



One summer evening as we were returning from eating out with my grandparents in Rock Hill, South Carolina, we came upon an accident. My father was driving a station wagon, and my grandfather Pappy was next to him. Pappy was the state's safety engineer for building interstate highways so as we came up to the accident, Pappy told my father that he was required by law to stop and give any assistance he could. So my father pulled over to the shoulder, and Pappy and Daddy got out, administered first aid, directed traffic, and waited until the ambulance came.

Pappy came upon an accident and did not gawk at it, but went to work. If we are not trained and were not witnesses to the accident, there is nothing for us to do but to travel around the accident. We are not to stare, gawk, and take pictures, lest we end up in a wreck ourselves. Rubbernecking keeps us from traveling safely. Likewise; staring at others and not getting involved keeps us from the ministries to which God is calling us.

In Acts 1, we read Jesus ascended to the realm of God, and the disciples' immediate reaction. Jesus had instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, so that they could become effective witnesses of Jesus and his resurrection from Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

When Jesus left then and went to the glory, majesty, honor, and power of his Father, the disciples stared up into the sky, gawking at the clouds—the classic rubbernecking posture—and angels had to come and rebuke them. “‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”

Then the men returned to others in a large room where they were staying, perhaps in the Upper Room where they ate the Last Supper with Jesus, or in John Mark's mother's house, or in an entirely different house. Exactly which house they stayed at was not important. What was important was that they were obedient to Jesus; they stayed in Jerusalem; stayed together, and got busy. They quit rubbernecking and did what they were supposed to do.



The text then tells us a few things they were doing as they waited for Pentecost. They didn't sit around marveling or staring at each other's toes and noses, but were united and committed to one another as a new family; persisted in prayer; studied scripture; and organized themselves for ministry. They didn't know *when* their new ministry would begin, but they were preparing themselves for it. They demonstrated and strengthened their love for one another; they gathered together to worship, eat, and pray; they persisted in prayer, together and

alone; they studied scripture to see what it had to say about their circumstances; and they organized themselves for ministry.

Our church may be in a holding pattern right now, but we can do what the early church did. We can make sure we are united together, growing in love and commitment towards one another, and regularly spending time in fellowship with one another. We can persist in prayer, praying earnest prayers together and apart, praying for God's guidance, understanding, and power. We can pray for opportunities to share the gospel and make a difference in the lives of others around us, seeking to make the world a better place for all. We can pray for understanding, wisdom, energy, and boldness. Pray for health, knowledge, courage, and love. We can pray persistently, regularly, corporately and privately. Pray. Not just two-minute prayers; but extended dedicated time in prayer.

William Walford was a blind English man, with an obscure birth and connections, and no formal education; but he had a keen mind. He spent much of his time whittling objects out of wood, bone, and ivory, praying, memorizing a large amount of scripture, and composing sermons and poems in his head. He occasionally preached in a Congregational Church, figuring out what he would say in his head ahead of time, and quoting scripture verbatim from memory, causing some to believe he had memorized the whole Bible.

Thomas Salmon, an ordained American Congregational minister from New York, went to England to serve the people there for a few years and became a friend to William Walford. One day, as Reverend Salmon visited him, William Walford asked Reverend Salmon to write down a new composition for him. He did so, and later sent the poem to the *New York Observer*, which published them on September 13, 1845; afterwards, those lines were set to music by William Bradbury, and it became a beloved hymn of the church:

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.

The disciples were united together, persisted in prayer, and **studied scripture**. Although this is not stated explicitly in this passage, it is obvious that Peter had been studying scripture for he gets up to tell the assembly that scripture warrants them to appoint a person to replace Judas. Peter had

searched his memory of scripture, and questioned what it had to say about their current situation and came up with some guidance from two of David's psalms.

We also are to study scripture, reflecting upon, remembering, and applying it to our lives, finding from within it direction, comfort, and strength. Scripture is central to our life together; it is the basis for all that we do together. We let Jesus rule over us through the dictates and principles of scripture.

Or at least that is what we say we believe and do. In 2016 the Barna Research Group found that 60% of Americans could not name five of the Ten Commandments. 82% believe the quip, "God helps those who help themselves," can be found in the Bible. A significant number believed Joan of Arc was Noah's wife, and that Billy Graham preached the Sermon on the Mount. 50% of graduating high-school seniors thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

We cannot blame secular Americans for not knowing their Bibles, but we can blame ourselves for ignoring and forgetting scripture, never letting it affect our lives. The majority of American adult Christians believed the most important thing to do on earth is to provide for their own families; and many believe a Christian is nothing more than living as a good American citizen.

Too many of us have forgotten that Jesus is supposed to be our ruler, that we are to be tell others of God's love and grace, live with joy and gratitude toward God, and make this life, the here and now, a better place for all people, not just for our own selves and families. We are to be living out the vision of the universal, gracious, and eternal kingdom of God, not "make America great again."

We must study our Bibles, meditate upon scripture, learn and know them, and then apply them to our lives, to our individual lives and to our corporate life together as a church.

The 120 or so believers in Jerusalem were united together, loving, committed to, and fellowshiping with one another. They persisted in prayer, and studied and applied scripture to their lives, and **they became organized**. Peter discerned they needed to replace Judas, and make the number of Apostles twelve once again; but the decision on who that would be was not dictated by Peter, but was made by the group. They discerned a need for a specific ministry, determined the qualifications needed for that ministry, discerned who were qualified, prayed, and put forward two people: Joseph and Matthias. Then they drew lots to determine which of the two Jesus wanted as his minister and witness.

This is the only time in the New Testament where lots were used to determine God's leading, presumably because with the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the community could discern God's leading through scripture and prayer. So we do not organize and choose our leaders by chance, but we do seek to do all things decently and in good order. Organization, along with spiritual vitality and enthusiasm, are needed for a healthy growing church. There is nothing wrong or unspiritual about paying attention to our organization and structures.

Our particular organization is based upon members electing elders to rule over the affairs of the congregation on behalf of the congregation in conjunction with scripture and the Book of Order. Elders along with the pastor are to rule over the church and all members, along with the pastor and elders, are to do the work of ministry and service. Only members can be elders; only members can vote; that is the way we are organized.

So then, our organizational structure needs active *committed* members, not just long-term guests and visitors. We need **all of us** to be united and committed together, not just spiritually, but also organizationally. All regular attenders need to be active in our organization, so that we can do all that we can to serve God. So if you are not currently a member and feel God's nudging you to become one, let one of our elders know, and we'll bring you onboard.



The believers in Jerusalem did not continue to stare up at the clouds and wait for Jesus' sudden return from heaven. Instead they were united together, persisted in prayer, studied scripture, and became better organized.

We will follow their example by not being rubbernecks, staying uninvolved, safely on the outside and staring at what others are doing. Instead, we will be committed to one another, and involved in the worship, ministries and services of our church. And when we are united, caught up in praying and studying, and are organize and committed for service and ministry, then God will use us.

Be united, get involved, pray, and study. Be fellow members committed to Christ and this church so that we can become the Church God wants us to be.