

How Does the Church Grow in a Healthy, God-Honoring Way?

Acts 2:42-47

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"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

- Acts 2:42-47, ESV

So many books have been written on the topic of church growth. Many strategists and consultants have come up with guaranteed ways to grow your church and bring more people in the doors on Sunday morning (or Saturday night, which is more convenient for some people than the old-fashioned Lord's Day). Yet some of the biggest and fastest-growing churches have also seen relatively little lasting, God-honoring fruit in the lives of their people.

Is there a way to grow churches that is healthy, God-honoring, authentic, and lasting? Yes, and we don't need a shelf full of books or highly paid church growth experts to show it to us. God gives us His pattern for healthy, growing churches at the end of Acts 2. The church in Jerusalem in the days following Pentecost was deeply committed to four things:

1. The Apostle's Teaching: They sat at the feet of the apostles as they taught. How did the apostles teach? Peter's Pentecost sermon set the pattern: The apostles' teaching was marked by being thoroughly biblical, Christ-centered, theologically accurate, and personally passionate.

2. The Fellowship: This is the committed community life of the church, living life together and supporting each other. This fellowship is described in beautiful detail in verses 44-46:

"And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts"

3. The Sacraments (The Breaking of Bread): The use of the definite article ("the") indicates that this is the Lord's Supper, which is THE breaking of bread in the church. This is distinct from "and breaking bread in their homes," which refers to home-based table-fellowship. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper mark out the people of God as distinct from the world and remind us of the Gospel as signs and seals of God's grace.

4. The Prayers: Again, Luke uses a definite article - "the prayers" - which probably identifies the formal corporate prayers of God's gathered people in worship. When we gather as the people of God to worship God, we must also lift up our voices in prayer before Him - adoring Him, confessing our sin to Him, thanking Him for His grace and imploring His help for our need.

What happened when the church "*devoted themselves*" to these essential elements of worship and church life? They experienced true joy, favor with outsiders and real, vibrant church growth. Imagine if this description were true of our churches today: "*. . . 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.*" That's the kind of church life and growth that pleases God!

Heavenly Father, call Your church back to our core commitments, which reflect Your Gospel and a loving commitment to Your Son, Your word and Your people. Keep us from being distracted by the world's foolish models of quick-and-easy church growth that does not honor You. Make us the people You would have us be. In Jesus name, Amen.