

HOW WE DO IT

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, August 11, 2013

Acts 2

⁴¹ *Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*

⁴² *All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.*

⁴³ *A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.*

Where We Want to Be

Look again at the end result of this amazing episode:

Acts 2

⁴³ *A deep sense of (**reverential**) awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.*

Awe and miracles! Isn't that what we all want with respect to God? There is room for more awe and miracles in all of our gatherings.

Those results were no accident! And they were not automatic. Let's learn the back-story and see what ingredients led to this result.

How We Get There

Acts 2

¹ *On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place.* ² *Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting.* ³ *Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.* ⁴ *And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

The believers' commotion rallied people from all over the city. Some also wondered at what was happening, while others mocked the work of the Spirit.

Peter, emboldened by the Spirit, arose and spoke boldly to the crowd, explaining that this event was the fulfillment of an ancient prediction that God would pour out His Spirit on all people, a promise that had been won by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 2

³⁶ *“So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”*

³⁷ *Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”*

³⁸ *Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”*

⁴¹ *Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*

⁴² *All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.*

⁴³ *A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*

⁴⁶ *They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*

The first ingredient of this divine recipe for awe and miracles can be seen in its timing: the Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost

Every year, the Jews were instructed by God through Moses to celebrate God’s protection and provision with three annual festivals.

The first was in March or April, coinciding with the beginning of the first grain harvest. It began with the Passover meal, commemorating the Hebrew peoples’ rescue from slavery in Egypt, and continued for seven more days as the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Fifty days after the Passover, another festival, known as the Festival of Weeks (for the seven weeks that had passed), celebrated that first harvest of grain. The people recognized and honored God for His provision of their needs (specifically, their food) by bringing their firstfruits to the Lord in the Tabernacle (Temple): each household baked two loaves of yeasted bread, representing the **first** of their crops, as a thank offering to the Lord. (Moses instructed them to *“Bring [the Lord] a voluntary offering in proportion to the blessings you have received*

from him” (Deuteronomy 16:10).) This offering became known as the tithe, for it was measured as a tenth of the early harvest (the same proportion for everyone).

At the end of the Autumn harvest, the people again celebrated with thanksgiving, following the reaping and threshing of the second grain harvest and the pressing of the grape harvest. The Festival of Booths, so called because they were instructed to live outside for a week in “tents” constructed from tree limbs and brush, also reminded them of where they came from—living in tents as they wandered through the desert to the Land of Promise.

Many have recognized in these celebrations a commemoration of spiritual highlights in our journey with God: (1) our rescue from sin by the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Lamb of God; (2) the first harvest of souls that followed the outpouring of the Spirit, the Church Age; (3) the celebration of the completed harvest following the return of King Jesus.

Pentecost (meaning “fifty”) became the common name for the second festival, because of the fifty days they counted after Passover to the Festival of Weeks.

On this particular Pentecost, God gave the first harvest of human souls—those who entered eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior. All of those believers—and we don’t know just how many there were, for there were 120 in the first days of their prayers, but more than 500 had been with the Risen Lord before His ascension—were together in one place and in one accord (with one heart and one purpose). Suddenly, God fulfilled His age-old promise and poured out His Spirit, and they were all filled with the Spirit and began speaking praises to God with languages they did not know or understand.

The first three ingredients of the Awe and Miracles are these: (1) Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as represented by Pentecost; (2) United prayer for the will of God; (3) Receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.

Belonging

Here’s the fourth ingredient:

Acts 2

⁴¹ *Those who believed (acknowledged the truth of) what Peter said were baptized and added (won over) to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*

Joining a local church doesn’t have to be formal, but it has to be. There’s no such thing as a Solitary Christian. God puts *“the solitary into families”* (Psalm 68:6). And if it has to be, then it may as well be formalized by water baptism and a mutual commitment between the entering believer and the receiving body, like a spiritual adoption.

Joining used to be desirable and common, whether it was a neighborhood group, a club, a church, or a union. Regular meetings offered social interaction, news exchange, and ideological debate.

But today there is a broad shift—a reticence, even a suspicion. What do they want from me? What will it cost me?

And today many more options exist that seem more attractive just because they do not require joining personally—the Web and social media, and old-school print, radio, and TV. Shallow connections are prevalent—hiding behind cute little avatars and made-up usernames, lurking without participating, commenting without follow-up or accountability—seeing without being seen, hearing without being heard, knowing without being known.

Many such relationships exist only in one's head—anonymous, unaccountable, unsupported—holding and offering ideas and imaginations that lack contextual (real) relationships.

Those early believers joined because they wanted to be together, to gain what they could from shared ideas and experiences, to catch the fever of living faith, to support each other on the fresh and unknown journey.

We still need that kind of fellowship and camaraderie today, perhaps even more, because it is not the social norm, especially in urban settings.

They joined in multiple settings: in the Temple (large group meetings) and in their homes (small group meetings). Each of these settings offers unique advantages (and their own disadvantages).

When you think of a Temple (large group) gathering, what benefits can you hope to derive? What annoyances do you anticipate? Is there something about them that puts you off?

In contrast, when you think of small gatherings of people, what special benefits do they offer? How could a small group meeting help you grow in faith and in your walk with Christ? Is there any reason you would want to stay away from them?

The locations and sizes of their meetings is not all that we should note. Luke emphasized the frequency of the meetings (daily). Is that really as impractical as we imagine? Or are we just too absorbed in pursuing the world's goods?

Devoting

The fifth ingredient may be the most rare, and the most expensive.

Acts 2

⁴² *All the believers devoted (were devoting) themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship (close association involving mutual involvement and relationships), and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer(s).*

Devotion emphasizes the quality of their motivation, their faith—steadfast—as well as the quantity—frequent.

Devotion implies personal necessity, personal surrender, personal commitment, and personal persistence.

What did they devote themselves to? First and foremost, to Christ. Believing Christ. Following Christ. Worshiping Christ.

Second, to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (in our day, that means the Scriptures—the record of their acts and teachings—and the anointed teaching of the Word of God). Apostles were those who had been with Jesus as first-hand witnesses and were personally commissioned by Him. Today, their teachings are explained by those who have a life-giving relationship with the Lord, who sit at His feet to learn the Word from Him, and offer the lessons they have gained from walking with Him.

Third, to hospitality and worship. It's more than food on the table; it is Jesus at the table. It is sharing with each other. It is giving and receiving. It is enriching each other's lives.

Fourth, to prayer (literally, *to prayers*). This is united prayer, group prayer. It is regular prayer, scheduled prayer. It is frequent prayer.

Christ, teaching, sharing, praying—in the “temple” and in the homes, every day.

Should we go there? (I know there may be pushback; I feel it in myself at times, too.) Can we get there? Can we become the church that Jesus is building? Will you go there with me?

Final Results

There is more! If you can believe it, awe and miracles are only the beginning! Do you know what comes after that?

Acts 2

⁴⁷ *All the while (they were) praising God and enjoying the goodwill (favor) of all the people. And each (every)day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*

Favor and multiplication! Community transformation and church growth. This is what God has in mind for His people. Can you see it? Will you believe for it? Let's work toward it! That's how we do it, people!