

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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## The Growth Program of the Early Church

by Dan Trygg

“They were continually devoting themselves to the doctrine of the apostles and to open-sharing, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers....<sup>44</sup> And all the ones believing were being upon the same thing and were having all things in shared-availability;<sup>45</sup> and they were selling their property and possessions and were distributing to all, according-as ever anyone was having need.<sup>46</sup> According to each day devoting themselves with the same passion both in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing meals together with gladness and openness of heart,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding the ones being saved according to each day upon the same thing” Acts 2:42,44-47

**If you could be a fly on the wall on the day of Pentecost, or the days immediately following, to observe the follow-up program of the early church in Jerusalem, what would you see?** Those first days after Pentecost were some of the most exciting, explosive, white-hot days of the Body of Christ. Remember what had happened? The apostles, Jesus’ mother and brothers, and other close followers of Jesus had been gathering in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem for about ten days of prayer, waiting and seeking God for the Promise of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit. They did not know what exactly to expect, but Jesus had told them to “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49), ...so they waited, and prayed, ...they waited, and prayed. Suddenly, they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and, when they looked around, they saw what appeared to be like a flame of fire hovering over the head of *each* person! When they opened their mouths, they suddenly spoke in other languages, ...languages they did not even know! They were all speaking loudly, and filed out of the house into the street. The noise of their exclamations soon drew a crowd of onlookers. There were many pilgrims in town, Jews who had traveled from all over the Roman empire to come for the feast of Pentecost. As they heard the commotion, they gathered to see what was going on. To their amazement, these Galilean Jews were proclaiming praises to God in all their various native tongues! Certainly, this *was* a *miraculous* event, and most were amazed. There were some who mocked, however. Peter stepped forward to explain the phenomenon. He said this was the fulfillment of words spoken by prophets of old. This was none other than the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would come in the last days, before the Lord returns in judgment. It was also an opportunity for people to repent and call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. Peter then explained that this had happened because Jesus, a man designated by God through miracles, signs and wonders, which God worked through Him in their midst, had been delivered over according to God’s predetermined plan, and “...you nailed Him to a cross, ...and put him to death”, *but*, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *He* has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:22,23,32,33). “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- *this Jesus* whom *you* crucified” (2:36). As Peter preached, the people were cut to the heart, and cried out, saying, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter then instructed them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). About 3,000 people received Peter’s message and were baptized that day.

**So, what do you do with 3,000 new converts?** The apostles had no church buildings, or ministry staff, or books, tapes or videos to give to people. **There were 11 apostles, plus an additional 109 followers, men and women, who were gathered in the upper room when all this happened. What did *they* do? *They got everyone involved in a growth program.*** They developed a strategy, and put it into effect, *immediately*. **Everyone was encouraged to do four things: They were to be devoted to (1.) the doctrine of the apostles; (2.) the open-sharing with other believers; (3.) sharing meals together; and, (4.) the prayers.**

**These activities were to occur in two very different settings.**

***They met daily in the Temple.*** This was not unusual. While there was only one Temple to Yahweh in the entire world, when people were in Jerusalem, they made a point of going to the Temple for prayers. This occurred at 9 a.m, noon, and 3 p.m. Generally, the most well-attended was the time at 3 p.m., because the day was soon coming to an end. After the Temple prayers, the Christians would meet in the portico of Solomon, a back porch area out of the main flow of traffic. **At these meetings, the apostles could give instruction to a larger gathering of disciples.**

***After these meetings, they would adjourn to home groups.*** At these home groups, small, intimate gatherings of believers would meet for further instruction about the teachings of the apostles, share a meal

together, where they could converse about how things were going, how they were doing in their faith, as well as share struggles and difficulties they were experiencing. At the end of these meals, they would unite together around a reenactment of the Lord's supper, to remember the Lord's death, resurrection and victory over sin and death, as well as to emphasize their oneness in Him. They would close out their evening together by praying for one another and other concerns that may have been on their hearts.

**How do I know this was the normal growth pattern for these new believers? This is clearly emphasized in the Greek by the phrase, “*they were being upon the same thing*”, which occurs in verse 43, and again in verse 47. God was adding new converts “upon the same thing”. Whether following the 9 a.m. prayers, the noon day prayers, or the late afternoon prayers, **it appears that this same pattern was being diligently pursued, so that everyone who was interested and devoted could attend a large group gathering and a small-group gathering every day.** AND, virtually all of these new converts *were* deeply excited, committed and devoted to growing and living out their faith. **Thus, the early Jerusalem church grew rapidly, and had a significant impact in the city.** Everyone became aware of these “followers of the Way”, as they were called. They were radical and refreshingly practical. *The quality of their lives was vastly different.* The level of *their righteousness, their love and devotion to God, and their love and concern for others* dramatically changed. There was not even any poor among them, because they shared their resources with those who had needs.**

**Now to us, this may seem quite radical, but this pattern of daily church involvement was preserved through much of church history** in the Roman Catholic church. Throughout the Middle Ages, and even up to modern times, it was *expected* that people would attend an early morning Mass *every day*, and evening vespers. The entire community revolved around the church, so people's jobs, families and other responsibilities were scheduled and accomplished around these church meeting obligations. When I was a new believer, I was part of a group of young people that met five times a week. The church I attended also met on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings and Wednesday nights. We often had Bible study groups we attended at other times in the week. **It has only been in the past few years that people seem more resistant to meet more than once or twice in a week.**

**Why do I think this regular meeting is so important? It offers a daily discipline to keep the Lord as our priority on a daily basis. This is a discipline; it is not legalism. It is a useful methodology to help us grow.** It doesn't mean we earn more points with God for doing it. It will be advantageous to help us grow, however. *It keeps us learning* more of what it means to be a Christian. **What was the “doctrine of the apostles”? Do you know?** They were especially prepared and gifted by God to give us the correct and valuable instruction that will equip us for life as a Christian. Don't you think this is *worth* learning? **This kind of daily discipline would also help us to develop community with other believers** who can support and encourage us in our growth, and to whom we also can offer help and ministry. I not only learn how to ask and receive help from others, but I also learn how to serve, as well. **An intimate small group also offers accountability, especially if it is made up of honest, serious-minded seekers,** people who share their real struggles and concerns with one another. I become someone who is known, and who is missed, if I don't show up. If I truly develop friendships with others in the group, they will seek me out to check on why I wasn't there. This is not about control; this is healthy love and concern for one another. There is also something wonderful about sharing the Lord's supper with others in such a small, informal setting. It is very personal. Yet, because we do it together, we feel somehow bound together. **Finally, this kind of discipline keeps our focus on the spiritual underpinnings of our journey and our battle. We need God's help.** Christianity is *not* a self-help program. It is entirely dependent upon the working of God in our lives, and the lives of others. Prayer is critical. A daily discipline of meeting with others that includes prayer is *so* helpful to keep that center stage. *We also learn from one another, as we pray.* From the simplest, fresh cry of a child or a new believer, ...to the example of the prayers of a man or woman steeped with years of experience in intercession and rooted in the promises of God..., there is *always* blessing to be gained when we come to Daddy together. My life has been deeply enriched by participating with others in prayer, and by having others come alongside me to lift up my burdens and needs to God in prayer.

With the persecution of Acts 8, the large gatherings in the Temple were stopped. For the next 275 years, followers of the Way met primarily only in the smaller home groups. **Regular interaction with serious, motivated disciples of Christ was a key part of the strength of the church** during those days. People met to pass along the apostolic doctrine, to share with and encourage one another, and to keep things focused on Christ's sacrifice and victory over sin and death by observing the Lord's supper at their potluck meals, and by consistently seeking God together in prayer. **What can you do to step up your spiritual growth program?**