

INTRO: Last Monday, **Sept 25th** marked the once year anniversary of becoming **the new pastor of Calvary Chapel Venice**. Mary and I were prayed for then we returned home to prepare for what's next...Hurricane Ian! (**Expound: Roof, Moving, Separation, Change and Conflict**). When I look back to SEE what the Lord has done since then it truly brings me to tears... and here we are moving to a second service...Amen!

As God continues to add to this church daily, I believe that **it is essential for me to reiterate the simple intentions** that He gave me for this ministry... do you know them?

Love God, Love People, Make Disciples!

This **MISSION** is important to uphold because it has been sadly reported that **church attendance and it's evangelical impact is on the decline**. **Here are just a few statistics...**

- According to **Lifeway**, **6 out of 10 churches** are plateaued or declining in attendance. And **more than half of their churches** saw fewer than **10 people who became Christians in the last 12 months**.
- A **Barna** survey reports that **85% of pastors** believe **the mission of the church** is to **Reach the Lost**, only **42%** of practicing Christians feel the same...wow! **What is wrong with the church today folks?**

Maybe we have forgotten that Lord and Savior sacrificially DIED for the Church! (His Bride!) – **A Healthy Church is supposed to...**

- Shine the Light of Jesus Christ in this dark world.
- Point people to God, bringing Spiritual Clarity within their situations.
- The Church helps Healing broken lives: **the Sinner find forgiveness, the Rejected find acceptance, and the Lonely experience love, and the Hungry are fed.**
- Yet, a healthy Church is not identified as being perfect. This is because the church is made up of a lot of imperfect people.
- A Healthy Church is a Growing Church! **The fact of the matter is, a Church that is NOT growing is probably a church that is missing some of the basic Essentials for Thriving!**

And so, today I want revisit what a biblically healthy church looks like, using (***Acts 2:40-47**)

In (**Acts 2**) we learn how the power of the Holy Spirit makes believers Effective Witnesses! Peter was the first to stand up and demonstrate this in (**Acts 14-40**).

I. CONFRONTED WITH TRUTH (40-41) – Peter just preached his **1st Spirit-Filled sermon** in (**Acts 2:14-36**) and many were convicted in their hearts about “Who Jesus is!” – The **1st Essential for a Thriving Church is to PROCLAIM the Gospel Truth!**

A. The Command (40) – Be Saved! Peter (*filled with the Spirit*) boldly testified that *the generation in which they lived was perverse!* Peter made it clear that they needed to be saved from such perversity (crookedness), which is sin... which leads to death!

B. The Conformity (41) – They **gladly received** the exhortation and **were baptized.**

CLOSING THOUGHT: The **RESULT** of Peter’s Spirit Filled preaching was amazing. It brought Glory to God and Growth to the early church. The church grew from **120 to over 3,000**. The Holy Spirit brought the **TRUTH** with **POWER**, and the response was **CONVICTION** (cut to the heart v.37). I must point out that these new converts **didn’t merely add Christianity to their already busy lives** (Phase) but devoted themselves to the **Way** (a new Lifestyle).

- **(2 Cor 5:17)** *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*
- **(Rom 6:4)** *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in NEWNESS OF LIFE.*

The 2nd Essential for a Thriving Church is...

II. COMMITMENT TO THE WAY (42-43) – This provides a compact description of Christian Discipleship. Notice the pronoun **“they” They committed to the way!**

A. Committed to Teaching (42a) – The **“Apostles Doctrine”** was essential as well as foundational in the early Church; **it provided insight to spiritual growth and maturity**. The Holy Spirit used these men to bring about a clear understanding of the way. And the Holy Spirit recalls it. **(John 14:26)** *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and **bring to your remembrance all things** that I said to you.* Much of their teachings later became parts of the N.T. as we know it.

B. Committed to Fellowship (42b) - The word **“Fellowship”** means much more than **“being together.”** It means **“partnership”** or **“having in common,”** and refers to the sharing of material goods that was practiced in the early church. **Fellowship is essential** because believers help one another in many ways both **spiritually** and **materially**. In the early Church it was motivated by LOVE! This was certainly not a form of modern communism; the program was totally voluntary.

C. Commitment to Breaking Bread (42c) - **“Breaking of bread”** probably refers to their regular meals, but at each meal they would **pause to remember the Lord** by observing what we call **“the Lord’s Supper.”** Bread and wine were the common fare at a Jewish table. Communion is Essential **(1 Cor 11:24-29)**, because as the body we are to recognize and remember that Jesus Christ is our Broken Bread and Poured out Wine.

The 4th part of Commitment to the Way...

D. Committed to Prayer (42d) – *“Prayer”* was essential because the entire body recognized the need to speak with the Heavenly Father. It was practiced corporately as well as individually. Jesus often spoke of the need to pray often: **(John 14:13-14)** *And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.* **(Luke 18:1)**, *Then He spoke a parable to them, that “men always ought to pray and not lose heart.”* The Apostle Paul later added in **(1 Thess 5:17)** that we should: *“Pray without ceasing.”*

E. Constructive Fear (43) – Came about amongst the community as many witnessed to the signs and wonders that were committed by the apostles. The Holy Spirit granted these to the apostles, which in turn produced a respect for Divine Power. **(tt. Acts 5:11-13)** *So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. And through the hands [not by] of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.*

CLOSING THOUGHT: Being committed to these **four practices**, accompanied with a reverential fear will help *any congregation grow as the Spirit desires.*

III. COOPERATION AND JOY (44-47) – Comes from **abiding in the right Spirit!**

A. The Community (44-45) – *“All things in Common,”* and later we see in **(Acts 4:32)** *the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*

- **Members of the early Church did not hold on to their possessions so tightly.** When a need arose some would sell their possession to help provide for *others (as the Lord lead them to)*. In referring to the Corinthian church, Paul taught **(2 Cor 8:13-14)**; *For I do not mean that others should be eased, and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.*

B. The Cooperation (46-47) – The **common practice** of Early Believers was to **(1)** go to the Temple to Worship and Praise God daily, and to **(2)** Observe the regular hours of prayer in the Temple; along with **(3)** Being a Witness to the Name of Jesus Christ.

- This along with the continuance of breaking bread and fellowship produced *“Gladness and Simplicity of Heart.”* **JESUS WAS THEIR FOCUS!**

CLOSING THOUGHT: The Christians you meet in the **Book of Acts** were not content to meet once a week for *“services as usual.”* They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), sought the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, NOT a once-a-week routine.

- **Why?** Because JESUS was ESSENTIAL to the early church! **The risen Christ was a living reality to them, and *His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit.***
- **If we desire to see the church thrive in these last days, then none of these essentials are a burden, but rather a delight...let's pray!**

CHURCH, Let's Shine the Light of Jesus Christ in our community, and in this dark world.