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). 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). 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 CCCCCs, 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

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

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.


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?

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

2 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.

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