

## A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 12<sup>th</sup> Devotional

### A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD IT'S BIRTH AND EVOLUTION THROUGH THE YEARS

#### **Devotional Scriptures:**

Luke 24:44-53

Acts 1:1-8; 12-14

Acts 2:1-21; 37-47

#### **Study and Reflection:**

##### **THE HOLY SPIRIT FORMS THE CHURCH**

The CHURCH of Jesus Christ was birthed into existence as the fulfillment of the Promise of the Father articulated by Jesus as the last message to the Apostles, after His resurrection, and just before His ascension into Heaven. Jesus alerts them that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, BEGINNINGS AT JERUSALEM.” (Luke 24:49-50)

The CHURCH is birthed into being in the book of Acts, chapter 2. This ushers into existence the CHURCH and theologically the CHURCH AGE!

It is quite simply the age of the Holy Spirit! The Church, prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 16, purchased by Jesus' Blood on Calvary (Romans 3:24-25), came into existence, on the day of Pentecost, when those gathered in the Upper Room were Baptized with the Holy Spirit, forming the Body of Christ, the CHURCH. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

This is now the newly formed CHURCH, Christ's body on earth. This was the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy (ACTS 2:16-18)

Those in the Upper Room were baptized into the CHURCH. This promise of the Holy Spirit with power was set in place, as Peter preaches his inaugurating sermon. From this initial group of about 120 souls, God's intention is articulated and demonstrated. Note that the pattern, character, operation, and spirit of the CHURCH was set. On that day, 3,000 souls were added. The new CHURCH “continued steadfastly together in the teachings of the apostles, sharing together in connected fellowship, warm relational gathering, and prayers. Generosity permeated everything they did. Humble sharing and giving was universal. God's favor and grace was apparent. (ACTS 2:39-47)

#### **Action Items:**

Having read and studied, the account of Luke beginning in Luke chapter 24, and proceeding through the first two chapters of Acts, what are your personal thoughts? What are the key elements and dynamics of these accounts? Be honest, how would you relate them to your own experiences in being born again and the early experiences of your life, in the church?

*Journal the key elements of your experiences.*

#### **Involving Others:**

Share with others your thoughts and experiences. Listen and relate with them their experiences. Is there similarity? How would you and those you share with, compare your shared experiences with what you have read and studied? Has the church continued in the spirit of the early “called out community?”

How prepared are you as a group to *honestly come to some conclusions* that you are willing to put into practice to ensure healing and moving forward together in a healthier way?

# A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 13<sup>th</sup> and April 14<sup>th</sup>

Two-Day Devotional and CLife Discussion Questions

## A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD EVOLVING TO VICTORY IN THE MIDST OF OPPOSITION

### Devotional Scriptures:

Acts Chapters 3-5

### Congregational Life Discussion Questions:

- How was the church able not just to sustain but *thrive* in the Faith in the Lord Jesus under such an oppressive atmosphere?
- Has the church continued in the spirit of the early “*called out community*?”
- How prepared are you as a group to honestly come to some conclusions that you are willing to put into practice to ensure healing and moving forward together in a healthier church?

### Study and Reflection:

I urge you to be up to the challenge of reading and reflectively studying the next three chapters (3-5) of the book of Acts. I have purposely spread this section out *over the next two days*. The reason is that as we seek the Lord for insights and understandings regarding the history and experience of the early church, there is no doubt that something dramatic happened from the joy of the first Christian Pentecost, to what the saints had to experience in these chapters.

Notice that the transition from the end of chapter 2, “Praising God and having favor with all the people”.....to the first miracle.....healing of the lame man in chapter 3 leads to an atmosphere of challenge and pointed persecution for the apostles and all the new Christians. In chapter 3, Peter indicts the people and the spiritual leaders present, and charges them with being in opposition to Jesus, and being responsible for His death. Their response is recorded in chapter 4....”And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus, the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:1-4)

As you study these chapters, you will see that the spiritual environment for the CHURCH was not welcoming or inviting. In fact, throughout the early years of the church, the atmosphere of the existing spiritual groups, and the civil government was distinctly hostile to the message and teachings of Jesus and His followers.

By the end of chapter five, it was clear....the apostles and early saints were threatened and told to stop believing in, teaching about, and in any way declaring the Name of Jesus, to the hazard and forfeiting of their lives!

Notice the response of the apostles and followers of Jesus (Acts 5:40-42)

### Action Items:

I challenge you to take to heart what you sense, feel, and experience, as you open your heart to the Holy Spirit as you read and reflect these readings. What do you think these early disciples of Jesus had to deal with? How does it compare with what we are challenged to “go through”?

Do you think the overall spirit of the gathered believers was one of depression or joy, knowing that the world they lived in opposed the message they were to share?

How were they able to not just to sustain but thrive in the Faith in the Lord Jesus under so oppressive an atmosphere?

Again, be honest and write out what you are feeling and experiencing.

### **Involving Others:**

I trust you will have the courage to have a lively discussion with others about the Church planted in the world in these three chapters, and the opposition that arose against it. It is in the face of such opposition that we are called to be God's effective agents, living in a hostile world.

*The secret: They believed in and relied on their collective favor with God, their reliance on the Holy Spirit, and their coming together in unity and fellowship would result in victory against every foe, and success in Building God's CHURCH!*

## A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 15<sup>th</sup> Devotional

### A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD THE CHURCH EMBRACES DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

#### Devotional Scriptures:

Acts Chapter 6

#### Study and Reflection:

As the Church began to grow and take form, we see in the 6th Chapter of Acts, the Church now embracing those of diverse backgrounds. Up until this point, the community of believers were primarily of those who were of distinct Hebrew origin. Note that on the Day of Pentecost, more than 3,000 souls were added. In chapter 4, after the persecution of the apostles, over 5,000 were added (Acts 4:1-4).

The writer Luke records that now there was the inclusion of converts who were of Grecian origin which immediately created tension within the community. We must understand that the filling of the Holy Spirit does not erase the culture of our past. Do we value all people? Do we treat people differently depending on cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, and economic status?

We now have the power to overcome, but must recognize and face that our attitudes and practices of the past must be dealt with in the presence of the Holy Spirit and in the context of our New Community: **THE CHURCH.**

The Bible says that the conflict arose when the Church, responding to its commitment to help meet the needs of its people, began to demonstrate preferential treatment to one group above another. But we see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and the insight of the leadership, recognized that this challenge of diversity must be acknowledged and its impact faced with new ideas and a different structure, that would ensure the blessings on all the people. Luke writes that through what appears to be something that could stagnate the church's growth it becomes a means by which expanded and innovative ministry is created and the kingdom is further advanced.

A new and different community demanded a new and different way to look at things and a more expansive mode of operation. Here we see that diversity, inclusion, and justice are not just buzzwords that we discuss and keep doing things the way we always have, but the Move of God demands that we see things and function in ways that guarantee expansion of the Kingdom and brings Glory to God. The insight of the new Spirit-Filled and Spirit-Led leadership, along with the obedience of the disciples caused the CHURCH to pivot, grow, and prosper (verse 7)

#### Action Items:

The Apostles, through the Holy Spirit, set a structure in place with a criteria that the people would identify. The people not the Apostles, would choose 7 men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. This demonstrates that the disciples were connected and in fellowship with one another. They could identify those among them, and the various gifts and character traits of each.

After the selection of the men by the church, the Bible says that the leadership affirms them by prayer and the laying on of their hands.

This narrative is rich in principled application for us today. As we reflect on the entire chapter, think on the Church's response to issues of inclusion within its community today. Are we openly accepting of those who may not be of our racial, cultural, and even economic backgrounds? Have we courageously identified areas where we have suppressed others who may not fit the description of

leaders that we are accustomed to. This is especially important in the way we have seen, identified and treated women and young people in the church.

As we consider these questions, have we allowed the Holy Spirit, the teaching of the Word of God, and life's dynamics to change our thinking and practice as it relates to diversity, inclusion and justice?

### **Involving Others:**

Through the directing of the Holy Ghost and the yielding of the leadership and the people, we can see the forward thrust of God's plan being demonstrated. The Bible says that because of this, the Word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly (Acts 6:7).

Notice that those who were selected were those who were already demonstrating the spiritual capacity to fulfill the need. Ask yourself, do I and others in my group value and exhibit these characteristics?

- Honest report
- Full of the Holy Ghost
- Full of wisdom

*In your discussion group, commit in a corporate way to make these character traits and manifestations of the Holy Spirit more common and plentiful in our church community!*

## A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 16<sup>th</sup> Devotional

### A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD GODLY REPUTATION & SERVICE MAY COST YOU YOUR LIFE

#### Devotional Scriptures:

Acts Chapter 7

#### Study and Reflection:

Reflection: Chapter 7 reveals what may be the cost of being HIS CHURCH.

- Stephen became the first martyr of the church. We learned about him in chapter 6. He was known in the church as a spiritual leader (a servant), full of faith, wisdom, grace, and power. He was also known in the church for his administrative and teaching gifts.
- Notice that Stephen was known first by his spiritual character and leadership. It was why the church identified him and six others to serve as leaders, the first deacons in the church. Take a moment to reflect on how you are known in the church. We must take not be defensive and deny responsibility for the fact that in large part, we create our own reputations, even in the church!
- Stephen was not known because of his title or position in the church. He became known and was chosen because of his character, commitment to serving, love for God, His Word, and His people. This got him in trouble. **IT COST HIM HIS LIFE!**

#### Action Items:

- Write a short bio on your present reputation. How are you known both within and without the church?
- How would you like to be known? How are you going to go about this change?

#### Involving Others:

Stephen was identified because of his commitment and witness. Doing God's will out of a pure heart got him in trouble. Discuss in your small group how willing you are to be and to be known for the principles of *witness*, *service*, and *spiritual excellence*.

**Evening Reflection:** Take some time this evening and reflect on how God has directed your life in spiritual leadership and gifts in the church. Share your thoughts from the devotional with an accountability partner. Ask them for their honest feedback in how you are known in the church. Ask them to hold you accountable for becoming a better person/leader in the church.

## A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 17<sup>th</sup> Devotional

### A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD EMPOWERED & WILLING TO BRING ABOUT HIS WILL IN THE EARTH

#### **Devotional Scriptures:**

Honestly review the scriptures from Luke 24 through Acts 7

#### **Study and Reflection:**

As we review the history of the church, from its prophetic beginning in Luke and the gospels, to the explosion on the Day of Pentecost, revealed in Acts 2, and follow its evolution in the first 7 chapters, it should inform, inspire, challenge, and empower us to become His LIVING CHURCH.

In our mad rush to live life at the pace this present age imposes, we are apt to miss the real character and awesome call, and glorious power and privilege that God has given HIS CHURCH. What have you seen and learned that has opened your eyes to what and how the church must be in the earth? How do you now see God's purpose and plan for His Church?

#### **Action Items:**

I challenge you to review the awesome birth and growth of the church in the early years of its existence. Appreciate how it was born and how it evolved from a small insignificant band of believers, to the huge church it now is.

- How was it able to thrive and grow, in the midst of terrific persecution and opposition?
- Where and how do you fit in the Master Plan of God in this present age.
- How do you see yourself as an active member of this, the Apostolic Faith Church?
- How willing are you to bringing about His Will in the local and global church?

Honestly journal these thoughts and commitment.

#### **Involving Others:**

After reflecting about and journaling about the impact this week has had upon your understanding of the church for you individually and others corporately, answer these questions:

- How do you see yourself as an active member of the church and how will you now involve others?
- What are you willing to do and be in order to bring vision and mutual accountability to yourself and those you are tied to in ministry?
- Identify and engage with others who are in the church as a model to follow.