

Sharing Our Lives for Christ

Scripture Text: Acts 2:42-47

Introduction

As we have been studying the issue of discipleship and ways to disciple others, we have looked at many important topics. We have explored the need for a genuine relationship with God. We have spent time looking at the importance of individual Bible study and a genuine prayer life. We have also seen the importance of regularly gathering together with the Church for encouragement. Many people have different ideas about what the Church is. Some think the Church is a building where we meet, but we know better. The Church is God's people who are saved by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Of those who believe the Church is the people of God, some of them think the Church is *merely* everyone who individually follows Jesus Christ. Some do not think it is important to gather with other believers, but that following Jesus is just an individual practice. The problem is that is not the Church. Christianity was never meant to be practiced alone. The Church is literally a community. It is a *group* of people who live out their lives together. I want to continue our look at being disciples of Jesus Christ by exploring the concept of being together with other disciples of Jesus Christ.

God intended from the very beginning to bring together a group of people who will worship Him together and who will support and encourage one another. That group is the Church. That group is also broken down into smaller groups called "local churches". We see this pattern throughout the New Testament and particularly in the book of Acts. We see both the global Church and the smaller local churches. We see God's people gathering as one large group in a city as well as gathering in smaller groups in their homes. Either way, God's people are sharing their lives together. Last week, we looked at a passage from the book of Hebrews that exhorted us to not neglect meeting together, as some do, but rather to encourage one another through the community of faith. The passage challenged us to stir up one another to love and good works. God's intent for the Church is to be a living organism that He is building, who are drawing closer to Him, who are persevering together in the midst of persecution, and who are strengthening and encouraging one another as they wait for the Day of Jesus' return. But, what sort of things should a church do while they are together? What does God expect us to do when we meet together? We see several things in this passage.

Sharing Our Lives in Corporate Prayer

One thing we notice throughout scripture is the importance of prayer. Thus far, we have seen in scripture the importance of prayer in our individual, personal relationship with God. We need to have a genuine relationship with God through prayer. However, is prayer important to the community as a whole? Put another way, do we need to pray together? What we learn from the early Church is that they spent time praying *together*. In fact, they did not wait long after Jesus ascended into heaven to practice genuine prayer time with the community. Look at the follow passage in the beginning of Acts.

Acts 1:12–14 ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Just after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church started their life together by praying. That is exactly where we need to start anything we do. The early Church was putting into practice what Jesus had taught them and what He modeled for them. They went into the upper room and prayed. And then, *while they were all together in one place*, the Holy Spirit descended upon them with great power and they got their worship on. They had an awesome worship service, so much so, some people thought they were drunk. Then Peter got up and gave a heart-piercing sermon to the crowd, perhaps the first time Peter delivered a sermon. This is the same Peter who earlier had cowardly rejected Jesus, just as Jesus predicted he would (Matthew 26:69-75). So impactful was Peter's sermon that those who heard it were "cut to the heart". They asked Peter what they should do, and Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized", and so they did. There were about three-thousand people who accepted Peter's invitation that day (Acts 2:37-41). It was a very special day! Fast forward a bit, and Luke gives us a picture of how this fledgling Church community shared their lives together after Pentecost.

Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

One of the things we notice from this passage is that the Church was devoted. That word means to stick with something or to persist in doing something. It means to be committed. What is something that you are devoted to doing? Maybe it is work. Maybe it is staying out of debt. Maybe it is spending time with family. Maybe it is all of that and more. What does this verse say the Church was devoted to doing? In general, it says the Church remained constant in worshipping together. They did not waiver in doing it. They stuck together in it. We see this later in the passage in verse forty-six with their *daily* worship and in verse forty-seven with God's *daily* blessing on the church. They kept on. They were devoted to it. Notice what specifically the Church was devoted in doing: *the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, breaking bread, and praying*. Again, we see prayer is an important part of their community. They were praying together before Pentecost and after Pentecost. They were praying together before the Spirit came and after the Spirit came. They shared their lives by praying together.

Sharing Our Lives in Teaching, Eating, and Fellowshiping

The early Church was also devoted to doing other things together. Prayer was not the only thing on the list. They were also devoted to the apostles' teaching. We should not think of this as teaching the apostles created, like their own curriculum. Their teaching included those things Jesus taught them and what the Holy Spirit revealed to them. In

fact, the apostles' teaching was probably similar to Peter's message at Pentecost. Their teaching probably focused on making Christ known to other people through the witness of God's Word and the personal testimony of the disciples. For us today, we should be devoted to the apostles' teaching by faithfully following and teaching God's Word. The Church was also devoted to sharing meals together. That is evidence that the first Christians were Baptists. We love to share a meal. We are devoted to eating. For the early Church, this probably included both the Lord's Supper and other fellowship meals.

The Church was also devoted to regular fellowship. We use that word, *fellowship*, a lot. For some of us it means that time we spend together, whether on Sunday morning or at other times. Fellowship is an important part of our Christian faith. We need it! We need fellowship with God, for He created us to enjoy Him. That is what the grace of God is all about — bringing people who were once enemies of God into fellowship with Him. The Church is a redeemed people who are now in fellowship with God. A church should also be in fellowship with one another. Christ came to bring people together so that they can be His Body, united together, and sharing their lives together with Christ. Fellowship means a close relationship with one another involving mutual interests and sharing our lives with one another. It also means partnership! We partner with God to do His work. We also partner with each other to accomplish that work. Remember, that was part of our mission statement, to do God's work together. Paul mentioned this idea of partnership in his letter to the Philippians. Look at the following passage.

Philippians 1:3–5 ³ *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,* ⁴ *always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,* ⁵ *because of your **partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now.*

Notice Paul's emphasis on thanksgiving and prayer. He thanked God when he prayed for the church in Philippi, specifically for their partnership in sharing the gospel. Our fellowship involves being partners in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We are partners in serving God together in reaching others for Jesus Christ. The early Church did this, as we see in verse forty-seven. People were hearing the gospel, responding to it, being saved, and being added to the Church. Luke did not tell us how people were added to the Church, but it appears that sharing their faith in Christ happened through their gathering in the temple and in their homes. In this passage, we see that the Church shared many things together. They shared their prayers together (v. 42), they shared their meals together (vv. 42, 46), they shared time together in the temple and in their homes (vv. 42, 46), and they shared their material possessions (v. 44), which we will look at next. Before we go there, one thing we might say about when a church is devoted to the right things, incredible things will happen. Look at the next verse.

Acts 2:43 *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*

When a church is devoted to the right things, great things will happen. For the early Church, many were struck with awe with what God was doing through the Church. Are we ready for God to do great things? Are we devoted to doing the right things?

Sharing Our Lives in Service Together

As part of their fellowship, the early Church did something else together. They served one another. Service to one another was an important aspect of Church life. We read last week about “stirring up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). The Church in Jerusalem loved one another and served one another by gathering their material possessions and distributing those things to members of the church who were in need. Look at the following passage.

Acts 2:44–45 ⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*
⁴⁵ *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

Serving one another is an important part of being the Church. It is an important part of discipleship. If we say we follow Jesus Christ, if we say we are members of His Body and members of God’s family, we will act like true brothers and sisters. We will serve one another and take care of one another, just like any family is supposed to do. The church in Jerusalem voluntarily sold their possessions in order to help others in the church whenever a need arose. The members shared their possessions with each other not because they were required to do so, but because they were generous and committed to one another. This was a natural expression of their love and commitment to one another. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is proven by our love for one another. Our love for one another is demonstrated by how we serve one another. It is easy to say “I love you”, but are you showing that love for one another by helping others in need? We must teach one another to serve one other just like Jesus taught us to do.

However, what does this mean about serving those outside of the Church? Does God expect His people to serve the community outside of the Church? Indeed, I believe He does. What did Jesus model for us? He helped many outside His circle of faithful followers. For instance, there was the man He healed at the pool on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17), the multitude of people He fed on the mountain (John 6:1-15), and the man who was born blind (John 9:1-41), just to name a few. Jesus helped many who were outside His faithful community. The Church should also help those outside of our community of faith. Some say that charity begins at home, and that may be so. Charity may begin at home with the family, but it does not end there. If we are to be a light to the world and show them Jesus, we must serve them. Why do you think the early Church had favor with “all the people” (v. 47)? Might it be that they were in their community serving the people? We must reach out beyond our walls and serve our community.

Sharing Our Lives Openly and Personally

The last point I would like to make is about where the early Church shared their lives. Lest we think that being a community and sharing our lives only happens when we gather together once or twice a week in the same location, we should note where the early Church shared their lives. Early Christian gatherings took place in two primary places: the temple and the homes of individual believers. Look at the following verses.

Acts 2:46–47 ⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

The early Church was committed to sharing their lives together. They were together for worship, in praying, teaching, eating, and fellowshiping. They were together to serve one another and to serve the community outside the Church. They were also together for growth, both individual, personal growth in Christ and corporate, missional growth in bringing more people into the Church. Notice where the church was together. They were in the temple and in their homes. Many of us get the part about gathering together for worship on Sundays. Many of us get the part about meeting at certain times to be with our church family. But, do you get the part about being together in your homes? Our homes are probably the most sacred places in our lives. We treat our homes like a sanctuary, a personal and private area of our lives. Are you willing to open up your home to your church family? Are you willing to share your life with your church family, like the early Church did? If we are going to “do” Church, be the Church, and be a true community and family of God, we must be in each other’s lives outside of Sunday.

One more thing, notice in verse forty-seven that the Church had “favor with all the people”. I am not going to say that all people will like us. In fact, we know the world hates us. The world’s hatred of us is only going to get worse until the Jesus returns. Come Jesus, come! But, consider this, if we want to have favor with our community, what does this passage say is a way, not guaranteed, but a way to do that? Serve them! If we want a good reputation with the community we must love them and serve them. We cannot meet privately in a building, do our own thing, serve just ourselves, spend God’s resources for just ourselves, and expect the community to like us and want to be a part of us. If we want to see change, we must serve others just like Jesus did and just like the first Church did. And this is not for our sake. We serve others so that they can know the Savior and be a part of His family, whether that is with us or with another community. Are you willing to look outwardly to serve others for Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

In closing, we come together as the Church in order to do many things. Overall, we worship God together. We do this by studying God’s Word together, by praying together, by eating together, particularly the Lord’s Supper, and by fellowshiping. Our fellowship is a partnership with God and each other. We do this by sharing our lives with one another. We also “do” Church by serving God together and serving each other. Just as any family would do, we take care of our church family. We also seek ways to serve the community outside our “church walls”. These are things the early Church did. These are things the Church today should do. Are you devoted to doing this? Are you devoted to sharing your life with your brothers and sisters in Christ? May it be so.