

TRUE FELLOWSHIP AND THEN SOME

I. Acts 2:42-47

A. Acts 2:42-47 (NLT) is about the early church: **42** All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. **43** A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. **44** And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. **45** They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. **46** They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- **47** all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

B. Charles Swindoll, in his book, *The Church Awakening*, said this about the passage I just read: *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* (Acts 2:42) "In this one verse we have the lowest common denominator of a church. This is ground zero. It would help greatly if God's people reminded themselves of this single verse of scripture every day. When the first body of believers gathered together, they devoted themselves to four essentials. Did you notice them? Hear are the four essentials: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This verse is not only descriptive of what the early church did; it is prescriptive of what the church must do."

C. Besides in their homes, the new believers met together daily at the temple. Built by Herod the Great, this venue was an architectural marvel, rivaling the 7 wonders of the world. Covering 36 acres, it was twice the size of the Acropolis in Athens! Based on descriptions by Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, the sun would radiate off the gilded walls so brightly that people had to cover their eyes.

D. So while the Jewish people still brought their animal sacrifices to the temple to be offered, in another section inside called Solomon's Portico, these new believers met to worship the ultimate Sacrifice, THE LAMB of GOD who had truly atoned for their sin! Think of the contrast as the Jews walked by these joy-filled believers to perform their now obsolete rituals. And if the number of believers was increasing daily, then the number of old covenant followers was decreasing. One more thing: this grand edifice would be destroyed within 35 years. No worries though, God's more glorious temple survives-and that temple is You!

E. Several years ago I was eating breakfast with a pastor whose upbeat positivity always made me feel like I was down in the basement digging holes. From across the table I asked him how he was doing and at first he riffed something akin to, "If I was doing any better I'd be paving heaven's streets with gold bricks!" (Surely I exaggerate!) And then I began sharing with him about the difficult season I was plowing through and then something happened. Tears filled his eyes and he began pouring out his heart. You see he too was going through an enormously difficult season, one that made mine pale in comparison. That breakfast birthed something very deep and meaningful between us...

F. Some refer to fellowship as "fellows in the same ship." That's pretty good. "True fellowship," someone else once said, "is more than mere "hello-ship." That's very true!

Fellowship, *Koinonia* in the Greek, is deep, transparent, empathetic, Spirit-birther building up of one another in what? Love. Encouragement. In this most holy faith. True fellowship sometimes leaves our shoulders wet with someone else's tears. True fellowship often causes someone to alter a course that would've been terribly detrimental. Likewise, true fellowship may put someone on a more redemptive path, or on a more fruitful journey. Most importantly, true fellowship finds Jesus at the very center of it all. Has anyone here experienced this kind of true fellowship?

G. Malachi 3:16 (NIV) was what I read in my quiet time this past Wednesday. Then on Thursday yet again. It seems fitting: **16** *Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored His name. (Perhaps the Lord will listen in and record our conversations today as well.)*

H. I'm hopeful some of this good stuff takes place today. Of course it's fine to catch up with family activities or even predict who you want to win tonight's Super Bowl. But maybe, just maybe, the Holy Spirit will prompt you to voice some encouragement to someone. Or maybe you'll share a Scripture with someone that'll be like *apples of gold in settings of silver*. Maybe you'll pull someone aside and pray for them about some serious matter or an exciting opportunity that may be unfolding. Maybe you'll mourn with someone mourning. Maybe you'll rejoice with someone rejoicing. Maybe you'll go out of your way to meet someone new. Maybe you'll sit at more than one table so as to maximize your encounters...

* Once when Jesus went to a wedding, the wedding party ran out of wine. It would've been very embarrassing except Jesus was present and He wasn't going to let that happen. He instructed jars be filled with water which He miraculously transformed into wine. And it was apparently fabulous wine! Our Lord is with us here as well and I pray our fellowship together is just like that--really fine wine... *"Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored His name."*

* Close with Prayer & Grace...

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[Acts 2:42-47](#) (NLT)

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[Malachi 3:16](#) (NIV)

16 Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored His name.

Quote from Charles Swindoll

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.’ (Acts 2:42) “In this one verse we have the lowest common denominator of a church. This is ground zero. It would help greatly if God’s people reminded themselves of this single verse of scripture every day. When the first body of believers gathered together, they devoted themselves to four essentials. Did you notice them? Hear are the four essentials: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This verse is not only descriptive of what the early church did; it is prescriptive of what the church must do.”

- Charles Swindoll, *The Church Awakening*, p.p.14, 15.

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

The Temple - The Bible Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTnq6l3vUbU>

Solomon's Portico (Colonnade) - Luke Taylor (2BeLikeChrist)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hElJnr2hUM

Who Is The Church? - Jeff Vanderstelt (Desiring God)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfqsoSJ-Fgk>

Jerusalem History: The First and Second Temples - Moon.com

<https://www.moon.com/travel/arts-culture/jerusalem-history-first-second-temples/>

The Babylonian Conquest of Jerusalem & Destruction of the Temple - Megalim Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZZbhDoYHX0>

The Roman Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD - Megalim Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5vuoX09ryw>

Mark 13:1-2 (NLT)

1 As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of His disciples said, “Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls.” **2** Jesus replied, “Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

Matthew 24:1-2 (ESV)

1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when His disciples came to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. **2** But He answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Luke 21:5-6 (NLT)

5 Some of his disciples began talking about the majestic stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls. But Jesus said, **6** “The time is coming when all these things will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

John 1:14 (AMPC)

14 And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us; and we [actually] saw His glory (His honor, His majesty), such glory as an only begotten son receives from his father, full of grace (favor, loving-kindness) and truth.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NLT)

16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? **17** God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (AMP)

16 Do you not know and understand that you [the church] are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells [permanently] in you [collectively and individually]? **17** If anyone destroys the temple of God [corrupting it with false doctrine], God will destroy the destroyer; for the temple of God is holy (sacred), and that is what you are.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV)

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (AMP)

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens [outsiders without rights of citizenship], but you are fellow citizens with the saints (God's people), and are [members] of God's household, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the [chief] Cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure is joined together, and it continues [to increase] growing into a holy temple in the Lord [a sanctuary dedicated, set apart, and sacred to the presence of the Lord]. **22** In Him [and in fellowship with one another] you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV)

4 As you come to Him, a living Stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NLT)

4 You are coming to Christ, who is the living Cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but He was chosen by God for great honor. **5** And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. What's more, you are His holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

Hebrews 12:12-24 (NIV)

12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. **13** "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. **14** Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. **16** See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. **17** Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. **18** You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; **19** to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, **20** because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." **21** The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." **22** But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, **23** to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Revelation 21:1-7 (NIV)

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. **4** 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." **5** He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **6** He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. **7** Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be My children.

Justin Martyr (100-165) on the Church in His Day...

And what kind of lives did they lead? Justin Martyr, a noted early Christian theologian, wrote to Emperor Antoninus Pius and described the believers: "We formerly rejoiced in uncleanness of life, but now love only chastity; before we used the magic arts, but now dedicate ourselves to the true and unbegotten God; before we loved money and possessions more than anything, but now we share what we have and to everyone who is in need; before we hated one another and killed one another and would not eat with those of another race, but now since the manifestation of Christ, we have come to a common life and pray for our enemies and try to win over those who hate us without just cause." In another place Justin points out how those opposed to Christianity were sometimes won over as they saw the consistency in the lives of believers, noting their extraordinary forbearance when cheated and their honesty in business dealings.

The Temple in Jerusalem - Historian, Flavius Josephus

"The outward face of the temple in its front lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. This temple appeared to strangers when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white."

- Josephus, 5th book, *The Jewish Wars*.

Quote by Paul David Tripp

"The church is not a theological classroom. It is a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and sanctification center, where flawed people place their faith in Christ, gather to know and love Him better, and learn to love others as He designed."

- Paul D. Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*.

Quote by Mark Dever

"We are all called to initiate involvement in each other's lives... We covenant together to work and pray for unity, to walk together in love, to exercise care and watchfulness over each other, to faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require, to assemble together, to pray for each other, to rejoice and to bear with each other, and to pray for God's help in all this."

- Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Crossway, 2000, p. 221.

Quote by Edwin Gray Hurley

"What makes a church perfect is imperfect people like you and me caring enough about God and each other, and bringing enough of our real, broken, imperfect lives to the Lord who can take them and make us new. Jesus Christ, who turned water into wine, can turn imperfect people like you and me into new people. He can create the perfect, or the real, church."

- Edwin Gray Hurley, sermon titled, "*The Perfect Church*," Wednesday, January 01, 2003.

Quote by A.W. Tozer

"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

Quote by R.C. Sproul

"The church is the most important organization in the world. It is the target of every demonic, hostile attack in the universe. Jesus personally guaranteed that the gates of hell will never prevail against the church. He made no guarantee that the gates of hell would not be unleashed against it, however."

Quote by J. Vernon McGee

"There is a brotherhood within the body of believers, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the common denominator. Friendship and fellowship are the legal tender among believers."

Quote by Sam Allberry

"Church is not for your entertainment, as a consumer, but for you and others to find encouragement, as a contributor."

How To Create Community In Your Church

By Daniel Darling

<http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/daniel-darling/how-to-create-community-in-your-church.html>

As a pastor of a small church, I'm particularly sensitive about building a sense of community. I don't think community is just another 21st century buzzword, I think it reflects the body life described for the church in the New Testament. For example, in our latest study of the Lord's Prayer, I've been struck by Jesus instructions for how to pray. You will notice the use of the plural. *"Our Father"*, *"Give us our daily bread"*, *"Forgive us our debts."* This pattern is all through the gospels, the epistles, the pastoral letters--commands and encouragements given in the plural. The point is this: Christianity was not meant to be lived individualistically. When you put your faith in Christ, you are baptized into a body, joined to a people.

So it is an important function of the church to create environments where this body life, this community, can flourish. Much of this falls on church leadership. They must work hard to create environments for God's people to fulfill the "one-another" commands, where gospel fellowship, confession, repentance, friendship, encouragement, and life can happen together.

But there is a role for the church member as well. Since I've been in some form of church leadership for a long time, I've really never had the experience that many Christians have in choosing a church. But in talking to people who have joined our church and talking to friends, it seems finding community is at the top of the list when deciding between equally strong, gospel-preaching churches. People will attend and stay at a church where they have friends. But what role do the church members, not the leaders, have in creating such an environment? I want to offer five ways for church

members to create community. You'll notice that these are more pragmatic in nature. I didn't mention things like small groups, bible study, etc. Those are sort of assumed. I'm talking here really of just developing friendships.

1) Attend the Potlucks

I realize that if you attend a large church you may not know what a potluck is. And if you attend a small church, maybe you think it's outdated. I realize that I'm speaking out of my own experience at a church under 100 in attendance. But my larger point is this: attend social functions at your church. You may think that potluck or chili cook-off or ice-cream social is kinda lame. Maybe there is an NFL game on that night. Maybe you're on a vegan diet. Maybe you'd rather clean out your car. You should attend the potluck anyway and here's why: you can't create community simply by going to church on Sunday morning, checking it off your list, and going home. At some point you need to break bread with people, to experience life with people, to see where your church is going as a body. There is a lot in Scripture about "breaking bread" together, because something beautiful happens when people enjoy a meal together. It breaks down differences and unites you in your need to sustain yourself with food. I've often said that what happens at a potluck may be as important as what happens in church. Don't mistake what I'm saying. Preaching and corporate worship are vital to the body. So is good doctrine. But you can do those two things and not have community and therefore not experience body life and therefore experience a void in your relationship with God. So, go to the potluck and eat the bad lasagna. You'll thank me later.

2) Host other people at your home

If you want to experience community, you need to invest yourself in creating it. In my five years of pastoring, I've noticed something kind of funny. All the friendly people who go out of their way to make friends somehow manage to develop deep friendships. And all the stand-offish people who don't lift a finger to create friendships seem to complain about not being able to make friends. Relationships take work, they take time, they take effort, they take intentionality.

And if you believe the local church is important, if you think that the way we love each other is a picture to the world of God's love for us in Christ, then you'll not consider your church friendships as a sort of neat option, but as something vital to God's mission. Maybe you've never thought of this before, but it could be that having another family over to your house for dinner and developing lifelong, deep Christian friendships may affect the gospel proclamation in your community. Putting that extra roast in the oven may seem sort of pedestrian, but it may be contributing to God's mission in your community.

There is a level of discipleship and spiritual growth that only happens in long conversations over food.

3) Help someone move

It's amazing how much you can learn about a person as you are lifting a couch with them. I know it sounds weird, but working with someone, outside of church, outside of

the sort of dressed-up official Christian functions goes a long way to developing life-long relationships. Plus, as Christians, we're supposed to serve our brothers and sisters in the Lord in their needs. So maybe it's giving an elderly person a ride to the doctor or maybe it's helping a Christian brother with his basement remodeling job or maybe it's shoveling snow for a widow. Either way, you develop deep, good, rich friendships as you are working and sweating and struggling alongside people and learning their unique sorrows and joys.

I've found myself that once I've spent a day with someone doing something other than church stuff I've gone somewhere with that person. I've learned about their jobs, their families, their history. I've earned a bit of relationship capital, the right to speak into them and they've earned that with me.

4) Get involved in a ministry

Again, I'm showing my small-church bias here. In a larger church, ministry opportunities may not be as readily available. Maybe they are. Regardless, you begin to make the church community your own by rolling up your sleeves and getting involved. Taking ownership of an area where you can apply your unique set of gifts and talents. And in many cases, you get a chance to work alongside someone you may not know. Perhaps it's folding bulletins or maybe it's working on a church project. Last year we remodeled the outside of our building. Many of our guys came out to work on Saturdays--as a result we got to know each other very well and developed deeper friendships. Many who work in our children's ministries have said the same thing--they've had the chance to get to know and make friendships as they've worked alongside others.

Plus, by serving in whatever capacity you are gifted and wherever there is a need, you demonstrate to the church body that you care about them, that you're not just at church to receive, but to give, that the welfare of the church matters to you. So much so that you're willing to give time and effort to ensure the community is served.

5) Know and pray over the needs of others

Do you pray for the people of your church? Do you know what to pray for? In order to pray rightly for your brothers and sisters, we actually need to know what their needs are. And to receive intercessory prayer, we need to be a bit vulnerable and share our own needs with others. Every church has a different mechanism for prayer requests. You have the formal lists that go out via email and other forms--we should take these seriously and pray for them. But you might also find that person who sits next to you at church this coming Sunday and just lean over and say, "Is there anything I can pray about for you today?" And perhaps if you're having a difficult season, you might ask someone in church to pray for you. Open up a bit and say to them, "Hey, I could use some prayer--would you mind praying with me?"

I've found this to be a vital part of my own spiritual life. I have several folks in the church that pray for me specifically. I've had moments where I've pulled in a brother and said, "Hey can we pray over this really quickly?" And I've had brothers and sisters pull me in and ask for prayer. Something powerful happens in a friendship when you pray together.