

The Big Idea 2009: Community

#1 How it started.

1. Intro

Welcome to this Bible Study which forms part of the "Big Idea Series."

The principle behind the "Big Idea" is that we channel a lot of energy into dealing with a basic concept and hopefully get it into our heads, hearts and lives.

Our overall theme is "Community." In the first week we look at how the first church looked.

1.1) Sunday's Sermon: Summary.

Readings: 1Kings 19:11-18; Ephesians 4:1-16

- God is Trinity – Perfectly Loving Community of Father, Son and Spirit. We are created in His image: Community is a Theological Imperative.
- Elijah was devastated at the thought of being alone. It was part of his burnout. God pointed out that there were 7000 others who had not bowed to Baal:
 - Elijah was not alone
 - Others were going through what he was going through
 - He could be inspired by their faithfulness.
- Paul shows how committed God is to the church. He gives the church four kinds of gifted people:
 - Apostles: Pioneers who go out on the frontiers and establish God's work in new places
 - Prophets: Not crystal ball prediction but God's comment on current affairs. Helping keep the church in touch with God's way.
 - Evangelists: People who are able to draw others in, either with crowds, like Billy Graham or one to one.
 - Pastors and Teachers: People who care for and grow the family of God. They are the shepherds who care for the flock.
- God gives these gifts to the **church**. Why?
 - So that God's people can mature. It can't happen outside the church.
 - So that we are not blown and tossed by every wind of teaching.
 - So that we can serve and grow together. Greatest Commandments are "Love God" and "Love Neighbour."
- We all hit Elijah times in our lives – community will carry us.
- If we want to grow as Christians then Church Community is part of that growth.
- Practical Challenges:
 1. Stay for tea and connect
 2. Meet new people
 3. Serve and meet a need
 4. Join a group
 5. Pray for people by name and pray with others

2. Bible Study – The Early Church

We're going to use the SOAP method of study:

- Scripture
- Observe
- Apply
- Pray

2.1) Scripture

Background:
It's the day of Pentecost which was a traditional feast (firstfruits) in Jewish Culture. There would have been thousands of Pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Feast. The Holy Spirit is poured out in power and the disciples miraculously speak in all the languages of the people there. Peter preaches and 3000 people are converted! This is an instant-church and this community serves as a template for what church should look like.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.
44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.
46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

2.2) Observation

1. What do you think it would have been like to become a church overnight like this? What would you think some of the challenges would be?
2. Of all the things that the early church did together, which two are emphasised the most?
3. What were the locations of their activities?
4. Why do you think the believers moved into community "selling their goods and having everything in common?" How do we understand this in the light of the fact that none of the other churches in the book of Acts do this?
5. Here is a list of the key "ingredients" of the first church experience. Identify them in the passage above and then look up the cross-references and discuss each of the concepts.
 1. To learn together. (1Cor.4:17)
 2. To share and fellowship together. (Heb. 10:25)
 3. To pray together. (Acts.4:23,24,31)
 4. To share in needs together. (Phil.4:14-15; Gal.6:2 & 5)
 5. To worship God together – to be in awe of Him. (Ps.47:1)
 6. To meet in homes. (Rom.16:3-5 Col.4:15 Acts 20:20)
 7. To enjoy the favour of all the people. (Mt.5:13-16)

8. To give to God's work. (Malachi 3:7-12)

2.3) Application

1. Luke tells us that the Early Church were "devoted" to these key facets of a growing church. This devotion is revealed in the three areas given below. Discuss these in the group and try to isolate the principles and how to apply them in today's society.
 1. Frequency:
 2. Sacrifice:
 3. Attitude:
2. What was the pre-cursor to "wonders and miraculous signs"?
3. What's the difference between the "home" and the "temple"?
4. How can we do more about praying together?
5. What are some of the obstacles to the "ingredients" (see 2.2.5 above) of community and how could these be overcome?

2.4) Prayer

Take some time to pray that our levels of Community in Grace and Emmanuel increase quality and quantity.

Answers

1. OBSERVATION:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.
44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.
45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.
46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.
And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

1.1. *What do you think it would have been like to become a church overnight like this? What would you think some of the challenges would be?*
Here you can just get folk to list the obvious things like getting to know names, chaos, being lost in the crowd, recognising new people (!) etc

1.2. *Of all the things that the early church did together, which two are emphasised the most? (See green and yellow highlights above)*

1. Teaching and Worship (Worship is implied by the temple and the celebrations of the temple.
2. Fellowship and Breaking of Bread.

1.3. *What were the locations of their activities?*

1. The Temple: This moved to the synagogues and eventually other gathering places.
2. and the home.

1.4. *Why do you think the believers moved into community "selling their goods and having everything in common?" How do we understand this in the light of the fact that none of the other churches in the book of Acts do this?*
During the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles many pilgrims would come to Jerusalem. Nearly 80% of the folk in Jerusalem would have been Pilgrims (a bit like the Grahamstown Festival). So it be safe to assume that 80% of the 3000 new church members were from out of town and needed to be taught the basics of the faith before they could go home. The local believers would have had to help accommodate them. This kind of Kibbutz living doesn't reappear anywhere else in Acts.

The key issue is to transfer the principle of caring and being there for each other. You could talk about "refrigerator rights" (that people are comfortable enough in your home to scratch around in your fridge and other ways of caring and sharing e.g. baby-sitting, lifts, meals etc.

1.5. *Here is a list of the key "ingredients" of the first church experience. Identify them in the passage above and then look up the cross-references and discuss each of the concepts.*

I have given you the verses... I think the discussion is fairly straight-forward.

1. To learn together. (1Cor.4:17)

17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

2. To share and fellowship together. (Heb. 10:25)

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

3. To pray together. (Acts.4:23,24,31)

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them..."

...31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

4. To share in needs together. (Phil. 4:14-15; Gal.6:2 & 5)

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philipians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ...
... 5 for each one should carry his own load.

5. To worship God together – to be in awe of Him. (Ps.47:1)

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.

6. To meet in homes. (Rom. 16:3-5 Col.4:15 Acts 20:20)

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house.

15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

7. To enjoy the favour of all the people. (Mt.5:13-16)

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

8. To give to God's work. (Malachi 3:7-12)

Try not get into too much discussion here – the storehouse is the OT Temple, the church in our context. The tithe is the amount you choose to give, the guideline is 10% but for some it could be more or less. The key issues are:

1. We give our money to God because we cannot serve God and money

2. We give to the church so that the money can be used to God's glory. Church is accountable – and congregation members can review the Financial Statements and discern whether God's money is being used well.

3. The amount we choose must be enough to get our attention and remind us that we serve God and not money and yet we must be able to give cheerfully. A deeply personal and individual thing.
4. It is ultimately an act of worship and David said it best "I will not offer anything to the Lord that cost me nothing."

Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?'"

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How do we rob you?'"

"In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

2. Application

Here it is harder to give answers – just some pointers for the discussion.

2.1. Luke tells us that the Early Church were "devoted" to these key facets of a growing church. This devotion is revealed in the three areas given below. Discuss these in the group and try to isolate the principles and how to apply them in today's society.

1. **Frequency:** They met often – some every day – but they had more time then – houses were walking distance, safety was less of an issue. How can we overcome these? Think sms, email, calls, and piggy-backing fun & fellowship & work-parties.
2. **Sacrifice:** They sold things etc. Maybe our biggest sacrifices are reaching out in a society that is less sociable and sacrificing time in a society where time is money.
3. **Attitude:** "Glad and Sincere hearts" and "devoted themselves" How do we do this?

2.2. What was the pre-cursor to "wonders and miraculous signs"?

"Everyone was filled with awe."

Ultimately its about an experience of the glory of God – how do we enhance this?

2.3. What's the difference between the "home" and the "temple"?

Intimacy vs Celebrating

Formal vs Informal

Learning from each other vs Learning together

Brain storm ideas – what about praying together?

Brain storm ideas – what about sms's emails conference calls.

2.5. What are some of the obstacles to the "ingredients" (see 2.2.5 above) of community and how could these be overcome?

Open discussion

The Big Idea 2009: Community #2

Coining a Phrase...

1. Intro

Welcome to this Bible Study which forms part of the "Big Idea Series." The principle behind the "Big Idea" is that we channel a lot of energy into dealing with a basic concept and hopefully get it into our heads, hearts and lives.

Our overall theme is "Community."

In the second week we look at another significant community

1.1) Sunday's Sermon: Summary.

Readings: Mar2:15-17; Psa133:1-3; 1Sa22:1-2

- "It's hard to get over the disappointment that God, having made an exception in my case, doesn't call nice people to repentance."
- We stumble over people's humanity.
- Christians are not perfect – David was surrounded by Ragamuffins.
- But I'm a rebel, debtor, discontent and misfit too – I too need a Saviour.
- Interesting Angle: David's Brothers
- History was not good – brothers disregarded him
- - Forgot about him when Samuel came to anoint a king.
- - Rejected him when he came to the Goliath battle-site.
- Yet they are here at the cave of Adullam.
- They could have betrayed him to Saul
- Maybe Ps.133 especially about them....
- Ps.133 about gap-closing:
- Oil = blessing soaking the whole of Aaron – beard to hem.
- Dew = Hermon is about 700km North and gets dew every night – lush vegetation
- Occasionally weather conditions cause this dew to come down on arid Jerusalem.
- When gaps are closed there is great blessing.
- God blesses gap-closing.
- Are there gaps with people in your life?
- The Church - a hospital
- Not a showcase for perfect saints, but a hospital for broken people being healed.
- - Levi and his friends
- - David and the Adullam gang
- On a road to growth – learning to pray together, share together, trust God together.
- Principles
 1. If you find a perfect church, don't join it or you will ruin it!
 2. The only perfect one is Christ
 3. Prepare to be surprised how God can use rough and ready people
- Practical Challenges:
 1. Stay for tea and connect
 2. Meet new people
 3. Serve and meet a need
 4. Join a group
 5. Pray for people by name and pray with others
- Community is something God blesses – you miss out if you miss it!

2. Bible Study – A Significant Community.

We're going to use the SOAP method of study:

- Scripture
- Observe
- Apply
- Pray

2.1) Scripture

Persecution broke out against the church with the stoning of Stephen. Since then disciples spread out from the "epicentre" of Jerusalem like ripples of Good News.

There were some significant communities formed, but none as significant as the community at Antioch which would become Paul's base and "sending church" for his missionary journeys.

Acts 11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

2.2) Observation

1. The first part of ch.11 is all about Peter explaining his visit to the home of Cornelius and how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. Bearing in mind that the council of Jerusalem was finally understanding that the gospel is for everyone, what is the significant pre-cursor to the revival that broke out in Antioch? How does this relate to Acts 1:8?
2. How did people become part of the church according to v.21? What do you think these mean?
3. The name Barnabas means "encourager" – why do you think the early church sent him? Have a look at the content of his encouragement (v.23). What does his encouragement imply with regards to the journey of faith?
4. Barnabas found "Evidence of Grace" at Antioch – what do you think this means? If "grace" is defined as God's Riches At Christ's Expense, then what do you think he found? How was it made evident and how would he have seen this?
5. What were the three qualities that Barnabas exhibited?
6. So what brought another "great number of people" to the Lord?
7. What does the fetching of Paul (Saul) tell us about Barnabas? Why do you think he fetched him?

8. The Antioch believers have a particular honour given to them, what was it, what did it imply and was their getting to this milestone a fly-by-night thing?

2.3) Application

1. If the disciples who brought the gospel to Antioch crossed a boundary by speaking to the Gentiles, what boundaries might we have to cross to reach each people for Christ and establish community?
2. The new believers in Antioch believed and turned to the Lord.
How do the stories in Luke 19:1-10 and Matt. 14:25-31 help us understand these two actions?
3. What are some practical ways we could encourage others?
Who, in our community, could/should be encouraged?
4. What does being filled with the Spirit mean? (Eph.5:18 and Gal.5:22-25 may help)
5. So, if being called a Christian was a combination of:
 - Believing and Turning to Jesus
 - Being an encouraging community that has been touched by God (evidence of Grace = the fingerprints of God)
 - Enduring through tough times
 - Have leaders who are good, faithful and Spirit-filled
 - Committed to good teaching for the long run.then how are we doing?

2.4) Prayer

Take some time to pray that our levels of Community in Grace and Emmanuel increase quality and quantity.

Answers

1. OBSERVATION:

- 1.1. *The first part of ch. 11 is all about Peter explaining his visit to the home of Cornelius and how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. Bearing in mind that the council of Jerusalem was finally understanding that the gospel is for everyone, what is the significant pre-cursor to the revival that broke out in Antioch? How does this relate to Acts 1:8?*

The fact that they started talking to gentiles – this constitutes the “crossing of a boundary.”

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth could be seen as geographical (my city, my province, my country, the world) or relational (my family, my friends, my colleagues, everyone) or crossing boundaries (people who are like me, people who are similar to me, people I may not like, people I don't know at all.)

So, the precursor to the revival was the crossing of the boundary.

- 1.2. *How did people become part of the church according to v.21? What do you think these mean?*

They believed = trusted, put their faith in Jesus.

They turned from their old lives to a new life in Christ

- 1.3. *The name Barnabas means “encourager” - why do you think the early church sent him? Have a look at the content of his encouragement (v.23). What does his encouragement imply with regards to the journey of faith?*

They sent him as an act of care and concern, but also to ensure that people had the “real thing” and not some twisted variation of Christianity – that is why teaching plays such an important part here.

The journey of faith was going to be hard – that's why they would have to remain true “with all their hearts.” Christianity is not for wimps.

- 1.4. *Barnabas found “Evidence of Grace” at Antioch – what do you think this means? If “grace” is defined as God's Riches At Christ's Expense, then what do you think he found? How was it made evident and how would he have seen this?*

Barnabas found changed lives.

The people in Antioch lived what they believed and practised what they were preaching. Evidence of Grace would mean that there was gentleness and humility in their lives. They were not proud – they had been saved by Grace and not their own good works. They were gentle – they knew that they were sinners saved by grace and treated everyone with the same attitude.

We can talk about the Fingerprints of God. When God touches us we see the fingerprints of His graciousness in our lives.

This is what Barnabas encountered.

- 1.5. *What were the three qualities that Barnabas exhibited?*

- Good man (Morally good) i.e. he was a straight arrow

- Full of Faith – He was willing to trust God through thick and thin
 - Full of the Holy Spirit – When God spoke, Barnabas said “Yes”
- 1.6. *So what brought another “great number of people” to the Lord?*

The good leadership of Barnabas – his example and encouragement.

- 1.7. *What does the fetching of Paul (Saul) tell us about Barnabas? Why do you think he fetched him?*

Barnabas was humble enough to recognise his limitations – he needed someone who could teach well – who better than Saul/Paul who was a trained rabbi!

- 1.8. *The Antioch believers have a particular honour given to them, what was it, what did it imply and was their getting to this milestone a fly-by-night thing?*

They were called “Christians” which means “little Christ”

In essence, the townspeople were saying of the church people: “Hey, your lives reflect the life of the one you keep talking about – we'll call you little Christs.”

They did not get to this milestone overnight – they persevered.

2. Application

Here it is harder to give answers – just some pointers for the discussion.

- 2.1. *If the disciples who brought the gospel to Antioch crossed a boundary by speaking to the Gentiles, what boundaries might we have to cross to reach each people for Christ and establish community?*

Open to discussion here: Examples might be:

- getting past our electric fences to the neighbours we don't know anymore
- overcoming our hectic busyness to build community
- crossing over many racial and cultural differences
- etc

- 2.2. *The new believers in Antioch believed and turned to the Lord.*

How do the stories in Luke 19:1-10 and Matt. 14:25-31 help us understand these two actions?

Belief is about trust – taking a risk. (See Peter below)

Turning is about repentance – about changing things (See Zacchaeus below).

MT 14:25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It's a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

28 “Lord, if it's you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29 “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink,

cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

LK 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus,

come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."
9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

2.3. What are some practical ways we could encourage others?

Who, in our community, could/should be encouraged?

Lots of possibilities here:

- Notes, email, a kind word, a bible verse on a card or sms, Polyanna, etc.
- Those who do the background jobs, those who are taken for granted, etc.

2.4. What does being filled with the Spirit mean? (Eph. 5:18 and Gal. 5:22-25 may help)

Using Paul's analogy of wine:

- we see if someone is full of wine by its effects – they slur and stumble
 - to stay drunk one has to keep drinking
 - when we are full of the Spirit we see fruit
 - to stay full of the Spirit, we drink by "staying in step" with the Spirit – when he prompts us and we listen, we are a little more controlled by Him (we're "filling up") when we disobey the prompts we are "leaking".
- Not really about how much of the Spirit I have, but how much I am being controlled by Him!

Eph5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

2.5. So, if being called a Christian was a combination of:

- *Believing and Turning to Jesus*
- *Being an encouraging community that has been touched by God*
(evidence of Grace = the fingerprints of God)
- *Enduring through tough times*
- *Have leaders who are good, faithful and Spirit-filled*
- *Committed to good teaching for the long run.*

Open discussion.....