

Growing Stronger Together

The Church at Its Best • Message 2

Bryan Jones

August 24, 2025

Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray for a heart that's committed to spiritual community.
- Pray to be rooted in regular spiritual habits: prayer, Scripture, fasting, confession, and worship.
- Invite God to guide you in living with purpose for His Kingdom.

Scripture Reading:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

A. Introduction.

When we lived in Chicago about 15 years ago... there was a car that was outside taking photos of my house. And so, when they sped away, I hopped in my car and started to follow them. I chased them down for about 5 miles into a gas station, and I got out of the car. I went over to them and said, *I want to know why you are mysteriously taking photos of my house...* They looked so confused.... And in a stern voice, I said again, *I want to know why ...* And they asked me... *What house do you live at*, and I told them... then they had this surprised look on their face, and they said... *I'm a realtor, and I was taking pictures of your neighbor's house...I was just in front of your house in my car to get different angles...* and then they said, *How long have you been following me?* And I said... *Hey, there are a lot of crazy people out there, can't be too careful...* needless to say, that wasn't my best moment...

We all have moments in life that we handle really well... where we are at our best... where we seem to be at our best in our work, family, or faith.

We also know what it's like to feel like we aren't at our best...

The title of the message today is **The Church at Its Best**.

So many of us know what it is like to see the church at its best. To see a church unified, moving together, and loving and serving so well. When the church is working well, there is not a more powerful force around.

Many of us also know what it's like to see the church at its worst. Where it's filled with back-biting, gossip, criticism... where people tear down instead of build up, where people judge and put their own needs above others... when the church isn't working well, there is almost no force as destructive around.

So today, I want you to see a picture from Acts Chapter 2 of the church at its best.... What does it really look like for a church to be at its best?

B. The church is at its best when it's...

1.) Devoted to MEET regularly.

(Acts 2:42)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42 (ESV)

The word for devoted means to continue steadfastly...

Now I want you to think... if God gave us revival like this in Acts 2... where people are coming off the street, thousands of people are getting saved, and it changes the entire city... what would you do with it? Like if God showed up in such an undeniable way that even the cynics in the room couldn't question it. If thousands of people became Christians in a moment... if the Holy Spirit fell in a way that miracles and healings were happening right now in this space... what would you do with it? Or said another way, what would you do next? ... This happens in Acts 2. God shows up, revival happens, and their big idea was to form small groups.... that was it... to gather together and keep meeting.

Remember, most of the people were on a pilgrimage, meaning they didn't live in the exact area, but God showed up in such a way that they decided they weren't going back to their lives. They were devoted to this new life... and so people sold all they had to help those in need...

Now, throughout my time as a pastor, I've heard some people say, *I just want a smaller church*. But do you realize the first church ever formed was a megachurch? It says that 3,000 were added to it, and the 120 means that there were at least 3,120 people in the church.

But this group was committed... they were devoted... notice, it says they had fellowship... which might be one of the most overused words around... Any of you grow up in a church with a fellowship hall? I never really understood the fellowship hall, I just knew it was the place that had all the food...

But the idea of the word is about sharing, communion and contribution... that you are committed... and I think sometimes in the church we set the bar so low with community, some people aren't that inspired to commit to it...

So, for some people, when it comes to meeting and being devoted, our version of Acts 2 might read more like this...

They studied the apostles' teaching when they had time. Fellowshiped with people who were easy to hang out with. Prayed when they needed something. Everyone knew someone who had experienced a miracle, but rarely experienced any themselves. People talked about generosity and gave from excess, but most resisted acts of giving that stretched them. They gathered for corporate time of worship about 1.5 times a month...praised God when their favorite worship leader was singing, and occasionally, some people were saved.

The Book Of Bryan 2:42-47

Listen, we all long for Acts 2. We want fellowship, we want to save souls, we want to grow in God's word, and we want miracles. But we cannot bring our 21st-century values into our church and expect first-century church results.

So, we must be committed/devoted to this time together, but also to meeting in small groups. Some people go... *Why?* Because it is what we are called to do from this section of scripture... Listen...

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

Acts 2:46 (ESV)

Notice there are two parts:

A.) LARGE gathering. (temple/outer court)
Acts 3:11

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 3:11 (NIV)

Large gathering- at the temple called Solomon's porch. It was more about instruction and inspiration.

B.) SMALL gathering. (homes)
Acts 5:42

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Acts 5:42 (ESV)

Notice how it was done? A big meeting and a small meeting... the temple and the house, a formal and informal meeting. You really need both. In church, God gives the pastor something to say, and in small groups, God has something for you to say. You need both.

2.) Devoted to a MISSION.
(Acts 2:43-44)

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Acts 2:43 (ESV)

Everyone loves this verse. Look at the miracles that happen. But you can't have the miracles without the mission. They were devoted...

Listen to what it says in verse 44...

And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

Acts 2:44 (ESV)

Let me just give you three reasons why community is so hard... why this vision that God has given us in Acts 2 isn't always easy.

Listen, some of you... Your next step is just to join a small group... Others are in church or a small group, and want more... Can I encourage you to run after God? (Some of you run faster/slower.) If God's given you dreams to create a group, don't settle. Keep building... keep running after the mission.

Challenges of Community:

- **Pseudo community**

So many people are in a bunch of communities, they go... *Why do I need a small group?*

Have you noticed how there is a community for everything...? Community has become a watered-down word. You can take anything and put community on it. There is a reptile community...they have a knitting community, book community, biking community, swimming community, there is even a jeep community... and for whatever reason, they give ducks... have you seen this? JC Thompson, our executive pastor here, is one of the more masculine men and has a car filled with children's toys. 😊

Jesus' call is a call to a community based on mission and one where you share your lives with each other. Jesus is doing a thing in the world, and he's calling you to join Him.

Most of the pseudo communities aren't bad; they are good, but they are surface-level.

Nobody is handing JC a duck and saying, *Now that we are in the jeep club together, I was just curious about your greatest sin patterns.*

- **Half-hearted commitment to church**

Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in "muchness" and "manyness," he will rest satisfied.

So many people are so driven by work, tasks, or kids' programming that they can't commit or be bothered to join a group right now. One day you will, but not now... I don't mean this harsh... but when things get hard, you want the church's prayers.. but for the most part, you are here for your thing and your quest... and the problem is... that makes community very hard in the church... and I'm not saying that to judge you... but that complicates things...

I don't think God's vision was for people to skip church and then catch up with a podcast while they are jogging. For those of you watching on the treadmill or listening, I love you. Keep jogging... I'm just saying that not being together in corporate worship shouldn't be a regular practice...

- **Crushing expectations**

Sometimes we jump into a group and we expect them to meet all our needs, be the perfect group, always say the right things... then we end up getting frustrated and hurt... now let me be clear, there are bad groups and you shouldn't be in those... but every group is a messy group... often we hear a talk like this and we get excited... then we go to a group excited... then suddenly we get disillusioned because we realized the people in the group are just as jacked up as we are... if you have crushing expectations then you put weight on them that they didn't sign up for ...

3.) Devoted to a PRACTICE-BASED, not OPINION-BASED community.

When you read this section of scripture, you will see how committed this early church was to practices like prayer, Bible reading, confession, fasting, and sharing their faith...

So often, even if we are careful, groups become opinion-based rather than practice-based. Please hear me say there is nothing wrong with opinions; you just can't build a church on them.

And let's be honest, we all have opinions. One of the things my wife and I constantly fight about is noise level. I like to listen to movies loud, and I like to listen to music loud... and she likes subtitles... I literally had surround sound in my last house that I used once when she was gone... she likes the volume so low that I now read subtitles... It's been a source of many of our fights... and I'm saying this on this stage... mostly because it's safe... but I think she is wrong. The other day I was complaining, and I said... *Why do I have to listen to the world's quietest movies and then you come to church where the music is loud?... listen, why aren't you complaining to the sound guy?* ... I just want him to feel my pain...

And her answer floored me... she said, *Worship isn't about me, it's about Jesus, and if others like it, I'm game...* I loved and hated her response... she said... *If God lets me live a long time, I hope I'm the old person in the front row with headphones because the church is filled with too many opinions, and I want to be a blessing to others...* and can I say I LOVED that!

One of the biggest revivals happened in Scotland at a place called the Hebrides... and I read a great book on it... they had a pastor named Duncan Campbell come and preach, and God swept through the place like a hurricane... what floored me in the book is that the church almost didn't invite him to come because he wore black shoes... at the time they believed brown shoes were more reverent and he was a little too progressive... their opinions almost caused them to miss the Holy Spirit.

Listen, opinions aren't bad, but you can't build a church on them... and they can make small groups difficult. We must build our church and small groups on practices...

Listen, I realize this won't be for everyone, but I really believe God's calling us to go deeper. Here are five practices from the Acts 2 community that will change and transform your group.

5 things that will transform your group

- 1.) Fast – fast one meal a week and pray for God to show up in your group.**
- 2.) Inform how God's speaking- share what God has been speaking to you, not just highs and lows.**
- 3.) Real transparency and confession – don't just stay surface level and guarded, open up.**
- 4.) Evangelism- who are the 1-2 people you are praying for and pouring into?**
- 5.) Study God's word together – feast on the word together.**

What we are going for is a Jesus at the Center group, which sounds really simple, but how do you know you have a group where Jesus is at the center?

Jesus at the Center Group:

1.) Love God

2.) Love People

Does my group push me to love God more and love people more? ... that's it.

Now, as we close, let's take a moment to get our hearts right so we know we are in the right mindset to join a group.

-Ask God to grow your heart for him- duty and delight (he considered it joy/ John 17 last prayer)

-Ask God to grow your heart for others- then you love others (Jesus/Judas)

What if you have two groups that get together?

One shares their opinion on the sermon, doesn't confess any sin, or shares anything vulnerable and then comes when it's convenient?

Then you have Christians who are fasting, feasting, confessing, praying, listening, blessing?

Jesus at the Center...

We want to live this out and follow the example of the Acts church by observing Communion.