

Acts 2:42-47

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're looking today at what many Bibles call the fellowship of the believers.
- The fellowship of the believers. And these verses in chapter 2 of Acts are really looking at how the apostles actually got people together to minister to them, to encourage them, to have fellowship together.
- So let's just read it together. I'm going to emphasize certain words. It's not that I would say they're more important than other words in these verses, but just that it helps us just to focus on this idea of fellowship, of being together.
- And being together because God has placed us together. It's not really our choice. It's God who chooses to bring his people together. So it's what the verses say.
- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul.
- [1 : 0 1] Many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together. And they had all things in common.
- And they were selling their possessions and belongings. And then distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together, breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.
- Praising God, having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved.
- How amazing. What an amazing description to help us understand how the Holy Spirit led them. How they served God by serving others.
- And if ever I'm wondering how we should live and how we should behave as God's people. Here we have it. In five verses. Under God's authority. So this is not just a good idea that the early church had.
- [2 : 1 6] It is God's word. God's intention. God's desire for us as his people. So what is God's desire for his people?
- What does God want? What do these verses tell us about what God was doing with his people? It shows us, and we can look back in scriptures as we will do in a moment.
- It's always been God's desire for a community of faith who follow him. A community who share life together through obedience to his word.
- Praying together, sharing food, sharing possessions. Looking after each other. Blessing each other. Loving one another. Supporting and looking after those who are in need in any way.
- And God never changes his way. His intentions are perfect. And these verses show what God desired of his people as they followed him.
- [3 : 1 8] So all of these are part of God's perfect plan. They're not just something that just happened. Or it's not just a few friends getting together. Our father is determined that we should share our lives together.

To support each other. To enjoy being together. Because that is his desire for his creation. So living in close fellowship.

Being together in God. Is essential. For all of us. It's not something we can pick and choose. It's essential. Because it's inspired by our father.

It's inspired by Jesus. And by the Holy Spirit. They direct us to the word of God. And truth. And how we should be living our lives. Just look for a moment at the language that is being used.

To describe the behaviour. Of those who were committed to following the apostles teaching. As they were also touched by God. As they became part. Of a living community in God.

[4 : 21] Within the early church. They were really committed. To God. Committed to each other. Determined. To follow the teaching of the apostles. They wanted to make sure that they behaved.

In a heartfelt manner. In practical ways. Rather than it just being. An intellectual exercise. They knew that what they were receiving from God at that time.

Was God's will. And so they were willing to completely commit themselves. To meeting together. And acting on people's knees. Through their love for God. And to show love for the people around them.

This made me think back to when I became a Christian. I was saved. When I was at university. I had no idea. How to live differently. To what I was used to. And a lot of that wasn't very nice.

And what I saw around me. But I knew that God had changed my life forever. And I needed to trust him. I was a student. There were people I didn't know around me.

[5 : 25] I didn't even know they were Christians. I didn't know many Christians at all. So I attended a weekly group for new Christians. Led by an assistant vicar. And that opened up a whole new world to me.

Then I was looked after by a group of Christians. Who were full of life. Who taught me so much. And were able to answer so many of my questions.

I couldn't do it without them. And they were fun to be with. They knew their Bible well. They prayed enthusiastically. They taught me so much. Even when I had big questions.

And would knock on their door at two o'clock in the morning. I needed Christians around me. To enable me to grow in Christ. But then I learned. It's not just about how we live individually.

When we are saved. It's about how we share life together. As everyday followers of Christ. Two pages stuck together.

[6 : 26] There we go. These verses in Acts chapter 2. They're not just a description. Of what people did. At the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are God's living word.

For his people. It doesn't matter whether they were living. 2,000 years ago. Establishing the early church. Those who have lived since then. Through century after century. Building his church.

Those who are alive today. And those who will be alive in Christ. In the future. God's living word. Is essential. For all of us.

For those who know God well. Those who perhaps struggle with their faith at times. Those who perhaps find it difficult. To always be obedient to what God the Father is saying.

And those who inspire us in Christ. God's living word. Is essential. And he has an eternal desire for his people.

- [7 : 25] And that desire. Is that we can live together in him. Through the power of his spirit. You see sometimes I think we almost forget. That God our Father has established the way. That he wants his people to live. So we can enjoy what he has ordained. It isn't just for those in the early days. The apostles.
- And those who followed the apostles teaching. It's not just for the future. Since the resurrection. But for all those who have lived since creation. And that word togetherness.
- Do you know when I was reading this. I thought togetherness. Does that word really exist? It's an odd word isn't it? Togetherness. But it's far more than just a nice idea. Of getting together. Together. We need to be.
- With other Christians. We need to be depending on each other. It's really difficult. If not almost impossible. To live a life in Christ on our own. We need each other.
- [8 : 26] And God has shown us that. God has shown us that. So let's think back to creation for a moment. God himself. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three in one. From the very beginning. And Genesis chapter 2 verse 18 says.
- The Lord God said. It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. This wasn't because God had forgotten.
- And only made Adam. And not thought about Eve. This was because this was God. Reminding people. His people. Of his eternal plan. Something that they could hold on to forever.
- Not just for the beginning. But forever. God wanted his people. To see that they should not live alone. They should know God. They should be empowered by him.
- They should share their life with God. And together. With his people. And because God's plans are perfect. There is no debate. No discussion about that.
- [9 : 28] This is God's will. But it's not just. His will. It's actually his desire. That we live in this way. That's what he desires for us.
- We have choices we can make. But we know that what God desires. Is the best choice to make. So we see too. With Moses.
- In the Old Testament. As he leads God's people. Out of slavery. And he delivers God's promises. And God's commandments. To God's people. As one people.
- Living and sharing. God's provision together. Through thick and thin. He showed the people. Through Moses. How to support each other. How to know God's love.
- God's provision. Through the good times. And through the bad times. They had in the desert. And Moses was frustrated. By the people's sinfulness.
- [10 : 25] Through God. Through God. He was able to persevere. Building God's people together. And the people of God. Learned. To be together with God. As God had planned.
- And move forward. To the disciples. And their relationship. With Jesus. They spent so much. Quality time. With Jesus. Learning through him. About God.
- The father. And yet. They still made mistakes. They weren't perfect. They didn't understand. All that Jesus taught them. At that time. But they wanted.
- To spend time. With him. And with each other. They wanted. To be together. For the three. Four years. That they were together. That they wanted. To be together. And Jesus called.
- The disciples. To follow him. They didn't just arrive. And knock on his door. He went. And called them. By name. He called them. To be together. He spent time. With them.
- [11 : 20] Before. And after. His crucifixion. And resurrection. So they could learn. Together with him. Share life together. Appreciate their father. So they could be prepared. For the future.

So you see. What we learn. Is that fellowship. Togetherness. Oneness. Were always God's desire. It's nothing new. They were always his promise.

And his determination. For all of his people. And that includes all of us. God desired. He designed. A way of life for his people.

Who could enjoy their relationship. With him. Who would recognize his authority. His power. Alongside. His love. And forgiveness. He would be able to enjoy life.

Not on their own. But together. As God's people. Together with. God's people. So the simple question. Today really is.

[12 : 18] Are we living. In the way. God wants. Each of us. To be living. Are we living. As God's people. God's people. You see.

Our father never changes. He's always the same. He always wants the best. For each one of his people. He always wants to have that relationship with us.

But not just with individuals. But with his people. As a body. As they share life together. Through his Holy Spirit. But I'm sure you've noticed. God never forces us.

He's gracious. He allows us to make choices. So we need to be ready. To recognize those choices. And make the right choices. So we can choose.

To be a life affirming people. Who live. In God's power. Or sometimes we can say. That life is difficult enough. And we choose to go it alone. We can choose a life with God.

[13 : 19] That reveals his desire. To be with us. Or maybe we sometimes say. It's me first. Just so I can survive. We choose a life.

We can choose a life. Where we are inspired. By God's wonderful presence. His power. His strength. Or we can choose to be selfish. And thereby deny God's power.

And deny the amazing life. He offers us. But it's not about being forced. To behave in certain ways. I hear some people say. I can't follow God. Because he makes you do things.

I want to be free. God loves us. And he loves to have us. Close to him. To have a relationship with us. So how are we doing in Harvest Church?

How are we doing as a church? As a fellowship? God has designed the perfect way of life for his people. That is the best for them. He's given each of us.

[14 : 20] Opportunities to live this life with him. In fellowship with others. As one body. That's an amazing gift. To give to us. He wants us to know.

And to live in his grace. He wants us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And what do we do? Often we think.

Oh. Then I've got to try harder. No. It's not about trying harder. We don't need to try. To be perfect. Or to only get involved. When we feel we're having a good day.

The Holy Spirit. Is always there. To spur us on to life. But as God created life. His perfect creation. The Holy Spirit.

Is always there. To empower us. However we're feeling. On different days. Or weeks. Or months. Sometimes. If you're feeling low. Whatever is going on in our lives. God is gracious.

[15 : 18] He's there. To empower us. We're not on our own. But we also need to beware. Of the enemy. We know.

Don't we? The enemy hates to see us. Being together in Christ. He hates it when we worship together. And he may well try to find ways. To try and discourage us. Put us off. Cause us not.

To be one together. To try to cause division. Disharmony. To divide us. He tries to get us. To fall out with each other. Or to be so busy.

We can't find time. For togetherness. With God's people. Togetherness does not happen. Just like that. We need to be open. To God's.

Spirit. We need to ask. The Holy Spirit. To guide us. To encourage us. To enable us. Through his power. To support and strengthen our desire. To serve God.

[16:16] To serve God. With others. To serve God. Not just on our own. God's people. Now we are really blessed by our Lord in Harvest Church. There's so much happening that we can be involved in as we live out the gospel.

And enjoy spending time participating in so many activities. Where we can support each other. And be supported. And be supported. Where we can be encouraged.

But where we can also encourage others. Where we can strengthen others in their faith. And also be strengthened in our faith. Looking after each other.

And being looked after. Loving each other. And being loved. And I'm sure that's what we actually really desire. But often other things get in the way.

And lead us astray. So we need to be observant. We need to be alive to looking at what is happening. So we can be close to God.

[17:16] We can be in fellowship with God's people. I think we do look after each other in this church. In this body of Christ. Christ's. And I think we do encourage each other in many different ways.

And you know I was thinking back when I was preparing for today. And I thought back to some of the churches. Where Clem and I have moved around. Mainly because of jobs being in different places. And God speaking to us.

And leading us into different churches. Some of those churches are small as just tens of people. Some quite big. And one church we used to belong to. Which had literally. This is not an exaggeration.

Thousands of members. It was probably about 3,000. Members of that church. So when we first came to the UK. We were in a very small church. Back in 1981.

A long time ago. Which came from a Baptist background. Because a lot of churches at that time. The spirit was moving. And people were actually saying. We want to be in a spirit-filled church. And quite often the churches where they were.

[18:14] Didn't really see it the same way. And we knew. And we knew. That we needed to. Be together with people. Where we could. Encourage people. And what happened was.

That the church actually moved out. Of its background. Baptist background. Because it wanted to know God's spirit. And move in God's spirit. And God was moving amongst us.

And in one meeting. We had an American Christian woman. Visiting who had a healing ministry. And one of my colleagues at work. Worked in the YMCA at that stage.

One of my colleagues at work. Came to the meeting with us. In fact I think he came with his whole family. His wife and two children. He had been born. With one leg. Shorter than the other. Which meant he walked slightly awkwardly.

And you would see this limp. And the American woman. Prayed for people. In the room. And when she prayed for my friend. He literally fell down.

[19:19] He was laid down for some time. I can still remember it. He got up really awkwardly. He didn't feel himself. When he looked down.

His leg was the same length as the other one. And he was walking awkwardly. Because his back. Suddenly. Had to accommodate for this. New leg. He wasn't healed.

By the person who prayed for him. He was healed by God. God had touched him. And as a small church. We were really close to each other in God. And God moved amongst us. Many different ways.

Through his Holy Spirit. Through people who. Helped us to understand more about. What God was doing at that time. And before we moved to Alton.

To Harvest Church. We were in a church of around. 3,000 people up in North London. And that was a very different experience. Because. There were so many people there.

[20 : 20] You couldn't really. Get fellowship. Just with them. In. In. On a Sunday morning. You had to be part. Of a life group. A house group. So that you could actually be together.

With a smaller group. To get to know them. But people wanted to be together. They wanted to pray together. They wanted to be in God's presence. They were wonderful evenings.

And what they did. Was they organized. A time of prayer. For people to be invited to. And you think of times of prayer. As maybe. 30, 40, 50 people.

There were. Probably. Near on 1,000 people. In those meetings. Praying together. Just imagine how powerful that is. When so many people. I mean. It would start with worship.

It would start with people. Reading words. And then we'd have times of prayer. Where people really wanted. Just to be in God's presence. And just to enjoy. Being in his presence. What an experience.

[21 : 25] We learned a lot through that. And when we retired. We moved nearer to where my. Mum was living. And I can honestly say. I've never known a church. Like Harvest Church.

Because there's so much. Emphasis. On togetherness. In God. And we just found that. So wonderful. So exciting. I can remember back. Clem could not attend. The first Sunday. I came to.

Harvest Church. Due to work. So I came along my own. And when she got home. She wanted to ask me. About questions. And I said. Look. I'm not going to say anything. To you this time.

I'm going to wait. And see what you think. Next week. And then we can share. What we felt. What we experienced. And next week. We came together. And she felt exactly the same. She felt that.

This was a place. Where. We could see. God was moving. And where we would. Continue to be able to grow. In fellowship. And grow in him spiritually.

[22 : 24] And God has continued. To bless us. As a church. All of us. As a church. He has continued. To grow our church. Hasn't he? Which is wonderful to see. And he has enabled us.

To focus on being one. Together. In so many different ways. He's provided. Lots of different ways. That we can share together. Strengthen each other. Grow together. Which is really exciting.

I'm just going to quickly. Remind you of several. If not all. And I don't think it will be. Because I'm sure I've missed some out. But different. Different groups. And different meetings. In Harvest Church. Cap. The Job Club. Food Bank. One Way.

Fresh Start. Stepping Stones. Children's and Youth Groups. Alpha Course. Encounter Evenings. Looking After Sick and Elderly. And Praying For Them. Women's Meals. Men's Meals. Bible Reflection. Classic Cars. Sewing and Crafting. Walking Together. Yarn and Natter.

First Steps. Bereavement Journey. Women's Weekend. Lent Gathering. And More. Isn't that fantastic? Isn't that wonderful? I've never known any church. Have so many different ways.

[23 : 20] Of getting together for fellowship. But also supporting each other. Helping each other. And being together. Being together. So what should we be doing? What is God's desire?

How can we be even stronger in Christ? God wants us to be walking closely with him. Be involved in serving him in his church. He wants us to be devoting ourselves to serving him.

He loves the way we are growing as a church. His desire for us is to continue to grow. And thrive. You know, sometimes we think, oh, that's enough. No. God wants more.

And we should want more. He wants each of us to be like those first disciples. Looking to be obedient to God's calling. And ready to serve him. And I thought that, you know, I had a question in my mind.

Why do we see God adding to our number? What's happening in this church? Why is it that this church is growing? And I felt God saying to me that he looks at our hearts.

[24 : 20] He recognises his people who are wanting to be obedient. To his calling. To share life with him. To share with others day by day. It isn't just about meeting together in Harvest Church.

We're reaching out to our local community in many different ways. So we can share the Lord and his provision. And God wants us to keep on giving. Keep on supporting others in need. Keep on praying fervently.

Keep on meeting together. Keep on preparing the way for others. And God says, keep going. Don't stop. And I felt he was saying there's lots more to do. We may have new ideas.

We may be reaching out to new people. Sharing God's love through our actions for people who belong to Harvest Church. And those who are not yet members. What else is God asking of us?

He asks us to encourage each other. This is part of what those disciples, early disciples learned. We all need encouragement. Whether we are fairly new Christians.

[25 : 18] Or quite mature. Or very mature. God wants us to encourage each of us to be his servants. To work with each other. To achieve his purposes. To reach out in love.

As we serve each other. So it's quite obvious what we can all do. We need to pray together. And we'll just say. We need to have more people coming to pray together.

We need to really see that as essential. In what God is doing. We must be praying together. Reading the Bible together. Meeting up together. Sharing food together. Supporting each other.

Reaching out to those who need support. Looking after each other. Sharing God's love. And let's continue to be generous to each other. Having the grace to give and receive.

Continuing to build strong relationships. Really caring for each other. Let's have that same desire for God. The same purpose in our lives. The same longing to serve God. As we gather together in him.

[26 : 20] Now maybe that sounds a bit like a party political broadcast. But it isn't, is it? It's what God is saying to us. And it's not something people just say. To get you on board. To vote for them. It's saying this is what God desires for his people.

And how he wants to bless his people. So as we continue to serve God in different ways. Let's spur each other on. Let's stir each other up in Christ. Let's encourage each other to be involved in God's work.

Let's strengthen each other. Look after each other. As some struggle in their walk with the Lord. Let's make sure too. That we avoid legalism. We're not living by rules and regulations.

We're living our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. Who guides and strengthens us. That we can walk more closely with him. Serve God well. And enjoy our special relationship with the Lord.

So let's just finish by just reading from 1 Peter 4. Verses 8 to 11. Peter says, Above all, love each other deeply. Because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[27 : 22] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each year you should use whatever gift you have received. To serve others. As faithful stewards of God's grace.

In its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks. The very words of God.

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides. So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

Amen. So there may be some people here today who want to respond to the message today. You may wish to talk to somebody about how you might serve.

You might want to talk to somebody about how you can be more involved with God's grace. How you can support others through his power. How you might get involved in something you know well or something new. So I invite you this morning.

[28 : 23] Do come over to the wall today and speak with us. There will be people there who can talk to you about what you might want to do and how you might get involved. And we can pray with you so you can discover what God has in store for you.

Don't miss out. Take this opportunity to be actively involved in making sure that each of us are serving God. Let's just pray. Father God we thank you this morning.

We thank you for the way in which you have blessed us this morning through worship. Through watching the youngsters getting involved Lord. Through seeing people growing up in you.

Through the way you're moving amongst us Lord as a body. The way in which you touch each of us. And show us your love and your peace and your strength. And we ask Lord that you would just show us Lord what we need to be doing Lord to bless you.

How we can bless you more Lord. How we can serve you better. How we can operate in your grace. In your love. In your strength. Reveal that to us we pray in Jesus' name.

[29 : 23] Amen. Amen. I'm going to pass.