

LESSON 8: A HEALTHY CHURCH

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

There's great value in being part of a healthy church where the Bible is taught, prayer is valued, and community is nurtured. In such a setting, Christians can ask questions, support one another, and learn and grow in their faith. The church as a body is meant to glorify Jesus while allowing for individual faith expression.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Healthy churches are based on key biblical truths, but can look different from one another in several ways.
- 2. WHY:** Young people can distinguish between church essentials and church preferences as they become involved with a vibrant faith community.
- 3. HOW:** With guidance from Scripture, teenagers can look for healthy characteristics in a church, feel confident asking questions, and become an integral part of a church body.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:42-47

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 12:27

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

Luke wrote this inspiring book in the 30 years after Jesus' death and ascension. Acts tells about the start— and growth—of the early church and how Jesus works through the first Christians as they seek to follow his loving example. The book sets out foundational truths about ministry that churches still use today, including discipleship, service, and evangelism.

Chapter 2 details the Holy Spirit's powerful arrival on Pentecost, almost two months after Jesus' crucifixion. Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival celebrated 50 days after Passover. Today it marks the birth of the Christian church, when Jesus' first followers received his Holy Spirit. Verses 42-47 provide a great model for a healthy, welcoming church that acts as a caring family and glorifies Jesus in all things.

If all Christian churches were based on the healthy characteristics from Acts 2:42-47, more people would want to be part of it! When a church community loves, cares, and teaches, it meets needs and encourages growth. Knowing these key components will help young people now and in the future, when they're looking for their own healthy church home.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- *What makes churches the same—and different? Join us to dig for answers!*
- *What do you like most—and least—about church? Come engage in some great discussions.*

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear Parents,

We just wrapped up the series “My New Life With Jesus.” This week we talked about the church, exploring the characteristics of a healthy community of Christians.

By looking at Acts 2:42-47, we reviewed the characteristics of the first church—and saw how Jesus blessed his followers. We then discussed how some things in church life are essential and others are just preferences (size, location, appearance, programs, etc.). Finally, we discussed the most important role of a church: bringing Jesus glory through its ministry.

As you talk with your teenager this week, I encourage you to focus on these questions:

- *What are some important characteristics of a healthy church? Which of those things do you experience in our congregation?*
- *What are some preferences or non-essential elements of a church? Which of those is most important to you, and why?*
- *When you look for your own church home some day, what will you look for?*

Thanks for supporting our ministry and your teenager's faith journey. We're so grateful to partner with you!

LESSON 8: A HEALTHY CHURCH

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED



Preview the following video clip for your group: <http://request.org.uk/life/church/church-tours/#> (or find another video about churches). Choose the third video on the right; it features a blue Woodlands sign and is called “Come & See: An Independent Church.” You’ll need an Internet connection and a computer or tablet to display the video for your participants.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then introduce the video clip.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Today we’ll be talking about church. To get your wheels turning on the topic, let’s watch a video of Joey, an Englishman, giving a tour of a contemporary church in the United Kingdom. Pay attention to what elements of the church are the same or different from the church you attend (or how they compare to your assumptions about church).*

Play the clip.

ASK:

- From Joey’s tour, what impression did you get about this church?
- What did you observe about this church that’s similar to or different from yours (or what you think church is like)?
- If you have a church home and gave someone a tour of it, what would you emphasize, and why?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Despite what many people think, the church isn’t a building; it’s a community of believers. And the way a church looks and functions can vary in many ways. Today we’ll discuss some basic characteristics of a healthy church. We’ll find out what traits are most important and what traits are merely preferences.*

TEACHING POINTS



Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Acts 2:42-47 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Many churches use this Bible passage as a basis for how they do ministry. Let’s dig into them together.*

1. A HEALTHY CHURCH HAS IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS

ASK:

- *What are the essential ingredients for growing a plant? What happens when just one of those is missing?*
- *According to these Bible verses, what are the essential ingredients for growing a church?*
- *How can you tell if a church is teaching biblical truth as opposed to someone's opinions?*
- *What does verse 47 say about the church's attitude toward God—and about his response?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Water, sunlight, and dirt are essential ingredients for a growing plant. Essential ingredients for a growing church include Bible teaching, prayer, fellowship, and sharing. But just as healthy plants can have many types of appearances, so can a healthy church. It's important to find a church where you're comfortable, but the top priority is making sure the church has the Acts 2:42-47 "essentials" in place.*

2. HEALTHY CHURCHES CAN LOOK DIFFERENT

ASK:

- *We talked about some basics that are important for every church. What are some ways churches can be different from each other (size, location, denomination, style)?*
- *Why do you think so many different sizes and styles of Christian churches exist? Does Christian unity suffer because of that? Why or why not?*
- *If you can't find a church that has all the "extras" you want, what are the essentials that are most important to you, and why?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *As you get involved in a church, you may have questions about what it believes or how it does certain things. Just remember to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. For example, regularly celebrating communion (the Lord's Supper) at church is important. The exact timing or method isn't as important. If you don't feel right about something, however, pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is nudging your heart. Seek answers by praying, reading the Bible, and talking with mature Christians.*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

3. A HEALTHY CHURCH GIVES JESUS GLORY

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus wants his church to be a loving community that follows the essentials of Acts 2:42-47 while bringing him glory. That matters more than the exact way certain things are done. Jesus will honor our efforts when we value Bible teaching, prayer, fellowship, loving, serving, and sharing. Are these things in place at your church? How are you involved with them?*

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.

ASK:



- Acts 2:42 says the first Christians were devoted. What does that really mean? Why was that important then? Why is it still important now?
- To what are you devoted, and how does it show in your life?
- What are some results you'd expect to see from a healthy body of Christ (increased attendance, answered prayers, more people following Jesus, etc.)?
- In what ways do you feel part of Christ's body? How have you become more active and involved in it?

Bring everyone back together, and ask a few people to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- From today's discussion, what intrigued you the most, and why?
- In what areas can our church grow or improve? How might you be able to be involved in that?
- When you're on your own and need to find a new church, what will you look for? Which non-essentials matter most to you right now? How might that change down the road?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: No matter what church you attend or how long you've been a Christian, you'll have questions. It's important to ask them, but don't get hung up on the little stuff or on preferences. If your church is seeking to glorify Jesus, teach the Bible, meet people's needs, and grow a community, then the key elements are in place. Stay involved, keep learning, and own your faith!

SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).