

Encourage One Another

(Acts 4:31-37)

Introduction

1. Accelerate: Jesus accelerates us by the power of the Holy Spirit to a transformative, relational, missional life in Christ.
2. Reason people don't feel like coming to church: When we don't feel connected to others, or share a common bond.
 - a. What if God has a better way of creating real community than superficial bonds?
3. Background: Like 2:42-47, Luke writes another check-in point for how the new Church family is doing.
 - a. [Acts 3-4] Peter & John heal a crippled man by Jesus' name & the Holy Spirit's power to demonstrate Jesus has authority to heal/save.
 - b. They prayed to speak about Jesus with boldness & power, regardless of the opposition.
 - c. Growing from 120 in Jerusalem to over 5000, there are bound to be differences/obstacles in community.

The Holy Spirit creates a community that's Jesus-centered in unity [Acts 4:31-32]

1. [31] They experience the power/presence of the Holy Spirit
 - a. God answers their bold prayer (cf. 4:29-30).
 - b. There's a physical manifestation of the Spirit's power/presence (a localized quake).
 - c. *All the believers* are filled with the Holy Spirit (God; the 3rd person of the Trinity).
 - d. They are empowered/emboldened to preach the gospel, regardless of opposition.
2. [32] The Holy Spirit creates Jesus-centered unity (cf. Eph 4:1-6).
 - a. [32a] As they pray & are filled by the Spirit, *all of them* ("the full number") become of "one heart & soul."
 - i. One heart: Shared desire/passion for Jesus motivates them.
 - ii. One soul (breath/essence/core being): Shared identity in Christ defines them.
 - b. [32b] "Everything in common": Shared lifestyle in Christ exemplifies them.
 - i. Not just emotionally/cognitively united, but also on a tangible, practical, everyday level.
 - ii. People still owned homes & had personal possessions (cf. 12:12; 17:5).
 - iii. If of one heart/soul/family, in daily living I don't withhold things from you; nothing labeled only "mine."
 - iv. When you have Jesus & His Spirit, you become less selfish, more humble/generous, willing to share.
3. When Jesus is the center of your life, the Holy Spirit changes your priorities & lifestyle.
 - a. We become intentionally Kingdom-minded, transformed to be givers (vs. takers/users).
 - b. We become involved/committed in Jesus' messy, imperfect family.
 - c. Our bond isn't from worldly common interests:
 - i. E.g., hobbies, politics, familial relations, ethnic/cultural origins, how long we've known each other.
 - ii. Satan's lie: Those are what we should base our sense of connection.
 - d. Our bond is on the deepest level: Primary passion, identity & lifestyle centered in Jesus.
 - i. What Jesus has done to change/rescue us; He's the love of my life & Lord over my life; I love Him & live for Him.
4. Application: Are you of one heart/soul with others at church?
 - a. Is your passion, identity, lifestyle primarily in Christ?
 - b. If not, pray boldly for God's Spirit to fill you & make Jesus foremost in your life.

What are the practices of a community united by the Holy Spirit in passion, identity & lifestyle? 2 areas:

Encourage each other in common mission [Acts 4:33]

1. [33a] The apostles experience great power to give great testimony about Jesus.
 - a. As John & Peter did (3:1-4:22), the 12 all go out to meet people far from God, heal them & share good news.
 - b. As Jesus miraculously heals through them, they tell people about Jesus' resurrection.
 - c. It wasn't just the apostles who experienced this:
2. [33b] "Grace upon all": *All of Jesus' followers* experience the favor/power of God in their gospel ministry
 - a. It's not the favor/acceptance of the people (as in 2:47) they receive, but God's grace/favor.
 - i. God's favor in answering their prayer (cf. 4:29-30) in miraculous, powerful ways.
 - b. It's not just the apostles who receive such favor/power, but all of the believers.
 - i. "Them all": The same group of people ("them"; cf. 4:34-35) who bring offering-gifts to the apostles.
 - c. The Holy Spirit empowers & emboldens all the followers to show Jesus to people.
 - i. They are all empowered to supernaturally bless people.
 - ii. They are all emboldened to use the miracles to point people to Jesus.
3. When we are united in our passion, identity & lifestyle in Christ, we encourage each other in common mission.
 - a. Deeper friendships form from having to trust/depend on Jesus together, take bold risks together, & together experience Jesus to be mighty.
 - b. Why don't we experience that level of friendship/intimacy at church?
 - i. We do not take bold risks for the gospel together.
 - c. Why don't we experience the Holy Spirit's supernatural power?
 - i. We don't do anything that requires Jesus to show Himself great/powerful.
4. Application: What if we joined the first disciples in being empowered & emboldened to be on-mission?
 - a. What if that would deepen our sense of friendship & connection that we long for?
 - b. How do you need to radically reorient your life for the sake of intentionally reaching people for the gospel together?

Encourage each other in common caring [Acts 4:34-35]

1. [34] When someone was in need, followers would take their property & sell it to share & care for each other.
 - a. The unity of God's Spirit wasn't just expressed outside the Church missionally, but also within Jesus' family.
 - b. Many in their community were poor: From small rural villages, or rejected & isolated from family/resources.
 - c. They understood & obey Jesus' Word (cf. Matt 25:35-40; Deut 15:4-11; Jas 2:15-16).
2. [35a] "Laid [the money] at the apostles' feet": Submitting to the authority of spiritual leaders
 - a. Not because they get to control the money or lord it over us.
 - b. Sometimes we need wisdom/discernment when we don't know the person or how to help.
 - c. Our policy: If someone in personal/financial need, & you don't know well, point them to a church leader first.
3. [35b] "Distributed to each as any had need": The Church family takes care of each other's needs, not greeds.
 - a. Needs: Food, shelter, clothing, job, medical, relational/emotional health, etc.
 - b. Greeds: Sluggards who are lazy, drunk, foolish, spending, gambling, chase fantasies/get-rich-quick schemes, self-centered/self-entitled, & come to ruin [cf. Prov 6, 13, 19, 20, 22, 26].
 - c. When someone was unable to care for themselves, the Church family surrounded them.
 - d. They gave sacrificially (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-5) & cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7), without expectation of return (Luke 6:34).

A live illustration: Barnabas [Acts 4:36-37]

1. [36] A man named Joseph
 - a. Levite: From the tribe of Levi; likely a priest who served in a temple; well-educated.
 - i. Levites wouldn't own property (Num 18:24); he's not rich.
 - b. From Cyprus (Mediterranean island): He wasn't born/raised in Jerusalem/Israel; he's an immigrant.
 - c. Nicknamed Barnabas: "Son of encouragement."
 - i. [Greek] *paraklesis*: One called come alongside, to console, help, encourage.
 - ii. Same root as the Holy Spirit as Helper (*parakletos*; cf. John 14:16).
 - iii. The guy who walks with you through ups & downs; gives help/support, friendship, shoulder to lean on
 - iv. He will be the first to embrace, vouch for, & minister with an ex-Pharisee (Saul/Paul) who will become one of the greatest missionaries because someone like Barnabas encouraged him.

- d. He is one of Luke's heroes, honored by God, made it into the Bible as a good guy
2. [37] Why does he have property if he's a Levite?
- a. God's people were instructed to care for the Levites without property (cf. Deut 12:19).
 - i. They were uncared for, as Sadducees & Scribes took all the money from temple operations.
 - ii. At this point in history, Levites had to fend for themselves.
 - b. As a poor immigrant from Cyprus, he owned a small, humble field that he probably lives off of.
 - c. Decision: Will he hold on to what little he has, or care for the needs of others who have even less?
 - d. As an example of great faith, he's led to sacrificially love others.
3. Application: Like Barnabas, are you a "son of encouragement" to others? Even when you don't have a lot?
- a. What sacrifices are you willing to make, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, to bless a brother or sister in need?
 - b. Satan's lies: The needs are too overwhelming; you need to deal with your own issues/needs; be insular.
 - c. You can't solve everything; you can do something; don't do nothing.

Conclusion

1. Story: A boy who preferred shadow puppets of bunnies to his mom's gift of a real one.
- a. Many of us are drifting through life, preferring a shadow of the real thing.
 - i. A shadow of the real you.
 - ii. A shadow of the real experience of life with/through Jesus.
 - iii. A shadow of real family in Christ.
 - b. Jesus miraculously took over 5000 people of different backgrounds, experiences & preferences, and weaved them into one family, of one heart/soul through His one Spirit.
 - c. If you follow Jesus, ask: By the power of Your Spirit, give me one passion, identity, lifestyle centered in You.
2. The expression of a life centered in Christ is family life called "Missional Community."
- a. We need to be both on-mission, and participate in the needs/lives of each other as a community & family.
 - b. If you are done playing Church, it's time for us to be the Church.