



**"Acts of the Apostles: Lesson 6" by  
Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist  
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"Formula for Vital Growth"



In the last few weeks we saw the little band of 120 persons receive the Holy Spirit in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. The Church was born. Peter preached his first *Kerygma* sermon. Today's scripture shows the response of repentance to that sermon where 3,000 people came to faith in Christ and were baptized. Last week we learned that repentance happens not only at the point of salvation, but throughout the spiritual life of every believer as we each grow into what God desires us to be. But what is the mission of the Church? What is the long term strategy?

In the last 20 to 30 years businesses have seemed obsessed with crafting a Mission Statement along with a Vision Statement. Many books have been written encouraging teams of people in business to identify the primary motive of what they are doing, and to envision strategies that make those missions achievable. When I was in business some of my employees fell into this, demanding to know what our mission was and how we were to achieve that mission. I always found such conversations a little strange. For me, the mission of a business was to make money, and the strategy was to identify core values and do them well. This provided wherewithal to keep good employees and maintain the business.

I now see churches caught in the same mission-vision trap. Teams of people do deep soul searching trying to come up with a fresh idea of what the purpose of the church is, and they exert great mental muscle to come up with visions for the future and strategies to achieve those goals over time. I believe this is all sort of pointless. The mission of the church and the strategy to get us there is perfectly laid out in scripture. What we need to do is obey what the Bible says.

In what many call "The Great Commission" Jesus says,



<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20, NKJV).

So there you have it! We don't have to come up with a mission statement because Jesus has already given us a mission statement. We are to make disciples of all the nations. And, the Lord has brought all nations right here to our own community in Grimes County, Texas. That means sharing the gospel so that others hear and receive it, and so that they give their lives to Christ. We share the good news that Jesus who was God incarnate, was born and died in an exchange we don't quite understand as substitution and payment for our sins. When others join with us and believe, we are ordered to make disciples, or "learners," of them. When we bring others to Christ we are to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is so they can identify themselves with Christ's death and along with Him they can be raised into newness of life. That is our Mission statement. So if that is the mission, how can we best achieve the goal? What is God's directive on how this is to be done? If we look at the earliest days of the Church, we can see the method that God prescribes for the growth of His disciples.

Stand with me now as we read a portion of our scripture for today.

*<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he [Peter] testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." <sup>41</sup> Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. <sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (Acts 2:40-43, NKJV). Please be seated.*



I can't imagine ever preaching and seeing three thousand people respond wanting to give their hearts to Jesus. Even if these converts were all baptized by all twelve of the apostles that means each apostle baptized two hundred and fifty persons that day! This was an incredible day for not only Peter, but also for the Church. This was a wholesale conversion with a massive baptism.

It reminds me of pictures I have seen of the Jesus Movement of the 1960's when thousands of young people (some called them hippies) came to faith in Jesus. It is told how Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel preached and kids by the thousands repented, realizing the emptiness of sex, drugs, and rock and roll.<sup>1</sup> They had been lied to by Satan and the world that those things were the answer, and that this lifestyle would fill their deepest longings. Their lives were changed forever as they found peace and joy in the saving knowledge of Jesus.

The scripture for today gives us a wonderful road map to direct us in how to grow in the Lord: (1) Study of the Apostle's Teachings/Doctrines, (2) Fellowship, (3) Breaking of Bread, and (4) Prayer.



### **Study of the Apostles' Doctrine - Study the Word!**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW-2tbSiCWM>

When you called me to pastor you at this church I made a vow to the Lord that I would never come before you unprepared, and that I would never come before you without a passage from the Bible that was the focal point for the day. As I reminded you last week, my job here is to teach you God's Word. I am to dive deep into it so that through study and the illumination of the Holy Spirit I can share with you the deepest treasures of the faith.

Preaching that which is not Bible focused is useless. Kelton and I have been called to pastor you and teach you. It is not our job each week to make you feel good. It is not our job to be your best friends. It is our job to teach you a passage, interpret that passage, and guide you in how to apply that passage to your life. Stories, anecdotes, and self-help mumbo jumbo will not change your life. What will change your life is the living, active Word of God. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

*"<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* (Hebrews 4:12-13, NIV).

I recently learned from my Rabbi friend that the Hebrew word meaning "to teach, to guide, to learn" is the root word of the word "Torah."<sup>2</sup> It is in the study of God's Word that the supernatural teaching and learning occurs. It is through His Word that we learn of Him, we learn of each other, and we learn about ourselves. The study of God's Word is a holy act. It is, in fact, worship. When you study God's Word it is part of your Avodah.<sup>3</sup> In that work there is worship. In that effort there is divine service.

The Apostle Paul instructs the young pastor Timothy to be diligent in study saying, *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV).

I spend approximately 8 to 10 hours every week reading, studying, and thinking on the passage that I will teach you the next Sunday. It is in that abundance of study that the Holy Spirit often pours out something unexpected on you all each Sunday. Often I'm even surprised by twists and turns that come out of the residue of what I have studied that makes a doctrinal point with total clarity.



### **Fellowship - Do it with others! It's more than fried chicken and potato salad.**

*Koinonia* is a Greek word that occurs 20 times in the Bible. *Koinonia*'s primary meaning is "fellowship, sharing in common, communion." The first occurrence of *koinonia* is Acts 2:42 (NIV), "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Christian

<sup>2</sup> *Torah* = from the root "hay-rash-hay" to teach, to guide, to learn

<sup>3</sup> *Avodah* = labor or service or worship

fellowship is a key aspect of the Christian life. Believers in Christ are to come together in love, faith, and encouragement. That is the essence of koinonia.<sup>4</sup>

I have a friend who gets annoyed when people from different cults ring her doorbell and want to share their version of the "good news." She opens the door and politely tells them that she is a "church of one." It is sort of a funny thing to say, but the term is oxymoronic. A person may well enjoy their own fellowship, but the Lord instructs His followers that our faith is not exercised alone. The person who believes "going to church" is sitting in front of the television on Sunday morning to watch a service by oneself is terribly mistaken and doesn't understand what the Bible says.

We are instructed to not forsake the gathering together with other believers. (Heb 10:25) God puts us together in part because as individuals we often have difficulty getting along with one another. The majority of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians chapter five have to do with heart attitudes exercised when dealing with others. Listen to the list: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. Sure, self love is important, but Jesus tells us that we obey His commandment when we are loving others as we love ourselves.

It is in relating to one another that we experience fully the body of Christ. We come together to not only be encouraged and built up, but to encourage others and build others up. When we come together, affirming one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, we are united with others in the group. Our relationship with others is probably one of the only things we can take to heaven.

Philippians 2:1-2 tells us, "'If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.'" The Apostle Paul is telling us to be in agreement with one another, and to remember that we are united in one purpose. We are commanded over and over in scripture to be devoted to one another and to honor one another (Rom 12:10). We are to live in harmony, serving one another with kindness and compassion (Ephesians 4:32). As we each grow in Christ we should spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Be hospitable to each other (1 Peter 4:9) and above all love one another (1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11-12). That's it! That's what koinonia should look like.

### **Breaking of Bread - Bonding in Nourishment**



Eating together is one of the most bonding actions of human behavior. When we "break bread together," trust is established and genuine affection and mutual respect rises with those with whom we eat. I am not sure why this happens. It is sort of a human mystery. The formula in Acts tells us that this is important. The early Christians came together for common meals. Scripture tells us they had "everything in common" and this

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/koinonia.html>

included meals. It is important to note that his is not some sort of call to communism. This wasn't forced on them, rather they were a small band and their commitment to each other went deep for the survival and expansion of the group.

I think this also included the regular observance of the Lord's Supper, but it also is just regular eating together. Here at Union Grove we eat together a lot. Every Wednesday night we have one of the sweetest family reunions I have ever been to. We all know and experience the joy of this mystery. As long as I am pastor this practice will be foremost in our experience together. When the Lord gave me His vision of my ministry here, it was that we would come together and experience a community of faith such as we've never known. I think we're well on the way to experiencing that together. We also believe it is important to have Communion regularly and we observe this every first Sunday of the month.

### **Prayer - The Glue that Holds it All Together**



We have all heard, "the family that prays together stays together." Well, the church that prays together grows together. We are instructed to have vibrant private prayer lives, but we are also instructed in this passage to pray together as a Church body. That is why I almost always ask several to pray on Wednesday night as the Holy Spirit leads. I do not know exactly why it is so powerful to pray together as a group, but it is. Whenever you're called on to pray, speak from your heart to the Lord. Realize that you can boldly approach the throne of grace and take us there with you. The writer of Hebrews says it so eloquently, "<sup>16</sup>Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16, NKJV).

Jesus gives us a model prayer that we call "The Lord's Prayer." If you don't know how to pray, start with that. Then just share your heart with Him. When you pray avoid your own agenda. Eloquent words are not needed. Don't try to have a public quiet time when you're called on to pray. Public prayer should never be a way to gossip. Rather, it should be a time when you carry the heart of the group before our Father in heaven who loves us and longs to hear from us and be a part of everything we think, say, and do.

Let us pray.

Invitation to come to faith in Jesus and an invitation to be baptized.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868.

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