

**Series: Committed**

**“Engage in Community”**

**Acts 2:38-47**

This morning I want to ask you a question to consider: “In your life, who or what are you committed to?” We live in a day where few people like to commit to anything. We wait until the last possible minute to sign up for something because we don’t want to commit. We aren’t sure what may come our way, or we aren’t sure if a better option may be available. So, for many of us, we choose to remain uncommitted to various things. However, for us to grow and progress in life we must have commitment. \*\*ILL: An athlete understands this. An athlete knows that if they are to grow and improve, they must be committed to practice and discipline themselves to grow in their skill. \*\*ILL: A student knows this. They don’t just get to campus, pay the bill, and show up four years later to walk across the stage and get the diploma. That achievement demands great commitment and discipline. \*\*ILL: A scientist understands this. As they look for potential cures for diseases and remedies to a whole host of problems, they know that it will take time, commitment, discipline, and effort before a cure is discovered. In each of these cases we understand the benefit of such commitment. Commitment is important, yet we are often still hesitant to commit. The issue is not one of busyness or distraction, but really a matter of priorities. It boils down to who and what is important to you. I challenge you to consider that this morning: What are your top priorities? Who and what are you committed to? As we continue this sermon series this morning, I want to ask you directly, “Are you committed to Christ and His Church?”

There are many things in life that fight for our time and attention. There are many things that seek our mental, physical, and financial resources. There are all sorts of things that constantly pull at us, but as we continue studying the early church in Acts 2 I believe that God wants us to see how we should be committed to Him and to His bride – the Church. Clearly, we should be committed to Jesus Christ. He alone is Lord and Savior. He alone is worthy of our worship and our praise. He alone lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and rose again from the grave. He alone is preparing a place in heaven for all who believe, and He alone is coming again one day to gather us to Himself. Without question, Jesus is the Lord over all, and He should be the Lord and Ruler over each of our hearts and lives. However, I am also reminded that if Jesus is truly the Lord of our lives, then what is important to Him will be important to me. What He was committed to, I will be committed to. What He sacrificed for, I will sacrifice for. **Ephesians 5:1-2** instructs us, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Jesus showed His love for us by sacrificially giving His life for us, and as followers of Jesus we should be faithful to do the same. If Christ valued the Body of believers that much, then why should I value the Body any less? The question is simple, “Are you committed to Christ and His Church?”

Throughout this study, I believe God is calling us to commit to Christ and His Church in four ways: The first we saw last week was to commit to Experience Jesus in worship. Just as the early church came together on the first day of the week to pray and to worship the Lord, we should commit to the same thing. It is a beautiful thing to God when His people come together to worship

Him, but it is also a powerful testimony to the world. If we are going to be the church that God wants us to be, we must be committed to Experience Jesus in worship. Then, as we see today, there is a second commitment – We must commit to Engage in Community.

#### Show Text

For years here at Crosslink we have said that our vision was to invite people to Meet Jesus, Follow Jesus, Serve Jesus, and Share Jesus. We are now in the process of clarifying and revamping these commitments. While these four goals are certainly still at the heart of what we do, they have provided a foundation for us as we move forward today. Meet, Follow, Serve, and Share is a wonderful way to describe the process of knowing and growing in the Lord; however, that can be misleading for some. For example, while I completely agree that we should be able to go into the community to invite people to come together in a worship service to hear the Gospel and meet Jesus, the truth is that we are all called to be witnesses of Jesus. We are all called to be His missionaries, taking the Gospel everywhere we go. In other words, we shouldn't merely invite them to come and hear, we should take the Gospel to them wherever we go. The invitation to meet Jesus isn't an invitation to come to church, it should be a personal invitation for them to believe in Jesus right then and there. Similarly, the goal of "following Jesus" can also be misunderstood. For example, there are many who would say, "Yes, of course I follow Jesus. That's why I go to church." Another might even go so far as saying, "Well, you don't have to go to a church service to follow Jesus." It is true that believing in Jesus and following Him is a personal decision that is often made privately in one's life. However, our goal for every believer to follow Jesus is much more involved than just one's personal private conviction about Christ. Many believe that they are fully following the Lord because at some point in their life they believed in Jesus as Lord and repented of their sins. They turned from their former way of life and were gloriously saved and changed. Most likely they soon began to experience growth as they read God's Word and fellowshipped with believers. Perhaps they were discipled and participated in a class and everything was wonderful. Over time, however, the story of many is that life gets busy. Times get tough. Circumstances hit, job demands are high, money is tight, kids are growing, sports commitments are many, the stress of life is overwhelming, etc. Before long that person may still be in a church service at least somewhat regularly, they still believe all of the same truths that they previous believed, but they aren't really involved. They aren't really engaged. And, as a result, they aren't really growing. They are in a rut and have become stagnant. Through the seasons of life, while they are still on the right team, they have been relegated to the sidelines and they are now merely watching on as God works. Instead of becoming active participants in the work of God, they are simply spectators. I believe this is very common in American church culture today. Many want to see, but don't want to serve. Many want to spectate, but not really participate. Many want to experience, but don't really want to engage. Strangely, most would say they want to "grow", but they aren't really committed to what is needed for growth to occur. God wants us to grow. God didn't save you and change you for you to sit on the sidelines. God didn't pardon your sins so that you could wear the t-shirt and be a fan. He called us so that we might be His disciples in the world today. As such, we should commit first to come together to Experience Jesus in worship. Then, as we see in our text this morning, we should make a second commitment - we

should commit to engage in community. As we study the text, I want us to make three simple observations about this early church community:

### **I. The Need for Christ-Centered Community (vs. 41)**

We all need community. Many all throughout the culture today will acknowledge their need for community. They will look for it at the gym, in the workplace, on the ball fields, in the local community in which they live. Most long for a place to belong and feel connected. Here, we see in the early church that there was a need for a Gospel-centered, Christ-focused community.

#### **A. This is a Practical Need**

There was and is a practical need for this community. There is no way that a pastor or pastoral team can do all the work of ministry and of discipleship. That was certainly the case here in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 souls were saved in one day. Can you imagine the scene? How in the world do you minister to that many people at one time? The group in the upper room was 120 people. By the end of the day, the group was now 3,000. This was significant. The apostles couldn't personally do all the work. Yes, they could teach the large crowds and explain the Lord's teachings and miracles, but there is no way that they could come alongside of every person. And, in a group this size, there was absolutely no way that they would know everyone's story, struggles, needs, etc. Beyond this, how do you regularly minister to 3,000 people? We would struggle with that even today in our area. There are literally very few facilities here that would accommodate such a crowd, and none that would do so on a regular basis. And, how would you have a personal connection with each person in a group that size. Clearly, there was a practical reason for this Christian community. Breaking up into smaller communities that met from house to house allowed the opportunity and the environment for people to connect and do life together.

#### **B. This is a Spiritual Need**

There was also a spiritual need for these community groups. Yes, they needed to engage in community for the purpose of encouragement, support, and even accountability, but please understand clearly that the reason we need to be in Christian community is because it is this community that God uses to equip us and grow us to be the person that God wants us to be. Some will argue and say, "But I don't have to be involved in a Christian community to be a Christian," which is a true statement. We are saved only by grace through faith. We aren't saved by any man-made rules, works, or processes. Many don't understand that, and that ultimately is why they get bent out of shape if we leave that church or that group. We are saved only by grace. However, **you aren't likely to be a vibrant, growing Christian without being in community with other Christians.** Many today are content to just get words from the pastor, and I am grateful that God has called me to be a pastor. I take very seriously my calling and seek always to give Him glory in all that I do. But, if you are only learning from the pastor, you don't understand the role of the Church and of its members. We must be committed to joining together with other believers. Why? Because it is through Christian community that God further matures and equips us.

How does God do this? From other passages of Scripture we get a clear picture of what was taking place in the early church as they met.

1. We are to speak to one another about the Lord – **Ephesians 5:18b-19** commands us, “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs making melody with your heart to the Lord.” **Colossians 3:16** says, “Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
2. We are to stimulate one another to love and good deeds – **Hebrews 10:24-25**, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” The key word here is “stimulate.” It’s the idea that we are to be faithful to be present in one another’s lives so that we might stir one another up to Godly love and to Godly actions. **\*\*ILL:** Perhaps you’ve been around a campfire that was providing light and warmth. The glow of the fire was refreshing and relaxing. But, as all fires do, the fire began to fade and die out. What do you do when that happens? If you want the fire to continue, you take a poker or a shovel and stir up the logs so that the air can circulate, and the fire can stay alive and hot. By stirring up the logs the air is like fuel to the fire, allowing it to continue. On the other hand, there are times as the fire burns, a log will fall down and roll off to one side. When it falls, at first you can see the bright, glowing fire, but because it is isolated by itself, that log begins to lose its luster. The glow fades and soon it is black with just a wisp of smoke that gives evidence that it was once on fire, but now it has become cold and lifeless. This is the picture that God has in mind. As believers in Christ we are to stir one another up, that the flames will continue burning bright so that the light of Christ will shine brighter than ever in us and through us. The only way that this can happen is by being committed to engage in community with other believers. When this doesn’t happen, like the log that loses its flame, the believer will likely lose his vibrance and passion for Christ.
3. We are to serve one another. Paul directly calls us to share in God’s work by ministering to one another in numerous passages of Scripture. **Romans 12:10-13**, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.” **Galatians 5:13**, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” This is simple, but how are you going to know the needs of others if you aren’t engaged in community and connected with others? It is through community that God gives us the opportunity to join Him by serving others.

## II. The Focus of Christ-Centered Community (vs. 42)

We all have a need for “community”. We are all relational beings, even those who are introverts. In fact, it is common for introverts to have fewer but much deeper relationships than those who are extraverts. Why are we relational? Because we were made in the image of God, and He is relational. This is why He desires a relationship with us. He could have made us mindless robots, but He didn’t do this. He created us and made a way for us to know Him and relate to Him. Because we are made in His image, we desire relationship with others. So, we look for that community in all sorts of places. Some of them are good. For example, being in a “community” at the gym can bring about physical health, discipline, good habits, etc. Being in a “community” on the ball field with other athletes or other parents can be good because it provides an opportunity to be a light for Christ and minister to others who may not consider going to a church building. There are clearly some positives. However, none of these other communities can do for you what a Christ-centered community can do for you. Why? Because they don’t have the same focus, priority, or goal. Yes, they may give a place to belong, they may help you feel good, they may enable you to know others, but they don’t minister to your soul or sharpen you spiritually. **The focus of true Christian Community is to focus on Christ and His Word, so that we might live for Him and glorify Him in all that we do.** So, as iron sharpens iron, we sharpen one another as we come together in community and focus on four things:

#### A. The Word of God

What was “the apostles’ teaching”? They simply taught about Jesus, the things that Jesus taught them, and the things that He was still revealing to them through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was with His disciples, He had prepared them for this very moment. In **John 16:12-14** Jesus explained what would happen after He rose again and went back to heaven. He said, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.” In other words, Jesus said to these same men, “Guys, when I am gone the Holy Spirit will come. When He does, He will reveal everything to you. He will not speak of His own initiative, but what is from Me He will reveal to you.” So, we know that when the apostles taught, they were literally teaching the very Word of God.

The early church received the teaching of the apostles and believed it to be the message from God and not merely a message from man. This is why they committed themselves to their message. We see this truth confirmed in **2 Peter 1:20-21**, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” These apostles weren’t speaking of their own ideas or their own thoughts. They were speaking and teaching as God gave them direction and utterance to do so. This was the commitment of the early church, and something that we see clearly modeled. For example, in **1 Thessalonians 2:13** Paul commended the Thessalonian believers by saying, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for **what it really is, the word**

**of God**, which also performs its work in you who believe.” The point is that if we are to live out our faith in Jesus in the local church it must begin by receiving the Word of God. But, it does go beyond that. Not only were they receiving God’s Word, the verse says that they were “continually devoting themselves” to it. The word “devote” here literally means “to give oneself to.” It means that they were giving of their time, energy, and resources – whatever it took – to know and understand God’s Word. They were committed to it.

## B. Fellowship

The second thing we discover is that they devoted themselves to the fellowship of the believers. When we use the word “fellowship” in our day, we often use it to refer to any gathering of people. We might gather together for a meal, a ballgame, a meeting, etc. If there are people gathered together in the same room mingling together, we often say that we are having “fellowship.” However, fellowship is much more than being in close proximity to each other. We can be in the same room with someone for hours and not have fellowship. We can make small talk over dinner and not have fellowship with someone. The word “fellowship” here literally means “having in common” and refers to the common bond that we share in Christ. Fellowship implies the unity and love that we have because of the close connection that we share in Christ and the actions that follow. Because we are a part of God’s family there is a mutual love, respect, care, and concern for one another. Please understand that I am not suggesting that we need to have a separatist mentality where we separate from the world, but we do clearly need to have an acceptance, an appreciation, and a devotion to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The fellowship of believers means that the early church understood that they weren’t living their lives for themselves. They were called to live their lives for the glory of God and the good of others. Friends, God wants us to be committed to and connected with other believers. We are most vulnerable to Satanic temptation and attack when we are isolated from others. **Charles Spurgeon** said it well, “Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in.”

## C. Breaking of Bread

There are some who will hear this statement and assume that it is referring to the taking of the Lord’s Supper. That is certainly a possibility, but I don’t believe it was at all limited to that. In verse 46 we see further that they were taking their meals together. This is very simple, but it is powerful. The act of enjoying a meal together is an action of intentionality, an act of relationship, an act of warmth and affection. You have people in your home for a meal when you want to get to know them, when you want to further relate to them, or when you simply love them and enjoy their presence. This was an act of genuine hospitality. There is something simple and comforting about sitting down and breaking bread together. Interestingly, this act also crosses all cultures. I have been blessed to break bread with many of you in Rockingham County, but even if we were to get on a plane and go to Nicaragua or the Ukraine or anywhere else in the world, there is something comforting and encouraging about the act of sitting down and enjoying nourishment and fellowship together. In fact, when I was in the Ukraine back in June, one of the things that ministered

to me the most was the way that we enjoyed a meal together. It wasn't about the food, but the fellowship was so sweet and encouraging. It was life-giving. This is what the early church had in mind.

#### **D. Prayer**

They were also continually devoting themselves to prayer. They corporately came together regularly to pray and seek God. **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18** commands us to, “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.” These exhortations to pray were given and received not individually, but corporately. The letters from Paul would be read aloud for the entire local church and then the letter would be passed on to the other churches. The point is that God calls us as believers to come together for prayer. As we do, God even tells us who we are to pray for. We are to pray for all people. **1 Timothy 2:1-3** says, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.” In addition to praying for all people, we should also pray especially for our Christian family. **Ephesians 6:18** instructs “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**.” Even Paul in the very next verse requested that the church would pray specifically for him. We see this devotion to prayer all throughout the early church. Prayer, in its various forms, is mentioned 29 x's in the book of Acts alone and nearly 100 x's throughout the remainder of the New Testament.

Clearly, we need to be in a Christ-centered community, and the focus of that community is very clear – to glorify Christ by devoting ourselves to His Word, to fellowship, to breaking bread together, and to prayer.

### **III. The Impact of Christ-Centered Community (vs. 43-47)**

The remainder of these verses show us the result of what happens in a Christ-centered community. Now, I have heard several who have preached that these facts are the goal. But, I believe that the goal is clearly that we would grow in the Lord and become more like Him. If we are growing in our relationship with the Lord, we will see the same impact in our lives as they experienced in Acts 2. These verses give us a simple summary of what happened when they had the right focus and devoted themselves to the right Person and the right things. What was the result?

#### **A. God Worked In Them Personally**

**Verse 43** tells us that they kept feeling a sense of “awe.” There was a sense of wonder and awe at what God was doing. As they were studying God’s Word, they were beginning to further understand what God had done. They were making connections and discovering things they had never seen or experienced before. God also worked in them in the way that they were unified. **Verse 44** tells us that that “were together” and had “all things in

common.” This means that they were unified together. This is exactly what Jesus had prayed for in **John 17**, that they would be one even as Jesus and the Father are One.

### **B. God Worked Among Them**

This unity and togetherness that they experienced then demonstrated itself practically in how they served one another. When we have the love of God in our hearts it will cause us to love others. **Verse 45** explains that some had possessions and properties that were apparently not needed, so they sold them and shared with others to meet whatever needs came up in the Body. In other words, they weren’t worried about their own rights or privileges. They were looking out for the needs of one another and did all that they could to share and minister to one another. Please understand that this was not some government or ecclesiastical welfare program that was forced on the people. Some through the centuries have used this to try to support communism, but this was no such thing. This was simply the Body of Christ at work. This was the hand caring for the foot, the eye looking out for the ear, and so forth. This was not forced upon them, but something they simply desired to do because they loved Jesus and had a genuine love and concern for one another. **1 John 3:16-17** says it clearly, “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?” This early church clearly loved the Lord and the Church and demonstrated this by faithful, sacrificial generosity. This is a beautiful picture of what the church should be. We are a family of believers bound together by the love of God and our faith in Him. As a result, we must be faithful to care for one another, help one another, bear one another’s burdens, and serve one another for the glory of Jesus.

### **C. God Worked Through Them**

So, what was the outcome of this situation? What was the result of them living out their faith in Jesus? The clear and simple result is that God moved mightily. Look at **Acts 2:46-47**. God worked amazingly through them and continued to add to their numbers day by day those who were being saved. This early church wasn’t perfect, but they were committed to Jesus and to His Church and they proved this by engaging in the community of believers. I love how **Warren Wiersbe** summarized it. He said, “The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for ‘services as usual’. They met daily, cared daily, won souls daily, searched the Scriptures daily, and increased in number daily. Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine.”

I realize today that we seem a long way off from where the Church was in Acts 2, but I am convinced God is not the One who has moved or changed. He is still the same. He still has the power to move today. He still longs to speak to His children. He still can give a supernatural unity. He still helps us to love one another as we ought. He still desires that all would come to repentance. He still holds up His Word to lead and guide us. God is committed to us. The question is, “Are we committed?” Are we willing to commit to Jesus and to His Church? Are we willing to Engage in a Christ-Centered Community?