

WAY OF GROWTH FOR OUR CHURCH

(A Thrust of Fruitfulness)

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The topic assigned to me is this: "Way of Growth for our Church." My own vocabulary of growth has changed over time. I have served the Lord for fourteen years as pastor of a church. We have 50 churches all over the Philippines. The National Church in which I pastor has 8,000 in membership. God has been very good to us. I am a great student of church growth, but I have come to discard the language of growth. Recently, I was invited to speak at the Philippine Missionary Institute on church growth. Essentially, the message was that before we even studied growth, we were growing. In fact, we did not know that we were growing!

Many of our churches are probably the largest or of the top three largest in the cities of the Philippines. I sought God's mind how I might share a message from our own experience, not to teach but to suggest. Perhaps it may be an alternative view, admittedly from our point of view, yet it may help you. If not, just discard it as one more of the useless things you have heard. As I sought God's mind, I felt we should look at the following Bible passages. Most of the texts on church growth are based on Matthew 28 and Acts 1. *Make disciples of all nations* is the imperative command. *You shall be witnesses after me*, is the thrust. However, after many years, John 15 has become my favourite. As I was asking the Lord, I felt that something should be there to connect with, something that God has done in our experience. John 15:8 says, "By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Forgive me, since I am not supposed to be here; I have been overworked. I forced myself to come here. So, please forgive me if my face twists a little and gives an impression not intended. If I look like I'm frowning, I'm probably smiling. If I look like I'm smiling, I'm probably frowning. You will have real problem tonight!

John 15:16 says, "You did not choose me but I chose you." What I see here is the sovereignty of God in a move within a work. It is not what we strategically make out but it is a choice, a sovereign choice of God. It says you did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you. Alternatively, as the King James Version says, *ordained you that you should go and bear fruit, that your fruit might remain.* That thing scares me today. We do not have a good, quantitative measure of growth. "Ask the Father in my name that he may give to you." Again, we find prayer attached to the ordaining predestination of God's choice for us in his programme. So I've titled our study tonight as, "A Thrust of Fruitfulness" rather than an experience of growth. I would like to focus on fruitfulness.

John N. Vaughn, a scholar of church growth, wrote the 1981 book, "The 20 largest Churches." Out of the 20 largest churches in the world, 10 were from the United States of America. This same scholar, in the year 1991, came out with a continued study of church growth. By 1991, only one church, the Highland Park Baptist Church, remained in the United States out of the 25 largest in the world. Many recent Christian books have been written about a coming night, a coming twilight. For example, Carl Henry wrote the book, *The Twilight of a Great Civilization.* Chuck Colson wrote the book *Against the Night.* Another book, *The Final Warning* was written on the dealings of God with David Wilkerson. Dr. Jeremiah wrote the book, *Escape the Coming Darkness.* John Stoll of Moody Bible Institute wrote the book, *The Dawn's Early Light.* Of course David Hunt wrote the book, *The Seduction of Christianity.* Probably the latest book is by Michael Scott Horton, *Powered Religion* regarding the failure of so-called power religion. Allow me to read from Joseph Stoll's book, "The Dawn's Early Light" an analysis of what is happening in the United States.

He says, "Indeed we have fought a good fight. We have had our day in the sun. Throughout the late 70's and 80's, presidents claimed to be born again. The evangelical presence was felt from the cover of music magazine to the halls of Congress. National office holders believed that they could not get elected without the evangelical block. The Moral Majority movement

was an influence peddler. Everyone knew our name and felt our presence. Then surprisingly just when we thought secularism was a toothless tiger, it rose up and powerfully reversed the Supreme Court nomination. Jerry Fallwell resigned from the leadership of the Moral Majority; right wing religious leaders publicly shamed the cause. Gay rights bills were passed in nearly every major American city. The radical feminist pro-abortion, pro-homosexuality lobbying gained ground and now holds phenomenal power. Pro-life politicians began tasting defeat and political wisdom confesses that it's hard to get elected while opposing abortion. The new secularism is boldly promoted in talk shows and Christian values are ridiculed on prime time sitcoms, which promote tolerance of a looser progressive culture. Christian consensus in the land of America is gone. We may have lost the day. Across the land there is a growing feeling that we are up against formidable odds and given the strength of a secular momentum, apart from miraculous intervention, there is little hope of reclaiming the day.

More and more leaders are quietly admitting that the tide may be irreversible. Chuck Colson states that there is a growing sense of despair and defeatism in the evangelical ranks as witnessed around the country. He goes on to say that in a mere decade, the 1980's moral majority has become the 1990's persecuted minority. A prominent evangelical veteran of the battles in the Eighties told Colson, "He was through." Chuck Swindoll, a church growth person who comes from the Evangelical Free Church, comments that a leader pointed out that during the 1980's the percentage of American adults attending church almost remained the same: 45% whereas Protestant Church membership actually declined. That squares with the research done by George Barner, George Gallop, and James Hunter. Hunter demonstrates a decline in real numbers of evangelicals during the past 25 years in the United States. Research by my colleague Bob Gillian shows that the average evangelical church in the United States introduces 1.7 people to Christ per year per 100 who attend worship services. A church with 200 worshipping adults then would introduce a fraction of worthy people annually. George Barner tells us that we are only replacing the dead. The evangelical body is not growing.

Churches are growing by rearranging saints. Evangelicals are simply playing musical churches, moving around to more exciting and larger churches. What is going to happen when that heater system dries up? What we are not doing is penetrating the world for Christ. Let me repeat that. What we are not doing is penetrating our world for Christ. Real evangelism, real discipleship, real outreach is simply not taking place on any serious level as the cold facts plainly demonstrate. The founder of the Fuller Institute of Church Growth, the late Donald McGavran, had a dream to help churches make disciples of all nations, to seek the lost and to find them. Seeking the lost will be the source of growth, but church growth has not happened. Instead, church growth principles replaced evangelism, and they have merely succeeded at undermining it by placing success in the hands of technicians instead of the believing community as it discharges its duties of bearing witness to the Gospel. I think the United States is a good example of a tragedy of being taken up with technicalities. I have never been one for much technique, but I believe we can learn from technique, from methods, from strategies. However, we must concentrate on something deeper.

Let us go back to the book of Acts. I have studied all kinds of church growth literature. In fact, my personal collection of church growth books runs into the 30's at least. However, as I said, I'm not one for technique. We experience growth before studying growth. I have chosen seven points to take from the book of Acts; the book of Acts gives us a very good example of the thrust of church life in the early experience of ministry. We can divide the book of Acts, roughly speaking, into three parts. Chapters 1-7 give us the foundation of ministry, chapters 8-12 give us the progression of ministry, and chapters 13-28 give us the extension of ministry. In these chapters, we find a thrust of fruitfulness in ministry, most clearly seen in Chapters 1-7.

Yesterday and today, Ajith Fernando talked about fellowship in a beautiful way, and I would like to latch on to that because we are dealing with the same portion of Scriptures, Acts 1-7. It is not simply a fellowship of being together but a fellowship in a certain spirit of prayer. The Bible says that with one mind, they continually devoted themselves to prayer. It was an inner fellowship. The Greek word of

course was 'Koinonia,' a commonality of life. This life was not just an external life of works, but an inner life. They continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. In Acts 2: 44- 47 we have the property concept, but look at verses 46 to 47. This is again a commonality of life, day by day. It is not a commonality of privacy; it is commonality of life, of being together day by day. They continued with one mind; they had something inside. They went to the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They took their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. They praised God and found favour with all the people. Continue to read in Chapter 4 verse 32, and verses 34-37. Essentially, people have noted that Jesus did not have any organisational structure. He did not leave any techniques, or methods or strategies. Yet, the church in the next 300 years destroyed the Roman Empire. They were fishermen, tax collectors, and simple people. They were not men of high intelligence. What then was the real secret? What was it about the early Christians that made them so successful but seemingly today, with all our techniques, the church has failed?

I have studied church growth in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. I have recently come from a 3-week preaching tour in Korea, and Korea is, of course, a flash point in Church Growth. In the year 1981, out of the 20 largest churches in the world, six of the largest churches were in Korea. By the year 1991, 12 of the largest churches out of the 25 largest churches in the world are in Korea. In a recent trip, I spoke at the Nam Bu Foo Gospel Church, which is one of the newest large churches in Korea. I was speaking to a group of 800 pastors and their wives. I found out that in 1990, church growth had already stopped in Korea. In 1991, they had already lost 300,000 members to Mormonism and to many kinds of other cults. According to Baptists, Presbyterian, Methodists, and Pentecostal pastors, this loss is a major problem. Therefore, Korea also has a problem. I come from a poor country. I thank God that I come from a poor country. God has given me the privilege of traveling to many countries. Recently I visited Geneva and Zurich. I wanted to visit the church of John Calvin. I wanted to visit the church of Ulrich Zwingli. I wanted to pray. I wanted to sense the original spirit that moved in Zurich. It

is no longer there. I've gone to England. I've gone to Rome. It is no longer there. The cities are beautiful places to visit, but there is something wrong. A pagan writer commenting on the strength of Christians said, "See how these Christians love one another!" That was Arastedes. They loved one another. They never failed to help widows. They saved orphans from those who would hurt them. If they had something to give, they gave freely to a man who had nothing. If they saw a stranger, they took him home and were happy as though he was a real brother. They did not consider themselves to be brothers in the usual sense, but as brothers in the spirit of God. It is not technique. It's this commonality inside; this fellowship.

People have always told me that they would not give money to the Philippines. A long time ago, I read the story of David and Goliath. They tried to put the sword of Saul on David, the spear of Saul on David, the armour of Saul on David, and they wanted David to fight Goliath. He would have died if he had used the armour and the weapons of Saul. He looked for his own sling-shot. The Assembly of God trained me. I tried three times to join the Assembly of God, but God prevented me. I could not understand why. Then God moved us into an independent ministry; we began from scratch. Subsequently, God has blessed our church. I tell our people never say that you are poor. We just don't have money. In our church, none of our Pastors receives a salary. Many years ago, I read the story of George Mueller. I said that if the God of George Mueller were alive, then that's the God I want to serve. God has been very faithful to us. One of the things that we have found is this: if we give from our littleness, with our little bread and our little fish, if we share that, then God will multiply it.

That's our church experience. For example, in our understanding of commonality, of Koinonia or fellowship, when the earthquake hit Central Luzon and Baguio in the Philippines, our church committed to help. We grieved about the money coming into our country and its incorrect use. Aid, in the form of money and goods, would come, but they would show up in Iloilo, in Davao, cities that have no connection with Baguio or Central Luzon. The goods would be sold in the market places. I said, "O God, help us." No matter how much money you pour into this country, there is something wrong with the

heart of this country. The spirit must be fixed first. I told the people that if we, though poor, do not learn to give our little fish, our little bread, and go and show our commonality with our people, God will not bless us. Churches all over the Philippines moved to share, to sacrifice, and when the Pinatubo eruption came, we did the same thing. In two years' time, since the earthquake, we have one of the biggest churches in Baguio city. We start many of our churches in this way.

Let's go to the next point. Worship. Acts Chapter 1. What do they do while they are waiting for the Holy Spirit? They went to the Upper Room. Why the Upper Room? To pray and to worship. There is no such thing as prayer without worship. That is the story of Acts 1: 13-14. It says that they entered and went up to the Upper Room. In verse 14, they continued to pray. They continually devoted themselves to prayer. Again in Acts 2: 42. They broke bread and they prayed. Look at verse 46. They continued with one mind in the temple; they continued in the sense of worship. Read chapter 4: 24-28. Note their reaction to a crisis. Worship. The sense of God's glory was there. "O God, it is thou that made the heavens and the earth." It was not: "Lord, look at our problems." No! "But Lord you are the God of all glory and might. Why do the Gentiles rage?" This is worship. This is the bigness of God, not bigness of problems. Worship. A.W. Tozer said that worship is to get so consumed with God that nothing on this earth touches our affections. I was talking with Rev. Ramos of the Conservative Baptist as we traveled here. He is the Secretary General of the Conservative Baptist, one of the strongest denominations in our country. He lamented about one of the problems with today's young pastors. The young pastors are predominantly concerned with the salary they receive. No more worship. There is now a divided-ness of heart.

It is so true of God that nothing on this earth competes with his affection. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo wrote, on his deathbed, that everything he wrote was useless as he saw the glory of God. That is not to say that what he wrote was literally useless, but when he saw the glory of God in worship, he knew he touched something else. In our own church, we give great emphasis to worship, and that is why we take two hours at least for our worship services. We have 8

worship services on Sunday, from 5 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock in the evening. We have two primary locations for our national church: in Quezon City and in Makati. We have six in Quezon City and two in Makati. We have set up our fortress in the political capital and the business capital of Philippines. People faint because they can't find a place to sit. We seat 1,800 to 2,000 in one service in our church. We spend at least 35-45 minutes in just singing to the Lord. If there is one characteristic about the Philippine church, it is worship. I think the characteristic of the Korean church is prayer. Probably the characteristic of the old English church was preaching. Probably the characteristic of the American church was revivalism with Finney, Edwards, Moody, and others. But I think the characteristic of the Filipino Church is worship.

Let me tell you a little story about worship. One time there was a drug pusher and the police were looking for him. The people in his village had invited him to worship for some time but he hated Jesus Christ and the Bible. But just to hide from the authorities, he went to our church. As he entered, people were worshipping with hands raised, forgetting themselves as the songs says, *Forget about yourselves, concentrate on him and worship him. Within the veil, now I would come to look upon thy face, I see such beauty there, none other can compare, I worship thee, my Lord, within the veil.* Our people were closing their eyes and enjoying, exalting, ministering to God. Now he came there with the wrong motives; he did not like Jesus and he was not interested. He was just hiding in disguise. But as he entered the church, he experienced goose pimples coming over his body. He could not understand, and tears began to fall down his cheeks as one of the songs was being sung, *Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of the earth they grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.* He could not understand right at that moment, but a love came upon him; he gave his life to Jesus without preaching. He gave this testimony later. This is what worship does.

Let's talk about my major thrust. Number three is the factor of priority in fruitfulness. You have already looked at many Bible passages, but Acts Chapter 1 verses 7-8, says that they had their own programme.

Will the kingdom be restored to Israel? Is the question in verse 7 wrong? No, it was right. It is still God's programme. Jesus did not correct them but he said that it is not for you to know the time of the apocalypse. The timing is not yours. Leave that to me. Focus correctly, he said. You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you. Then you shall be witnesses. That's the focus ministry. However, how do they prepare for this? Luke Chapter 24 tells us that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they are filled. They had all the training. The best Bible school, the best seminary, the best teacher - they had Jesus for three and a half years in intensive training. The best. Was that enough? No way. The Lord said, wait in Jerusalem; don't move until the Holy Spirit comes. How do they wait for the Holy Spirit? In prayer. We are told that in verse 14. Then look at Acts 1:24. Again, the reaction is prayer. Look at Chapter 2: 42. "And they were continually devoting themselves to prayer." Look at verse 46. They were in the temple. Again in prayer. Look at Chapter 3: 1. "And at the ninth hour they went up for a time of prayer." Of course we know that Acts Chapter 6: 4 really gives us the priority for them. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." It is not the ministry of the word, then but prayer. It is first prayer, and then ministry of the word. One Indonesian brother, as we were talking, said, "I remember Billy Graham in Amsterdam when he said, I have three priorities in life. No. 1 is prayer, No. 2 is prayer, No. 3 is prayer." Thank God.

That is why I say we are not too much into techniques. We study them, we try to use them when needed, but first things first. I tell our pastors that they are to spend a half day in prayer and a study of the word. Ministry should be an outflow of prayer. If the prayer is not correct, I don't care how you minister. It does not work. One of the worst preachers in church history was this kind of preacher, but his preaching reverberates up to now. He had the manuscript held up close to his face so that they could not see his countenance. Some of you who are students of church history know this already. Some of you who are not, I pray that this might open something. The preacher went on and on until people in the crowded church were moved almost beyond control. Bad preacher? How would you react if you preached this way and someone rushed down the aisle and cried 'Have mercy,

sir.' Others caught hold of the backs of pews, lest they should slip into the pit. Most thought that the Day of Judgment had dawned on them. The power of that sermon is still felt around the world today. However, few Christians know the secret of that sermon's power. That's the sad part. Some believers near that place had become alarmed while God was giving his blessing. They met that evening before the sermon and spent that whole night, in agonising prayer. On the other hand, the preacher had not eaten food for three days. For three nights he did not sleep. Over and over again he had been saying, 'Give me, O Lord, this community! Give me, O Lord, this community!' When he arose from his knees and made his way to the pulpit, they said he looked as if he had been gazing straight into the face of God. They say that before he opened his lips to speak, conviction fell upon his audience. The rest is history. That was Jonathan Edwards. The sermon was 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God.' He is probably the greatest philosopher theologian ever produced by the United States. What was his secret? Prayer.

When I was in Bible School, I almost lost my faith. I was into Greek, I was into Hebrew, I was into Theology, but I almost lost faith, I was always backsliding. Nevertheless, before sliding back all the way, I went into the church history of God's people who knew a different power, one I do not see today. Then I discovered the likes of a David Brainard, a Praying Hyde, a Charles G. Finney, a John Wesley, a George Mueller and so on. I discovered prayer. I had a Korean classmate in the Seminary. He said to me, "Since you are so interested in prayer, why don't you study the Prayer Mountains of Korea?" That was in 1984. Since then, I have gone many, many times to Korea. Last April we brought 82 Filipinos. We bring truckloads of Filipinos to Korea to visit the Prayer Mountains to see if the spirit of prayer is still moving in Korea. The reason is this: we want them to catch the spirit of prayer for ourselves. If there is probably something to stem the crisis in Korea it's the spirit of prayer.

Latin America is another flash point. For example, one of the number two and three largest churches in the world is now in Latin America, with memberships of 180 thousand and 100 thousand. That's Latin America. One of the pastors of the biggest churches said this about his secret of prayer. He said, "When I call a business meeting,

a few people come. When I call a Bible study, many people come, but when I call a prayer meeting, all our people come." The Koreans know something about prayer that many of us do not. Most churches complain that if you have a bible study, many people come; if you have a celebration many people come; if you have a sports activity, many more people come. However, if you call for a prayer meeting, you only have the wife and children of the pastor next to you! That's a problem, isn't it? That shows that there is something wrong with the church inside. God help us! He said that in Korea, in our church, if there is no office on Monday, people begin to go to church on Friday and they don't leave until Monday. It is prayer on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. That is why in our own church we introduced dawn watches. Then, we introduced overnight watches. We introduced Prayer Mountains. All our pastors are required to be at the Prayer Mountains for two weeks and for one of those weeks fasting and prayer. One of the things that I can say is that I am willing to forget every thing I know, but God helps us through prayer if we forget. That is why I believe in God's sovereignty, and prayer can touch that sovereignty.

The second factor is the Holy Spirit. Of course, the book of Acts has been called the Acts of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). The preparation of the book of Acts is this: Wait until you're clothed with power of the Spirit. "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you." "John baptised with water but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:4 say, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." We now face the question of what or who is the Holy Spirit? We talk about the Holy Spirit, but do we know him? I believe that the Holy Spirit is essentially an independent person who does not bend to our plans. I believe the Holy Spirit's power is in his right to change our plans. Without that understanding of the sovereign independent movement, or of an independent person, then we have made the Holy Spirit an influence, not a person. He has his own will, we need to consult with him; we need to talk with him. We need to ask, "Lord, are we doing it correctly?" That's why I say we have grown without having any objectives. We did not target the objective, e.g., "Let's grow with the churches." We had not. We began our church because we enjoyed the Lord. We began

our church because we wanted to grow in the Scriptures. We began our church because there was a light moving for us; we did not have any other way.

By the way, I was an atheist in one of the top universities, a Roman Catholic University, The Ateneo De Manila University. I was one of the top students and did well in theological philosophy. However, I was an atheist. I did not believe in God. I came to know the difference between talking about Jesus and knowing Jesus personally. I went for Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism; I almost became a hermit in Tibet. Thank God for his mercy. Jack Dere, a Professor of Sociology in Dallas Seminary for many years, part of the roster of Commentators in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, said that 95% of all Christian work could continue without the Holy Spirit. God help us.

Let me tell you the story of John Welch. John Welch was the son-in-law of the famous John Knox. He was a man of deep walk in the Spirit. He was known to pray for seven hours a day. Sometimes they would see him in the garden just walking back and forth and sometime the visitor would see a glow on him. The visitor would ask, "What's wrong with him?" The wife would say that he is thanking God. How can he thank God all night? Friends, it is not so much what we say, it is, rather, the depth of how we say it. It is not beautiful voices, beautiful tunes, or the right words. John Welch was, at one time, the pastor to a community in France because he was exiled out of Scotland. That was the time of the plague, the Black Death or bubonic plague. Every city was like a fortress, not allowing people to come in. Anybody who wanted to come in had to have papers that said that they were clean. Two or three merchants came to the city gate; they had horses and correct papers. They were supposed to be allowed in. They were clean. Since John Welch was the pastor of the community, they called him. John Welch went up, greeted the merchants, and said, "Before you come in, just allow me to talk to God." He went in front of the horses and began to look up. He looked around the horses and listened. After some time he said, "I'm sorry, your horses cannot come in. There's plague in the saddle bag." "How do you know? Because of plans, because you studied the book, because the papers were correct?" He said, "I'm sorry." The

merchants became angry and said, "But our papers are clean." He said, "I'm sorry. There is plague in your saddlebag. Throw your saddlebags away." They went in a huff to another community. They had the right papers. The majority of people in that community died.

One of our churches in Davao, a major city in the Philippines, is one of our strong churches. How did we set up a church there? We set it up with the understanding of the Holy Spirit. First, we prayed for Davao for a long time. After praying, we did not just send someone there to work. No, we kept praying. We needed to wait for the Holy Spirit. One day, some of our brethren from a church in Cebu, came from Davao. They were doctors and they had finished their work in Cebu and went back to Davao. In Davao, they tried to join other churches but could not find affinity of Spirit. So they began their own Bible studies. Now these people were lay people. However, the work grew. They needed help and they began to call to us for help. I said, "Wait, we're not sure. Let's continue in prayer." After a time, an international group familiar to us gave a seminar. They invited me to be one of the preachers in that series when they did it in Davao. I joined the seminar team in Davao. As I ministered in Davao on an inter-denominational basis, I felt the spirit of God strongly speaking. He was giving us favour in Davao. In a short while, another church joined the small Bible study group. This was the kind of confirmation we sought from the Spirit of God. Then one of our best pastors, as he was reading scripture, felt God was asking him to leave for Davao, like Abraham. We had several steps of confirmation and we opened the work in Davao, and we thank God for that. Helping us to understand, this is waiting upon the Holy Spirit. Understanding the confirmation. Something like the experience of Peter when Cornelius came. The Holy Spirit was working with Cornelius, and the Holy Spirit was working with Peter at the same time. When the messenger from Cornelius came, the Spirit told Peter, "Go without misgivings; I'll show you a vision." There must be an understanding of walking with the Spirit of God.

The next is Power. Again we have talked too much about power. Our own understanding of power is not signs and wonders only. We believe in signs and wonders very much. However, our understanding of power is for witnessing, to continue the work of Christ. That

means to build the church. We do not believe in healing that does not enfold the person to the church. We do not believe in a beautiful ministry that does not enfold people into the church. We do not believe in any kind of signs and wonders that does not work spirituality in Christ-likeness inside. That is why I like the word fruitfulness. Take for example, our own experience in Basilon. We are only two years old in Basilon. We are now the biggest church in the city. In our work in Basilon, our Pastor began to minister among the Muslims, and you know how difficult that is. He, moved by power, would go to hospitals, look for sick people, and pray for them. The Lord moved and healed them. They would come, because of that great work. During water baptism there was an impressive faith among the people. There was a person that was lame. As they were going to water baptism, this person sensed something and said, "Don't carry me, the Lord will heal me." They dropped this lame person. He could not walk and they carried him again. He came to the water and the pastor said, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The person touched the water, and he walked! That person now organises prayer groups and the prayer groups are now moving to the mountains, to the towns. The prayer groups are praying and enfolding them into the church. Again the understanding of witnessing, building the church of Christ.

Next, commitment. John 21 is the background to Acts 1. Never try to understand Peter from the book of Acts because Acts 1-12 is essentially the Acts of Peter. Acts 13-28 can be called the Acts of Paul in a similar sense. We need to understand this about Peter: Jesus told him, "Peter, when you were young, you went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch forth your hand and you will be led to where you do not want to go." He spoke about the kind of death by which Peter will glorify Christ. This is not a self-commitment. Peter tried this, remember, in Luke 22. He said, "Lord, I will follow you to the death." This is why I do not like to talk about a self-commitment. Sometimes we think doing good is good. No, there is evil in good. We need not be empty of our fullness, but we need to be empty of our emptiness. It has often been said, and Andrew Murray said it, "Humility is not avoiding being put up; it is also not trying to put yourself down; it is just simply not

focusing on self at all. But it is looking to God." That is true humility. Even if you are trying to put yourself down, self is still there. We still need to be empty of our emptiness. Peter had the same problem when he said, "Lord to the death I follow." The commitment was there but the Lord said, "Peter, before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times. But Peter, I have prayed for you and when you return, strengthen the brethren." You notice God's grace, the importance of grace. That's why I like to call it a commitment under God. Lord, I believe you but help my unbelief! Lord, I'll do what I can, but you know I can't, so help me. In John Chapter 10, Jesus said, "The Shepherd gives his life for the sheep." I think that's important. We see the same here in the book of Acts, all throughout, in their attitude to persecution. (John 21: 18-19; Luke 22:31-34; Acts 2 :36, 40) They rejoiced when they were persecuted.

When it comes to commitment, I like the story of Adoniram Judson who was classified a valedictorian, a man of great potential in the United States, and married to the lady of the town. Instead of going to a large church, he went to Burma. It took him seven years to have one convert. What kind of commitment is that? To get seven converts, it took him 11 years. For this reason, don't support the ministry; support a person. If you see a person that is committed, forget the statistics. The mixtures don't follow. If you see a man committed to death, give to him. By the time he died, Adoniram Juddson had 30,000 communicants in Burma.

One of the young pastors in our church, who has been used by God, comes from a wealthy family. We sent him to the province that is a far cry from metropolitan Manila. It was a difficult plan. His wealthy father came to him and deposited a large bank account for him to use if he had needs. Our pastors receive no salary and some of them had to fast by force. This young pastor and his senior pastor will share one loaf of bread for two days. Never tell the church what your needs are. That's something that God has allowed me to boast in. The young pastor would go through that time in prayer. There was temptation; there was money in the bank. However, he did not touch it. He wanted God's answer, the same God of the ravens who fed Elijah. The same God who filled the oil flask of Elisha. Sometimes we forget about that God. We talk too much of our human

resources. We forget the God of miracles. Why? Because we have no commitment to death. Anyway, he passed through that time and God would come. It is not always easy. We have to pay the price. You know people look at me. I dress well. I live in a brand new house. I have two cars. I send my children to the best school. I eat seven times a day even though it does not look like seven times a day. I don't receive a salary. Nobody can ever say that I have told them about money. I have traveled to many places. God has been very good. Some may say I sound a little proud; may God help me if I am. Pray for me if you sense that. Nevertheless, I boast in the Lord. I come from a poor country. But God is not poor. The kingdom of God does not depend upon the economy of the Philippines. Matthew 6:33 says "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, then all these things shall be added to you."

I keep telling our elders, deacons and members, that God has prospered our church. I have never touched the money of our church. Our house was a gift by God to me. The two cars I received were a gift, not of church money. When I travel abroad, I never touch the money of our church. My associate pastor yes, the church went to him, but me, I never touch the money of our church. I want to live in miracles. If it does not come, then I die. I am willing anytime to die. When God called me, he called me with a vision. I was a manager at that time. I did not want to be a pastor. You see in our country, many pastors are poor. Lord, I said, it's enough to be a Christian. Don't ask me to be a pastor. I don't want to be poor. My prayer life died. I lost the presence of God. I said, "Lord, if I missed you, forgive me. Just restore the glory." There was a verse in the Bible of which I was afraid. "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." I was afraid of that verse. I read the life story of Sadhu Sunder Singh and I said, "Lord, no, not that kind of a life." But that was exactly the kind of life that God used to test me. Somehow, by God's sovereignty, he has been very good. I am a quarter Chinese. My real family name is Yap, not Condo. Our line comes from a man named Yap Siak See in Chinese. My dream is to go to Beijing one day and to set a ministry in Beijing. That is why my son today is studying Mandarin. All my children go

to a Chinese Christian School. I have a dream for China. I do not forget my roots. Our church is air-conditioned. Many of our people have cars because I pray to God to prosper our people. The Lord shows them that there's a kingdom that does not depend on the economy of the Philippines. Show them the kingdom of God. Show them that there's a Ruth in the Bible that did not need to depend on the time of difficulty in the book of Judges. Show them that there is a Lord who cares.

Anyway, I asked God that I preach in an air-conditioned auditorium. But Lord, my brethren are in China, why was I not born in China? Why should I not be in prison Lord? When I know that my fellow brethren in China, even to take calcium, eat egg-shells, mix it with water and drink it. Just to tithe dear Lord, they have to fast on the Sabbath Day and give that to their fellow prisoners. I asked God what makes me different from them? I should be in their shoes. Brethren, I'm not lying, God help me. Somehow God said, "I call each person differently. I have an Elijah; I have a David. I have a Stephen; I have a Joshua. I have a James or John the Baptist. And I have a Joseph and a Daniel, each one different. We are not called to success; we are called to pray for less. My favorite scripture is Psalm 73:25-26. "Who have I in heaven but Thee, O God? And earth has nothing I desire besides you." William Carey said, "When I die, don't talk about me, talk about my Saviour."

The last factor is the Scripture - the very foundation of the work. Just when Peter began to preach in Acts Chapter 2, beginning in verse 16, he used the scripture: "This is what was spoken to the prophet Joel." He did not preach without the foundation of Scripture. I am a very strong fundamentalist. My prayer to God is this, "Lord, the day our ministry leaves the foundation of scripture, destroy our ministry. If ever I die, and our ministry leaves scripture, destroy it, God." Some people like to say, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." Whether you believe it or I believe it, has nothing to do with it. He said it. It will happen. I am not too much of a visitation type of pastor. I am a radical type. I like the style of Alexander McClarence who said, "I'm not too much into visitation. I just take care of the Word of

God so that every time my people come, they are fed with scripture." In John Chapter 21 we have Jesus saying twice, Feed my sheep. Feeding is very important. That's my own belief. I like what Dr. Kim said last night. The practicality of the word of God is to minister to the needs of people. Now that's why we are called Bread of Life. When we started the ministries, I prayed to God; I said, "Lord, what's a name for us to understand our own stewardship with you?" It is a bread for living. He who comes to me shall not hunger. He shall never thirst. You see, I come from a country that is very good at pretensions. The Filipino will smile but he will stab you at the back! He will get your money, say thank you, and use it for something else. That's why our credit cards are not respected in the world. I know that. I'm not ashamed of that. I need to repent of that. I am part of that. Daniel did not deny the sins of his people. Ezra did not deny the sins of his people. If we cannot accept our sins, we are hopeless. God forgives us. I come from that kind of country and then I travel to other countries. I'm always ashamed to go to the Filipino line. Once they find out you're Filipino they give you a lot of problems and I understand. We are a suffering people; there needs to be mercy in that area. They are going to another country where they can find something economically to help them. But, I say that's all wrong. First, seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, not the money. Seek his kingdom and then righteousness, and then the money will come. Go to another country and you will be like Elimelech, the husband of Naomi. He went to another country in Moab. There was famine in Bethlehem, the House of Bread. A real tragedy. That is happening to many of our people. They go and work in other countries, but their families are destroyed. It is like a curse on our country.

I ask God to teach our people to see a vision in our country. To see the scripture is not something to study and be cute about. Yes, we should know it is important to study, but as Leonard Graven Hill said, "Scripture is first to be believed." First, let's stand on scripture. That's the way we feed scripture to our sheep, and that's why I've been called a very down to earth pastor. There is a book brought out in our country called "The Filipino Spirit World." The problem in our country is that the Filipinos go to the Gospel because of their

eternal life needs, but when it comes to practical daily life needs, then they go to a witch doctor. They want prosperity, they go to a witch doctor, they want to fall in love, they want a girl, and they go to a witch doctor. God is the God of the spiritual, not the God of the material, but that's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is both God of the eternal and the temporal. He is both. I keep telling people that Christianity is not simply a way of getting from earth to heaven but also a way of bringing a touch of heaven to earth now. Otherwise, how do we know that the God we serve is true? If he is not real now, when we die how are we sure that he is true? That's why I was an atheist. I like to test things for myself. Let me end simply with that. I always try in my ministry. I am a doctrinal person, which you probably know by now. I have very strong beliefs. As Richard Baxter said, "My own secret is just that I set myself on fire and let people watch." I want to die with my boots on, setting myself on fire. If I die, then I die, but every Sunday, every time I'm on my pulpit, I try to apply the word to parents, to children, to jobs, to personal needs, to social needs; always apply to the needs. Make it work in the daily lives. Let's not talk about the Trinity only. How does the Trinity help us? Let's not simply talk about the atonement of Jesus Christ, but how does that affect us? Let's make the word come and feed.

God bless you, brothers and sisters. Forgive me if I've said very strong things. I do not say that out of love; I simply say that out of strong beliefs. After I had the experience of walking with God, I knew that I was a man of great sin. When I was young, my own mother cursed me. I was supposed to die at the age of six. I had an incurable tumour of the brain. The best brain doctor in the Philippines said, "Take him home, there is no hope. He is dead. Give him what he likes. He won't last a year." My mother, who was not a Christian, said, "Lord, if he turns out to be evil, take him but somehow, if you need him, leave him with us." I was about 5 years old. To make a long story short, I did not die, I'm still alive. We forgot that prayer. I lived a very prolific life. Two things I did not do, kill and rape. I almost killed my own father. I almost raped a woman. If God did not have mercy on me, I would be a criminal. He had mercy on me.

That's why I have very strong beliefs because I came from the garbage can. I saw what playing around with God does. I saw evil in Bible School. They were in Bible School, but they were not giving their all in what they did. I said if I studied and worked for the devil I would give my all, but how much more I've received. I do speak it with love, brethren, only to say, take what can help you. What's not applicable to you, and I understand not everything is applicable, just throw it away and somehow include us in your prayer, include our country. We need a lot of prayer. Let's pray.

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PARTNERSHIP IN EVANGELISM - II

Dr. Ajith Fernando

Today we will look at a very specific description of a type of partnership that was within the early church. If you will turn to Acts Chapter 4, beginning from verse 32, we find a description of community life. *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and God's grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time, those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."*

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Now a man named Ananais, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananais, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received from the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.

*When Ananais heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body and carried him out and buried him."
(Acts 4: 32 - 5:6)*

This is a good description of how this community put into practice their belief.

First, we are told that they were one in heart and mind. This statement is actually a prelude to a discussion about the sharing of