



LIFE TOGETHER: THE SPIRIT-FILLED COMMUNITY
ACTS 2:42-47 | ACTS 4:32-37

Sermon series called, Live Sent—17 pictures in Acts. Now it's important to remember that while Jesus has ascended to the Father's right hand not to take a break after a rough couple years of ministry. He's not on sabbatical. He is actively advancing his kingdom through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his people. We've seen his ascension and Pentecost 3 thousand people added. And today we get a peek into what that community looks like. **Puzzle box top**. Do we look like that? Important that we have texts like this, because we answer "what is a good church" wrong. **Pray**.

What Does It Look Like?

5 Marks of A Spirit-Filled Community

(1) Word-Centered Teaching

Apostles' teaching. Jesus never wrote a book during his earthly ministry. He never intended to. How did he design for his teachings to be preserved? The through the words the Apostles! Now could they possibly remember everything Jesus had taught them? They couldn't. That's why Jesus sends the Spirit. **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."** (Jn. 14:26) So Jesus sit at the right hand of God, and his plan it to govern his church through his words on the lips of the Apostles. He is shaping his people, growing his people, loving his people, through the Spirit's work in the Apostles teaching and 2000 years later that hasn't changed. What do you mean—aren't they dead? What do you think this is? So in a very real way, Jesus is *still* governing his church through his words on the lips—or pens—of the apostles. When I open my Bible Jesus is shaping my heart by the Holy Spirit through Peter and Paul and John. This is how he rules our hearts today—his Spirit working in and through the word. Which is why it was so central to the life of the church!

It's not an accident that the very first description of the Spirit filled community is their devotion to the Word. After Pentecost and the Spirit falling and speaking in tongues and 3 thousand baptisms, they're not being guided by passion and zeal. They're being guided by the Word of the Lord. This is instructive for us—some people say they are more "Spirit and prayer and passion" people and A types are Word people. There's not a shortcut. We have to devote ourselves to it. It's the Word of God that the Spirit uses to encourage us, teaching us, convict us, and show us the glory of Christ.

Preacher who preached a series on **"From Good to Great"** We don't need how-to's, we don't need a pick me up. We are committed as a leadership, are you? Are you devoting yourself to the Apostles teaching? Mon. – Sat?

(2) Genuine Fellowship | Breaking Bread

Scholars debate about whether or not breaking bread here is a reference to the Lord's supper or a reference to the meals they would share together. But either way the idea is very simply here, a Spirit indwelt community does life together. People who have the Holy Spirit are live in close proximity intimately connected to one another spiritually and emotionally and economically as we'll see. Look at the language of vs. 46, "And day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts." And if you wanted to summarize this walking with one another doing life together concept in one word it would be fellowship.

This word fellowship is *koinonia*. And fellowship is not just hanging out. Fellowship happens when we're living out our mutual unity with Christ. You see, if you've been saved, you are a child of God which means that you're in his family. Fellowship is the word "family" as a verb. As children of God we're called not just to be a family but to do family. We should be "familying" on a regular basis. And when we "family" we're living out the Gospel with one another and baring one another's burdens and encouraging and correcting and holding one another's hand as we all walk toward Jesus. And this isn't just nice, it's necessary.

There is simply no version of the Christian life where you can get the Father but punt on the family. And I see too many people living a lukewarm crippled Christianity because all they care about is they're personal relationship with Jesus. They're all vertical and no horizontal. They want to enjoy the benefits of having a rich Father, and avoid the burdens of doing life with a broken family. Which brings to the second thing pursuing this kind of community will require...

It's important to realize that from the beginning of the church walking with Jesus could never be separated from walking with his people. My hand is mature because it has remained connected to the body. Just as God has designed our hand to grow through being connected to our body, he has designed your heart to grow by being connected to his body—by *being* in a family and *doing* family.

This is why we have small groups! Most of the ministry in our church happens through the praying caring sharing sacrificing conversations and meals in small group ministry. That is where most of the ministry happens. AND that's where most of the mature believers in the church are! Concentric circle of participation. And as a result almost without the most solid, stable, mature, faithful believers are in small groups. There's not offering taken up! Please join one.

(3) Mission-Driven Prayer

The text specifically says "the prayers". It's possible these could have included some set prayers—almost certainly the Lord's prayer. But far from being people who just "said" prayers, the early church prayed like the Spirit working through their prayers was their only hope—because it was. They prayed like they were absolutely desperate—because they were. Now I'm not going to talk a lot about prayer because we just did an 8 week series on prayer Called in Jesus' Name, but I just want to make one observation and it's simply this: whenever you see prayer in the book of Acts it is always connected in some way to witnessing and advancing the Gospel. Acts 1 praying before choosing leaders...Acts 4 after persecution praying for boldness leading to an earthquake...Acts 6 praying before selecting deacons...Acts 9 praying for signs and wonders...Acts 10-11 (Cornelius) prayer surrounded every aspect of the crossing over of the Gospel to the Gentiles...Acts 12 praying for the release of Peter from prison...Acts 13 praying before setting aside the first church planting team.

There is never a prayer in Acts for someone to just "have a good day" or to be comfortable or be shielded from suffering. And too often we see prayer as a way to get the circumstances that we want. But this wasn't

the early church. They saw prayer as a mission critical lifetime whereby they could access the power they needed to advance the Gospel. This is why they're praying so powerful. Because they were missional. If God answered all of your prayer this week would just your life change or would the whole world change? Because their prayers changed the world. Pre-service prayer time? A Spirit-Filled Community is marked by Mission Centered Prayer.

(4) Selfless Generosity

(Acts 2:44-45) “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.” And there's a parallel passage in chapter 4 starting in vs. 32 “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

The openhandedness of the early church with their money and possessions is simply astonishing. Look at this picture here. Selling their possessions and giving to any in need. They called nothing their own and had all things in common. And it was all voluntary! Don't miss how big this is—there is much more than money in play here. Very similar to today—your social status was directly connected to your money and possessions. And so to sell them was not simply to lose money but taking a hit to their reputation in the community.

Who would voluntarily do this? What is going on here? Very simply these people had a new treasure. A new definition of success. A new purpose. A new identity. They had a new dream. That's what the Spirit does—he rearranges your understanding of what it means to live a meaningful satisfying life. The Spirit changes who you're living for—it's for a King and a kingdom. And when you realize that he's promised you that you'll inherit the world, it's only then that you have the power to let go of your stuff and give it away for the sake of the kingdom.

Now this isn't teaching that we can't own property—the early church met in people's houses. It's not teaching that is holier to be economically poor, because it's not. But it is saying that a Spirit-filled church is marked by a kind of generosity where people care about each other's well-being far more than they care about growing their financial portfolio and their membership at the country club. And yet this is difficult for us. Money promises to give us won't God won't.

Tithers only make up 25% of most churches, with the average Christian giving 2.5%. Christians gave 3.3% during the Great Depression. Some people say when it comes to giving, “The New Testament never says anything about giving 10%” and that's true. There is a new standard and it's this! 10% should be the least that we give to the Lord. And if that bothers us, we need to ask ourselves why are they more generous with so much less and we are less generous with so much more? Why does research shows over and over that the more money you make, the lower percentage you give away? Do you love your money? Money is a wonderful servant but a terrible master! Ask the Spirit to free you and give you open hands. Selfless Generosity...

(5) Conversion Growth

Vs 47“...And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Briefly, the natural—no supernatural—result of a community centered around Scripture, who’s doing life together, fervent in prayer and generous with their possessions, is growth. You’ll notice earlier that, “awe came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were being done through the apostles.” It’s an attractive loving witnessing community and it’s compelling—and the Spirit works through this community to save people. Not transfer growth but conversion growth. And it’s growth that God gives. And it’s not through special tactics and church growth methods. It’s through ordinary people doing ordinary life with Gospel intentionality, that’s how God grows the church. Some people don’t want the church to grow. They love it just the way it is. Plus if it got bigger I wouldn’t know everyone’s name and not everyone would know mine. And it wouldn’t feel as close knit and I wouldn’t get as much personal attention from the pastor. And I would simply remind you that we have not been given the Holy Spirit primarily so that we could enjoy the church but so that we could advance it. And if I ask, “Are you energized and motivated to see people far from Christ get saved and baptized” and you say “Ehhh” then it shows that you’ve drifted from the mission.

So this is the puzzle box top. The picture here is not simply something to admire. No friends we have the Holy Spirit, we have the teaching of the Apostles. This isn’t something to admire but to emulate. Examine yourself. The reason this is true of the community is because it was true of the individuals. What will you do? Like there are action steps to take. Bible, Fellowship, Prayer, Generosity?

What Will It Require?

And even as I say that, I can see how people would feel like they have to do all this stuff and feel burden and even discouraged after. And the truth is you almost certainly have work to do, but we can never forget the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news that no amount of improvement could ever make God love you.

Spirit-Driven Devotion

Tendency to romanticize this stuff. Notice it says they devoted themselves to these things...it doesn’t say that it was their favorite thing to do or that it just came naturally. This takes effort. Look no one drifts towards holiness and Bible reading and prayer. It takes devotion. And it’s a devotion that the Spirit has to produce. You can’t do this on your own. I need the Spirit to bring me to Bible reading. I need the Spirit to bring me to prayer.

Same thing with fellowship—living in a spiritual family can be difficult. In fact if you would describe being a member of a community of faith as easy and comfortable, you’re not doing right...which brings us to requirement number 2...

Spirit-Driven Sacrifice

It will require sacrifice of time, money, effort. And for whatever reason, we don’t think it should. Is there a lifehack for this? What’s the way to follow Jesus without having to study the word and pray and give? I’ve got a lot going on and it’s all just kind of inconvenient. Like Jesus came down from heaven and was torn apart for us, absorbed God’s wrath, rose from the dead, saved us from our sin so that we could have a safe comfortable life and chase your dreams. Not so friends. Jesus said take up your cross and follow me. “A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity, without a cross, will provide in the end a useless Christianity, without a crown.” (J. C. Ryle)

And so very simply, if we're going to have the kind of Spirit-filled community we see here in Acts, we're going to have to sacrifice. Membership class I try to talk people out of it. So many people trying to lower the bar we raise the bar. Time for reading the word and prayer. Energy for bearing people burdens. Money for contributing to others needs and the work of the church. Sacrificing preferences. Sports activities. If Jesus hasn't been raised it's silly. If he has, it only makes sense.

Spirit-Driven Persistence

Vs 46 "day by day" Literally "every day". This can't be something you just "try" for a season. **Dieting example.** And this is where the Spirit comes in. We can will power this stuff for a while—but it will just fizz out. Youth trip fizzled out. Bible reading, prayer. Tithing.

So I want to pray and give us a moment to examine ourselves. Please don't duck so this sermon doesn't it you.