**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

**Topic: THE CHURCH WE CAN BE**

**Trainer: Pastor Bill Vasilakis**

I love Jesus’ church because it’s the wonderful family of our loving Heavenly Dad.

It’s been my privilege and delight to belong to two fantastic local church families since I came to Christ in 1971. Adelaide Christian Centre, the Mother Church of our CRC denominational family was my spiritual home as I grew from a teenager to a young man. Since 1978 I’ve had the very fortunate task of leading the Christian Family Centre.

I’ve been an intimate witness on how Jesus leads and grows His Church, and how it really can be a magnificent, hope-filled God-like family. My local church and churches like ours are meant to really be the loving and united family of our Heavenly Dad in the location He places us.

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**So what kind of church can we be, if our Father in heaven is allowed to shape us as He wants?** Well, the best description of what a church family looks like, is Dr Luke’s brief statement about the first church at Jerusalem, and it’s a powerful picture.

*“41That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. 42They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. 43Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! 44And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. 45They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met. 46They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they 47praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.”* **Acts 2:41-47** (The Message)Luke tells us in verse 41 that repentance, water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit are the important **first steps** to get us into, and established in Jesus’ Kingdom.

Then in verse 42 he lists the four indispensable **habits** that are necessary if we are to develop properly and remain on fire for Jesus.

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Luke is saying that these first Christians remained ablaze in their love for their heavenly Father and didn’t let their fire become a mere flicker, because they wholeheartedly devoted themselves to some key spiritual disciplines. In the midst of all the activity around them, these brand new believers set aside specific time to **learn**, to **fellowship**, to **worship** and to **pray**. Their persistent attention to these critical disciplines paved the way for the mighty works God accomplished through them. We will grow rapidly when we receive and apply the **teachings** that called and gifted leaders share with us and when we **connect** deeply with other believers to further the cause of Christ throughout the world. When our **worship** is cross-centred and Christ-exalting and **prayer** pervades our personal lives and corporate gatherings, there will be no limits to what God can do through us. Greg Laurie’s terrific book ‘*On Fire’ about the Acts church opens this up in a most inspiring and practical way.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Luke is telling us that the evidence of true conversion is a wholehearted commitment and devotion to Jesus and to a localised Christian community, like this one in Jerusalem. They were connected to this local church immediately upon conversion, as only in the living community of a local group of Christ followers, can personal growth and ministry development occur in a balanced, healthy way.

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Then as we closely examine verses 43-47, Luke describes the **results** of their devotion to Jesus and their commitment to one another as members of the Jerusalem church. Once can see the clearly observable **fruit** of their transformed lives through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

They had a deep **reverence** for the things of God. (v43a)

They operated a **miraculous ministry**, where the sick were healed and those bound by evil spirits were delivered (v43).

They experienced a **dedicated unity** that released their collective strengths. (v44)

They were **materially generous**, which revealed how selfless and loving they had become (v45).

They saw themselves as **full-time Christians** and part-time everything else, meeting as a large group and also in **small groups** that were known for their **joyful**, **authentic** and **hospitable** way of life (v46).

They were **dependent** on God, always **thankful** and **respected** by their non-Christian neighbours (v47a).

Finally, they experienced a God-ordered **growth pattern** as people were giving their lives over to Jesus on a daily basis (v47b).

I doubt that we can find a better description of church life, and it’s an ideal that many of us have tried to keep the Christian Family Centre aligned to over the years. This passage has been a constant **diagnostic tool** and a **guiding compass** to help our leaders follow the pattern of this ground-breaking early church. I’ve lost count of the number of times I have used this Acts 2:41-47 passage to assess the spiritual health of our church. With brutal honesty we prayerfully face the facts about the real state of the church as we go over every one of the transferable principles in this passage. We assess our scene on a scale of 1 to 10 and I can honestly say that I’m totally discontented if we fall below five. My joy and gratitude to God returns when we are six or higher on the scale.

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A leaders task is to keep fanning the embers of these timeless truths till they become a raging fire once again among Jesus’ people.

We are to preach, teach, model, pray and organise them into existence and purposefully keep them at the forefront of the church.

A few years ago we became aware that we were not seeing enough healing miracles; we were probably around 2-3 out of 10 on the scale. We addressed it by bringing in a dear friend Pastor Ian Miller to stimulate our peoples faith, introduce Healing Clinics and make a real focus on lifting our believing bar. It worked and the number of physical healings became more pronounced in our church over the next couple of years. You really do get what you go for. This applies to all of this inspiring Acts 2 passage that paints a clear picture of the normal Christian church that we can be.

**Here are another couple of questions:**

How can we get our church family to look like the Acts 2 model?

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There’s a most enlightening passage from Paul’s writings that answer these two questions. In fact, if Acts 2:41-47 is the best **descriptive** passage of what a biblically functioning Church family looks like, then Ephesians 4:1-16 would have to be the best **prescriptive** passage on how to become a Christ-centred and Christ-like Church family that reflects the Acts 2 picture. This Ephesians passage is so key, that I’m going to spend the next four chapters opening these amazing verses up. Both the Acts and Ephesians scriptures reveal to us that Jesus’ church is the only hope for our world. This vision of the church that we can be, captured my heart as a young man and it has been seducing me ever since. I pray that what I have been attempting to outwork in practical church leadership over the past four decades, will be helpful to you.

Let’s jump in and read the first six verses: *“1As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* **Ephesians 4:1-6** (NIV)

In this marvellous passage, Paul passionately shares about seven characteristics that all Christ-followers and all church families are to display. This includes us. These reflect what our loving heavenly Father is like and as His spiritually reborn children, we are to be ‘chips off the old block’. What is more, if Jesus is really living in us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20), we can, with his miracle working power, be changed to reflect these family characteristics.

**HOW CAN WE REFLECT THE FAMILY LIKENESS?**

**First, we will reflect the family likeness when we are filled with humility and this has to do with our attitude towards ourselves.**

The Greek word for humility is *tapeinophrosyńe*, which means lowliness of mind like the total submissiveness of a slave. Let’s be honest, corrupting pride is behind all division in every dimension of our relating to others. It’s the mother of all sins and the root and fountain of all the types of evil we will encounter in this life. Yes! Even within Jesus’ beautiful church. Only humility, through Christ’s example and His powerful indwelling presence can neutralise its terribly toxic effects, whether in our natural family or in our church community.

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*7But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8This is why it says:*

*“When he ascended on high,  
    he took many captives  
    and gave gifts to his people.”*

*9(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*14Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

1. ‘On Fire’ by Greg Laurie – 1993 Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon [↑](#footnote-ref-1)