

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series through the Book of Acts. So far, Jesus has risen from the dead, ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit has been given to the disciples at Pentecost to be God's presence inside of them, Peter has preached to the gathered crowd, and in one day the church has grown from 120 to 3120 in one day. We're going to go back to v. 37 to read about the end of that sermon, and then look at the picture of the early church, a truly inspiring vision of what a community filled with the Holy Spirit can look like.

*Acts 2:37-47 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from **this corrupt generation.**" ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone **as he had need.** ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

What a beautiful vision of the church. Look at the transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit, uniting people from all different backgrounds into one dynamic community. The early church community that we see in this passage is marked by three features:

1) **A learning community**

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The first thing we read about the early church is that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They had just learned about this Jesus who had risen from the dead, they had turned from sin to faith in Him, they had received the Holy Spirit, and now they were devoted to learning as much as they could about Jesus. When you fall in love, you want to learn everything about them. What makes them happy? What is their story? When you enjoy something, you want to learn all you can about it. New music from favorite artist, or field of study that interests you. It's the same with God. When He puts His Spirit inside of you, there is a draw to Him, a desire to know Him that was not there before.

When I came to faith, the Bible came alive and I wanted to read all I could to know about God.

We still devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching by treating the NT as the Word of God. You will never plumb the depths of God.

***Romans 11:33-34** - Oh, the **depth** of the **riches** of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"*

Devote yourself to learning. Coming on Sunday. Daily Bible reading. Community groups.

2) **A loving church**

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Devoted to one the fellowship. Koinonia from the Greek word for generous. They cared for all who had needs, meeting together in the temple courts and in homes. This is not socialism; this is voluntary sharing. It's about generosity, seeing all we have as a gift from God and sharing with those in need.

***1 Thessalonians 2:8** - We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our **lives as well**, because you had become so dear to us.*

1 John 3:17 - *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*

What is going on here? When God puts His Spirit in you, you become adopted members of God's family.

Romans 8:16 - *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

Lots of brothers and sisters all of a sudden.

Matthew 12:46-50 - *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸ He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

My experience of having brothers and sisters and a closeness I never experienced. For some of you, this means your family just got larger. For others, it means that you belong to a family. That means that if Holly is struggling, your sister is struggling. If Bill is in the hospital, your older brother is in the hospital. If someone's daughter needs help, your daughter or niece needs help.

Benevolent fund. Love and serve. Welcome those who are new. Reach out to someone. Pray with someone.

3) A praying & worshipping church

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Breaking of bread – remembering Jesus' death through the Lord's Supper. Prayer – connecting with God and praying for His kingdom to come. They experienced corporate worship in temple and home. Formal and informal. Glad and sincere

hearts, and filled with awe as wonders and miraculous signs were done. What a combination of joy and reverence.

More than just a community that cares for people or learns, it is a place to meet with God.

Matthew 21:13 - "It is written," he said to them, "**My house** will be called a **house of prayer,**"

It is natural to worship and celebrate that which you love. No one has done a better job explaining worship than C.S. Lewis in his book *Reflections on the Psalms*.

"We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence, or delightfulness; we despise even more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand... worse still was the statement put into God's own mouth, 'whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me' (Psalm 50:23). It is hideously like saying, 'What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.'"

*"But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that **all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it.** The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.*

Praise is a natural thing – when we enjoy something, we want to praise it. When you feel that someone is beautiful, you want to tell them. If someone has made you proud, you want to tell them. If you read a great book or watch a great movie, you want to praise it to others. If you love a team or player, you want to talk about how great they are. When you experience a beautiful sunset, or breathtaking mountain view, or incredible waterfall, you want to praise it, share it with others. When we enjoy something, we naturally want to praise it.

Lewis continues:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with... The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude.

When we enjoy something, our delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Ever watch a movie by yourself? See a moving video? Listen to an amazing song? Read an inspiring article? What do you want to do? Tell others about it! Post it on Facebook or share it on Instagram! Express to others how amazing it is and hope that others join you in praising it! Shout it from the rooftops so that others will join in praising and share in the enjoyment! Share it with others so that they can join you in praising it.

Lewis continues:

It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that “Heaven” is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God... To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”

Come on Sundays. Pray. Come to prayer meetings. Daily Scripture & prayer prompts.

But in the end, this is not a list of things you need to do. It is an invitation to a deeper relationship with God. This is what the Holy Spirit brings about in people, what a community filled with the Spirit looks like. A passion and hunger to know Him more. A God-given affection for others and desire to serve them. And a passion to pray and worship God. Lord, fill us with your Spirit!

What was the result? God added to their number daily those who were being saved. Did they go out and share the gospel? Probably. But the text doesn't specify. What it does show us is that when a community is this loving, it is attractive.

God, that we would be known for our love more than our brand, our website, our music, or anything else. We have a long way to go. But this is a good vision to have.