

Weekly Study Guide

The week of November 6, 2016

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Daily Readings

MONDAY

Acts 13:13-25

TUESDAY

Acts 14:1-7

WEDNESDAY

Acts 14:8-20

THURSDAY

Acts 14:21-28

FRIDAY

Acts 15:1-21

SATURDAY

Acts 15:22-35

Regular habits of private Bible reading strengthen our relationship with God and teach us how to follow Jesus. In addition to the thematic exercise above, you can use this guide each week to lead you through relevant sections of the Bible.

Group Discussion

CONNECT

In worship this week, we lit candles to remember Christians who have gone before us. Share with your group about someone who has inspired you or been a role model to you.

LEARN AND APPLY

In our *Ancient Roots* series, we're learning from the ancient summary of the Christian faith called the *Apostles' Creed*. As a group read, this week's emphasis from the Creed out loud together: **"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints."**

The Biblical word that is translated as "Church" was not originally a Christian word, or even a religious word. The word is "ekklesia," and it was used to describe lots of different kinds of clubs or associations of people. There were ekklesia's for members of trades or crafts, ekklesia's for local government, and even ekklesia's for social causes or interests.

- In today's world the Lion's Club, the plumbers' union, and the city council would probably all be called by this same word as "churches." What do groups like these have in common? What does this suggest to you about how the early Christians thought about their "churches"?
- **Read 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 1:1, and 1 Thessalonians 1:1.** Instead of being the ekklesia or a certain trade or government, what defines "the church?"
- The Creed doesn't say "the holy Lutheran church" or "the holy Baptist church." When we confess that we believe in "the holy Christian church," we are not only implying that it's Christ who defines us, but also that we share this identity with all Christians everywhere. (Another translation "the holy catholic church" just means "the whole church everywhere," not specifically the Roman Catholic Church.) What good examples have you seen of Christians or Christian churches cooperating together? How do you think it could happen better than it does?

We also confess another phrase for describing the Holy Spirit's work in us, "the communion of saints."

- The Biblical word translated as "communion" here implies a sense of partnership and sharing, and it can be translated many different ways. Read Acts 2:42 ("fellowship"), Galatians 2:9 ("fellowship"), Philippians 1:5 ("partnership"), and Philippians 2:1 ("participation").
- How are Christians partners with one another? Try to think of different things we share together.
- This word can specifically refer to sharing material resources. Read 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 ("taking part") and Romans 15:26 (a "contribution"). Do you think Christians should operate with a mindset of sharing? Why don't we do this more?
- Outside of material resources, what else could we share with one another to live into this confession of faith?

Saying we are a "communion of *saints*" can be a bit confusing. Most of us don't feel like "saints." But the word saint doesn't mean perfect or pure. It's really the same root word as "holy" or "sacred," and it means "set apart" or "designated for special use." The Bible says that Christians *already* are holy saints or "set apart for special use." It is the truth about us, not something we are called to make true.

- Do you believe this about yourself - that God intends you for special use? What makes this hard to believe?
- The sense of holiness as "right living" or moral obedience grows out of this idea. If I am set apart for service to God, then it would be appropriate for me to live as a representative of God. Do you think there's a particular way God is inviting you to grow in living out your relationship with him?

PRAY

We are the "Christian church" and the "communion of saints" with Christians around the world. Please remember to pray together today for other Christians who live in extreme poverty or in danger of persecution.