

Weekly Reflection – “The Blessings and Burdens of Church Growth”

ABIDE

Jesus said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:5 ESV) We defined abide as living completely dependent and reliant on Jesus for everything. Like a branch depends and relies on the vine for everything it needs to grow and produce fruit. (John 15:7,9-10, 12 and John 8:31) I laid out the thought that before we will abide, we must trust, and before we trust we must know. (Know - trust – abide – bear fruit – glorify the Father)

I believe that the local church is a primary means of you and I abiding in Jesus, abiding in His love, abiding in His Word. That the local church is a God given means for us to know Him, trust Him, abide in Him, and bear fruit that glorifies Him.

Last week we looked at the first place we see the word church in the Bible, Matthew 16, and that the church is a group of people called out around the identity and Gospel of Jesus (Matthew 16:13-18). We see very clearly that Jesus is the church builder, and it is His church; and the way Jesus builds His church is by using Holy Spirit filled people to be witnesses of who Jesus is and what He has done. *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8 ESV)

The Church is Born

Now let's go to Acts 2, this is the day that the church is born, on Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. What we see in the beginning of Acts 2 is the Holy Spirit being sent and the disciples of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being witnesses of Jesus. *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* (Acts 2:4 ESV)

“...we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” (Acts 2:11b ESV) In Acts 2:14-36 we see Peter immediately being a witness and preaching the Gospel and explaining who Jesus is. We see Jesus using Peter to build His church. That is how it started. That is how it has always happened and that is how it always will happen. Jesus will use Holy Spirit filled disciples to bear witness to who He is and what He has done, to build His church.

The Blessings and Burdens of Church Growth

When I say burden, I am not being negative. A burden is a weight or a load. It doesn't have to be a negative thing. A newborn baby is a blessing but is also a burden. There is a weight, a load, more responsibility; none of that negative but all very true.

The blessings of church growth come with burdens. More people to care for, more people to teach and help grow. This is a good thing but none the less added weight and responsibility. I want to draw your attention to the fact that God has blessed Living Hope with growth. Living Hope has more than tripled in size in the past five years, this is a tremendous blessing, God has done amazing things, and we praise God for it all. With that blessing of growth has come burden. More people to disciple, more people to get to know, more people to care for; as well as the practical burden of not having enough room in the physical building or at least getting close to not having enough room.

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 ESV) Now this is sudden church growth. If I'm one of the Apostles, one of the first things I'm thinking is we can no longer fit in this upper room (Acts 1:12-15). It's a blessing that the church is growing but it brings with it a burden, how are we going to do this. That gives a certain realism to verse 42, *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the*

breaking of bread and the prayers." Now how did they do that? There are only eleven apostles, and there are thousands of adults plus children to care for. I wonder what it was like to manage or coordinate all this? How did they provide teaching and pastoral care and worship to these thousands of people? And I think there was a good bit of burden, added responsibility. My point is that with the blessing of church growth there often comes burden, added responsibility.

How did they manage this?

The first observation comes from verses 42 and 46. Verse 42: "***And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***" Then verse 46, "***And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,***" The parallel with verse 42 suggests that one way the apostles' teaching was happening was in the larger group gatherings in the temple, and in smaller groups as they fellowshipped, ate, and prayed in their homes. So, the first observation is that there were larger group gatherings and there were home group gatherings, and maybe this is the way the teaching filtered down to everyone. But the burden to make sure that all the new believers found homes and good teaching and pastoral support and practical care must have been immense, remembering that there were no telephones or email or Flocknote.

The second observation is that neither here nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we get detailed instructions on how to organize the church for pastoral care and worship and teaching. There were elders in the churches (they show up very soon in the Jerusalem church) and there were deacons, and there were the foundations of teaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, evangelizing, and missions. But as far as details of how to structure the church there are very few particulars.

I do not take this as a divine oversight. I think God left the particulars open so that churches could be structured in ways appropriate to the culture and setting they are in. I take this New Testament flexibility to be an invitation to the leaders and the people of every church to fast and pray for God's leading in matters that are not specifically defined in the Bible.

Why does this matter?

The reason I believe this matters for us right now as a local church is because there has been growth happening in Living Hope Ministries. Jesus has been building His church. Living Hope is Jesus' church and He has been building it; He has been adding people to this local church. Not thousands like we read in Acts, but enough that we feel a burden to care for all the people God has brought to this local church. Enough so that we are recognizing that we may need to do some things differently. We want to be a biblical local church that is devoted to the apostles teaching (the Word of God), fellowship, the breaking of bread (communion), and to prayer. As we grow there is burden to continue to do this well and a recognition that at times that requires doing some things differently.

Prayer and Fasting

The Leadership team is inviting you to pray and fast with us. To fast one meal on Thursdays for the next 6 months. Choose to fast a meal where you can spend that time in prayer. If Thursday do not work for you, choose a day that works for you. The reason for prayer and fasting is a recognition that Jesus is building His church. You and I are not building His church. Through prayer and fasting we will join God in what He is doing. We believe that God will speak to us and provide vision, direction, and wisdom for us as a local church. We are praying and seeking God so that we can join Him in what He is doing, to be used by Him

as He builds His church. Prayer and fasting is not a way to get God to do what we want. Prayer and fasting changes us, not God.

Prayer points:

1. Thanksgiving and praise: Thank God for all the amazing things He has done, the amazing people who are part of Living Hope. All the ways He has blessed us and provided for us.
2. Spiritual Growth: How do we effectively help people grow and mature? (Small groups, bible studies, children, youth, men, women, Sunday mornings) Who is it that God is asking you personally to be in a disciple-making relationship with? In all this, that we will stay faithful to the Word of God and led by the Holy Spirit.
3. Physical Growth: How do we manage growth? (Do we expand the building? Do we add a service? Do we send people out to plant a church?) How do we steward well the property and resources God has given us to glorify Him and share the love of Jesus with the community?
4. Leadership: Continue to ask for wisdom for the Leadership Team. As the church grows it is likely the Leadership team should grow. When does that happen? How does that happen? Who will that involve?

Following is a list of ways that either are available or will be available to provide opportunity for people to learn the Word of God, fellowship with one another, and pray together. Some of these are still being planned and more information will come. There are also a few other opportunities that are being explored to offer more opportunities for people. The purpose is not to see how busy we can get or how many things we can have going on. The purpose is to help each person know Jesus, trust Jesus, abide in Jesus, so they will bear fruit that glorifies the Father. I invite you to pray for these various ministries, to ask questions if you have them, and to get involved where you feel God leading.

Women's Sunday Morning Group – starting January 18th, 9 – 9:30AM, led by Edie Roggie, going through "The Purple Book – Biblical Foundations". Class will be 10 -12 ladies. Class will last approximately 13 weeks and plan to do the class again in the Fall.

Sunday Morning Bible Study – 9 – 9:30AM, led by Troy Moser. Class will be 10-12 adults.

Wednesday Morning Men's Bible Study – starting Wednesday, January 7th, 9 – 10 AM, going through "The Purple Book – Biblical Foundations."

Gather, Grow and Go Winter/Spring 2026 – Wednesday evenings 7 – 8PM. (January 28, February 11 and 15, March 11 and 25, April 8 and 22) Plan is to discuss a variety of topics. More info to come.

Overcoming Depression – 6-week Bible study, led by Mark Tuttle. Start date and time to come.

Membership Class – for those who desire to become members of Living Hope Ministries. Class will meet March 15 and 29, April 12 and 26. Plan is to meet following the Sunday morning service, 45-60 minutes.

Fellowship Meals – Sundays January 25, March 22, and April 26. For January 25th the plan is to play cards/board games following the meal.

Senior Luncheon – Monday January 19th at noon.

Mom's Club – to state the obvious, this is for mothers. This is group from several different churches that meet at Living Hope. Typically meet two Tuesdays a month. Next meetings are January 6 and 20, February 10 and 24. Meet from 6:15 – 8:30PM. Childcare is available if needed.

Freedom In Christ course – small group study. There will be a small group of men meeting Friday morning 7 – 8AM starting January 16th. If you are a man and interested there is space for a couple more. It is about a 3-month commitment. We plan to go through this course in the future as well, it is a course for all believers so potentially will be available for women as well.

Saturday Men's Group – we are still working out details. Potentially meet once or twice a month on Saturday mornings. Thinking to do a Bible study and a time for a different man to share their story as a way to get to know each other. Details to come.

Junior Youth – this is for grades 6 through 8. Planning to start meeting twice a month for most months. Greg and Stephanies Eaves are heading that up.

Youth – this is for grades 9-12. Also planning to meet twice a month, as well as a few other events and activities throughout the year (The Vine Conference, Encounter, a couple of fund raisers, potential mission trip). Justin and Casey Szucs along with a few others have been leading the youth.

Children's Ministry - Rachel Moser and Lauryn Nicol are working toward using Superbook Academy for children's time as well as equipping the parents with resources to disciple their children during the week. May be a month or two before that is up and running. Edie Roggie has began working on this summers VBS, there will be information coming for that.