

## **LESSON 16**

## LESSON 16 THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

What kinds of ministry should the local congregation of God's people involve themselves in so disciples are nurtured and new disciples gained? One response to such a question would be to say it depends on the community, it's needs and circumstances.



After all, no two congregations are the same and no two communities (mission fields) are the same. Design the ministry to reach the people - those inside the church

and those outside the church. As Christians, that approach is very important and critical to the call from God to disciple all nations. Because of the diversity of peoples in our country and communities, we need to know our neighbors. We also need to identify unique and effective ways to reach people with the Gospel message of salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. That's what Peter, Paul and others did in the activities of the early church as we've observed its growth in Acts. And yet, there is another component to the ministry we need to consider in addition to responding responsibly to the issues and needs of the unchurched community/mission field. A look at the church in Acts unfolds for us the basic ministries all churches need to focus on in addition to the unique ministry strategies we use to connect with people in this world of diversity. It is not an either/or, it is a both/and. There are certain basic ministry activities all churches must do. Yet, those ministry basics need to be carried out in ways that connect with and relate to the reaching of lost people for Christ. The early chapters of Acts place before all of us those basic ministry foci, regardless of who we are

and where we are in ministry.

Look at the ministry of your church. Make two lists: 1) List the key/basic things you do in ministry. Keep your list to the five basic things you perceive you must do as a Christian community of believers. 2) List the variety of ways you employ to connect with people and share the Gospel. Again, keep your list to the top five methods used.

### THE MODEL IN ACTS 2

The first part of Acts 2 records the exciting events of Pentecost followed by a powerful message from Peter. The results? Verse 31 tells us: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." The number of believers increased significantly that day. God opened the door of faith. The Spirit worked mightily in the hearts of people.

Interestingly, people swarmed into the city of Jerusalem for the celebration of the just completed grain harvest. Little did they know that God was going to bring forth an even greater harvest - a spiritual one.

Immediately following that event and soul harvest, Luke takes us into the day-to-day life of the believers - the church. Here is the model for us - the basic work of the church, the fellowship of believers.

### ACTS 2:42-47

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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 favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

- Look over those six verses which give us a glimpse into the life and activity of the early church. Develop a list of the things they did and an additional list of the attitudes they practiced with others and one another.
- What occurred as a result of such activity and attitude?
- How would you like to see your church become more like the early church in these verses?

One way of describing the basic activities of the church would be to focus on four basic activities which describe the church - then and now. All churches should be about the following basics!

1. Be teaching/learning churches.
2. Be loving churches.
3. Be worshipping churches.
4. Be witnessing churches.

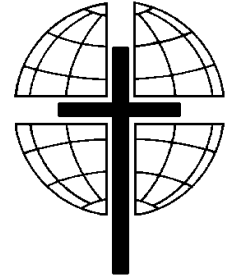
## TEACHING/LEARNING CHURCHES

- What phrase describes this characteristic of the church of Acts 2?
- From your study of Acts what was the content of the "apostles teaching"? What are the basic teachings you need to focus on as the church today?
- Why is it important for believers to continue to learn?
- What percentage of your youth and adults are involved in weekly Bible study? What can you do to increase the percentage?
- Why is it so difficult to get members into a Bible study? What does such lack of on-going Bible study do to the internal

and external growth of the church?

## LOVING CHURCHES

- How did the people in Acts visibly show their love for one another?
- What does your church and its members do to visibly show your love for one another which flows from God's love for us in Christ?
- Why is a church's reputation so important to ministry and outreach? According to 1 Corinthians 13 what happens to our actions and activities if they are not seasoned with the attitude of love?



- Acts 2 says the believers devoted themselves "to the fellowship." Fellowship has a vertical dimension to it - our fellowship with God because of Christ; and, a horizontal dimension to it - our fellowship with one another because of Christ. The latter flows out of the former. Both are essential. How did the believers in Acts express their oneness in Christ with one another? How do we today?
- React to this statement: "Christian fellowship is Christian caring and Christian sharing . . . that we have hundreds of thousands of destitute brothers and sisters is a standing rebuke to us who are more affluent."

## WORSHIPPING CHURCHES

Verse 42 refers to two activities of the early church - the breaking of the bread and the prayers. While much discussion is made of the meaning of "the breaking of the bread" in this verse, the evidence is very strong in favor of this phrase being a reference to the Lord's Supper (two of the many reasons for this interpretation: the connection of the phrase

with prayers, which connotes things spiritual; and, the use of the definite article - the breaking of the bread). Prayer (services or meetings) and the Lord's Supper were two aspects of the early church's worship.

- Why is it healthy and important for believers to gather together for worship?
- What happens to people when they absent themselves from worship for a period of time?
- What is the relationship between worship and outreach?
- In Acts 2 worship was joyful, reverent and done with glad and sincere hearts. How does your worship foster those three ingredients?
- In the Lord's Supper God offers us the forgiveness of sins. What a spiritual blessing! In addition to that blessing, what are we doing, according to 1 Corinthians 11:26, when we receive the Lord's Supper?



### WITNESSING CHURCHES

One of the dominant themes of Acts is the expansion of the faith by believers in Christ (missionaries) in witnessing Christ to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit. Learning, teaching, loving, sharing and worshipping didn't so preoccupy the believers that they forgot about witnessing. Balance in all characteristics of the church is essential.

- According to this passage who brings growth to the church? What role do we play?
- Note what happened in the early church - "God added to their number (the church) daily those who were being saved."

- none were added without being saved (no nominal membership)
- none were saved without being added (no solo Christianity)
- the Lord added daily (not occasional or sporadic witnessing, but rather an on-going way of life for believers).



How does the outreach efforts of your membership reflect those three features of witnessing?

- What are the roadblocks which keep us from being a more witnessing church?
- What one thing can your church do to improve its witnessing feature of ministry?

Four characteristics describe the work of the church then and now.

Biblical teaching

Loving fellowship

Living worship

Ongoing, outgoing evangelism

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low) rank the effectiveness of your church's ministry in these four areas of the work of the church. Share this ranking with the leaders of your church along with suggestions for bringing balance and greater effectiveness in these four basic and critical areas of ministry.

Close your session with the reading of Acts 4:32-35 (the other passage which gives us a glimpse into the life of the church) and a prayer for these four ministries in churches attached to Jesus Christ.