

Different To Make A Difference

Multiply Exponentially – Part 1

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MULTIPLY EXPONENTIALLY – PART 1 Acts 2:47

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do. I invite you to open to Acts 2. In the next two weeks, I want us to wrap up our time looking at the early Church and what made them different and how it affects the way we look different in our culture today.

We've been studying Acts 2:42-47. A lot of you have been memorizing it. I want to give us an opportunity to say it together, the whole passage. Let's say it together. You quote it along with me.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

We've seen this picture of how they prioritized and valued those four things. They valued speaking the Word of God boldly. The Word was supreme, central in their worship. They cared for each other sacrificially, laid down their lives for each other. They worshiped wholeheartedly, exemplified in the way they participated in the Lord's Supper. They prayed desperately for God's grace and God's power. They devoted themselves to prayer.

What I want us to do is camp out in that last verse, verse 47, "*The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*" (Acts 2:47). What we need to realize is that is a summary statement that recaps what was going on. Luke does that at different points throughout the book of Acts. What we are going to do is we are going to look at these different summary statements that he tells us about how the church was growing, how Jesus was adding to their number daily those who were coming to Christ, how the gospel was spreading.

We are going to look at those summary statements and then put them together in a package and say what are we seeing? How is Jesus growing the church? How is He adding to their number daily those who are being saved?

I want to show you some of those summary statements. You might underline them in your Bibles. Acts 2:47 is the first one, "*The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" How else does Luke show us the gospel increasing, the church growing? Look at Acts 4:4. This is another summary statement after the passage we've studied about the lame man being healed by Peter and John and preaching the gospel. Look at what happens in 4:4. It says, "*But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men*

grew to about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). So, it's kind of a summary. We had 3,000 at the end of Acts 2, and the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved. Now we've got 5,000 men, and even more women and children that are not counted right there. So, that's a summary statement.

Then we come to 5:14, and Luke draws our attention again to how the church was growing. After Ananias and Sapphira are struck down in the presence of God, it says in Verse 14, *"Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number"* (Acts 5:14). Then you get over to 6:1. The apostles are persecuted pretty intensely in Acts 5. In 6:1 Luke tells us, *"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing"* (Acts 6:1). He's saying they are still growing. At that point he talks about a conflict between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews. There was some inner strife, and they deal with that. Look what happens in 6:7. Here is a summary statement about the growth of the church. *"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith"* (Acts 6:7). What happens after that is Stephen stands up and proclaims the gospel. He gets stoned, and the church scatters. It begins to go to regions it had never been before.

Then we come to Acts 9:31. Acts 1:8 told us the gospel was going to go from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Look at Acts 9:31. It says, *"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria"* (Acts 9:31). Does that sound familiar? That's exactly what had been promised in Acts 1:8. *"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord"* (Acts 9:31).

Then you get to Acts 12. The gospel is now going to Gentiles, to places the gospel had never gone to before. When you get to Acts 12, Peter is delivered out of prison miraculously. When you get to Acts 12:24, it says, *"But the word of God continued to increase and spread."* Luke is telling us that growth in the church was automatic. The Word was continuing to spread.

Let me show you a couple more. Look at Acts 16:5. By this time Paul and Barnabas had gone out and started churches and they are multiplying churches. Look at what Acts 16:5 says, *"So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers."* Look at Acts 19:20. The gospel now goes to other areas of Europe and Greece and Asia Minor. In Acts 19:20 the Bible says, *"In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*

I'll show you one more in Acts 28. Paul goes to Jerusalem. He's arrested there and he's taken to Rome where he's basically put under house arrest. In Acts 28:30 the Bible says, *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 28:30-31).

Do you see how growth in the church was just natural? It was increasing, spreading. The Word of God was increasing and spreading. The number of disciples was increasing. Luke gives us some guideposts along the way to draw our attention to that.

A Different Kind of Church Growth ... Unifying and Expanding

What I want us to do is take all those versus and put them together in a package, and I want us to ask the question, "How". Acts 2:47 says, "[Jesus] *added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" How was He adding to their number? How was Jesus growing the church? I believe what we are going to see is that Jesus was growing the church in some ways that we might not expect.

We are going to look at five ways that Jesus grew the church, and we are going to look at them in couples, in pairs. We are going to see that Jesus put together things in the church that we often times separate. And when Jesus puts them together, the church grows. When we separate them, we miss out on what Christ wants to do in the church.

The first characteristic of how Jesus was growing the church is, number one, they were unifying and expanding at the same time. They were unifying and expanding.

Let's draw on what we've seen over the last couple of months. We've seen a picture of the height of Biblical community. They devoted themselves to caring for each other sacrificially, to fellowship. They were loving each other, serving each other, sacrificing for each other, laying down their lives for each other, selling their possessions and goods to give to each other. It was the height of Biblical community. They loved each other deeply.

At the same time, we are seeing in the book of Acts that they were expanding and the church was growing. The church was growing not just inwardly, but the church was growing outwardly. Many people were coming to faith in Christ. Some people were standing on the outside scared to join them because of the community they saw. In Acts 5 it says they were coming to know Christ and join in their ranks. Daily people were coming to faith in Christ. So, we've got them growing inwardly and outwardly at the same time.

That seems pretty obvious, but think about how we often differentiate between the two in the church today. How many times have you heard somebody say, "Well, in our church, we've gotten so focused on each other that we've forgotten about the people around us"? Have you ever heard that? On the other hand, sometimes we say in the church, "We've gotten so focused on reaching out to other people, we've forgotten to care for each other. We've gotten so focused on leading others to faith in Christ, we've forgotten to take care of the people who are already here." We often differentiate between the two.

And what we see in the early Church is they are put together. The church is unifying and expanding at the same time. And it could be that when we love each other deeply and sacrificially and we care for each other, that may just be one of the keys to reaching the most people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

True biblical community is inseparable from the mission of the church.

Unifying and expanding. There are two truths that we are seeing arising out of this. Number one, true biblical community is inseparable from the mission of the church. When we love each other and care for each other and as members of the church we sacrifice for each other and we lay down our lives for each other, then that speaks volumes to a lost world around us. People in this community are longing to see a people who put each others' interests above their own, who aren't after their own agendas but each others' agendas,

who are pursuing the good of each other and sacrificing their own possessions and goods to help those who are in need. That's the picture in the early Church.

What would that speak to a community like ours today? True biblical community results in the mission of the church. It's inseparable from it. That's exactly what Jesus had said. What did He say? "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" That's John 13:35. If you start caring for each other deeply, true biblical community, it's going to affect your power in reaching others with the gospel.

True biblical evangelism is inseparable from the social responsibility of the church.

Number two, true Biblical evangelism, which basically means proclaiming the gospel, the good news of Christ, is inseparable from the social responsibility of the church. We don't see a picture of the New Testament believers handing out a bunch of tracts in Jerusalem. We don't see them walking through the streets of Jerusalem with a big orange neon cross saying turn or burn, yelling out their condemnation on people. That's not what we see them doing. What we see them doing is proclaiming the gospel with their words and backing it up with the way they were living their lives and caring for the people that nobody else cared about.

That's social responsibility. Exactly what we've talked about as we've studied the book of Acts, and we've seen that these were people who were deeply concerned about the needs in their community. And the ramifications there for us are huge. We need to be a church that is strong in the Word, a theologically conservative church that is strong in the Word, but at the same time we are culturally liberal. We care deeply about the needs of the people that nobody else cares about. They put it together. True biblical evangelism cannot be separated from the social responsibility of the church. And when you put the two together, you begin to see unfold a church that is growing together and growing out at the exact same time. And that's something only Christ can do when we give ourselves to biblical community and to biblical evangelism, proclamation of the gospel, unifying and expanding at the same time.

Quantitative Growth and Qualitative Growth

The second characteristic we need to see is as Jesus was adding to their number daily those who were being saved, He was doing it through quantitative growth as well as qualitative growth. I want you to see how Luke emphasized both of these facets of the church growing. He's showing us how the church is growing quantitatively and qualitatively. Let me show you the first, quantitatively.

We've already seen that Luke is pretty intentional to show us about the numbers of people that were coming to faith in Christ. He tells us in Acts 1:15 that it all started with about 120 people. By Acts 2:41, "*About three thousand were added to their number that day*", came to faith in Christ. Luke doesn't just tell us that a good number of folks came to Christ. He said 3,000 did. In Acts 4 it grew to 5,000. He continues to talk in Acts 6:1 and 7 that the number of disciples was increasing. In Acts 9:31 we read that the church grew daily in numbers, was strengthened in numbers.

I want to show you a few more instances. Turn to Acts 11. Maybe if you have something to write with, you can circle every time you see Luke referring to the number of people that were coming to faith in Christ or the number of people that were being added to the church. Just circle the word "number" whenever you see it.

Look at Acts 11:21. This is talking about the church at Antioch, and Luke is telling us how it's growing. It says, *"The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord"* (Acts 11:21). Look at Acts 11:24. This is talking about Barnabas. *"He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord"* (Acts 11:24). Verse 25 says, *"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch"* (Acts 11:25-26). Luke is telling us great numbers are coming to faith in Christ.

Now turn to Acts 14:1. Luke was very detailed in describing how the church was growing quantitatively. The Bible says, *"At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed"* (Acts 14:1). Look at 14:21. They come back to Antioch and Syria. The Bible says, *"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples"* (Acts 14:21). You are seeing this repeated.

Look at Acts 16:5. This is a verse we read just a second ago. Let's read it again just to see it in the progression. Timothy, Paul, Silas Barnabas are out spreading the gospel and starting churches. Acts 16:5 says, *"So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers."* Look at Acts 17:4. This is talking about when Paul went to Thessalonica. *"Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women"* (Acts 17:4). So, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and a bunch of prominent women.

Look at Acts 17:12. This is in Berea. *"Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men"* (Acts 17:12). Look at Acts 19:26. This is Paul in Ephesus. He preaches the gospel, and a riot erupted as a result of what was going on. People were really mad at him. In 19:26 they are talking about Paul, and they say, *"And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia"* (Acts 19:26).

So, Luke is intentional. Don't miss it. Over and over again the number of disciples was increasing. A large number of people came to faith in Christ here. A large number of people came to faith in Christ here. A large number of people had their lives changed here. Quantitatively the church is growing. But as many times as we see this idea of numbers being emphasized in the book of Acts, far more times we see not the quantitative growth but the qualitative growth of the church emphasized. Yes, Luke tells us about the number of people that were coming to faith in Christ. But think about where he spent the bulk of his time.

He spends two chapters talking about how two of these men, Peter and John, healed a guy and preached the gospel. He spends the whole next chapter, Acts 5, talking about how the people that had come to faith in Christ were being persecuted. He comes to Acts 5:41 and says that, *"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."* He's not just talking about how many. He's talking about who they were. These were people that when they were persecuted, they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

In Acts 6 and 7 he gives us a picture of a Grecian convert named Stephen who was stoned because he proclaimed the gospel. In chapter 8 he focuses on a guy named Phillip and how Phillip sacrificed everything to spread the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria. Then he gets to chapter 9 and he focuses on Saul, the persecutor of Christians, and his life is turned

upside down and he now becomes the greatest proclaimer of the gospel in the rest of the book of Acts. In chapter 10 he gives us a picture of Peter having his life turned upside down and the whole face of the church changing as Gentiles came into the church.

In the chapters that follow you see Paul's journeys. You see him come to Acts 20:24, and he stands up and he knows he could be risking his life, and he says, "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*"

Yes, we are seeing numbers, quantitative growth. But at the same time Luke is spending most of this book showing us a picture of who they were and what kind of believers the early Church had. So, this testimony in the book of Acts, quantitative and qualitative growth, beckons us to ask two questions. One of them is far less important than the other.

The less-important question: How many people are coming?

First, the less important question that we need to ask. The less important question is how many people are coming? How many people are coming? When we think about the church growing, that's most often the question that comes to our mind, how many people are coming. If we have to start a third service, that means a lot of people are coming and that means the church is growing. So, how many people are coming we equate with the growth of the church.

What I want you to see, though, is that's not just the kind of growth we are seeing in the early Church. In our day and in our culture where bigger is better and more is better, we need to realize that numbers alone will never indicate greatness, especially in the church. I am convinced that in our culture you can do anything to draw a crowd. Whether it's a football game or a Tupperware party, you can draw a crowd together. It doesn't take a lot to draw a crowd. Yes, the churches with the best programs are drawing the largest crowds. But so are the best restaurants and so are the best theaters, because they all entertain. You can draw a crowd that way.

I'll be honest. One of the things that scares me. That our drawing a crowd in our culture may mean nothing more than simply a symbol that we are putting on a good show. And if our measure of success is how many people are coming and that question alone, then we will never experience the growth that Jesus wants to add to His church. We cannot be content to ask that question and move on and point to our numbers. You can draw a crowd with anything. That's the less important question.

The all-important question: What kind of people are we producing?

The all-important question is what kind of people are we producing? That's the question by which success is measured in the church of Jesus Christ. And not that the two don't go together. But if we just have the one, which is what we most often do, and forget about the second one, we miss the whole point.

It's not how many people are here. The question is what kind of families are we producing, what kind of men are we producing to lead families. Are we producing men who are honest in business? Are we producing families that are passionate about proclaiming the gospel? Are we producing the kind of teenagers that would count it worthy to suffer for the name of Christ? Are we producing men and women who are risking everything, risking our careers, our bank accounts, our retirement plans, risking it all to penetrate this community with the gospel? That's the question we need to start asking, what kind of people are we producing.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, God will not be satisfied to know that we attracted large numbers of people and only a few became producers for the Kingdom. God will not be satisfied to know that we attracted thousands and thousands of people if only a few of us become producers for the Kingdom. And so we need to have the courage to ask the right questions and face the answers. It's not just how many people are coming, but what kind of people are we producing. It's quantitative and qualitative growth in the early Church, and I pray that it will be so in this local church.

Worshipping and Witnessing

The third characteristic that Jesus brought together that we often miss out on is this early Church was worshipping and witnessing. This is one of those things we talked about a few weeks ago, hit on a little bit, but we didn't have time to camp out there. I want to show you how this unfolds in the book of Acts.

What we need to realize when we come to the picture of the early Church is the history before then. For the people of God, the temple was the central place of worship. If you were going to worship, you went to the temple. That's where you encounter the glory of God and the presence of God. That was the place where you would go to worship.

But when we get to the New Testament church in this picture, I'm convinced the temple was no longer the central place of worship for the New Testament church. Jesus had died on the cross. The curtain of the temple had been torn into. He had made a way for us to come directly to God. We don't need to go to a temple anymore, and they didn't need to in the New Testament.

They unified through their worship.

As a result, for the first time we see them going from house to house worshipping, from house to house praising God. Worship became a continual activity for them, and that's where they unified through their worship. They met together in homes with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. They unified together day in and day out through their worship. Remember worship in Scripture is a response to God's Word and His work continually in our lives.

I've been so encouraged. I was talking with one member of our church recently who has been a Christian for a long time, been a member of the church for a long time, and he said it wasn't until the last month or two that he for the first time memorized a verse of Scripture. And he said it's changed my walk with Christ because it's in my heart, it's in my mind, and all day long I'm continually responding to it. It's continually affecting what I'm going through. He said he had been through some pretty rough things this last week, and it was amazing to go into my office and shut the door and sit there and have God's Word in my heart and in my mind speaking to me. That's what happens when worship becomes a continual thing, and that's exactly the way it was in the early Church.

Back to the temple, worshipping and witnessing. I'm convinced that the temple was not the primary place of worship in the New Testament church. I'm convinced it was the primary place of witness in the New Testament church. Think about it with me. If you come to faith in Christ and you still have a bunch of Jewish believers who are practicing Jewish customs and going to the temple to worship, where is the best place to go and proclaim the gospel? Right in the heart of the temple. Let's go tell them what true worship is about. Christ has come and has died on a cross so that you can have personal interaction with God.

They multiplies through their witness.

So, they unified through their worship and then they began to multiply through their witness, as they witnessed in the temple. I want to show it to you. Look at Acts 3:11. After the lame man is healed, he comes and he grabs ahold of Peter and John. And it says, "*While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them*" (Acts 3:11-12). Peter begins to preach the gospel. So, there they are in the middle of the temple with a huge crowd around them, and they begin to preach the gospel. What happens is they get in trouble. Peter and John get brought up before the Sanhedrin. They gather together and they pray, God, we know we want to proclaim the gospel, and they go back out in the temple to proclaim the gospel.

Look at Acts 5:17. They were witnessing in the temple again. Look at what happened. Some people got mad. It says,

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people the full message of this new life.'

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 'We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.' On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

Then someone came and said, 'Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people' (Acts 5:17-25).

All the leaders get really mad. We are going to put them in jail. We are going to stop this from happening. They take the guys and put them in jail. They go to bed for the night. They come back in the morning and say, "Call the guys in." They go to get the guys. "We don't know where they are. Where are they?" Somebody else comes running in about that time. "Hey, the guys you put in jail are in the temple preaching the gospel."

You couldn't stop these guys from going into the temple and proclaiming the gospel. Look at Acts 5:42, "*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*" You couldn't stop them.

Now think about how Jesus was adding to their number daily those who were being saved and how we miss this in the church today. Most often what sets us apart is that first facet—worshiping. We are a people who are known to be passionate about worship, and that is wonderful. That is good. However, if it is disconnected from the second part here, witnessing, then we will never see what the New Testament church saw with Jesus adding to their number daily those who were being saved. It's worship connected with witnessing.

What would happen if we were not just known as a people who were passionate about worship, but if we were also known as a people who were passionate about proclaiming the gospel? You can't stop us. We never stop proclaiming the gospel. If you try to stop us, some angel is going to let us out and we are going to go at it again. Over and over again, day in and day out, week in and week out, you are going to hear the gospel out of our mouths.

Our worship is empty if it is disconnected from expression in the world.

What the New Testament church is teaching us, a truth that is rising up that is so huge, is that our worship is empty if it is disconnected from expression in the world. Our worship is empty if it is disconnected from expression in the world. We cannot call what we are doing here today "worship" if it is disconnected from witnessing of the greatness of Christ when we leave here today.

Acts 13:1—4 is a perfect example. The Bible says, *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul'"* (Acts 13:2). So, they did, and they sent them out on the missionary journeys to change the face of the New Testament. It was worship and witness, glorifying God together and then glorifying God as they sent each other out to proclaim the gospel.

Next week when we gather together, we are going to see how our worship can be expressed in the world in a very real and in a challenging way. I want to invite you to begin praying even now for our time together next week where we see how we've got to put these two together, our worship and our witness.

Gathered and Scattered

They were unifying and expanding, growing in number and also in quality. They were worshiping and witnessing. Now, here is where it really gets good. The early Church was growing as they gathered and as they scattered. Gathered and scattered.

This is huge. There are a variety of places in the book of Acts where we see the early Church gathered together. In chapter 4 they are gathered together in prayer. In chapter 12 they are gathered together in prayer for Peter to come out of prison. In chapter 13 they are gathered together before they send Paul and Barnabas out. In chapter 15 the leaders gather together to make some decisions in the church. In chapter 20 Paul gathers together some leaders in the church at Ephesus. There are some intentional times where believers are gathered together.

However, the majority of the verses in the book of Acts tell us not what happened when the church was gathered together but when the church was scattered apart. What we are seeing in the book of Acts is that the power and the work of the Holy Spirit are most clearly seen not when the church gathers together but when the church scatters apart to proclaim the gospel. Let me repeat that one more time. The power and the work of the Holy Spirit was most clearly seen when the believers in the early Church scattered apart to proclaim the gospel.

As I was studying this week and seeing that unfold in the Scripture, I began to realize I'm convinced we've completely reversed this. And when it comes to the power and the work of the Holy Spirit, for the most part we have confined His power and His work to what happens within these four walls when we gather together for an hour or two every week.

When we talk about the Spirit, we say, "The Holy Spirit really moved in our service today." Or, "When I was singing that song, I really felt the power of the Spirit." And it's not wrong to say those things. I hope the Spirit of God is at the center of what happens when we gather together and I hope the Spirit is strong, and I hope we say that we sense the power of the Spirit moving among us.

However, if we limit our view of the power and work of the Holy Spirit to what happens within four walls on a Sunday morning, the Bible is teaching us that we will never experience what the early Church experienced. Do you know why? Because from Acts 1 to Acts 28, they didn't have these four walls. You don't see that anywhere in the book of Acts.

When they met together, where did they meet? They met in their homes. They met in their communities. They were always scattered about proclaiming the gospel. The early Church knew nothing of limiting the work and the power of the Holy Spirit to what happens in an hour and a half one day a week when they gather together in a building. But that's exactly what we have done in the church today. We fail to realize the power and the work of the Holy Spirit are most clearly going to be seen, not on Sunday morning, but when we scatter apart to proclaim the gospel. That's when we are going to see the power of the Holy Spirit at work.

Many times we talk about, "I can't wait for Sunday. I can't wait for our time in worship. You never know what God is going to do when we gather together there." There is some anticipation, and that is good. I pray that it's always there. I pray that we are always anticipating what God is going to do when we gather together. But what would happen if we started to anticipate what God does tomorrow and Tuesday and Wednesday when we go out into our work places and our homes and our neighborhoods? The bulk of what God is doing by His Spirit in us is happening all throughout the week as we scatter apart.

Contemporary Misunderstandings ...

As I've looked at this and seen how we've completely missed it, I've come down to see what I believe are two contemporary misunderstandings that we have today about the church that are severely limiting our ability to experience what the early Church experienced. I want to show you these two contemporary misunderstandings.

Number one, in the church today, we view staff as professional performers and members as amateur spectators. There is a great temptation for us to view staff as professional performer and members as amateur spectators. When I travel and preach in other places, it almost seems like there is this atmosphere where you finish the sermon, and you almost expect people to stand up and hold up a number. "We'll give that an eight. That was pretty good." Occasionally it's a ten. We walk out and we think the music was probably about a seven. "Most of the songs I liked." How many of us think this way when we are leaving our worship services? We put so much focus on the staff being professional performers, and we sit back as amateur spectators. This is a dangerous temptation.

Elton Trueblood had a lot of great things to say about the church in the 20th century. He said this:

"Perhaps the greatest single weakness of the contemporary Christian church is that millions of supposed members are not really involved at all. And what is worse, they don't think it's strange that they are not involved. As soon as we recognize Christ's intention to make His church a militant company, we understand at once that the conventional arrangement cannot suffice. There is no real chance of victory in a campaign if 90% of the soldiers are untrained

and uninvolved. But that is exactly where we stand now in the church. Most alleged Christians do not now understand that loyalty to Christ means sharing personally in His ministry. And the majority of the members of the church are not actively engaged in personal ministry. They are more on the fringe.”

Bill Hole, as pastor out in California, talks a lot about disciple making in the church. He said, “American churches are filled with pew—filling, sermon—tasting spiritual schizophrenics whose belief and behavior are just not congruent.” I thought I would quote him, because I wasn’t bold enough to say it. He said it, and I’m just going to share what he said. “American churches are filled with pew—filling, sermon—tasting spiritual schizophrenics whose belief and behavior are just not congruent.”

Is it true? I’ll be honest. I’m to blame for part of this. What I mean by that is that leaders in the church, including myself, have created a mentality that we are the ones called to ministry and you can look to us to do all of these things. That’s our job because we are the ones who have been trained to do that. We are the ones called to ministry. And for that I want to repent.

I want to say to every member of this church that you have the Spirit of God living in you. Christ Himself dwells in each and every one of you. The power of His Spirit is alive in you. It is not necessary for every member to have seminary training or a staff position or “X” number of years in ministry. You have the power of the Spirit and the power of the Word alive in you. All the power that belongs to Christ belongs to each of you. And as a result, you have no reason to settle for spiritual mediocrity. You have no reason to sit back in a pew and give an opinion every once in a while or pursue an agenda or sit still while a lost world passes you by. You are called and commanded to penetrate this community and this world with the gospel, and you have everything it takes to do that. Not one person here is an amateur spectator sitting on the sidelines, so don’t live like it and don’t give like it and don’t serve like it. Honor the investment that Christ has made in every single one of you. He has given you all of His riches. Use them for His glory.

There were no professional performers and no amateur spectators in the early Church, and it can’t be that way today. God help us to all be involved in the ministry of Christ. This is why we were saved, not to sit back and to evaluate the worship and to pursue personal agendas. That’s not what the New Testament Church is about.

The second misunderstanding that goes right along with that is we measure success more by what happens when we come in than by what happens when we go out. We measure success more by what happens when we come in than what happens when we go out. Again, we are seeing here in the book of Acts the power and the work of the Spirit when they are scattering, when they are going out, not when they are gathering together.

When we talk about revival or awakening of the Holy Spirit, we talk about what happens when we gather together. Traditionally we have revival services and we gather together for revival. And when we ask God to pour out His Spirit in our day, we most often think in our minds that that is going to happen when we gather together, that it’s going to happen when we come together. So, that’s why we anticipate Sunday so much. But what would happen if we started to look for the power of the Holy Spirit not when we were just gathered but when we were scattered? Let me give you an illustration.

Leading people to faith in Christ, drawing people to salvation, most often we think that’s the primary function of the worship service. So, we come together and we pray. If we do pray before the Sunday service, we pray, “If there are people who are not believers in Christ,

that they would come to faith in Christ today, that you would draw people to yourself. We pray that people would come to faith in Christ during this time.” And that’s not bad. That’s a great thing. And many people do come to faith in Christ, have been coming to faith in Christ during our time together on Sunday mornings.

However, if our primary evangelistic and growth strategy in the church is based on people coming to faith in Christ during this hour and a half that we have together every week, then I will submit to you that we will never see what happened in the early Church. Think about it with me. It combines these two misunderstandings at this point. We have relegated the soul-winning responsibility to one person who stands up for an hour and a half a week in a building filled with tons of people.

Let’s be honest. Where is the greater chance that people are going to come to faith in Christ, when we gather together for an hour during the week with one person speaking or when 4,000 believers scatter throughout Birmingham in this next week to rub shoulders day in and day out with lost people who need to hear the gospel? Which is going to be more effective? Which falls in line more with the early Church?

This is one of the reasons we don’t always have a public invitation where we invite people to come to faith in Christ every week in and week out. Because I’m convinced that somewhere along the way we’ve created an unhealthy dependence on the pastor to lead most of the people to faith in Christ. “Are you saying, Dave, that you don’t want to lead people to faith in Christ?” Absolutely not! I want as many people as possible to come to faith in Christ, and I want it bad enough to pour my energy into raising up an army of believers filled with the gospel, trained with the gospel, ready to go out in the power of the Spirit and scatter and proclaim the gospel and lead many more to Christ than I could ever lead to Christ.

Let’s be smart. The majority of unbelievers in Birmingham, especially those who are hardest to the gospel, are never going to come where we worship. They are not going to come here. And if our strategy is built on bringing them here, then that is completely opposite of the strategy of the early Church in the book of Acts. But if our strategy is built on us scattering apart to proclaim to gospel to them wherever we go, then we begin to see how the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved. And we measure success in the church not by how many are coming together in a room for an hour and a half a week, but how many are going out and proclaiming the gospel and leading people to have their lives changed by the power and the blood and the grace and the mercy of Jesus Christ. It’s a complete reversal here.

People might say, “Well, don’t you think David, that there are people even here this morning who are here and don’t have faith in Christ, have not placed their faith in Christ, unbelievers?” Absolutely! I’m sure there are many who are, and I pray every week that in our time in God’s Word that Christ would be shown in all of His beauty and His greatness and that people would be drawn to Him.

“Why don’t you give that public invitation week after week?” What if the 2,000 people who were members of the church and had the gospel in them started getting concerned enough about the spiritual condition of the people sitting right next to them and we were leading people to Christ? Wouldn’t that be more in line with what the New Testament Church is teaching us, to empower and enable each other?

And I pray that every week we do that. I pray that this is always a place where you can bring unbelievers, people who have not placed their faith and Christ, to worship. I pray that this is always a safe place for them to come and know every week that they are going to

see a very real and meaningful and powerful picture of Christ in His Word and in music and in other forms of worship. I pray that you will be empowered when we finish to say to that co-worker or that family member, "Can I tell you more about Christ? Would you be interested in giving your life to Christ?" And now we are not just amateur spectators, we are actually involved in the great commission. And that's a good thing.

A Biblical Understanding ...

A contemporary misunderstanding is we view the staff as professional performers and members as amateur spectators and we measure success more by what happens when we come in than when we go out. A biblical understanding, on the other hand, says we gather together to train one another in the gospel. We gather together to train one another in the gospel, and then we scatter apart to penetrate the world with the gospel. We gather together to train one another with the gospel. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." These things were so important, and they scattered apart to penetrate the world with the gospel.

You know one of the things that I enjoyed most in studying this week? When it hit me that the disciples, the original disciples, the original apostles, leaders in the church, had a fairly minimal role in the book of Acts. It was pretty evident by the end of Acts 12 that Peter pretty much disappears off the scene. We see him a couple of other times, but for the next 16 chapters there's no mention of Peter. We see John every once in a while. A couple of others had their names mentioned.

These original apostles, the leaders in the church, faded into the background as the early Church rose up and an army of believers took Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth with the gospel. And my prayer was as I studied the book of Acts this week, God, may I fade into the background of an army of believers who are taking Birmingham and the world with the gospel. God, may it be so.

Before we close today, I want to share with you a story from the early Church. This was about a century after the New Testament church here. In that day, the first, second and third century, before Constantine legalized Christianity in 313, before that time was a time of great persecution and difficulty for the church. Believers proclaimed the gospel at the risk of their lives, and the church grew rapidly during that time.

And it was during those early centuries of the church that apologists rose up. You would think an apologist is somebody who apologizes for something, I'm sorry for sharing the gospel. No. An apologist is somebody who defends the gospel amidst a culture where Christianity was not popular and there were so many other world views out there. An apologist would stand up and show the truth of Christ, the beauty of Christianity.

Think about how that relates to our culture today. Do you think there's a need for that today amidst the multiplicity of world-views in our culture in the United States, pluralism, relativism, skepticism, for us to rise up and be able to know the Word enough to show why Christianity is true, why we believe these things, why we know that they are real? That's what an apologist would do.

In the early Church, those apologists would rise up and they would defend the faith in different ways, in speeches, sometimes in letters. That's what this is. This is an apology of a guy named Aristhetes. Basically he's writing to a king and trying to convince this king that Christianity is real and true, and I want you to hear what he says. Pay attention.

He says, "Now, the Christians, oh, King, by going about and seeking, have found the truth, for they know and they trust in God and they refuse to worship strange gods. They go their way in all humility and cheerfulness."

This is what he writes to the king to tell him that Christianity is true. He says,

They love one another. The widows' needs are not ignored, and they rescue the orphan from the person who does him violence. He who has gives to him who has not ungrudgingly and without boasting. When the Christians find a stranger, they bring him to their homes and rejoice over him as a true brother. They do not call brothers those who are bound by blood type alone, but those who are brethren in the Spirit and in God. When one of their poor passes away from the world, each provides for his burial according to his ability. If they hear of any of their number who are imprisoned or oppressed for the name of the Messiah, they all provide for his needs. And if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free. If they find poverty in their midst and they do not have spare food, they fast two or three days in order that the needy might be supplied with the necessities.

They observe scrupulously the commandments of their Messiah, living honestly and soberly as the Lord their God ordered them. Every morning and every hour they praise and thank God for His goodness to them. Such, oh, King, is the commandments given to the Christians and such is their conduct.

I want you to think about this. This was his explanation of why Christianity is true and why Christ is real in a skeptical culture. What did he point to? Did he talk about the worship services where they gather together and have good music and good preaching? No. He talked about when they scattered apart to help and to serve each other. He talked about how when somebody is poor and didn't have enough to eat, the whole group will fast and will not eat so that that person will have all that they need to live. This is what they do when they scatter apart.

Did he talk about their worship? No. He talked about their witness. Did he talk about how they were growing and more and more people, numbers of people were coming to faith? No. He talked about the quality of people that were known as Christians. What he did to show that Christianity in his culture is real and true, he said look at the church and you will see Christianity is real.

And I am completely convinced that in our culture today, in the 21st century with religious pluralism, moral relativism and biblical skepticism at their height, if we try to point people to what happens in a building an hour and a half during the week when we worship and gather together, that we will not be able to lead a skeptical culture to Christ.

However, if we start showing biblical community, if we start scattering to proclaim the gospel and if we start caring about each others' social needs and multiplying our lives just like they were doing in the lives of those around them, I have a feeling our culture will sit up and take notice and say there's something real there, and the Lord may just add to our number daily those who are being saved. That's the picture.

I wish you could hear some of the things I hear, and read some of the things I read from people all across this faith family. They are talking about the opportunities they've had to lead co-workers to Christ recently. They are talking about how the Word is changing their lives, their perspectives and their families, how God is moving in mighty ways.

I wish you could have heard the conversation I had with a student in Virginia at this conference where I was preaching this last week. I also preached at the same conference last year. He came up and he said, "I just want you to know that because of what God spoke through you last year when you were here, in May I'm going overseas to live and proclaim the gospel."

That's what the Kingdom is about. That's what the Kingdom is about, not just what happens in here. It's what happens when we scatter. And my challenge for you today is to write out one or two ways that you can put what we've seen in the Word of God into practice as we scatter. How can you best show Christ not just in the way we've sung and participated in worship here, but in what happens when we leave here this week.

I want to invite you to spend some time in reflection between you and the Lord about that. I want you to think about multiplying exponentially. That's the picture we see in the early Church. They were giving themselves away. They were all involved in ministry.

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