

Opener

Imagine that due to circumstances beyond your control you had to move to a town which was entirely unknown to you, and where you had no contacts. What factors would be the most important in deciding which church to join?

Worship

The first half of 1 Peter 2 contains some beautiful metaphors for the church, which we are going to meditate upon. Open in prayer, asking God to meet with you and speak to you. Then read 1 Peter 2:4-11 slowly. Afterwards, read each of these descriptions of the church again. After each one, allow a minute or two for everyone to meditate upon what it says about who we are as God's people, and for one or two to offer prayers of thanks.

- Living stones, being built into a spiritual house.
- A holy and royal priesthood.
- A chosen people – belonging to God.
- A holy nation.
- People who have been called out of darkness into God's wonderful light.
- People who have received mercy.
- Aliens and strangers in the world.

Bible Study

Read Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37 and Acts 6:1-7 and discuss together:

- What do these passages tell us about the main priorities of the New Testament church during those very early days after Pentecost? What were the specific priorities of the leaders?
- Why would they need to *devote* themselves to the fellowship? Doesn't fellowship just happen automatically when we get together?
- The early believers took their responsibility to one another to include the possibility of selling their own possessions so as to be able to provide for the needs of others. Is this a desirable model for church life today? If you have time you may want to look up Luke 12:32-34; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and consider what light each of these passages throws onto the question.
- What hints are we given in these passages about the impression that the emerging church was having on others who saw them in action? If you have time you may find other pointers in the passages between these three sections. What aspects of the life of the church particularly impacted the wider community?
- What do the events of Acts 6:1-7 tell us about leadership in the early church? It is interesting to note that all seven names of the men chosen are *Greek* names, and so probably all of them were Grecian Jews. You might want to read on to verse 8 to see a potted character reference of one of the men selected to wait on tables. Is this the kind of person you would *expect* to be asked to take on such a task? Are there any principles from this approach to solving a problem in the church which could be applied to resolving disagreements in our church today?

Reflection and Prayer

As a group look again at Acts 2:42-47. Ask yourselves how the priorities here work themselves out in your group. What does it mean to you to devote yourselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer? Do you regularly ask for miracles when you pray together? Are there ways in which you could be more effective in sharing together and meeting each other's practical needs? Is there an expression of gladness and praise as you meet in each other's homes? Turn your thoughts and discussion to prayer, and into action!