

Text: Acts 2:41-47

Title: "Be Fruitful and..."

Introduction: This is the wrap-up week to our series, "ESSENTIAL". Over the past few weeks we've heard some disturbing news about the state of the Christian Church in America. We have found that people are quitting mainline denomination (Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Catholic, etc.) churches by the thousands. As our population in the United States has gone up substantially over the past 40 years, attendance at Christian Churches has gone down substantially. The United Methodist Church has lost over 2 million members over the past 40 years ... 73,000 members just last year. The Lutheran Church has lost at least 50,000 members each year since 2002. The Catholic Church is losing members and priests like never before in their history.

Why do we care? Here's why: If the United Methodist Church continues to lose members/attendees at the rate it is now, in 44 years, there is no more United Methodist Church in the United States. I might be dead and gone, but I hope my kids are still alive ... and my grandkids.

LET'S PRAY!

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will find an outline that is not quite complete. Your job today is to fill in those blanks as we go along. Our job is to give you the answers to those blanks, so watch the screens. This is not to be used for just this hour, but please take this home and refrigerate it. Look back at the scripture and the outline and be reminded more than once about what we've talked about today and maybe explore how God might want you to respond to what we learn. For those of you listening on line or IPODING, you can download the outline off of our website as well.

I grew up in the United Methodist Church. I believe in the United Methodist Church as a tool to be used by God for God's Kingdom. I have seen lives transformed, whole communities change because of United Methodist churches... I believe that the structure of the United Methodist Church can be used by God to bring faith in Jesus Christ back to the forefront of consciousness in America. I want my kids, grandkids, great-grandkids, etc. to have an opportunity to meet up with and live for Jesus Christ in this world. I want them to have a chance to serve God's Kingdom through a church. I want them to experience KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.

I want my descendents to carry on the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world they live in! I want so bad to meet up with someone in heaven who says, "Wow, your Stan Pegram. If you had not been a 'good and faithful servant' I would not have met Jesus Christ back in 2090!"

Here is a chart to help us see the direction the Christian Church is headed:

Who Attends Church in America Each Weekend?

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Birth Years</i>	<i>Percentage Attending Church</i>
Builders/Industrials	Before 1946	51%
Boomers	1946-1964	41%
Busters/GenX	1965-1976	34%
Bridgers/GenY	1977-1994	29%

Do you get it? If you and I don't make the necessary changes now so that generations after us will be at all interested in a faith in Jesus Christ and if BMZ Church does not lead a church revolution of some sort; there's not going to be a United Methodist Church or a Christian Church. We, you and I, live at a pivotal point in history. It's up to us to say, "Yes, we will do whatever it takes to help the church continue to be the tool that God planned to use to build the Kingdom" or "No, I don't really care if my kids and grandkids ever experience the thrill of knowing Jesus Christ or the Eternal Paradise promised."

If we are going to be the Church that Jesus Christ planned, some things have to change and get better at BMZ. We have learned that in order to be ESSENTIAL in the lives of younger generations, we have to have SIMPLE structures that can be understood and followed. We have to continually take people DEEPER in their faith experiences and understanding. If we are going to connect with the next generations, we have to have an environment of HIGH EXPECTATIONS of membership.

This week, we are reminded that in order to be ESSENTIAL and Live, we have to MULTIPLY!

Multiplication flashcards? (1x1=?; 3x4=?; 70x7=?; 100x0=?)

Well, that gets us to our Scripture for today. We are in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is the story of the Church. The Church was God's plan ... a movement of people for a particular purpose ... "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you (Matthew 28:19-20)." These orders were to be carried out by the Church. Here's how that Movement got Moving:

READ ACTS 2:41-47!

- I. Early Church = Three Things they did in order to be Affective in Society ... in order to be the Church that God wanted them to be:
 - A. Unified (v.42, 44, 45, 46)
 1. v. 42 = "All the believers ... teaching, fellowship, meals and prayer." They spent time together daily ... following Jesus was a lifestyle for them ... TOGETHER!
 2. v. 44 and 45 = "And ALL the believers met together in ONE PLACE ... shared everything... sold property and possessions and shared the money..." They cared about each other so much that they made sure everyone had what they needed!
 3. v. 46 = They worshipped together at the Temple ... met in homes ... shared their meals ... (wait for it) ... WITH GREAT JOY AND GENEROSITY..."
 4. In order to be affective, they had to be TOGETHER in what they were doing. They knew that they couldn't change the world on their own ... they NEEDED EACH OTHER! They had one heart and mind about serving the Kingdom of God!

- B. Magnified (v.43, 46, 47a)
1. v. 43 = What was life all about for them? Not themselves! “A deep sense of awe came over them all...” They were in the presence of God and they knew it!
 2. v. 46 = “They WORSHIPPED Together...” They didn’t miss the chance to worship GOD with each other ... they knew that life was not about them! They knew that their faith in God was the most important thing!!
 3. v. 47a = You know what characterized the early Church? “All the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.”! They were focused on their faith in God and enjoyed being around each other. They were all FOCUSED on the Kingdom of God; not themselves!
 4. Get it? God was lifted up as great ... God was MAGNIFIED!
- C. Multiplied (v.41, 47b)
1. v. 47b = The last thing that characterized the Church? Don’t miss this. This was a major part of who the Church is the way God wants it to be ... “And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”
 2. v. 41 = We know from verse 41 that they started the Church with 3,000 members. Peter preached and 3,000 people said, “We want to follow Jesus!” they were baptized and made part of the Church.
 3. Okay, one sermon; 3,000 new people following Jesus Christ! Wow! Do I ever have a lot of work to do ...
 4. Maybe you’ve heard people say this: “Remember the Good Old Days when we knew everyone in the church? Remember when we knew everyone by name?”
 5. We think that’s a good thing, but that’s not being the Church ... not according to Scripture!

II. Evangelism

- A. Imagine the reactions you would get if you walked into a crowd of people and used the word “Evangelism”.
1. Some would be excited and talk about the Great Commission and that’s what we are supposed to do as Christians.
 2. Most would say things like, “Those darn Christians always trying to shove their narrow-minded beliefs down my throat!” People running around yelling that the end is near and we need to REPENT or we’ll go to hell...
- B. Don’t forget what Jesus said. Jesus plan was for His disciples / followers to TELL other people the *Good News of Jesus Christ – God is way more concerned about your future than your past.*
1. Jesus died on a cross in order to offer forgiveness for our past, so that’s covered.

2. God really wants to talk about how you will serve God's Kingdom in the future!
3. How many people do you know that would love to be told that God is willing to forget their PAST?!?

III. De-Churched to Re-Churched

We understand that 70% of the people who grew up in the church leave between the ages of 18-22. They quit. They are de-churched people. But, there is GOOD NEWS! Studies show that 1/2 to 2/3 of those people get back into church in some capacity by the time they are 30 (Re-Churched!).

So, how did they get back to church? We know from asking people who actually came back that 3 things work:

A. Family and Friends –

1. Of the 394 people interviewed who went from De-Churched to Re-Churched, a solid 50% of them said that they came back to church because of the encouragement of a FAMILY MEMBER and/or FRIEND.
2. So, between the ages of 18-22, 70% of those people leave the church, but if they are encouraged by family or friends, half of those might come back.
3. The majority of these left the church, not because they were mad, but because it wasn't ESSENTIAL. It was an option.
4. So, if we are going to ask family and friends to invite them back, the church needs to show how ESSENTIAL it is in life.
5. If we ask them back, and we are still trying to conduct our business the same as we did 20-40 years ago; they aren't staying.
6. Remember, it has to make sense to them ... SIMPLE, DEEPEN, EXPECTATIONS and now, MULTIPLY!
7. This next generation has to know that they are part of a movement that is set on changing the world for good!

B. Invite Someone –

1. In interviewing more than 300 unchurched persons, studies showed that 31% of the people were "Very Likely" to attend worship if a Christian family member or friend asked.
2. 51% said they were "Somewhat Likely" to attend worship if asked by a Christian family member or friend.
3. That's 8 out of 10 people that would attend a worship celebration if they were just asked by someone they knew cared about them (family or friend).
4. BUT, here's the deal: If you want this to work (as you think in your head of a person you know that you've always wanted to invite to worship, but just haven't had the guts), they will be much more comfortable if the person who invites them actually walks into the church facilities with them the first time they attend!!!!

5. Do you know what that means? “Hey, what are you doing this weekend? You in town? Cool. I was wondering if you’d like to go with me to worship at BMZ this Sunday morning. I would be happy to pick you up around _____ / I’ll meet you in the back parking lot at _____. (pause) Yeah, you’re right, that’s kind of early, but they have coffee. (pause) What? You don’t feel like you have anything decent to wear? The Pastor wears jeans! (pause) Great! I’ll see you then!”
6. The scariest part about coming to a new church is getting through the doors!! Like dialing the phone for a date (just dial the last number!)...
7. Homework = INVITE A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER BETWEEN NOW AND CHRISTMAS!

C. Life Events –

1. My Dad (former pastor) told me early and often, “Stan, you can grow a church off of weddings and funerals.” I would like to add, baptisms!
2. My Dad understood that people take a serious look at their own lives, their children’s lives and their eternity around significant LIFE EVENTS!
3. If we show caring and kindness and supply people’s needs around life-changing events, they might listen when we invite them to get to know Jesus Christ.
4. Let me add this one ... birth of a baby! If we can create a ministry to help out young families of our communities after having a baby, we have an inside track to speaking to those moms and dads about the faith side of their lives!
5. That’s EVANGELISM! What did Jesus do? Took care of people’s needs and then invited them to get to know God.

Okay, that was for people who were once involved in a church and then quit. What about the people who never attended church more than a couple of times in their lives? What about the...

IV. Unchurched

A. The Book of Haggai

1. In this two-chapter Book, the Jews have been allowed by the Persians to return to their homeland after being exiled by the Babylonians. When they returned, they found the City of Jerusalem in ruins ... the walls around the city, the buildings and even the Temple in ruins.
2. Haggai was a prophet speaking for God when he said that the people expected much, but got little ... their harvests were not good, they were hungry and their work was not paying off ... why so many problems?

3. “Because my house still lies in ruins, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses.” (1:9)
 4. The people of Israel were in trouble because they were commanded to rebuild the Temple and instead they chose to rebuild their own desires and comforts first. It didn’t work so well with their relationship with God.
 5. You and I have been commanded by God through Jesus Christ to “go into all the world and make disciples for Jesus Christ, baptizing them and teaching them about Jesus.”
 6. But, way too many American Churches and “Christians” are not following orders. We are more concerned about our own comforts and desires than we are Jesus Christ.
 7. Then, we have the nerve to ask why God is not blessing us!!
- B. Doctrine Multiplies
1. If we are going to be ESSENTIAL in the lives of people who are Unchurched, we have to know what we believe, why we believe it and live it out in our everyday lives!
 2. These younger generations are smart and they see through fakers. They want to see someone / anyone actually be passionate and live life according to their beliefs (repeat)!
 3. We live in a culture with very few “Absolutes” or “Truths”. The next generations desire to know TRUTH and see it in action!
- C. Don’t Just Stand There...
1. As we wrap up this series, let me finish with this... We now know why the Christian Church in America is dying ... we know that we have to make changes in order to live and grow and be a healthy part of people’s lives again ... we know that in order to be ESSENTIAL to the next generations, we have to do something NOW.
 2. Don’t Just Stand There ... let’s INTENTIONALLY do something to change the world for good!!
 3. I know it would be WAY Easier to go back to doing things the way we used to do them.
 4. It would be WAY Easier to NOT ask my friend or family member to come to worship and pick them up or meet them in the parking lot.
 5. It would be WAY Easier NOT to change what we are doing and challenge other churches to do the same.
 6. It would be WAY Easier to DIE as a Church than it will be to LIVE as a Church. I choose to LIVE!
 7. I choose to MULTIPLY!

Next Week: Our Economy Ain’t Pretty. Help is on the way! KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD. Let’s Pray!