

We Are an Evangelism Community

Church, A Community on Purpose – Part 4

August 29, 2021

Day 1: God's Design for Reaching People

This week we'll look at how a primary purpose of Church is to reach people with the gospel and, conversely, how God's design for reaching people is through Church.

Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Jesus had spent his last three years on earth doing some amazing things. He healed a bunch of people. He told people the kingdom of God was coming. He reversed religious cultural stereotypes, flipping tables and flipping customs. He spent a lot of his time with a small group of followers (disciples), and here in Acts 1, after Jesus was crucified and raised to life, His followers want to know "what's next?" – Jesus gives them these final exhortations:

- You will receive power through the Holy Spirit, and
- You will be my witnesses to the world.

Jesus was telling them: YOU have seen me and everything I've done, it's up to you to tell the people what you've witnessed. And you will have everything you need to carry this message to the world. It's also clear that there's no backup plan!

On one hand, converting the world to Christianity seems scary and challenging! On the other, being a witness to the truth can be boiled down to a simple concept: tell people what you've seen!

1. Imagine you are called to a witness stand to testify about Jesus.
 - a. First of all, who is in the courtroom?
 - b. What have you seen of Jesus, in your life or in others', that the court needs to know?
2. How do you experience the Holy Spirit empowering you?
3. If you struggle to sense His empowerment, do you know why?
4. Either way, spend some time with Him to thank Him and ask Him for help.

Day 2: Evangelism Results from Fellowship

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Spirit came upon the believers on the day of Pentecost and they started proclaiming the good news of Jesus to Jews from all over the world in their native tongue (Acts 2). In the same passage, Luke makes a point of describing the nature of the believers' relationships with one another:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Acts 2:42-47

Clearly, the fellowship of the believers was noteworthy, and pertinent to their mission.

1. If your goal was to reset and restructure your life to mimic the Acts believers, what would be most/least appealing about that life?
2. What would be easiest or hardest for you?
3. Which of those seems most possible to implement in your real life?

At Pentecost, “about three thousand [believers] were added to their number” (Acts 2:41). Then, in verse 47, we’re told that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

4. Fill in the gaps: what is happening “day by day” to bring people into “their number”? Imagine the daily interactions and conversations from the believers’ point of view and then from the perspective of those who were being saved.
5. Why didn’t Jesus send them out individually or in pairs, wouldn’t that have been more effective (more spread of the gospel)?

Day 3: Why doesn't Evangelism *feel* natural for me?

Unfortunately, whether we're in community or not, evangelism rarely feels natural! We don't know who to talk to, or how to start a conversation, or don't even think about talking about "religious" things in the first place! Let's dive into the problem first. The *primary* problem is not that we're bad at sharing our faith. Really, we need to look at how sin complicates God's design for evangelism and community.

Let's consider, again, the believers in the early Church. As we can see in Acts 4, the believers had a unique fellowship:

"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 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." Acts 4:34-35

Can you imagine a modern-day community like this? Of course, even the Acts Church wasn't without blemish.

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet." Acts 5:1-2

1. What was wrong with what Ananias and Sapphira did?

Immediately after Peter rebuked Ananias, Ananias died (Acts 5:5). After a few hours Sapphira met the same fate (Acts 5:7-10). Obviously, our sin does not always lead to immediate physical death, but there are often other repercussions.

2. Who was affected by their bad decision? Consider how Ananias and Sapphira's community was affected by their selfishness and how selfishness in the Church affects our witnessing.

3. What (else) gets in the way of Christ-exalting, people-serving, fruit-yielding fellowship?

Day 4: Fear God

We've discussed how evangelism doesn't often feel natural. Often, some sort of self-centeredness manifests as reluctance, apathy, or fear. The most important, and somewhat mysterious, solution to address our fear isn't necessarily conquer it but to redirect it.

Fearing God is confusing. Fear is sort of a one-dimensional word today. If you fear something, you're afraid of it. There's not much more to it. But when the Bible talks about fear of God, I think it means much more than to be afraid of Him (which, in a sense, we should!). Read any (or all) of the following passages to get a sense of fearing God:

- Isaiah 6:1-7
- Revelation 4-5
- People seeing/meeting God in the Bible: Exodus 19:16, Job 23:15, Psalm 48

1. What do these passages (or others) make you think about God?

Remember Ananias and Sapphira? Certainly, God was working on growing the believers' fear of Him in Acts 5:

“And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”
Acts 5:11-14

2. When people in community fear God, what happens to evangelism?

To be sure, Biblical fear of God includes awe and wonder at His greatness, reveling in His majesty, and beholding His glory (I think of Psalm 19). It also encompasses our reaction to the gospel.

3. Spend a moment meditating on the beauty of the gospel of grace (Ephesians 2:1-9). Think on what God has done for you through Jesus. How does this dimension of fearing God affect your ability to be his witness (Acts 1:8)?

Day 5: Pray for Boldness

Spend some time looking back at the Acts passages from this week's devotions (or ANY passages in Acts, for that matter!) – what do you notice is the natural result of fearing God?

It's a bit intimidating to look at Acts and see the disciples proclaiming the gospel in the face of persecution (Acts 4, and many other examples). The book of Acts is not intended to show how much better the disciples of the early church were at reaching people, but to show what the Holy Spirit does through a community of believers who fear Him and are willing to take steps of faith!

Notice what happens among the community of believers after Peter and John face persecution for speaking out about Jesus:

When [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed"—*

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:23-31

1. The "all stars" prayed for boldness and God granted it.
 - a. Where do you need boldness in your life?

 - b. Pray for it now!

2. How is being a part of a community of believers an advantage when it comes to evangelism?

3. As we wrap up our week what is one concept or idea that helps you when you think about sharing your faith?