

1: THE CHURCH

The Fullness of Christ

Most people have a view of the church which falls far short of the vast and awesome truths we read about in the Bible.

At Living Rock Church we want all our members to understand and experience things the way God sees them.

This session will help us understand the Nature, Mission and Growth of the Church.

ACTIVITY

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10

How is the church described in verse 9?

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THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

In the Bible the word ‘church’ is always used to describe the people who belonged to Jesus Christ. It was never used to describe a building where they met. The church is essentially God’s people, wherever and whenever they meet!

Let’s look at 4 important characteristics:

1. Called Out – the original Greek word (*ekklesia*), which translates as ‘church’ literally means ‘called out’. As we can see in 1 Peter 2:9, God’s people have been called out of darkness into God’s light. The church is therefore not just a group of people, or even a club or an association, but a ‘holy nation’ who

have become God’s ‘Kingdom Community’ here on earth.

2. Joined Together – On the day of Pentecost when the church was born, about 3,000 accepted the message of Christ that Peter preached. The book of Acts tells us they were ‘added to the church’. They were joined together through **one** baptism into **one** body (Christ’s body, Eph 4:20-21).

Whilst being an *individual decision*, becoming a Christian is not just an *individual experience*, as it means becoming part of the worldwide body of Christ, known as the church. Living Rock Church is a ‘local expression’ of the universal church of Christ Jesus (Eph 4:4-6).

3. Built Up – The book of Acts clearly shows us that the disciples continued Jesus’ ministry on earth by establishing these ‘local expressions’ (churches) through the ministry of Apostles and Prophets.

These essential ‘foundational’ ministries Jesus continues to use today so that the church can be built up into maturity and unity (Eph 3:3-5, 4:11-13) in readiness for His return.

4. Sent Out – We were called out from darkness for a specific purpose - to ‘declare the praises of Him’ who called us (1 Pe 2:9).

Like the disciples before us, we have been ‘sent out’ by Jesus into the world, in the power of the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses and thereby fulfil the great commission He gave us (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

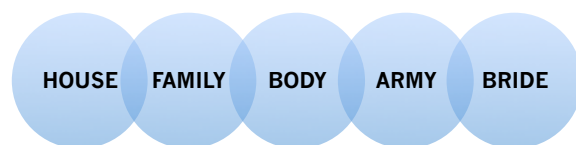
Our mission is to continue the work Christ began during His ministry (Acts 1:1), going on to even greater things than He did (Jn 14:12), because He established an ever-increasing Kingdom (Isa 9:7). Our mission includes: -

- **Establishing His Kingdom Will and Rule** (Mt 6:10, Eph 1:9-10)
- **Revealing His Wisdom** (Eph 3:10)
- **Filling the whole earth** with His glory, as we make 'disciples of the nations' and are 'transformed from one degree of glory to another' (Hab 2:14, Mt 28:18-20, 2 Cor 3:18)

Fulfilment of our mission prepares the way for the '**Restoration of all things**' (Acts 3:21 when all creation fulfils God's original intention for it.

PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

The letter to the Ephesians has 5 pictures of the church:



- **House** – built on apostolic-prophetic foundations and filled with the Spirit! The church is the home God has always sought (Eph 2:19-22).
- **Family** – never an organisation, but a Kingdom Community made up of God's own children (Eph 3:6, 14-15).
- **Body** – everyone has a vital role to play in the function of the body (Eph 4:11-16).
- **Army** – defeating an enemy and winning a war! (Eph 6:10-18)
- **Bride** – preparing for her glorious destiny when Jesus returns – the consummation of the ages (Eph 5:25-27).

How do the biblical images help us understand the nature and mission of the church, and our own part in it all!?



THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

The Church is God's means of establishing His ever increasing Kingdom, so growth is in her DNA. It is her daily experience by living as a Kingdom Community. As Jesus' body, our growth comes by living and expressing His Love poured out into us (Rom 5:5). We should ...

- **Love God – Reaching-up** to Him who called us, with lives characterised by gratitude (Rom 12:1).
- **Love each other – Reaching-in** to each other, loving and discipling one another with grace (Eph 4:32, 5:21, Heb 10:24).
- **Love the world – Reaching-out** with God's love

Jesus told His disciples that the harvest is plentiful (Jn 4:35), sending them out two by two into '*every town and village where He Himself was about to go*' (Luke 10:1-9), with clear principles ...

- **Pray...Bless...**
- **Develop** friendships...Meet needs...
- **Tell** your story!

THE CHURCH – KEY POINTS

- The Church is the community of the King and the expression of His Kingdom.
- God has an amazing plan for the church!
- We are called out, joined together, built up people, designed to be filled with Him!
- We are a people with an identity and a mission.
- We are the Body of Christ, his 'hands, feet and voice' on earth.
- The Church is the Bride of Christ, getting ready for His return.