

## ACTS 2

### FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

#### Characteristics of Fruit-Bearing Congregations

##### Introduction

Eugene Peterson, in his contemporary rendering of the Bible called *The Message*, writes these thoughts in his introduction to the Book of Acts:

“The story of Jesus doesn’t end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who believe in him. The supernatural does not stop with Jesus. Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God – they are *in* on the action of God, God acting *in* them, living *in* them. Which also means, of course, *in* us.”

The apostles and earliest disciples of Jesus bore much kingdom fruit. They were able to do so because God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, was *in* them, and they were responsive and obedient to the Spirit’s leading. The Book of Acts is a lively record of both the means and the ends (fruits) of **God’s activity** *in and through* God’s people.

The fruits are clearly identified in the second chapter of Acts, verses 41 – 47:

- ❖ persons of all nations and races being added to and included in the faith community;
- ❖ persons receiving the Good News and being saved;
- ❖ persons being cared for as they had need; and
- ❖ persons demonstrating wonders and signs of God’s kingdom-reversing and kingdom-multiplying power.

But, the means are also clearly identified in Acts 2:

- ❖ hospitality that welcomes persons of all nations and races into the community;
- ❖ glad and passionate worship that praises and magnifies God’s presence;
- ❖ devotion to the apostles’ teachings, fellowship and prayer that grows disciples; and
- ❖ justice and mercy ministries that serve the community.

The following Characteristics of Fruit-Bearing Congregations will serve as benchmarks for pastors as they develop ministry plans and seek to lead their churches toward greater faithfulness and fruitfulness.

## **Radical Hospitality**

“And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Acts 2:47b

“So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” Acts 2:41

- New persons being added to the church, particularly by profession of faith or reaffirmation of faith.
  - \* Healthy congregations are receiving into membership each year at least one to two percent of their current membership.
- Growing number of visitors in worship and ministry programs.
  - \* Healthy congregations are attracting and welcoming visitors each week on the average of one to two percent of their current worship attendance.
- Increased diversity within the congregation.
  - \* Healthy congregations are attracting and integrating into their worship and ministries persons of different tongues, races, nationalities, economic status and life styles.

## **Passionate Worship**

“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread from house to house and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” Acts 2:46-47a

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Acts 2:43

- Additional persons participating in worship.
  - \* Healthy congregations are growing by three to five percent each year in average worship attendance.
- Growing unity of the Spirit within the congregation.

- \* Healthy congregations focusing on the good will of all the people and maturing in their efforts “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

### **Faith-forming Relationships**

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Acts 2:42

- Increase in the persons involved in small group discipling experiences, particularly Bible study and prayer.
- \* Healthy congregations have 60 – 80% of those actively attending involved in small group formation or education experiences.

### **Risk-taking Service and Mission**

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as they had need.” Acts 2:44-45

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Acts 2:43

- Additional persons involved in ministry.
- \* Healthy congregations have 60 – 80% of those actively attending involved in ministry.
- Growing number of persons outside the congregation who are being ministered to each year.
- \* Healthy congregations minister to three or four times the number of people who make up the average weekly worship attendance.
- Generous giving to support missional outreach.
- \* Healthy congregations demonstrate extravagant stewardship and share 20 – 25% of their total giving with others outside their congregation.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough  
July 1, 2006