

## INTRODUCTION

Before we know it we have come into the second quarter of the year. If you still have some faint memory of how we began the year, the message theme for this year is called “The 4G of Christian Life.” The 4G are Grace, Growth, God and Glory. Now we have come to the second G. From April to June there will be a few sermon messages on the sub-theme “What an Amazing Growth.” Today our first message will be on “A Thriving Faith Community.” We will talk about how God wants a church to be like. Building a church is like erecting a high-rise building. If you want to go up you need to go down first. You have to begin by laying a strong foundation. From that all the building materials connect with each other, one story at a time on the top of each other. Some of you or your children may have played a game called Jenga. Wikipedia says that the word Jenga is an African dialect that means “build.” To play the game first of all you put a bunch of wooden blocks layer by layer in crisscross formation to form a tower. Each player will take turn to draw one block and then put it on the top. You can imagine that by drawing pieces from the middle of the tower the structure will become increasingly unstable. The game ends when the tower crumbles. Building a church is similar to erecting a Jenga tower. Jesus Christ is our foundation. Each believers connect together like the wooden blocks. If we go independent of each other we are only little pieces. But when Christ puts us together we become a strong building. That is exactly what happened to the first Christian church in Acts 2. At that time Jews from everywhere gathered in Jerusalem to observe the Pentecost. Peter preached a sermon to them and 3,000 people committed themselves to Christ. Through studying how the disciples built a church from this large crowd we can learn how God wants us to build our church. We shall see that a church is not about planning activities, it is about building a community. From this passage let us learn the three trajectories of Christian life – upward, inward and outward.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 向上的信徒生活 Upward Christian Life

First of all, let us look at the upward Christian life of the first church when the believers showed adoration to God together.

#### A. 一同纪念 Together, We Remember

Twice in the passage we are told that the believers got together to remember the death of the Lord by breaking bread, whether in the church or at home. In today’s term they observed the communion. They followed the Lord’s command to constantly remember His death through the communion. Jesus said at the Last Supper, as recorded in [Luke 22:19-20](#) that: 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Besides the remembrance aspect of the communion the fact that we observe the communion as a church reflects our unity

in Christ. We eat the bread and drink the juice that come from the same source. In **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** Paul highlights the communal aspect of the communion when he say: 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. There are churches where the participants of the communion pinch off a small portion from the same loaf, and take turn to drink from the same cup. No matter how communion is administered a key thing it symbolizes is that we are one church in Christ.

## B. 一同敬拜 Together, We Worship

The passage also tells us that the believers in the first Christian church not only remembered the Lord's death together, they also worshipped together. Verse 46 tells us that they had daily worship. We may wonder the Christians in the early church worshipped. **1 Corinthians 14:26** may give us some clue into that: ...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. Believers worshipped by singing songs and teaching of God's Word like we do. In regard to speaking in tongue, it is a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit that enables a person to proclaim a message from God in a foreign language that he has never learned. With the completion of the whole Bible most churches believe that the gift of speaking in tongue has become less important. Paul points out that besides giving glory to God an important purpose of our worship should be to edify one another. We can do so even through singing. **Colossians 3:16** reads - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. When we sing about God's faithfulness, love, provision, etc. we are encouraged. That leads to an important question. Do you come to participate in the worship or just observe it? When the worship team sings do you sing with them? When someone leads a prayer do you echo with it in your heart? Often we mistakenly think that worship is all about the sermon. Do we habitually come late because we believe that sermon is the most important? Recently I realized that I even had to remind the worship coworkers on duty to arrive on time. Even when people arrive some of them mingle in the foyer or in the pews to chat. I wonder what goes wrong. My conclusion is that it is a heart issue. Brothers and sisters: we all need to repent and change. Otherwise we are turning worship into a religious entertainment show! If we truly understand God is here then we do not need any reminder to come earlier or to stay silent before the worship.

## 2. 向內的信徒生活 Inward Christian Life

A church is about building a community. We have to strengthen our upward Christian life toward God. We also have to develop our inward Christian life toward one another.

### A. 一同实践 Together, We Practice

When the people in the first Christian church got together they practiced the Word of God. The passage says they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The word "devoted" means "to adhere to." In other words they learned from God's Word and they put what they had learned into practice. Picture this: all of a sudden the Jerusalem church had 3,000 new converts.

Naturally, these new believers would ask: “Now I am saved, what is next?” They grew by studying the Word of God, and they followed the example of the disciples and practiced what they had learned. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 11:1** that - Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. We learn about what God says in the Bible and also through the examples of mature Christians. What kind of example had Paul established for the young believers? Paul shares in **2 Thessalonians 3:7-8** that: 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. Rather than taking financial support from the churches they ministered, Paul and his coworkers would rather work diligently with their own hands to support themselves. Brothers and sisters: we do not only encourage one another to study God’s Word, we also need to remind each other to practice it. I observe that often after we leave the sanctuary or classroom we will go back to our “daily-life mode.” In just about any topic in our conversation – career, raising children, politics, health, etc. we resort to our human wisdom or experience. Next time when we share our opinion let us challenge ourselves to practice the Word of God in our life circumstances.

## B. 一同分享 Together, We Share

The believers in the early church not only practiced God’s Word they also shared resources among themselves. Some of them sold their possessions and shared with whoever that were in need. God moved the believers to minister to the needs of the 3,000 new believers. That is a huge number to feed and host. What the believers did was not a one-time action but sharing of is part of their life. **Acts 4:32** tells us: All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. Then continue to read **verses 34-35** – 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. This practice can only work when believers see their own possessions not as something to hold onto, but they use them to bless others. Sharing of resources is a tangible expression of love. Apostle John tells us in **1 John 3:17-18** – 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. John explains that love should not stay at the emotion level it should also motivate us into action. Give thanks to the Lord that we have a lot of loving brothers and sisters in our church who would not hesitate to share their resources with someone in need. It can be money, food, giving people ride, etc. In a recent Sunday I overheard a sister inviting a newcomer to her home to share some extra furniture with his family. They knew each other for the first time. When we share things with others the recipients do not owe anyone a favor. Today you help because I am lacking, then in the future when I have the capability I can help a third person. This is how a faith community works.

## 3. 向外的信徒生活 Outward Christian Life

A church is about building a community. A thriving church does not only display in its upward and inward Christian life, it is also expressed in an outward Christian life.

## A. 一同见证 Together, We Witness

The Christians in the first church came together to witness their faith. Imagine this: it would be hard for people outside of the church to overlook what those 3,000 believers were doing. How did the general public look at this church? Verse 43 tells us that they were “filled with awe.” The same Greek word can also be rendered “fear.” In particular, the people outside of the church were thrilled to see the manifestation of God’s power through miracles performed by the disciples. The disciples witnessed that Lord Jesus Christ who died, resurrected and ascended to the heaven was still very much alive in their midst. Later in Acts chapter 3 Peter healed a man who was born crippled. **Verses 9-10** tell us the reaction of the people: 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Peter seized the opportunity to witness to the crowd that it was through the power of Jesus Christ that the patient was healed. Similar examples of how the early church witnessed for the Lord are plentiful in the book of Acts. In Acts **chapter 8** Philip went to Samaria to share the gospel. **Verse 6** says: When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. In both examples the disciples first witnessed the presence of God with their hands, then they proclaimed the gospel through their mouths. Today, God witnesses His power when His church stands up for righteousness and holiness. Christians should care about what is happening in our surrounding. Recently when the Parkway school district proposed to change their sex education curriculum a group of Christian parents stood up because they saw that the program would not be in the biggest benefit for the children. Similarly, the church should stand up when proposed new laws are in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Bible. Through actions we witness to the world that we are Christ’s followers.

## B. 一同收割 Together, We Harvest

The first reaction people had toward the early church was awe. The second reaction we see in verse 47 is that the believers won the favor of the people. As a result, the church continued to reap spiritual harvest. The end of **verse 47** tells us: ...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Any Christian church would envy such daily numerical growth. What caused such growth? The public saw from the Christians were not just religious rituals but changed lives. These Christians shared their material possession with others with love. Though they were harassed by the religious leaders and oppressed by the Roman government they did not retaliate. What attracted the people initially was not Christian faith itself, but faith lived out in real life. At the Last Supper Jesus gave His disciple a command as recorded in **John 13:34-35** – 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Before people show interest in the gospel the way we love others is a strong appeal to them. They may wonder: if everything I see is real, I want that too! Let me ask you: what kind of classmate, colleague and neighbor the people around you may see in you? A comment we often hear from our seeker friends is that Christians are people filled with love. Sometimes I heard students telling me that their parents encourage them to seek help from the church when they are in trouble. That is the reason why a more effective way to share the gospel is through building friendship. We surely should continue to invite our gospel friends to come to fellowship meeting, Sunday worship or the seekers’ class. We can also invite them to home gatherings, where they

can see how we conduct our lives outside of the church walls. We need brothers and sisters to knock on people's doors and share the gospel with people. But we also need Christians who are willing to spend time to building relationship with others. The two works together to reap a spiritual harvest into God's Kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

How God wants a church to be like? A church is about building a faith community that displays upward, inward and outward Christian life. We honor God in our Christian gatherings. We treat our brothers and sisters according to God's Word. We invite people to get to know our God. We live in an individualistic society where each person just minds his/her own business. God's heart is to put us together in a faith community so that as one people we can reflect God's glory.