

Being Part of a Gospel Community

Chris Starn / General

Gospel Community / Acts 2:42–47

Scriptures:

Acts 2:42–47 *ESV*

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

2 Timothy 3:1–7 *ESV*

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Ephesians 4:1–15 ESV

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Pastor's Notes:

- We have spent the last 4 weeks looking at different aspects of a Gospel Community.
- We have looked at **why we need to be part of** a Gospel Community.
- We examined **what a Gospel Community truly is.**
- We have seen **the how of a Gospel Community.**
- Today I am not going to share anything earth shattering, at least I don't think that I am.
- Mostly what I want to share today is **common sense.**
- **What does a Gospel Community look like from the inside? What does it mean to be part of a spiritual family that has the Gospel as its main focus and is rooted and driven by the Gospel?**
- There is a **goodness to being part of God's family.** It is a ***beauty and a privilege*** to be part of the Gospel family.
- You and I are adopted, sons and daughters grafted into God's people. And it is all because of what Jesus has done perfectly.
- It is a beautiful privilege to be part of an ***intimate, committed, vulnerable, transparent, authentic community of people.***

- When we become part of a Gospel Community we are **committing ourselves not just to Jesus, but to each other** as a community that has a **greater purpose** and **mission** that is **greater than** just the narcissistic self-serving goal of **living out the American dream**.
- I think this is why though there are a lot of people who **claim** they are part of a Gospel Community are **in reality just spectators**. They are **not involved in a committed, intimate, vulnerable, transparent, and authentic relationship** with others in the community.
- And the reason they have not taken that deeper step is because **they are hanging onto their self-seeking desires** that the world tells us we should pursuing.
- Next week are going to begin looking at the book of Acts, the start of the church.
- In the second chapter of Acts there is a definitive definition of a Gospel Community. It is a common verse and am sure each of you know it and have heard it hundreds of times.
- ***After Jesus was buried and rose again, He spends 40 days preparing His followers for His exit from this planet. But before He goes He makes them a promise that He will send them a helper and that they are to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit.***

- The Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost and the church is born and the Gospel is proclaimed to those Jews from all over the world that were in Jerusalem for Pentecost. And **this little band of Jesus followers increased by 3,000 in one day. Now that is the power of the Gospel.**

Acts 2:42–47 ESV

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- If you are truly believer in Jesus, if you put you put your faith in Him, these verses should stir inside you so much that you have to say YES! **That is what I want to be part of.** That is what I want church to look like. **This is what Jesus came and died for,** to create a **new community of people with a new identity and way of life.**
- **What we see here in Acts 2:42 is so different from what we see in the American church today.** We find **disunity instead of unity.** We find the **Gospel being pushed aside for feel good psychology.** Instead of people being rescued and saved from their sins, we see the very leaders of the church involved in those same sins.

- **Paul tells Timothy what I think at times is a fair description of our culture and the church community in America.**

2 Timothy 3:1–7 *ESV*

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

- ***If you were to ask me if we are living in the last days I would tell you to look at these verses and tell me if we are in the last days.*** I am not saying that everything we do today in the church is bad. But **American Christian culture is stagnating and stunted because we have exchanged Gospel Community for a worship service.**
- We have **exchange community interdependence and relational discipleship for a sermon on Sunday morning or a classroom where we gain information.**
- **And the thing is, those activities aren't bad, they are just not what Jesus came and died for.**
- Compare 2 Timothy 3:1-7 to Acts 2:42-47 and tell me which description better reflects where we are today in the American church.

- **Being a Gospel Community is about being a new family who gathers together.** All of your families gather together, maybe not so much in the last 6 weeks, but when you do it rarely goes as planned. It can get rather messy.
- ***Be honest, we love and forgive each other, but there is also conflict and resolution. This is all part of being a family. It is much bigger than just one event.***
- Look at Acts 2:42 again.

Acts 2:42 ESV

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

- **They devoted themselves...**
- Are you devoted? In the same way that they were devoted?
- **We have redefined what it means to be devoted in America.** We look at our religion and faith as a **personal and private matter.**
- We talk about our personal relationship with Jesus, but **our devotion is to ourselves instead of the message, mission, and community of God.**
- The early church, they were devoted to each other, to the community, to the message, and to the mission.

- I think today what we see is **more fickle devotion** and not the kind of devotion we see in Acts 42.
- ***I will be devoted to it as long as it is convenient.***
- True devotion has some very interesting characteristics.
 - **First is commitment**
 - When you are committed to something, your life revolves around it. You actually get magazines that pertain to what you are committed to and you actually read them. I like guns. I get magazines on guns, but I do not read all of them. I am not committed to guns.
 - **Second is consistency.**
 - If you are truly devoted to something and you have an opportunity to engage in it, there is no question that **you are going to do it.** There is absolute consistency.
 - **Third is a little bit of crazy.**
 - Golf is a great example. If you like to play golf and you wonder if you are devoted to it, just ask yourself one question. If it was cloudy and below 32 degrees and you could be on the golf course would you do it? If so, then you are crazy, and committed, and devoted.
 - **We have to ask ourselves in the church today if we are devoted to more than just getting out of Hell and into Heaven?**

- Are we devoted **not just to what God gives us but to the mission and mandate that we have as a people of God.** Are we really devoted to it?
- Are we committed and consistent and maybe just a little crazy?
- **I am saddened and afraid of the answer I think we would give to this question.**
- The **church today is in trouble, and not from the current situation we are in.**
 - There is a mass exodus from the church.
 - When children in the church become adults and go to college at 17, 18, and 19, one of the things they are leaving behind is the church. And not just the church, but a true faith.
 - **Experts have been exploring this phenomenon and have a pretty good handle today as to why this is happening.**
 - **One of the key factors is simply devotion. Oh not the devotion of the child, but the devotion of their parents.**
 - Kids are growing up in the church seeing their **parents making their faith and church a religious ritual and an optional activity.** They go to church if it is convenient.

As long as it doesn't conflict with a sporting event or an activity then we will go to church.

- **Are we devoted to the Gospel Community? Is the Gospel Community part of who we are when we are not gathering on Sunday morning? Is it part of who we are? Or is it just another activity on our calendar?**
- **Is church for us just an event or an activity? Is being active in the community optional for us?**

Acts 2:43 ESV

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

- Many times we read verse 43 and think that the problem is that we don't see many wonders and signs in the church today. But we don't see why there **were** amazing things happening in the early church.
- We want to see God working more in the church.
- We are like the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Matthew 12:38. They wanted Jesus to show them a sign so that they would believe. They got it backwards just like we do today.
- The key word is "and" at the beginning of Acts 2:43.
- Why did they see many wonders and signs? Go back to verse 42

Acts 2:42 ESV

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

- **It was because of their devotion to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.**
- **It is not that the Gospels have lost their power, it is because we are not devoted to the Gospel Community.**
- **You cannot treat Jesus, His mission, and His people as an option** and then when everything starts to fall apart come and expect Jesus to work a miracle in your life the way you want.
- **We treat the Gospel Community with complacency and then wonder why we struggle in life.**
- **Church is a family, not the facility. *We are the church and church cannot be optional.***
- **It is not about being devoted to our church building because the Gospel Community has nothing to do with geography.** It is about being devoted to the people that make up the church because of who Jesus is.
- **We have turned our worship services from a participation to a performance. We have turned our churches into a dispenser of spiritual goods and services that consumers can come and take what they want and ignore what they don't want.**

- ***The Gospel Community is not an event or a performance that we watch, it is a life that we participate in, we engage in the community.***
- The Gospel Community is about shared life, not shared space.
- You can come to church and sit in the back row, no offence to those who sit in the back row, and never make a connection with anyone at church and walk away saying that there is just no community at this church.
- ***Community doesn't happen because we are in proximity to someone. Community takes engagement.***
- If you want to be part of the Gospel Community, then **you have to open up, reach out, make connections.** Without you taking action there is no community.
- **You must be intentional. You have to make a choice.** It takes energy and effort to be part of a Gospel Community. It takes sacrifice. You must share your life and that is scary. But it is also very rewarding.
- Are you devoted? Not just a casual commitment. Not a just a believer intellectually. **Are you devoted to know and be known?**
- The early church shows us that a Gospel Community is relational, interdependent, sharing life together.

Acts 2:44–45 ESV

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

This is not communism or socialism.

- **This is intentional sharing.** The Apostles did not have to tell people to give. They did not have to pressure people to help each other. They did it willingly and without compulsion.
- **They chose to share** what they had and their generosity set them free from greed and the desire to hoard what they had.
- This is what love looks like.

Acts 2:46–47 *ESV*

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

- **Gospel community breeds Gospel Community.**
- When we live out the Gospel Community it will bear fruit.
- **A Gospel Community is a life shared together.**
- **Individualism is toxic to the Gospel Community.**
- Our American culture tells us that we are the most important thing in the universe. We learn that it is all about us. Be your own person. Be whatever you want to be. Don't

let anyone tell you what you should be. In other words, **make yourself the center of the universe.**

- Too many times we bring that into the church.
- **Many of us are living more as American people than Gospel people.**
- We were given the Gospel to set us free from narcissism. **You cannot and must not mix the Gospel with the very thing that it came to release us from.** What you will get is a fruitless church.
- What you get is people saying the name of Jesus, but denying that it has any power.
- **A gospel Community is a life shared together that is messy. It takes intentionality and making a choice. It is counter cultural.**
- **Gospel Community doesn't happen at an event or a performance. It happens in the daily rub of life.**
- **Gospel Community is being with each other during good times and bad times, during times of weakness and strength, and during times of joy and sadness.**
- **Gospel Community is being engaged with each other and going above and beyond what society deems normal. It is going to be messy and really awkward at times.**
- **Gospel Community is life shared together.**

- It is possible to show up at church every Sunday and never experience Gospel Community.
- You can come and see Gospel Community from a distance. You can go through the motions, check off going to church from your to-do-list, attend events at a building, but **if you do not engage the community, you do not have Gospel Community.** You might be near it, but you are not part of it.
- Gospel Community requires intentional sacrificial sharing of your life with the lives of others that know and follow Jesus.

Ephesians 4:1–15 ESV

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

- **We are the church. Everyone is needed. The Holy Spirit has given each of us a part to play. But we must engage with each other to be successful.**
- **Successful at what, growing up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ.**
- **By actively, intentionally engaging in each others lives we will grow in Christ.**
- **To be part of a Gospel Community is to grow in Christ.** It is the Gospel Community that helps us grow into Christ. But we have to choose to be part of it, to engage each other and do life together.
- **When we do this, God will grow the church.** He will grow it wider, but even more important is that He will grow it deeper. **He has given us all the required tools, all we have to do is be devoted to the Gospel Community.**
- **Is this the kind of community you want to be involved in? If so then you need to intentionally engage each other.**
- **Be devoted to the Gospel Community beloved. It is God's will and desire.**
- Let's Pray

Questions for Consideration:

1. Which of these actions—fellowship, worship, discipleship, and evangelism—do you more naturally gravitate toward? Why is the balance of all four important for the individual Christian and the church as a whole?
2. How are these connections strengthened by doing life together? What might happen if we tried to live out these values on our own?
3. What does it mean to live on mission for God? Why is doing life together such an important aspect of living on mission for God?
4. In what ways is our church currently impacting our community?
5. What are some practical ways we might encourage one another to live on mission for God?