers taught, encouraged, and comforted one another. The church was full of workers who met people's needs. Thus was the church strengthened.

Application

3 Match each Bible verse describing the first church (left side) to the phrase that tells why the believers met (right side).

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|----------------------------|---|
| ... a Acts 6:2–6 | 1) To pray for each other |
| ... b Acts 11:22–23 | 2) To learn about God |
| ... c Acts 11:29–30 | 3) To meet material needs |
| ... d Acts 12:5, 12 | 4) To comfort and encourage one another |
| ... e Acts 14:22 | 5) To choose people for a certain work |
| ... f Acts 18:26 | |

We can see from our study that the members of the first church worked together. When someone was in need, the believers prayed, sent food, provided clothing, or gave comfort. If someone did not understand God's way, the believers taught him. If someone failed in some way, the believers helped him to follow the Lord.

There was cooperation and caring. At one time the believers shared their goods so that everyone had enough (Acts 4:32–35). When there were dangers, they protected one another (Acts 9:29–30). The ministry of the body of Christ in the first church was to help each other and anyone who was in need.

B. THE CHURCH TODAY

Goal 2. Show similarities between the first church and today's church.

We use the word *church* to mean the assembly or gathering of those whom God has called out of the world to belong to Him. Because the church is not a building but the people who gather together, you are a part of the church if you believe on Jesus, even though there may not be a special building for you to worship in.

The church includes people from every race. We may be of different language groups, but we are one body. God wants the world to see Jesus through His church. It is to be a continuation of the work of His Son on the earth. Believers are to bring the message of life and healing to the nations. This is God's purpose for the church today.

People's needs do not change. Thus the ministry of the church is much the same today as it was at the beginning. We know that all need to be saved, so the church preaches Christ as the one who forgives sin. Believers need God's power in their lives, so they are urged to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is need for encouragement and comfort, so the church offers times for sharing and fellowship. Many people need healing, guidance, or advice. Pastors and leaders are appointed by God to aid in these ways.

Application

4 (Choose the correct response.) The most important reason why believers should gather together is to

- a)** pray for people in prison.
- b)** be like the first church.
- c)** minister to each other's needs.
- d)** meet people from other races.



We can gain strength when we are with the church body. This strength will help us overcome Satan, our enemy, who tries to discourage us and tempt us to sin. When we gather with our brothers and sisters, we are helped as the Word is preached and as we sing and pray together. Do not try to live without the help of the church. It is there to minister to our needs. In the church truth is explained and people pray together. It is a place where believers serve one another in the love of Christ, where burdens are shared and sins confessed (James 5:16).

Not every meeting is alike. First Corinthians 14:26 reads, “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” If each one has something to say or do, who should lead? Ephesians 4:11–16 shows that God has given gifts to the church. These gifts include leaders. In almost every church a pastor or other leader leads the service. An evangelist or teacher is also God’s gift to the church. No one works alone. “We are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Application

- 5** The following things were true of the church in the book of Acts. Which of these should also be true in the church today?
- a)** Began in Jerusalem and was led by the apostles Peter, John, Paul, and others
 - b)** Gathered together for teaching and prayer
 - c)** Was persecuted by the apostle Paul before he believed in Jesus
 - d)** Prayed that the apostle Peter would be freed from prison
 - e)** Shared their goods and possessions with those who had needs

6 Are you part of a certain church? If so, answer the following questions:

- a)** What needs of yours are being met by the leaders and other believers?
- b)** What needs of the other believers are you helping to meet?
- c)** What needs of yours and of other believers still need to be met?



Check Your Answers

- 4 c)** minister to each other's needs.
- 1 b)** John 20:2–25. These verses show that it is possible for a believer to have doubts. Later on, Thomas' doubts were replaced by belief (John 20:26–28).
- 5 b)** Gathered together for teaching and prayer.
e) Shared their goods and possessions with those who had needs.
- 2 b)** explain God's way to him.
- 6** Your answer. Did you list some needs that need to be met?
As you continue studying this course, pray that God will help you see if there are any of those needs you can help meet.
- 3 a** 5) To choose people for a certain work
b 4) To comfort and encourage one another
c 3) To meet material needs
d 1) To pray for each other
e 4) To comfort and encourage one another
f 2) To learn about God