

## I like Church... Renewing Our Vision, Acts 2:22-47

*Small Group & Personal Bible Study Lesson: Pastor Dennis Hadley*

**Daily Scripture Reading:** (During the course of this study you will be given opportunity to read the entire book of Acts. This week we are only focusing on a few verses which serve as a launching point of the entire study. Next week we will begin to read through the entire book of Acts)

1. Acts 2:22-36
2. Acts 2:37-41
3. Acts 2:42-43
4. Acts 2:44-45
5. Acts 2:46-47

### ➤ What has God revealed to you from the book of Acts this week?

I encourage you to always start each meeting asking them what God has revealed from their daily reading that week.

### Small Group Lesson: Acts 2:22-47

1. According to Acts 2:47, who is responsible for adding to the numbers of the church? ‘

The Bible makes it clear that God grows his church. It is not about us or our abilities. We simply cooperate and obey what God asks us to do.

2. How does knowing that God will add to those being saved, help you understand the purpose of the church better? What comfort do you find in that truth?

It helps me understand that God is in control of all things. That the purpose of the church is to do his will and we are not to worry about things that only God can do. I am comforted to know it isn't about me, my abilities, or my energy. It is all about God and his hand at work.

3. The Word of God is powerful as is seen in Acts 2:22-41. How can knowing the Word of God is all you need help you be more willing to read it, believe it, obey it, and give it away?

I am encouraged to know that God's word is powerful and effective. The truth of Jesus Christ is all I need. I do not need to be eloquent in speech, wise in my words, or convincing in my message. I just need to be truthful and let the word of God move powerfully in the lives of others. When I trust what I read in the Bible I am led to obey it and share it. This is the role of a disciple wrapped up in a statement.

4. What differences do you see between the church of Acts in 2:42-47 and the church of America today?

Let people discuss their observations from scripture. To keep people from becoming critical of the church, remind them that we are the church (them included). If we desire to renew our vision to God's plan for his church then it starts with ourselves. God has blessed EVC and he isn't finished with us yet.

5. How might being a part of a small group enable you experience the church of Acts more closely?

I believe that the close connection we experience in a small group will help us grow closer as the church did in Acts. We can care for one another in an intimately close way and our prayers for one another are sincere and personal. This is God's plan for his church. Jesus told us to love one another over and over again. That is God's plan. Being connected to a small group of brothers and sisters enables us to experience that type of love as we grow together and belong to one another.

**Action Step: Meet with Others:** (During this series, we will have an action step we want to have people respond to in obedience to what God lays on their heart. Encourage your group to take these actions each week. This first week may not apply if you are already in a group but future action steps will)

During the course of the next eight or nine weeks we would like all of the church to meet together in homes and then come together at EVC to worship and hear the word of God as we study the book of Acts and learn from the blueprint of the early church.

We want to encourage you, maybe even push you, to make a decision to join a group. You may choose to join an existing group, start your own group in your home (or at Starbucks), or just meet with a few friends or family members. You don't have to find twelve people to meet. A group can be as small as three or four people. You don't need a Bible Study leader. You just need the word of God to read through the reading plan each week and meet once a week to go through the lesson and questions in the bulletin together.

### **The Local Church** (Each week we will include a special message on the subject we are exploring that week)

First we need to make some observations about a Biblical definition of the church. The word "church" in the N.T. never refers to a building or a place. It always refers to a people: either the total number of believers who have ever lived, or a local group of those believers. For example, in Ephesians 1:22, 23 Paul says that God, having raised Christ from the dead above all rule and authority, "put all things under his feet and made him head over all things for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." That is the universal church, the whole number of the redeemed who look to Christ as their life and their authority. In this sense there could never be such a thing as churches. There is only one church, "one body" (Ephesians 4:4).

But in the N.T. the word "church" also is used to refer to the group of believers in a particular city and in a particular house. For example, Acts 11:22 refers to the "church in Jerusalem," 1 Corinthians 1:2 refers to the "church of God which is at Corinth," 1 Thessalonians is addressed (in 1:1) "to the church of the Thessalonians" and so on. 1 Corinthians 16:19 says, "The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord." In Colossians 4:15 Paul sends greetings to Nympha and the church in her house. And Paul's letter to Philemon is also addressed to "the church in your house." So there seem to be three levels at least where the word "church" applies to God's people. One is the universal body of Christ including all believers of all times. Another is a group of Christians associated because of their geographic togetherness in a city. And a third would be a smaller segment of believers who gather in a home. These last two groups might be identical in a city where there were so few Christians they could all meet in one home. But in a city with thousands of Christians, like Jerusalem, small house churches must have developed quickly.

I would define a local church like this: a local church is a group of baptized believers who meet regularly to worship God through Jesus Christ, to be exhorted from the Word of God, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper under the guidance of duly appointed leaders. According to this definition there are at least seven qualifications if a group wants to be a church in the N.T. sense. 1) The people must give evidence that they are believers--that they trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. The N.T. makes it clear that we are adopted into the family of God through faith (John 1:12, 13). 2) The people must be baptized. Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19 that the way to make disciples was by "baptizing them . . . and teaching them." This was the uniform practice in the early church. 3) There must be a regular assembling. A group of people who only came together say once a year could not rightly be called a local church because there are essential activities of the church which lose their meaning when not done corporately. Therefore, Hebrews 10:25 commands us not to neglect to meet together. 4) Among these meetings there must be gatherings for worship. This follows inevitably from the ultimate value placed on Jesus Christ who calls us together and from our relation to God through him. The church is destined to live to the praise of God's glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14); therefore, it would contradict our nature not to assemble for worship (Acts 2:47; Romans 15:6, 7). 5) Our meetings must include exhortation from the Word of God. We were born anew through the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:23); and our life in Christ is preserved not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). The shepherds of the church were the provision God has made for feeding his sheep. Therefore, we strive not to be the church where the Word of God is neglected. 6) Along with worship and exhortation we must celebrate the Lord's Supper in order to be the church. We are commanded to "do this in remembrance" of Christ (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). Neglecting this ordinance might seem inconsequential at first but I think a church will bleed to death through that amputation. 7) Finally, all of this must take place with the guidance of duly appointed leaders. Paul appointed elders in all the churches (Acts 14:23), he gave instruction about the qualifications of deacons and elders in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1, and he said that Christ had given pastor-teachers to the church to equip the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:1, 12). *Excerpt from "The Local Church: Minimum vs. Maximum" by John Piper*