

#AsWeGo - Message 2  
Community  
Joshua J. Masters  
January 6, 2019

OUTLINE

*But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 (NLT)*

A. Being the church requires unity in COMMUNITY

(1 Corinthians 1:10. C/R: John 13:35; 1 Peter 3:8; Philippians 2:2; Titus 3:10; 1 John 1:7)

B. A healthy community requires...

1. Devotion to learning God's WORD together.

(Acts 2:42a. C/R: Psalm 119:11; John 8:31-32; Romans 10:17; Acts 17:11; Hebrews 4:12; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16)

2. Devotion to FELLOWSHIP.

(Acts 2:42b. C/R: Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 John 4:11-13)

3. Devotion to PRAYER and WORSHIP.

(Acts 42c, 46a. C/R: Isaiah 12:5; Acts 1:14; Acts 4:21; Ephesians 5:19)

4. Devotion to CARING for one another.

(Acts 2:44-45. C/R: Acts 4:32, 34-35; Galatians 6:2, 10; Philippians 2:4)

ENGAGE

How do you think community plays into the greater role of Christ's mission for us? This week, ask God how He wants you to build better community among other believers. Post a picture or text on social media using the hashtag #AsWeGo and tag @BrookwoodChurch so we can engage with one another.

**NOTES TO PRODUCTION:**

- Please keep all underlining, italics etc. for the teleprompter.
- All text highlighted in yellow, blue, or green are on screen text. Please change the **letters** to those colors on the teleprompter (as opposed to highlighting).
  - Sections of **Highlighted text with Bold Underlines** are to be emphasized on the teaching screen (NOTE: This is only true for text that is highlighted as well).
- Please note that there are several on-screen references marked in translations other than NLT

COLOR KEY:

**Yellow:** Primary Passage; **Blue:** Supporting Passages/Definitions/Quotes; **Green:** Outline

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Good morning! It's awesome to have our students lead us in worship, isn't it?

Last week we started a new series called #AsWeGo asking the question,

“What does it mean to BE the church?”

We started the series exploring our MISSION as the body of Christ.

So the first component of BEING the church from week one was:

**Being the church requires knowing your mission.**

We talked about our need to influence the world by building relationships of integrity with those who don't have the hope of Christ in their lives...

And if you weren't here last week, I encourage you to listen to the podcast or watch the message online (or through our app).

Because the next few weeks are going to build on how we fulfill that mission.

Today we'll talk about the second key component in being the church.

So the fill-in at the top of your outline is this:

**A. Being the church requires unity in COMMUNITY**

We were designed by God to live, grow, and work in community.

If we're going to bring the light of God to the rest of the world, we must be living in that light together.

Look at the key verse at the top of your outline:

**But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 (NLT)**

We must have unity.  
Continually building one another up.  
Challenging one another in our sin.  
And walking with one another in our trials.

Circle this verse on your outline.  
1 Corinthians 1:10:

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. **1 Corinthians 1:10 (NLT)**

Because that is the only way to fulfill the greater mission of the church.

Be of one mind.

Unhealthy churches are filled with politics and personal agendas because they've built a culture of individualism over purpose.

Gossip, undermining, and division are the most destructive forces in the church, and we must not tolerate them in the body of Christ (Titus 3:10).

So what DOES a healthy community look like?

The best example is probably found in the first description of the New Testament church recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

You can go ahead and turn or swipe there in your Bibles now.  
It's on page 876 if you're using the Bible available in the bookstore.

At this point in the timeline, Jesus has given His instructions to the church (we talked about that last week).

He's ascended back into Heaven,  
and the new believers have just received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

So this description of the early church reveals an electrified group of people.

Now, is it fair to measure the modern church against the church in the Book of Acts?

Some would say no...  
That this was the church of the apostles,  
That they were being persecuted,  
They were in a different culture,  
A different time,  
and that they'd just experienced the first indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

That all needs to be taken into consideration, but maybe those are the exact reasons we should compare the modern church to them.

They were the closest to the source of our hope, and it's the purest description of the church that we have.

Now, I really encourage you to read the ENTIRE book of Acts this week, but we'll focus on the end of chapter 2 today.

Starting in 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. **Acts 2:42 (NLT)**

So as you can see, it says, 'All the believers devoted themselves to the teaching of Fox News, the fellowship of football games, and the sharing of chicken wings as they prayed for their team.'

Oh... I think that's a different translation.

Look, I love chicken wings and college football too, but Listen...this phrase...

**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. **Acts 2:42 (NLT)**

"All the believers devoted themselves" in Greek means "a state of being". To exist in devotion.

What do you exist for?

What in your life are you truly devoted to above everything else?

Well, the first thing the early church was devoted to was:

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. **Acts 2:42 (NLT)**

Now, the apostles' teachings were the Word of God... the foundation of the New Testament we have today.

We'll expand on that in a few minutes.

But the believers were learning the Word of God together.

They had a hunger for the Gospel and what God was saying to them.

So...

**B. A healthy community requires...**

**1. Devotion to learning God's WORD together.**

There's an entire list of passages in your outline you can dig into with your small group about the importance of learning God's Word together.

In fact, there's extra verses with all the fill-ins for that reason.

But Sunday is a time of equipping one another—growing together and exploring the power of what God has to say to us as a group.

Are you devoted to coming to church every week?

The early church had a hunger for understanding Scripture and what they were being taught.

Let's leave the church in Jerusalem for a moment and fast-forward to the church in Berea.

Acts 17:11...

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. **Acts 17:11 (NIV)**

They were eager to be taught the Word of God and had such a devotion to God's truth that they searched the Scriptures every day to confirm what they were being taught.

One of the best thing that happens in our small group is when a question comes up about something Perry said in his message and we have to abandoned all the other questions, dig into the Bible, and debate the issue.

And the group I'm in is really weird, so if we can do it, your group can too.

And if you don't have a small group yet, you really need to get plugged into one.

We need to dig in to the Bible on our own, but we also need to do it in community... because that's what protects us from interpreting scripture to mean what we want it to mean rather than what it actually says.

Do you have a hunger for learning God's Word?

◇◇

Church hopping is a major distraction to the mission of Christ.

If a church is teaching heresies then yes, you need to leave.

But most people leave saying "I just wasn't being fed."

Most people who feel like they're not being fed at a church are starving themselves during the week and expecting the church to quench their hunger in one hour.

And those people are usually not engaged in healthy community either. They're not digging into Scripture with other people.

That leads to the second devotion the early church had in our text:

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. **Acts 2:42 (NLT)**

We'll talk more about the Lord's Supper in a little bit.

But they spent time together with a focus on Christ.

So:

**A healthy community requires...**

**2. Devotion to FELLOWSHIP.**

Celebrate Recovery and the Landing are a discipleship program for overcoming all types of past hurts, habits, and sin issues—

Anger, Codependency, Addiction, Peer Pressure, Overcoming Abuse, Relationship issues...

But there's a reason we host a Café after every meeting and have monthly fellowship events...

It's because healing and growth happens in relationship.

When someone comes into Care Ministries looking for help because they feel like their entire life is falling apart, do you know what the first question we ask them is?

- What does your support system look like?
- How are you plugged in?
- Are you connected to a ministry or a small group?

And if they aren't living in community... the very first thing we do is try to connect them to one because without that sense of fellowship, we know any steps we take with them will be short lived.

Christian fellowship is more than just a group of people being together.

It's encouraging one another in hope, Equipping one another in our gift,  
Challenging one another in our growth,  
And sharing how God is moving in our lives.

If you want to make a difference for God's Kingdom in a broken world, you need to have a strong community supporting you and helping you grow in Christ.

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We've been asking everyone to read this book as a supplement to our series:

*Surprise the World: Five Habits of Highly Missional People* by Michael Frost.

You can get it in our bookstore.

One of the things suggested in this book is to be intentional with your meal times.

You have 21 meals a week. This book asks that you share just 3 of those meals with another person.

At least one being with a non-believer you're building a relationship with, and at least one with someone from within the church.

Why? Because with very few exceptions, you cannot fulfill your mission in the world without the support, wisdom, and encouragement of a healthy Christian community.

I would further challenge that one meal be with a non-believer, and TWO be from within the church—a believer you're feeding into and a believer who's mentoring you.

We need fellowship.

That's why our hashtag for this series is #AsWeGo instead of #AsIGo

How would you rate your devotion to fellowship? How will you become more involved in community?

Look at the "Engage" hashtag action at the bottom of page 2 of your outline.

Now if you weren't here last week, we explained the hashtag concept, the reason we're doing it, and how to engage.

So, again, I encourage you to listen to that online.

And I'm so grateful for those of you who've already started posting on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The response has been awesome.

Here's one from this week that's also perfect for today's message:

<SHOW PICTURE: AsWeGo\_InstagramExample\_01.06.2019.jpg >

This was an Instagram post from Brookwood Connect, a College-age Bible study group that meets Wednesday nights. They said:

"Lord, #AsWeGo help us to grow as a group this New Year and encourage other young adults in their walk with God. @BrookwoodChurch @BrookwoodYoungAdults."

So as we build community, let's try to double our posts this week and encourage one another by commenting and engaging with one another.

You can post as yourself, or you can post as your small group or ministry team to show community like this group did.

Fellowship face-to-face, supplemented by online community.

Let's continue reading in our text:

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.** Acts 2:42 (NLT)

The last thing verse 42 tells us is that the believers were devoted to prayer.

Remember that for a moment and let's add the next couple verses:

All the believers devoted themselves...to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day...  
**Acts 2:42-46a (NLT)**

Now, I don't want to skip over verse 43. So let me just give a side-note here.

*"A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders."*

As we said early, the apostles had a very specific role in the early church.

They directly spoke the Word of God, People were healed when Peter's shadow passed over them (Acts 5). They raised people from the dead (Acts 9:40).

Many scholars will point out that greater signs and miracles were necessary in the early church to confirm God's word through the Apostles, until there was a New Testament to serve as God's witness.

That's true.

And we no longer have apostles as their described here.

But God is still working in miracles.

We have Care Volunteers available to pray with people every week... they anoint people with oil and sometimes we see healing according to God's will.

So have we lost the sense of awe the early church had because there are no miracles, or do we no longer see the miracles around us because we've lost our sense of awe?



The early church was filled with the Holy Spirit, saw the WORKS of the Holy Spirit, and ENGAGED with the Holy Spirit.

And how did they do that?

Look at our text:

All the believers **devoted themselves...to prayer**. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. **They worshiped together at the Temple each day... Acts 2:42–46a (NLT)**

They devoted themselves to prayer and to meeting together for worship.

A healthy community requires...  
**3. Devotion to PRAYER and WORSHIP.**

We can absolutely pray and worship on our own... and we should.

But we're also called to worship and pray together.

Every Sunday we meet at 8:15am for prayer before services, and there's often a power and tangible sense of the Holy Spirit's presence when we're praying together.

It prepares our hearts for worship and we sense God preparing us for something as a church.

We usually have 20-30 people.

But what would happen if we filled the room with people seeking God's movement here?  
Come early for prayer.

And worship...

If you're coming into the service after worship has started... two or 3 songs in... you're missing the point of the church.

And you're missing how the Spirit can speak to you during corporate worship.

If you're not willing to worship God, how do you expect to hear from Him during the teaching?

This is Paul's advice on how to conquer sin in your life:

...be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 5:18b–20 (NLT)**

We've already said the word "devoted" in this passage is a state of being... a state of existing for something.

Do you want your existence to be one of communion with God or communion with your schedule?

Come early on Sundays with a heart already prepared for worship and prayer.

Come to the Night of Worship we're having on January 20—

Be willing to engage with the Holy Spirit and see what He does.

So, a healthy community has a devotion to learning God's Word together, living in fellowship, and coming together for prayer and worship.

A healthy community also requires...  
4. Devotion to CARING for one another.

Get ready... this last one is going to be a rough ride.

Now, I'm a care pastor... I like caring for people (most of the time), but this is a difficult passage for any believer in Western Culture:

Verse 44:

And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. **Acts 2:44-45 (NLT)**

Now, make sure you understand what's being said here.

This particular statement is talking about generosity beyond giving money to the church leaders for redistribution or ministry.

We're absolutely called to give to the church... and we're going to talk about that in another message in this series (I won't tell which one because I want you to show up).

But what THIS is talking about is having an overwhelming love for other believers.

It wasn't communism or socialism... Rather, it was a love so sincere for one another that they were giving directly and sacrificially to the needs of every fellow believer.

We know from Acts 5 that all this giving was completely voluntary, and we know they still owned property and homes (v 2:46)

But the Holy Spirit gave them a love so deep for one another that their own needs and possessions didn't matter to them as much as the needs of other believers.

They voluntarily and joyfully surrendered whatever was necessary to meet the needs of those in the body.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century philosopher, Aristides (Ara-stide-ees), wrote an explanation of Christianity and in those writings he said:

“If they find poverty in their midst, and they do not have spare food, they fast two or three days in order that the needy might be supplied with the necessities”

(*The Apology of Aristides*, translated by Rendel Harris)

But to be fair, the believers who received help probably didn't cause a delay in the parking lot, right?

What really happened to this culture in the church where every believer directly and sacrificially cared for the needs of every other believer?

Did it just last a few weeks after Pentecost? Months? Maybe a year?

As I was studying, I came across a very disturbing answer to that question.

I was going to paraphrase it, but I think it's more powerful to read it.

This is from the IVP Bible Background Commentary:

“These actions do not reflect an ascetic ideal [religious self-discipline], as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions. Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by pagans until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church.”

-Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*

Let that sink in for a moment.

After 1800 years, how do we get back to that kind of culture? I don't know.

But what if we tried?

The Greek word used for fellowship in verse 42 of our text is

**koinonia (κοινωνία)**

Partnership, Communion, Generosity.

What if this were the way we lived our lives... with unconditional love for one another, and living with unity of purpose?

These early believers regularly engaged in what they called the Love Feast.

(Love being the Greek word *Agape* for perfect, unselfish love.)

That's what's referred to in verses 42 and 46 our text:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to **sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper)...**

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**—all the while praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people.

**Acts 2:42, 46-47a (NLT)**

They would gather together in homes, share a feast of fellowship based on the love of Christ, and remember the sacrifice of Jesus as they broke bread.

When was the last time you had someone over to your house and observed communion as part of your meal?

When we shared in the Lord's Supper during our Pause series, we had nearly 5 minutes of quiet time to remember Christ's sacrifice, commune with God, and hear His voice.

That, and self-examination, are the most vital aspects of the Lord's Supper.

But I think we sometimes lose the fellowship aspect of communion.

So we're going to do something *very* different today.

Some of you are going to HATE this... but it's okay to be uncomfortable. We'll all be uncomfortable together.

You can take out your communion pouches and if you didn't get one, raise your hand and our volunteers will bring you one.

**The bread in this pouch represents the body of Christ—and how it was sacrificed for our salvation.**

**The juice represents His blood—a symbol of the new covenant, the hope of our restoration with God.**

We're going to remember the meaning of these elements in fellowship together.

So here's what we're going to do...

Kensley's going to come out and share another song with us.

As she plays, I want you to find a small group of one or two other people around you to share communion with.

Look for people around you. Make sure no one is left out.

During the song, you'll share in communion with your group.

No one's going to tell you when or how... I'm coming down there with you.

My hope would be that each person in your group would say something—one sentence expressing something God is doing in your life, something your thankful for, how He's challenged you today.

Maybe you'll reflect on what the elements represent, and share what you're expressing to God by taking communion—it doesn't matter what it is as long as it's sincere.

If you have no idea what to say, just say you're thankful God brought you here today. That's enough.

We don't really know exactly how they did communion in people's homes in the early church—so the beauty is that you can't do it wrong.

And if you're new here and this feels weird to you—that's okay, it's weird to us too.—

but if you're new or you're not in a spiritual place where you feel comfortable taking communion, that's okay—no one has to take communion that doesn't feel comfortable—but join a group and just introduce yourself—or give a prayer request. There's no judgement.

Then when your group is ready, just share the elements together. Don't worry about what the other groups are doing or where we are in the song.

When you're group is done, you can turn back and reflect on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice or join in the rest of the song with Kensley.

Then I'll come back up and close us out.

Let me pray

**<PRAYER>**

Okay. Find your group and be sure to include the people around you.

**<WORSHIP– *Come to the Table*>**

<**PRODUCTION NOTE PER JOSH TAYLOR:** *Please include some camera shots of the crowd in their groups. Thank you.*>

Community is vital to our mission in Christ.

Last week we talked about our mandate to go into the world and be the light of Christ—that we need to build relationships of integrity with those who don't know Jesus.

But if we don't live in community—if we're not devoted to growing in God's Word, having fellowship with other believers, worshipping with one another, and caring for one another...

If we don't have a devotion to those things and we try to go out into the world, we'll discover that the world will have more influence on us than we have on the world.

But what if we truly sought God?

What if we embraced the 4 Biblical ways to BE the church we're talking about over the course of this series?

What might God do if we start moving in that direction? What kind of revival might we see?

The last statement of our text says this:

And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.  
**Acts 2:47b (NLT)**

I believe God can do this again. I believe there can be revival in Greenville County... I believe there can be revival in our nation.

God can do anything through the church if we're willing to BE the church.

If God is saying something to you this morning and you need someone to talk to or pray with, our Care Volunteers will be down front after we pray.

<**PRAYER**>