

God's Recipe for Church

Acts 2:42-47

Good morning church! My name is Eric Aho and I serve as the Small Groups and Congregational Care Pastor here at Coram Deo. We are in the final week of Summer Teaching Series. Each week a different pastor from staff has had the privilege of preaching the Word. I'm grateful to Pastor Rob for the opportunity to preach this morning while he and Becky wrap up a much-deserved break.

Open up your Bibles to Acts 2:42-47. If you need a copy of God's Word, just get the attention of one of our ushers and they will get one to you.

We are going to see in this passage this morning a recipe. That's right a recipe. Not a cookie recipe. Not a recipe you would find at a 5-star restaurant. Instead, it's a recipe for church.

I'm going to be completely honest from the beginning, that I am not much of a cook. My wife Malorie can attest to that. Instead, if I cook, I need a recipe. Without it, I get lost and don't know what to do.

What's amazing about the book of Acts, is that it gives us a great description of the early church. It shows us what they were committed to and how they lived as a church. One thing to note is that the book of Acts is often descriptive not prescriptive. Meaning it describes the way the church lived, but does not command us to do everything they did or the way they did it. We should instead, look at the way they lived and pull out the principles, God's desires behind the way they lived and put them into practice within the context we find ourselves today. When we follow these principles, we get, in metaphorical terms, a recipe for the church today.

At the end of Acts 2, Peter has just finished preaching a message to a great crowd that had gathered at the temple in response to a miracle God had performed through him. In this message he shared the truth about Jesus and 3000 people repented of their sins and followed Jesus.

Now with the church growing, Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, describes what life is like in this early church. **Read along with me in verses 42-47.**

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

We are going to break down this recipe for the church by pulling out the principles behind the way they were living. In doing so, we are to see ingredients for the way the church should live and what results. As we do, examine your life to see if you are living out God's recipe for church.

Look back at verse 42 with me. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Within this verse we see the early church devote themselves. If we are going to live as the church today, we need to do so as well.

So our first ingredient this morning is to **devote yourself**. Specifically to four things.

First **to the Word**.

They listened to the apostles teaching. They listened to what they had to say about Jesus, about the Old Testament prophets, and what God was leading them to share. We have this teaching recorded in the Bible.

The early church didn't take a halfhearted approach to God's Word. They devoured it. We need to do the same. We need to devote ourselves to God's Word by listening and applying the messages we are hearing on Sunday mornings, at Bible study, at youth group and kid's club, anywhere the Word is rightly preached.

In your personal time, you should also devote yourself to studying the Word. Spend intentional time each day learning from it. It's a sacrifice to set aside that time, but it is so worth it. As we learn from the Word, we grow in our love for God and one another. We learn to live as the church.

If you are going to live out God's recipe for church, you first need to devote yourself to the Word.

Second, **devote yourself to church**.

In verse 42, we read that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship."

"The fellowship" refers to the gathered body of believers and the way they lived together. Believers are to come together in love, encouragement, and to help one another.

The early church was committed to the fellowship. We read in verses 44-45 that they were very generous. In fact, the Greek verb for fellowship means participation and sharing. That is one way this fellowship played out. We will examine this generosity closer in a minute.

But fellowship is more than just generosity. It's a unity and serving of the body. In fact, the one another's of Scripture give a great description of how we can live in fellowship.

John 13:34 tells us to love one another just as Jesus loved us.

Galatians 5:13 tells us to serve one another through love.

Hebrews 10:24 tells us to gather together and to stir up one another to love and good works.

James 4:11 and 5:9 tell us to not criticize one another or complain about one another.

There are many other one anothers found throughout scripture.

As we live them out, we are being devoted to church.

Imagine if this was true of every one of us. It would transform the way we interact with one another. We would set aside bickering and instead serve. We would be there for each other as crisis comes up in life. Church let's be devoted to church. As we do, we are following God's recipe as described in Acts 2.

Third, **devote yourself to Jesus.**

This one might not be obvious at first read of the text. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread."

Breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper in verse 42 and a larger shared meal in verse 46. When Luke describes the church as being devoted to "the" breaking of bread, he is likely highlighting the Lord's Supper with his use of the term "the." The Lord's Supper or communion is a time to remember Jesus and what he did for us. He commanded us to do so in Luke 22:17-19. "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In taking communion, the church was devoted to Jesus. We do this at our church as well regularly to remind ourselves of what Jesus did for us. To refocus our hearts on him, to be devoted.

But that shouldn't be the only time we are devoted to Jesus. This should infiltrate all areas of our lives. We should be people who think first, what would Jesus do, that classic bracelet everyone wore. But the idea makes sense. Be devoted to living like Jesus and obeying him.

Pastor Garth and Grady just highlighted this over the past two weeks. Jesus should be on the throne of our hearts. If he is, it will change the way we live. It's no longer about us, it's about what Jesus wants.

As we interact with others, we will follow his commands. As we make choices about the future, we will think through what he wants. As we come across temptation, we will turn away because we are devoted to him.

We will live as members of his kingdom and serve him. This is transformational.

If we are going to live out God's recipe for church, we have to be devoted to Jesus.

Fourth, **devote yourself to prayer.**

The church was devoted "to the apostles' teaching, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

They made it a priority to call out to God in prayer. They knew they needed him. They didn't try to operate as a church by their own cleverness. They relied on God.

The early church prayed a lot. They prayed together. They prayed individually. They prayed at the temple. They prayed in their homes. They prayed without ceasing. They prayed as they came across those who were sick. They prayed before sharing the gospel. They prayed for those being persecuted. The list goes on and on.

So often we don't do this. We go through the Christian life relying on our own strength or abilities to follow God. That's not how he designed the church. The church is to turn to him. To rely on him. To ask him for help. He is faithful and we he will work all things out according to his good purposes.

We are to humbly cry out to him. We should share what we need prayer for with each other and pray together. We should be turning to God each day on our own and asking for his wisdom, strength, and everything else to remain devoted to him.

Begin today. Share with others what you need God's help with. It's humbling but it's the best place to turn. Then pray with them and on your own to God.

Examine your life this morning to see whether you are devoted to these four key parts to the church. If not, now is the time to begin.

As we all devoted to the word, to church, to Jesus, and to prayer, we will see God do some amazing things.

In fact, if we are devoted, **it's a recipe for amazement.**

The early church saw this firsthand. In verse 43, we read “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”

God was at work. God showed this church idea was from him. He confirmed what the apostles were doing through miracles. It caused everyone to have awe, amazement, even a healthy fear. God was at work as they were devoted to what God wanted.

God will do a work in our lives and this church as well as we lived devoted lives today. In fact, he already has. 20 years of ministry we celebrated last year. Buildouts and provisions that we couldn’t have imagined were possible. Lives changed for the gospel. Growth and maturity that clearly was the result of God’s hand on people’s lives. These are all the result when the church is devoted to God’s recipe for it.

Church let’s follow God’s recipe and let him do some amazing things.

Continuing in the recipe, Luke goes on to mention one way the church lived in fellowship with one another. Extraordinary generosity.

Verses 44-45. “And all who believed were together and had all things in common.”⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

If we are going to live as the church, **we need to be generous, our second ingredient.**

As the believers were gathering together, they recognized needs within the body of Christ. They then sacrificed to meet those needs by selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds.

Some people have twisted the phrasing of verse 44, “They had all things in common,” to mean that the early church was promoting communism. Communism is the idea that nothing belongs to anyone but everything should be divided by needs. This is not what is happening here. The church wasn’t giving up on the idea of individuals owning houses, land, and possessions. The fact that God commands us not to steal shows that we have personal possessions. Even verse 46 tells us that they met in their homes, referring to them possessing them, owning them. This was not communism. Instead, it was generosity. They were so moved by Jesus example of his own generosity and his commands to love one another that they obeyed and shared with each other as needs arose.

How do we practice generosity today? It starts with **being generous with all that God has provided.** Think about all that God has provided for you. Living in this country especially we have often been blessed with more than the rest of the world has. We have money, we have time, we have abilities, we have possessions. The list goes on and on. We should not selfishly hold on to those things but be generous.

Especially when we see someone in the church in need. **Be generous with all that God has provided to meet needs.** When someone is in need in the body, we should be the first ones to step up and help. When you hear of someone in your small group who needs help with childcare and we have that capability, we should jump in. When a person at your table at bible study, confesses they are being abused, we should jump in and help with what God has given to us and how he has gifted us. When we have been blessed financially and our brother or sister is struggling, using what God has provided we should sacrificially love them and help them out.

When we do, we can be blessing to others. **Generosity is a recipe for blessing others.**

This was God's design for the church. As we live generous lives, we are a blessing to others. Just like Jesus was a blessing to us in what he did for us. Generosity has always been a key ingredient to church.

How are you doing in this? Do you run away from needs or lean into them? Do you selfishly hold on to possessions or freely give them away to be a blessing to others? Do you give money, but refuse to give of your time? I think all of us have areas in our lives that we are holding tightly to rather than generously giving away.

If we going to follow God's recipe for church, we must be generous.

Look back with me at the text for our last ingredient.

Verses 46-47.

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

Our last ingredient for God's recipe for church is to get together.

This is what the early church did. They gathered together purposely. Let's break down what is happening here with the church.

First they got together **regularly.**

They didn't come up with excuses for why they were too busy. They didn't let other priorities get in the way. They made sure they were gathering together regularly, day by day as the text says.

This should describe our gatherings as well. It shouldn't be only when we feel like it. Only when we have the time. It should be a non-negotiable.

Don't let other things get in the way of frequently gathering together with other believers. We need each other. It's God's recipe for church.

What did this regular gathering look like? To start with, they got together regularly at the temple. We do this today **at church**. Our Sunday morning gathering of the local body of Christ.

We should make Sundays together a priority. Together we can worship, learn, encourage, pray and so much more. But if we don't, we miss out on that fellowship and fail to lean into our relationship with God and each other.

There have been many people over the years at our church that let other priorities get in the way of coming here on Sundays. It's an easy trap to fall into. But God's recipe for the church is to get together at church.

And not just at church. We should get together **in homes**. The early church broke bread in homes. Meaning they were gathering together outside of just one large group. They were meeting together, sharing meals, and living life with one another.

We do this today when we get together with Bible study groups, accountability groups, small groups and much more. It's small groups of people getting together to lean on one another. This is what God wants for his church.

The amazing thing about getting together with others specially in homes is that often our walls come crashing down. We are less on guard with each other. We relax and open up in ways that we don't normally do in public settings. It's why we encourage our church small groups to meet in homes. We naturally open up and share life. When we do, then we can lean into those areas we need to grow in. We can encourage someone when they open up about their struggles. We can surround ourselves with believers who we can serve and be served by. It's God's recipe for church.

If you are interested in getting involved in one of these smaller gatherings of believers, I would encourage you to check out small groups, Men's and Women's ministry bible studies, youth group, kid's club, and freedom groups. They are smaller groupings of believers that meet together for the purpose of growing as disciples, as members of the church. You can find more information about each of those on the church website. Take advantage of those opportunities.

As we get together regularly, at church, in homes, we should also be **rejoicing**. This is the idea behind "receiving their food with glad hearts". They were rejoicing at what was happening. God was doing a work amongst them. The church was living generously and providing for needs. They were rejoicing at what was going on. To rejoice is to be overwhelmed with joy. It's a gladness of the heart as you focus on God and what he is doing.

This should be our attitude as well when we gather together. We should remember all that God is doing amongst us and through us and let our hearts be filled with joy. Too often we miss out on what is happening because we are so focused on other things that we forget about God. We live in fear about the future, we live to please others, we live for money and influence, we let the hardships in life overwhelm us, etc. In doing so, we forget about God and what he is doing. So we miss out on being filled with joy and rejoicing with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should look for how God is at work – answered prayers, provisions, fruits of the Spirit, etc. – and then, as we get together, we should share what God is doing and rejoice together. Joy is a natural part of the believer's life. Those who have experienced salvation, rejoice in what God has done for them and is doing. Despite the hardships in this life, as we lean on God, we experience joy.

This joy should naturally lead into **praising** God. To praise God is to give honor and glory to God.

We read at the beginning of verse 47 that they were praising God. They gave him the honor and glory that he deserves. This is a vital part of the church.

As we recognize what he has done, who he is, we should be filled with joy and channel that joy in praise to God.

This is corporate worship. What we do at the beginning and end of every service. We sing praises to God. Do you ever stop to think about the words you are singing? They are praises to God, giving him honor and glory. God deserves our regular praise. But don't stop there.

Praising is also sharing testimonies and praising God for what he has done in someone's life. Some of my favorite times of praise are when people share their testimony, what God has done in their lives, and we get to clap and give praise to God.

Praise is also leading your family in prayers of thanks to God for what he has done this past week. I've known families who made it a priority on Sundays to share one way they saw God at work in the past week. It led to natural praise of God.

Praising God should be an everyday part of our lives.

As we get together and live this way, we will be displaying an attractive faith to the world around us. For the early church this led to "having favor with all the people." This should be true of us as well. We should be **having favor** with those around us.

Now does this mean that everyone will like us and appreciate us and our faith? Absolutely not. In fact, if you read the rest of Acts you will see the church was not welcomed by all. But in this moment, they show us something that we should seek to emulate. They way they

lived with one another, being generous, loving each other, praising God, was attractive to many. We ought to live the same kind of lives.

We should display our faith boldly and show who Jesus is. The fact that he condemned sin yes, but also commanded us to love one another like he loved us (John 13:34-35). People will be amazed at the way we treat each other. And this will lead them to want to know Jesus as well.

Look back at verse 47. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

God was at work and led more and more people to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus to save them.

God’s recipe for church led to more people being added to the church. **It’s a recipe for growth.**

When we embrace God’s recipe for church and live it out, God will do a work in the lives of those around us. He will lead them to be curious and seek to join us.

The question we have to ask is whether we are following this recipe in our own lives? Are we living devoted lives, generous lives, getting together with other believers regularly? Or are we trying to live our faith on our own? Are we holding on to what we have when we see an opportunity to serve or bless others? Are we devoted not to what God wants, but to what we want? That’s a recipe for stagnation, for selfishness, a lack of amazement.

Church, let’s embrace God’s recipe and live it out daily.

Let’s Pray.