



# Congregational Vitality

Encouraging Healthy Missional Momentum

## 10 Healthy Missional Markers - Small Group Study

### **Compelling Christian Community (Acts 2:42-47)**

- ❖ When was a time you felt ostracized or left out from a group of people?
- ❖ Somebody once said that the world would be a better place if it wasn't for people. We get what this means, but, the truth is that people make the world a wonderful place too. The answer isn't in getting rid of people, but in getting rid of bad ways people relate to each other. Jesus wanted this and he called it the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, to Jesus, is a society/community of people who relate to each other according to the King's principles, the King's will. The book of Acts paints a picture of what this looks like in chapter 2:42-47. This picture of the very first believers relating to each other is a beautiful picture of community and it compels us to seek how we can create this kind of community for the Church today. Let's look at the passage and see how it teaches us to be a community that best reflects God's kingdom.
- ❖ Read Acts 2:42-47
  - What were the things that the first believers did together? *(Have group create a list of what they see in the text. Have individuals share their lists. Write observations on a flipchart or whiteboard)*
  - How did the believers distribute material items? *(Shared possessions; also see Acts 4:32-37)*
  - Who were the leaders of this group? *(Apostles; they taught, performed miracles, distributed resources)*
  - How did God respond to this? *(Added to their number everyday!)*
- ❖ Interpretation
  - What are similarities and differences between what you read and what you see in the Church today? *(There will be a variety of answers, again take note and list out on flip chart. Keep for future reflection)*
  - Why do you think there are differences and are some of these differences good or bad? *[Church evolves as culture evolves, so the church develops new traditions or structures to deal with cultural change – i.e. buildings offering a place to gather and do ministry (good), but which can also isolate the church from the world(bad)]*
  - Sharing possessions and financial resources with each other is an incredible way to operate as a community. Why is this a significant signature of the first believers and not so much for the western church today? *(It is not an easy answer, but things such as individualism, affluence, consumerism, classism, play into the explanation)*
  - Why is leadership so important for community? *(Leadership helps build protection, trust, orientation, and direction for the community; leaders can also hurt these things if they misuse their power)*
  - This picture in Acts 2 depicts people relating together in a way that is very compelling and attractive to almost any person. Would you say this is true of the church today? Why or why not?
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - How have you most felt community from the church?
    - How have you offered community to others?
    - What is the biggest problem that causes you to not build close relationships or invest in the lives of others?
  - Your Church
    - Is Your Church a place that offers compelling community? Why or why not?
    - How can Your Church do a better job of creating community for people?

**Notes:**

## Centrality of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)

- ❖ What was a time when you were lost and how did you find your way back (i.e. driving, walking, in a large store, in a forest, etc.)?
- ❖ We use things like maps, flashlights, signs, and guides to find our way around our spatial reality. The sailors of old, used the stars to know where they were going. Now, professionals in the transportation industry use GPS. Understanding where we are and where we want to go is a fundamental component of our everyday life. It is also a fundamental component of our spiritual life. Knowing where we are and where we are headed spiritually is more critical for us than spatially even. In today's study, we are going to look at a key component for guiding our lives spiritually, God's word. Timothy was a young man who knew and valued God's word. Paul encouraged him to never let this go. The following reading and questions let us in on why Paul encourages Timothy to keep embracing God's word.
- ❖ Read 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5
  - After reading this passage, what do you think is the main point that Paul is trying to convey to Timothy? *(Ministry and life in general are full of challenges, so you need the guidance of truth to navigate the challenges)*
  - What are some of the challenges that Paul brings up in this passage? *(Persecutions, those who deceive, people departing from sound doctrine, people embracing myths, etc.)*
  - How does Paul think that Scriptures/Jewish torah (God's word) will address these challenges for Timothy? *(It will guide Timothy through deception, unsound doctrine, dealing with immorality, strengthening and equipping people, etc.)*
- ❖ Interpretation
  - Why does Paul turn to God's word as the answer? *(He believes that it has the truth to guide people's lives; Paul believes it as the universal truth for all people)*
  - Why would the Church have turned to wrong doctrine, myths, and general deception during that time? *(Because of the prevalence of different philosophies and religions; because of people within the church misunderstanding and manipulating others with half-truths)*
  - What do you think it means that Scripture is God-breathed? *(To breath into means to inspire; we know that most Scripture was written by human hands, but their minds and hearts were inspired/motivated by God)*
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - What is your view of God's word? Why?
    - Do you feel like you know God's word and do you feel equipped to study it on your own? Why or why not?
    - When was a time that God's word helped navigate your life during some challenges? How does it navigate your life right now?
  - Your Church
    - How well is Your Church teaching God's word and making it relevant to our current reality?
    - How well is Your Church equipping and training people to study and apply God's word?

**Notes:**

## Life Transforming Walk with Jesus (John 3:3,30; Phil. 1:6)

- ❖ Have you ever run into a friend you hadn't seen in years? What were the first impressions of seeing them and getting reacquainted?
- ❖ When you run into old friends typically it is an experience of getting used to how they have changed and vice versa. Most of the time it's a change for the better. Once rebellious and impetuous, now they seem to show more maturity and wisdom. Yet, this is not always the case; people can digress too. Always, their physical appearance has changed: lines set a little deeper in the face, a bit of sag around the belly, or that classic hair recession that crowns many a male. Someone once said that one thing that never changes is change. Although change is not always fun, it is something that Jesus wants his followers to embrace especially in regards to our character and behavior. In our study today, we are going to look at Jesus' emphasis on change and how that change takes place in our lives.
- ❖ Read John 3:1-21
  - What change is Jesus describing that needs to happen for someone to enter the kingdom of God? (being born again)
  - How does Jesus explain what being born again means? (being born of the Spirit)
  - How does someone become reborn of the Spirit? (trust in Jesus/follow Jesus)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - Who is this Spirit and why does the Spirit cause someone to be reborn? (*The Holy Spirit, or God's Spirit, and it is the third person of the Trinity, the power and presence of God in our lives that marks us as reborn*)
  - Why do you think Nicodemus struggled to understand this? (*He believed that the law and Jewish heritage were the marks of righteousness before God*)
  - What does it mean to believe in Jesus? (*This has to do with both belief, trust, and obedience; we need the help of the Holy Spirit to do these things, as through the Holy Spirit, God's desires are revealed or illumined*)
  - If Jesus is the key to rebirth and eternal life, why don't more people follow him? (*See verses 19-21; people don't like to come into the light*)
  - Is rebirth something that happens all at once or gradually? [*Both; it is immediate and it is gradual; (see 2 Cor. 5:17 for immediate, see Phil 1:6 for gradual)*]
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - What practices do you implement to strengthen your belief, trust, and obedience in Jesus?
    - When do you find spiritual change/transformation to happen most?
    - If we are to change to look more like Jesus, what areas in your life do you find most challenging to change?
  - Your Church
    - Does Your Church reflect a community of people whose lives are transforming? Why or why not?
    - How is Your Church helping your process of change/transformation?
    - Do you feel Your Church offers enough resources, experiences, and settings to equip people for change/transformation? Why or why not?

**Notes:**

## Global Perspective and Engagement (Acts 1:8)

- ❖ Globalization is the new buzz word of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How do you understand this concept? What are some of the ways you feel globalization impacts your life?
- ❖ Interestingly, Jesus was about the globalization of his movement, meaning, that it would go global. He commanded his disciples to go to the ends of the earth to bring testimony about him. With today's modern conventions of travel and communication, the effort to globalize Jesus has more potential than ever. Often, though, ethnocentricity and narrow minded world views challenge the Church from embracing a global effort for the gospel. Certainly, the disciples struggled with these issues as they tried to obey Jesus' commands to witness to the world. To go into their arch rival's region, Samaria, and bring the news of Jesus would have been a very disconcerting idea. How were they able to face such a challenge? Let's look at today's lesson and see what helped them carry out their witness of Jesus to the world.
- ❖ Read Acts 1:1-11
  - To whom does Luke write Acts? (*Theophilus; this could be a specific person or an honorary title used to cover a general audience; the name means "friend of God"; fundamentally, Luke is writing to someone who is not familiar with the story of Jesus and the acts of the apostles*)
  - Luke describes Jesus behavior after his resurrection. What did Jesus do? (*He showed himself to the disciples several times; gave convincing proofs*)
  - Who does Jesus promise he will send to the disciples? (*The Holy Spirit*)
  - What are the disciples concerned about? (*Jesus restoring Israel to power*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - How might Luke be carrying out the globalization of Jesus? (*By writing to those who do not know about Jesus; these would be the more educated/academic class because only they knew how to read*)
  - Jesus appeared to the disciples not once, but many times over a period of 40 days. Why? (*To create great confidence in the disciples that he was indeed alive and still directing them to carry out his ministry*)
  - Why is the Holy Spirit so important in this endeavor to globalize Jesus' movement? (*The Holy Spirit empowers and strengthens the disciples; also, the Holy Spirit is key in breaking the disciples out of their ethnocentricity because it is through the Spirit that they speak all sorts of tongues; also, it is the Spirit throughout Acts that manifests in the different ethnic communities to convince and lead the disciples to reach the world*)
  - What does the disciples' question regarding Israel tell you about their world view? (*They still see Israel as the dominant/most important people group*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - Do you think you have a global world view? Why or why not?
    - What prejudices or ethnocentric behavior do you exhibit?
    - What was a cross-cultural experience that shaped you?
  - Your Church
    - How do you feel about Your Church's efforts to globalize the gospel?
    - What things could Your Church do better to keep in touch with global issues and address them?

Notes:

## **Intentional Evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20)**

- ❖ When was the last time you found out something that made you feel so good you had to tell others about it? What was it that compelled you to tell others?
- ❖ “We’re having a baby!”, “They hired me!”, “I made the team!” There are so many scenarios that come together when something good happens to us and we have to tell people. It’s a normal way of being for us humans. We are social, so we want others to share in our experience. In today’s lesson, we will be looking at Jesus’ Great Commission to the disciples. The disciples had experienced something beyond belief in Jesus’ resurrection, let alone the three years they followed him during his ministry. Simply put, Jesus had been an incredible experience. Now, Jesus wanted them to share with others about this incredible experience, but, not just share about him, invite people to experience him themselves.
- ❖ Read Matthew 28:16-20
  - What was the reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus? (*Worship and doubt*)
  - How much authority does Jesus receive from the Father? (*All authority in heaven and earth; that’s a lot of authority!*)
  - What does Jesus tell the disciples to do? (*Go, make disciples of all nations, baptize, teach them to obey*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - Why do you think some of the disciples doubted? Does this reflect how people generally respond to his resurrection? (*According to Matthew’s Gospel, this was the first they had seen of Jesus; it would have been hard to believe at first*)
  - Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples he has been given all authority in heaven and earth? (*To affirm his divinity, which would put some weight behind his mandate to make disciples*)
  - Why do you think Jesus wants them to baptize? (*Baptism was a way of showing a new start, a new direction for one’s life*)
  - What are some teachings of Jesus that the disciples would have had to teach to future disciples? (*See Matthew 5-7, Matthew 25:34-36, John 13:35*)
  - Why would the above teachings been good news? (*Following these teachings would enact the continued realization of Jesus’ kingdom on earth as it is in heaven; this would be good news for all those oppressed, alienated, suffering, broken, lonely, and lost*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - How have you been taught to follow Jesus? Does this match-up with how Jesus taught his disciples to follow him? Why or why not?
    - How have you lived out Jesus command to go make disciples?
    - Do you feel compelled to make disciples? Why or why not?
  - Your Church
    - How is Your Church doing at making disciples?
    - Do you sense that Your Church has a burden for disciple-making? Why or Why not?
    - How is Your Church doing at equipping people to make disciples?

**Notes:**

## ***Transforming Communities through Active Compassion, Mercy, and Justice Ministries (Micah 6:8)***

- ❖ When was a time that you felt helpless and God used someone to deliver you from your situation?
- ❖ The artist Sting sings a song called “Fragile.” The song recognizes that we humans tend to use physical force or violence to secure ourselves or get our way. When this happens, however, what results may be one group’s survival, but another group’s destruction. Sting is challenging people to see all human life as fragile, meaning, to see it as something with which to take extreme care. This really lines up with the way God sees human life. God knows that humans are fragile and he shows throughout the Bible a behavior of trying to take care of humans, especially his people. He also likes to use his people to take care of others. We get a sense of God’s priority for human life in Micah ch. 6 as he holds Israel accountable to better value and take care of other humans. Let’s look at how God speaks to Israel to help them get this.
- ❖ Read Micah 6:1-8
  - Who is speaking in this passage? (*Micah and the Lord*)
  - What does the Lord say to Israel? (*Remember how I treated you when you were helpless, when you sinned and disobeyed*)
  - What does Micah say? (*That it is not religious acts that God wants; it’s treating other humans with mercy and justice; its having a humble heart*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - How would you sum up the Lord’s charge against Israel? (*The lord has shown mercy and justice to Israel, who does not in turn show mercy and justice to others*)
  - To whom would Israel have opportunity to show mercy and justice? (*Read Isaiah 58:6-9*)
  - Why do you think that to God mercy and justice are more important than religious sacrifices? (*Because God values human life over religious acts; Israel is not reflecting to the world who God truly is when she neglects human life*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - How does your life reflect God regarding compassion, mercy, and justice?
    - Are compassion, mercy, and justice hard to live out? Why or why not?
    - Where do you see compassion, mercy, and justice issues in your community or neighborhood or the world? Have you had any thoughts about how to address these issues? If so, what are they?
  - Your Church
    - How is Your Church doing in regards to compassion, mercy, and justice?
    - Does Your Church identify clear ways in which people can participate in compassion, mercy, and justice?
    - Is Your Church helping people understand what compassion, mercy, and justice mean for Your City, State, and the World?

**Notes:**

## Heartfelt Worship (Psalm 138)

- ❖ When was the last time you gave credit or recognition to someone else? What caused you to make this recognition? What did you say?
- ❖ In a way, worship recognizes God, to His face. No one in the Bible was better at doing this than King David. What made David so exemplary in his worship of God? The Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart and his Psalms certainly reflect this. David's psalms are full of words that show a man sincerely loving God and wrestling with God too. This sincerity of heart speaks more to God than any fluffy words or lines of music. God does not want anybody falsely giving him glory. Yet, when the heart is in line with God, there is no better experience than worshiping Him. Recognizing God to his face is good for the human heart because humans were created to worship God. Psalm 138 offers a great sample of David recognizing and praising God with heartfelt worship. Let's look at this passage.
- ❖ Read Psalm 138
  - What are some reasons that David gives for his praise? (*God's love and faithfulness, God's glory, God's word, God's compassion, God's provision, God's protection, God's plan/purpose*)
  - What are the "gods" that David speaks of? (*Baal, Asherah, Molech, and many other pagan gods*)
  - What things happened in David's life that showed him God protects and helps him in the face of his foes? (*Goliath, Philistines, King Saul, etc.*)
  - What thing in David's life told him that God had a purpose for him? (*His anointing from Samuel when he was younger*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - What might be some things that would be going on in David's life and world that would make him praise God the way he does? (*He's a king, he's in a context of competing nations and people groups, he deals with managing a government, etc.*)
  - Why would David mention that before the "gods" he praises the Lord? (*Israel struggled with worshiping the other pagan gods; David is wanting to show his allegiance to Yahweh and obedience to the first commandment*)
  - Why would David pray that other kings praise Yahweh? (*Yahweh wanted that Israel would reveal Him to other nations [Gen. 12:1-3]; David wants the other nations to turn to Yahweh and away from their false gods by seeing how the Israelites worship and follow Yahweh only*)
  - What purpose (v.8) do you think David may have understood for his life? (*To glorify God in his own personal life, to lead the Israelites to collectively glorify God, and through all this, to reveal God's glory to other nations so they would follow Yahweh*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - How do you define worship?
    - Do you see a difference in David's purpose and your purpose? Why or Why not?
    - What false gods do you struggle not to worship?
  - Your Church
    - How is Your Church helping people to understand worship?
    - How is Your Church's worship ministry impacting your life?

**Notes:**



## Culture of Godly Leadership (*Hebrews 13:7*)

- ❖ Who is someone who has influenced your life greatly and why?
- ❖ Leaders are supposed to influence people and in the church, specifically, they are to influence people to look more like Christ. Leaders cannot influence people to be Christ-like if they themselves are not living Christ in their own life. One of the biggest criticisms of culture against the Church is that it is a hypocrite. A big reason for this is because the Church has not been great about doing its best to strengthen and maintain integrity in its leaders. Look at the litany of Church leaders in America over the past twenty years who have been found to live secret lives of immorality or disobedience. This is not to say leaders must be perfect, but they must consistently attend to some very fundamental areas in their lives for them to hold leadership in God's community. Leadership is something very critical to the health of God's people. The author of Hebrews lines out a few of the areas to which leaders must attend, so that the health of God's Church is not deteriorated by their influence. Let's look at a few of those areas
- ❖ Read Hebrews 13:1-8
  - The author of Hebrews wants his readers to imitate Godly leaders. According to this passage what things might be important for a leader to do and model? (*Show love, be hospitable, care for oppressed, maintain sexual purity, don't love money*)
  - The author of Hebrews tells the reader to remember those leaders who spoke the word of God to them. What are they to evaluate about these leaders? (*The outcome of their lives and their faith*)
  - Who is the leader that most exemplified Godly leadership and what is the author emphasizing about this leader? (*Jesus; that he embodies integrity because he never changes or fluctuates; what you see is what you get always, see v.8*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - Why do you think the author of Hebrews focused on the areas he did to emphasize what is Godly? (*Because these were things that Jesus upheld*)
  - How do these areas compare and contrast to Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Tim. 3:1-12? (open to many answers)
  - Out of these areas of godliness, what is the easiest for a leader to hide? (*History has shown that sexual immorality can be hid pretty easy; it's probably the number one issue for pastors/leaders being let go from leadership*)
  - What would be some ways to strengthen leaders against sexual immorality? (*Accountability relationships; open to other answers from group*)
  - Why do you think the author of Hebrews tells the readers to look at the outcome of a leader's life and their faith? [*These are the fruit of maintaining a Godly life; Jesus emphasizes to look at the fruit of a person's life (see Mt. 7)*]
  - The author ends up on Jesus as the ultimate leader to imitate. How can we keep him as our foremost leader to follow and imitate? (*There may be a variety of answers*)
  - Why is Godly leadership so important for a community of believers, the Church? (*Leadership requires trust from those following; integrity builds trust; corrupt leaders greatly damage/destroy church communities*)
  - Individual
    - How do you line up with the areas of godliness in our passage? Where could you do better?
    - How much do you think about Jesus and try to really imitate his life?
  - Your Church
    - What sort of trust level do you have in Your Church's leadership? Why?
    - How well is Your Church training up Godly, competent leaders for ministry?

Notes:



## Fruitful Organizational Structures (*Exodus 18:13-26, Acts 6:1-7*)

- ❖ Split the group up into two or three teams. Using playing cards see who can build the biggest tower with the cards in a specific amount of time. When you finish, discuss what it was about the structure of the winning group's tower that made it successful?
- ❖ To have large buildings, a strong framework must be in place to support the weight and pressure. Just like buildings, organizations or communities of people need appropriate framework/structure in order for them to carry out their purpose. The early church, as we read through the book of Acts, increases in number daily. This means that after only a few weeks or months, they had become a very big community. After this short while, pressure was being put on the way the first apostles were trying to minister to the Church and the Jewish community. Their modes or structures of ministry would begin to break down under the demand of the people's needs spiritually and physically. We see a very vivid example of this in Acts 6:1-7. Yet, the apostles make an adjustment to create a better structure that supports the community. Let's look at what they did and how it can relate to the Church today.
- ❖ Read Acts 6:1-7
  - What church problem is being described in this passage? (*Grecian Jews being overlooked in the daily distribution of bread; apostles aren't able to supervise it*)
  - What did the apostles do to first address the issue? (*They brought people together to communicate the problem*)
  - What did the apostles have the people do to solve the problem? (*They had them select some leaders to be in charge of bread distribution*)
  - What kind of leaders were they to be? (*They were full of Spirit and wisdom*)
  - What was the result of this structural adjustment in the church? (*The Word of God spread and more people became disciples*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - Why did the Grecian Jews get overlooked? (*Because of prejudice*)
  - How is it that prejudice crept into the behavior of the church? (*Lack of accountability and supervision*)
  - What was it about the apostles' actions to deal with the issue that made it productive and yet, everybody was on board? [*Told everyone about the problem, let them take part in the solution (i.e. selecting the leaders)*]
  - Why would being full of wisdom and the Spirit be helpful in the role of distributing bread? (*Meeting the needs of a large community is complex and requires the guidance of wisdom as well as the Spirit*)
  - Why would more people have become disciples because of this structural adjustment? (*Apostles focused more and better time in spreading the Word*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - In your life, what responsibilities could you let go of that keep you from doing what you are supposed to do? (This could be at work, home, church, community organizations, etc.).
    - How can you begin to let go of these things? (communicate with those involved, figure out the best solution for everyone, let others be involved in the solution)
  - Your Church
    - How is Your Church doing in carrying out its ministries?
    - Where could Your Church adjust to make things more productive?
    - How is Your Church doing to communicate and solve its current challenges?

Notes:

## ***Sacrificial and Generous Living and Giving (Romans 12:1-8)***

- ❖ Do you have any stuff/material items that lay in storage and you wonder why you are hanging on to them? What keeps you from giving these items to someone else to use?
- ❖ As Americans it is very hard to absorb the biblical idea of stewardship. We operate in a proprietary culture, where we idealize private ownership and fervently guard its institution. However, when we look at our stuff through the lens of the Bible, we see the theme that God is the real owner of everything and he makes us stewards over his stuff. And, this doesn't just mean material things, but also relationships, responsibilities, and our very own lives with their respective talents, skills, and knowledge. When we see everything through the stewardship lens, it causes us to take very seriously God's desires that we share and contribute his stuff to the greater good. Paul is really trying to help the Roman church get this in ch. 12:1-8. Let's take a look at how he presents his concept of stewardship.
- ❖ Read Romans 12:1-8
  - According to Paul, how should we respond to God's mercy shown to us through Jesus? (*become living sacrifices*)
  - According to Paul, how can we know God's will? (*Don't conform to the pattern of this world; renew your mind*)
  - How does Paul want us to think about ourselves? (*With sober judgment; don't over-perceive your importance or your demonstration of faith*)
  - What is the image that Paul is using for the church and how does each person work within this image? (*A body and every person takes on a particular bodily function based on their respective gifts/abilities*)
- ❖ Interpretation
  - What do you think it means to be a living sacrifice? (*Surrender our lives to God; give Him his stuff back*)
  - What does it mean to renew your mind, so you can know God's will? [*Focus our minds on God's principles/priorities; this helps us know how we can use our lives for God's glory and neighbor's good vs. our own glory and good (which is the world's pattern)*]
  - Why is it critical that church people don't over-perceive their importance? (*Because when one member of the body over-perceives themselves they get in the way of other members trying to do their role in the church; it can disrupt the stewardship equilibrium*)
  - If the body is the church, what role does Christ play? (*See Eph. 4:15&16, 5:23*)
  - Are there times when the Head and Body are in conflict? If so how? How can the church get in line with the Head? (*Open to many answers*)
- ❖ Application
  - Individual
    - What is the hardest area in your life to sacrifice over to God? Why?
    - What spiritual gifts, abilities, and resources do you possess and how have they defined your role in the church body? Are you currently using those gifts and abilities for God? Why or why not?
  - Your Church
    - How is Your Church doing to help people understand generous giving/stewardship of God's stuff?
    - Is Your Church a generous church? Why or why not?
    - How could Your Church better equip people to manage God's stuff?

**Notes:**