

We Fellowship Together

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[0 : 00] All right, church, we are considering on with our series called Community this morning. So I'm going to ask you to turn to Acts chapter 2, the book of Acts chapter 2.

We're talking about community, lessons from the early church. While you're turning, I'm thankful for how Jared and the choir kind of handled that whole mess up with the technology going on.

And if you would have been in here before church this morning, we tried that track. It worked perfectly. Everything was fine. And then the devil decided to get in and try to mess it up. But I'm thankful that it came together and we're still able to praise the Lord together.

It's all about speaking Jesus, whether we're doing it inside the church building or outside the church building. That's what we're called to do. We're called to speak Jesus to one another, to ourselves, and to the world around us.

As we worship together, as we grow together, we do it in community. It is an absolutely essential ingredient to a healthy, Christ-centered church.

[1 : 09] You cannot be a healthy, Christ-centered Christian if you are not in community with other believers. Now, you might be all alone on an island.

You might be the only one in your area that is a Christ follower. But God calls us and designed us to be in community with one another. So it's going to be difficult for you to grow in your faith unless you're surrounded by a Christian community, which is why God ordained the local church.

He ordained the family. He ordained the church. It's because we were not meant to do this alone.

We're meant to do this in community. So last Sunday, we talked about how we study truth together. This was kind of the first lesson that we receive from the early church. As we do community, as we do Christ-centered worship together, we study truth together. And our takeaway was, will I commit to grow with my church community in studying truth together?

It's a commitment. We see that in Acts chapter 2. So let's get back into it. If you're there, would you stand together? And we'll read from Acts chapter 2.

[2 : 23] I want to remind you of this quote we looked at last Sunday. The church is the church. Only when it exists for others. The church is not about us. The church is about Christ. And Christ has established this church to exist for others.

For one another within the body and for those outside the body who need to hear the saving message of Jesus. So the church is the church only when it exists for others.

Let's look at Acts chapter 2 and verse 42. I'm reading from the Christian Standard Bible. Beginning in verse 42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and to sharing in meals, including the Lord's Supper, and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all. And the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

They sold their property and their possessions and they shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the temple each day. And they met in homes for the Lord's Supper and shared their meals with great joy and generosity.

[3 : 38] Watch this. All the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day, what was the result of all this?

The Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. What an amazing start. It's no wonder that the church, this movement that got its start, as we read back here in the first century, survived to this day.

We still gather. We still meet together in the church building. And then we go into our homes and we fellowship together and we share meals together. And we enjoy the goodwill of all the people.

Praising God. And what happens? The Lord adds to our fellowship those who are being saved. May we pray together? God, I pray that you would bless the reading of your word.

I pray that you would quiet our hearts and minds and you would focus on your scriptures and your truth. God, we study truth together and we're doing that right now.

[4 : 42] So I pray that you would individually apply the lessons from the early church, from your word, to each person in this room. That we would all walk away challenged, edified, encouraged, and refocused on our need for you and for one another.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Would y'all look at the screens for a minute and check out this picture?

What's happening here? They're on their phones, right? Anybody have a witty comment for that? They're enjoying each other's company, right?

Four dear friends getting together for lunch. Having a great time together. Individually on their devices. They're not really fellowshiping, are they?

They're gathered, but they're not really fellowshiping. There's not really community happening. They could be doing this completely separate from each other.

[5 : 48] Nothing would really change that much. They're completely focused on what's going on themselves. So, I love hanging out with people who make me forget to look at my phone.

This is obviously an epidemic in our culture, right? We are very technology dependent in today's world. And each new generation that comes up is just more technology centric.

That can be a good thing. It certainly has its advantages. But obviously it comes with severe disadvantages as well. And one of these is the loss of community.

The lack of community. We talked about this a little bit last week. And we showed a graphic on the screen that showed as a result of the isolation that we experienced during the epidemic, the pandemic, COVID-19, when people were isolated, especially in other places.

See, I wasn't living in Texas at the time. I was living in the People's Republic of Nevada. Nothing against Nevada. It's just they pretty much do whatever California does.

[7 : 01] So, enough said there as far as their politics go. But listen, it was so isolated. You know, they were extremely serious about their rules and regulations of where you could go and where you couldn't go and who had to stay home, etc.

So, yeah, isolation was a very real thing. And especially for those who were dealing with pre-existing conditions and health problems and really couldn't be exposed to this.

Because if they got that virus, there was very serious dangers to their health. And then those kinds of people, I know many in this room, probably experienced some prolonged isolation during that time.

And all the studies have agreed that that was not good for humanity. That was not good for our minds. That was not good for our emotions. It wasn't good for our souls to be isolated from one another.

We were designed to live in community. But the world around us and all of its technology and everything that makes, puts the world at our fingertips. And yet somehow, even though we can talk with people across the globe at a moment's notice, somehow we fellowship less than ever before.

[8 : 12] Somehow we are in community with one another less than ever before. So, maybe there are people in your life that make you forget to put down your phone. Or maybe there aren't. But the people around you, look around this room.

Make it awkward, look around the room. Come on. There you go. The people in this room are supposed to be the people that make us forget to look at our phones.

The people in this room are supposed to be the people that we share community with. So, let's look at what the Word of God has to say about it.

We read it just a moment ago. Acts chapter 2 and verse 42. All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship. So, that's lesson number two or ingredient number two in healthy church community.

And let me share this with you. It's also ingredient number two in our discipleship groups that are starting up next week. Next Sunday, we're going to unroll all the groups.

[9 : 19] You're going to hear all the details about them. Meet the group leaders, etc. And we are giving you the ingredients for what these groups are going to be about.

Say, how are these groups different than Sunday school? How are these groups different than a church service? How are these groups different than me just getting together with my buddies? Even if they're friends from church. How are these groups different?

Because they contain these ingredients that the early church started with. And it's what God meant for us to be faithful in in practicing community.

So, last week, we're going to study the Word of God together. We're going to study truth together. And then this week, we're going to fellowship together. Fellowship. Fellowship. So, we fellowship together is the theme for today.

Where do we get this word fellowship? What does it mean? Throughout the Bible, there's this Greek word. In case you weren't aware, the Bible wasn't originally written in English. Some of you might have been realizing that for the first time.

[10:22] That's okay. That's all right. I'm not pointing the finger at you. The Bible was written many, many years ago. Old Testament was written in Hebrew and parts of it in Aramaic. This old ancient language.

And then the New Testament was primarily written in Greek. Koine Greek, which is now a dead language. Koine means, Jared, where'd he go? What does koine mean? Common.

There you go. He's doing some seminary online right now. He's learning all that. But, yeah. So, the common man's Greek. It was kind of the working class Greek was what the New Testament was mostly written in.

And so, koine Greek, we have this word koinonia. Koinonia. Koine. When we see this word fellowship in the Bible, it came from this Greek word koinonia.

Now, I took my Greek back in Bible college. I took two semesters of it. And I moved on. And I'm not going back to that. Okay? So, we're not getting into Greek class. My Greek professor would be very pleased that I'm not getting into Greek class with y'all because he would say you're nowhere near qualified to do that.

[11:25] But, there are all kinds of tools online that brought that back to me. And I remembered enough to be able to share this with you today. It's really important for us to get this concept down. What is the Bible saying when it uses this word fellowship?

Koinonia. To be drawn together by intimate participation and fellowship. To be drawn together by intimate participation and fellowship.

Now, this is incredibly important for us to wrap our heads around. Because, number one, fellowship is drawing us together.

Why? Because, naturally, we're not going to be drawn together. Who do we naturally gravitate toward? Anybody want to take a stab at it? Anybody?

Don't be shy. Who do we naturally want to hang out with? People like us. Very good. Now, you might be a social recluse and you're like, the person I enjoy hanging out with most is me.

[12:29] And that's all right. That's okay. Sometimes I sympathize with you. Sometimes with you. Sometimes I'm in that headspace, you know. I just want to have some me time. But we must be drawn together.

We have to step outside of our comfort zone. You know, can I just be honest with you? There have been times in my life as a Christian, as an adult, leading a family, that I have not wanted to go to my group.

You know, I'm in a church where they have groups and I'm involved in one with my family. And I just, the last thing that I wanted to do that evening was go to the group.

But because I made a commitment to go to the group, I went ahead and went. And by the time I went home, what happened? Anybody want to take a guess? I was glad I went.

I was glad I went. Yes. It's not, you know, a big surprise. Yeah. I was glad I went. And my wife and I would look at each other and, you know, we didn't really feel like going, but I'm really glad we went.

[13:29] Because we have to push ourselves to step outside of our comfort zone and allow ourselves to be drawn together. Because when we are together, we sharpen one another.

When we are together, we uplift one another. When we are together, we might be needfully corrected by one another. We're convicted by one another.

And it doesn't even have to be that they're pointing the finger at us saying, you're doing wrong. You need to fix it. But it might be hearing a testimony from somebody else that convicts us. Man, I got to be there.

I got to get there. I am not there in my walk with God where they are. And I know I need to be. They're walking so closely with him. And I see the evidence of that in their life. And God's blessing them. And I need that. So we're there to sharpen one another. To encourage one another through tough times. To sometimes you just get this adrenaline.
[14 : 27] You get this vitamin B12 shot from going and being around the community of fellow Christ followers. So we're drawn together by, what's that next word?

Intimate. Intimate. Intimate participation and fellowship. There's this kind of unwritten rule in the city of Las Vegas. What happens?

Yes, we're in Henrietta, Texas. And y'all know that. I'm not going to ask how you know that. I used to live in Nevada. So that's how I know that. I traveled in Vegas all the time. It's kind of the mantra, right?

By the way, in the age of the internet, what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas. So don't try to apply that to life, okay? What happens at group stays at group, okay?

When you are in a discipleship group, and honestly, this should go beyond group, but any confidential information that's shared between believers should certainly be respected, right?

[15 : 27] But you might open up because of the intimacy of the setting. And as you spend more time fellowshiping with one another, drawn together, then you tend to open up more.

You tend to start to build trust with those people. And the intimacy of that setting can allow for healthy, emphasis on healthy there, healthy sharing of what's going on in your life, the things you're struggling with.

Maybe there's somebody in that group, men, that could be an accountability partner for you. Maybe there's someone in that group, ladies, who could be someone who could be that shoulder to cry on sometimes when it's just overwhelming and you have no one who understands what you're going through.

Maybe somebody could be there to be that person for you. There's an intimacy in group fellowship that is hard to find other places.

You might see one another in church on a Sunday morning, might see each other out in the town or the community, might run into each other at Target in Wichita Falls. But it's different when you're doing life together week by week in intimate fellowship.

[16 : 41] So that's what it is. Koinonia, when we see that word fellowship in the Bible, it's to be drawn together by intimate participation and fellowship. The key to all this is participation.

You've got to be there. If you show up once in a blue moon, it's hard to be drawn together. It's hard to develop that intimacy. It's hard to develop the blessings that come when you're not participating. So let's look at Philippians 1.5. That was a long introduction and the rest of this is going to go pretty quickly. So try to listen closely, listen fast, and let's get through it here.

I hope God speaks to you as he has to me in preparation for this. Philippians 1.5. I give thanks to my God because of your partnership in the gospel. You know what the really cool thing is?

The word, the Greek word, remember the New Testament was written in Greek? The Greek word for partnership right here is koinonia. Same one we just studied. Same one we just looked at.

[17 : 43] So this gives a whole other aspect, a whole other curveball to this word koinonia. It also can mean partnership. So when you bring in that part of it, you say when we're fellowshiping together, we're partnering together.

Y'all, if we don't partner together, then God's mission is never going to be fulfilled. So what we learn from this is fellowship is partnering. If you're writing things down in your notes, fellowship is partnering.

Acts 2.42. The believers devoted themselves to this fellowship. It was a commitment. We talked about that some last week when we talked about studying truth together.

It takes a commitment. It takes a partnership. You ever been in a partnership where two sides were not equally giving? It was out of balance. One was giving far more than the other.

Maybe it was a marriage. Maybe it was a work partnership. Maybe it was a friendship. But whatever it was, it just wasn't working because the partnership wasn't there. True partnership wasn't there. Ecclesiastes 4 gives us some insight on that.

[18 : 49] Two people are better off than one because they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone, real trouble, man. Two people lying close together can keep each other warm.

But how can one be worn by themselves? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated. But two can stand back to back in partnership and conquer. And I love the way this ends.

Three are even better for a triple braided cord is not easily broken. The more we bring into this partnership, the healthier and stronger and more protected against outside attacks, it is.

That's what God intended for us. Be in partnership. Be in community. Be in fellowship with one another. There's strength in partnership. There is strength.

Just like that cord. You can't easily break that cord. The more you start braiding around, the more cords you start binding together, it creates something that's so hard to break.

[19 : 56] I want to share this quote with you from former President John F. Kennedy. Partnership is not a posture, but a process. In other words, it's not just something you're going to say I'm in.

I am now in partnership. It is a continuous process that grows stronger each year as we devote ourselves to common tasks.

So what does that look like for a church? What does that look like for a discipleship group? The common tasks are we study truth together. We fellowship together. And then we'll unpack the next two Sundays with those other tasks are, our common tasks from Acts 2.42.

But you can cheat and look ahead if you'd like to. That's fine. Philemon. Philemon verses 4 through 7. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints.

So Paul was writing to this brother in the faith, Onesimus, and he says, I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers. I hear about this great reputation you have. And then he gets a little bit further.

[21 : 02] Okay, I just lost control of this. Would you take me to the next slide, please? Verse 6. Uh-oh. Y'all, the devil is in the technology this morning, okay?

I'm just going to read it from here, and y'all just trust that I'm reading the Bible. If you want to turn to Philemon and follow along, that's totally fine. I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for the sake of Christ.

The fellowship of your faith is what he's talking about. The fellowship of your faith. There we go. We're back. It would become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for the sake of Christ.

For I have had great joy and comfort in your love. Watch this. Because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you. Can I just take one tiny little rabbit trail and ask you a question?

How many people would say their hearts are refreshed by you? There's all kinds of other questions that we could ask that maybe you would be able to give positive answers to.

[22 : 16] But how many people would truly be able to say, my heart is refreshed through that person? I pray that God would use me to refresh hearts.

My prayer for you is even more that God would use you to refresh the hearts of one another. And I say even more because so many people in this room have known each other for years, for decades.

And I pray that God would use that familiarity, that intimacy to bind you together for the purpose of refreshing each other. That is what this fellowship looks like.

That's what we read here in Philemon. What a testimony that Paul was able to write to this man and say, The hearts of the saints around you have been refreshed because of the fellowship of your faith.

So fellowship is strengthening, but it's also refreshing. It's also refreshing. We need it. Y'all, we've been needing some refreshing from this heat this summer, right?

[23 : 19] And we're starting to get it now. I've never been so happy to see like 90s and now we're getting into the 80s. It's awesome. This refreshing is fantastic.

Now, I noticed that when we went out of town, man, it's a month and a half, a couple months ago. We went out of town for a Monday through Friday and went to see my parents down in Louisiana for a little bit.

And when we're out of town, what do you do to the thermostat? What do you do to the thermostat when you leave the house for a while? What do you do? Turn it up, right? You turn it up to 80 or 85. You don't turn it off, do you? Right. You don't do that because mold, if you do, stop, okay? Don't do it. Talk to people that are experts in that thing. Google it.

Google it. There's reasons that you're not supposed to turn it off. But just like in the wintertime, you don't ever turn the heat completely off. You just turn it way down. Those pipes will freeze, right?
[24 : 19] So you turn it off. Well, inevitably, when I come home from that trip, is the house nice and refreshing when I walk in? No, it's not.

I hate that. I hate it so much. Because I want to walk in, and I'm always tired from the drive, you know? It's like, man, I just want to get the stuff out of the car, put the kids down, and let's go to bed. But I got to wait for the house to cool down. Because I'm missing that refreshment. But when that air kicks on, and that steamy, stuffy, muggy house starts cooling down, it feels like as close as we're going to get to heaven on this earth, man.

It's just like, yes, give me all the AC. First world problems. The age in which we live. The people who live before air conditioning are like, man, you're so soft.

Yes, it's true. Society has made us this way. But it is so refreshing to feel that air conditioning. Y'all, I want to be an air conditioning unit for somebody else.

[25 : 30] And I want you to be the same thing. I want, when this church fellowships together and comes together, it is like a blast of AC on a hot, muggy day.

2 Timothy 1.16, we get a little reminder of this from Paul. He's writing in Timothy. He says, may the Lord grant mercy to the house sold of Onesiphorus because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

This is the second person that Paul is saying was a refreshment. He was so encouraging, uplifting to be around. He's like a breath of fresh air.

Is that our testimony? Is that something that anyone would genuinely, truthfully say about you in an honest moment?

Would they say they refresh me? Number one, they strengthen me. Number two, they refresh me. If you're only a refreshment to somebody else and you don't strengthen them, could be that you're not really helping them.

[26 : 43] If you're only a strengthening presence to someone else and you're not refreshing, it could be that your voice with that person will eventually run its course because you're hard to listen to.

You're hard to hear. Abrasive. Grating. God needs his people to be in community with one another. He designed us that way. I read a little devotional. I shared it with our little group on Wednesday night this last week that talked about how God made us incomplete.

Now that sounds like heresy, doesn't it? God made us incomplete. Well, he made us intentionally incomplete because we're supposed to live in community with one another.

If he gave us everything we need all on our own and we're completely self-sufficient, then why do we need each other? But he made us incomplete intentionally where number one, we would gain everything we have from him, but how do we do that?

[27 : 56] How does that play out? How does God give us everything we need? Oftentimes, he uses people to do it. He uses people to accomplish his will and purposes on this earth.

And he uses the body of believers to encourage, uplift, strengthen, and refresh one another. So in closing, the takeaway for this Sunday is this.

It's very simple. Well, I commit to partner with my community, church community, in fellowship together. That means I've got to be willing to be strengthened and strengthen somebody else.

I've got to be willing to refresh and be refreshed by somebody else. It means I've got to open myself up. It means I've got to be willing to put trust on the line.

It means I've got to be willing to make a commitment and not go halfway. It means I've got to be willing to say, God, I understand the value of community.

[28 : 58] I understand why you created us to be this way. And I'm going to do my part in being in community and providing community for someone else.

May God strengthen us. May he refresh us by his spirit and through one another so we can be on mission for him and we can take his gospel message to the people who need to hear it most.

But man, we've got to get our souls fed. And that's going to come from this koinonia, this fellowship with one another. Would you pray with me? God, I pray that you would convict us because right now I believe that our church is in need of more community.

I believe our church is in need of more fellowship with one another. So many of us, we see each other on Sunday mornings and that might be about it. And maybe in passing on Wednesday night,

maybe here and there in the community, but it's so hard to find time in our busy schedule to sit down and fellowship.

God, I pray that these discipleship groups would help with that. There's people that are finding that in their Sunday school class. I thank you for that. And I pray that you would bless that and expand it and help it to thrive.

[30 : 09] I pray that through all the different gatherings and ministries of this church, they wouldn't just be just to do them. Because that's what we do. But as we would see the value of coming together in those times, tonight for prayer, for church prayer, could be such a valuable time of fellowship, praying together.

We're gonna look in just a couple of weeks about how prayer is one of the key ingredients of community in our church. I pray that you would use the challenge from your word today from the book of Acts.

We look back at how that group got together and how you made their community spread like wildfire. How that could happen again today.

There's no limit to you, God. There's no limit to what you can do. We're the ones usually who hold you back. I pray that you'd bind us together through our common faith in you.

That we would strengthen one another. That we would refresh one another. Let our spirits reflect that. Let our words reflect that. Let our actions reflect that.

[31 : 25] Let our showing up reflect that. Let our being willing to open up and share, reflect that willingness to be used by God.

We'll give you all the glory for it.