



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### HG44: Growing The Church (2/6) *Growth In Depth*

**Acts 2:42-47**

### Home Group Study Notes

13<sup>th</sup> February 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Acts 2 reminds us how there were Jews present in Jerusalem from all over the then known world. Share with your Home Group where in the UK/world you are from and where in the world you would love to visit.



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study Acts 2:42-47, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) Rick Warren suggests that discipleship: “... *is the process of ... people become more like Jesus in their thoughts, feelings and actions.*” Discuss whether this is, or isn’t a good definition. What might you add or take away?

2) If a Spirit-filled and growing church, is eager to believe and obey what Jesus and the apostles taught: how can we grow deeper both individually and as a church? What, in your view, is the key to being a learning church?

3) If a Spirit-filled and growing church, is a loving, caring and sharing church: how can we grow more loving both individually and as a church? What, in your view, is the key to being a loving church?

Mission is a biblical imperative and, according to Canon Robert Warren, a former Archbishop’s advisor on Evangelism, mission should: ... *dominate the life and worship of a church.* Jesus never instituted the church to perpetuate a social club for Christians to be a holy huddle, he commanded us to make disciples. We are called to live in a wider community than the church community. It’s so easy to become caught up in the ghetto of the church, with our friendships and orientation so rooted in church life that we lose sight of the lost souls around us.

Church weekend away ... I wonder, how many friends do you have who are not yet Christians? When was the last time you invited someone to a Service; Event; Alpha Course? When was the last time you shared your faith with a stranger?

I recognise that it isn’t always easy, and it isn’t always easy to see where we fit in the bigger picture. We say, I did this once and it didn’t work. We held a holiday club, but the children never came back. I invited someone to a special event but never returned. And we use all of these as excuses/reasons not to do anything again. But if Jesus has touched your heart and changed your life, is it too much to be inconvenienced so that someone else can find his love for themselves?

I’ve never forgotten the words of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, to the author Rudyard Kipling, who had expressed his dislike of tambourines: *Young man, if I thought I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my head and beating a tambourine with my feet I would learn how to do it.*

**Conclusion:** Looking back over these marks of the early church, it’s evident that they were all inextricably linked.

- **Firstly:** They were a learning church eager to receive the apostles’ instructions. A Spirit-filled church, therefore, is an apostolic church, a NT church, anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and the apostles taught.
- **Secondly:** They were a loving church and they persevered in their support of one another and relieving the needs of the poor. A Spirit-filled church is a loving, caring and sharing church.
- **Thirdly:** They were a worshipping church and worshipped in the temple and in the home, in the breaking of bread and in their prayers. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church.
- **Fourthly:** They were engaged in continuous evangelism. John Stott writes: “*No self-centred, self-contained church (absorbed in its own parochial affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit.*” (Ouch!). The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit and so a Spirit-filled church is a missionary church.

Do we consider ourselves to be a Spirit-filled church? We may engage with each of those four marks of being church in varying degrees but do we devote ourselves to them in equal measure?

I’ve often likened these four principles of active discipleship to a table with four legs. Have more of one and not enough of the other, then your Christian life becomes uneven and dissatisfying. However, each principle acted upon in equal measure gives for a stable and meaningful Christian experience. If your Christian experience isn’t as Spirit-filled as you think it should be, I think you already know both the answer and the solution.

Through prayer, we can enter into any situation we choose. We can travel to any part of the world we choose. We can stand alongside any individual we choose. The early church quickly learned to use prayer effectively because of the persecution they suffered. After Peter and John were rebuked by the Sanhedrin, and returned to the fellowship, prayer was the first order of the day. Later, when Peter was imprisoned, the fellowship came together to pray. The early church was devoted to prayer as a way of life and God moved in their midst as a result.

In Ephesians 6:12, we read: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* Whether we like it or not, we are engaged in a spiritual battle which must be won in prayer. Could our church life be suffering because we don't spend enough time doing battle in prayer?

A primary school class went on a field trip to a local fire station. After the children had an opportunity to examine the fire engines, the Firemen's gear, living quarters and so on, one of the firemen began to talk to them about fire safety. He said: *If you think your house might be on fire, the first thing you should do is go to the door and feel it to see if it is hot. The second thing you should do is fall to your knees.* He asked: *Does anyone know why you should get on your knees?* One little boy in the front raised his hand and said: *You get on your knees so you can pray that God will get you out of that mess!*

That's probably not a bad description of our prayer life! We all have the tendency to make prayer an emergency exit - to get us out of trouble - when it should be the front door to all we are and seek to do.

The worship of the early church was both formal and informal, for it took place in the temple courts and in their homes, which is an interesting combination. A mixture of corporate and small group worship. True fellowship is built on more than an hour or so together in church and is one of the reasons why I always encourage as many people as possible to be involved with a home group.

**4) They were an Evangelistic Church:** So far we have considered the study, fellowship and worship of the early church, for it is to these three things that Luke says the first believers devoted themselves. Yet, it seems to me, these are aspects of the internal life of the church; they tell us nothing about its compassionate outreach to the world. However, it was, as a result of their devotion to these three aspects of their deepening discipleship that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Just as their worship was daily, vs46a, so was their witness. Praise and proclamation were both the natural overflow of hearts full of the Holy Spirit and as their outreach was continuous, so continuously were people being saved. Perhaps that something the church at large needs to reclaim.

Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing and worshipping that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church. Evangelism must play a central part of our everyday life if we wish to be an authentic expression of a Christian community in the 21<sup>st</sup> C.

The church was instigated by Jesus to be mission orientated, of reaching out with God's love to those who are alienated and ostracized and struggling with life in our society and to draw them to the Lord through our acceptance and our love for them and the proclamation of the Good News of the Cross.

4) If a Spirit-filled and growing church is a worshipping church: how can we develop our worshipping life, both individually and as a church? What, in your view, is the key to being a worshipping church? (If you are able, have a read through Nigel Scotland's article on 'The Eucharist Re-examined' and, if appropriate, discuss).

5) If a Spirit-filled and growing church is a missionary church: how can we engage more effectively in mission, both individually and as a church? What, in your view, is the key to being an evangelistic church?

6) *"No self-centred, self-contained church (absorbed in its own parochial affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit."* Discuss why these words of John Stott might be: a) Offensive; b) True!



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG44: Growing The Church (2/6) Growth In Depth

Acts 2:42-47

### Home Group Sermon Notes

13<sup>th</sup> February 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** As we continue our series on 'Growing the Church' we're thinking this morning about 'Growth in Depth.' It seems to me that growing in depth is about deepening our discipleship. Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, suggests that: *Discipleship is the process of ... people become more like Jesus in their thoughts, feelings and actions.* But Discipleship also means discipline. I'm sure there are many disciplines we could/should adopt as Christians. But it seems to me that what we believe affects what we do and this was certainly true of the early church. Their lives were, as Pauline reminded us a couple of weeks ago, transformed by their experience of the Holy Spirit. This morning I want to suggest four principles that are, I believe, fundamental to living as disciples of Jesus and we find these in Acts 2:42-47. The verb used in vs42 is 'devoted' the Greek translates this as something that was continual rather than occasional! So, what kind of church was the early church and what enabled them to grow?

**1) They were a Learning Church:** The early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They gave a high priority to understanding the truth. Having come to know Jesus, they wanted to know more about Him and, there's no doubt, that God's word brings us to a closer relationship with Jesus and enables us to live morally and ethically in our daily lives. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul writes: *All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Devotion to knowing the truth is not something that was only needed in the early church, it is something that is desperately needed in our world today. That's because we live in a world of many questions. The issues that dominate our society are issues that we must be able to grapple with. We don't want to be in the situation where we are so heavenly minded that we become of no earthly use. We want to be able to give answers to the questions people ask that make the Gospel relevant to their situations. I don't mean pat, off the cuff answers, full of clichés and simple solutions, but answers that have substance and are grounded in truth. Have we, for instance, learned to think Biblically about contemporary issues and so-called 'moral dilemmas?' How do we respond to questions about AIDS, abortion, homosexuality, poverty, homelessness, racial prejudice, church unity or even the church itself? Unless we make it our business to know what the Bible says about issues like these, we won't have any real answers for ourselves - let alone for others.

**2) They were a Loving Church:** The early church devoted themselves to the fellowship (*koinonia*, meaning common). Some people often substitute fellowship for church attendance - but there's a huge difference. Some view fellowship like a jar full of marbles. They may be in the same jar but there is little togetherness and they have little effect on each other as they roll around sharing the same space. Church attendance in itself, without fellowship, turns people into iceberg Christians.

One man who visited a church for the first time gave his description of what he experienced: *I don't want to say that people had a cold attitude towards me, but the sidesmen wore ice skates.* Real fellowship is more like a jar of grapes that bleed on one another! Fellowship should allow our faith to rub off on one another. The early church saw the need to devote themselves to a shared life with other believers and met, vs46, on a daily basis.

It's a well known fact that people generally gravitate to others in similar circumstances and find comfort in the common ground they share. People look for those who are the same age, or who have children, or who share their interests. The opposite is true of the church - we are thrust together, almost, with people who are nothing like us. The early church, however, vs44: had everything in common - this suggests something of a comprehensive fellowship. In the reality of God's Spirit-filled presence they discovered that it transcended issues of age, education, social status and ethnicity. This is the beauty of the church, and a testimony to the love of Jesus.

It was a fellowship where lives became so entwined they lost sight of what's yours and mine. They sold their possessions and gave to those in need, vs45. Some suggest that the early Christians gave up their 'capitalism' and became 'communists' selling everything they had putting it all into one pot and dividing it up among themselves. But that's not what this passage suggests at all. It's simply that, as they entered into more intimate fellowship, they entered into one another's sufferings and individual burdens became mutual burdens. But, when we fellowship with one another in this way it is a fellowship that is bound together by God's love. The best way to explain what that way was/is, is to simply see what the Bible has to say. The Summary of the Law in Luke 10:27: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and, Love your neighbour as yourself.*

Fellowship is a way of life and a way of treating others. The Christian community should be an environment where we can begin to grow in love and know, and experience, what it means to worship in Spirit and Truth as we allow ourselves to be caught up in God's presence. So that, Ephesians 3:19: *... you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

**3) They were a Worshipping Church:** The early church devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to prayer. That is, their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for each other, but in corporate worship too. Some may suggest that the breaking of bread refers to sharing in Communion and there's no doubt that the early church had been gathered together into one fellowship through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and so they began to celebrate their unity and love for one another alongside their worship and reverence for Jesus.

A regular remembrance of Jesus' broken body and shed blood is a reminder of God's vision for the world - of reconciliation. It provides an opportunity for personal healing and to put right what is wrong in our lives. However, it does not exclusively refer to Communion. Martin Luther liked to talk about every meal as being sacramental in nature. And I agree. Every time we sit down across the table from one another and share food, we strengthen our relationships and our fellowship together. Jesus often spent time eating: Wedding at Cana; Feeding of 5000; Meal with Mary and Martha; Tea with Zacchaeus; The Last Supper; Breakfast on the shore.

They also devoted themselves to prayer. Their focus was heavenward; toward the throne of grace; on God Himself. They knew that if they were to be an effective and growing church they must be a praying church because they depended on God for their very existence. Jesus said that His house should be known as a house of prayer. The early church knew the necessity of seeking God and His will in prayer. D.L.Moody: *The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.*