

## Acts 2:42-47

### Outward Church: Church Together

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Cornerstone is a **church plant**. Sometimes when you tell others you're starting a new church it's like, "Wow! That's amazing! You can do **whatever you want!**" It's almost like people think you're playing a game of **Sim Church**, kind of like **Sim City** or **The Sims**. Except instead of building a city or a neighborhood I'm putting up some **stained-glass windows** here, a **nice cross** there; I'm starting **VBS** and **Awana** and now it's time for the **baptisms**.

But here's the thing... The church is not an **iPhone** with **fully customizable preferences**—the **iChurch**. The church is a people, lots and lots of **messy people** who come together to know and worship Jesus—not **iChurch** but **WeChurch**. That's what we see in Acts. Messy people come together to know and worship Christ Jesus. **Acts 2:42-47** introduces us to the **first church plant**, ever. As we look at it we see they're not a Sim Church or an iChurch but a WeChurch, a community of believers doing **church together**.

And so today I want to look at one that **means**. What does it mean to do church together? If an iChurch is about me and my preferences then WeChurch is about **Christ** and **his preferences**. He's given us an **example** of what he'd like to see in Acts. This passage is **purely descriptive**, with **no relevance** to today, but neither do I believe it's **so prescriptive** that we have to look **exactly** like it. Instead, I see some **truths** and **principles** for all churches. So let's look at what those are, which tell us **how to do church together**.

### 1. We gather around God's Word.

We opened chapter two with **Pentecost** (Acts 2:1-13); then we heard Peter preach and **3,000** people **repent** and **believe** in Jesus (Acts 2:14-41).<sup>1</sup> Now here, those who stay behind in Jerusalem and don't return to their homes in the countryside, they form the **first church**. It's like they almost **naturally** come together to do what they're **supposed** to do to **be a church**, and it starts with **gathering** around God's Word.

**Acts 2:42a, 43** (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching... 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

They don't yet have copies of the **New Testament**, but they have the **Old Testament**, the **Hebrew Scriptures**, or what they would have called the **Tanakh**, the **Torah** (Gen - Deut), the **Nevi'im** (prophets), and the **Ketuvim** (historic and poetic). The **Apostles** (the 12 disciples) would have spent time talking about **Jesus**, reminding them of **his teachings**, and showing how the **Tanakh** points to Jesus as the Christ (the **Messiah**), just like **Peter** did in his sermon (Acts 2:14-40).<sup>2</sup> Then they **perform miracles** just like Jesus to **authenticate** that what they're saying is **true**.

There has to be **something** that brings us together as a people. We're not a **movie club**. We're not brought together by our love of **film** and **television**. We're not an **exercise group** or a **cooking club**. We're not brought together because we're all from the **same country** or speak the same **languages**. It's not our **hobbies** or **interests** or **nationalities** or anything else that **unites** us **except** for **Christ Jesus** and **his Word**. That means when we get together as Christians, we can talk about all those other things, our **favorite TV shows** and **recipes** and **hobbies**, but we can also **talk about Jesus** and **his Word**.

When we gather around **God's Word**, you could say we're gathering **around Christ** and the **gospel**. We're coming to **learn about** him, to see how the **Scriptures point** to him, to **confess** our **sins** to him, to **receive**

his **grace** in our lives, to remember his **sacrifice** on the **cross**, to celebrate his **resurrection** and **ascension**, to be in **relationship** with him, to **know him**. There is **someone** who **unites us** despite our **different ethnicities** and **backgrounds** and **movie** and **food** and **exercise preferences**. *We gather around Jesus and his Word.*

## 2. We do life together.

Christianity is not just a Bible study, it's a **lifestyle**.

**Acts 2:42b, 44-46a** (NIV) They devoted themselves... to fellowship... 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...

The church is not a building or a place but a **fellowship**—people doing **life together**. This word for “fellowship” in v42 is the Greek word “**koinonia**.” It most commonly means “fellowship, communion, participation, sharing.” You really see what that means as you look at v45-46. These people are willing to **sell** property and possessions to help each other out, and they're spending **time together daily worshipping**.

In the 12th century an English monk named **Aelred** called doing life together “**spiritual friendship**.” Our **denomination**, the **CCCCs**, has set one of our guiding values as, “A community that lives out a **shared life** and **shared mission**.” The last time I preached Acts 2:42-47 my big idea was “The core of Christian community is costly love.”

We are to spend **time** with each other, **care** for each other, be willing to **sacrifice** for each other, give **generously** to each other, and share a **common life**, all in response to **Jesus** doing those things for us. Not the iChurch but the **WeChurch**. The Bible says **little** of **independence** and everything for **community**. The **investors** on *Shark Tank* say, “The **most valuable commodity** I have is my **time**.” Christ calls us to give our most valuable commodity to each other.

We are already doing **fellowship** when we gather for worship, or when we **play** games or **eat a meal**. When we do a **Bible** study or go on a **hike** or join a **community group** or **Christian Ed** or visit each other in the **hospital**, it's all fellowship. But if we're **honest**, we might also **admit** when we do it can be a bit **planned**, a bit **orchestrated**—the house is **clean**, the **meal** is made, and the **parents** are home.

Fellowship is more like welcoming a **church friend** in to **experience life with you** even though there's **laundry piles** on the **floor**, **dishes** in the **sink**, the **baby** is crying, and the **kids** won't do their homework. Fellowship is when your **parent dies** or **you're sick** and a church friend comes over to **take care of you**. Fellowship is **getting up early** for **breakfast** with **brothers** or **sisters in Christ** to **pray** and **confess your sins** to each other. Fellowship is seeing each other on the **good days** and the **bad, day in and day out**, which is probably more like how our **family and children** see us than our **church family**.

There's a **deeper component** to this. The **root** of the Greek word for fellowship, **koinonia**, is **koinos**, which means “**common**” or “**profane, impure**.” Although there is something **rich** and **meaningful** and **loving** about **church fellowship**, it can also become something almost **profane** and **impure**. **This** is the **model church**, but you know who **might** very well be **among** them worshipping and praising God? **Ananias** and **Sapphira** who try to lie to God to make themselves look good (Acts 5). They also have to have the whole **Jerusalem Council** in Acts 17 because the Jewish believers don't know how to incorporate the **Gentile** believers (Acts 15). **Peter** leads them but at one point he **refuses to eat** with the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-13).

My friend **Pastor Rick Harrington** from the **Ockenga Program** recently self-published a book called *How to Find a Church: Seven Steps to Becoming Part of a Spiritual Family*. The **first** step is **preparation**, the **second** is the **visit**, and so on and so forth. The last step is “**Persevering** through the **pain**.” He writes:

You will get hurt. I actually think this is part of God's plan for the church (though that does not excuse the one who causes the pain). He wants us to learn to forgive and show grace. This is where it takes true grit, a staunch stomach and a test of a faith. You need to stick it out... When you've done this step, you've found your spiritual family. - *How to Find a Church* by Pastor Rick Harrington<sup>3</sup>

Life together has wonderful times of **encouragement** and **joy** but also **bruises** and **frustrations**, but we stick it out because we **love Jesus** and **each other**. *1. We gather around God's Word. 2. We do life together.*

### 3. We share meals and take communion.

Food is a **big deal** in the first church plant.

**Acts 2:42c, 46b** (NIV) They devoted themselves... to the breaking of bread... 46 ...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

The early church would **eat together** and **celebrate the Lord's Supper** as part of the meal (1 Cor 11:20-22). It was a continued time of fellowship, focused around Christ, aided by food. You know some parts of Christianity aren't much fun; like **suffering** for Jesus (Matt 16:24). But some parts of Christianity are **great**, like the **food**, like the **eating together**. I know the Jesus only gave us **two ordinances, baptism** and **communion**, but I'm pretty sure he meant to add "**church potluck**" as the **third**.

Food is such an **important part** of doing life together. I want to **challenge** all of us to **invite one person or family** from **Cornerstone** who you've **never had over** to your **home** in the **month of February**. This can be someone you **don't know really well**, or someone you **do know really well** but have **never had over**, and **invite** them over for dinner. Now if you're brand new to Cornerstone, you can **join the challenge**, or you can **invite yourself over** to someone's home who has been here a while. If your home isn't the best place to meet, **go out to eat**. Just **share a meal** with someone you don't **typically** do this with. *1. We gather around God's Word. 2. We do life together. 3. We share meals and take communion.*

I want to talk a little bit more about communion, but we're going to close by taking communion today, so first I want to talk about the fourth way **we do church together** and then look at the results.

### 4. We pray together.

**Acts 2:42, 47** (NIV) They devoted themselves... to prayer... 47 praising God...

In Acts we find the early church **praying together** and **worshipping God**. Have you ever heard "A **marriage** that prays together stays together?" Well "A **church** that prays together stays together." The last book I read with some local CCCC pastors was on prayer. In it the author shares this quote from **Gene Getz**.

The hallmark of Western civilization has been rugged individualism. Because of our philosophy of life, we are used to the personal pronouns "I" and "my" and "me." We have not been taught to think in terms of "we" and "our" and "us." Consequently, we individualize many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer. The facts are that more is said in the Book of Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines.... Don't misunderstand. Both are intricately related. But the personal dimensions of Christianity are difficult to maintain and practice consistently unless they grow out of a proper corporate experience on a regular basis. - *Old Paths, New Power*<sup>4</sup>

An **iChurch** prays alone or not at all. A **WeChurch** prays together. One of the **highlights** for me of **moving to Sunday mornings** is being able to sit down and pray from **8:00 - 8:40**. If I'm being **honest**, usually we

begin praying at around 8:15 or 8:20 (we start with **grace**). Usually it's just **Karyn** and **myself**. We've gotten as **many as three** on two other days. I **don't want** to **guilt** anyone into coming to pray, but if there's **any little part of you** that the **Holy Spirit** is **convicting**, and you think you need to **pray more** with your **Cornerstone church family**, please come. I feel **energized** and a sense of **peace** after our prayer time. We should feel that way because we've been in the **presence** of the **king praying together** as the **church body**.

How do we do church together?... 1. *We gather around God's Word.* 2. *We do life together.* 3. *We share meals and take communion.* 4. *We pray together.* So what's the **fruit** of all this? What's the **outcome**?

## The result? We grow.

The last verse ends like this.

**Acts 2:43, 47** (NIV) Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ... 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

**Acts: A Visual Guide** lists three **outcomes** we see in these verses:

a. **Fear (v43)**

The word for "awe" is the Greek word **phobos** which can mean **fear**, **terror**, or **reverence**. Some people are just plain afraid. They see **miracles** and this **communal** church family and it freaks them out.

b. **Favor (v47)**

Verse 47 says they enjoyed **favor**, which is the **same word** for **grace**. People were amazed and **favorable** towards them. But the **best result** of all...

c. **Faith (v47)**

Every day more and more people are **coming to faith** in Christ and joining the church family.

The result of this church family studying the **Scriptures** together, doing **life** together, sharing **meals** and communion together, and **praying** together is there's something so **unique**, **distinct**, and **wonderful** about them that others can't help come to faith in Christ. It's not that they don't **evangelize** and **witness**. They do; but how they live **positively influences** their witness. I listened to one Pastor this week who said, "**Our with-ness aids our witness.**" - Skip Heitzig Our with-ness aids our witness.

*Let's transition to communion.*

I'd like today's communion to be a little bit of a **response** to today's sermon. We'll pass out the bread and the cup the normal way; and we'll all take it at **about the same time** to show our **unity** as a church body; but when you take it; would you **turn to the person next to you** and speak the **phrases** I normally **speak**.

"**The body of Christ, broken for you.**" And then they say it back to you. "The body of Christ, broken for you." Then you both take the **bread**.

Then once we've passed out the **cup** to everyone you say the lines I would normally say.

"**The blood of Christ, poured out for you.**" Then they say. "The blood of Christ, poured out for you."

Communion is meant to be a **communal experience**. You don't do communion in **iChurch**, but **WeChurch**. I'm not a fan of taking communion by **yourself** or even **apart** from the gathered church body. This is a

**special thing** for us, the church congregation, so let's keep it that way. I'm going to read the **Words of Institution**, and then I'll pray and we'll partake.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-24** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (ESV)

**1 Corinthians 11:25-26** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (ESV)

Let's pray.

*Serve communion.*

Please say to each other:

"The body of Christ, broken for you."

"The blood of Christ, poured out for you."

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

## Discussion Questions:

Good for small groups, community groups, life groups, Bible studies, Sunday school, or personal and family times of devotion and prayer.

1. If you could play *Sim Church*, what type of church would you create? Would it be more of an iChurch or a WeChurch?
2. Why does God's Word matter? How does it bring us to Christ Jesus?
3. What might it mean for you (or your group) to take more seriously the example of fellowship found in Acts 2:42-47? What do you think it means to do life together? How might you do this?
4. Have you ever been hurt by a church? Without naming the church or people, how has your past hurt effected your current church experience or expectations?
5. Do you think the saying "hurt people hurt people" is true? Has it been true for you? How might gospel help you find forgiveness and healing? What else might you need to do to find those things? For example, if you haven't released the bitterness yet, go talk with the pastor or a leader of that church.
6. What type of heart do you want to have when taking communion? How important is it to be right with your brothers and sisters in Christ in your church?
7. When was the last time you hosted a church friend over to your home for a meal? Can you come up with one name you want to invite this month to dinner? If you don't feel comfortable doing it at home, take them out for a meal.
8. Why does corporate prayer matter? What's the prayer life like of your group? Something that really matters or is usually rushed?

9. Do you agree with the idea “Our with-ness aids our witness”? Why or why not?

10. How might you pray right now for change based on our study of Acts 2:42-47?

For another [Acts 2:42-47 small group study guide click here](#). For another [sermon on Acts 2:42-47 click here](#).

<sup>1</sup> At Sinai 3,000 died for worshipping the golden calf, but here 3,000 live because of Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus affirms the Tanakh in Luke 11:51, referencing the first and last books of the Hebrew Scriptures in their original order, Genesis to Chronicles.

<sup>3</sup> I read a manuscript before the final publication, so some things may have changed.

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, Daniel. *Old Paths, New Power: Awakening Your Church through Prayer and the Ministry of the Word* (p. 114). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.