

GROWING — Empowered to Gather III

Acts 2:42 - 47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to **fellowship (shared life)**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The New International Version. (2011). (Ac 2:42-47). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

During the pandemic, many of us have focused only on the blessings and silver linings that Covid-19 brought with it. But as the season is turning, we're now reflecting on how Covid-19 has damaged us and hurt our communities.

This has not been easy, but it has been necessary.

Now that we're getting back together, we're relearning how to share our lives together. That is what it means to be the church — sharing our lives together, our thoughts, and experiences, the good, the bad, and the ugly. We struggled together and ask how Jesus has been giving us grace in every moment.



When we are together, we can remind each other of who we really are; our Gospel Community reinforces our identity and purpose in this world.

The word that describes the core action of the church is fellowship: Shared life.

When we share our lives together, not only do we share common interest and identity, but we take interest in the other. At least, that is what Christ gives us as the ideal.

Obstacles to Gathering

As we see the picture of the Acts 2 church, they were rich in fellowship, sharing their lives in large gatherings in the temple and small gatherings in home.

They shared joy together and enjoyed being together.

There was spiritual growth and they met each other's needs, and everybody wanted in on what this family had. And this can happen for us too in the 21st century.

If you want your happiness and holiness to go up, we share lives.



However in the Western Church, we have put too much primacy on our independence and individualism. We have made Christianity in the west about consuming content.

The church has always been an embodied people in a locale. The New Testament always refers to the church about a group of people who know each other and practice their faith together. It's always a location where people raise their families and share their lives together.

It's time for us to grow beyond "consumer church" and create the community that Jesus died to create.

Overcoming Obstacles

Many in that Acts 2 church were later scattered throughout the four corners of the earth due to legitimate fears over persecution. Many shared their faith where they went but others fell to the wayside and forgot to meet together.

When we stop meeting together, we forget who we are.

Hebrews 10:24 - 25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The New International Version. (2011). (Heb 10:24–25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

By sharing our lives, we have the power in us to spur someone else on in their walk. I can help remind someone else of who they are when they forget. And you have someone who will remind you of who you are when you forget.

A big reason we forget who we are is because we start to believe in lies

- "I don't have much to offer"
- "I am not anything special in this community."

When we get into community, we have amazing opportunities to reject those lies and instead speak truth: "I'm a mess but how are you doing?" And through listening to each other, we are encouraged and reminded that we are called into this community by the King of the World.

You're a contributor, not a consumer. You have the power of resurrection life in you every day that you wake up.

People need you. They need to hear your struggles and your Covid-19 experiences. We need to hear each other and share stories with each other once again.

Like the Hebrews

Before the pandemic, we were like the Hebrews who forgot to meet together. We often wouldn't meet together. We took community for granted.



The pandemic was an opportunity that showed us that isolation kills. We are not meant to be alone. We're not meant to do church online for the rest of our lives.

~32% of the church during left during the pandemic. This should remind us that the church is always one generation away from extinction. We accelerate extinction by not meeting together.

Will you contribute to the church and come along for the journey and build that Acts 2 community? Will you value what God as put in you and be the church?

Scattered & Different

The early church was deeply diverse. All those who gathered at Pentecost were Jews from Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, and others from Asia, Lybia, Rome, Cretans, and Arabs.

The one thing they had in common was their faith. They did not remain in a homogenous, multicultural setting and instead branched out and had to learn to bear with each other's differences.

Because we value being a multi-ethnic church, it means that you are committed to getting to know people in our family that you don't already know.

We are better together, wiser together, more humble together.

Will you open your homes to each other and invite each other to eat together? If you don't know that many people, could you invite someone you don't know over for lunch or dinner? Or go out to lunch together?

Different Maturities

We don't look down on anyone at where they are in their faith. The older, wiser ones can't look down on the younger, less wise ones. This holds true for any category. Instead of condemnation, our model is to wash their feet and not to judge each other.

Instead of valuing differences of opinions and stages of maturity, the early church had to learn to bear with their differences and learn to value their diversity.

The pandemic has set us up to be judgmental and sit in a bubble of self-righteous superiority. Jesus came after that attitude with a whip and turning over tables.

As we learn to live together, Jesus is calling you to let go of self righteousness and superiority, reject all that and instead learn that we are better together, differences and all. Our DNA is unity, not division.