

“Be the Church”

In Common Sermon Series | Week Three | Newbreak Church

September 11th, 2022

Newbreak’s Sermon Study Guide is an in-house resource that serves sermon-based Life Groups and/or individuals who want to reflect further on how the message contributes to our spiritual formation.

In this week’s study, we talk about our collective mission to *be the church* outside of the walls of our Sunday gatherings!

Icebreakers for Life Groups

- What is something you have been thinking deeply about this week?
- When was a time you saw the Church shine bright in the world?

Going Deeper Into the Message

What does it look like to “be the church” in today’s world?

Read Acts 3:1–16; 4:32

Point 1 – Unifying under a common goal that guides our mission.

All the believers were **united** in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32, NLT)

Even the most unified of peoples have plenty of things that are not in common. You see, being united does not mean that we are uniform. Unity, though, is about having the most important things in common. For the early church, it meant they were working together toward a common goal. What draws us as one? As Christians, it is “in Christ” that we are one and part of that oneness of heart is a heart to be the church outside of the church walls and even outside our homes. Community life is never an end in itself; a vibrant community is a community on mission together. **This is also known as being “missional.” We see our whole lives as part of God’s mission and every environment we are already in as a mission field.**

And all of this is fueled by one dynamic ingredient—compassion.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see great examples of Christians (individually and collectively as the Church) meeting people's needs with acts of compassion and also presenting the gospel.

The early Church saw the person of Jesus as the One in whom the whole intention of God's Law was realized. Christ showed us how to live as redeemed humans in light of his life, death, and resurrection. When Jesus taught and modeled what it meant to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39) for example, the early Christians took that seriously. Their whole lifestyle was reoriented around self-giving love. **For the early Christians, the teachings of Jesus were not just slogans to subscribe to; they were a constitution that compelled their very lifestyle.**

Sociologists recognize that Christianity grew at a rate of approximately 40% per decade. This is mind-boggling. Sociologists estimate that at the launch of the Church there were approximately 1,000 Christians. By AD 100 that number has risen to about 7,500 Christians in the Roman Empire. Come AD 150 there were about 40,000 Christians. Flash forward to AD 350, when there were as many as 34 million Christians in the known world!

Within three centuries Christianity went from 0.000015% of the population (not even 1%) to more than half of the Roman Empire! How did they do it? As we have said, there were radical changes in their lifestyle.

Again, the early Christians' method can be summarized with one word: Compassion. In the ancient world, there was no such thing as government welfare. So, what did you do when you were down and out with no way to climb out of your miserable situation? (Think of a widow or an orphan or someone who was extremely poor). One would only hope that someone would have enough pity to give you bread to make it through the day.

But this was not what the Christians did. Amazingly, the early Christians pioneered the way for a society to have social reform and change, but not through the means of policy and legislation, but by *being* the means—by *being* the hands and feet of Jesus. This is what it means to be the Church—which is a key part of our DNA at Newbreak!

"Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world... [That it] revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and

earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.” —Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 161.

Do we see how radical and revolutionary the practical faith of the early church was? Any society that has developed a sense of welfare has only done so by taking after the model example of the Christians. In this way:

Christians didn't just make a difference in the world, they made the world a different place.

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” (Acts 17:6, NKJV)

→ For more on this and some specific ways in which the early church demonstrated tangible compassion, read the blog post we previously wrote on this:

www.newbreak.church/early-church-growth/

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- “For the early Christians, the teachings of Jesus were not just slogans to subscribe to; they were a constitution which compelled their very lifestyle.” How do you see this to be true in the early church? Do you sense this is equally true of the church today? Why or why not?
- How does compassion fuel our missional efforts?
- What do you discern God saying to you in light of this discussion so far?

What does it look like to “be the church” in today’s world?

Read Acts 4:32–35; 11:27–29; 1 Peter 2:9

Point 2 – Purposefully playing our part.

Being inspired by a great vision of compassion is one thing... but it could also be overwhelming! It seems so big—to change the world—but what if all that is asked of us is to do something small? Playing our part is a way of thinking small but it contributes to the bigger picture of what God is doing (and has been doing) through His Church for

2,000 plus years!

The power of the apostles boiled down to something simple—they had been with Jesus ([Acts 4:13](#)). Do you see the power of this? It's not that they have a different power source than we do. The Holy Spirit draws us—like them—to be with Jesus. We—too—are His witnesses. Sure, we are not the literal witnesses to the resurrected Christ, but we are the witnesses of the power of His Spirit coming to animate that truth in our lives. We are invited to be with Jesus and then allow it to spill into the rest of our lives as we live with His love and compassion. We all have a part to play, but we must be willing to play our part.

And the best part is that it does not necessarily involve adding anything to our already busy schedules. (*Say what?!*) Seriously, if we would just take inventory of where we already are; where we are going later in the week; and so on... we would see an ample amount of opportunities to “be the church” in a variety of spaces to a variety of faces! **The world needs Christ. Amen? What if we, as Christians, gave the world a sample of who He is simply by encountering us?** We promise you, your part to play is probably already in your schedule, it's just about showing up in a way that sees your whole life as a mission field with missional opportunities around every corner.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does Peter's description of Christians inspire you with a vision for your life?
- It all boils down to us playing our part. What do you feel like is your part to play in “being the church” in today's world? What part of your weekly schedule has opportunities to embrace the challenge to be Christ-like in those spaces?

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 2:9 (NLT) But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think or live differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

How does this week's message shape or nurture your relationship with God?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids in a way that they would relate to or understand?