

reNEW

Bible principles and practical steps
towards church revitalisation

notes for session 4 What Is A Church?

This workbook may contain preparatory notes,
leaders notes, participant notes or discussion starters.
It can be downloaded as a pdf and printed as required.



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Session 4 Video

The session 4 video - What Is A Church?
Running Time 15 minutes 29 seconds

Access via the Partnership website:

<https://partnershipuk.org/renew-session-4/>
or, for smart TV,
<https://vimeo.com/479053726/26b0cf5d26>

reNew is a video-based learning resource to help us think through Bible principles and practical steps towards revitalisation. Simon Ladd has had over 35 years of experience in church leadership, serving in a variety of local churches in SE England. Drawing on both his own experience and that of those with whom he has served, reNew is a tool that can help you, as a leader, think through the regrowth possibilities in your local church.

LEADER'S NOTES

Session 4 – What Is A Church?

These notes were written pre-Covid. You will need to make adjustments according to your situation.

General Notes

- Think about where it is best to hold this meeting. Somewhere informal, such as somebody's home might be a nice venue. Can you move around to different houses during the course? This involves more people and builds community as people visit the homes of others. It allows people to 'practice hospitality'. (Romans 12:13).
- Encourage people to keep it simple – tea, coffee, cold drink and a few biscuits. Do not allow a hospitality 'arms race' to develop – where people try and 'out do' each other – and do not let the provision of food become an expensive time-consuming burden.
- Start on time – even if some people are not there yet. If you don't - start times just drift later and later. Some people will inevitably be a bit late – but it is amazing how often it is the same people!
- You will need to be able to show the video. Aim for a big television that everybody can see – a laptop is not really adequate. If you have a smart TV – you will be able to get the video from YouTube/ Vimeo. Make sure everybody can hear.
- These sessions are designed to last 60 to 75 minutes including the video at the beginning and prayer at the end. Don't let them go on longer. Some people need to know that things will end promptly or they will stop coming.
- Do not be tempted to tell everybody to watch the video for themselves – and then we will meet up and discuss it. It is not the same.
- Don't skip the first 'ice-breaker' question. Some people are terrified of speaking out in a group. The ice-breaker is designed to give people confidence by getting them more used to speaking up when there is no danger of them being wrong.

- The best group size for discussion is 6 – 12. If there are more than 12 – split into multiple groups for discussion.
- Try new people as chair. Give them the leaders notes in advance and let them have a go at leading one question. You might be surprised.
- A common reason why churches aren't growing is because present leaders are hogging their roles and responsibilities. Only insecure leaders hog their roles. Good leaders are always looking to involve and develop others.
- Your task as chair is to keep the noisy people quiet and get the quiet people to speak up. A useful technique is to say "For this question we will start with somebody who hasn't spoken so far".
- Welcome all contributions even if they seem off the point. If you don't think they are right – do not contradict the person (unless it is heresy!) and do not make the person feel small. Another useful technique "Mmmm I haven't about it that way before – what do other people think of that?"

Video Script

In this video questions are posed and then possible responses are considered by Simon. There are clearly marked points in the video where you should stop to discuss the questions. The script and timeline are given here to assist you.

00.00 Introduction

ReNew 04 – What is a Church?

This isn't as simple as it first seems - but it is vitally important.

Unless we arrive at a common definition of what a church is, what is it meant to do and how is it meant to do it, we will all be pulling in different directions and working towards different goals. There is no hope of being efficient or effective. Above all, unless we are working to Jesus' agenda – we cannot expect His blessing.

00.48 Ice Breaker

Make every effort to start your group at the appointed time. A few people are running late? – it happens. (although it does seem to happen to the same people quite a bit!) But if you delay – the start time slips later and later.

Question 1 is always designed to kick things off, be an icebreaker, get things going. Don't miss it out. It's important – but if people join later they won't have missed the essential heart of the study

1. *Go around the group and ask people to share what they value most about church.*

01:23 STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS

01.29 Discussion of responses

There is no right answer to this – but hopefully there has been an avalanche of positive comments about your church.

01.38

2. *Imagine a hospital. The staff work long, unsociable hours, often including weekends. Being involved in a local church isn't easy. There is a Christian Union at the hospital. There is a meeting every day in the Chaplaincy rooms. The staff pray together; they sing together (if a musician is present); they do Bible studies, and because they all work in the same environment, they really understand each other's pressures and they support each other very well. Is this a church, and if not, why not?*

02:19 STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS

02:23 Discussion of responses

So what did you say? Did you spot that the hospital group don't appear to celebrate communion?
Did you spot that there doesn't seem to be any emphasis on evangelism or reaching out with the gospel?
What about leadership structure and decision making?

But, what if they did start to celebrate communion?
What if they did have an evangelistic barbecue every now and again?
And if they made their leadership and decision making processes a bit more formal – would they be a church then?

Well maybe. Yes. Just about. Perhaps they would be a church but with a few things still to work on.

Hmm! That makes them about the same as every other church I know!

03:14 Defining what church is – turns out to be quite tricky. It's easier to say what a church isn't.

In common usage a church is a building. The New Testament uses the word church 114 times – but none of them refers to bricks and mortar.

The word in the Greek is ‘ekklesia’ which itself is a compound of the noun for assembly or congregation and the verb to call.

The church is the gathering of God’s called people.

In other words, you don’t go to church – you are church.

Don’t get in the habit of saying – “The church ought to do something” – because all you are saying is ‘We ought to do something’ or “I ought to be doing something” – because we are the church.

04:09

3. *Try and make a list of all the words, pictures, metaphors and images that you can think of, that the New Testament uses for the church.*

*For example, the church is pictured as a body in Ephesians 5:23 - Christ is the head of **the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour;***

and a flock in Acts 20:28

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.

[Here is a clue. In your list, you should be aiming for double figures.]

04:53 STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS

04:57 Discussion of responses

A body (Ephesians 5:23), a building (1 Peter 2:5), a bride (Ephesians 5:25-32), a family (2 Corinthians 6:18), a household (Ephesians 2:19), a temple (Ephesians 2:21) a nation (1 Peter 2:9), a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), a vine (John 15:1-8), an olive tree (Romans 11), a field (1 Corinthians 3:9), a flock (Acts 20:28), a pillar, (1 Timothy 3:15) a foundation (1 Timothy 3:15)

All this gives us an indication that the New Testament's conception of the church is deep and multi-layered.

05.29 Church isn't something that we go to on a Sunday - if we are not busy with something else.

More than a dozen metaphors are used because the notion of church is so rich, so intimately connected to Christ himself, that language struggles even to begin to describe the church's majesty, its glorious potential, its indispensable place in the purposes of God and its unstoppable procession towards victory and triumph.

To belong to the church is the greatest of privileges.

06.06 Let's look at the first use of the word 'church' in the Bible.

Matthew 16:15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." ¹⁸ 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.

06.42 4. *What can we learn about the nature of the church from this passage? Take a few minutes to share your thoughts with your group.*

06.52 **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

06.56 Discussion of responses

This passage marks a big divergence between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic churches understand this passage to mean that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build His church. They claim Peter as the first Pope and that he is the foundation and head of the true church.

Protestants argue that Jesus is making a pun on Peter's name (Peter's name comes from the Greek word Petros which means rock)

Interestingly a similar pun works in English. If you say something is 'rocky' you can be saying it has the solid character of rock – or you might be saying it is unstable!

Just 5 verses later Jesus says to Peter "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; If Peter is the rock of the church it doesn't seem to be a very firm foundation.

Protestants say that the rock here is not Peter's character, it is Peter's confession of verse 16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.", and that this is said to be a revelation from God and not something that Peter had worked out all along

If somebody understands that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the Messiah, understands it and embraces it, and is concerned to live it out - they are a Christian, they are part of God's family, they are part of the church.

08:45 I have picked out 4 things from these verses:

- 08:48** • "I will build **my** church". Jesus says "It's my church". It belongs to Him. It's His idea. It is natural that we refer to 'our' church – but we must never forget that it's 'His' church. If it was 'our' church we would be free to arrange things the way we like them, but we can't because it is His church. "How does Jesus want it?" is the primary question.
- 09:18** • "I will **build** my church." Building the church is Jesus' job. If we are working alongside Jesus, following His plans and relying on His power, we should expect progress, growth, development.
- 09:36** • The foundation of the church is the fact that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God". The theology of the church is understanding the full meaning of that statement, and the mission of the church is living it out and message of the church is proclaiming it.

10:00

- To be part of the church is to be heading for victory. This is the implication of the statement “I will **build** my church” because Jesus accomplishes all that he sets out to do.
But in case we missed it – it is stated explicitly. “**The gates of hell will not prevail against it**”
This is not a helpful translation. It tends to paint a picture of the church holding out against the onslaught of the enemy.
This is entirely the wrong way round.
Gates are not instruments of attack. They are for defence. It’s hell that is on the defensive – the church is going forward. The gates of hell will not hold. The chains break. The gates implode. The Kingdom surges in.
I know a preacher who says that the mission of the church is to depopulate hell and every day it is succeeding.

11:04

5. Acts chapter 2 from verse 42

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

These verses are sometimes held up as an example of a perfect church.

11:24

Here’s the question - What do you think, is this a description of the perfect church, is this what we should be aiming for, and is anything missing? Take a few minutes to discuss this in your group.

11:37

STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS

11:44 Discussion of responses

Sometimes I think we are a bit naughty with this passage – we cherry pick the bits we like and conveniently overlook the bits that are too challenging.

11.55 The usual list is
the apostles' teaching
fellowship
breaking of bread
prayer

They are vital and excellent:-

But notice too the depth of the Christian fellowship:

- they met daily
- they met in each other's homes
- if somebody was in need the others helped out
- there were sacrificial levels of generosity

12.22 The church was characterised by sincerity, gladness and praise.

(is that what folks say when they come into your church – this place is so full of gladness and joy – what is your secret? How are you so joyful?)

12.40 And notice too, the relationship between the church and the community around it:

12:47 The church meets not only in homes, but in the temple courts – this is a public space The church doesn't want to hide away.

12:58 Notice too, that the church has a great reputation: enjoying the favour of all the people.

13.05 And the church is involved in it's community with generous social action. It says they are concerned to help 'anyone' in need.

(What does your community think of your church? – do you have a good reputation? – we looked at that in study 3)

13.14 Notice also the indispensable activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church: there is a sense of awe inside and out, signs and wonders are apparent, and each day more people become Christians.

13:32 Somebody once asked the question if the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from your church – would anybody notice? Would the programme just roll on the same? We should ask that question regularly and make sure that we know the answer.

13:52 Yes. The situation in Acts 2 is pretty much revival – the bar is set extremely high, if our church is going to be more like this, a lot is going to have to change, most of all me. But do we have the right to set our sights any lower, is it right before God, to settle for anything less?

14:17 Are you getting a little bit excited about this? That you are a part of the church of Jesus Christ? Working alongside Him, on a road of irresistible progress and growth that leads to guaranteed ultimate victory.

14.31 The Spirit of the Lord is upon us to proclaim good news: good news for the poor, good news for the oppressed, good news for the lost, to free the captives, to restore the fallen, showing everybody how they can connect to God's blessing and feel His renewing power surge into every corner of their life.

15:01 Everybody wants to make the world a better place – but nothing on earth can do that better than the church, not even close. What a mission. What a calling. What a privilege.

What are we going to do?

