

Church in the Wild Devotional
Sunday, July 8, 2018

After twelve weeks of feasting upon the Old Testament, let's turn our attention to a rich morsel of the New Testament: 1 Thessalonians. Next Sunday I'll begin a series called "Model Church." Paul wrote that the Thessalonians "became a model to all the believers" (1:7). We can learn much from these champions. Today we'll focus on how they drew people into their movement.

Thessalonica is on Greece's northern coast. It was Macedonia's trading hub when Paul and Silas arrived to share the news of Jesus. **Read the Acts 17:1-10 account of how a new church was planted in only three weeks!**

Notice that Paul's "custom" was to tell the good news first to the Jews, those who were already God's covenant people. Upon entering the city, he and Silas went to the synagogue to tell faithful Jews and the "God-fearing Greeks" learning Judaism that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). It was difficult for Jews to understand how God would allow the conquering Messiah to be crucified, so Paul "reasoned with them from the [Old Testament] Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ (Messiah) had to suffer and rise from the dead" (vs. 2-3). "Some of the Jews were persuaded" ...as were "a large number of the God-fearing Gentiles..." (v. 4).

The apostles focused on synagogue-attenders because they already knew the true God and were awaiting His Messiah. **I see an interesting parallel for us now.** We began *Church in the Wild* by sharing our vision with other Christ-followers disappointed by church institutions. Some of you were disappointed by conflict and others bored with "consumer church." You yearned for a more relational, gracious, and missional church. Part of what persuaded you to join us was looking anew at how the Bible describes the early church.

But as was the case in Acts 17, only a small number of God's people decided to join us. Most church people resist change, even if there's a biblical rationale for it. Yet as in Thessalonica, some Christ-followers have joined us, leaving the comfort and predictability of institutional church. Starting to join our movement are spiritual seekers who weren't involved in a church—a bit like Thessalonica's "God-fearing Gentiles." Both types are welcome in our movement. Long-time believers bring experience and maturity. New-to-church participants bring enthusiasm.

When Thessalonians began to believe in Jesus, a jealous mob rioted. If only *Church in the Wild* could have such a problem! Religious leaders seized Jason because he "welcomed [the apostles] into his house" (vs. 7). Jason's gracious home was ground zero for Jesus' grace. When practiced in homes, worship and fellowship is authentic and compelling.

Several months ago Lynn and I participated in a gathering of Brevard Organic Church. It consists of about 25 people of all ages (including small children). They gather on a weekly basis in someone's home for an informal, spontaneous time of worship, followed by a covered-dish meal. They chose not to have a pastor to lead them. Instead they each utilize their spiritual gifts—music, teaching, and shepherding—to provide mutual care. The children learn the Bible from their parents and their church family. We enjoyed their grace and the experience. It's our dream that our home or pavilion-based gatherings will also become "Brevard organic churches!"

Brevard Organic Church isn't a "model church," for its participants seem OK with being the only one. Brevard needs many organic churches! Our *Church in the Wild* vision is to disciple and train, so groups of us can create welcoming gatherings where guests catch a whiff of Jesus. Gathering everyone together every two weeks furthers this goal (And keeps me employed☺)

Questions to Ponder or Discuss:

- When you've told other people about *Church in the Wild*, what do you emphasize?
- How is studying the Bible and praying together different in a home or pavilion setting?