

When We Come Together

Part 1: Not One Member, but Many

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Full Text (for reading on your own)

Acts 2:42

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42) There is no relative importance given to this list of 4 activities of the early church. They seem to each be an equal part of the mixture.

Notice that the 2 things we think of as “church-y” things (apostles’ doctrine and prayers) are only 2 out of the 4 things. Do you notice that fellowship and breaking of bread are 2 out of the 4 things the early church continued steadfastly in? I am not trying to make a rule, but simply paint a perspective.

Getting together as a church body to fellowship, eat bratwurst, have a short message is great. Getting together as a church body without even having a message is GREAT too! There are 4 things in Acts 2:42!

If someone is uncomfortable going to church if there is not a message, that’s actually a problem - and not one that can’t be fixed ...

Church is a family. Families that are wonderfully healthy and full of comfort, unity, peace, love, etc. don’t need to do things together in order to enjoy each other’s company. They can actually just be together. I personally believe that many believers are actually hiding behind structures and activities at church.

I was listening to a well-known pastor put words to what I’ve felt many years ago too. A new person came to their church and asked how he could get relationally connected at the church. The pastor asked him if he had shook anyone’s hand at service, met anyone during the meet and greet time or before or after service ... the visitor responded “no, no, no, I am asking for your home group structure.”

How would you meet people at a church? You would talk with them!

Sometimes church is so highly structured that we show up when worship has already started, then there is a message and then everyone leaves and I managed to go to church yet had very little chance to talk with other believers there - and that may actually be very comfortable because then I don’t

need to talk to anyone. I feel like I was with people the entire time but truth be told I only talked to other people for a grand total of 3 minutes.

You cannot change people's lives outside of the church if you cannot talk with people in the church. Sometimes we have so much church structure that we become unknown in the very environment that should be family - where you are known.

For instance, if I change something with church in the park and say "I'm not going to do a message today. Instead you all are going to talk at your tables ..." some people melt inside. "Because as long as Peter is talking I don't have to have any intimacy going on with anybody else. But as soon as he stops talking and we need to start talking now I have to be intimate with other people. And there is a great danger in that potentially because they might know me - and they could reject me."

But you are accepted in the Beloved!

And if there was ever a place for you to be accepted it's in church! You are accepted in the Beloved! This is God's great purpose for you - for you to be with Him forever.

So we need to model relationship in the church. Some of us are very relationally comfortable. That was NOT me, but it is now me.

If I notice that I am in a situation where I am not relationally comfortable ... if I am meeting a famous person and I notice that there is a twinge of discomfort in me ... do you know what I do? I take that to the Lord because there doesn't need to be any! He paid for my acceptance in Him that I would know that so well that it wouldn't even enter my mind to feel insecure in a social setting!

If you are in an environment and you feel insecure, that means your security is in the wrong place. If your security is in the Lord, then He's the same always. But if my security is in what other people think of me then I am in a certain situation and now all of a sudden I am shaken.

Jeremiah 17 says *"Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the Lord ... "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord."*

There are two options and the fear of man lays a snare.

If my identity is in Christ, now I have the potential to be in complete peace in every social situation that I would ever be in. To the extent my identity is outside of Christ, I have the potential for discomfort, anxiety, and despair in every social situation that I would ever be in. I don't get condemned about it, I get excited about it ...

Any situation where I feel uncomfortable is an opportunity for me for an upgrade! For me to be transformed by renewing my mind! To realize that I can be completely comfortable with who I am in Christ and no longer worry about what other people think about me.

You may think “what’s that have to do with possibly being uncomfortable with talking in small groups at church in the park?” The point I am making is this: In that moment of discomfort you have 2 tracks that you can take: (1) you can either hate that I am asking you to talk with someone else or (2) you can see it as an opportunity for an upgrade.

If we as the church cannot operate relationally, purely, beautifully, comfortably, joyfully, etc. with each other, how will be a beacon of light to the world? We have apostles’ doctrine and we might have prayer, but what about breaking of bread and fellowship?

We think that those things are less spiritual but that’s one of the ways I can commune with God - by being with someone else who I regard no longer according to the flesh but instead according to the reality of the Spirit of God being in them! (2 Cor. 5). They then become an expression to me of just how good God is and His will being accomplished in their life becomes an encouragement for me about all God wants to do in my life!

When you’re in fellowship with other believers, you are actually communing with God! Isn’t He in them?

We need to be careful to renew our minds according to what the Word actually says. If there were 4 things listed that the early church was doing and 2 of them don’t sound like church then we need to view those things properly and in the proper light.

If we find ourselves uncomfortable in those sorts of scenarios we need to be careful that we are not finding our comfort in hiding behind the structures of church - not realizing that in talking with someone over a table, in breaking bread together, we are actually doing something very profound!

Jesus Himself spent so much time eating and drinking with folks that they accused Him of being a glutton and a wine-biber. Our Savior on earth, bringing the Kingdom, was constantly eating and drinking with people.

This is why being a Christian is so hard! You have to do things like eat food and drink with people ... and have a God who loves you so perfectly that you never need to be concerned with what anyone else thinks about you. That’s the nature of walking with our God.

We have an amazing opportunity as a church to do something that’s quite unique. In 2013, Mark Crawford prophecied this. I believe God has been setting us up for what He is wanting to do. He leads us in straight paths when we trust in Him!

One of the things that has been happening is we started house church 3 years ago. The million dollar question that house church asks and answers is “can church be church if it’s not in a church building?”

For decades we’ve heard “the church is not the building. The building is not the church.”

We like to nod our heads to phrases like that in theory ... but when we take the structure away and say “you guys are going to get together and worship without a worship leader, but you all have worship on your heart ... and you guys talk about the sermon because you all have revelation ... and you guys minister to each other because the Spirit of Christ is in you ... and you guys eat together and talk amongst yourselves ...” “uhh... I don’t like this!”

For some people, the social, interactive thing is easier. I understand that. Some people love studying on their own and may not like the social thing as much. Some people love being around others and may not like studying on their own as much. I understand that. BUT God has not made anyone relationally inept. He’s not.

If you struggle relationally, God has breakthrough for you. That’s the nature of it!

So we’ve done main service and house church back and forth for about 3 years. Is church still church if it’s not in a church building? Or God-forbid if the pastor’s not there?

I believe we were ready to tackle that question and I believe everyone has done really well with it overall. But it is one thing to nod our heads to the commentary of “church is not the building” ... but do we feel like it is less “church” if we don’t meet at the building?

I now believe this “ekklesia” thing is starting another new phase in something.

The Building is Being Sold

I also have some other news to share with you ... this building is actually being sold. Please listen to 16:30 - 23:00 on the recording. This will be an exciting time. It will be a bit of task, but it will be an exciting time!

Testimony: Protected from Harm

We were supposed to go to my parents’ lake house last week. All week long we were supposed to go there. Things kept coming up and the timing kept not being right and most of all we just didn’t have peace on it for some reason. I kept thinking “are we crazy? We’ve delayed 3 days!” I got a call Thursday night of that week and they had a tornado at my parents’ lake house!

They happened to be out of the house - praise God - and the house was totally fine. It was just covered in leafy debris that had been plastered onto the house by the high winds. 7 or 8 trees (some

80 ft. tall) had been ripped out of the ground in the back yard. NO harm was done! The rain was so torrential that apparently the next door neighbor (who was home) couldn't even hear the sound of the trees being ripped out of the ground.

Where were we?

Wondering why we hadn't gone out to the lake yet.

Protected from harm.

That's the third time this year where I know the Lord was trying to protect me from harm. Do you know how many times I've succeeded in hearing it and acting upon it? One!

The other time I got food poisoning. I felt to go to another restaurant and suggested something lightly ... but didn't act strongly enough on what I was sensing. I ended up with food poisoning from that restaurant.

The voice is very small sometimes. Peace is sometimes the strongest indicator of the voice. "I just don't know why I don't have peace on this ..."

Years ago, I had someone call for a meeting before. For some reason I hear the Lord say "NO." This was a friend. Why not go? "I'm sorry I won't be able to do that right now." I hope they don't ask why because I don't have an easy to explain reason! I found out later it would have been an inappropriate conversation that would have been very awkward to end. Instead the Lord told me not to go to lunch with them!

God will protect you from harm but sometimes it's not big blinking red lights! Sometimes I have a check on my heart. It is like a dumbbell on my heart. When I feel that I've learned to ask "Lord, what is it?" Recently I felt that while coaching baseball and making a lineup for position players. I didn't stop to ask "Lord, what is it" and it turned out that what I was doing (which I thought would help) ended up causing us to get hosed defensively and contributed to losing the game!

You have to listen to that peace. We are the people of peace. The sheep of His pasture. He constantly has His staff out and He's directing us and He's saying over here ... We say "I don't know but I just feel that hook of His staff around my neck a little bit right now" and I've been learning "what if I listen to that just a little bit more closely because He wants to protect us from harm."

Testimony: God Directs Intercession at House Church (from Erin)

One of the beautiful things about house church is that it is R&D (research and development) in so many ways. When a pastor isn't telling me (Erin) what to do next, what does church look like? What is this? What is it for? Why are we here? Lord I am here with anticipation because I know that this is

your will that I am here without someone telling me what to do and I know that you have something You want to do, so I just open myself up to what you want to do ... what is it? Help me walk there.

I notice that a lot of times you have little nudges here and there from Him and you don't have a clue what you are doing. It's not until you get to the end that you realize what the Lord is doing and you understand and He gives you new vision though that.

So this past Sunday we were in house church. A whole big group of us. I (Erin) had a strong sense that we were supposed to pray in tongues together. There was business the Lord wanted to do. I could sense that but didn't know what it was about. He invited us to partner with Him in using our mouths for what He was doing. I had done this sort of thing before and seen fruit from it so she spoke up and said "guys I don't know what it is about but I feel like we are supposed to pray in tongues for a few minutes. We may never know what it was for, but are you willing?"

We prayed in tongues for a couple of minutes. During that time a few different things happened (which will become clear in a moment)

Sometimes when I'm (Erin) praying the Lord will push or pull my body in a specific direction ... perhaps toward a person I am supposed to pray for. During this prayer time at house church I kept feeling this pull in a certain direction.

Meanwhile Peter asked the Lord for an interpretation of the tongues we were praying for. The interpretation he got was that we were praying for the soccer team in Thailand that had been trapped in a cave. (12 boys and their soccer coach had been stranded in a cave that had flooded and had been trapped in their for 10 days).

I looked it up later and realized the direction I was being "pulled" was towards Thailand.

Then we opened it up and started praying in English. Different people had a sense of praying different things. Someone would say "I really feel like we are supposed to pray this." We would say "great, YOU pray that!" Aaron got a vision. The children prayed. Mandy got a word. There was authority on the prayers.

Do you know that Sunday July 7th was the day the Thai government decided to go in and save the boys? They had had no way to get them out previously because it was just too dangerous. Over the course of 3 days following Sunday they got all 13 people out and they were all alive and all healthy! Praise God!

Two highlights: (1) In Matthew 16:19 Jesus said "what you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven and what you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven." Taking this risk of praying for these children

on the other side of the earth is actually binding and loosing. Here the boys needed loosed! (2) In 1 Cor. 12:14 *“or in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body?”* There were people sitting in our house church that morning that didn't feel like they had anything to give to what the Lord was doing. They looked to Peter or me or whoever yet what they ended up bringing to that prayer was something that neither I nor Peter were able to bring to it! God designed it to be THIS WAY - when the body comes together and does the work of the Kingdom AS A BODY - that is when the full power of God is released.

It's not about your leader. It's not about the person who seems to have the most obvious gifting. Some of the most powerful prayers that were prayed that morning were by new believers who thought they had nothing to give!

When We Come Together

We minister out of the measure of our faith. You can activate your faith by hearing more of the Word, hearing more testimonies, exercising your faith through action, etc.

I am personally aware of where I am at in my faith. If I didn't have faith for something at the time, I seek the Lord about it and get in the Word about it and my faith will rise and I will then pray for someone.

When I (Peter) first heard about those Thai boys being trapped I thought “boy I ought to do something about that.” This is the life of a Kingdom son or daughter. The One that is in me is greater than any circumstance or need in the world and what I bind or loose on earth will have Heaven's backing.

However, my next thought was “I don't feel it on me to do it.” So my heart was willing to do it, but I didn't feel a grace to do it. What do I do? I say “Lord if you have for me to pray for that, put it on me.” In other words, I asked Him for the grace to even have the faith to pray! That was Friday the 5th or so probably.

On Sunday the 7th I wasn't thinking about the Thai boys from anything. I had done my part. I had told the Lord to put it on me if He had for me to partner with Him in meeting that need. As we prayed in tongues at house church I remembered what 1 Cor. 14:13 says *“Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.”* Instantly the Thai boys come to mind! Do you know what that was? The interpretation! Then I keep praying in a tongue and everything I am saying has a translation to it for me and they are all specific things about the Thai boys coming out of the cave safely.

Then different people each had visions and thoughts about what they needed to pray and we prayed into all those things. What happened. They're all out!

What if it wasn't our prayers that did it? I don't care as long as they're free. It's immaterial. One plants, another waters, God supplies the increase.

1 Corinthians 14:26 speaks of the normal things that happen when the brethren come together *"How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."*

What Erin just described: we came together, she felt the lead of the Lord, people prayed in tongues, there was an interpretation, etc. ... This is what Paul was saying. When we come together, these sorts of things will naturally be happening. He's just saying make sure everything is done for building others up and not for some sort of selfish motive.

Every part of the body has a role to play - is bringing something when we come together!

Kingdom Activation

Listen to 43:30 - 49:00 for an activation / impartation of the working of the Kingdom in your sphere of influence!