

FOLLOWING JESUS IN FAMILY

What is keeping us from following Jesus and living like Him? What keeps us from following in the example of the first century church? What is it? What will it cost you to follow Jesus completely? What will it cost us as a Church Family to follow Jesus completely, whole-heartedly, and radically? Jesus is calling us into His apprenticeship and Kingdom practices. We are being invited into an eternal spiritual formation where we seek to Be with Jesus, Become like Jesus, and Do as Jesus did. This is what it means to follow Jesus as His Disciple/Apprentice. The highest and fullest expression of this practice is seen when walked out “*with all of the Saints*” (Eph. 3:18).

Acts 2:42-47 *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

I. THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY TOGETHER

- A. **Acts 2:42** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- B. The first Disciples and Followers of Jesus the Way were committed to Christ, His Kingdom teachings, the Great Commission set before them, and to the fellowship of their spiritual family.
- C. There is a great need in our life for power to endure and walk out these same practices. Endurance is a supernatural grace and gift that comes from God. It comes from faithful fellowship and friendship with Holy Spirit. It’s God’s promise to us.
- D. **Galatians 5:22-23** *But the fruit (life/work/characteristics) of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
- E. *“If you want a religion that makes sense, don’t choose Christianity. If you want a religion that makes life, choose the Christ of Christianity.” (Rich Mullins)*
- F. There is a deficiency in any Biblical teaching that presents Jesus as someone to try or to a practice to add to your current life. The genuine message from Jesus Himself is to come and follow Him in all of His ways, starting with the death to our old life in order to receive a new life in Christ.
- G. **Matthew 16:24** *Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*
- H. The authenticity of the genuine faith-conversation of these 3,000 new Followers of Jesus is phenomenal. There was a clear gospel/good news message preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost and 3,000 said yes to Christ’s invitation to an apprenticed life of following Him.
- I. There is a beautiful fact of the lives of these early Disciples in that there was no turning away and forsaking of their faith in the Messiah, even when they all faced persecution and martyrdom. What keeps a person through these difficulties? The grace of God at work in their hearts as they remained steadfast in the Person and Work of Christ and the Spirit.

II. CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH WITH 4 PILLARS

- A. **Acts 2:42** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- B. **The Apostles Doctrine-**
- The Apostles were simply taking and continuing what Christ as Messiah had already taught them in His instructions while on earth, along with the instructions of the previous law and prophets.
 - Matthew 5:19** *Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - John 16:13** *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.*
 - The early Believers practically continued to meet together to hear, be refreshed by, and confirm and Word of God with all of the Saints. They valued the holy scriptures and promises of God.
- C. **The Fellowship or Communion of the Saints-**
- Fellowship (Greek- 'koinōnia')**- *communion; having things in common, or participation, society, friendship.*
 - The early Church and Disciples of Jesus had all things in common. This included far more than simply a description of earthly possessions. They had the same hope of heaven, the same joys of a loving Savior, the same hatred of sin, and the same spiritual enemies as they faced persecution for their faith lifestyle in following Jesus the Way. They had the same Biblical conversations, the same practices of prayer, the same practice of remembering the Lord in communion. And as the context of scripture says, they regularly shared all things, including their possessions, property, and finances.
- D. **Breaking of Bread Together-**
- The Syriac renders this "the eucharist" or the Lord's Supper. It cannot, however, be determined whether this refers to their partaking of their ordinary food together, or to feasts of charity, or to the Lord's Supper. The **bread of the Hebrews** was made commonly into cakes, thin, hard, and brittle, so that it was broken instead of being cut. Hence, to denote "intimacy or friendship," the phrase "to break bread together" would be very expressive in the same way as **the Greeks** denoted it by drinking together." (Barnes' Notes On the Bible Commentary)*
 - Very simply, there was probably a routine practice of the early Jews who followed Jesus the Way to gather in the temple to remember Christ's sacrifice in broken bread and poured wine and then share a fellowship meal together. When persecution increased for the Disciples and Followers of Jesus the Way, they continued as much as possible in their personal homes.
 - Exodus 24:11** *And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence! (NLT)*
- E. **Prayers-**
- One of the fruits and by-products of God's Holy Spirit-outpouring is a desire of God's family to meet with Him regularly in prayer. Jesus instructed them to start a prayer meeting while waiting for the Father's promised Spirit-dwelling, then walk out a life for Him of powerful and loving obedience. Just as the Disciples experienced the initial outpouring, the following future

encounters of God would come in like manner. This was the early Church's practice. Nothing has changed today.

b. **Ephesians 5:18-20** *Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled (continually) with the Holy Spirit, ¹⁹ singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NLT)*

c. *"A genuine revival will be always followed by a love of prayer."* (Barnes Commentary)

F. These are the 4 critical ingredients and elements for any healthy Church Family and ministry who seeks to follow Jesus closely and fulfill His commandments of loving God and others and fulfilling the great commission.

III. ALTAR—TABLE—ROAD

A. We want to offer these three words as a guide and direction for how we can walk out the above 4 pillars expressed by the early church of Jesus. These three expressions can also be a filter for our church family as we seek to model the first and second commandments in practical ways. Again, I see how these focusses line up with the core elements of the first century church.

B. **ALTAR**- As a church family, our primary pursuit is to minister to God through personal intimacy w/ Jesus, extravagant devotional worship, corporate intercession, as well as encouraging the Church in our city to pursue the same. The Altar is where we meet God and learn to practice the first commandment of 'loving God w/ all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength'.

a. **Isaiah 56:7** *"...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."*

b. **Acts 15:16-17** *'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; ¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the ⁴Lord who does all these things.'*

C. **TABLE**- We want to encounter God's heart as a Father to His family. We celebrate the Church as God's family in community gatherings, small group gatherings, while also celebrating everyone God has placed in our family community. The Table is also where we encounter our spiritual brothers and sisters and learn to practice the second commandment of 'loving our neighbors as ourselves'.

a. **John 13:34-35** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

b. **John 17:21** *that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

D. **ROAD**- We want to follow Jesus in maturity and obedience into all His work. We believe that Christ is working in individual hearts, families, communities, and across the nations of the earth. We want to follow Jesus wherever He leads us into our assigned harvest field/spheres of influence. This can be expressed in serving our local communities as well as traveling to other nations to call others into the Good News and practices of following Jesus the Way.

a. **Matthew 5, 6, 7**...The Sermon On the Mount declaration

b. **Matthew 28:18-21** *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*