



FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

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I think we all want to see our church be Spirit-empowered—a place where the Spirit of God moves among us in grace and power. But what does that look like?

Some of us think back to the “old days” of large revival meetings or campmeetings, with powerful evangelists and extended prayer meetings.

But many of us have no such frame of reference, and instead may think of home Bible studies in small groups, when the Spirit fell and worship was deep.

During this unprecedented disruption, I am more persuaded that looking “back” will not take us where we need to (or want to) be.

Instead, we need to let go of the forms of our past and extract the principles that motivated us (or others) to entrust our lives to Christ. That leads me back to a passage we reviewed briefly a couple of weeks ago, at the end of Acts 2.

Acts 2:43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

These were the phenomenal results of the planting of the church in Jerusalem. Could we experience such results again? How could it work?

I see three ingredients for this sauce. Three stages to this recipe. Three movements of the Holy Spirit in this Act of God.

1. A deep sense of awe, leading to miraculous signs and wonders.
2. They met together, sharing everything they had.

3. The worshiped together, enjoying the goodwill of the community.

And the GRAND RESULT of all that was that the Lord added to their fellowship every day those who were being saved.

Let me speak of these three elements of a thriving church.

ONE

All the believers experienced a “deep sense of awe.”

We need to recover the “deep sense of awe” in the presence of God. We need to recapture what the Bible calls the “fear of God” (reverential awe).

You won’t have a deep sense of awe unless God is BIGGER than anything else in your life.

Bigger than your pride.

Bigger than your paycheck.

Bigger than your dreams.

Bigger than your defeats.

Bigger than your fears.

Bigger than your pains.

If we want to recover a deep sense of awe, we can’t be casual; God must be our priority.

If He’s a matter of Priority, He can’t be a matter of convenience.

Jesus Christ isn’t an app you add to your computer library; He’s the operating system that makes your computer work.

However, one piece of this is the **root** and the other is the **fruit**.

I’ll tell you how people get this backwards: They chase after “miraculous signs and wonders” in hopes of feeling a “deep sense of awe.” (That’s an exercise in frustration.)

The proper order—the Biblical order—is “deep sense of awe” FIRST, then miracles follow.

We want to be awed by His miracles. He wants us to be in awe of Himself.

If God isn’t enough for you WITHOUT the miracles, then you’re only worshiping idols—**you’re worshiping the products of His mercy, instead of the God of mercy Himself.**

What practices have you engaged to deepen your sense of awe in God?

TWO

All the believers “met together” and shared everything they had. We need to recover what the Bible describes as the fellowship of the saints.

This individualistic brand of Christianity is a shallow substitute for the church that Jesus Christ is building.

Do we have to go to church in order to be a Christian? Of course not! But you cannot live the Christian life without being part of the local church.

It may be boring at times. It may be hectic and messy at times. There may be hypocrites in the church. There may be cliques. People may be stingy. People may be self-absorbed. People may get in your face. People may be sullen and withdrawn.

But which of our own families could not be described in similar terms from time to time?

Iron will never sharpen iron if the two do not coexist. You cannot grow in faith, if your faith is not put to the test.

Your capacity to love will always be limited to the size of your challenge. That’s why Jesus said, “If you only love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”

Love is not a feeling you have; it is an action you make.

Think about the widow who gave her last two pennies. Jesus said, “The person who has been forgiven much, loves much.”

Love cannot be measured by what you have; it is measured by how much you give.

In this section, which is the **root**, and which is the **fruit**?

Here again, we are inclined to get it backwards: We expect to make love happen by enforcing sharing. “How come we don’t share everything like the Early Church did?”

The answer IS because we do not love like the Early Church did, but you cannot make that happen by redistributing the goods of the members. **Sharing is the product of loving**, not the other way around.

Meeting together is how we discover needs for sharing and ways of loving.

The proper order—the Biblical order—is to “meet together” FIRST, then the Spirit can grow our love for one another.

What is the most important element for you of the local church meeting together that reinforces your love for others?

THREE

All the believers “worshiped together” and enjoyed the goodwill of the community.

This characteristic of the Early Church combines the other two (“awe” and “meeting”) in a synergistic interaction that is explosive. That’s what true worship is. It’s an overflow.

The worship we offer in church on a Sunday morning magnifies God and it blesses us. Nothing wrong with that, but that doesn’t impress anyone else. It’s for God, and for us.

The people who live across the street aren’t impacted by our worship or impressed by our praise. We don’t produce “goodwill” in the community by what we do together on Sundays mornings.

Worship, in the sense of this passage, is not orchestrated singing; it is the organic overflow of joyous energy that is generated by two or more Christians sharing together in the life of the Spirit of Jesus. Doing life together.

Speaking of the good works of the Lord.

Over a meal. Over coffee.

On the job. In the gym.

At the park. On a hike.

Serving meals in a shelter.

Fixing the car of a single-mom.

Repairing a fence for a senior citizen.

Visiting in a hospital or rest home.

Praying for the sick.

Encouraging the lost.

Activities like these impact people outside the church—even unchurched people and unbelievers. They react with words like, “See how they love...!”

This kind of worship raises the spiritual temperature of the city. This kind of worship convinces people that God is among us.

Besides congregational music and singing, what are your favorite ways of stimulating overflowing worship from day to day?

We want to see signs and wonders. We want to see human needs met. We want to see the culture transformed.

But it won't happen politically. It can't happen legislatively. And, most importantly, it won't happen just because we want it, or even because we say prayers for it.

If we don't put feet to our prayers after we say, "Amen," by personally spending time in the presence of God to deepen our awe of Him, and meeting together with other believers routinely, in both small and large groups, in person or virtually, and worshiping our God in concrete ways in the world around us that He created, among the people around us that He has redeemed, for the sake of the lost that He came to rescue, then all of our prayers will have been offered in vain.

Especially pertinent to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today—socially distant under statewide "shelter -at-home" orders—is the fact that while the fruit will necessarily look different, the root principles may still be employed, in fresh, creative ways.

Nothing, and no one, can prevent us from deepening our awe of Jesus Christ. Nothing, and no one, can stop us from meeting together, at least virtually (cards, telephone, social media, Zoom) in the powerful name of Jesus. Nothing, and no one, can keep us from taking note of all that God has done and practicing an overflowing worship of Jesus Christ in the world He has made.

Miracles are the result of FAITH. Faith grows—not by chanting the promises of God in self-talk, but—through a deepening sense of awe in the presence of God Himself. How big is your God?

Sharing everything together is the evidence of a LOVE that is greater than our natural selfishness. That kind of love is not developed by memorizing Hallmark card sentiments; it is honed on the grindstone of meeting together—frequently—to learn to care for one another.

Worship is the expression of an irrepressible HOPE—in song, in feasting, in joyous goodwill. It doesn't require a band or lights or a fog machine; it is deeper than all of that. It bursts forth from a heart that has been redeemed, rescued, and restored.

"These three things abide forever—faith, hope, and love." It was, and it always has been, the testament of the Spirit-empowered church that Jesus is building.

Let it be the testimony of Trinity Community Church as well. And the GRAND RESULT will be that the Lord will add to our fellowship—both in quality and in quantity—day by day.

ROOT	FRUIT
Deep sense of awe	Miraculous signs and wonders
Met together	Shared everything they had
Worshiped together	Shared meals, enjoyed goodwill