

Anne Woodcock

# Church

*Enjoying God's Masterpiece*



 8-Session Bible Study

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✔ **8-Session Bible Study**

Church: Enjoying God's Masterpiece  
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# Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God’s word as “a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we’ve discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They’re perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let’s take a look at what is included in each session.

**Talkabout:** Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

**Investigate:** These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

**Apply:** These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

**Explore More:** These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

**Getting Personal:** These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

**Pray:** Here, you’re invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you’ve seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven’t got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you’ll find a **Leader’s Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God’s light-giving word.

# Why Study the Church?

If you have never before investigated what the Bible tells us about the church of Jesus Christ, you are, I hope, in for a wonderful surprise. Few things present a more astonishing contrast than the way most people view church today and what the Bible tells us about the church. Even some who have followed Christ for years might be missing out on the whole breathtaking truth about the gathered people of God that we find in the pages of Scripture.

There are various reasons why this might be. Throughout church history, there have always been groups professing to follow Christ but who then stray from the central truths of Scripture. With Bible teaching illuminating our minds on this subject, we start to see that some organisations identifying as churches are anything but.

Then, of course, every church is peopled by sinners—those saved by Jesus, yes, but all still struggling with weakness and temptation, and who sometimes fail badly. So churches can at times be painful places, even for faithful and mature Christians. At other times church can just feel like a slog: a lot of hard work with very little reward. We might therefore be tempted to let our difficult experiences of church blind us to the promise of Jesus Christ: “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

If disappointment or difficulty with church affect you, or if you’re simply unsure of what the Bible says about church, here’s an opportunity to unearth these unimaginably wonderful truths about the people with whom you gather week by week. As you investigate seven key characteristics of the church of Christ set out in the New Testament, you’ll learn what God is doing in and through you together.

My prayer is that you will come to see your particular Christian fellowship—though weak, prone to error and unimpressive in worldly terms—as nothing less than part of the ultimate masterpiece of our loving heavenly Father. With that renewed understanding, you can grow in your enjoyment of what God, through his Son’s sacrifice of atonement and the power of the Spirit, is crafting in his church.



# 1

## God's People

**1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:9-10; Acts 2:42-47**

### **Talkabout**

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word "church"?

In the Bible, the word "church" is used in two ways that overlap.

- All believers everywhere throughout history. We join the church in this sense when we are born again by the Holy Spirit and become a follower of Jesus. This total church cannot be seen now but will be revealed in the new creation.
- A local group of believers. We join the church in this sense when, having become a follower of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the community and activities of a local Christian gathering, and put ourselves under the teaching and pastoral care of the leaders there.

## Investigate: All Believers Everywhere

 Read 1 Peter 1:1-2

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### DICTIONARY

**Apostle** (v 1): one of a group of men chosen by Jesus to be the first leaders of the church (all his followers in all places).

**Elect** (v 1): people chosen by God and saved by him from their sin.

**Sanctifying** (v 2): making holy.

**Sprinkled with [Jesus'] blood** (v 2): cleansed from sin by Jesus' death.

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2. How does Peter describe the people he is writing to?

- What's comforting and what's challenging about his description?

3. How does Peter's description contrast with commonly-held views in our culture today of what a church is?

 Read 1 Peter 2:9-10

Having contrasted those who reject Jesus Christ with those who trust in him (2:1-8), Peter launches into another description of all the followers of Jesus.



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## Explore More | OPTIONAL

God has always aimed to create a people that he calls his own. David wrote this song celebrating God's proactive love for his Old Testament people, Israel.

### Read Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

As you answer the questions, note the similarity of relationship between God and his people in Psalm 68, and God and the church in 1 Peter.

- Verses 1-3 sets out two groups. How are God's enemies described?
- What marks out his people here?
- In verses 4-6, what do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about his people?
- From verses 7-10, list the things that God has done in history for his people.
- What have his people done?
- In verses 32-35 David lists reasons to give God praise and glory. What do God's people contribute?

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## Apply

As scattered exiles, the church is weak and out of place in society, and often without rights. But as God's chosen people and special possession, the church is also the astoundingly privileged royalty of the universe.

7. What practical difference should both truths make in our attitude towards Christ's church?

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## Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise ... influential ... of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world ... the weak things ... the lowly things ... and the despised things ... so that no one may boast before him.”

(1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

Christians look weak and lowly in the eyes of the world. Are you able to accept that joyfully—or do you instinctively feel resistant to the idea? How does it help to remember that this displays God’s power and wisdom, not ours?

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## Investigate: The First Local Church

 Read Acts 2:42-47

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### DICTIONARY

**Breaking of bread** (v 42): eating together (Luke 24:30-31, 35); or celebrating the Lord’s Supper

together (Luke 22:19-20); or both (1 Corinthians 11:20-27).

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The word “church” is not mentioned in Acts until chapter 5, but as the Greek word itself simply means “gathering”, there can be no doubt that here Luke is describing the first church (“together” appears three times).

8. What essential features of a local church are listed here?

9. How would this description of a church surprise people in your culture today, do you think?

## Apply

10. Read through the features of the first church again. In what ways is your church like this one?

- In what ways is it different? Why, do you think?

11. How could you help your church to be as much like the first Jerusalem church as possible?

## Pray

*Thank God that you and your church are part of his chosen people, his royal priesthood, his holy nation and his special possession.*

*Ask for his help to live in obedience to Jesus while you are scattered exiles in this world.*

*Pray for your church to become more and more like the first church, and for yourself to be more and more like those brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.*