

## Identity #6 Together

April 14, 2019

I have four wonderful children, 3 boys and a girl: 16, 13, 11 and 9 years old.

Right now, we are in the, "I need a ride phase." Also known as the, "We don't have anything to eat, can we get a pizza phase" of life.

My favorite phase was when the kids were little. There are some things I miss and some things I don't.

I don't miss:

- the diapers
- the incessant noise
- the epic battles to eat peas
- the constant clean-up demands
- chasing them down to get them ready for bed
- all the visiting viruses and bacteria

I miss:

The days that their life and interests did not extend past Tiffany and I. We set the bounds of their little lives. I miss all the funny things they would say.

But do you know what I miss most?

The questions.

I didn't realize it at the time, but looking back I miss the torrent of questions that would come at me.

Dad—

- Why is the sky blue?
- Where does the sun go at night?
- Why do you close your eyes and pray?
- Where did Jesus come from?
- Why do I have to take naps?
- Who made God?
- Who made me?
- Are we there yet?
- Are we there yet?
- Are we there yet?

At some point, we stop asking questions and put our lives on cruise control. But we Christians must continue to ask questions.

Diane Sawyer the veteran journalist said,

“I love the early process of asking questions about a story and deciding which questions matter most.”

If we don't ask the questions that matter most we won't know who we are or what we are to be. So, we've tried to decide which questions matter the most in this identity series we have been in.

So far we've asked the following questions—

What is a Church?

What is our Church to do?

Who is our church to worship?

How is our church to reach the lost?

You can review the answers to those questions on the website—today we ask a different question.

How are we to build deeply together?

We devote ourselves to each other.

That might seem a little extreme, but I am going to show you where I get that idea.

We are going to go back to Acts 2 and see a summary sketch of how a church builds deeply together. When you become associated with Jesus you become associated with his people.

PROP: People devoted to Jesus are devoted to his people too.

To build deeply we must fellowship around Jesus Christ.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> 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

## PRAY

Acts 2 is our origin story. It details where we came from and what we are to do. The first church and our church is to be about the same things.

Just to recap what preceded our the section I read from Acts 2. The Christians gathered to pray 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection.

As they prayed the God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers. There were tongues of fire and people speaking in all kinds of languages. It was such an uproar that a crowd gathered.

And Peter stood up to preach—and said in part:

“Men (and women) of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—[23] this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [24] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”  
Acts 2:22–24

The gathered crowd heard this and were ‘cut to the heart’—they cried out—what shall we do?

Repent and be baptized. In other words, turn away from your past life and turn to Jesus.

And that day the gathered crowd became the very first NT church. What did they do?

We will talk about fellowship—but notice what else they

“And they devoted themselves to”:

- The apostles teaching
- The fellowship
- The breaking of bread
- The prayers

We devote ourselves to the same things. We are devoted to the apostles teaching—as we seek to do all we do prescribed by the word of God. We are devoted to the breaking of bread—which means hospitality and sharing meals in our homes. The prayers—we are to be a people of prayer to a God who hears and answers prayer.

Today we talk about fellowship—

What is fellowship?

What is devotion to fellowship?

How can we be devoted to fellowship?

### ***1. What is fellowship?***

Fellowship is the means of building deeply together.

Fellowship is a word that Christians can throw around without really thinking about what it means. Fellowship means to share something in common with others.

What did the people in Acts 2 have in common?

- Hobbies? No.
- Economic Background? No.
- Education? No.
- Athletes? No.
- Marital Status? No.
- Country? No.
- Background? No.
- Generation? No.

What did they have in common?

Jesus. They had Jesus in common and were able to fellowship around him.

At the most basic and fundamental level, fellowships around Jesus.

We are united around none of those things—we are united around Jesus Christ.

We can look around and think, “I don’t have much in common with these people. I’m not sure if I fit in.”

That is exactly the wrong way to think. What we share in common is Jesus Christ as our king and savior.

What did this look like in Acts 2?

They had common cause—and their unity was expressed in a specific way,

Vs. 44,

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

They had Jesus in common and shared what they could with the other followers of Jesus at their church. Most of the church in Acts 2 was not from Jerusalem as the vast majority of people were in town for Pentecost.

When Peter preached and the Holy Spirit came, people did not go back to their homelands, they stayed in Jerusalem. The church had to band together and share food, shelter, clothing etc...

To fellowship is to give someone a share in your life as you receive a share in their lives. Many of them needed the basic necessities of life and because they had a share in each other's lives they helped each other.

This was not a forced re-distribution but an expression of their fellowship together. They welcomed anyone and everyone and shared what they had.

We find ourselves in a different situation—we are not newly moved to the area with no means of

supporting ourselves. But we must fellowship with each other just the same.

We must give each other a share in our lives and be willing to receive a share from other people's lives as well. This does not mean that we should have the expectation that everyone will have a share in your life or that you will have a share in everyone's life.

That is not possible. But we all must be invested in other people's lives so that we care about them and they care about us.

To put it bluntly, it is impossible to serve Jesus alone. We are made in the image of God and we must reflect something of that image back to him.

Who is God?

God is three and God is one. Or the reason we must have a share in the lives of other people is because we are made by and serve and strengthened God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

On the night before his crucifixion Jesus prayed in part,

"All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. [11] And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." John 17:10-11



May they be one, even as we are one. The answer to that prayer that Jesus prayed on the night that he was betrayed is answered in every authentic church.

We are one in Christ.

Let us remember who we fellowship around.

He is who we have in common. We must be more aware of who we have in common than potential differences.

- Hobbies
- Economic Background
- Education
- Athletes
- Marital Status
- Country
- Background
- Generation
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Educational Choice
- Vaccination Convictions
- Political Parties

You will not be able to fellowship the way you ought to if you are more aware of how you are different than others here rather than how you are the same.

Think of all we have in common—

Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4,

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.” Ephesians 4:4–7

In other words, the things that normally divide mankind do not apply here.

- We have different life experiences—but have one savior.
- We are of different ages—but have one savior.
- We have different intellectual abilities—but have one savior.
- We have different political persuasions—but have one savior.
- We have different levels of coolness—but have one savior.
- We have different technological capabilities—but have one savior.

He is what makes our fellowship unique.

Not just any kind of teaching or fellowship or breaking of bread or prayers—what?

The apostles teaching  
The fellowship  
The breaking of bread  
The prayers

The kind of fellowship that is uniquely Christian. Christians are to be devoted to Christian fellowship with Jesus at the center.

And we gather around that savior—we fellowship around Jesus.

## ***2. What does devotion to fellowship look like?***

What building deeply together looks like.

Look again at verse 42,

***“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”***

We could translate verse 42 as, “They continually devoted themselves....”

These people were devoted. To be devoted to or for something means to set it aside.

- Brides devote a special dress for their big day—not for common, everyday use.
- NASCAR drivers devote a special car for the big race—not for common, everyday use.
- Chefs devote their kitchen knives for prepping meals—not for common, everyday use.
- Anglers devote their fishing hooks for getting fish—not for common, everyday use.

Similarly, Christians devote their lives—set themselves aside for fellowshiping with believers—and all else is common, everyday use.

How are we to be devoted?

It is easy to say you are devoted to Jesus and yet be removed from his people, but Jesus says devotion to me means being devoted to my body.

This is so hard.

You can tell how devoted someone is to Jesus by how he treats other people.

It is hard work to be devoted to each other. This is why it matters so very much that we understand that our devotion to each other is a outworking of our devotion to Jesus Christ.

Loving Jesus is easy—loving his bride is not.

How can we be devoted to each other?

- See other people through the eyes of Jesus.

Last week we saw Jesus looking at the crowds with eyes of compassion because they were sheep without a shepherd. How does Jesus look upon us?

With love. And no matter how others might tempt us, try us, grate on us, berate us, irritate us, disagree with us, we must look upon them like Jesus does.

It is a great comfort for our own souls to hear—

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38–39

It is instructive to also look at others in this church and know that that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is a great comfort to know that Jesus will never send us away and say, “I’ve heard enough from you—get away from me.”

Jesus will never say that to us—should we say that to others? No.

Think about what Jesus did for that person in your small group that talks too much and get on your nerves. Jesus devoted himself to destruction so that that person might live.

We can see others through the eyes of Jesus—also we can

- See how we need each other!

Fellowship is one of the means that the Lord uses to keep his people safe from the ravages of ruined lives.

“Take care, brothers (and sisters), lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another

every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”  
Hebrews 3:12–13

Here is the truth that the writer to the Hebrews is getting at—we can see sin in other people’s lives better than we can see it in ourselves. I am blind to the sin in my life that you can see much more easily.

Jesus has put us together in fellowship for our own safety and the safety of others. This does not mean that we should always go around exhorting everyone all the time, but it does mean that our brothers and sisters will see problems in our lives before we do.

None of us are so discerning as to not need anyone.

### ***3. How can we be devoted to fellowship?***

How does it work—practically—to be devoted to each other?

- *Make time in your life for other people.*

Sitting down with your calendar and planning on having people over is never going to feel very spiritual. But it is.

Part of being devoted to other people is making time to be devoted. If your life is so full with leisure, work, sports, kid sports that you don’t have time to fellowship around Jesus—you won’t be able to be devoted.

Make time.

- *Pray for people.*

Every person in this room has needs and every person in this room needs prayer. As you take time to pray for the people in your life you are going to find that you are going to want to be more devoted to fellowship.

Think of all the needs—

- Employment
  - Healing from cancer
  - Wayward Children
  - Healthy pregnancy
  - Wisdom for future
  - Encouragement
  - Weary
  - Grieving
  - Debt
- 
- *Find ways to serve people.*

This is so much more than just ministries on Sunday morning as important as that is.

What are the needs you are aware of—try and help.

Those things that you are praying for—ask—How can I help?

- Employment
- Healing from cancer
- Wayward Children
- Healthy pregnancy
- Wisdom for future
- Encouragement
- Weary
- Grieving
- Debt

- *Find ways to serve WITH people.*

Every single ministry here at this church needs help. Every single one. When you serve alongside others you will find that you are able to fellowship with them.

- *Don't expect perfection from other people.*

Not every professing Christian responds to challenges with the faith and godliness of Christ. But that is why we need each other.

- *Give yourself to other people.*

*"Give yourself to the Church...If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth. All who have first given*



themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people...

As I have already said, the Church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for the Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. The Church is the nursery for God's weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep—the home for Christ's family." Charles Spurgeon

Building deeply together takes more time and patience than you think.

This is one of the many reasons not to just hop around from church to church until 'feel a part.'

Building deeply does not mean that every conversation has to be deep.

We don't have to be a somber, heavy people. There are times when we get together where we just to get know each other.

Building deeply starts with you.

If you wait for others to reach out to you, or  
make you feel a part, you won't be devoted.  
Serve together

Building deeply means taking an interest in someone  
less mature in the Lord than you.

Building deeply means taking an interest in someone  
more mature in the Lord than you.

Building deeply takes openness to people unlike you.

That might sound scary and dangerous, but it is  
oh so necessary. We live in a world where we can  
make fb groups with the smallest of niche  
interests.

But we need to be around people that are  
different than us.

What happens when we build deeply and devote  
ourselves fellowship?

Look at what happened in Jerusalem—

<sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and  
breaking bread in their homes, they received their  
food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God  
and having favor with all the people. And the Lord  
added to their number day by day those who were  
being saved."

They experienced real Joy.

Their hearts were glad and generous even for things that might seem small, like food.

Gladness and generosity are infectious.

They found reason to praise God.

You will be more likely to praise God and be grateful when you devote yourself to fellowship.

The surrounding community thought well of them and the Lord added to their number.

People devoted to one another is compelling. We are a people who have a savior who is devoted to us—and we can be devoted to others.

People are dying to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

There is no other institution on earth that has the promise from Christ like this—

“I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

PRAY

[11] Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. [12] Greet one another with a holy kiss. [13] All the saints greet you.

[14] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:11–14