

Lessons from the Early Church

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[0 : 0 0] sermon of this new series on community. So I would like you to take the Word of God and turn to Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2. As you turn there, I want to reassure you that I will not be leading worship every Sunday. I don't think I could handle that, all right? The only reason I'm doing it this Sunday is our new worship and youth minister, Jared Adams. Well, his wife, Lindsay, had their baby last week. So yeah, that's something to get excited about. We are very excited. I'm sure she's very excited to have that little human out of her and in the house now. So just keep them in prayer right now as they've got a little two-year-old who's, you know, going to be so willing to give up all the attention to the new baby, right? That's how that works. Now, they're grateful to have a happy and healthy baby and mama during this time. So the Adams will be back with us very soon, and he should be back up here next Sunday leading worship for us. But I used to do that back in days past.

I actually had the exact same job that Jared Adams has here. I was serving as a music and youth minister in a different church. And yeah, I'm really glad God called me to pastor. So it's a blessing.

But I miss getting to lead worship every once in a while, but I'm glad I don't have to do that and preach every Sunday. So that's a blessing. But let's look at Acts chapter 2, and we are starting a series on community. This is intentional because we are launching our discipleship groups or dGroups on September 8th. So it's right around the corner. We basically got the details ironed out, just waiting on a couple of last things before we unveil all that information to you, and you'll be able to sign up for a dGroup both in person here on September 8th or on through our church app when we get that up and running as well. So this is very intentional at this moment, as I said, because community is an essential ingredient to the Christian life. Let me say that again. Community is an essential ingredient to the Christian life. If you are a child of God, and you don't have a regular, dependable Christian community surrounding you, then you're missing out on one of the essential aspects of this life that God intends you to live on this earth as we prepare for heaven. So let me share this quote from you. As we look at Acts chapter 2, we're going to be taking some lessons over the next few weeks from the early church when God established his New Testament church here on earth. What did they do? What did he have them do? And what lessons can we learn from that centuries later as we are still continuing on with the church that God established?

So what are these lessons we can learn? Well, I've been quoting him quite recently lately, and that's because Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote down a lot of great theological points in his study of the Bible, and this is something that applies directly to what we're talking about today.

The church is the church only when it exists for others. Say that again. The church is the church only when it exists for others. You say, well, the church should only exist for God. Yes, but if it exists for God, then it must serve at the pleasure of God. The good thing is God has determined and clearly stated in scripture how he wants the church to serve and whom he wants the church to serve, and that is others. So that's why last fall, almost a year ago, we started in on a series called *We Are the Church*, and we said this. Let's see if y'all can remember back that far. I know there's been a couple of sermons in between. We don't just go to church. We are the church. Y'all are good, man. Well done. Pat yourselves on the back. That's right. We don't just... No, don't pat yourselves on the back because it's not about you, okay? It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about God, and God says it's about them. The church exists as the vehicle to carry the mission of God, the commandments of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world around us. We are supposed to advance the kingdom of God on this earth, so the church does not exist for me. It doesn't exist for you.

[4 : 36] It exists for others, and thank God it does because I was one of those others, and so were you. So the church is the church when it exists for others. Let's look at the scriptures. Acts chapter 2 and verse 42. For this sermon today, I'm reading from the New Living Translation. All the believers devoted themselves. Y'all, would you mind joining us in standing? I know you've been up and down this service, and I apologize, but if you're able to, just out of honor for the word of God, would you mind joining us in standing if you're able to? If health prevents you, that's totally fine. Acts 2 and verse 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. And what happened? A deep sense of awe came over them all. The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders, and all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. Man, this is an amazing picture of this community of believers. Not exactly what we think of when we think of church today, but they had nailed down this sense of Christian community. And let's pick it up in verse 45. They went so far as they sold their property and possessions, shared the money with those in need. 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. Verse 47. All the while, praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day, what happened? The Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Each day, the Lord added those who were being saved. Kind of seems like it's implying here that people were being saved daily. This was a powerful move of God in the first century church.

The church got off to an unprecedented start. Nobody had seen a movement like this take off so fast, thrive so incredibly. And now centuries later, the church is still alive. Why? Because they started off with the key ingredient of community. For a church to survive, we must be in community. Let's pray together. God, I pray that you would teach us this principle that you've laid out so clearly in scripture. And sometimes in this world in which we live, we have to recognize that it might be hardest, it might be harder than it's ever been before to stay in community with one another.

So God, I pray that you would empower us by your spirit to overcome that opposition. And intentionally be in Christian community with one another. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[7 : 58] You may be seated. Thanks for standing. Amen. The first principle I want to leave with you this morning, taken directly from this passage in Acts, Acts chapter 2 and back in verse 42, is that we study truth together. When we are in community, we study truth together. So what do we mean by community? Well, I think it gave a pretty good picture here in Acts 2 of what the early church meant by community. We see how they practiced community with one another. So there are four essential ingredients to Christian community, and we're going to cover them the next four Sundays. So starting off today is we study truth together.

Directly in Acts 2:42, it said, all the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So number one for today, there is unity in our community. I thought that was pretty clever. Like that's got to stick in their minds, man. Unity in community. We can find that, can't we? It's hard to have community if you're not united around truth.

Might change that a little bit. It's impossible to have community if you're not united around truth. There have to be some core truths that you accept and you all agree on, or else you just cannot have community. You can't get along. Now you're never going to have unity in all areas. So let me get that dead out of the way at the beginning. I dress differently than you do. You dress differently than I do. Ladies, you should be very thankful for that. I would not look good in your outfits.

We have differences between us, right? How many of you are Texas Longhorn fans? Get your horns up. Let's go. Come on. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Matt Murphy up. Yes. Wow. I saw a horns down up there. I know that wasn't from a Murphy. I know that wasn't from a Murphy. How many of y'all are gigamaggies? Anybody?

I should put that down. Somebody's going to take a picture, use it as blackmail. How about Reckham Tech? Yeah, there you go. Sickum Bears, anybody? No. Yeah. Up here, this means more like Bearcats, right? That's, okay, that's Bearcats. This is, I don't know. Yeah. My parents went to Baylor.

[10:37] That's all right. We don't need to go anywhere else, do we? Do we have any Sooner fans up here? Oh, I'm sorry. Just, boomer. Boomer. Sooner. Yay, land thieves. That's great. What? Do it again. Nope, nope. Put the phone down, boy. All right. Somebody take his phone away, please. Yeah, look, the point is, we're never going to be united on in everything. Now, the truth is, we can have fun with sports, and college football started yesterday. Anybody watching college football yesterday? I got to watch a little bit before our steak and shoot, and that was fun. Pretty good games, pretty good games going on, but next week, kind of the big games start. We're never going to agree on everything.

There's no holiday people in here, are there? I'm just going to pretend like I didn't see that. Oh, my goodness. Yeah, that's true. You do live out there. We're fairly united in this room on Bearcats, but, you know, there's some other, as far as that rivalry goes, there's plenty of other schools represented in here, though. We got Midway, we got Bellevue, we got whatever else out here.

Petrolia, Petrolia, that's a big one. What else we got out here? There you go. All right. Yeah. So, we're never going to be united on everything. The truth is, though, some of those casual things, say, that's not casual, man. That's religion in Texas. That's right. It is. Probably more than it should be, but we won't go there today. The truth is, there are some pretty serious issues that we're not always united on, you know? There might be different political leanings of people in this room. There might be different philosophies on history. There might be different philosophies on civil issues, social issues. There might be different philosophies on what's right and wrong sometimes. Now, you can only go so far with that because the Bible is pretty clear usually on what's right and wrong, but there is room for disagreement on issues that are not absolutely primary and essential. There are secondary issues, and you and I are not always going to be united on every secondary issue, and that's okay. With some people, it might affect how much we get together and hang out, and that's okay. As long as we can remain in community with one another, as long as we can remain in Christian fellowship with one another, with hearts of love toward one another, then we can have unity in our community, okay? So what are we talking about when we say unity in community? All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. All the believers.

They were unified in their understanding that community was vital to what they were trying to do. It was absolutely essential. It was indispensable. There wasn't an option of whether or not we're going to be in community. It was all of us are going to join together in community. One of the reasons was they were under persecution. It was not socially acceptable to be doing what they were doing, so they had to band together. Little rabbit trail here. Just permit me this for a second, and we'll get back to it. You know what's interesting? Our natural reaction is to push back against opposition.

What if God wants to use opposition to the Christian faith to get us back to the world of the early church when the church thrived more than it ever has before? The church thrived when people were trying to put the fire out, when they were trying to throw governments, other religions, philosophers were trying to throw water on the fire of Christianity that was spreading, and nobody could stamp it out. What if God wants to take a somewhat apathetic church and put them in a place of hardship where then it begins to grow again? It begins to thrive again. So we have to be careful when we push so hard against opposition.

[15 : 13] God might be using that opposition to get us to where he wants us to be. So all the believers were united in their community. Psalm 133 is a great principle to learn how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. And we'll talk a little bit more about what that unity looks like, but the principle is there. They were united in their need for community and their valuing of community.

So how many of y'all know who the little guy in the white uniform with the basketball is? Anybody? Anybody? You can say his name if you know. Steph Curry. There we go. Anybody know who the big tall guy is?

Probably not. His name's Kevin Love. He played for a long time. He was pretty good actually, but by this time he was getting a little bit older and he's a big tall guy, about six foot, 10 inches, and the other guy's probably six foot, two inches or so. And yeah, Kevin Love is in a world of hurt right now, okay?

Why do you think that is? He is in what is called isolation defense, and he should not be. His place, when they're playing defense on basketball, trying to keep the other team from scoring, just to help you with what that is, his place is down by the basket where he doesn't have to run around a whole lot. He can just kind of stand there, big tall guy, and block the shots, okay? He should never be as far out as he is trying to guard a guy as small and quick as Steph Curry. So he's about to get shook up. He's about to get taken to school, whatever. He is in isolation.

They call it ISO for short. When you and I are in ISO against the devil, we're going to lose.

[17 : 15] We're going to lose every time. So I'm more powerful than the devil. No, you're not. And I'm not either. God is. But you're still living in your sinful flesh, and the devil rules the kingdom of sinful flesh.

You can't match up against him. Funny thing is, take the devil out of the equation. You're no match for your own sinful flesh. I'm not either. Guys, when I move away from the Spirit's voice in my life, I lose every time. And it doesn't just affect me. It affects the people closest to me.

I can't make it in isolation. I'm going to get taken to school every time. And you will too. That's why community is so important. God did not design this life for us to live it alone.

That's why God established the church. That's why God established the family. That's why God said, where two or three are gathered together, I'm there with them. That's why he said, in the multitude of counselors, there is safety. He said, you are meant to walk with me and walk with each other. Because he knew we would need people that we can see in front of us. We would need people that we can hear their voices when they talk. And he can use them. He can work through them. He can speak through them. And we can encourage one another, pick one another up, carry one another through. So don't be in isolation. All right. Don't get caught in this situation when it's you versus your flesh or you versus Satan. There is unity in our community. We must be unified. Don't be the one. Don't be the one who's pushing back. Don't be the one who's out there. Oh, don't worry, guys. I got this. And the rest of the team's like, no, you don't. He's about to kill you, dude.

No way in the world. No, it's going to take the whole team. It's going to take the whole team working together. So number two, we're committed to community. Unity in our community and then committed to community. It takes a commitment. Look back at Acts 2 again, verse 42. All the believers devoted themselves. Miss Sarah highlighted it with the children up here just a minute ago. There was a level of commitment there. There was a level of devotion there. There was a loyalty to the team.

[19 : 39] There was a loyalty to the family of God. Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 24. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. Let us not neglect our meeting together.

That means here in church. That means when you sign up for a dGroup, don't neglect the meeting together as some people do. But encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. If there has ever been an age when we need each other, it's today. The forces of Satan are all around us. Sin is so easily accessible. It's all around us everywhere. Often coming cloaked in the guise of Christianity. So it's important to stay in Christian community so we can discern together what is right, what is of God. Encourage one another because God's day of return is drawing close. How many of y'all ever saw this series on TV a while back? It's been quite a while now.

Band of Brothers. It came from this book which is actually a historical history book written by one of the greatest writers in that genre of all time, Stephen Ambrose. And in this quote, the movie was, or the series was a lot of fiction involved but the book was actually historical fact.

And he put this quote in there, anything they said was better than the blood and the carnage, the grime and the filth, the impossible demands made on the body, anything would have been better than that except letting down their buddies. They were committed to each other. So I don't want to be here, bullets flying at me, people dying all around me, blood, gore everywhere. I don't want to be here.

But the only thing worse than this would be letting down my brothers in arms. My grandfather was a career army made up to Fulberg colonel and then his wife made him get out before he could apply for general. But he would say this kind of thing. There is that camaraderie between brothers in arms that's unlike anything else. We get a little taste of it with teammates on a team.

[22 : 13] We get a little taste of it in other areas of life. But y'all, the family of God has to have that kind of loyalty. God's team of which you and I are members, we got to have that kind of commitment.

So, there is commitment to our community. We are committed to our community. Number three, it's a community of truth. We are all unified in this community. We're all going to be a part.

We're committed to it. We're not going to let each other down. And then thirdly, this is a community of truth. Look back again at Acts 2 and verse 42, the last part here. All the believers devoted themselves to what?

To the apostles' teaching. That was the truth. It was the scriptures. It was God's word passed down to them. They'd been walking with him. They'd written it down and now they were sharing it with one another.

That was why the church took off. They were committed to the community. They were all going to participate. And it was committed to truth. It was built on truth.

[23 : 30] John 17 and verse 17. Holy Father, Jesus said, protect them by your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one.

God and his son. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. What is the truth that we can build our g-groups on? It is God's word. What is the truth that we can build our church on? It is God's word. What is the truth that we can build our home lives on? It is God's truth.

What is the truth that you and I can rest on? It is God's word. God's truth. His word is truth. 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 15. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and the foundation of the truth.

The church, our church, not the building. We don't just go to church. We are the church, right? We are supposed to be the pillar and foundation of the truth. That means it is imperative.

It is so important that you and I ground ourselves in the truth. That means going back to it every day, running back to it when voices of lies and falsehood come attacking you all around, whether it's at work or at school or on the internet or with family or friends, and you hear those lies, sometimes even unintentionally, people are trying to draw you off course and you've got to run back to the truth of God's word.

[25 : 05] We must ground ourselves in it. We are the pillar and foundation of the truth. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 19.

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Y'all remember this? Ephesians 2, I think it was the second or third sermon back in our Ephesians series toward the beginning of this year. We are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. So it's setting the stage here for something really important to tell us. Verse 21, in whom the whole structure, this whole structure, the pillar and foundation of the truth, Christ is the cornerstone. We're built up into this house. Now, verse 21, the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Let's start there for a second. We're supposed to be joined together, growing.

Some of us are splintered off and stagnant. But when all the members are joined together, God empowers us for growth. God does not want you to be the same Christian you were last year.

God has been leading you on a journey. Now, maybe you hit pause. Maybe you got off course. Maybe pride or fear or whatever else drew you away from the footsteps of Jesus. But Jesus is always right there, not shaking his fist at you, not saying, what were you thinking? He knows what you were thinking. He knows how weak you are. He knows how weak I am. He knows how many times he's had to pick me back up and put me back where I'm supposed to go. So he's eminently forever patient and faithful and long-suffering toward us. But then he wants us to grow again. Then he wants us to join back together again so he can grow us into a holy temple in the Lord. Verse 22, in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Don't be the weak link in the building.

We are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. You know what the crazy part of this is? When you place your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, you repent from your sin and you turn toward Jesus and say, God, by faith I believe. I believe you're the Son of God.

[27 : 53] I believe you died for my sins. I believe you rose from the dead. I believe you love me. You're willing to save me. Forgive me. Make me your child. God, take me to heaven when I die. I'm yours.

When you're saved, what we call that, maybe there's somebody in the room that needs to do that today before we leave this place, then you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God then walks with you, talks with you, leads you, protects you, guides you, he's with you all the time.

That's you. That's you and God. When we come together, we start to grow and be built into a dwelling place together jointly for God by the Spirit.

It's not that the Spirit wasn't there before. He's there with us already. But when enough of us come together and we're united and we're committed, then the Spirit of God can take over and make it this dwelling place where anyone in the company of those believers knows, wow, God is so full in this room. I feel his presence. I sense his presence. I sense the unity. I sense that maybe they don't all agree on everything, but they sure do agree on God and how much he loves them and how much everybody needs to hear about it. Then the Spirit of God has free reign to move. It's a home for him.

So here's the takeaway. Will I commit to grow with my church community in studying truth together?

[29 : 44] Will I commit to grow in my church community by studying truth together? Over the next few weeks, we're going to dive more into this passage. We're going to unpack the different ingredients that made this community of God so special and why it set the stage that we are now the direct fruit of today. We can trace it back through church history. I got to actually take classes on it in seminary on church history and how we trace it all the way back to that early church that started. We read about it in the book of Acts. And ever since then, it's spread around the world. And now on every continent, of this globe, except maybe Antarctica, I'm not sure if there's any churches there.

Somebody needs to go reach those scientists, man. On every populated continent on this globe, on this globe, there's churches just like ours. How did that happen? How did we get here? How have they survived? How has this church survived over a hundred years? How has that happened? By following the principles from this book in Acts, that this church, by God's spirit, put into practice is community. It's community. We've got to have it. And if you don't intentionally commit to it, intentionally recommit to it, intentionally grow in your community, then the community begins to shrink.

The community begins to die. It begins to grow stale. So by God's grace, lets you and I commit to grow with my church community in studying truth together. God, your word is truth. We know that you are truth. God, you are the way, the truth, and the life. If anyone would come to the Father, it's got to be by you. Church, with our heads bowed right now, if there's anyone who needs to turn to Jesus right now, would you slip your hand up so I can pray for you? You say, I need to turn from my sin and turn to Jesus.

I want to be saved. Never done that. I don't want to do it today before I leave this place. Slip your hand up. I'll pray for you. Church, for the rest of you, with our heads bowed, our eyes closed, would you say, God's working on me and my heart about making a commitment to this church and this community? Maybe I'm already a member. Maybe I'm not a member. Maybe I need to join a membership today. But whatever it is, you say, God, I'm willing to commit to the next step.

And being in community with my church. Would you slip your hand up and say, God's working on me about that. I'll pray for you as well. Thank you. Thank you. I'm working on being in community with this church. Thank you. You can put your hands down. How many of you would say, God, I pray that you would use me to help somebody else. Help challenge somebody else to be in community. Help talk to them about how important it is for us to not live this life alone. Say, God's putting somebody on my heart that I need to go talk to. Somebody in my mind that I need to go talk to. Say, hey, come be in community with me. Whether it's here at the Sunday morning service. Whether it's in the D group when we get started. Whether it's in the Sunday school class on Sunday morning. Whatever that place is.

[33 : 06] How many of you would lift your hand and say, God's got somebody on my mind and my heart I need to talk to. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. God, you see all the hands. I may not see them all. But God, you know exactly who those people are. You know the condition of our hearts. You know what we need.

So God, by your spirit, illuminate the path to help our community grow. God, we love numbers because every number is a person. Every number is a soul that you died for, that you love. But God, more important than just having a bunch of people, we want to have people that you can impact, that you can join together and accomplish great things for you. God, just draw us to yourself and draw us to each other. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Church, would you keep your seats? The ladies are going to play. We'll just have a moment of prayer. So if we can just be in an attitude of prayer for a couple minutes and then we'll dismiss. But let's see what God has to say to us right now. And if you don't have anything else to pray about right now, would you just pray for our church? Pray for our discipleship groups that are starting up. Pray for these people who have taken on the responsibility of helping to coordinate their group and lead it and facilitate the discussions. Would you pray for them, for God to use those powerfully to study truth together, to be in community together. So let's go into prayer right now.