



THE REVOLUTIONARY DISCIPLE

What Is Church?

A Worksheet to Help You Process God's Heart About Our Lives Together in the Church



WHAT IS CHURCH?

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Complete this study with a group, one-on-one, or on your own.

In Chapter 8 of *The Revolutionary Disciple*, “It’s God’s Church, Not Ours,” we describe our understanding of “What is church?” from Scripture. Our list is not comprehensive, but it focuses on the essentials. Yet leaders can benefit from processing this issue for themselves. Our churches will continue to face new challenges, so we as leaders need to think clearly about which aspects of church life are foundational and which are cultural. Then, we must cling to what’s foundational, anchoring our life together in Scripture.

This tool helps you process the question, “What is church?” from a biblical perspective.

We’ve outlined our ecclesial minimum in the book, but what’s yours? Do you agree with our ten items from Chapter 8 (listed again in this PDF)? Or would you change the list? As we seek to answer this question, “What is church?” we must remember no such list exists in Scripture. That’s why we can process this and discern as best we can this question about church life.

On the other hand, Scripture offers us precedents and clear instructions about church life. So it’s still important to seek God by examining the Scriptures because it’s his church, not ours. If we’re looking for a new law or a rulebook about church life. The New Testament doesn’t offer that. But if we listen closely to the heart of God as we search the Scriptures, we are sure to find themes, common threads, and theological clarity. Our goal with this worksheet is to help you process God’s vision for the church with an eye toward your church in particular.

After you complete this worksheet, we hope you’ll walk away with clarity about the core aspects of church life with the result that you will confidently stand on God’s Word as your foundation for your understanding of church life. We’re not seeking to define what *the individual Christian life* looks like for each of us. We’re seeking to understand *the corporate life of the local church*—together.

GETTING STARTED

Read through Acts 2:42–47 about the early church, and then list what you believe is a core aspect of church life and what was cultural in their time from this passage.

Core

Cultural

Why?

Read through Acts 4:32–35, another passage about the early church, and then list what you believe is a core aspect of church life and what was cultural in their time from this passage.

Core

Cultural

Why?

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Read Titus 1:5, 1 Corinthians 16:1–4, and Matthew 16:17–19, which all address church life, and then list what you believe is a core aspect of church life and what was cultural in their time from this passage.

Core	Cultural	Why?
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What other passages in the New Testament passages describe church life?

Passage	Core	Cultural	Why?
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OUR ECCLESIAL MINIMUM

Read below our list of ten core aspects of church life, which is an excerpt taken from pages 108–111 of *The Revolutionary Disciple*.

As you read, keep in mind that the earliest church was composed of disciples who had accepted the gospel and shared a baptismal experience (Acts 2:38–40). Then starting in Acts 2:42–47, we see ten core aspects of church life, what some might call an “ecclesial minimum” (the minimum requirements for participating in a church).

The first four are foundational because the first church “devoted themselves” to these aspects of their life together. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

1. *The apostles’ teaching.* This was the foundation for the church because the apostles’ teaching came directly from Christ, who himself was the bedrock of the church (Matt. 16:18). These, in part, were the commands given to the apostles to teach wherever they went (Matt. 28:19).
2. *Fellowship.* The word for “fellowship” here in Acts 2:42 means more than Christians just getting together for coffee and donuts. The early church not only shared their lives in deep, intimate relationships but also their belongings and food.
3. *Communion.* They called it the “breaking of bread” here, but this was shorthand for communion at the time.
4. *Prayer.* Communal prayer characterized the early church. This was likely organized prayer time in some fashion because it’s called “the prayers” (ESV), not just “prayer” in general.

Today, we must treasure and teach the words of Jesus, share life together, take communion, and pray together to function as a biblical church. These comprise the core activities of the early church, and they provide for us today guidance about what makes a biblical church.

The description in Acts 2:42–47 and other parts of the New Testament help us see the importance of six additional elements, which are vital to any group claiming to be a church:

5. *Gatherings.* The people physically gathered together. In order to experience true and full fellowship, we also must physically gather (Acts 2:46).
6. *Regular meetings.* The believers initially met “every day” (Acts 2:46), but then the early church began meeting weekly on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1–2). While one-time gatherings have their place, a biblical church requires us to have relationships and regular touch-points with others.

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7. *Worshiping God.* The early church praised God together (Acts 2:46–47). When we function as God’s church, we don’t just teach about God but we also praise God himself.
8. *Evangelism.* “The Lord added . . . daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). While churches can grow at different rates or have lulls, healthy biblical churches evangelize the lost and grow.
9. *Giving.* As the church grew, they shared physical possessions with those who had need (Acts 4:34–35). They also brought money to their meetings based on their income. Barnabas, for example, gave money he received from the sale of his property so the church could use it as God directed the leaders (Acts 4:36–37). Churches today must help the needy among them and beyond.
10. *Elders.* While new churches don’t usually have elders, Paul made sure churches “in every town” soon had them (Titus 1:5). God still leads his church through a plurality of elders today.

A church can involve more than these essentials—much more!—but never less than these.

Now that we’ve shared our understanding of what Scripture says about church, would you add any “essentials” to your list? Use Scripture and explain.

Would you take any from our list away? Use Scripture in your explanation.

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Would you change anything from our list above? Use Scripture in your explanation.

Which of the essentials does your church do well? Which might you be neglecting?

How has this exercise been helpful for you? What's your biggest takeaway?