

# Study One



## Introduction

One of the essential aids to living in the city is access to an online journey planner, something like Streetmap.com or the RAC route-finder (and no we're not getting any commission for the free advertising!). You simply type in the postcode or street number of your starting point, followed by the details of your chosen destination and streetmap.com will display a map of the whole area. The RAC route finder will even provide detailed, step by step directions for your car journey, along with all the major landmarks and mileage for each section of the journey. These tools are invaluable for getting around by car in the city. It would be disastrous to set off with only a vague idea of general direction and no real clue on how to get to our ultimate destination. We need clear directions.

Likewise it is no less important for the church to know where it is going. And in the Bible we have an invaluable aid for negotiating the challenges that confront the church in our day and context. In the Bible the church has been given clear directions. Scripture provides us with churchmap.com

Understanding where we are going, what we are for, what our purpose is as a church is basic to the good health of the church and its members (you and me). In this study we are thinking about those purposes. ***What is the church for? Where ought we to be going as a church? Why are we here?***

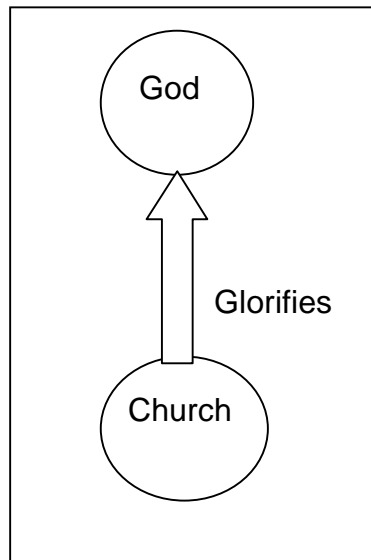
**Take a few moments to offer some of your own answers to those big questions.**



**Part one: Worship**  
**Read 1Peter 2:4-12.**

1. Who is the Living Stone of verse 4?
2. In verse 5 the church is described as living stones being built into a spiritual house (the Temple) and as a holy priesthood. What is the job of the Temple and its priests?
3. In verse 9 Peter gives us another list of title's for the church. This time the focus is on belonging to God. What is the purpose of the church in this verse?
4. What are 'spiritual sacrifices' and how do we offer them?  
(1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 13:15, Romans 12:1,2)
5. In our church how do you fulfil your priestly role?

Figure 1. The Purpose of the church

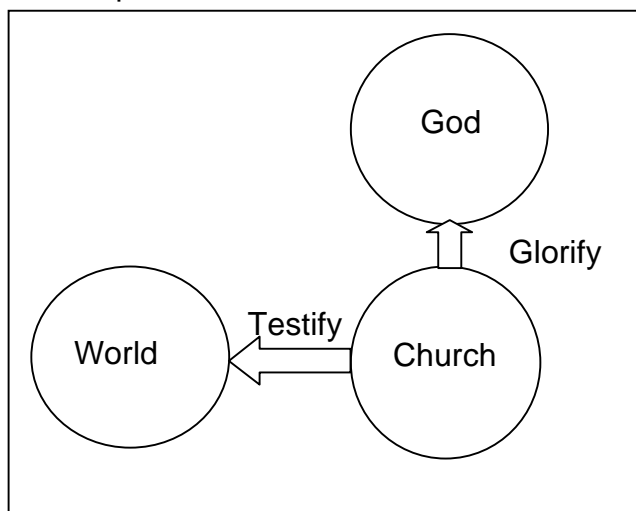




**Part 2: Mission**  
**Read 1 Peter 2:4-12**

6. What implications does Peter draw from the fact that the church is “a people belonging to God”? (vs11-12)
7. What is Peter’s objective for our lives in these verses? (vs12)
8. The rest of the passage, from 2:13 through to 3:12, unpacks and explains what these ‘good lives’ look like. But in 3:15 Peter tells us that actions alone are not enough. What else is required?
9. Do you look for regular opportunities to ‘give a reason for your hope’? Do you find it hard to be open about your faith? Why or why not?

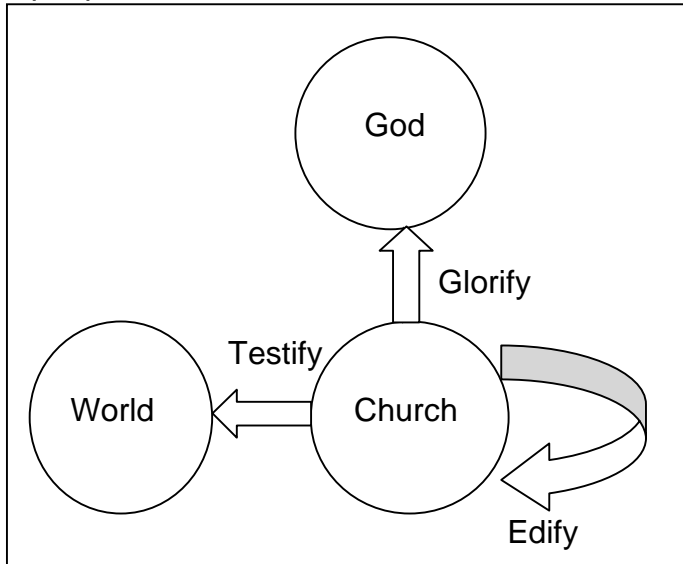
Figure 2: The Purpose of the Church





### Part 3: Nurture Read Ephesians 4: 7-16.

We've seen that the purpose of the church is to glorify God. It does that in its worship, and in its witness to the world. Now finally we will see that it does that also by building up God's people.



In this passage Paul uses three word pictures to speak about the church. In verse 12 the church is like a building site. It is 'being built'. It is under construction. It is, to use Peter's phrase (1 Peter 2:5), a spiritual house, a temple that is steadily rising from its foundations. It is growing. But **numerical** growth isn't what Paul has in mind, and the second picture he uses makes that clear. In verses 13-15 he uses the image of infants becoming mature, growing up into adulthood. Paul is talking about personal **spiritual** growth. And he makes that same point again in the last metaphor, in verse 16. The church is like a body, growing and developing. The point is clear: **spiritual** growth is an important goal of the church. Verses 7-16 tell us how that growth takes place.

9. What gifts has the Risen Christ given to the church? (vs. 7-11)
10. Why? What is their purpose? (vs. 12)
11. What is the goal of the church being built up? (vs. 13)
12. How does the church edify and build up its members? Who does the building up? (vs. 12, 15)



### Think it through

Think about each of the three areas of the church's ministry (worship, mission, nurture). Can any of these be done in isolation from the others? What, for example, might be the results of a church committed to mission without equal commitment to worship or Christian nurture?

1. Towards which of these areas are you most biased? In which areas are you most uncomfortable? Why is that?

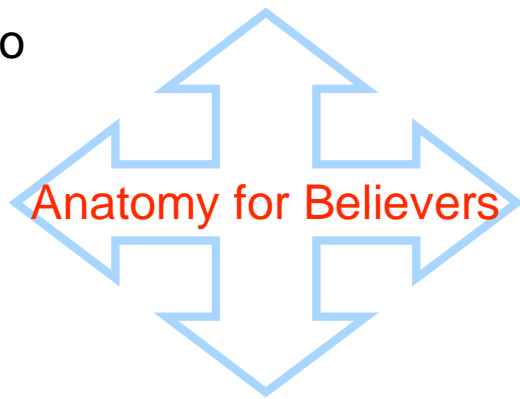
2. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul tells us that growth in Christian maturity happens as we speak Biblical truth in a loving way into each other's lives (for examples of what Paul has in mind compare 5:19, and Col. 3:16). How do we do this in our church? How can we do this better? Write down any useful ideas that come from your group and pass them on to the leadership of the church.



## Pray

Take time now to pray together, asking specifically that the Lord would help us move as a church family in these three 'directions': *upwards* in the worship God, *inwards* in the nurture of believers, and *outwards* as we reach the lost. Pray especially for the various forums we have for each of those areas of ministry, and for the people involved in them. Pray particularly for an increase in love as we 'speak the truth' to each other in small groups in the weeks ahead.

## Study Two



### Introduction

Understanding our own body's needs is important if we are to maintain our physical wellbeing and grow in a healthy way. Likewise, the church needs to understand what it means to be the Body of Christ if it's to maintain its health and grow. In **1 Corinthians 12:4-31** Paul provides us with an anatomical textbook for believers. Here is how the Body works, how it fits together and what each part needs. Reading Paul here is like undergoing a complete physical exam. It's a spiritual health check for the whole Body of Christ.



### Part One: Gifts and the Giver Read verses 4-11

1. In verses 4-6 Paul calls spiritual gifts, “gifts” (vs4), “service” (vs5), and “working” (vs6). What does that tell you about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts?
2. Why are spiritual gifts given? (vs7)
3. What dangers are there for the church when we ignore the purpose of Spiritual gifts?
4. Are all spiritual gifts available for every Christian? Who determines the gifts we have, according to Paul?
5. In verses 7-11, Paul emphasises that the *same* Spirit gives all these *different* gifts. According to verses 12-13, what point is he trying to make?



### Part Two: Body Parts Read verses 12-24

In verse 12 Paul introduces the image of a body made up of many parts yet still making one body. The Body of Christ is also diverse. Paul lists people of different ethnic backgrounds (“Jews or Greeks”) and social status (“slaves or free”), and yet they are united together in the church through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit initiates us into the body of Christ (“baptised by one Spirit into one body”) and he sustains and strengthens us as we live and work together (“we were all given the one Spirit to drink”). This is the way things ought to be. In verses 14-24 Paul will deal with the way things all too often really are.

6. What is the problem Paul addresses in verses 14-17?
7. How does he correct it in verses 18-20? How do we make this mistake?
8. What different problem is he addressing in verse 21?
9. How does he correct it in verses 21-24? How do we make this mistake?



### **Part Three: A Healthy Body** **Read verses 26-31**

10. Why has God ordered the parts of the body this way? (vs25)
11. When the body is organised this way what results? (vs26) Why is this a good thing?
12. Is it wrong to desire spiritual gifts? (vs31)



### **Think it through**

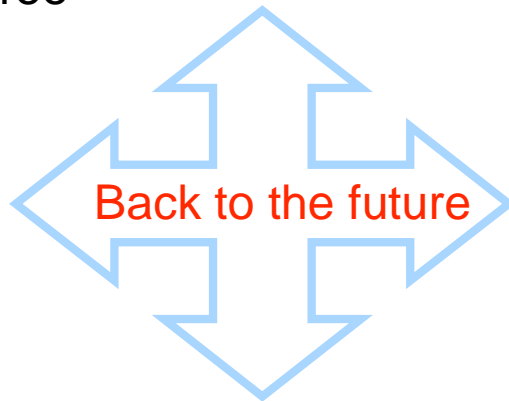
1. Why do you think it is necessary for us to be reminded that God, who gives the church gifts, is one God, and the church, though diverse, is one body?
2. Is your contribution important according to Paul?(21-24) How does that challenge your view of your place in church?
3. In 12:31 Paul calls us to eagerly desire the best gifts and in 14:1-5 he tells us what gifts he has in mind. Prophecy is more valuable than speaking in tongues, because in prophecy the whole “church is edified” (vs5). In 14:12 he tells us to “excel in gifts (note the plural) that build up the church.” Now that we have a complete New Testament, the church no longer needs direct revelation from God (as in prophecy and tongues, for example) but what other gifts build up the church today? How can we pursue excellence in these areas
4. In 12:31b Paul breaks off his discussion of gifts, to emphasise the “more excellent way” of love. Why is love so important for the way we live together as the body of Christ? Why is love so important for the way we exercise our gifts?



### **Pray**

Spend a few moments in silence reflecting on this passage and its message. Ask yourself how you think of other believers in your church. Do you ‘rate’ them based on your perception of the importance of their gifts and ministries? Now pray together, confessing your pride or insecurity, and acknowledging the areas where disunity threatens our part of the Body of Christ. Pray that the Spirit would help us all to serve one another in the context of “the most excellent way” of love. Thank God together for gifts of others in the church.

## Study Three



### Introduction

When you set off on a new journey to a new destination it always helps if there is someone you can follow in your car who knows the way and is going along too. In the past two studies we've considered where the church should be going, and how the church should function as it goes. Today we are thinking about **Acts 2:37-47**, which gives us someone to follow along the road who knows the way. Here is a picture of a church that is well along the road to living out many of the things we've been talking about. It has not arrived yet. There is much still to be done. But they clearly know where they are going. We're going to study their example and try to follow them along the road towards the church's final destination.



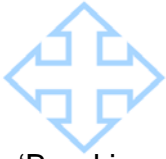
### Part one: Devoted to Teaching Read Acts 2:37-47

1. Where did the new church in Jerusalem come from? What accounts for its remarkable character? (2:1-4, 17, 33, 38-41)
2. In vs. 42, the new converts are said to be devoted to radical Christian living in the church. Can you think of another word to characterise the attitude of the believers?
3. Being devoted to the apostle's teaching (vs. 42) means more than having a reputation for being a solid Bible teaching church. It means being a church full of learners. In what ways do we learn in our church?



### Part Two: Devoted to the Fellowship

4. When we talk about 'sharing fellowship together' what do we tend to mean?
5. What does Luke mean in Acts 2:42? (The word 'fellowship' here, means "to give someone a share in something"- and verses 44 and 45 give us a picture of the depths of their fellowship. Compare also 4:32-35.)
6. Is fellowship like this easy and automatic for Christians? Why or why not?
7. How large was the Jerusalem church? (vs41)
8. What different meetings had been established to ensure the remarkable quality of their fellowship? (vs46) What might the equivalents be in our church?



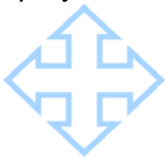
### **Part Three: Devoted to Praise and Prayer**

'Breaking of bread' (vs. 42, 46) is shorthand for eating a meal together. But in the church it came to be a technical term, referring to the Lord's Supper which was central to the early church's worship. By referring to the Lord's Supper like this Luke is telling us that these first believers were devoted to not just to the Communion ritual itself, but to the worship of the Risen Lord Jesus in its entirety.

9. In verse 46 and 47 what three words does Paul use to describe the attitudes and actions of the believers as they 'broke bread and ate together'?

10. What obstacles are there for you in having the same attitudes in worship?

11. They were also devoted to prayer (vs42). What kinds of prayer meetings took place in Acts (1:14; 4:24-31; 6:6-7; 12:5, 12, 13:2-3, 14:23). What place does corporate prayer play in the church's life in Acts?



### **Think it Through**

1. What would devoting yourself to each of the areas mentioned in Acts 2:42ff mean in practise?
2. Are you still a devoted learner? How can we cultivate an appetite for learning Biblical truth?
2. What forums are available for prayer in your church?
3. Why is gathering together in prayer important?
4. The Jerusalem church worked hard at fellowship that involved real sharing in practical ways with those most in need. How can your small group practise practical fellowship like this?



### **Pray**

Give thanks for the teaching, learning, fellowship, praise and prayer we enjoy together in the church. In verse 47 Luke notes that one result of this radical new community of God's people living in the way they did was that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Pray earnestly that the quality of our church life would be so attractive to a lost generation and that our spiritual growth would be accompanied by numerical growth. As an expression of fellowship in your small group, take time now to bring one another's needs before the Lord in prayer.