

STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING

Week of September 29

"Ingredients for Christian Community"

Text: Acts 2:42-47

(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)

Review from Last Week: Acts is the one of the most exciting books in the NT.

- It tells of beginnings of Christianity with a vigor and vividness.
- It's a story of men and women who are filled with divine power, inspired to speak with effectiveness far beyond natural ability, guided and sustained at crucial moments by divine visions, their mission punctuated by miraculous healings and rescues.
- Its particular "hero" is Saul who becomes Paul, persecutor become advocate, Pharisee become apologist, ardent Jew become missionary to Gentiles. His conversion, travels and crises,

Acts is a book which stirs the passions when read...evoking the same mixed responses that Paul's own message received: some being persuaded by what is said, others disbelieving...Few can remain unimpressed or unmoved by Acts account.

Why did Luke write this book?

1. His concern was to trace out the **continuation of** and the continuities **with** the work which Jesus began (1:1-2). Ben mentioned this in his sermon. The work of Jesus continues in the followers of Jesus.
2. His intention is to **describe the spread of the new movement – the church** and the **success of its witness in the power of the Spirit. Acts 1:8 is the theme of the book and the theme for the church.**
3. Luke will highlight the developing schism with the leaders of Judaism in Jerusalem (chpt 3-7) and in most cases with the chief representatives of the Jews. – showing a **new emerging identity** of Christ-followers.
4. Luke sets out to include the beginning, justification, and development of the **mission to the Gentiles. The Christian church is for all!**
5. To underscore the **unity** of this expanding movement: emphasizing the centrality of the Jerusalem church. Unity of the church is a primary theme. That's why Ben is stressing this right from the get-go. Unity even in the midst of diversity.
6. To include the relationship to the power of Rome [roman officials are regularly portrayed in a positive light. Paul and the movement of the early church was **evidently** no threat to Roman law or state and could be left free to get on with its own business.

Background for Acts 2 - Pentecost

- For a first-century Jew, Pentecost was the fiftieth day after Passover.
- It was an agricultural festival. It was the day when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop, and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop, too, would be safely gathered in.
- Pentecost is the Feast of First Fruits – seen as the beginning of God’s work of redemption as a sign - that like the sheaf which is offered to God, as the sign of the great harvest to come.
- When we look closely at the way some Jews told the story of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, we can see some parallels. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up the mountain, and then came down again with the law. **Pentecost is about God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they are to now carry out his purposes.**
- Here, Jesus has gone up into heaven in the ascension, and – so Luke wants us to understand – he is now coming down again, not with a written law carved on tablets of stone, but with the dynamic energy of the law, the power of the Holy Spirit, designed to be written on human hearts. ‘Pentecost’, then, is a word with very particular meaning, which Luke is keen that we should grasp. Wright, N.T. (2011-05-31). Acts for Everyone, Part One: Chapters 1-12 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 22). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.
- It is most significant, in the light of the ascension, that the wind (Spirit) came "from heaven" (2:2). The whole point is that, through the Spirit, some of the creative power of God himself comes from heaven to earth and does its work there. The aim is not to give people a "spirituality" which will make the things of earth irrelevant. The point is to transform earth with the power of heaven, starting with those parts of "earth" which consist of the bodies, minds, hearts and lives of the followers of Jesus.
- The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is the complementary fact to the ascension of Jesus into heaven. The risen Jesus in heaven is the presence, in God's sphere, of the first part of "earth" to be transformed into "new creation." In Jesus heaven and earth are joined. The pouring out of the Spirit on earth is the presence, in our sphere, of the heaven itself. The gift of the Spirit is thus the direct result of the ascension of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

Introductions - everyone know everyone?

Opening Question: when have you felt refreshed by being in a community of sorts? What was that like? What was the community like?

Read Acts 2:24-27

1. Think of what people who are not part of a church. How do they describe “church”? What do they think about the church? Where do they get their information about the church and Christianity? How would you describe what church is?

2. Imagine you spoke to a person in the early church and asked them, “why are you meeting like this and why are you doing what you do?”, how do you think they would answer?

3. Can you be a Christian and not belong to a “community of faith”? Why or why not?

4. What would be the benefit of belonging to a Christian community? Is there a downside?

5. When you think about the various “ingredients” of the Christian community, which one or two are important to you? Why? Which one would you like to see more of or explore? How might it be strengthened?

- I. Ingredient #1: Devotion = Perseverance... community requires perseverance, messy, hard, awkward, frustrating... regular.... Consistency... commitment
- II. Ingredient #2: Apostle’s Teaching, Learning, always learning, mystery, riches!
- III. Ingredient #3: Fellowship, Koinonia, life together... joys and concerns, intergenerational
- IV. Ingredient #4: Breaking of Bread, Lord’s Supper... Christ-centered
- V. Ingredient #5: Prayer, Lord’s Prayer, for each other
- VI. Ingredient #6: Awe, Reverence... never boring...
- VII. Ingredient #7: Wonders and signs, see things happen! Allow God to work!
- VIII. Ingredient #8: Generosity, sharing, not communism
- IX. Ingredient #9: Worship in temple courts, Sundays
- X. Ingredient #10: Ate together in homes with joy... gladness of heart
- XI. Ingredient #11: Liked by people, attractive... people want what they see
- XII. Ingredient #12: Multiplication... more come!

6. How else did the early Christians express their common life in practical ways? In what ways can we express this common life and bond that we have with other Christians materially and otherwise?

7. The early Christians thought of themselves as a “single family” – part of one another. Do you see that at PCJH? How? Why or why not? What would need to change in our lives?

8. How has being a part of a Christian community been important in your life? When people ask, "why should I go to church", how do you answer?