

Recipe for Becoming a Spirit-Filled, Growing Mission Church

Ingredient 1. We are learning the truth and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ (and the challenges of repentance) together so deeply that we become energized and automatically want to share it with others.

As our lives are transformed by a deep encounter with the gospel, our personal lives themselves will be a testimony to the reality of God and the truth of the gospel.

The Parable of the Seed That Grows by Itself

²⁶And Jesus was saying, “This is how the Reign of God is. It’s like a person who casts seed on the soil. ²⁷They sleep, and they get up, night after night, and day after day. And the seed sprouts and grows—how, the person doesn’t know. ²⁸The earth bears fruit all by itself. First comes the blade,¹ then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹And when the grain is ripe, right away the person puts in² the sickle, because it’s harvest time.”

You see, we believers don’t need to worry about getting people to join us or about making people grow in Christ. Our job is to invest so deeply in the gospel together that we let our individual and community life be transformed by the good news and the power of the Holy Spirit. The truth of Jesus Christ—energized by the Spirit—really does set us free (Jn 8:32). Then we will be a community that is a wholesome place for God to bring people into. Jesus has his eye on lots of lost sheep. Are we willing to let him make us into a safe place to bring them home to?

If that feels convicting, if you don’t feel ready, don’t be afraid. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, can get rid of a lot of hindrances in a short time if we are willing to open ourselves and risk everything for the wholeness he wants for us—and for those he wants to save, but who don’t know him yet.

Ingredient 2. We all regularly do ministries of simple, unglamorous service—to the spiritual community, and to the wider community.

You could call this the John 13 principle. You know, that’s the chapter where Jesus takes a towel and bowl and washes his disciples’ feet. And then he says,

Do you understand what I have just done for you? ¹³ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and

¹ Wheat is a grass, so early on it looks like grass.

² Lit. “sends out.”

Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵
I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

We Americans (especially we males) are trained from childhood to look at every social situation, every opportunity to get involved, from a selfish point of view. We're consumers. What's it going to get for me? We want other people to serve us, or, if we have to serve, we want our efforts to gain us more centrality, more power, more status, more visibility. Those who are scrambling to be first, says Jesus, are going to be last when the judgment comes. Those who don't have (that is, they don't have the secret of servant identity) will find that they lose even what they thought they had when they managed to get positions of visibility and status. Usually churches solve this problem of fleshy competition and selfishness by (1) putting all the visibility, status, charisma in the pastor, so there's nobody else to compete with, and pastor is too far up on a pedestal to compare ourselves to, and (2) not expecting anything of people than that they will just act like consumers. No, we really have to repent and become what the gospel says we can become—servant-hearted, like Jesus. We've got grow out of the habit of competing, not just have it put out of our reach like toddlers. A key way we do that is that we all work on humble service together. Ideally, it becomes a part of the agreement of membership that, unless there is some particular difficulty that prevents it, everyone has a service ministry—*especially* those of us whose social locations have trained us into a sense of automatic entitlement to be served and to be the boss. White middle class brothers and sisters, I'm talking about us. [I am going to extemporize for a minute about my personal ability to be tempted by status seeking.]

Ingredient 3. When we can, we all take part in mid-week meetings for fellowship and mutual edification.

This is key. Powerful worship services are fabulous, but people can't get their needs for spiritual and personal nurture, growth in discipleship, and transformation met just by taking part in weekly services. The greater part of personal change happens when we invest in real, faithful, accountable relationships with one another by regularly praying, fellowshiping, practicing hospitality, and studying the scriptures together. We have to walk the path of discipleship together. There is no such thing as personal salvation. When we devote high quality time to one another in small groups, we learn to take care of one another and spur one another

on to spiritual growth. Just going to church once a week is a recipe for no spiritual growth and no community growth. As the author of Hebrews says,

Let's not avoid meeting together, as some have been in the habit of doing, but instead let's encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25).

Ingredient 4. We each practice regular, disciplined, daily prayer.

I said just now that there is no such thing as personal, individual salvation. Our very nature, as made by God, is to be community. That's why we are called the Body of Christ. We're not made to be individual, separate, independent units. We need each other; we were *created* to need each other. *However*, the body that we make up is only strong when each of its parts is open to the life of the Holy Spirit. If we want to grow and to glorify Jesus Christ as a body of believers, we must each bring our own actively cultivated and living relationship with God, to the life of the body. Each of us is like a cell in the Body of Christ. Every cell receives support from the body, and each cell gives its own particular gift to the body. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 12,

And we've all been given one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴And our body, after all, isn't one part, but many! ¹⁵Suppose the foot says, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body." Does that make it not belong to the body? ¹⁶Or suppose the ear says, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body." Does that make *it* not belong to the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were about hearing, then where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact, God has placed each one of the parts of the body just where God wanted it to be.

Sometimes we are down and discouraged, sometimes sick, sometimes we stumble and sin. In those times Jesus can use the body to lift us back to health. Our job as individuals is stay tuned to God, hearts open to Jesus. That way, God can use us daily and we will bring our best game when we gather to worship God and we will be ready to let God do powerful things among us on Sundays.

Ingredient 5. We teach and encourage people to use gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Speaking of God wanting to do powerful things, the Spirit is ready and able and willing to testify to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we clearly preach and teach the gospel, the Holy Spirit loves to say "Amen" by giving out powerful gifts such as prophecy and healing and words of wisdom and knowledge. But

beyond that, when we are open to the work of the Spirit among us, the Spirit likes to give out gifts to us for the building up of the body and the healing of its members. When I mention gifts of the Holy Spirit, some of you might be recalling bad memories of fake prophecies, or times when certain people were all about bragging what gifts they had, all puffed up and spiritually competitive. Of course self-aggrandizement and faking it is dishonoring to God. But do we throw up our hands and say, well, those gifts dried up nineteen centuries ago, or those gifts are for the rare missionary over someplace else? Or do we take the risk of learning how to accept God's gifts—which are explicitly for the body of Christ on a normal basis, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 12—and grow in their humble, accountable expression together? God's trying to give the church powerful gifts that will help us to grow and experience freedom in Christ. It's a straight cop out to be so afraid of getting it wrong that we'd rather have no manifestations of the Spirit than be shown up to be learners. The same thing goes for our fear of possibly having to say to someone, brother, or sister, that word you brought didn't seem edifying. You know where those two fears come from? The first (fear of making mistakes) comes from pride—which leads to *hypocrisy*, the desire to be perceived as having it all together. The second comes from timidity. Pride is a sin. Timidity is a sin—it's the opposite of faith. We've got gospel work to do in the name of Jesus Christ, and it's unworthy of us to be more invested in keeping things safe and tidy than in opening ourselves to the power of God for change and transformation. Everyone can be graced with gifts for the community, and it's ok to make mistakes. Wherever the gospel is being lived and preached, evidences of the power of God should be expected and prayed for.

Ingredient 6. We show up together publicly for justice.

We practice being the hands and feet of Christ in the street, where the hurt is. It's our duty to testify publicly to the truth of God, to stand up for justice and to stand up against injustice—that's our corporate prophetic role in our society. We are called to be the voice of Christ in this world. Most of what passes for institutional Christianity in this country right now is hand in glove with the radically unjust social and economic and political and military order that is oppressing and even killing people here and abroad. The visible church has become indistinguishable from the world in its attitudes and actions. It plays the role of the silent priests and the murmuring false prophets in relation to the oppressive government, our racist, me-first society, and our rampaging mega-businesses. Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, on those who speak out against

injustice whether they get spat on or not. If you're not in public crying out for justice, you're not with him, because that is where he is. And, you'll meet people in the street who are yearning for God's real kingdom without knowing God. They may never have seen anything but a flabby, worldly version of the gospel and of faith in Jesus. The good news is for them, and you are God's invitation to them.

Ingredient 7. Women, people of color, and people with non-mainstream sexual orientations or identities or other disempowered social locations are trusted, visible ministers among us.

I think Pastor David is going a superb job as a pastor in bringing this ingredient into reality. But I think it's important to understand its significance in relation to church growth. This is a secret. The composition of our visible leadership will determine the composition of our community as it grows. Do we want to show the world, show Santa Barbara, what a truly interracial, intercultural, egalitarian, queer-inclusive, Spirit-filled community looks like? I think we do, and the proof is right here in this room. Look around you. You're here because Jesus wants his body to look like us. Let's keep lifting one another up and displaying the glory of redeemed people whose glory has been suppressed by this sick wealth-serving, Puritan, male supremacist, white supremacist society. Then when the judgment comes we will hear the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servants!" (Mt. 25:23). Here, in this community, Jesus will be revealing ahead of time what was revealed to John when he saw

a huge crowd—so big that nobody could ever count it. There were people from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages, standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes, and there were palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They shouted with a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb!

¹¹And all the angels were standing all around the throne, together with the ancient ones and the four living creatures. They fell on their faces in front of the throne, and worshiped God. ¹²They said,

Amen! May blessing, glory, and wisdom,
And thanks, honor, power, and strength
Be given to our God, forever and ever! Amen!