



Leader's notes

why on earth... bother with the church?

People have lots of different ideas about the church. This session explores the very earliest days of the church. We look at why new people wanted to be a part of it, and ask what a life-giving church today might look like.

Needed: Drinks, name/picture badges (if desired), Session Sheets, some pens, a pack of Post-It notes.

General Intro: *why on earth...?* takes a look at some of life's hardest questions. Each session offers simple first steps in exploring a difficult subject. These are not final answers, just starting-points. Group members are invited to talk about their own thoughts and experiences with honesty. Then we explore Christian angles on the subject, and begin to think how these might apply in our own lives.

Session Intro: People today have all sorts of ideas about the church. Some people experience a local church as a wonderful community of faith, hope and love. Some have had bad experiences of church – or know friends and family members who have. Many only know the church through stories and stereotypes in the media. This session invites people to think where their ideas of church come from and offers a positive look at what church can be, rooted in the life of the early church and biblical images of church.

Starters (approx 30 mins)

- Drinks, welcome, notices, write name badge (if desired).
- One short passage later in the session needs to be read aloud. Identify somebody who is happy to do this (alternatively, the leader can plan to read it).

- **ICEBREAKER:**

Explain that the group is going to play a game about things they like best, and discover who else in the group likes the same things.

Identify the area of the room with most space. Create a long imaginary line (or put a long piece of string on the ground). Each end of the line represents a strong like. The leader will ask group members to stand somewhere on the line, according to what they like best in a few areas: either at one end, or somewhere in between. For example, for 'coffee or tea?' they stand on the far left if they strongly like coffee, far right if they strongly like tea, or choose a point in between. Repeat for each topic.

- a) Coffee or tea?
- b) Morning person or night person?
- c) Winter or summer?
- d) Classical or rock?
- e) City break or countryside?
- f) Love Marmite or hate Marmite?

Invite the group to take their seats again.

- **DISCUSS** (*whole group*): Were you surprised by anybody's preference in a particular area?
- **BACKGROUND NOISE** (*in pairs*):

Ask group members to get into pairs. Hand out Session Sheets and invite everybody to look at the *Background Noise* picture.

Explain that we all carry thoughts and ideas in our head on a range of issues. These ideas may come from lots of places. In pairs, we are going to explore the 'background noise' already in our heads on the topic. Explain that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers here: it's all about examining our own starting-points.



Explain that the thought-bubbles represent:

- > (School) School and upbringing
- > (People) Friends and family
- > (TV) TV and film
- > (Smartphone) Social media
- > (Question-Mark) Anything else

In their pairs, invite group members to discuss their own thoughts and experiences of church (good and bad). Also ask them to discuss what they hear other people say about church: friends, family, TV news stories etc. Use the thought-bubbles as a prompt if helpful.

After a few minutes, invite people to rejoin the whole group. Invite them to share anything they discussed if they would like to. Handle sensitively, as people may share difficult personal experiences.

Main Course *(approx 45 mins)*

- VIDEO

- ON SHEET:

Ask group members to look at *Video Recap*, a summary of key points in the video:



Groups that work



Early church: shared faith



Early church: caring



New people joined



Bad experiences?



Being more alive

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss each of the following questions:

- What part of the video stood out for you?
- If somebody had asked a member of the early church, 'Can't you just be a Christian on your own?' how do you think they might have replied?

- ON SHEET: Ask people to look at the *Pictures of Church* sheet. Explain that the Bible uses picture-language to talk about church and what church is meant to be. These include the six pictures on the sheet. Go through the pictures one by one, reading out the Bible verse for each. For each one invite the group to take a few minutes to discuss what the picture means, and what this might look like in practice in a local church (*Note: invite ideas rather than simply giving answers. If people get stuck, there are hints for the leader below*):

- **Family:** love, home, belonging, unconditional acceptance, community, God as parent.
- **Grapevine:** organic link to Jesus as source of life, God as vineyard owner, fruitfulness, fruit/wine representing fullness of life.
- **Lamp:** standing out as different, reveals truth, light as hope, lighthouse as guide/warning.
- **Parts of a Body:** belonging together, different functions, no part superior, growth and maturity, health, Jesus as head.
- **Temple:** God as architect and builder, built on solid foundation, others share the work of building, place where God is, place where heaven and earth meet, worship.
- **Flock of Sheep:** God as shepherd (care, protection, guidance, lost and found), dependence on God.

Pictures of Church



Family

'You are members of God's family.'
(*Ephesians 2:19*)



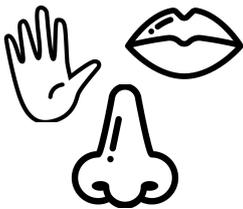
Grapevine

'Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.'
(*John 15:5*)



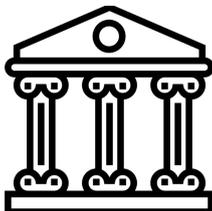
Lamp

'You are the light of the world – like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all.'
(*Matthew 5:15/16*)



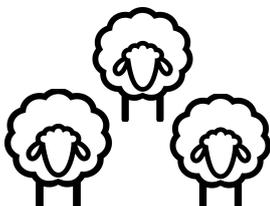
Parts of a Body

'Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part.'
(*1 Corinthians 12:27*)



Temple

'And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple.'
(*1 Peter 2:5*)



Flock of Sheep

'I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me.'
(*John 10:14*)

- **DISCUSS** (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss each of the following questions:
 - Have you ever been part of a team, club or work group that worked really well? What made it so good? (This can be at school, or as an adult).
 - Complete this sentence: 'At its best, church is...'

- **ON SHEET:**

Ask somebody to read out *Text Message: Imperfect People*

We saw that the early church got some things right, and lots of new people wanted to join them. But of course they weren't perfect.

That's because the church isn't made up of perfect people. It's made up of ordinary, imperfect people. But they're people who want to keep on growing, in two main areas:

- Faith in Jesus Christ.
- Love and care for each other.

- **DISCUSS** (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss the following question:
 - What is the most important difference between a church and any other club or team?

Dessert (*approx 15 mins*)

- Invite the group to join in either the Creative Prayer or Space to Think (as decided by the leader before the session). Then end by praying the Closing Prayer out loud.

1) Creative Prayer:

- Each person in the group is given two Post-It notes.
- On the first, each person writes or draws one area of the Christian life they'd like to grow in (eg trusting God, understanding the Bible, caring for others...). These are then stuck in a cluster on a door, wall, board or other surface.
- On the second note, each person writes or draws one gift or quality they have. Think particularly of gifts that could help other people. If a group member is unsure, ask others in the group to suggest ideas. These are stuck in a cluster on another surface.
- Invite people to look at the two clusters of Post-It notes. Then invite people to get into pairs, share briefly what they put on their Post-It notes, then pray for each other – aloud or quietly – that they will grow in these areas.

2) Space to Think: time to reflect on words from the Bible, ending with the Lord's Prayer

Tell the group you are going to read out a few words from the story of the early church in the Bible (below).

Say you are going to read the words twice, slowly.

Invite them to take a few minutes in silence to think what one word or idea stands out to them and why.

Read the passage (twice, slowly):

'All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity' (Acts 2:44-46).

(Modern Version)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

(Traditional Version)

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

• **Closing Prayer** *(read aloud):*

Lord God, we thank you for your church. We pray that it will be a community where people find faith, truth, and love that is expressed in down-to-earth ways. We pray for all the churches in our neighbourhood, and for the people you have called to lead them. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Takeaway

- **ON SHEET:** Ask somebody to read out the *Takeaway* section:

Either:

- Imagine you and a group of friends have been asked to start a new church in your neighbourhood. What name would you give it, to tell people what's so special about it?
- Take time this week to list as many of the churches and Christian groups in your neighbourhood as possible. Choose one of them, and find out more about it. Ideally, meet somebody who is a member of that church who can tell you more.