
ACTS

LIFE-ON-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

MATTHEW STEVEN BLACK

“Life on Life Church”

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Living Hope Bible Church, Roselle, Illinois

livinghopechurch.net

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LIFE ON LIFE CHURCH

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:42-43, 46-47

How do we do discipleship?¹ The Spirit makes us a family. He binds us together in our souls. We have one Head, and we are his Body. But how do we act like the family that we are? Life-on-life discipleship is really the fruit of God's Spirit. We can preach all we want that Jesus Christ is Lord, but Jesus says we have to live out his love to one another before the world will believe.

¹ Portions of this study are adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Acts 2:41-47.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
—*John 13:34-35*

So how do we get there? How can I love my brothers and sisters in Christ the way Christ wants me to. We can't do it in our own power. We can't "white knuckle" it. We need a divine visitation. We need God to touch us. That's exactly what happened at Pentecost. And dear saints, you must believe that Pentecost's power of the Holy Spirit carries on today. The prophecy is that our sons and our daughters will prophesy the Word. That's not just some emotional experience. That means they are filled with the Spirit and with joy because they know the truth of the Word deep down in their soul.

So let's see what is necessary, what we need, what we must have, in order to love one another and live out the life-on-life discipleship that we've been reading about in Acts.

Acts 2:41-47 | So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The first thing we see, is that the love of God comes from above and touches the heart of otherwise spiritually darkened and selfish people. If we are going to demonstrate Christ's love to one another, we need a touch from God.

A CHURCH TOUCHED BY GOD (2:41-42)

Peter preached the Word, and his sermon brought forth instant results. There was a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit on Peter's audience. The Word of God attended by the Spirit always brings forth results.

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please.

—*Isaiah 55:11, NKJV*

The rest of Acts 2 describes what happened as people chose Christ and stepped out of darkness into life; out of wrath and into grace; out of sin and into freedom; out of religion and into the church. Not all of them sadly, since there were anywhere between thirty to sixty thousand people gathered at any one time on the southern steps of the Temple, but three thousand came to know Christ that day.

If we are going to see this world change, we must know the touch of God personally. At Pentecost, God created a new entity, the church, and it was one that would turn the world upside down. Christ said:

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

—*Matthew 16:18*

Each of us is a continuation of the church at Pentecost. That was the seedbed of the church throughout the world today. Your DNA is from Pentecost. We must move forward with the same anointed Word of God and the same Spirit of God. We need that touch of God or we cannot see the world moved for Christ. At Pentecost you knew who was being touched, because there was immediate obedience. That's the sign of grace in a person's heart. We were once bound in sin, but now we have the freedom to obey the impulse of the Spirit. We don't care what anyone thinks, because we've surrendered! These believers, like us, were touched by grace, transformed forever when God saved them.

Touched by Grace (2:41, 47)

Acts 2:41, 47 | So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

We believe in a regenerated church membership, because regeneration is God's doing. No one can regenerate themselves. A truly saved person comes to Jesus in repentant faith. That's conversion. That's what we do. That's two sides to the one coin of what God requires. Wherever there is repentance there is faith.

But at the same time, God is doing something only he can do. Theologians call this regeneration. God is creating in us a new heart, giving

us new eyes, a new joy, and a new Spirit within us. The wind of the Spirit comes to form a new creation: the church! As a result, those who received Peter's teaching about Jesus were immediately changed and touched by God.

The first thing we see is the Spirit did the work. The transformation and regeneration of the heart is the Spirit's work. We believe. We repent. But it is the Spirit that moves in permanently and indwells us in regeneration. Pentecost created a saved people. Day by day they were being saved. It always happens with the Word. But the Word has to be accompanied by the Spirit. Salvation is always what happens when the work of conviction is done in a human heart by the Holy Spirit.

Something incredible happened that day. Previously dead sinners had now "received his word" (2:41). The local Jerusalem Church was formed. "There were added that day about three thousand souls" (2:47). No man planned it. The Spirit did the forming. This Jerusalem church is the prototype of our church, and all churches. They were touched by grace! Have you been touched by grace? Have you received the Word of the Gospel? Is Jesus Christ the very center of your life? If so you are not alone. Look at what they did who received his word. They did something that would demonstrate a new belonging. They joined a new community.

Touched for God's Family (2:41b)

Acts 2:41 | So those who received his word were baptized.

It's such an honor to go to a wedding. You are celebrating a new family. You are rejoicing in the love of a couple that is publicly confessing their love and commitment to each other. They are being joined together in a new entity, a new household. That's what baptism is. It's like a Christian's wedding ceremony to Christ. We are being wedded to one another, with Christ as the Head.

Baptism is an entrance into God's family. People who are born again want to be brought into fellowship and into church membership. When you are born again, you are brought into God's universal church. But when you are baptized, it is an entrance into God's local church. Baptism is an outward ceremony of an inward reality. When I got married, I became responsible for my Bride, to love, cherish, provide and protect her and any children we have. I became accountable to lay my

life down for her and treat her right. Baptism is like that. We say publicly: I stand for Christ. I surrender to Christ. Hold me accountable.

Baptism is also a statement. It's saying: I'm co-crucified with Christ. I'm co-buried with Christ. I'm co-resurrected with Christ.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
—Romans 6:3-4

Baptism doesn't save, but it does make a statement: I'm united with Christ in his death and resurrection. There were various ritual washings used in ancient Judaism, but always on the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) they would immerse themselves. Immersion in a ritual bath (mikveh) is used in Orthodox Judaism during the three festivals, even to this day.²

Baptism, Peter tells us, is "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet 3:21). Only a true believer in the Lord Jesus can have that.

Baptism is a bold step both today and on the day of Pentecost. For those at Pentecost, it was a bold step to be thus publicly baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. For many at that time, it meant persecution, to be cut off from family and friends and denied further place in the synagogue and in Jewish society. The price of this first step of obedience remains high in many countries and cultures even today.

You may not be persecuted if you are loosely associated with Christianity, but once you are baptized, and you are totally sold out for Jesus, you may have to pay a price. What else can we do but to join God's forever family in the public ceremony of baptism. Baptism is a beautiful act of obedient faith that pictures Christ's death and resurrection.

Touched to Grow (2:42)

Acts 2:42 | And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

² Rabbi Maurice Lamm. "The Mikveh's Significance in Traditional Conversion." My Jewish Learning. Accessed 20 February 2021. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/why-immersed-in-the-mikveh/>

Four pathways of Christian growth marked the infant church. The key word here is “devoted.” It means to continually give themselves to four areas of growth: teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer.

Growing in Teaching

Acts 2:42a | And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

First, their devotion was marked by *the truth*: “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” The Holy Spirit first gave them a hunger for truth. Do you eat each day? Does someone have to tell you to eat? No. Why? Because you have an internal hunger. So it is for the child of God.

It is written [*in Deut 8:3*], “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” —*Matthew 4:4*

Spirit filling is always connected to a hunger for the Word of God. What happens when you are filled with the Spirit? You start speaking and singing God’s Word.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; ¹⁹Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.
—*Ephesians 5:18-19*

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. —*Colossians 3:16*

A Christian can no longer live comfortably in sin, and the only way to keep the fire of the Spirit burning in us is by fueling yourself with the Word of God.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
—*Psalms 119:11*

Ultimately the written Word is so important because by the Spirit we are connected to the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. It’s personal. Jesus said,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.
—*John 15:4*

Growing in Fellowship

Acts 2:42b | And they devoted themselves to ... the fellowship.

Second, their devotion was marked by fellowship. New links of love were forged that day, a new community created. The church is God's "forever family." John later wrote:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. —1 John 3:14

The Church is Like a Body

The church is the Body of Christ. Union with our Head means union with the members. What hope does an eye have apart from the body? What hope does an arm or a leg have apart from the body? A hand or foot disconnected from the body is a grotesque thing. So is a Christian disconnected from the Body of Christ. The disconnected Christian is a powerless Christian.

We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. —*Ephesians 4:15-16*

Dear saints, we need each other. Our bond is forever! We cannot walk the Christian life alone. That's nothing but pride to think you can do this without the help of your brother and sister. We need fellowship.

The Church is Like a Flock

The church is compared to a flock of lambs. Paul instructs the Ephesian shepherds to care for the flock of sheep God's given them.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. —*Acts 20:28*

A flock is not a random collection of lambs. Sheep belong to specific flocks. Sheep listen to Jesus' voice, and they listen to those who preach what Jesus taught (Jn 10:27).

The Church is Like a Temple

The church is compared to God's Temple.

In whom (Christ) the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

— *Ephesians 2:21* (cf *1 Pet 2:4-10*).

Notice that we are being built together into God's temple, by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit joins us to one another. I like to think of the individual Christian as a brick in the temple. A brick on its own is missing something vital – it is not fulfilling its purpose.

The Church is Like a Household

The church is compared to a household (family).

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and [family] members of the household of God.

— *Ephesians 2:19*

We like to say around here that we are God's forever family. Our earthly family will pass away, but God's family endures forever. Often, we have more in common with a brother in Christ than we do with our biological family member if they do not know the Lord.

What's the point? Don't be like a lone cut off member of Christ. To grow, you have to be vitally connected to the Body of Christ, like a flock, a Temple, and a forever family. We have no power in the Christian life as solo, lone ranger Christians.

Growing in Communion

Acts 2:42c | And they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.

The third mark of growth was the Lord's table. Communion is a dramatization of the Lord's death. That's how we grow. We have to die. We have to stretch out our hand and let it be nailed. We die to self. We put on the servant's towel, and out of love we serve. That's what the Lord's table is all about. It's about identification with the death of Christ.

The Lord's last request before he went to the cross was "This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). In *baptism* we enter the church, but in communion we recommit to our place at the Lord's table. We are his forever Bride. We are his friends. You don't have a meal with your enemies. Every communion is a dress rehearsal for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Growing in Prayer

Acts 2:42 | And they devoted themselves to ... the prayers.

And fourth, the devotion of the early church was marked by *constant prayer*. These would often be corporate prayer meetings. Now as believers, our lives are marked by answers to prayer. Some have asked, “If God is sovereign, why pray?” That’s a good question. It’s because God chooses to use the prayers of his people to do his will. That means: no prayer, no power. Don’t expect to grow in Christ or see others grow without prayer. With prayer, we enter into the ministry of Christ, pleading for our loved ones before the throne of grace.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
—Hebrews 4:15-16

Let’s run to our great High Priest who sits at God’s right hand. If you are a Spirit-filled believer, you will see constant answers to prayer.

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.
—Jeremiah 33:3, NIV

A CHURCH TOGETHER FOR GOD (2:43-46)

God created a new entity, the church, and it was one that would turn the world upside down. Christ said,

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
—Matthew 16:18

You can’t have life-on-life church unless you are wanting to live life together.

Experiencing Purity Together

Acts 2:43a | And awe came upon every soul.

The church does not instill much awe today. The professing church accepts such low standards for its fellowship that lying, immorality, questionable doctrine, deception, and even immorality are allowed. We have forgotten the divine injunction. “Be holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16). We have forgotten that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The infant church was holy. It was a fresh, new creation, made by the “wind of the Spirit,” so “fear came upon every soul.” Those who were within feared the Lord. They knew his presence. When God is moving everybody knows it. There is a holiness, a special sense his working.

Experiencing Power Together

Acts 2:43b | And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

The newly formed church had more than purity; it had power. The gift of the apostles included the power to work miracles. An ungrrieved Holy Spirit poured out his power upon those men, and soon Jerusalem rang with stories of miraculous healings.

It was as though Jesus of Nazareth were back, as though he were walking again—giving sight to the blind, making the deaf to hear, the dumb to talk, the dead to live, the lame to walk, cleansing the leper, casting out demons. And so he was. Only now it was his Spirit empowered people that were the vehicle of his miracles.

Don’t discount this. I know we see far more miracles in pioneering lands, but God will make himself known to you in doing things that only he can do in your life. Those who discount miracles are blind to the special works of God in our lives. When God does a miracle in our lives, it’s like him giving us a hug.

Experiencing Provision Together

Acts 2:44-45 | And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

It was a true body, each member caring for and nourishing each other member. Here we see the answer to the Lord’s prayer:

That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

—*John 17:21-23*

The oneness of the early church was organic oneness, not organized oneness. They were generous and provided for one another. It wasn't that they all lived together in a commune. They were willing to sell extra things they had to meet the needs of any of the brothers or sisters.

There was a mutual caring and concern for other believers. There was a spontaneous coming together of like-minded believers in love with the Lord, in love with each other, in love with lost souls.

Experiencing Praise Together

Acts 2:46 | And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

With life-on-life discipleship, the Spirit of God leads us together. Those who were in love with the Lord found their way to the place of prayer and praise and hospitality together. They went to the Temple because the Temple court was an accommodating and convenient place to meet for worship and for fellowship. The Spirit-filled person will seek out the gathering place of God's people.

Along with participating in the Temple fellowship, this new Christian congregation had the practice of meeting from home to home and sharing meals in a spirit of great joy.³ God's Spirit always spills over into the mundane aspects of life. We live life together. The Spirit brings his people together in hospitality. When we come to know Christ, we get "refrigerator rights" at each other's homes almost every day. The commonplace things of life, such as eating and drinking, are sanctified into a sacred thing. Life is no longer compartmentalized into the sacred and the secular, but everything becomes an act of worship.

When they came together, they met God and had "glad and generous hearts". Glory.

A CHURCH TELLING THE WORLD (2:47)

We worship together. We live life together. And what comes next? The world begins to notice. Your lost family and friends will notice first.

³ Chalmer Ernest Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 50.

They may not understand, but the Lord will often grant you favor with them.

A Favored People

Acts 2:47a | Praising God and having favor with all the people.

Singing and praise was the pulse of the early church. The people were happy. No wonder their numbers grew. Their joy was infectious. We are worried about coronavirus, but we out to let there be an outbreak of joy and praise; that's the outbreak the world needs. When there is love and praise, we become an attractive company of people, just like the early church. God gave them favor with everyone around them. The joy of the Holy Spirit is noticeable. We have a joy that the world cannot take away.

This praise and joy brought favor among their loved ones, their neighbors, and perhaps complete strangers. And that leads to people coming to know Christ.

A Fruitful People

Acts 2:47b | And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

You give the light. You express the joy. You articulate the glorious Gospel. But the *Lord* adds to its members those he saves.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

—*Psalm 127:1*

Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase.

—*1 Corinthians 3:6*

Effective evangelism is the ultimate impact of the first fellowship's worship and growth. Believers faithfully witness; God builds the church.⁴ There's nothing wrong with small churches. But, dear saint of God, there's something wrong with a church that's not a growing church, if it's surrounded by lost people.

The early church started out with 12, and the 12 got to be 120 (1:15). Then the 120 added 3000 in one day (2:41). Acts 4:4 tells us that 5000

⁴ William H. Baker, "Acts," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 889.

men (heads of households) were saved, so if you add their families that's likely around 20,000 more. We learn more in Acts 5.

They "filled Jerusalem with [their] teaching" of Jesus. —Acts 5:28

In several places it records that scores of numbers kept coming to know Christ. J. Campbell Morgan estimated "It was more like 250,000 members that were added in six months."

Let's remember that all the results of our evangelism, if we are at the disposal of the Spirit of God, can never be added up.⁵ God will do "exceeding, abundantly above all that you ask or think" (Eph 3:19). God wants his heaven full.

Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. —Luke 14:23

He calls us to be "fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). You don't know who God is bringing into the Kingdom. But his word never returns void.

Conclusion

The final impression we are left with is of a church that knew the awesome presence of God and the evidence was changed lives and a growth in the church both numerically and spiritually. The Gospel hasn't changed. God's power hasn't diminished. People still need rescuing. God used this church because of the Spirit's love they shared together, doing life-on-life church.

How do we get this mentality? It's a total surrender of yourself to love God by loving the Body of Christ.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. —John 13:35

When God originating love that is not dependent on other believers, but is poured out unconditionally on other believers, that's a divine love that no one can stop.

During the Nazi reign, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was cut off from other believers, isolated in a prison cell, and it took a great toll on him. We are told that the pain was more than he could bear. Cut off from the nurturing fellowship of other Christians, he felt a deep hunger for the fellowship that was no longer available to him. Like a hungry man who

⁵ G. Campbell Morgan. *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 95.

knows the taste of delicious bread though he can no longer reach and break from the loaf, he knew the power of fellowship when it was painfully absent.

If you were cut off from the fellowship of the saints, would you miss it? Does it mean to you what Christ intended for you, that you would meet him in a deeper way by living life together? One day Bonhoeffer's reality might be ours. Dear brothers and sisters let's not wait until it is illegal to gather and worship before we long for the fellowship. Don't take this for granted. It's what the Spirit uses to grow us and to expand his Kingdom, adding one soul at a time to his church.