

The Biblical Church

**Bible Studies on the Church: What is it?
What does it do? and Why bother with it?**

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Introduction

St. Luke's Vision Statement

Under God, by 2014 St. Luke's Liverpool will be a community of vibrant, Bible-based church gatherings. They will reflect the social and cultural diversity of the Liverpool area and will be united in the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These gatherings will comprise 1000 men, women and children:

- who love God in their prayerful obedience to His Word the Bible;**
- who in partnership with one another are encouraged to use their time, energy, gifts and resources in the service of God's church; and**
- who will share the good news of Jesus with the people of the Liverpool area.**

This is no small vision for St. Luke's Liverpool. Humanly speaking it is impossible for us to achieve, but it is not impossible for God. This sermon series and set of Bible Studies are intended to help us get our bearings as a church and understand how we dared to state the vision as we have. The series will help each of us understand not just the church, but the "Biblical Church". As we engage with God's word the Bible we will understand what it is, what it does and why bother with it. Our hope and prayer is that St. Luke's Liverpool will be the Biblical church that God wants us to be.

Gathered Together

Deuteronomy 4:1-14; Hebrews 12:18-29

Getting Started

1. Which of the following definitions from the Macquarie Dictionary best describes your understanding of the church and why?

- an edifice for public Christian worship
- public worship of God in a church
- the whole body of Christian believers
- any division of this body professing the same creed and acknowledging the same ecclesiastical authority
- a Christian denomination
- the ecclesiastical organisation or power as distinguished from the state
- any non Christian religious society, organisation or congregation

Investigate Deuteronomy 4:1-14

The book of Deuteronomy records Moses' words to the 2nd generation of Israelites that had been rescued by God out of slavery in Egypt. The 1st generation had died as a result of God's judgement during the 40 years of wandering in the desert.

2. What do we learn about obedience towards God in verses 1-8?

3. How will the people of Israel stand out from amongst the other nations? (4:5-8)

4. What threatens the life of God's people in verse 9?

5. Why were the Israelites called to assemble at Mount Horeb? (4:10)

6. How did God relate to His gathered people? (4:12)

7. What is strange about verses 11-12 given that this generation of Israel were not at Mount Horeb?

Thinking it through

8. Why do you think Moses could say to this new generation that they were at Mount Horeb?

Investigate Hebrews 12:18-29

The letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage and exhort Christians from a Jewish background. It seems they were tempted to return to Judaism or to import Jewish ideas and practices into the gospel.

9. How is the Christian experience different from the Old Testament Israelite experience in verse 18-21?

10. List out what Christians have come to in verses 22-24?

11. How is the Christian response similar to that of the Old Testament Israelites? (12:25)

12. What does verse 28-29 tell us about:
Why should we worship God?

How should we worship God?

Thinking it through

13. How can verses 22-24 describe Christians when we are clearly in Australia and not in the world of the 1st century New Testament?

14. How does this study on the church as God's gathering shape your understanding of St. Luke's in its present configuration?

Prayer Point

That we will understand the importance of church as God's gathering and make God's gathering a priority in our lives.

Relating Together

1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Colossians 1:15-23

Getting Started

1. What difficulties can we encounter in relating to others with whom we share a common bond?

Investigate 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

2. How does Paul describe the church? (12:12-13)

3. What does this passage have to say to the Christian with low self esteem? (12:14-20)

4. What does this passage have to say to Christians with high self esteem? (12:21-26)

5. In verse 28 Paul lists a variety of ministries in the body. Why do you think he put apostles, prophets and teachers first?

Thinking it through

6. How does the body image help us understand our unity and diversity?

Investigate Colosians 1:15-20

7. How is Jesus' relationship to the church described? (1:18)

8. How was this relationship achieved? (1:19-20)

Thinking it through

9. What do you think it means practically for Christ to be the head of the church?

10. True or False "When you see the church, you see Christ." Why / Why not?

- True
- False

Prayer Point

That as a church we might give proper expression to our unity and diversity with Christ as our head.

Church and the Temple of God

2 Chronicles 6:12-21, 32-33; John 2:12-22; Ephesians 2:19-22

Getting Started

1. When you hear the word “temple” what do you think about?

Investigate 2 Chronicles 6:14-21, 7:1-3

This passage records King Solomon’s prayer of dedication for God’s temple in Jerusalem. God had commanded that the son of King David would build “a house for my name.”

2. How does King Solomon understand the significance of the temple in verses 14-15?

3. Why does Solomon question the presence of God amongst his people in verse 18?

4. What does Solomon request from God regarding the temple? (6:20-21)

5. What do you think the events described in 7:1-3 signify?

Thinking it Through

6. How would you describe the function of the Temple in the life of Israel?

Investigate John 2:12-22

7. How has the activity at the temple changed from the dedication prayer of King Solomon?

8. How does Jesus reinterpret the temple for the Jews and the disciples? (2:19-21)

Thinking it through

9. How might Jesus fulfil the function of the Temple described in 2 Chronicles 6?

Investigate Ephesians 2:19-22

The apostle Paul has explained how Jesus' death unites Gentiles with Jews as the people of God.

10. How is the temple described in this passage?

11. How is Jesus significant in this image of the temple? (2:20-21)

Thinking it through

12. Why can the people of God be considered a "holy temple"?

Prayer Point

Give thanks that Jesus himself has replaced the temple

On a mission from God

Exodus 19:1-9, Philipians 1:27-30

Getting Started

1. “The church is the *result* of God’s mission, not the *agent* of God’s mission.” What do you think of this statement given your understanding of church?

Investigate Exodus 19:1-9

Three months have passed since the exodus out of slavery in Egypt. These verses introduce the gathering of God’s people at Mount Sinai (also known as Mount Horeb) where God will call for a commitment from them.

2. What does God remind the people of before calling for a commitment? Why might this be important for God’s people?

3. How will the Israelites be different from the rest of the world if they obey God fully and keep his covenant?

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4. Read Numbers 3:10 and Leviticus 9:7. What do these verses tell us about the priests in the Old Testament?

Thinking it through

5. What do you think it means for the Israelites to be a “kingdom of priests” in an unbelieving world?

Investigate Philipians 1:27-28

6. What does Paul expect of the Christians at Philipi? (1:27a)

7. What will it mean for the church as they “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel”? (1:27b-28)

Investigate 1 Corinthians 14:23-25

Tongues are a gift from God where people can speak in an unknown language that requires someone with the gift of interpretation in church. Prophecy is speaking the word of God in the language of the people, not necessarily speaking about the future.

8. What concern should the church have for the unbeliever that enters the church gathering?

Thinking it through

9. What factors in church gatherings raise the question of intelligibility to an ‘outsider’? What needs to be changed at St. Luke’s?

10. What elements are non negotiable for a Christian church gathering?

Prayer Point

That we will be a missionary people who form a missionary church.

Body Building

Matthew 16:13-20; Ephesians 4:1-16

Getting Started

1. List what you think makes the ideal church.

Investigate Matthew 16:13-20

2. Who will build the church? To whom does the church belong? What is the foundation of the church? (16:18)

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3. Is the church today under threat? Why / Why not?(16:18)

Thinking it through

4. How do these verses challenge or inform the idea that:

- Vision, commitment, planning and leadership grow the church
- Church needs to meet people's felt needs
- Church traditions are important foundations in the church

Investigate Ephesians 4:1-16

5. What sort of lives are Christians called to in verse 1?

6. How do verses 2-6 help us understand the sort of life we're called to live?

7. How does the passage change in verse 7?

8. What has Christ given to his church to prepare God's people for works of service and why? (4:11-12)

9. What sort of difference will unity and maturity make in the life of the church? (4:14-16)

Thinking it through

10. How does Christ build his church?

11. What will happen to the church if each part of the body of Christ doesn't do its work?

12. What practical ways can you participate in the building of Christ's church at St. Luke's?

Prayer Point

That we give thanks that Christ builds his church and uses each and every disciple to achieve that end.

Love, not “fellowship”

Mark 12:28-34; 1 John 3:11-24

Getting Started

1. How do you understand fellowship in the church gathering?

Investigate Mark 12:28-34

Jesus has been involved in a series of disputes with the Jewish religious leaders within the temple precinct.

2. Of the 613 commandments found in the pages of the Old Testament, which did Jesus consider the most important?

3. What surprising addition does the teacher of the law add in his response to Jesus' answer? (12:33)

Thinking it through

4. What do you think it means for you to love God with all your:

- heart

- soul

- mind

- strength

5. Why do you think this man was “not far from the kingdom of God”?

6. Why do you think Jesus offered two commandments when he was only asked for the greatest commandment?

Investigate 1 John 3:11-24

7. What is the message that we have heard from the beginning? (see also John 13:34-35)

8. What is one sure way that we can know we have eternal life? (3:13-14)

9. What two important aspects of love do we discover in verses 16-18?

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10. What will it mean for each of us to obey God’s command to believe in his Son and to love one another? (3:24)

Thinking it through

11. How can we be guilty of enjoying fellowship, but not love when we gather together?

12. How do others really know they are loved by you?

Prayer Point

That love will be the defining mark of our life as the church gathering.

Finish the race together

Hebrews 3:7-19, 10:19-25

Getting Started

1. Why do Christians find it difficult to make church a priority in their life?

Investigate Hebrews 3:7-19

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 95, a quote that speaks of the generation of Israelites that God rescued out of slavery in Egypt.

2. What warning do we learn from that generation that was saved from Egypt? (3:7-8)

Thinking it through

3. How can we avoid the hardening of our hearts towards God and his plans and purposes?

4. What do these verses tell us about the Christian life?

5. How are you encouraged in the Christian life and how do you encourage others?

Investigate Hebrews 10:19-25

6. How is it that followers of Jesus can draw near to God when only the Israelite's High Priest was able to do so? (10:19-21)

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7. What should we do as a result of being able to draw near to God? (10:23-25)

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Thinking it through

8. Why do Christians need encouragement?

9. How might we be responsible for our encouragement?

Prayer Point

That we will recommit ourselves to helping one another keep going in the Christian life.

What about Worship?

Isaiah 1:10-20; Hebrews 12:28-13:17

Getting Started

A definition of worship. “First we learn to praise God, then we sanctify our minds through the power of the Spirit, then our emotions take over and bring us through the veil into the presence of God in worship. When we come to that final act of worship, it is the divine invitation of the Lord himself that draws us within the veil ... and it is only when our relationship with God is consummated in worship that we truly feel that we are where he is and he is where we are”¹

1. What does this definition tell us about worship? How does it fit your understanding of worship?

Investigate Isaiah 1:10-20

The prophet Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord to the nation of Judah and its capital, the city of Jerusalem. At that time Jerusalem barely resembled the city of God, and so Isaiah warns them of God’s coming judgement and the promise of the future with a new Jerusalem.

2. How does God describe the temple worship of his people in verses 10-15?

3. How do verses 16-17 help us understand the problem of Israel’s temple worship?

¹ T. Law, *The Power of Praise and Worship* (Tulsa: Victory House, 1985), pp. 140-141.

4. How do verses 19-20 help us understand the true worship that God wants?

Thinking it through

5. How does the temple worship of Isaiah's day present a warning to us?

Investigate Hebrews 12:28-13:17

6. How are we to worship God and why? (12:28-29)

7. How do chapter 13 verses 1-8 help us to understand our worship of God? (Remember that chapter divisions, verse numbers and heading were not part of the original text!)

8. How is the language of worship in the temple transformed with Jesus' life and ministry? (11-16)

9. How does verse 17 practically apply to:

- the ordained leadership

- Bible study group leaders

- Elected lay leadership

Thinking it through

10. Why is Jesus so central in Christian worship?

11. Why do you think that Christians tend to restrict worship to what we do in church?

12. Reflect again on the introductory definition of worship.

Prayer Point

That our whole life will be lived in worship towards God through Jesus.

Do I have to go?

1 John 1:5-2:2; Acts 20:28-31; Colossians 3:12-17

Getting Started

1. What would it take to stop you going to church one Sunday? Why?

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> wild horses | <input type="checkbox"/> too cold |
| <input type="checkbox"/> threatening storm | <input type="checkbox"/> too hot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> too tired from Saturday night | <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday is a family day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> no Lord's Supper | <input type="checkbox"/> awkward relationships at church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good show on TV | <input type="checkbox"/> (other) _____ |

Investigate 1 John 1:5-2:2

2. What do we gain by "walking in the light"? (1:6-7)

3. What makes our fellowship possible? (1:7)

4. What is the key to good relationships with one another? Why?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> common interests | <input type="checkbox"/> boundaries in relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> compromise | <input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communication | <input type="checkbox"/> genuine interest in others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (other) _____ | |

Investigate Colossians 3:12-17

5. What do verses 12-14 say about the nature of our relationships?

6. What place does the peace of Christ and the word of Christ have in our life together as the church of God? (3:15-17)

- peace of Christ:

- word of Christ:

Investigate Acts 20:28-31

In these verses Paul gives his final instructions to the Ephesian elders regarding their responsibilities within the church.

7. To whom does the church belong?

8. How much did the church cost God?

Thinking it through

9. What threatens or weakens our fellowship with one another?

10. What sort of effort do other people need to make in order to have fellowship with you?

11. What value should we place on our church gatherings? Why?

Prayer Point

That our meeting as God's church and our fellowship with one another will be a priority

Must I get involved?

Galatians 6:1-10

Getting Started

1. “90% of the work gets done by 10% of the people.” Do you think this is true of St. Luke’s? Why?

Investigate Galatians 6:1-10

2. What attitude should we have to a brother or sister in Christ who is caught in a sin?

3. What do you think the law of Christ is and how can we fulfil that law amongst us at St. Luke’s?

4. What place is there for comparing ourselves to one another within the church? (6:4-5)

5. What does it mean when Paul says, “A man reaps what he sows”? (6:8)

6. How does Paul apply the reap what you sow principle? (6:9-10)

Thinking it through

7. What do you think it means to “restore someone gently”?

8. How might pride threaten a person’s involvement in the life of God’s church?

9. What encourages you to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”?

Prayer Point

That we might regard involvement in the church as both a privilege and responsibility.