

The life of the Early Church Session 4



Devoted to God (Acts 2:47; 5:12-16; 8:26-40; 16:25-34)

ENGAGE - activities to set the scene

- **How well can you sell?! (You will need pictures from the link [Funny and Weird](#)).**
Print out or project pictures and descriptions of real products from the link above and ask some volunteers to try and 'sell' the rest of the group on their product as best as they can. Ask the volunteers how hard they found it to persuade people about a product that they didn't really believe in, or they didn't know very much about.
- **A successful church**
Choose a couple of people or ask everyone to draw a picture of a 'successful' church. Ask them to be as creative and detailed as possible, without worrying about artistic ability. Give opportunity for people to share their drawings and thoughts with one another. In doing so, ask them how they define success personally and what they think 'success' means, practically, for their corps/church? How do they measure success? What are actual markers of the corps/church being fruitful and successful?

PRAY - prayer activities for different contexts

The Early Church did not start outreach programmes. The Spirit of God, gratitude for their salvation, love for one another and a heart for those who did not yet know Jesus filled them. They witnessed about Jesus wherever they were by their words, their actions, and their love for one another.

- **Circle prayers (You will need paper and pens)**
 - When Smith Wigglesworth was asked how we could see revival happen, he replied: 'I draw a circle around myself and I pray that God would revive everything inside that circle.' Hand out the pens and paper and ask people to draw an outline of themselves, and a circle around that, praying for them to be filled with God's Spirit, with gratitude, with love for their brothers and sisters and with a burning heart for those who do not yet know Jesus.



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- Ask people to then draw a wider circle around their outline and get into pairs and begin to pray the same thing over each other. (If there is time, get into fours and pray the same thing over each other. Then eights, etc.)
- Then ask people to turn around and face outwards towards the world. Begin to pray specifically for friends and family who do not yet know Jesus, that by the fruit of the Spirit in people's lives they would be drawn towards God. Pray for miracles of healing in their life, or signs and wonders that might point them towards the Saviour.
- Encourage people to keep praying daily for those that God puts on their heart and to be ready at any time to share the hope and love that is in their life with those whom God puts in their path.

TEACH - content to help inform a sermon or small group outline

Context

- We sometimes read Acts 2:42-47 as if the last half of the last verse - 'And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved' - is the point of the whole thing. It isn't, but neither should it be ignored. As the new fellowship of believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to prayer, to meeting and eating together daily, and to open-handed living, one of the natural by-products of this life was a regular increase in the number of believers.

Exploration

- This should not surprise us. We were created to be in union with Christ and in loving community with one another. A group of people truly living that out is bound to be attractive. This is part of the fruit of discipleship: we begin to shine with the beauty of Jesus himself as his life infuses ours, and many people are drawn to the light as moths to a flame. (Though we should never forget the accompanying truth - that some people will want to kill the light. Christ was killed, and the young Church faced its fair share of persecution.)
- In the book of Acts we see countless examples of the early Christians involved in evangelism, in some cases through intentional mission trips, but very rarely through the type of outreach programmes we have become familiar with in modern times.



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- It seems as if the message of the gospel and the empowering presence of the Spirit was simply bursting out of them in every moment and circumstance, whether walking through the streets, meeting someone on the road, standing in front of the authorities, or stuck in jail. They couldn't keep themselves from worshipping God, caring for one another, and talking about what they had seen and knew of Jesus.
- They knew the good news and they couldn't keep it to themselves. The fruit of evangelism was born out of their intimacy and union with Christ, and God blessed the fruit of their discipleship and made it increase.
- If we want to become effective, fruitful evangelists, the key factor is not becoming experts at debate, at entertaining sermons, or at running great programmes. None of these is a bad thing, but they are not the heart of the matter. You can't (or shouldn't) communicate something that you don't know about and don't love. Our evangelism will only be 'effective' (and this is not necessarily measured by numbers) if we are branches that are deeply connected to the vine of Jesus.
- If we are bearing the genuine fruit of discipleship - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - this will become very apparent to those around us. We will be a healthy and a holy people.
- We will also be confident in speaking about what we *know* of Christ as we grow in Christlikeness. We won't just have words to say, but actions to show and a loving community to offer. And God will bless these efforts.

Conclusion

- Let us not forget the matter of miracles, signs and wonders. These seemed to happen with some regularity in the Early Church (though not always) and certainly helped with evangelism. Remember, the same Spirit who lived in them lives in us today. We cannot make miracles happen, but as we learn to trust in the Spirit's direction and help we should not be surprised to see miracles in our midst. Learning this trust and expectation comes from daily devotion to the Lord through worship, prayer, generosity, fellowship, and study of the word.



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REFLECT - questions for discussion/small groups

Read **Acts 2:42-47**, and then repeat verse 47.

- What is the Church devoted to according to this verse? What is the fruit of their devotion?
- Why do you think this new fellowship of believers was so attractive to people?
- What kinds of things have you done, or has your corps/church done, to attract people to Christ and to your fellowship?
- What has been effective? Why? What has been ineffective? Why?

Read **Acts 5:12-16**, **8:26-40** and **16:25-34**, three further stories of the Acts Church bearing the fruit of evangelism.

- What do these stories tell you about discipleship and evangelism?
- How did the Christians' devotion to God lead to effective evangelism?
- What are some common factors in the stories? What was their motivation for evangelism?
- What do you think is the most important factor for effective evangelism? Why?
- How could you, and your corps/church, bear more fruit of evangelism?
- Discuss what this would look like in practice, in daily life.

