



CONNECT

**FIRST STEPS - LESSON 16: COMMITMENT TO A
LOCAL CHURCH**



Objectives

- New believers to understand the importance of commitment to the local church.
- New believers to understand the importance of serving in the local church.

How To Start The Lesson

- You may consider starting this lesson by sharing your decision to commit and serve God in the local church.
- You may consider sharing your experiences of receiving God's blessings because of your commitment to the local church.

Introduction

“To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part”. This is a segment of wedding vows, to be exchanged between a bride and a groom during their wedding ceremony. The exchanged vows paints a picture of commitment both to the newlyweds, and to God. This gives us a glimpse of what commitment to the local church can look like. Commitment says that I will use my gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ and to submit to church leadership.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,
Ephesians 2:19

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
1 Peter 2:9

When we speak of a kingdom, we are reminded of a king and his people, of authority and duty. For a kingdom to flourish, thrive and have peace, it needs a benevolent king, good governance and responsible citizens who submit to authority and contribute to the kingdom.

In God’s Kingdom, our Lord Jesus Christ is the King. He is sovereign in the church. We, as His redeemed people, should do our part in obeying Him and be part of His Kingdom.

The Definition Of The Church

The Church does not refer to a physical building or sanctuary. “Church” is derived from the Greek word “Ekklesia” which appears 115 times in the Bible. It refers to an assembly or gathering of people (in the New Testament, of God’s people).

The world church is used in two different contexts in the Bible:

1. The universal church

Used over 20 times in the Bible. It refers to those who believe in the Lord Jesus, and are born again spiritually in the past, present and future. Therefore including every believer that has ever lived and will live.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Colossians 1:18

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. **Ephesians 1:22-23**

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18

2. The local church

Used over 95 times in the Bible. It is mentioned more times than the concept of the universal church, which points to a greater importance, at least in a believer's daily life. The local church is defined as a group of Christians that gather together in the same area that meets together on a regular basis. Every Christian should belong to a local church, actively growing and serving there. Some of the examples are:

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 1:2

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

The Importance Of The Church

The church is important because:

1. God wants to reveal His eternal purpose and salvation plan through the church

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 3:10-11

Paul highlights the purpose of the church: God will use the church to reveal His wisdom to the whole world and also to reveal the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that God's plan of salvation is proclaimed and that people might be saved.

2. Jesus is invested in building His church

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18

The word "I" refers to Jesus. It shows that it is only through the power of Christ that the church is built and not through human hands.

3. Jesus loves His church so much that He gave His life for her

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross and gave Himself up because of His great love for the church. He also bestows upon the members of the church holiness and to deliver them out of the dominion of sin in order that at the end of the day we may be presented to God holy and blameless.

4. The Church gives glory to God

to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:21

Characteristics Of A Local Church

The church is represented in different ways in the Bible:

1. The Body of Christ

The church is described as a body, where it contains different parts (the hand, leg, nose, ears), having different functions, but all working together to allow the body to function at its optimal and desired state.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4-5

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

1 Corinthians 22:26

Every part of the body has a specific function. God created everyone in the church to be different, that nobody is an exact copy of someone else. God created everyone in their own unique way. For example, a person may be musically inclined and another person might be an avid reader. Despite the differences in interests, skillsets and hobbies, the Bible tells us that everyone plays an important part in the church and God will use everyone to build His church because every person matters!

It also goes to show that as Christians, we are never meant to be alone but to be integrated into a community of believers, where everyone contributes their time, talents and treasures to build the house of God together.

2. The temple

Christians are also compared to a brick or living stones which are connected with other bricks to form a temple.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord

Ephesians 2:21

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

We cannot build a temple by just putting bricks in a pile in an unorganised way. Each brick must be joined together with other bricks on its six surfaces; its top, bottom and sides. Likewise, we must build a close relationship and fellowship with our spiritual leaders who take care of our lives, to our friends and to the spiritually younger believers who are under our care.

3. A family

As Christians we are adopted as children into God's big family.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20

Family members commit themselves to investing into each other's lives. In our natural family, it is important that we are to share the responsibilities around the house and to carry one another's burdens. In the same way, we must share the responsibility of God's work in our local church, to pour in and invest into the lives of our brothers and sisters around us. Hence, reinforcing the fact that the church is not a convenient gathering place. Rather, it is God's plan for us to be part of it. While fulfilling God's plan together, other believers will also help us to grow strong in the Lord.

4. The Bride

The bride must commit herself to her groom

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Ephesians 5:25

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Revelation 19:7

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Revelation 21:2

The Church of God must be holy, pure, loyal and faithful to the Lord Jesus who is the groom. The church is to commit herself fully to be used for the purposes of God.

5. The army of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6:10-17

Every Christian is a soldier in the army of God. The army of God must be mobilised in unity to fight spiritual warfare's and to be sent out for the Great Commission.

Reflection Station

1. Why do I need to become a serving member of a local church?

Key reasons for joining and serving as a member of a local church are:

a) To follow the example of the early church

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

When we come together in love as a church family and to be committed to one another regardless of race, background or social status, it is a witness to the watching world. No believer can be the Body of Christ alone. Hence, we need each other to fully use all that God has given us to build His church. When we do commit to be functioning part of a local church, we will have the opportunity to grow into a life of godly service and we will be able to use our potential gifts fully.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:3

b) To partner with one another in the Christian community

Someone once mentioned that the local church is a classroom for learning how to get along in God's family.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

1 John 3:16-17

This is the kind of sacrificial love God expects you to show other believers – a willingness to love them just as how Jesus loved you. Being rooted and planted in a community of believers allows us to live out the Biblical definition of Christian fellowship. To invest deeply into the lives of our brothers and sisters around us by practicing what the word of God calls us to do such as generosity, mercy, encouragement, love and to help one another grow deeper in relationship with God and each other.

c) To receive spiritual covering by your church leaders

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Hebrews 13:17

God never intended us to live our lives independent of others. He desires us to develop relationships of accountability with other Christians and in this case, our church leaders. Identifying yourself with the church and submitting yourself to church leadership allows church leaders to better and more effectively care, watch over and protect you from the schemes of the enemy.

d) To participate in the mission of Christ

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission is the call of God upon the life of every believer. As a member of the local church, we have the privilege of being a part of this call, to partner along with God and others in the Body of Christ to fulfil this mission God had given us by winning souls, making disciples and building His church.

Mentor Chat

1. How can I serve in a church?

a) Meet on a regular basis

Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25

The author of Hebrews exhorts the believers to be in close fellowship with each other. We should grab hold of every opportunity such as weekly celebration services and life groups to put this Biblical principle into practice.

b) Follow your leaders and support the vision of the church wholeheartedly

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Hebrews 13:17

c) Use our God-given time, talents and treasures to serve Him

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms

1 Peter 4:10

God has given every individual different gifts. It may be gifts of encouragement, generosity, music, administration or arts. Whatever gifts God has given us, we have the responsibility of being a good steward of those gifts, which means that we are to use those gifts, not for self-centred reason, but to bless and serve others around us.

d) Tithe and honour God in our finances

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Malachi 3:10

God has placed believers in different churches with the purpose of building those churches up. Therefore, as members of a local church, our prime responsibility is to ensure God's work in our church is well funded through our tithes.

e) Share in the ministry with our leaders and members

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth

1 John 3:18

Get involved in the various ministries that are available in the church to help build the house of God together with our leaders and fellow members.

f) Avoid division in the church

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

Romans 16:17

Notes to Mentors:

For believers who have an existing church membership in their home country.

Take some time to explain to new believers the importance of church membership even if they attend another church back in their home country. You can use the following pointers:

1. Where do you regularly gather?

Being a part of a church enables you to regularly gather to worship God. If you have a church membership back home and are now out of your country (i.e.: to pursue higher education, or to work), you will need to consider where you are going on Sundays. Flying back home to attend service every week would not be a practical and sustainable option.

Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25

The word of God clearly points out to us the necessity of regular meetings with fellow brothers and sisters in the local church. This means that our church membership should be with one we regularly attend.

2. Who is best positioned to keep watch over your soul?

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Hebrews 13:17

It would be very difficult for our leaders back home to keep watch over us when we are not even present back home.

This does not mean we disown them when we join the membership of a local church, rather, we are positioning ourselves to be cared for. The years away from home are special seasons of a person's life. Away from home temporarily does not negate the call of God to be in a fellowship with the local church.

Please share your personal testimonies of how you became a member of the local church and your journey serving in different ministries.

Suggest a ministry to the new believer to start serving, both in life group and in church.

Conclusion

Being committed to a local church plays a crucial role in our walk with God. No Christian is ever called to live out their Christian journey in isolation but in constant fellowship with fellow brothers and sisters in the church. Coming together to use the gifts God has given to build God's church allows us to fully live out the call that God has upon our lives.

Christ is the head of the church. All of us form the body – the church. We cannot love the head, yet despise the body. Likewise, we cannot love God, yet despise His church.

Memory Verse

NOT GIVING UP MEETING TOGETHER, AS SOME ARE IN THE HABIT OF DOING, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER—AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.

HEBREWS 10:25



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