

## Seize The Opportunity: To Belong – Various Scriptures

Let's continue by opening up God's Word to Acts 4:31 (Intro)

- You can go to a lot of places on Sunday morning – Panera, Starbucks, the golf course, Wal-Mart, the river, your easy chair  
You can go a lot of *places*, and do a lot of *things* – like piddle on your laptop, watch the NFL pre-game show ad nauseum, read a book, float downstream, walk the dog . . .  
You can basically worship at the altar of leisure; You can do that

Or, you can go to church; Which *you* 've chosen to do on this particular weekend; And I want to commend you for it; Especially so b/c the Bible *tells* us to  
**Heb 10:24-25** says – *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* The day of Christ's return  
Don't neglect meeting together God says; IOW go to church, and seize the opportunity to belong; Seize the opportunity to be a part  
That's it; And I assume that's why most of you are here\*\*\*\*\*

- But here's the thing – make sure it's a church; And don't just settle for any old church  
Don't go to a church just b/c it's close to your home; Or comfortable for you to attend  
Or makes you *feel* good; Or doesn't make you feel bad; Or is filled with lots of people  
Rather, find a church that's filled with the *Spirit*, and go there  
That's the *first* thought I want to commend to you

Seize the opportunity to belong . . .

### To a Spirit-filled church (Acts 4:31)

A church where the Holy Spirit of *God* is firmly in control  
A church where his *power* is obviously evident  
A church that's alive with a passion and fervor for the Lord Jesus Christ  
Like the early church was, described in Acts 4:31; Take a look

It says – *And when they had prayed* [that's the early believers, the *early* church], *the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

They were filled with the Holy Spirit – every one of them; Which together, made them a Spirit-filled church

And as such, they went on to do 4 main things; The very things Spirit-filled churches do today; And I want to share them with you . . .  
B/c if you don't know what a Spirit-filled church *looks* like and *does*, you won't know what to seize; And you might even seize the wrong thing

So first of all . . .

### • They proclaim the authority of God's Word without apology (2 Tim 4:2)

Which Luke, the *writer* of Acts, alludes to right here in v31; Saying that they spoke *the word of God*; That's what they proclaimed

But it's the Apostle Paul who makes it explicit (**2 Tim 4:2**); Writing a few years later he says – *I charge you . . . preach the word* [i.e. proclaim it, herald it, expound it]; *be ready*

*in season and out of season* [i.e. when it's popular, and when it's not]; *reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.*

*Reprove*, as in use the word of God to expose someone's sin for the purpose of conviction  
*Rebuke*, as in tell them to stop sinning for the purpose of holiness  
And *exhort*, as in urge them toward righteousness for the glory of God

That's what *Spirit*-filled churches do; And not just the pastor, but everyone\*\*\*\*\*  
They proclaim the authority of God's Word without apology  
Without backing down; Without minimizing the hard parts; Without adding caveats  
They speak the truth in love, and let God do what only he can do through his Spirit

Second . . .

### • They lift high the name of Jesus in worship (John 5:23)

Worship, meaning they focus their mind's attention, their heart's affection, and their will's submission on Jesus; Lifting him high, or exalting him . . .  
By declaring that his name, his person, his work – is above all others

It's like Jesus said in **Jn 5:23** – *The Father . . . has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.*  
That all may worship the Son, just as they honor and worship the Father

Especially so (**Phil 2:9-11**), since – *God* [himself] *has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name*  
[10] *So that at the name of Jesus* [the mention of Jesus] *every knee should bow* [should worship], *in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* [that Jesus Christ is exalted], *to the glory of God the Father.*

That's what Spirit-filled churches do – they lift high the name of Jesus in worship\*\*\*\*\*

That doesn't mean we swing from the rafters or roll in the aisles . . .

It means that in our hearts, lives, and voices – we put Jesus first, and draw all the attention we can, to him

Third . . .

### • They believe firmly in the power of prayer (Acts 4:31)

Which is exactly why they were praying in Acts 4 – b/c they believed in its power; And experienced it on the spot  
Not only was the place *shaken* – but they were empowered to speak; Despite the persecution and opposition that surrounded them

As Spirit-filled people strive to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:12) . . .

And Spirit-filled churches wage war against *the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Eph 6:12) – they do so through prayer

Not only b/c that's what the Bible *says*, but b/c they firmly believe in its power, and experience it routinely

And then fourth . . .

## They share the Good News of Jesus with **boldness** (Acts 4:31)

Which brings us right back to the early church; Who was speaking the word of God with *boldness*; The core of which is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ  
That's the focal point of this entire book  
That Jesus became flesh, lived as our example, died for our sins, rose again for our life, and is coming again one day to receive those who are his, and judge those who aren't

That's the gospel; The Good News that Spirit-filled churches share with *boldness*  
A Spirit-led, Spirit-enabled conviction to speak;; Not obnoxiously, but lovingly; Not bashfully, but firmly  
That's what Spirit-filled churches do; And that's the intent of ours

- In fact, those are the 4 pillars of our church; The 4 principles on which we build our entire ministry; Take a look at this **video** (One Mission – 3:33)

(**Summary**) Find a church like that, and you should seize the opportunity to belong  
B/c not only is it Spirit-filled, but it's most likely an uncommon community  
And that's the *second* thought I want to commend to you

Seize the opportunity to belong . . .

### To an **uncommon** community (Acts 2:42-47)

We have a theme every year in our church, to reinforce a principle or truth found in the Bible; And this year it's **Uncommon** – b/c we serve an uncommon God  
So uncommon there is no other  
And we serve him in uncommon community; Or at least we *should*; Acts 2:42-47\*\*\*\*\*

Once again this is the early church, just a short time *before* the events of chapter 4  
And their community is characterized in some really compelling verses  
[42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

That's an uncommon community; Marked by at least 7 different characteristics

Starting with the fact that they were . . .

1. **Devoted** – from v42, they were devoted to God's Word, the Apostle's teaching . . .  
They were devoted to one another, the community of believers, *the fellowship* . . .  
They were devoted to The Lord's Table, *the breaking of bread* . . .  
And they were devoted to worship – designated times for prayer  
If you find a church like that, a place where the majority of people are devoted in that respect – seize the opportunity to belong; B/c it's uncommon; Especially in our day

Second, uncommon communities are . . .

2. **Blessed** – blessed with a front row seat to the *awe*-inspiring work God is doing  
Like the wonders and signs in *their* church, to confirm his message

And his work in ours to restore marriages, heal the broken-hearted, provide for ministry, and change lives; Hundreds of them; It makes us blessed

Third, uncommon communities are . . .

3. **Unified** – v44 says, *all who believed were together and had all things in common*  
That doesn't mean they lived together, but that they were of the same mind and heart, and freely shared with one another  
Like our Small Groups do from time to time; As God knits their hearts together, he often uses them to bless one another through mutual sharing  
From babysitting, to lawnmowers, to home remodeling

4. **Generous** – from v45, they make sure each other's needs are being met; Like *we* do through our Compassion Fund  
Giving away upwards of \$20k a year to help those both inside *and* outside our church  
Not to mention the hundreds of *individual* expressions of generosity every year

5. **Faithful** – far from fair weather fans who go to church only when they feel like it, or when it's convenient, uncommon communities don't miss; They're faithful  
That's the idea in v46, of *attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes* – day by day

6. **Joyful** – no Debbie-Downers or Pessimistic Pete's, they *gladly* meet for church, they *gladly* meet in Small Groups, they *rejoice* over God's provision like it says in v46b . . .  
And praise him for it; Finding favor in the eyes of men; No wonder; Joy is attractive  
And uncommon communities have it

7. **Growing** – v47 says that *the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*; Those who believed in Jesus, and repented of their sin  
I don't know if I can say that's true around here every *day* – but most weeks, and certainly every *month* people are coming to Christ, people are being saved

Some of which is reflected in our baptisms; Where over 600 people have *declared* their salvation, in just 8 short years of our existence  
Take a look at some of these highlights (**Video** – Baptism Highlights)

- (**Summary**) A community of believers like that, is worth belonging to  
And I'd encourage you to seize the opportunity (Pray for West Davenport Campus)

And then last, seize the opportunity to belong . . .

### To the **family** of God (John 1:9-13)

Here's the deal; You can't truly belong to the uncommon community of a Spirit-filled church, unless you belong to the family of God  
Unless you're part of the body of Christ, by virtue of your faith in him, and repentance of your sins

IOW just b/c you *go* to church, doesn't make you a *part* of the church  
That would be like saying you belong to the uncommon community of NASCAR, just b/c you *drive* a car; Or that you're a mechanic, just b/c you park in a garage  
Church is a spiritual thing; A family where you belong, by becoming a child of God  
Let me show you what I mean, by turning to one more passage – John 1:9-13

- The Apostle John is writing, and referring to Jesus he says . . .

[9] *The true light, which gives light to everyone* [as in righteousness, hope, and life itself], *was coming into the world.* [10] *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.* [11] *He came to his own* [the Jewish people of his day], *and his own people did not receive him.* [12] *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God* [he gave the right to become part of his family; adopted in, forever and ever]

[And they're *born*, those who receive Christ; they're born into God's family] *not of blood* [not in a physical sense] *nor of the will of the flesh* [through some physical act or work on their part] *nor of the will of man, but of God* [IOW it's *God's* will and *God's* doing to adopt you into his family].

And when he does, you're not only a part of his *family*, but a part of the *church*  
But the key, as v12 says – is *believing* in Jesus, and *receiving* him into your life

- If you're going to seize the opportunity to belong to a Spirit-filled, uncommon community of *believers* – you have to believe yourself  
You have to trust Jesus to save you, and commit to follow him as he leads you  
Repenting of your sins and confessing him as Lord; IOW . . .

**Believe in Jesus** – as the one and only one, who can save you and keep you

**Repent of your sins** – to be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness, and avoid the penalty of eternal suffering; And . . .

**Receive him into your life** – as Lord and Savior; Committing to follow him and live his way, the rest of your life

Believe, repent, and receive; That's how you become a child of God, and part of his family

And if you've never done that, but want to – I'm going to lead you in a prayer of salvation right now . . .

And I want to encourage you to seize the opportunity, to *pray* with me

- Pray – God, I *believe* in Jesus; I believe he died for my sins, in my place, so I wouldn't have to; And then rose again, so I can too some day; I believe  
And I *repent* – I repent of my sins; I've sinned in so many ways, and I'm sorry for it; Will you forgive me, and cleanse me, and wash me white as snow? I'm done with my old way of living; I repent  
And I *receive* you now into my life, to be my Lord and Savior – committing to live for you, in the strength you provide, from now on; I receive you
- As we continue in prayer, if you just prayed with me to receive Christ – will you raise your hand and look at me, and wait for me to acknowledge you?  
I'm not going to call you out, but I do want to rejoice with you, and pray for you in just a minute; Is there anyone?\*\*\*\*\*

Pray – God, thank you for adding to our number, those who are being saved; Newborn children of yours that they are, would you assure them of your love and protection? And comfort them with the presence of your Holy Spirit, within? And give them a hunger for you, your word, and your people – that fuels them and fills them for the rest of their life?

Thank you, God; We love you, we give to your work now – for this very end; To proclaim

your name, and your gospel, and your work, all the more

For those of you just prayed to receive Christ, we praise God for you