

WHEN SURRENDER LEADS YOU INTO A PEOPLE

15 MARCH 2026

SUMMARY

This message challenges modern Christians to move beyond individualistic faith and institutional maintenance toward authentic Christian community and evangelization. Bruce Downes traces the historical shift in the Church from its early missionary focus (when evangelization was essential) to a maintenance mode (when everyone was already Christian), and finally to today's crisis where many are "sacramentalized but not evangelized." Drawing on papal teaching from Vatican II through Pope Francis, the message calls for a return to the Acts 2 model of community - characterized by teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer - where believers are known, loved, served, and celebrated. The message issues a prophetic challenge to the congregation to ask whether they are merely attending services or truly living as a transformative missionary community that reaches a godless world.

KEY POINTS

- The early Church was primarily focused on proclamation, conversion, and community formation
- From the 4th century onward, as whole populations became Christian, the Church shifted from evangelization to maintenance and pastoral care
- Modern secularization (especially since the 1950s) has created a generation that is baptized but un-evangelized—they've received sacraments but don't have a relationship with Jesus
- Popes from Paul VI through Francis have called for a "new evangelization" to reach the post-Christian world
- The Church has lost its evangelizing instinct and know-how after centuries of maintenance mode
- Christian life was never meant to be lived alone—Jesus formed communities of disciples, not isolated individuals
- Faith becomes fragile, evangelization weakens, and communities struggle when Christianity is practiced privately and individually
- True Christian community involves being known and knowing others, loving and being loved, serving and being served, celebrating and being celebrated
- Evangelization doesn't begin with techniques but with transformed people whose changed lives cause others to notice and ask questions
- The question for the community is whether they want to be people who gather for a message and go home, or become authentic community that reaches the world.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- Acts 2:42-47 (primary focus): "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved"
- Acts 2:40-47 (extended passage describing early Christian community life)

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work during this Lenten season. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

ICEBREAKER

Share one experience where you felt truly known and cared for by a community. What made that experience meaningful? Discussion Questions

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding the Message

1. Bruce Downes described three phases in church history: proclamation, maintenance, and the current crisis. Which phase resonates most with your own faith journey? Why?
2. What struck you most about the description of the early church in Acts 2:42-47? What specifically appeals to you about that model?
3. The message stated: "Many Catholics were sacramentalized but not evangelized." What do you think is the difference? Where do you see yourself in that statement?

Personal Reflection

1. Bruce Downes asked: "If you didn't turn up today, would anyone notice? Would anyone care?" How does that question make you feel? Is it true in your experience?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you experience authentic Christian community (where you are known, loved, served, and celebrated)? What would it take to move that number higher?
3. The message mentioned that modern culture trains us to be "self-contained." In what ways do you see this playing out in your own life? What barriers keep you from deeper community?

Application and Action

1. Bruce Downes described community as experiencing **prayer, healing, friendship, growth, and transformation** together. Which of these five elements is most present in your current experience? Which is most lacking?
2. If someone asked you, "How do I encounter Jesus?" would you know what to say? Would you feel comfortable inviting them into something? Why or why not?

3. The message challenged: "Messages don't grow communities—people who are committed to Jesus and commit to people grow communities." What would it look like for you personally to commit to people, not just attend services?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Choose one or two actions to implement this week:

- **Reach out intentionally:** Contact one person from your faith community this week just to check in and see how they're doing (not for a task or event)
- **Invite someone deeper:** Ask one person to coffee or a meal to share your faith story and hear theirs
- **Pray for evangelization:** Spend 10 minutes daily asking God to show you one person in your life who needs to encounter Jesus
- **Examine your "why":** Journal about why you participate in church/faith community. Is it just for you, or is there a larger mission?
- **Study the early church:** Read Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37 each day this week and ask God what He wants you to learn

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving Father, we come before you right now in the name of Jesus. Lord, we ask that you would speak into our life and into our heart. Lord, we pray that you would gather us in ways you call to gather us. Lord, the church you have cared for, looked after, and it will continue on as your dwelling place on earth. But Lord, through history, you've gathered and raised women and men, communities of people, movements, religious orders, lay people, priests, religious, to bring renewal. Lord, our church is desperate for renewal in many places around the world. Choose us. Choose us. Choose us. Don't go by us. Don't leave us behind. Don't forget about us. Choose us. And Father, we make this prayer in Jesus' name, through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.