



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Discipleship Series Sermon - Getting Together (Gathering)

Bible Reading: Acts 2:42–47

Main Point: The significance of getting together as disciples and the missional significance of gathering.

Intended Response: Encourage the congregation to consider how the primitive church can be a model of true Christian fellowship and mission for us today.

Introduction

This passage is well known in the Church and has become a blueprint for many churches. We see people nurturing, evangelising, worshipping, serving (the NEWS analogy), giving a snapshot of Christian community - a place of balance between ministry and mission. Does this sound familiar?

OUR MISSION

'Called to be disciples of Jesus Christ, The Salvation Army United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland exists to save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity.'

Our mission as The Salvation Army is to participate in aiding the saving of souls, in growing saints (through our ministry we enable discipleship), and in serving suffering humanity (our service).

Context

Acts 2:42-47 sits in the chapter immediately after Pentecost and after Peter addresses the crowd gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15-22). In verse 41 we read about the 3000 who were baptised on that day of Pentecost and the passage moves on to show how this new community of faith, instigated and guided by the Holy Spirit, starts to organise itself.

- In **verse 42** we read that the believers continued steadfast in the teachings they were receiving from the apostles. They lived in holy fellowship, strengthening and building each other up. They ate together frequently and broke bread as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. They knew that prayer was a key to communion with God and an increase of grace in their own lives.
- In **verse 43** this deep awe seems to be resting on the community of believers ever since the earlier baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Acts 2:2-4), and for several weeks they see a series of miracles happen before their eyes.





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- In **verses 44-45** we read that there was unity in their thinking and being, they were of one mind. In these circumstances, it was natural and proper that the believers should share their property with each other, and with others who were in need, while they remained together.
- **Verse 46** tells us how they broke bread in their homes. This new community of believers are not just organising themselves and gathering for corporate/temple worship, but gathering in each other's homes, which is different from temple activity.
- **Verse 47** shows how the humble, serious and devoted witness of the believers won the favour of the great mass of the community. In doing their part, the increase in numbers wasn't theirs, but the Lord added to their numbers.

In Acts 4:23-31 Peter and John return from their ordeal of being arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. They gather with their community and collectively they pray. It is through their time of corporate prayer and petition that the Holy Spirit comes to them, and the passage ends with the group speaking the word of God boldly. This time of togetherness is about refreshment, renewal and recommission. The time equips them for further mission, and they go from their time together in boldness, they go in community and with responsibility - with the Holy Spirit's anointing and equipping.

This passage is a challenge to Christians today: to gather, to pray for one another and to corporately receive the power of the Holy Spirit to minister to the Church. It is in the gathering, in the coming together that the individual can be built up in their faith, but can also be equipped in reaching out into their community.

Key Headings

Gathering as part of a community of faith

Coming together with other disciples to eat, learn, pray, serve is a key part of the discipleship journey (Acts 2:42-46).

- Eating and sharing in food together is meeting our common human need. Learning is sharing in knowledge and wisdom, corporately seeking God and his will for our lives. Praying with each other and for one another, and then for our wider community is both ministry and can also be missional. Just like serving each other, but also the communities we find ourselves in.
- Reverend Michael Moynagh (Fresh Expressions) suggests that discipleship is often regarded as individualistic and about the person being equipped in their own walk of faith. However, Moynagh argues that this should not be the case, saying that Christians need community in order to belong and to be able to foster practices, disciplines and rhythms in life. 'Sharing practice builds community, which then builds the individual, who - in a virtuous circle - comes to value the community more highly.' (M. Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, London; SCM Press, p347).





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- No longer is discipleship about our own relationship with Christ but our corporate relationship with him and with others. There is something Trinitarian in all of that! God himself is in community with himself, through the Trinity. Therefore, gathering together is our ministry to one another and also our catalyst to mission.

Missional significance of gathering

- Discipleship can be viewed as ministry within the church but it should also be linked with mission, as is seen in Acts 2. The time together (the gathering) is a time of both nurturing and equipping.
- Quote: 'While good discipleship will develop leaders within the Christian community it will also develop Christian leaders who can be Kingdom agents within all parts of God's world. The key to making disciples is supportive relationships' (Goodhew, Roberts and Volland, *Fresh!*).
- We need to create community which is supportive and which holds relationships with one another as a significant value in the life of the corps, church and faith community. The Greek word *koinonia* (*κοινωνία*) encapsulates this common Christian fellowship and communion with one another.
- John Stott argues that *koinonia* is firstly 'a Trinitarian experience, it is our common share in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But secondly, *koinonia* expresses what we share together, what we will give as well as what we receive.' (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*).

Conclusion

Small groups, gathering with one another around food (our common bond), coming together to study God's word, to pray and to serve one another (and the wider community) are key to discipleship, to church growth and to playing a part in God's Kingdom in the community.

Discipleship has been designed to be a shared journey not an individual trek. Jesus' disciples were called as a collective, were anointed by the Holy Spirit as a collective and birthed the Church as a collective. To be in communion with Christ is to be in communion with one another- *koinonia*.

Application

Encourage people to think about the people in their corps community who they are journeying with in discipleship. Do they already gather together with them? If not, how could they make that happen? Ask God to identify people around them who they could journey in faith with. Do the realities of their corps or small group have the elements of both ministry and mission? If not, how could they see these being adopted into the life of the congregation?

