

Bing Videos

If a video like that cute one gets **a million views in one week** it is considered viral. Things **go viral because** they connect with our emotions and become a 'must see.' Propelled by the Holy Spirit, the Good News went viral.

The average person today **consumes over 2 hours** of social media a day.

- Social **media's algorithms** are designed to connect and feed us *more* of what we like. They connect with **our strongest emotions**, usually anger and fear, to feed these likes and avoid our dislikes.
- That algorithm knows you better than you know you. Many here today are more shaped by the news, than the Good News.
- Our fun little mountain goat **cannot compete** with videos from Minneapolis. 'Minneapolis is ...' Just saying the word Minneapolis caused many of you to listen. You want my next sentence to affirm what you already believe.
- Just one word made us go to our political corners?
- We end up in **personal echo chambers**. Because social media is designed to feed our likes and avoid our dislikes, we end up in an one-person echo chamber.
- **On the surface**, social media connects us with our friends. But at a **deeper level** social media also separates us from those who do not share our perspective or our rage.
- God is not going to say, 'well posted, good and faithful servant.' If you cannot tolerate those who see things differently from you, it is time to take a break from social media or the news

Today, I want to explore *why the Good News* went viral. The Good News should go viral with every generation and culture.

Going Viral

Acts 2, 4, & 5



We will see that the Good News **was attractional because of** what was seen in the community of believers. Your life might be the only Bible some people will view. *Are you a good translation?*

In Acts, Luke tells the story of the Good News **expanding from Jerusalem** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- On the Day of **Pentecost**, ‘Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all (Acts 2:41 NLT).’
- A short time later, ‘Each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved (Acts 2:47 NLT).’
- And again, ‘Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women (Acts 5:14 NLT).’

I believe that the early **church grew rapidly** *not because of anger or fear*, like today’s social media, but through the attraction of a joy-filled, Spirit empowered community.

A joyful, grace-filled community makes the Good News impossible to ignore.

1. Background.

We have been looking at **story segments** within Luke-Acts. *But today* we will look at **four texts** where Luke breaks from his story segments to give us snapshots of the early church.

- Scholars call these ‘**summary texts**.’¹
- These summary texts **are glimpses** into the primitive church.
- It reveals the **first unfiltered reactions** of these first Christians.

Luke shares these four summary texts *not just because its history but because ...*

- It is a “lived theology” – the joyous way life is meant to be lived in community.’²
- **It is how we participate** in God’s mission.

We will see ...

1. That God longs for a divine community.
 - While salvation is wonderful, but **God’s biggest dream** is *not just* for our salvation, but for our life together.
 - **God’s dream** is for us to have satisfaction and joy in our life together, both now and for eternity.
2. What a healthy Christian community looks like. A healthy community ...
 - Gives us perspective. Our own views are often too narrow to hold truth.

¹ Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 992.

² Lyle Story, *Joyous Encounters: Discovering the Happy Affections in Luke-Acts* (New York: NY: Herder & Herder Book, 2018), 281.

- Causes us to grow. So many have a fear of intimacy. 'People would rather stay disconnected than risk rejection.'³
 - Helps us to become selfless.
3. It is a joy-filled community. Joy is mentioned twice at key moments.
- **Overall**, Luke's four summaries show us a happy and grace-filled community.

Right after 3,000 people were saved on the Day of Pentecost.

2. After Pentecost, Acts 2:42-47.

'All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals, and to prayer (Acts 2:42 NLT).'

'Pentecost naturally flows into the story of the community's life together.'⁴

- **Gathering** together was *the initial response* of those who believed.
- They **decided to 'hold fast'** as a community of shared beliefs and experiences.
They were 'with one accord (Acts 1:14 ESV).'

'Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:43-47a NIV).'

Let's list possible factors for growth in these verses.

Why Viral?

- Teaching & preaching, v. 42.
- Prayer, v. 42.
- Miracles, signs & wonders, v. 43.
- Generosity – sharing with each other, vv. 44-45.
- Worship & celebration – praise, v. 47.
- Community – a unified, grace-filled, joyful community, vv. 42, 46-47.

³ I took his three negatives and made them positive. Andy Stanley, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004), 32.

⁴ Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 282.

If you are **from a liturgical or Reformed** background, **please note** that this is *neither* a doctrine nor a ritual-centered gathering. It was a dynamic, lived-theology – life together.

Joy is the natural response to grace.

- **‘Rejoicing appears to overflow** from the first moments in which ... (the Spiritual) gifts are perceived.’⁵
- It is **‘the quality of their life together** (that) creates a positive impression.’⁶
- This is **‘evangelism through lifestyle**.’⁷
- A joyful, grace-filled community makes the Good News impossible to ignore.

I have experienced such a community in a couple of churches. People were attracted to our loving, grace-filled community.

- In Duluth, **hippies** would come in off the streets, find Jesus, and stay because we accepted them. During testimonies it was **common to hear stories** like: ‘I was about to get my third DUI and lose my license when I prayed. God helped me to only get a warning. Thank you Jesus.’
- In **Japan**, **guests** would watch our interactions and determine if we were worth the time. When they saw how much we loved each other, they would join us. Often they would buy a Bible, stop drinking or running after girls, and even start tithing before they were baptized. They joined the community and adjusted their lifestyle to the community before they even believed.

‘And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved (Acts 2:47b NLT).’

The next summary statement highlights generosity.

3. Generosity Highlighted, Acts 4:32-37.

‘All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.’³³ The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all.³⁴ There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them³⁵ and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.³⁶ For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means “Son of Encouragement”). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.³⁷ He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles (Acts 4:32-37 NLT).’

⁵ Haya-Prats in Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 283.

⁶ Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 283.

⁷ Keener in Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 284.

Let's check off the reoccurring themes of why the early church went viral:

Why Viral?

- Teaching & preaching, v. 33.
- ~~Prayer.~~
- ~~Miracles, signs & wonders.~~
- Generosity – sharing with each other, vv. 32, 34-37
- ~~Worship & celebration/praise.~~
- Community – a unified, grace-filled, joyful community, v. 32.

Again, our social media divides rather than unifies. These believers were 'united in heart and mind (v. 32).'

- Does that mean they all loved the hummus Tevi brought to the meal? No.
- It means they learned to get along and love each other.
- They tolerated his awful hummus because they loved him.

Is there Biblical support for a type of communism here? That is **difficult to answer** because Luke gives us the initial reaction of people to grace. And while he says these first Christians **were to be generous** ...

- Luke is **retelling the story about 35 years** after the events.
- Twenty-nine years earlier Paul wrote (51 A.D.),⁸ 'We gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat (1Th 3:10 NIV)."'
- While we have a **positive example** of Barnabus' generosity, we also have a **negative example** of Ananias and Sapphira. They died because they lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter said to them, 'The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away (Acts 5:4 NLT)!' So, there is **an affirmation of property rights**.
- Generosity was to come from a free will.

The third summary statement highlights miracles.

4. Miracles Highlighted, Acts 5:12-16.

'The apostles were performing many *miraculous signs and wonders* among the people. And all *the believers were meeting regularly* at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ But no one else dared to join them, even though *all the people had high regard for them*. ¹⁴ Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. ¹⁵ As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and

⁸ Assuming Acts was written in 70 A.D. and this passage is referring to events in 33 A.D.

mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. ¹⁶ Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, *and they were all healed* (Acts 5:12-16 NLT).'

I once had a deacon say, 'Pastor, you need to do more miracles. If you did more miracles, the church would grow.'

- Somethings are **beyond our power to do**.
- In fact, I **love that Peter's shadow** brought healing, *proving* that it is not something we do as much as the Holy Spirit working through us.
- Miraculous works are as as the Spirit desires.

Let's check off the reoccurring themes of why the early church went viral:

Why Viral?

- ~~Teaching & preaching.~~
- ~~Prayer.~~
- Miracles, signs & wonders, vv. 12, 15-16.
- ~~Generosity sharing with each other.~~
- ~~Worship & celebration praise.~~
- Community – a unified, grace-filled, joyful community, v. 13. They were held in high regard, while others were afraid of God's power.

Two things are in all three summaries: miracles and a unified, grace-filled, joyful community.

I have about seen it all in a church.

I can say the **contemporary church is like ...**

- **A HOA** – a lot of grumbling about maintenance and cost of cleaning. Continual bickering about who is doing X or not doing X.
- **A hospital** – a lot of sick people are there. I recently had to spend time in an emergency room that was standing room only due to those suffering with colds and the flu.
- **A gym** – a lot of people who intend to go regularly, but really only go when conditions are exactly right.
- **A pharmacy** – everyone has a different prescription to improve the church. Diabetics believe in less sugar, and those with high blood pressure people believe less salt.

Despite all of this, a joyful, loving community is attractive and lives out the Good News like 1,000 sermons.

- Jesus **loved the church** as much as we love our spouses (Ep 5:25). Let's love what Jesus loved. The **church is far from perfect**, but if you look for it you will see truth, beauty, and goodness in it.
- 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1Co 12:27 NIV).' No one is perfect. Each one of us **has a selfish sinful component** that must be contained until the day we die, but we **also bear the image of God**.

How to thrive in the Church.

- Focus on the spiritual side in people, not the human. 'We tend to stare at our brothers and sisters and glance at Jesus. We should stare at Jesus and glance at our brothers and sisters.' – Dick Brogden
- Accept the imperfections of others. It is necessary to **expect people to say and do dumb things**.
- These days, **we are a high entitlement and overly parented country**. Which means we have fewer coping skills when feelings get hurt.
- Expect to serve and don't expect to have your needs met. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35 NIV).'

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Luke has one more summary statement.

5. Suffering, Acts 5:41-42.

The church was growing, people were getting healed, so the Jewish religious leaders threw them in prison.

- 'But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, ²⁰ "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life (Acts 5:19-20 NLT)!"'
- They continued to share the Good News and the religious leaders were even more furious, so they were beaten and told to stop.

'The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. ⁴² And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 5:41-42 NLT)."'

- Even in suffering there is joy.
- They suffered as Jesus did. Jesus, who, 'for the joy set before him endured the cross,'
- Or, like Paul and Silas singing in prison in last Sunday's message.

- At times we must endure suffering with joy.

‘God is still wringing good out of evil ... unmerited suffering is redemptive.’ - M.L. King, Jr.⁹

We really do need each other, so that in times of trial and suffering we are not alone.

Conclusion.

Here in western civilization we tend to have **an overly-individualized** view of faith.

- ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart (Job 1:21 NIV).’
- ‘Each one of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Ro 14:12 NIV).’

Preachers **emphasize a ‘personal salvation’** to the point of isolating ourselves from the other parts of Jesus’ body on earth. Of course we **must be nice to each other** but ...

‘We Christians act as though we are deep sea divers. Here we are in the murky waters of sin – but we have the protection of the diving suit ... and we have the lifeline that goes to the great ... ship above.

- You have your life in Christ and your lifeline and I have my life in Christ and my lifeline ...
- We say to each other “How’s your lifeline brother, you got any kinks? Get it straightened out, keep the oxygen going or the murky waters of sin will come rushing in.”
- We bump around each other and we say ... “get your lifeline right.” But here I am all by myself.’¹⁰



Friends, listen to what John wrote: ‘Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love ...

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other (1Jn 4:8, 11 NLT).’

We must take off our protective suits and be vulnerable with each other. True community is life-giving and attractional, but it requires us to be real with each other.

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- Am I separating myself by too much news or social media?

⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*, John M. Washington, ed. (Harper Collins, 1991), 221-23 (221-22).

¹⁰ Reuben Welch, *We Really Do Need Each Other* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 28-29.

- How am I contributing to a joyful, grace-filled community?
- Do I need to get out of my wet suit and really interact with others? How can I really be Jesus and touch people's lives.

Pray.

May the Church go viral through how I live my life in this joyful, Spirit-filled community.