

## **Intro**

We need relational connection with God's people. Today we'll learn some ways that we can connect with others in this church body.

This morning we consider the fellowship of the local church. We consider the purpose of fellowship. Is fellowship an end in itself? Or does fellowship serve a greater purpose? Why fellowship? Fellowship exists because we need each other to accomplish our mission of making new disciples.

Different things come to your mind when I say fellowship. Maybe watching a Patriots game, playing basketball, going fishing, quilting, having tea, potlucks. But is fellowship automatic whenever believers gather together? What makes our time together fellowship?

Maybe you're visiting with us and you wouldn't identify as a Christian. Maybe you've wondered, why do Christians spend so much time with each other and at the church? This morning you'll see what bonds believers together. The call to faith is a call to community.

This morning we'll see a positive model for local church life at an exceptional time in salvation history. And we'll see a powerful God expanding his church. Looking to the earliest local church we see that...

**BIG IDEA: God saves us for fellowship.**

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

Fellowship (2:42) = the intimate relationship between believers that is expressed by participation in shared gospel activities, and by participation in each other's lives.

This morning we'll see five aspects of fellowship.

### **Point 1: Fellowship in the apostles' teaching (2:42)**

#### **Explanation**

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*

The early church was devoted to core truths God revealed to the apostles. The inerrancy and authority of Scripture. There's one true God who created all that exists. The Trinity. The deity of Christ. The fall of man. Our sinful nature. Substitutionary atonement (That is, Jesus died as a substitute for sinners.). The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Salvation through faith alone. Regeneration. The 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. Eternal life. Eternal punishment.

In other words, they were devoted to God's revelation. They believed a set of core truths revealed in the Bible. That's why we have a doctrinal statement:

Our recently instituted church covenant says this:

*We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines.*

The local church exists to preserve and propagate the apostles' doctrine. The salvation of sinners depends on it. God expands his church through verbal proclamation of the gospel.

### **Application**

We remain a faithful local church so long as we maintain devotion to the apostles' teaching.

### **To unbelievers:**

Why a written book? God preserved the apostles' teaching in the Bible so that we could know how we ought to relate to him. In the gospel we see that:

- 1) God is ruler of his creation
- 2) We've rebelled
- 3) God doesn't tolerate rebellion
- 4) God sent his Son Jesus to die for sinners
- 5) Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death
- 6) We have two options: continue in rebellion and face God's judgment or give up rebellion and submit to Jesus, trusting in him for forgiveness and eternal life

When we trust Jesus, we enter into fellowship with others who've trusted him. Jesus died to create a community, the church.

### **Point 2: Fellowship over meals (2:42, 46)**

#### **Explanation**

*to the breaking of bread*

The early church devoted itself to the breaking of bread. Literally, breaking one loaf of bread into numerous pieces. Breaking of bread symbolizes sharing a meal at a table. In verse 46, we see that these early believers shared meals "*in their homes.*" The early church spent time with one another.

### **Application**

What happens when we invite people into our homes and spend time together over a meal?

- we slow down, we break from busy schedules, and we relax over the table
- we value each other by giving up our time and resources
- we take time to thank God for his provision together ("*they received their food with glad and generous hearts*" – 2:46)

- we welcome conversation and get to know each other
- we learn how to better pray for each other
- we become more familiar with each other and more comfortable sharing our lives with each other = we open ourselves up to every member ministry

Hospitality like this requires intentionality. And it opens up new avenues of ministry to one another. One great opportunity is small groups. In Kentucky, our group made one meeting a month simply a time for sharing deserts and snacks (because of kids). Unrushed we had time to talk at length, get to know each other, talk into each other's lives, and talk about Scripture together. Meals like these in a small group setting are a great opportunity for every member ministry.

Don't be burdened by guilt because it says the believers were daily gathering to break bread. We can't easily replicate this in our culture. Instead, be intentional in developing some pattern of breaking bread with your fellow believers outside of corporate gatherings.

Are you lonely? Do you need fellowship? Have someone over.

### **Point 3: Fellowship in prayer (2:42)**

#### **Explanation**

*and the prayers*

When the early church gathered together, they prayed together. One example occurs in Acts 4. Peter had healed a lame man, resulting in Peter being arrested along with John. When questioned by the Jewish authorities, Peter and John responded with boldness in such a way that the Jewish officials were astonished. And they were silenced since they saw a lame man walking. So the officials threatened Peter and John with further actions if they continued to speak about Jesus. How did Peter and John respond?

**Acts 4:23-31** When they [Peter and John] were released, **they went to their friends** and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "' Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'- <sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup> And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Released, Peter and John immediately visit their Christian friends and share what happened. Then they join in prayer. They recall the fact that God created the world and rules over his creation. They meditate on the

events surrounding the crucifixion. Herod, the Jewish people, Pontius Pilate, and Roman soldiers gathered together against Jesus, but in so doing, they were carrying out what God had planned and predestined to take place. Evidently, they were encouraged to pray because of confidence in God's eternal plan. Like Christ suffered opposition, Peter, John, and their friends were experiencing threats. So what did they ask for? They asked God to take notice of the threats against them. And they asked God to grant them boldness to proclaim God's Word, for God to heal (presumably healing of unbelievers with incurable illnesses to authenticate the message), and for God to work signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. And God responded. As soon as they finished praying, God filled them with the Spirit and they were equipped to speak the Word with boldness.

### **Application**

When faced with alarming threats how do you respond? Do you visit your friends and begin to pray? Do you recall the fact that God rules over his creation and is pleased to respond to our prayers? Our shared participation in the gospel calls us to pray together. God answers prayer. He answered Peter, John, and their friends immediately. God is available. God helps his people. In God's design, he's chosen to act for us in response to our prayers. So we pray together.

Overwhelming opposition = pray. Insurmountable circumstances = pray. Fear = pray. Confusion = pray.

Are you struggling? Overwhelmed? Make a visit. Make a phone call. Pray with God's people.

### **Point 4: Fellowship in meeting needs (2:44-45)**

### **Explanation**

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

They held all things in common in the sense that wealthier believers in the community didn't hold tightly to their possessions. Believers retained personal possessions and belongings, but when needs arose wealthier believers sold from their excess and distributed their proceeds to the church.

### **Application**

What drove this radical freedom from love of money and possessions? The text gives several clues:

- 1) They were devoted to the apostles' teaching = what the apostles said about money they took to heart.
- 2) They broke bread together = they spent time together and through time spent with one another, they came to value one another. Poor brethren were more precious than wealth.
- 3) They recognized that everything they received was ultimately from God. When they broke bread, they received it with glad hearts. They knew their food ultimately came from God. And if their food came from God, surely their possessions did too. They saw themselves as **stewards**. God had given them their wealth for a purpose. And that purpose wasn't to store up infinite wealth for themselves. They realized God had graciously provided them with wealth to help their struggling brethren.

God joins us together in the local church to care for one another's needs. God saves us for fellowship.

Do you have pressing needs? Make the body aware. Let us care for you.

### **Point 5: Fellowship in praise (2:43, 46-47)**

## **Explanation**

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people.*

The early church met at the temple and in individual homes. They met at Solomon's portico (Acts 3:11; 5:12), a large hall that was approximately 650 ft. long, 50 ft. wide, and 43 ft. high. The portico was like a large porch attached to the temple that covered people from the elements. The space was suitable to contain large gatherings.

As they met together, they praised God and enjoyed the favor of all people = unbelievers in Jerusalem. And what motivated this praise? Certainly they praised God because needs had been met. But they were also praising God because of the marvelous works he was doing. They were living at an exceptional time. Jesus was raised from dead and appeared to his people before ascending to the Father's right hand, the Spirit was poured out, signs and wonders were frequent, and God was rapidly increasing the size of the Jerusalem church by saving unbelievers daily.

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

The apostles were routinely performing miracles = awe of God's power. So they praised God. Not only were miracles occurring. The church was having favor with unbelievers. Maybe it was lives transformed by the gospel. Maybe devotion to God despite persecution made their faith attractive. Maybe unbelievers were witnessing wealthy believers sell their possessions so that poorer believer's needs were met. Maybe it was the intimate fellowship between the members of the Jerusalem church (meeting *day by day*). Maybe it was the signs and wonders. It was likely a combination of these factors. Because of God's work among them, the church had favor with outsiders. A good reputation. So the church was increasing in number.

*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

The Jerusalem church was doing its part. They were being equipped through the apostles' teaching, they were spending time together, they were praying together, they were caring for each other, but God gets the credit for their success. They were faithful, but God was growing the church numerically. God is pleased to use our efforts to bring people to himself (proclaiming the gospel, prayers for unbelievers, and godly lives of devotion). But only God can turn a hardened heart to respond positively to the gospel. Only God can draw a person dead in sin to himself. Only God can remove a loved one's blindness. This is why we pray for God to convert sinners.

God was adding new converts at a rapid rate. So they praised God.

## **Application**

How should we respond to accounts of signs and wonders and God saving people daily?

- 1) We should pray for God to grant us healings and signs and wonders with expectation.

**James 4:2** You do not have, because you do not ask.

Ask God to do the impossible. There's nothing in Scripture that suggests God will stop doing miracles. Sometimes God worked exceptionally (Exodus, entrance into the promised land, early church). Sometimes signs and wonders were absent (Samuel's youth; Asaph). But Jesus repeatedly encourages us to call on him to do the impossible (Mark 11:22-25).

## Illustration

● Darryl's daughter Chelsea: 22 hour seizure as a teenager → induced coma → not expected to wake up, if so a vegetable → planning a funeral → Ed and Gerald came to pray → recovered → never had a seizure again

2) We should submit to God's sovereign will when he chooses not to work signs and wonders.

We should have faith like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego when they were threatened with death by fiery furnace for refusal to worship a golden image instituted by Nebuchadnezzar.

**Daniel 3:16-18** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve **is able** to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that **we will not** serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

= God can do the impossible, but we'll serve him when he chooses not to

3) We should pray for God to convert unbelievers.

God is pleased to give us good things when we ask (Matt 7:11). God is the one who adds new converts to the local church.

4) We should continue to labor in evangelism when we don't see results.

God is pleased to use our efforts to save sinners. In the Bible, people turn to God because the gospel message is proclaimed and because unbelievers see our transformed lives and respond by glorifying God. This exceptional account doesn't imply faithfulness guarantees mass conversions. After all, God adds new converts to the church. We can't manufacture what only God can do. But our failure to labor in evangelism restricts numerical growth. Because God has chosen to use our witness to add new converts to the local church. God is powerful. God saves. God does the impossible. This moves us to praise.

## Conclusion

**God saves us for fellowship.** We've seen an episode where devotion to God and one another became known in the local community. Outsiders were inclined to repent and believe because of what they witnessed taking place among the believing community. God increased the church numerically in part because of fellowship put on display.

We enjoy **Fellowship in the apostles' teaching**. Scripture binds us together. We enjoy **Fellowship over meals**. Time with each other binds us together. We enjoy **Fellowship in prayer**. Praying with each other binds us together. We enjoy **Fellowship in meeting needs**. Caring for one another binds us together. We enjoy **Fellowship in praise**. Praising God's mighty acts binds us together. Fellowship occurs during a pot luck when we discuss truth, share our lives, encourage one another, or a number of other things. Fellowship occurs when we minister to each other. Fellowship serves God's mission.