

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

Learning and Living the Faith

Acts 4:32-35 (ESV)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.



Becoming Faithful

In week 1 we looked at the descriptions of the early church and how it was lived. Church beyond walls was simply a given considering there were not actual worship buildings to use.

In week 2 we are looking at the people, or more specifically the seekers and curious who wanted to join the early Christian community. The formation they experienced has echoes today with terms like 'catechism', but it was different in quite a few ways.

There were no formal 'Christian' schools or classes. People were not segregated along generational lines. Everyone learned the faith together.



Living Faith

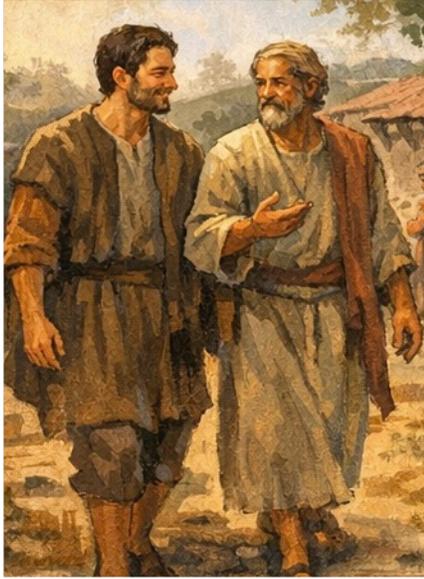
The early church had a process called the *Catechumenate*, which was a structured mentorship program for new believers. This was beyond attending worship every Sunday evening. All those who were interested in becoming Christian, or at the time as they were known Christ Followers or People of the Way, entered a period of guided formation that could last months or even years, depending on their readiness and where they lived around the Mediterranean. Each gathering of believers had their own process, similar to each other, but with a few cultural differences depending on geography.

The first newcomers were often called “hearers”. They observed, listened, and began to understand what it meant to live in a Christian community, but they were not able to participate in baptism or Eucharist. Depending on where they lived that could mean they were part of the learning portion of worship, but had to leave before the Agape meal, or they could be present but were not invited to participate in Eucharist specifically. Again regional variations dictated different experiences for these curious folks. It was during this portion of their formation that they watched and began integrating into the rhythm of the communal life of believers, starting to form habits aligned with this new faith.

Once they moved into the primary catechumen stage instruction became more intentional. Mentors who were experienced believers, guided new members through scripture, prayer, ethical instruction, and spiritual practices. This wasn't about memorizing creeds or theological jargon - in fact those things hadn't yet been thought out or written down - it was about learning to live faithfully, practice generosity, hospitality, honesty, and care for the vulnerable. The relationship between mentor and catechumen was crucial. Faith grew in action and participation, not in isolation.

Ritual milestones marked progress: fasting, symbolic renunciations of their previous lifestyles and often wealth, and purification rites, prepared catechumens spiritually and practically. By the time of baptism, usually at Easter, catechumens had not only learned about faith, they had lived it in community.





Core beliefs of the first Christians

Jesus was the Messiah, Son of God, and Saviour

That they were part of God's covenant

Turn away from pagan gods, household idols and rituals of other religious cults

Live a life that was honest, humble, generous and with sexual integrity

Practice hospitality and care for others in their community

Experience baptism as an entry into the Christian community and recognize that that was a ritual of repentance (turning away from their old selves), cleansing and initiation into a new life in Christ

Mentorship

Mentorship was the heart of early formation. New believers were never left alone to figure things out. They were guided by elders or experienced members who helped them interpret scripture, molded ethical living, and integrated into community life. Mentorship wasn't just about teaching, it was about doing the life of a Christian together, creating a bridge between instruction and practice.

Families together

Childhood did not have the same consideration in the earliest Christian community that it has today. That does not mean that children were not valued - quite the contrary. It was that childhood, as a concept, did not exist in the first centuries of the Common Era. It is a relatively modern concept. For the most part children were just seen as small adults to be taught through action rather than extensive formal education. Families were not separated during regular life, and that included in their faith formation.

If a parent, mentor or catechumen, was actively involved with the mentorship relationship, their children were most likely included as well. Children were baptized into the faith when their parents were, and were raised to be people of faith.

Attitude towards spirituality in the ancient world

We have to pause here to explore another aspect of ancient society that is not shared with our modern world. In the ancient world, there was no concept of choosing faith or spirituality. If you breathed, you were spiritual, that's all. Everyone was expected to believe in a god or gods, sometimes more than one religious cult in the Greco-Roman or north African areas.

This was one way the Hebrews stood out - they only believed in one God and only participated in the Hebrew Temple faith. They had an agreement with Rome that they wouldn't be part of the Roman cult. The early Christians, as a sect of the Hebrew tradition, were also covered under this agreement.

Living it today

Modern discipleship often assumes that attending a few classes or reading a book is enough. The early church suggests otherwise. Faith grows in relationship, rhythm, and guided practice. Weekly habits, mentors, and communal participation are opportunities to live and explore faithfully.

This week consider:

Who has guided you in faith? How could you bring mentorship into your spiritual life? What daily practices shape you? What other practices could you adopt intentionally?



CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS IS NOT ABSENCE OF STRUCTURE. IT IS PARTICIPATION, RELATIONAL DEPTH, AND FORMATION ROOTED IN FAITH THAT SURVIVES OUTSIDE WALLS. COMMUNITIES TOGETHER AND EXPLORING THEIR FAITH.

Activities of Catechumens

Attend teaching and scripture readings

Participate in communal meals and fellowship

Prayer and worship practice

Ethical and lifestyle formation

Model behaviour and role-play community life

Mentorship and apprenticeship activities (household responsibilities, travel, charitable actions)

Ritual preparation

Intergenerational learning

Learning to manage the communal resources (food, money, goods)

Regularly review and reflect on their moral and spiritual development with their mentor