

After We Believe...

David Flatt

Jesus worked hard to persuade people to believe He was God's Son. He demonstrated love and sincerity by associating with the marginalized of society. He taught the Gospel of the Kingdom. He gave glimpses into His purpose of bringing new creation by performing miracles. Most significantly, Jesus gave His life on a cross to atone for the sins of the world. Then, God raised Jesus from the dead to exalt Him over Heaven and earth.

Sadly, most people rejected Jesus. Yet, they were not without hope. Following Jesus' ascension, the apostles preached the good news of Jesus. On the first Pentecost after the coronation of Jesus, 3,000 Jews became believers in Jesus as God's Son and obeyed the Gospel.

Today, efforts are made to persuade people to believe and obey the Gospel of Jesus. The work of evangelism is important. Yet, there remains work to do in the lives and development of believers. Notice what we can learn from the first believers.

After We Believe, We Must...

1). Strengthen our new life. After the Jews at Pentecost believed, the Bible says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). These believers made a commitment to Jesus and their new life. They devoted themselves to learning from the apostles. They were committed to their new family of faith. They shared in the Lord's Supper. They prayed together. All of their actions helped them learn and grow into the image of Christ.

After we believe, we must nurture our devotion to Jesus and one another. We must learn from the Bible about our new life in Christ. Every day, we must work to put into practice what we learn in the Bible.

Christians are usually determined to learn and grow when they first believe. Yet, there is a tendency for our fervency to cool. We are less attentive to God's word. Our old way of life begins to creep back into our character. If this happens, we must repent. We must get back to doing the work of learning and growing.

2). Share in the community of believers. The first believers became family. They took care of each other. The Bible says, "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

The Bible calls the community of believers the Church. From the beginning, Christians came together as a church. They worshipped together. They studied together. They built relationships. After we believe, we must share in the life of a local church. The Church is a family. As with any family, each member must do their part to love, help, and support the family. The

Church is an indispensable relationship designed to strengthen believers in ways believers cannot strengthen themselves alone.

3). Endure adversity. While there was a culture of love and support among the first believers in Jerusalem, there was a strong contingent in the city adamantly opposed to them. The leadership in Jerusalem took action against the apostles. Peter and John were arrested, beaten, and threatened. A beloved Christian, Stephen, was murdered. Christians were driven out of Jerusalem. A legally sanctioned persecution began against Christians.

Jesus had warned the apostles about this kind of opposition: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20).

Adversity can surprise us. We must remember what Peter wrote: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Our family and friends may not support our new life in Christ. They may tempt and test us. We may lose relationships. Yet, we must endure. We must be resilient. We must find strength in Christ and one another.

4). Share the Gospel. When the first believers were persecuted, they did not waver in their commitment to Jesus. When attempts were made to silence Peter and John, they bravely told the Sanhedrin Council, “...Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). When believers were expelled from Jerusalem, they left preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

After we believe, we must share the Gospel. Some may welcome our words. Others may laugh at us. No matter the circumstances, we must remain unmoved in our determination to do this work.

Conclusion

These first believers have left a powerful legacy of faithfulness. The strong, determined believers of Acts 8 did not start this way. They grew in strength. They nurtured their new life, shared in the community of believers, and endured adversity. All of this contributed to their vibrant faith. If we want to become strong, committed believers, we must learn from their example and follow in their steps.