



Acts 2:42-47

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Last week we remembered Pentecost, the moment when the disciples were baptised with the power of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly the disciples who had been in lockdown, hiding for fear, boldly stepped into the streets and declared the wonders of God (Acts 1:11) in different languages. Peter, utterly transformed, stood up and preached about the work of Christ. As a result, 3,000 chose to believe and were baptised. The Church was born. These newly baptised disciples found that the Holy Spirit knitted them together becoming a community of God’s people with the twelve disciples, now known as Apostles, at the helm. They were ordinary people, that had one thing in common, namely, faith in Jesus Christ and they lived with their lives surrendered and under the control of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Acts recounts the first 30 years of the Church. It sets the blueprint for all churches throughout the ages. As we read the book we discover the principles that should govern our church today. A new way of life that stands in contrast to the world around.

They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching to mature in the Faith

The first thing that Luke notes about this new church community is that the devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching. These 3,000 new Christians would have known the Old Testament teachings of the law, but they did not have any knowledge about Jesus Christ and how He freed them from this strict law other than Peter’s preach (Acts 2:14-41). To know God’s commandments is to know His law but it is not enough, they needed to be taught and disciplined to know Jesus Christ through His teachings and the testimony of the Apostles. As they learnt they matured in their faith and became more and more like Christ so they could continue the work that Jesus had called them to, which in a nutshell was to fulfil the great commandment and the great commission.

As I reflect on this I am struck by the organisational nightmare this would present. I am thinking organisational meetings, lists of names, contact details, data protection forms signed, letters of invitations, second letter of invitation, sourcing and creating suitable material, training of group leaders, finding homes to meet in, organising suitable times and days, letters to remind everyone etc, months of preparation and organisation. And they accomplished this all without technology – phew! I get tired just thinking about it. However, it seems that the teaching and discipleship happened very naturally, and the influencing factor was the Holy Spirit at work in their lives giving everyone the desire to devote themselves to learn, daily, with each other as a community. Everyone wanted to be there. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47b).

I devote myself to God's word to mature in the Faith

The spoken word of the Apostles was finally written down, recorded, and eventually compiled into the Bible so that we can benefit from the teachings that the first Christians received and grow up into maturity. Learning from God's word and growing to maturity matters, as Paul writes:

"I want you to know how much I have agonised for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally.

I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love.

I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ Himself. In Him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments.

For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you.

And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.

Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on him.

Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." (Colossians 2:1-7 NLT)

I encourage you to spend some time reading and reflecting in these verses of Scripture:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16)

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (Romans 10:17)

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—
put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9)

“...Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

God states “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes,
you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
Stand firm then, with the ...
... sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” (John 6:63)

In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23) Jesus reveals that He sows the seeds of God’s Word, the good news, into our hearts and minds. And this seed is alive and living. Plus, the state of our hearts and minds, the soil, is imperative for our growth and the future harvest to come from the living Word of God. For if God’s Word falls on:

- a path, which represents a hard heart & mind, then the Word will not be able to take root and flourish. In fact, Satan will take it away.
- rocky places, which represent a shallow heart & mind, the Word is received with joy, but the Word of God is unable to produce a root to anchor itself and grow. With nowhere to grow the Word quickly dies in time of trial and persecution.
- thorny places, which represents an overcrowded, closed heart & mind, the Word is heard but with no space to grow because of financial and daily worries of life, it does not become fruitful.
- good cultivated soil, which represents an open receiving heart & mind, the Word is heard, received, and understood. As a result, the person is mightily blessed by the huge crop that grows from this one seed. This person matures in the Word, in their faith, and in Christ.

The living Word is active in the lives of those who receive it and has many layers. Upon reading it the living word of God speaks into our hearts. Upon studying it we are led deeper in our understanding and mature in our faith. Upon mediating upon it we allow it to dig deep anchoring it into our core. Daily putting all three into practice aids us to become the children of God He desires for us. In addition, we find that it sustains us (Luke 4:4), it brings faith (Romans 10:17), it has freedom to accomplish God’s will (2 Timothy 2:9), it gives spiritual birth (1 Peter 1:23), and it gives us nourishment aiding us in all situations and difficulties.

Commentator Matthew Henry wrote that the Bible:

“convinces powerfully, converts powerfully, and comforts powerfully.
It makes a soul that has long been proud, to be humble;

and a perverse spirit, to be meek and obedient.
Sinful habits, that have become as it were natural to the soul,
and rooted deeply in it, are separated and cut off by this sword.
It will discover to men their thoughts and purposes, the vileness of many,
the bad principles they are moved by, the sinful ends they act to”
(Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, Hebrews 4:11–16).

According to the psalmist, the person who meditates on and delights in the Word will be

“like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither” (Psalm 1:2–3).

Therefore, every time we come to the living word of God, we need be open minded and ready to hear what God is saying to us. Rather than shutting the Bible and running off into the day, we need to spend time reading, studying, meditating, thinking upon it, and receive the message God has for us within it. We need to allow the Word to challenge our thoughts and motives, allowing it to grow deep within our hearts. As we allow this to happen the Word of God will bring about transformation and blessings into our lives. We will become more and more like Christ and be more and more a blessing to those around us.

The Church community exists to aid maturity in the Faith

Today, we are in a unique and privileged position like never before. For centuries, the Bible was only attainable by the Pastors because the congregation were not able to read it. Today, with education improvements and technology, the Scriptures, devotionals, commentaries, theological writings etc are available to all at our fingertips. However, that does not mean we are to stop meeting together and sitting under the teachings of those who are gifted to teach within the Church. We are to acknowledge the gift of teaching that God has bestowed on those He chooses through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to release them to use that gift within our church community and submit ourselves to learn under their gift. Thus, enabling ourselves to grow and mature in our faith together as a community of God’s people.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:16-17)

Here Paul reveals that teaching is not only for those who have been given the gift from the Holy spirit. As Brothers and Sisters in Christ we have a responsibility to aid each other to mature in Christ. After all, it is God’s desire for everyone to mature in Him, therefore, it should be our desire too. And that can only be worked out in practice by God’s family meeting together, caring and loving each other as Christ loves us. We also need humility to allow our Brothers and Sisters to come alongside us to teach and counsel us with all the wisdom that God gives them.

Do you come to church expectant to learn from your Brothers and Sisters in Christ?
Are you open for God to fill you with wisdom to speak into someone’s life?

Of course, before we can teach admonish, counsel each other we need to know God's word. It is too easy to lean upon and give wisdom from the world when looking for help and counsel, but God makes it clear that all we need is His word for it is our guide to life.

However, teaching involves so much more than unpacking theological insights. You also have a wealth of knowledge that is insightful. As you share your stories of life, testimonies, and experiences you are teaching others. As you go about your day, whether good or bad, you are teaching others about the Christian faith and your walk with God. When we give wisdom about how to love a difficult relative, or sharing a testimony about making the right decision, or praying, or offering advice from our experiences or offering something we have learned from Scripture that has been a help, we are teaching. Therefore, the more we know God's word the more our actions and speech will be filled with Biblical wisdom rather than worldly wisdom.

As a result, small groups are so important. Different churches will have different names for these groups – discipleship groups, bible study groups, life groups, house groups, home groups, cell meetings etc. These groups usually have no more than 12 people, thus they are safe places where everyone can share their lives together, encourage each other, teach each other, and learn together, thus aiding each other to grow up in Christ. BHBC is currently about to start a Bible study on Ruth. If you have not already done so and are able I would so encourage you to join one of our small group zoom meetings. I invite you for your own growth but also so you can aid your Brothers and Sisters to mature in Christ as God desires.