

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

PASSION AND ZEAL FOR LOCAL CHURCH WORK

LESSON 1

WHAT IS LOCAL CHURCH WORK?

Ephesians 2–4

In the margin of this paper, write words that come to mind when you think of local church work.

Webster's Collegiate Unabridged Dictionary defines *passion* as “intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction” and *zeal* as “eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something.”

The church is the collective body of God's people. The local church is a part of the church committed to associating and assembling in a geographic location. Simply, local church work is God's work done by the church in a specific location.

It sounds simple. Is being part of a collective body of people who love God and want to do His will really that difficult? If it is truly simple and easy to exhibit, would letters written to local churches thousands of years ago still be needed for us to gain understanding? Would we need the examples of effective and ineffective local church work? Would we need these letters regarding encouragement, works, relationships, shortcomings, commendations, attitudes, behaviors, etc.—letters so important that we are told they will last forever (Isaiah 40:8)?

These letters were written for the understanding of all who read them. Not only is the existence of the local church critical, but *how* the local church exists is important to God. God gave the divine plan for the church, and He assigned the work. God told us *to* do and *how to* do.

Read and discuss Ephesians 2–4.

We cannot deny the message of unity throughout the New Testament. *Unity* and *oneness* are defined for us. Knowing human nature

and relationships, Paul prayed that the church at Ephesus would maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit by exhibiting humility, gentleness, patience, and love (4:2–3). He knew that spiritual family members working together for the cause of Christ would be difficult enough to require complete individual submission to the cause and the intervention of the Spirit. That should wake us up to know that our spiritual relationships must be treated with intent and emphasis. Some of us might convince ourselves that the inability to work with our brethren is acceptable. If it is acceptable, are we “one” and “unified”? Are we the church? Are we doing everything we can and praying diligently for intervention to help our inner beings overcome whatever human nature is keeping us from being unified?

While this study is about understanding what God expects His church to do, this study is also about *how* He expects the church to work collectively. Do you equate passion and zeal with the words you wrote in the margin about local church work? Are you intense, driven, and eager to get up each day and do the work of God *with* your local church? Are you truly zealous today about working with _____, _____, and _____?

QUESTIONS

1. Is it difficult for you to feel passionate about working with your local church family to serve God? If so, why?
2. Is it easier for you to feel passionate and zealous about working on personal projects for God than ones with your local church? If so, why?
3. Do you have relationships in your local church requiring greater efforts by you to overcome human nature in order to be united in Christ?

4. Should God's plan for the local church evolve with time and circumstances?
5. Should we adapt the plan situationally to each community?
6. Should we adapt the plan for each generation?
7. Should we adapt the plan depending on resources?
8. Give examples of times when local church work can evolve into areas outside of God's plan.
9. Give examples of situations when holding fast to God's plan for the local church can be difficult.
10. Discuss differences in local church work and church work within the community.

LESSON 2

FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH WORK

The Book of Acts

The church grew rapidly on the Day of Pentecost and every day thereafter. The church began meeting together, eating together, worshiping together, studying together, praying together, caring for one

another, and helping others. If we break down the previous list of actions exhibited by the early church, what work would have been involved for those actions to have occurred?

For the church to grow, there have to be saved people being added to it. For people to be saved, they must hear, believe, and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and through Him is the only means of salvation. They must acknowledge that their sin separates them from Him and that they can only come to Him through repentance and baptism. For this message to be heard and obeyed, it had to be taught. There were teachers.

The early church fellowshiped daily. The Scripture says they met, broke bread, prayed, and studied. There had to be meeting places. Most of the daily meetings and meals took place in homes (Acts 2:42–47). People opened their homes. Food was prepared. Food was served.

They were of one mind and unified. Their faith strengthened and their knowledge grew through meetings, meals, breaking of bread, and fellowshiping. Their bond was Christ.

They prayed for one another and praised God in prayer. The early church was grateful to God and grateful for one another (Acts 4:23–31).

The church took care of one another. The church continually gave as was needed. The church recognized those in need and took care of the needs. The church saw their possessions as God's possessions. The church saw the well-being of others as more important than the possession (Acts 4:32–37).

The early church was persecuted. They spoke boldly following their conversions. Many lost their lives as a result of their salvation and devotion to following the teachings of the apostles. Following times of persecution, the church scattered and grew. Earthly pain and suffering were joyful triumphs toward their greatest victory. Their devotion to Christ and one another was contagious (Acts 6–8:8; 11:19–21).

Leaders were appointed in every church (Acts 14:23). That would suggest there were qualified men within those churches.

The early church was devoted to teaching the lost and strengthening the saved (Acts 18:22–28). Elders were appointed in the churches to strengthen and protect. The elders of the early church were charged with watching out for their

own spiritual lives and protecting the flock from dangers within and without (20:28–33). In Acts 20:35, Paul told the Ephesian elders:

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”(ESV)

The church was not somewhere first-century Christians went once a week. The early church was transformed in their conversions. The church was who they were. They were passionate and zealous in living as the church and dying as the church. This was first-century church work.

QUESTIONS

1. What did church work look like in the early church?
2. When the church was first established and growing exponentially, what were the roles of the local churches?
3. Would you describe yourself as *devoted* to teaching the lost and strengthening the saved? Passionate? Zealous?
4. Think about your private feelings regarding opening your home to your local church. How do your actions compare to those in the early church?
5. What is your level of involvement in the daily function of the church? If it helps, make a list of work required for your local church to teach the lost, have worship services, offer Bible classes, host a meeting, have a meal, etc., and note your involvement.
6. Do you feel unified and of one mind with your local church? Explain.
7. Do you engage in every possible opportunity to assemble, study, eat, and pray with your local church? If so, why? If not, why?
8. The closely knit, unified body of believers was crucial to the growth of the early church. What could the church today emulate from the early church to see greater growth and strength?
9. What changes can you make in yourself to be more bold in your faith—enabling the world to see your transformation?
10. Are you joyful and grateful for your struggles? Do you see your moments of struggle as times of growth? Explain.