



RELATING TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Fountain or a Garden?

March 22, 2025

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Acts 1:8 • “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 56:6, 7 • “Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast my covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

Isaiah 42:6, 7 • “I, the LORD, have called in You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”

1 Timothy 4:12-14 • “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”

Matthew 16:13-18 • “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’”

Ephesians 1:22, 23 • “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

1 Peter 2:4, 5 • “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Acts 8:1-3 • “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and

women, committing them to prison.”

Romans 16:3-5 • “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia to Christ.”

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9 • “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency.”

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “RELATING TO THE LOCAL CHURCH”

Recent studies show young people steering away from churches because they don’t experience an impact in their own spiritual life or observe any impact in the community. While their perceptions may be clouded with many assumptions that are false, there is something to their misgivings. Do local churches convey a life-giving, difference-making atmosphere? The challenge of this lesson is to construct a concept about church that allows for discussion about the great potential of a church to do “great things” for God. Ultimately, this lesson will challenge young people to become responsible for the life and ministry of their church by becoming part of the solution. If your church doesn’t seem friendly, find ways to make it friendly. If it’s boring, do something about it. The church is God’s chosen instrument of spreading the gospel.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “RELATING TO THE LOCAL CHURCH”

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the role of the church.
2. Explore what the church was meant to be and what it is today.
3. Discover ways to become what God wants the church to be.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) Several varieties of the same kind of fruit (e.g., peach, avocado, plum—any fruit that has a large pit or stone at the center), knife; (Activity B) “How’s Your Church Doing?” handout (p. 123), pencils.

Connecting • Bibles, white/chalkboard, student lessons, paper, pencils, markers/chalk.

Applying • Chalkboard or flipchart, note cards or notepaper, pens or pencils.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE’VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for *Adventist Mission for Youth and Adult* at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively and with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • This exercise illustrates how each church is different, and yet in each there are core qualities that make it a church. Obtain six pieces of fruit of the same kind (peaches, plums, avocados—anything with a large or substantial pit). Find samples that are slightly different in color and shape if possible. The point of the exercise will be to demonstrate how each fruit is different but at its core is essentially the same.

Get set • Display the fruit in the open. **Ask:** **What do you think is the primary purpose of a local church? In one simple sentence, report, “Why are we (as a church) here?”** Have everyone respond to this question and then share their answer with the class. Note the range of the different answers. (If they all say “To bring lost people to Jesus,” then they probably have a pretty healthy idea of church.)

Go • Say: I have six pieces of fruit. As you can see, they are all [name of fruit]—but describe to me some of their differences. [Some are larger. Some are darker. Some might be ripe and some not.] **While these might have some differences—would you say they are more alike than different—or more different than they are alike? What is at the core of all of these [name of fruit]? A pit. While even the pit may have different shapes and sizes, they are essentially the same.**

Debriefing • Ask: How would you compare this illustration to the life of a local church? Churches are different, but they all

should have Jesus at the “core.”

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • This exercise is a simple survey to assess how the teens in your church perceive the effectiveness of their local church in four areas.

Get set • Give students the “How’s Your Church Doing?” handout. Go over the explanations for what each of the four categories (core values) means.

Go • Say: It’s time to rate how you think the church is doing in each of these areas. For each category, circle a number from 1 to 10 that expresses how you think the church is doing in this area, with 1 being an empty church building and 10 being the perfect church. Some of you may have already done a similar exercise in your lesson this past week. Feel free to draw from those answers. Allow a few minutes for students to complete the handout, then discuss the results.

Debriefing • Briefly survey the students on where they ranked their church in the four areas described on the handout. You might find that students vary significantly in their perceptions—affirm all of them, but get them to give examples of their reasons. See if there is a consensus.

Ask: What are the strengths of your church? What are some of the weaknesses? To what degree do you feel a sense of responsibility to make your church a more effective force for God?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

In the September 20, 2004, issue of *Maclean’s* magazine, Lianne George recounts this tragic story:

One November day in 2002 Jim Sulkers, a 53-year-old retired municipal worker from Winnipeg (Manitoba, Canada), climbed into bed,

pulled the covers up, and died.

Nearly two years later, on August 25, 2004, police who had been called by concerned relatives entered Sulkers's apartment and found his body in a mummified state. Everything else in his tidy one-bedroom apartment was intact, although the food in his fridge was spoiled and his wall calendar was two years out of date.

Mr. Sulkers's death went undiscovered for several reasons: he was reclusive, estranged from family members, and had a medical condition that prevented his body from decomposing and emitting odors. In addition, automatic banking deposited his disability pension and withdrew utilities and other expenses as they came due.

—Adapted from Lianne George, "A High-Tech Ghost Story," *Maclean's*, September 20, 2004.

Debriefing • Ask: What is your definition of "the church"? How would you describe its purpose? Should a church be able to prevent a person like Mr. Sulkers from being "lost" to the community? What are some of the major activities and programs a church should be doing? What one word should mark its reputation to the community?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

Churches have changed drastically since Christian congregations emerged on the scene 2,000 years ago. Leadership styles have changed. Worship styles have changed. The things we argue about have changed. The buildings where we meet have changed over the years. It seems as if almost everything that has to do with church has changed. One thing that has not changed are the few basic ingredients that make a local church God's chosen agency for spreading the gospel. Read this statement from the book *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 9:

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency."

Have students find and read aloud the following passages: **Acts 8:1-3; Acts 20:19-21; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19, 20; Colossians 4:14, 15.** These passages convey a snapshot of church life in the New Testament. Have the students look for common themes they can find as the verses are read. List them on the white/chalkboard as you go through the verses.

Debriefing • Say: Essentially, all these verses describe a church that meets in a house. While the church was an organized, growing movement with leaders, apostles, evangelists, etc., at the very heart of church life was a home where people assembled to meet, pray, eat, plan, and care for one another. **Ask:** How is the church like a home? How is it different?

Read Acts 2:40-45 and Acts 4:31-35. Discuss the aspects of this early Christian community that would appeal to your community.

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath's section of the lesson.

Ask: In what way does this story illustrate how churches can miss their intended purpose? Although there might be many parallels between this story and the way churches miss the mark, the question for us is: How can teens be citizens of change in their churches? What are some things they can do to contribute to the life of the church? What dynamics do young people bring to a church that help a church to grow?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Share the following ideas in your own words:

Sometimes you can become so familiar with the people in your church that you don't see their part in the big picture. Sometimes it may seem as if the people in your church are just there. Paul was great at affirming people in the church with specific words of encouragement for them. Together with your class, read aloud **Romans 16:1-16**.

Debriefing • Ask: Can you identify the specific strengths of the people in the church that Paul was writing to? How does Paul describe them? What qualities do they have that you see among your church members? What qualities do you wish were present? If Paul were writing to our church, whom do you think he would mention and what would he say about them? If time permits, allow students to try the exercise of rewriting this passage as if writing to your local church and paraphrase it using the names of some of your church members.

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Share the following anecdote:

Eight teens from the southeast coast of Australia sat around a circle sharing their frustrations about their church members with a visiting youth pastor at a camp meeting. The pastor asked them more pointedly about the positive qualities of their church, and gradually they were able to begin listing the more appealing attributes of their fellow church members.

"She's a bit long-winded up front, but when she invites you over she feeds you like royalty—she's a legend."

"Our head elder is always at the church fixing things."

The comments continued, and the more they

focused on the positive, the more good things they found to say about their fellow church members.

Ask: Have you ever tried naming the positive qualities of the people in our church?

Let's try it now. Help students begin brainstorming. Write comments they make on a white/chalkboard.

Say: Let's write simple notes to members of our congregation affirming them for a specific quality that they share with the rest of us. Students can come up with some new names and ideas, or use the ones that you wrote on the board already. Provide blank note cards or paper and give one to each student to write their note. Collect the notes and distribute them yourself to church members this Sabbath.

Debriefing • Ask: How does focusing on the positive illuminate things that might be taken for granted or go unnoticed? How does that happen in all of our relationships? In which relationships do you think it occurs most frequently? (church, friends, family)

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. If you could change one thing about your church, what improvement would you make?
2. What are the core values that should always remain the same in your church?
3. How do you think other teens around the world relate to their churches? What do you think remains constant through all of them?
4. Interview an elder, pastor, or a church member who has been around awhile and have them answer the following questions:
 - a. What amazing events took place in this church?
 - b. If you were to pick one moment in church life here at _____, what would you say our finest hour was?

- c. What hope do you have for our church?
- d. What do you think Jesus would say about our church?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

The local church is a gift from God. He made us with gifts that make the church strong, effective, and useful. People aren't perfect, and therefore the church isn't perfect.

But if we trust perfectly in Christ, He will complete the work He has promised to finish in us. Teens and young adults need to remember Paul's words to young Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (**1 Timothy 4:12**). Maybe what we need is a generation of young people who let their examples do the talking.

FOR LESSON TWELVE:
THIS HANDOUT IS FOR BEGINNING ACTIVITY B.

How's Your Church Doing?

Directions: On a scale of 1-10, rank your local church in these four areas. Look below for an explanation of what each of the categories means (1–Not too good; 10–They’re the best!):

Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Transformation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Action: Is your church busy with actively living out what they believe? Are they revealing in practice the principles of goodness, right living, and truth. Is your church a church of action?

Community: Is your church connected like a family? Is there a warm sense of camaraderie and partnership among its members, helping and encouraging them on to great works for God?

Transformation: Are people growing spiritually—overcoming bad habits, becoming more compassionate, learning to be more like Christ? Transformation has to do with the way God changes us. Are people different because they have come to know Jesus?

Service: Is the heart of the mission of your church to help others? Is lifting the burdens of humanity and proclaiming the gospel of Christ to lost people important? Does your church regularly offer a cup of cool water to those who are thirsty?



STUDENT LESSON

RELATING TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Fountain or a Garden?

March 22, 2025

Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 12, The Church:** “The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. . . . The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head.”
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 38-40

A FOUNTAIN OR A GARDEN?

A young man was strolling through a park and noticed a garden surrounded by a brick-and-tile border about two and a half feet high. Inside were various plants, shrubs, and flowers growing. The center of the garden had a small fountain where water trickled out of the top of an opening the size of a modest birdbath. To the young man, it looked weird—a big circle with a birdbath fountain in the middle.

A gardener came by, and the young man struck up a conversation with him.

“Can you tell me about this garden? How long has it been here?” the curious young man asked.

The gardener laughed and shook his head. “This garden has been around as long as I have been working here—13 years this fall. It’s a funny thing, this garden. It wasn’t meant to be a garden at all.”

“It wasn’t?”

“No. I was sweeping the base of the bricks last year and saw a lever hidden at the bottom. I didn’t know what it was for, so I turned it and heard what sounded like running water, but I didn’t see any water. I left it on, and when I returned an hour later the center of this circle was spilling out water. I dug around, and the water spewed upward like a geyser.”

“What had happened?” the young man asked.

“Well, I called my supervisor to find out what to do. He laughed over the phone and told me that the whole circle used to be a fountain long ago, but it wasn’t kept up, and it filled with weeds and grass. Finally, the dust and dirt built up in there so badly that people completely forgot it was a fountain,” he reported.

“This would be a beautiful place for a big fountain! Why is the little birdbath trickling instead?” the young man asked thoughtfully.

“I asked the same question. I even volunteered to take out all this stuff and make it into a fountain again, but the supervisor and the people seem to like it the way it is,” he concluded.

King David recognized that God is the fountain of life: “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light” (Psalm 36:9). Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well:

"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). How can we participate in the life of the church so that others will come to know our church as a fountain that offers abundant living water to the entire community? When we allow God to work through us, the water of life can spill over with His love and the hope of His Salvation to all who thirst. With whom can you share Jesus' offer today: "I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts" (Revelation 21:6)?

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.
- » In one particular church the pastor wanted to encourage a renewed commitment to church membership. So he sent out a well-written letter that was positive and full of grace, but contained the following challenge: In the next month we will be having a series of celebrations during worship, in which everyone who wants to be a member of this church can say so by either writing in a community journal their commitment to the beliefs and the mission of this church, or making a public testimony during the service.
- » Those who didn't feel as if they could do this were welcome to worship and be part of the church as it met for worship and service, but to be a member one needed to make a regular declaration of their faith and be willing to practice it. How would you respond to such a letter?

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON THE CHURCH

- » Read Exodus 19:3-7; Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 1:17, 18.
- » God is the head of the church, and we as members of the church are to reflect His love to a lost and dying world. Just as the body is made up of many parts, so God's church is made up of many members.
- » List ways that you can, as a member of Christ's church, spread God's message of love and His soon coming.
- » Unscramble this Bible verse using the New King James Version.

righteousness in instruction for correction
for reproof for doctrine for profitable is and
2 God of inspiration by given is Scripture
All Jesus Timothy Christ in is which faith
through salvation for wise you make to able
are which 3 Scriptures Holy the known have
you childhood from that and them learned
have you whom from knowing of 14-16
assured been and learned have you which
things the in continue must you But

Tuesday

REFLECTING

- » Read Acts 1:8.
- » “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency” (Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 338).
- » Some of the most meaningful acts of grace occur because believers band together and spend themselves in selfless service to others. The church is God’s chosen instrument to show the world His character of love. From large communities to small, God intended that His people would come together to share His love with everyone with whom they come in contact. God sent the Holy Spirit to lovingly lead His people to change the world, one person at a time. Today, do you sense your part in this endeavor?

Wednesday

BIBLE INSIGHTS

- » Fill in the blanks with 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 from the New King James Version of the Bible.

“For as the body is _____ and has many _____, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all _____ into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the _____ should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the _____ should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be

the _____? If the whole were hearing, where would be the _____? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed _____ many members, yet one _____. And the _____ cannot say to the _____, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the _____ to the _____, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be _____ are _____. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But _____ the _____, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the _____ the _____ for _____. And if one member _____, _____ the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first _____, second _____, third _____, after that _____, then gifts of _____, _____, varieties of _____. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more _____ way” (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

Thursday CONNECTING

- » Read Genesis 28:10-17.
- » Review the memory text.
- » "The Lord has appointed the youth to be His helping hand" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 64).
- » Paul's advice to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12-14 reminds us that young people are not just spectators in church: they have an important role to play. In fact, they can set an example for older church members! Think about what kind of example you and your friends can set for adults in the church.
- » How can you begin making your church the kind of place you'd like it to be? Write your answer on the lines below.

Friday APPLYING

- » Read Acts 2:42-47.
- » Below are the four core values seen in the church of Acts. What would these values look like if you were to try to live by them this week? How would your church change if everyone were committed to these values? Think of specific ways you and your church can put these values into practice this week.

Then share your ideas with an adult leader in the church. Offer your services to help put these values into action.

1. Action: How does your church live out what they believe? How is your church a church of action?

2. Community: How is your church connected like a family? In what ways are your church members united and working together for Jesus?

3. Transformation: In what ways are the people in your church learning to be more like Christ? How are the members in your church changed because they know Jesus?

4. Service: How does your church provide help to the needy? In what ways does your church proclaim the gospel of Christ to lost people?

