

To what extent are the above important to us?

Traditionally we have seen the purpose of “evangelism” to be involved in helping people come and worship God with us? Is that a fair assessment? Why or why not?

If these “Four Marks” were essential for the Early Church’s growth in Fellowship, how do we enable those new to or expressing an interest in the Christian Faith to practice them?

When the Twelve (with their larger company of friends and followers, as in Luke 8:1–3) were going about with Jesus, they had a common purse; various people contributed to it out of their resources; they behaved as a single family. How do you continue with that when, quite suddenly, several thousand join the movement?

With difficulty, it seems. But they were determined to do it. Not to do it would be to deny something basic about who they were. They seem not to have sold the houses in which they lived, since they went on meeting in individual houses (verse 46). Rather, they sold extra property they possessed—a highly significant thing for a people for whom land was not just an economic asset but part of their ancestral heritage, part of God’s promised inheritance.

What views should we hold about material goods and possession?

#### **READ 1THESSALONIANS 4: 9-12**

When Paul tells the Thessalonians that, since they already love one another, they must do so more and more, he doesn’t primarily mean that since they already have warm feelings for one another, they must have even warmer ones. He means that, since they already care practically for one another, they must work at making that more and more of a reality.

What is the thrust of this little section?

Is Paul implying that all we need do is lead a “decent life” as a way of attracting people to Christ?

How can the church best help others to find the truths of the Christian faith?

## Going Together II



There has been a tendency in the mainstream Western Churches to see any form of Mission and Outreach as a way of filling up the empty pews that are the common experience of many of our congregations... It is rarely said in that way but it is very often implied! We GO OUT to COME BACK. However the purpose of the church is not to fill its own building but to introduce men and women, young and old to Jesus Christ, so that they might know His love, mercy and grace and respond appropriately. Do you agree? Does this cartoon have a point? What might that be?

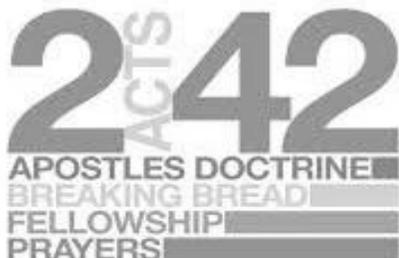
There will always be a need for some sort of corporate structure in our Christian lives together. It is noteworthy that in recent years no matter how many churches have been planted in public venues – schools and colleges in particular because they are not used on a Sunday - there comes a time when the growing congregation feels the need to find their own premises so that the various activities in which they are involved can happen throughout the week – a base or centre to give them flexibility. Any church that meets only on a Sunday will not last long!

What activities and meetings do you believe a church needs to have to be an effective part of the body of Christ are certain types of meeting superfluous to the mission of the Church?

The Acts of the Apostles gives us various snapshots of the way in which the early church worked as a fellowship:

## READ ACTS 2: 42-46

Acts 2:42 is often regarded as laying down 'the four marks of the church'. The apostles' teaching; the common life of those who believed; the breaking of bread; and the prayers.



*"You can't separate them, or leave one out, without damage to the whole thing. Where no attention is given to teaching, and to constant, lifelong Christian learning, people quickly revert to the worldview or mindset of the surrounding culture, and end*

*up with their minds shaped by whichever social pressures are most persuasive, with Jesus somewhere around as a pale influence or memory. Where people ignore the common life of the Christian family (the technical term often used is 'fellowship', which is more than friendship but not less), they become isolated, and often find it difficult to sustain a living faith. Where people no longer share regularly in 'the breaking of bread' (the early Christian term for the simple meal that took them back to the Upper Room 'in remembrance of Jesus'), they are failing to raise the flag which says 'Jesus' death and resurrection are the centre of everything' (see 1 Corinthians 11:26). And whenever people do all these things but neglect prayer, they are quite simply forgetting that Christians are supposed to be heaven-and-earth people. Prayer makes no sense whatever—unless heaven and earth are designed to be joined together, and we can share in that already."*

N T WRIGHT

Are each of these Four Marks still relevant to a church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

What do you understand by each of these?

What is involved? How do we "devote" ourselves?

We no longer seem capable of producing "signs & wonders" (v. 43) today, is that perhaps because we are no longer following these attitudes and practices with enthusiasm?

How can we effectively promote these virtues?

## NOTES

### **Instruction: The Apostles' Teaching:**

The twelve apostles had a significant role in the beginnings of the church. They passed on to these new Jewish believers a full account of Jesus' life and teaching. This would have included much of what came to be recorded in the four Gospels. In addition to this, they would have helped provide a new perspective on the Old Testament, explaining how Jesus was the fulfilment of many prophecies. Throughout the early history of the church, grounding new believers in the apostles' teaching was a major priority

### **Fellowship:**

It was important to these early believers to spend much time together. These hours would have been passed in discussing the apostles' teaching, encouraging and challenging each other, and enjoying one another in the family bond that the Spirit created. This "fellowship" also extended to a tangible manifestation of love for one another that found expression in sharing with the poorer members of this new community.

### **Worship: The Breaking of Bread:**

This expression refers both to sharing ordinary meals together (furthering their fellowship) and to remembering the significance of the death of the Messiah by celebrating what came to be known as "the Lord's Supper." At this stage, the Lord's Supper was held in conjunction with a common meal in homes throughout the city. This remembrance would have been a time of quiet reflection, as well as an occasion for expressing thanks to the risen Jesus and praising him for what he had accomplished.

### **Prayer:**

The first Christians spent much time before the Lord in prayer. They prayed privately, but they often prayed together as a group. It appears that many maintained the Jewish pattern of setting aside three times a day for focusing on prayer. Some continued to go to the temple and pray at the customary Jewish hours of prayer. Their prayers probably centred on blessing and praising God as well as asking him for guidance and for boldness in proclaiming the Gospel

