

A Church to Model Acts 2:42-47

A winters day
 In a deep and dark December
 I am alone
 Gazing from my window to the streets below
 On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow
 I am a rock
 I am an island

I've built walls
 A fortress deep and mighty
 That none may penetrate
 I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain
 It's laughter and it's loving I disdain
 I am a rock
 I am an island

Don't talk of love
 Well I've heard the words before
 It's sleeping in my memory
 I won't disturb the slumber
 Of feelings that have died
 If I never loved I never would have cried
 I am a rock
 I am an island

I have my books
 And my poetry to protect me
 I am shielded in my armor
 Hiding in my room, safe within my womb
 I touch no one and no one touches me
 I am a rock
 I am an island

And a rock feels no pain
 And an island never cries

CCLI 1292471

And so goes the song by Paul Simon. Did you catch the two troubling lines?
 I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain
 I touch no one and no one touches me

In 1989 George Gallup wrote that “Americans are among the loneliest people in the world.”

People today spend countless hours scanning social media connecting with their friends through

Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat and yet remain devoid of real, deep and personal friendships. Sure they join the hundreds, if not thousands they have added through a friend request, but they are barren and empty as they interact with people who, for the most part, provide only a surface level friendship offering nothing of substance during times of real pain or crisis.

Andy Stanley said, “we live around many people, but we experience life deeply with none.” Someone has rightly coined the phrase “crowded loneliness” and as the words of Paul Simon suggest I am an island, I touch no one and no one touches me.

In an episode of the Bob Newhart Show after he and his wife, Joanna, moved to Vermont to operate an inn, they met a couple who are there on vacation. They seemed to really hit it off as they dined and took in some of the local sites together laughing and talking as if they were long time best friends. One day another couple arrived at the inn and the newfound friends started chumming it up with the new arrivals. Dick Loudon, played by Newhart was puzzled because their new best friends dumped them for the new couple. When he asked about the sudden change in behavior mentioning that he thought they had become really close friends, the husband told Dick not to take it personally, they were basically shallow people.

A fundamental change began decades ago. Congested cities gave way to the rise of suburbia. Surrounded by people we have become even more isolated. Not that they are inherently wrong, but backyard decks have replaced front porch swings and rockers. Gathering points for neighborly discussions have been replaced with privacy fences. Scott Cook wrote that the front porch represented the ideal of community in America.

Overcommitted schedules, whether self-inflicted or because of over aggressive bosses, cause us to collapse at home at the end of our day with little desire to connect with others. We have dealt with people all day and so we just want to be left alone.

With the onset of COVID, we became even more

isolated. Gathering places like church, school or the local coffee shop were no longer safe places to meet with friends. When churches resumed services, it was with significant caution. The recommendation to socially distance ourselves from one another to minimize contact didn't aid our already isolation mindset. Masks hid expressions. Yet in the eyes of some, there was a visible emptiness because of the lack of human contact. We craved connection. Attempts through technology provided some relief to the tug of our heart to gather with others. But looking at a glass image wasn't the same as physical presence. Slowly, we are resuming to some pre-COVID normalcy, yet with skepticism.

It is this idea of connection, that I want to address in our new series. For the next number of weeks, we will be addressing the Biblical idea of fellowship and its importance to the health and well-being of each individual and the body of Christ as a whole. Science bears evidence of the difference companionship plays in the mental, physical, emotional, and yes, even the spiritual health of a person. People connected in relationship are better for it. We need each other and from what we see in the Bible, it's not just a suggestion, it's a command. My prayer is that as a local body of believers we will be challenged to rethink what it means to live in community as the body of Christ as we consider what Scripture has to say on the matter.

In case you have forgotten, we were created to be relational – both with God and with each other. While sin has marred those relationships, it is possible to renew that spirit of connection and the Bible provides guidance in that endeavor. I can think of no better place to begin our journey than in the book of Acts. Turn to **Acts 2:42-47**.

Nature gives us a good example of what happens when an animal is alone. When they are isolated from the herd due to injury or some other factor, the animals that are alone are the ones usually attacked by predators. It illustrates the importance of fellowship. Solomon writes in **Ecclesiastes 4:12** that **“a chord of three strands is not quickly broken.”** Meaning there is strength in numbers.

John Ortberg writes in his book *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, **“When I am in community, I experience what might be called ‘fullness of heart.’ The human heart is forever empty if it is closed in upon itself. In community – the divine community especially – a heart comes alive.”**

When we consider community, what is it from this passage that we can learn that will help us understand the importance of fellowship?

First of all, I see that it was a gathering church.

I. IT WAS A GATHERING CHURCH – v. 42

Francis Schaeffer noted that **“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community is the final apologetic.”** People will sit up and take notice if we are a loving, caring, serving, sharing church. Our actions toward each other and those outside will be the proof of the pudding if we believe and practice what we see in the Bible.

Jesus put it this way: **“They will know you are My disciples if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)**

In **Acts 2** we learn that it is the day of Pentecost. It was the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week. So it is the first day of the week or Sunday. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Harvest or the day of firstfruits. According to the calendar, today, June 5th, is the Day of Pentecost, 50 days from Passover on April 15.

Jews have gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the harvest, which occurs in the spring where ours is in the fall. Many have assembled in the Temple when Peter began to preach. At the end of his sermon, **verse 41** says that about 3,000 people were saved and baptized that day.

So the **“they”** in **verse 42** is referring to this whole body of believers in Jerusalem that now comprise the early church. Let me just interject here that this is by no means a perfect church. It's made up of

many new believers and when we get to **chapter 5** we read about the scandal of Ananias and Sapphira who both died for lying about how much they contributed to the Deacon's fund. Then in **chapter 6**, there was a division between the Greek Jewish Christians and the Hebrew Jewish Christians.

But here they are in **chapter 2** and we read that they were **"devoted."** (KJV **"continued steadfastly."**) The word in the Greek means to join or adhere to, to be faithful, to spend much time together, to be loving and loyal to each other. They had a strong commitment to one another and to four basic areas within the church in support of each other. It was intentional and heartfelt. So while it was an imperfect church, it nevertheless serves as a model church by what we discover from this passage.

What makes this church a church to emulate is that first they were committed to sound teaching.

A. They Were Committed to Sound Teaching

We spent that past couple of months in our series talking about the importance of God's Word. In that series I emphasized the importance of personal reading and study of the Bible, but I think that we learn best from Scripture in the context of community when small groups are huddled around the Bible in serious study that transforms lives.

Verse 46 says they met daily. Now that may not be practical, but I would tell you that getting together regularly with other believers is important beyond weekly corporate worship service. It's difficult to engage in conversation over what God is teaching in this kind of setting. So, once again, I appeal to you, if you aren't already, come out to Adult Impact.

I encourage you men to join other men on the third Saturday at 8:00 for one hour of fellowship and study. Our current study is a book by Tony Evans on *Kingdom Men Rising*, challenging us to become all that God wants us to be as Kingdom men, not settling for spiritual mediocrity as a man, but to grow in our walk with Christ and to take others along with us on that journey.

I encourage you to come out Wednesday night to

Pathway to Power where we study and pray.

Some of you are involved in Bible Study Fellowship. Keep it up.

If those are not convenient, start your own small group study either in person or through Zoom. Barb and Robert are giving serious thought to a small couples Bible study. Be devoted to one another through a regular study of God's Word. Andy Stanley writes in *Creating Community* that **"life change happens within the context of interpersonal relationships."**

These early believers met regularly to be taught by the Apostles. We aren't told exactly what they taught, but we can surmise that it included teaching from the Old Testament, framed around a better understanding of what the Old Testament taught regarding Christ. With new faith, they could more clearly see the typology of the Old Testament sacrificial system and how it pointed to Christ. They would have been able to see the prophecies foretelling the coming of Christ. They would have taught what they heard Christ teach during His ministry, maybe repeating things like the Sermon on the Mount or the lessons about the types of soil, forgiveness, how to treat others through the lesson of the Good Samaritan. They would have taught about salvation. In **John 14:26**, Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and teach them, reminding them of what He had taught them. There was no lack of sermon material to share with this newly formed church who devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching. They were committed to sound teaching.

B. They Were Committed to Social Gatherings

The verse says they devoted themselves to fellowship. It's the word we use for our ministry team koinonia. It means to have in common, but this fellowship is more than just being together. It also means partnership, joining together for a common purpose. There was a delight in getting together because of the common faith they had in Christ. They rejoiced with each other and wept with each other over losses or during hardships. It was a

shared time. They enjoyed the company of each other as they lived life together.

Warren Wiersbe once quipped:

To dwell above with saints we love,
That will indeed be glory.
But to dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

Remember what I said a few moments ago that the world is watching how we treat each other. **Do we like hanging out together?** There isn't any better compelling evidence that we enjoy one another than in how we practice the one another passages. If you pay attention to the announcement slides each Sunday, Pastor Jim inserts a one another passage that we should be practicing as part of the community of believers who share a common faith. Those encapsulate the idea of true koinonia. Christian fellowship is a key idea of the Christian life where believers gather together to love and encourage each other and to grow in faith together.

Philippians 2:1-2

True fellowship is being in agreement with each other, having the same purpose or goal in life and mutual ministry. It is serving alongside each other to meet needs within the fellowship of believers as a testimony of commitment to one another and as a witness to the community. That kind of fellowship is based on the mutual fellowship we share with Jesus Christ.

I John 1:6-7

On his observation of Christians in the first century, a Roman historian wrote "**see how they love one another.**"

Let me encourage you to consider how we might engage in more fellowship outside our weekly service. Koinonia is a beautiful thing to watch when the Spirit works in and through a body of believers being devoted to one another. This church committed themselves to one another in fellowship.

A third thing we find is that they were committed to sacred communion.

C. They Were Committed to Sacred Communion

Breaking bread was more than just eating a meal together. That was certainly part of fellowship and should be part of ours as well as we think about our shared faith in Christ. Communion is taking to heart the words of Jesus on the night He was betrayed where He instituted the practice of eating bread and drinking the cup as a reminder of His sacrifice when He gave His life and shed His blood. It was a practice they were to continue until He returned.

In **I Corinthians 11** Paul condemned their practice of communion because it had turned into a selfish free for all. At the common meal they had along with communion, some were gluttonous, others got drunk while others were neglected all together. Paul said it should be a time of spiritual self-examination and confession. After all, if we take to heart all that Christ did for us on the cross, we would know how sacred a time it is and approach it with reverence. It is a time for both purification and praise.

It was a gathering church committed to sound doctrine, social gatherings, sacred communion, and fourthly, serious prayer.

D. They Were Committed to Serious Prayer

We spent the first part of the year talking about the importance of prayer as an essential part of the believer's spiritual discipline. Prayer is one of the themes evident throughout the book of Acts. We see the prayers of individuals, small groups, and larger gatherings. One of my college professors used to tell students in his class that the church that prays together, stays together.

As air is to the body, so prayer is to the believer. I want to encourage you not only to use the prayer guides we include each week for your personal prayer time, but to have a prayer partner whether it's your spouse or someone else in the church. I have someone who meets with me almost every week for prayer. I am especially grateful for his commitment to get together for prayer. We don't miss very often when we can help it. Sometimes

things come up where we have to miss and sometimes we pray using Skype or Zoom. If someone comes to mind, call them up and pray over the phone with them. Be devoted to prayer.

Prayer is a time to connect with one or more believers to approach the throne of God as you bring your praise and prayer needs to Him. Make praying together a priority. We are both encouraged and commanded to pray. In our text, this early church was committed to each in prayer with each other and for each other. We should do the same.

Are we a gathering church for the purpose of teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer?

The next thing we see in **verses 43-45** is that it was a generous church as part of their commitment to one another.

II. IT WAS A GENEROUS CHURCH – vv. 43-45

Verse 43 shows us that they were generous without.

A. They Were Generous Without – v. 43

Galatians 6:9-10 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

They could have just hunkered down in their own little group and isolated themselves from the surrounding community, but we read that the apostles performed many signs and wonders which resulted in awe coming over the non-believers. Signs were meant to be a means by which the unbeliever could be drawn to consider Christ. Reaching out to the non-believing community demonstrated the love of Christ. Their non-believing Jewish neighbors were under the same Roman oppression the believing community was undergoing, so they reached out through signs and wonders as well as with tangible contributions for those in need.

We’re seeing that in the European sector as churches and ministries open their doors to both Ukrainian and Russian refugees. They are exhibiting what it is to demonstrate the love of Christ to those outside the church.

The Strategic Planning Committee is engaging in discussion about what community outreach looks like for our church to assist people locally as a way of showing Christ’s love. A lot of great ideas are being generated and you will be hearing more about their proposal to the church for consideration on how we can be generous to our community.

B. They Were Generous Within – vv. 44-45

There was a spirit of unity that permeated the church resulting in their voluntarily looking for ways to meet individual needs that existed within the church. Believers were selling property and possessions to meet needs. In **Acts 4:36** we have an example in Barnabas, who sold property to give to the disciples to distribute among those who had needs. This wasn’t a redistribution for equality. It was voluntary and as someone had a need. There was mutual caring for one another.

We do something similar to that with our Deacon’s fund. You contribute to a fund that the men in turn distribute as needs are made aware to them.

It really follows the principle Paul taught to the Corinthians. **“Each man should give what he has purposed in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (II Corinthians 9:7)**

If they could, people were free to give what they could. They weren’t coerced or pressured in any way. As God blessed and prompted them, they gave to support those who had tangible needs. Again from **Galatians 6:10** we are to do good especially to those of the household of faith.

Paul writes to Timothy **“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (I Timothy 5:8)**

Though it's referring to a physical family, the idea can be practiced in the family of God.

It doesn't have to be a matter of material goods that we give, like money or groceries. It can be time. Babysitting for a couple so they can go out for an evening of adult conversation without having to tell little Johnny to take his feet off the table or Suzie to eat one more bite or no dessert.

Knowing that I was not able to help Robyn outside with yardwork after my shoulder surgery, someone gave Robyn the wonderful gift of time by coming over two Saturday mornings to help her weed the garden. What a special gift and fulfills **Gal. 6:10**.

There are so many ways we can put into practice this principle of helping the household of faith by giving with a cheerful heart.

The church that really loves the Lord will really love His people. It gives as anyone has need.

It was a gathering church.
It was a generous church.
It was a glad church.

III. IT WAS A GLAD CHURCH – vv. 46-47a

Notice first that their worship was regular.

A. Their Worship Was Regular – v. 46a

We will talk about this more next week from **Hebrews 10:24-25**, but they met daily in the Temple for worship and teaching and then they went to homes to eat together and celebrate communion.

John MacArthur writes “Those who choose to isolate themselves are disobedient to the direct command of Scripture [not to forsake assembling together]. All members of the universal church, the body of Christ, are to be actively involved in local assemblies.”

COVID restrictions made assembling together difficult. Some of the webinars I listened to and articles I read, noted that it gave some on the fringe of church attendance the opportunity to ease their

way on out and not return. Some of you because of serious health concerns needed to be out longer, some still do. But where possible and health isn't a factor, you should be in church. We'll talk a bit more about that next week and in another message on the importance of your regular attendance and participation for the over all health of the church body. Your being present each week is not to stroke my ego. It is to benefit each other and offer worship to God. But let me say this with as much love as I can. Streaming services has been as much a blessing as it is a bane. It's a blessing because it has really benefited many folks, but it's been a bane because the convenience allows people to stay home when they could just as easily or should be in church.

We need each other for mutual support and encouragement and the early church met regularly for worship both formally in the Temple, and informally in each other's homes.

A second thing we notice is that their worship was real.

B. Their Worship Was Real – v. 46b

They worshipped and ate with glad and sincere hearts. Joy was evident. There are at least a dozen references in the book of Acts to joy in individuals or groups. If we are allowing the Spirit to develop His fruit in us, it will be evident in our love and joy. We should be glad to gather together to worship God and fellowship with one another.

It was not only evident within the church, it was something noticed by the those outside the church. A third thing is that their worship was respected.

C. Their Worship Was Respected – v. 47a “They enjoyed the favor of all the people.”

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify or praise your Father in heaven.”

Any effort on our part to show generosity and love within the church to believers and without to the community isn't to build a name for ourselves, it's to bring glory to God so that we point people to

Christ and He receives all the praise.

The people saw how the church was living out their faith as they met for worship and fellowship and they couldn't help but respect them. Listen to what a second century philosopher named Aristides had to say about why Christians were respected.

John MacArthur – page 90

What is the evidence of our love for Christ and for others?

Let me point out one final thought from this passage about the church. It was a growing church.

IV. IT WAS A GROWING CHURCH – v. 47b

They lived out their faith and because of that God added to His church, after all, salvation is only from Him. Only He can save people. All we can do is live out the faith we say we believe so that our good works are evidence of a changed heart. A selfish church will have no impact on the community to point people to the Savior, but a selfless church will.

Rebecca Pippert concludes that “people long to be part of community where they will be cared for.”

We aren't meant to be an island.

We are meant to live in community, to reach out and touch someone, both in the church and in the community.

How are we living in fellowship? It is one of the ways people are attracted to or repelled by Christianity.

Gandhi once said “if it weren't for Christians, I would become one.” Let's not allow how we treat each other be the reason someone chooses not to become a Christian. Let's be in fellowship.