

## Series: All For Jesus

### “All Together as the Church”

#### Acts 2:36-47

Today we are in week two of a series called “All For Jesus” where we are focusing on the vision of Crosslink Community Church. Over the past year, our pastoral staff has been in conversations and much prayer about where we are as a congregation and where God is leading us in the future. At the start of the year, we had a pastors’ prayer retreat where we deeply discussed the church’s mission and vision, and it was during this time that the Lord began to give clarity on the plans that He has for us. Our mission at Crosslink is to Impact the Valley and Bless the Nations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus called us to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, we see our part in that as the role of making disciples here and going out from here to plant churches throughout the Valley in areas of need and then throughout the Commonwealth and beyond, even to the ends of the earth. Our mission has been and remains the same, but our vision for accomplishing that is coming clearly into focus. In many ways this vision is very simple, but in others it is challenging because it is completely impossible without the power of God at work in our lives and completely impossible without each of us doing our part. This vision is to be a church where we are “All IN, All TOGETHER, and All OUT for the glory of Jesus Christ!”

In our culture, we often view “church” as a place to go, a service to attend, an experience to witness, or a club to join, but none of these are biblical views of the church. While a church may have a facility or a specific meeting spot, the fact is that God never merely called us to “go” to church. He calls us as His children to “be” the church. In other words, it doesn’t matter the address, the type of facility, the style of the building, or if there is no building at all. The church is the people of God. The Greek word for “church” is “ekklesia,” which simply means “an assembly of called-out ones.” We are the people who have been called out of darkness into light, out of death into life, and out of sin into salvation. **1 Peter 2:9** says it well, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Every person who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior makes up the big “C” Church. We are the called-out people of God, which is wonderful, but there is a slight challenge with the Church. It is invisible and cannot be seen because it is comprised of all the saints from every nation and every age. We will not see the Church like this until we are all in heaven together. However, until that time comes, God has given us the local church which is to be a visible representation of the larger Church. It is in the local church that we have the opportunity to live out the many encouragements and instructions that God gives us for how we are to live today in the body of Christ.

Here in Acts 2, we have the local church in Jerusalem that is being established. In its infancy, God was doing some amazing things in them and among them, and I believe wholeheartedly that if we get back to the foundational truths that were modeled there, we will see God do incredible work in and through us for His glory as well. Is that what you long for? Is that what you are hungry for today? By show of hands, how many of you would like to see God work mightily in His church? How many of you would love to see God saving souls and adding new people every single day?

How many of you would love to experience a sense of awe and wonder over God's presence among us? How many of you would like to experience the joy of the Lord in your relationships with other believers? Every follower of Christ desires to see these things, yet it is often the case that we desire great things **from** God without being willing to do great things **for** God. For us to be the people that God calls us to be and the congregation that God wants us to be, we must get back to the basics. We must be "All Together as the Church."

Show Text

We understand the importance of commitment. Consider the illustrations of an athlete, a marriage, and a student. We also understand the pain and consequences when there is a lack of commitment. The same can be true of each of us in the church today. Our commitment to one another in the body of Christ powerfully impacts the health and witness of the church, but at the same time, our lack of commitment does the same. As we look at the text, I want us to see four primary commitments that were evident in this Early Church, and with each one I want you to consider whether they're evident within you. These four commitments are not a magical formula, and I am not suggesting that these things should be done as some means of manipulating God. No matter what someone is doing on the outside, God always knows the heart and motives, and He is never deceived. I am simply saying that when we as followers of Christ are committed to these things, God often moves in personal and powerful ways. There is a subtle danger, though, in this message. The focus of today's message is entirely about our devotion to the Lord which is demonstrated through our actions towards and with one another. We must understand that if we only commit ourselves to these actions, we have missed the main ingredient. **\*\*ILL:** Could you imagine what it would be like if you hosted a Mother's Day luncheon but forgot the most important part? Imagine you were so excited that you made the menu, set the date, and brought all your siblings together. This would be a great way to honor mom and celebrate her on her big day. Finally, the day arrives, you have prepared a feast, your siblings have begun to arrive, and you have contentment within your heart for the time you will enjoy. When everyone sits down at the table you realize that something is very wrong. As everyone sits, they begin to look at each other with the awkward question, "Where's Mom?" Much to your disgust, you suddenly realize that you never actually called your mother to invite her to the meal. Your intentions were good, you put in a lot of hard work, but somehow you missed the main person. We may laugh at that illustration, but the truth is that if we only commit ourselves to outward actions, then we have missed the main Person all of this is about. The foundation for everything we will study today is that we must first be "all in with Jesus" in a personal relationship with Him. We become all in with Jesus by trusting in Him fully to be our Lord and Savior, by identifying with Him publicly through baptism, and by growing in relationship as we begin to personally walk with Christ. This personal relationship of devotion with Him now leads us to personal relationships and devotion to one another in the church. What should this look like? How should this be accomplished in our lives? Acts 2 points us to four primary commitments:

## **I. "All Together" as the Church Means that We Are Committed to Fellowship (vs. 42b)**

The word fellowship is very common among Christians. When we think of fellowship, we often think of the ways that we spend time and hang out with one another. We think fellowship is what occurs when we gather for a meal, a ball game, or a meeting of some sort. We might even have a

short three to five-minute conversation and conclude that we enjoyed the “fellowship” together. There is certainly a physical component to being close to one another that comprises the imagery of fellowship, but the Greek word that is used explains that there is much more to consider. The Greek word “koinonia” is often translated as “fellowship, participation, sharing in, and a fellowship in spirit.” In other words, just because someone is in close physical proximity and you share a word or two does not mean that there is a closeness or a bond that is developed. The imagery of this spiritual fellowship is that there is a spiritual bond that is formed based on our relationship with Christ. Because Christ lives in us, we now have a love for one another in the body of Christ. **1 John 3:14a** says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” It is this love for one another in the body of Christ that stirs within us a longing to be together with one another in the body of Christ. This fellowship is on full display here in the Early Church. A miraculous thing occurred on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 souls were saved, baptized, and added to the church on that very day, but the evidence of their salvation was not limited to what only happened that day. The evidence of their salvation was also found in the way that they loved one another and came together for fellowship. There was a genuine community that was developing among them as Christ was at work in them through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and God still does the same today.

We live in a day when we are all aware of our great need for community. We are inundated with all sorts of tools that tend to isolate, separate, weaken, distract, and hinder us from being and doing what God has called us to do. In our culture, everything is catered to our whims and wants. Most have our own personal devices, with our personal backgrounds, with our personal apps, and with our personal playlists. The messaging of the world is clear, “You can have it your way.” While all of these things are not bad, the enemy can use them for bad by tempting us to live for ourselves, when the fact is that we need the Lord and we need others. We have learned many things from the pandemic, one of the primary being that we need relationships with others. Many are fully aware of this so they seek community anywhere they can find it – the workplace, gym, ball field, dance studio, online, etc. While these can be beneficial and have their place, especially in building relationships to point people to Jesus, these are not the primary places of fellowship that God intended to help you grow in your faith and live it out. The means of connection that God has given every Christian to help us grow in the faith and become more like Christ is that He has given us one another in the church. It is a lie from the enemy to think that we can grow in the Lord and become more like Him without the support and fellowship of the church. However, we must recognize that this is not automatic. It takes time, effort, and discipline to engage with one another in the fellowship of believers. **Charles Spurgeon** said it well, “Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from another he delights in.” We must overcome the enemy by seeking opportunities for fellowship.

The fellowship in the Early Church is a beautiful picture of what our fellowship can look like today. Simply put, the believers gathered together from house to house and broke bread. Some believe that this is a direct reference to the Lord’s Supper. This is certainly a possibility, and the Lord’s Supper was often included in these meals, but the application is not limited to that. **Verse 46** explains that they were further taking their meals together. This is an act of great intentionality, hospitality, and of warm, sincere relationships. People gather for a meal when they want to get to know one another and enjoy someone’s presence, and this was done from house to house throughout the city. What a beautiful familial picture here in the Early Church. 3,000 souls have

been saved and added to the church, and they continue to come together to the temple to worship God. However, their love and devotion to God led them deeper to a love and devotion to one another which was seen in their rich fellowship.

I believe God desires this same commitment from every single one of us today. Here at Crosslink the way that we fulfill this is through our discipleship ministries. Just as it was difficult for the 3,000 and growing to have in-depth fellowship at the temple, when we gather on Sunday mornings we experience the same. Yes, we can chat and connect a bit, but we ultimately come to worship God. Then as we leave here, God allows us to fellowship through discipleship throughout the week. This is why we have Community Groups and EquipU Groups, so that we might grow in the Lord together in biblical community. And, what a testimony of God's grace to see how this has grown in the past 4 months alone. Did you know today that there are over 40 discipleship groups at Crosslink? Literally every day of the week, all throughout the Valley, there's a place to connect and begin fellowshiping and doing life so that you might grow in the Lord together as God designed you to do. If you have not yet taken this step, this is your next step. Get connected to what God is doing and get rid of the excuses that are preventing you from doing so.

## II. "All Together" as the Church Means that We Are Committed to Corporate Prayer (vs. 42c)

Every Christian likely understands that prayer is important. Jesus spent much time praying and instructed us to pray. At the same time, most Christians will confess that they greatly struggle in their prayer life. We should not be surprised by the little power of God displayed in and through our lives if we have such a small prayer life. Prayer is so important in the life of a Christian that it is interesting to note that Jesus never taught His disciples how to preach, but He definitely taught them how to pray. **Dr. Falwell** often said, "Nothing of eternal significance happens apart from prayer." If we are going to honor God and see Him move, we must be a people of prayer. In **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18** He commands, "**Pray without ceasing**; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." **Colossians 4:2** says, "**Devote yourselves to prayer**, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." **Ephesians 6:18** instructs us, "With all prayer and petition **pray at all times** in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." We should all be a people of prayer, but we must not miss the context of Acts 2. This is all happening within the fellowship of the believers which is occurring from house to house. In other words, in these close relationships, they were also praying to God and interceding for one another. They had a commitment to corporate prayer together with one another in the community. Prayer was such a prevalent part of life in the church that throughout the book of Acts we see prayer mentioned over 29 times and over a hundred times throughout the remainder of the letters to the churches. Just last year we studied through the book of Acts and the title of the study was "When the Church Prays." God moves in extraordinary ways when His people come together to pray, but have you ever considered the benefits of corporate prayer in your own life?

### A. Corporate Prayer Brings Awareness

In **James 5:16**, when dealing with someone suffering from sickness God gives a word of instruction, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and **pray for one another** so that

you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” The instruction is clear, “Pray for one another so that you may be healed,” but how will we know which people are hurting? How will we know the struggles that they are facing? How will we know specific things to pray for? The answer is simple, through close fellowship. When we are in community with one another we get to know one another, and the more we begin to know one another we become more aware of each other’s burdens and struggles. This gives us insight and opportunity to pray and fulfill what God has called us to do. Sure, you can become aware of some needs on social media, but you will not know the heart or details behind those things without actually being in a relationship.

### **B. Corporate Prayer Brings Accountability**

Praying together in fellowship brings accountability by bringing our needs to the surface and inviting others along with us on the journey. It also provides accountability in the sense that it promotes a spirit of humility. **\*\*ILL:** Just a few weeks ago I was meeting with the leadership team from Fishersville. As we concluded the meeting we opened the floor for prayer requests. There was something I was struggling with at that moment and trying to discern the Lord’s leading. I didn’t want to share the request with the group that night, but it became clear that every person at that table had openly shared their heart. God used that moment to gently remind me that I needed to be humble and transparent. This accountability forced me to recognize that I, too, have needs that I need to share with others. Without this group prayer, I probably would have thought I could have done it alone, which brings me to a final point.

### **C. Corporate Prayer Brings Assurance**

Praying with other believers brings us the personal assurance that we are not alone. Of course, we know that Jesus said, “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” **Matthew 28:20b. Hebrews 13:5b** explains, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’ ” However, we must also admit that when life gets hard and times get lean, we can all feel alone. Even David, the man after God’s own heart, cried out in despair wondering where God had gone. The fact is that God never abandons His children, but there are times due to sin or circumstance that we become distant. It is especially in these times that we need other believers around us - encouraging us, reminding us of the truth, and lifting us up in prayer. But, where do these believers come from? Do they drop out of thin air? God does occasionally graciously place someone in our path in just our time of need, but His primary means of placement of these believers in our life is already happening all around us. It’s called the church. God has given us each other to connect with, to fellowship with, to grow with, and to do life with so that we fulfill His purposes and calling. We shouldn’t wait for trials and circumstances to run to others only in times of emergency. We must be intentional today. Get connected. Get plugged in. Find a group and start growing together. It will feed your soul and when the trials come, and they will, you will stand firm and persevere by the strength of the Lord and the support of the saints.

## **III. “All Together” as the Church Means that We Are Committed to Give (vs. 44-45a)**

It is at this point where it is easy for us to push back. It is amazing how many people will agree with the importance of fellowship and prayer, but as soon as we hear the word “give,” our blood pressure rises a bit and we start to get uncomfortable, squirming in our seats. Perhaps getting uncomfortable is exactly what God wants us to do. As we look at the Early Church we see that there was such a deep sense of love for the Lord and a deep commitment to the church that they were “all together and had all things in common.” This is describing the incredible unity that they had in Christ. This does not mean that they agreed on every situation in life or even in the church, nor does it mean that there was uniformity where they all looked and acted the same. This is a God-given, God-empowered spiritual unity that Jesus had prayed for in John 17. This unity, however, was not simply a state of mind or being. This unity in Christ led to very specific actions which is largely noted through their generosity. One of the marks of a follower of Christ is that we will be a generous people. It is unfathomable to describe Jesus as our Savior and recognize that He willingly **gave** His very life for our salvation, and then live our own lives selfishly. What a contradiction! If the most generous Giver in the world is truly our Lord and Savior, then His Lordship in our life will direct us to be and do the same. **1 John 3:16-17** explains, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” Not only do we have Jesus’ example, but we also have His instruction. He said in **Matthew 6:19-21**, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Instead of hoarding resources to ourselves, God calls us to surrender our resources to Him, thus laying up treasures in heaven. He then tells us that our giving is a thermometer that reveals our spiritual temperature. Our giving exposes where our heart truly is. If you want to know what is important in your life, simply examine how you spend your time, talents, and treasures and you will quickly find what is most important to you. Here in the Early Church, we see immediately what was most important to them. Remember, these are baby Christians. They did not have any of Paul’s letters yet. They did not have the clear instructions that would come later for how they were to give tithes and offerings, setting them aside on the first day of the week, for the work of the Lord. All they had was the Holy Spirit and the first teachings of the apostles, but it was more than enough. Their growth in the Lord led them to great generosity. Their example teaches us to give in two ways:

#### **A. We Should Give Sacrificially**

They were so sacrificial that they began to sell their property and possessions and shared them with all. **Acts 4:32b** explains, “Not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.” Nobody was holding onto their “stuff” with a tight fist. They knew that everything they “owned” had been entrusted to them by the Lord. They saw themselves as stewards of these resources, so for the sake of bringing glory to God and good to others they willingly parted with their possessions. This, however, goes completely against the mindset of our culture and our selfish nature. Someone said it well, “We tend to get all we can, put it in a can, put the lid on the can, and then sit on the can.” We buy into the false illusion that the more we have, the more comfort and fulfillment we will have, but this is a lie from the enemy and a trap. In our fleshly nature, we will always want more, and more will never be enough. One of the ways that we honor the Lord and overcome our

selfish nature, is to sacrificially give to the Lord. Paul described this in **2 Corinthians 8:2-4** when describing the believers from Macedonia saying, “That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.” Many times we think, “I will give when this trying situation in my life is over, or when I have more money and ability.” The truth is that we will only give when we see giving to the Lord as a priority. It’s not about our circumstances or how much we have, it’s about having a heart to give. The believers in Macedonia were facing all sorts of afflictions and were financially the poorest church of the entire New Testament, yet they had such an abundance of joy in the Lord that they not only gave according to what they could, but they came up with creative ways to give even beyond their ability. Their heart was so focused on giving sacrificially that Paul says, “They begged us to participate in the offering.” Here in Acts 2, we see the same on display. This is a free-will, Spirit-led generosity that is both beautiful and contagious.

## **B. We Should Give Sincerely**

Some have argued that this elaborate generosity and sharing in the Early Church was a form of communism, but this is completely foolish. What was transpiring in the hearts and lives of God’s people was not required by force. Neither the government nor the apostles required this of them, and it certainly wasn’t some sort of free handout to everyone. This entire process of giving was motivated and led by the Holy Spirit who was leading this Early Church to love and care for one another. One of the reasons we know this is because there was no regret. There was a genuine spirit of joy in giving their best to the Lord. Why? Because they had given it sincerely to Him. They were not giving to be seen by other people, to be praised and applauded. They were simply giving because they loved the Lord and His people. Jesus warns us of this in **Matthew 6:1-4**, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven...But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret, and your Father Who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” One of the reasons that they could take their meals with such gladness and sincerity of heart is because their motives were pure. They were seeking to honor the Lord and bless His church, and all along the way they continued to praise God. These new believers experienced the truth that Paul explained in **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**, “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” Is this true of you? Are you committed to giving to the Lord? Do you give sacrificially? Do you give sincerely as an act of worship, or do you give so that you can be the center of attention? Those who are “All Together” as the church are committed to giving to the Lord and they do so for the right reasons.

## **IV. “All Together” as the Church Means that We Are Committed to Serve (vs. 45b)**

While there was much about serving that did not come into better focus until the churches of the New Testament were being established and Paul was giving clear instructions, in this passage we do get a glimpse of their heart for service in a simple phrase that might be easily overlooked. The

text says that their sharing was “as anyone might have **need**.” In other words, their giving was founded in their love for the Lord, and it was practically focused on the needs around them represented through the individuals and the congregation as a whole. **Acts 4:34-35** explains how this took place, “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had **need**.” The apostles were the leaders of this Early Church so they brought these gifts and laid them at their feet, understanding that the apostles had a greater awareness of the needs of the people and the needs of the ministry itself. By their actions, they’re asking, “How can we help? What can we do? What are the needs?” They are showing that they had a heart to serve and bless one another in the church. So in this moment, the action of generosity is actually an act of service as they’re seeking to serve the Lord by serving one another. What happens when there is a genuine heart to serve and bless others? God works and moves to grow the people. By the time we get to Acts 6, we learn that there are many practical **needs** in the body, but the church had grown so greatly that there were some who were accidentally overlooked and left out. This unintentionally led to a period of hurt and division as **needs** went unmet. The congregation then brought the needs to the apostles and prayed about what God would have them do. This resulted in them selecting the first “deacons” to facilitate meeting this practical need. What is a deacon? The word means “servant, minister, or waiter.” This is a designated person who serves to support the **needs** of the ministry. While some are indeed designated in this official capacity, it is important to remember that every child of God is called to serve Him in the body of Christ. We all have a part to play in serving and building up the church by meeting the **needs** of the body. To reject or neglect serving the Lord is to reject and neglect to fulfill His plan for your life. As followers of Jesus, our top priority should be to sit at the Lord’s feet and soak it all in, but we can’t neglect our calling to also leave that place to be poured out in service to Him. We were never meant to be a reservoir where we will become stagnant and still but a channel through which He works and moves through us. This is exactly why Paul spent so much time explaining our call to serve. In **Romans 12:6a** he said, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” **1 Corinthians 12:5, 7**, “And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord...But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Then listen to **Ephesians 4:11-12**, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the **work of service**, to the building up of the body of Christ.” There is no shortage of needs at Crosslink. They are places and opportunities to serve the Lord in nearly every area of ministry. Your next step and first step is simply to say, “Yes!” to the Lord. Friend, if you want the blessing of walking in the Spirit and sensing His presence, if you desire the blessing of a front-row seat to see what God is doing, if you desire the blessing of sensing His favor, these things are impossible without a heart of service for the Lord. May God give us a heart of service for Him and a heart of willingness to do whatever it takes to do His work!

Throughout this message, I’ve repeatedly used the word “commitment” because it is more relatable to our culture. However, it is clear from the original text that the primary word was “devotion.” They continually devoted themselves to the Lord and His church. The Greek word means “to attend constantly, to persist, to persevere, to continue steadfast.” These early believers had such a devotion to the Lord and the people of God, that there was nothing they were not willing to do for the glory of God and the good of others. They gave themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and to the body of believers where He placed them. I can’t help but wonder today what might happen in



our lives and local churches all across the world if we would simply get serious about devoting ourselves again to Him and His Church. Instead of treating it like a matter of convenience or comfort, what might God do if we started seeing it as a matter of conviction and calling? Many of us want the blessings of God that are described in this text, but that is a false reality that we will never experience if we are not truly devoted to the Lord and His people. We can't answer for all the churches throughout the world today, and we can't answer for every person who claims the name of Christ, but we can and must answer for ourselves. We can and must answer as a congregation. God is calling us to be "all together" as the church, where do you stand today? Are you all in with Jesus? Are you living all together as the church? Is there something that God is calling you to repent of? Is there a specific area that you need to make a personal commitment to? I don't know where you're at, but I know where God wants you to be. He wants you to be "all in" with Him and "all together" with His people. Let's determine today that we won't straddle the fence, sit on the sidelines, cheer on the workers from afar, warm a seat, and occupy space. Let's commit to the Lord and one another that we will roll up our sleeves and commit ourselves to the Lord and His work, "ALL Together" as the church!