

Life Together

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Date: 19 March 2016

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here with you guys today. It is my privilege to know John and Graham, to love them, and to hear from them regularly how things are going in the life of Bruntsfield Evangelical Church.
- And as obviously part of the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership, our hearts at Charlotte Chapel are very encouraged by what we hear of what's going on and what the Lord is doing in Bruntsfield.
- So it's great to be together like this and a great privilege for me to be here. If you have Acts chapter 2 in front of you, keep it open. You'll be helped as we walk through it together.
- And we've read the text already, so let's put our heads together and let's pray. Our Father, your word tells us that your very word spoken by you is authoritative and useful for teaching, correcting, training and rebuking.
- Lord, show us where we've gone off track. Show us how to get back on track. Tell us how to stay on track that we might be your people, walking in your ways with love and gladness in our hearts for you and for each other.
- [1 : 0 8] In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Well, in 1630, a man by the name of John Winthrop stood on the deck of a ship called the Arabella and addressed people who were sailing from England to America to start a brand new life.
- Winthrop, who became a governor of a new colony near what is now Boston, shared his vision for this new society that they were creating. Here's what he said.
- What a vision.
- What a vision for a community. Not even a church. A community. Now compare that speech with the one that was delivered 300 years later, given by a presidential candidate, Herbert Hoover, who also had a vision for effectively the same society, same kind of people.
- But it's very different to Winthrop's. Listen to this. It wasn't the knit together as one man speech. It was every man for himself.
- [2 : 3 6] It is the speech that became known as the rugged individualism speech. Now my question to you at the start of our day is, which sounds more attractive to you? Good.
- Someone answered. The first one, clearly. Now let me ask you a follow-up question. Which one does your life portray? Really? Think about it.
- Because actually what we often find is, if we look at our own hearts and the way we spend our time, the way we spend our time with other people, the way we spend our lives, the way we spend our money, etc., betrays the fact that we actually prefer Hoover's ideal, rather than Winthrop's.
- Now, we might say we want a shared life with the members of our church family, but actually making time for that is pretty inconvenient. I've got a busy life. My car is like a taxi, driving people around.

We might say we want deeper relationships, but really not the kind that demand any real commitment. I just don't know if I've got the personality for it, never mind the time for it.

[3 : 50] Or we might say that we really want to change and be more like Jesus, but if that means letting someone into our lives for the sake of actually confessing our sins to one another, I think that's in the Bible somewhere.

Or living a shared life together in a way that magnifies our witness to the people out there who don't know Jesus, well, if it means letting someone into our lives for the sake of things like accountability, well, we shrink back from that.

Well, that's rugged individualism, and that's really what I want to argue against profoundly today from God's Word. This is what we see in Acts chapter 2, 42 to 47. Jesus' vision for the life of the church is a shared life together.

Now, let me give you a bit of context. In Acts chapter 1, we saw Jesus has given his followers a task of finishing the mission he began. It basically starts off by saying, Luke saying, in my former book, I told you about all the things that Jesus began to do and teach.

Now, this book here is about the things that Jesus is continuing to do and teach. And he gave his disciples, that early church, the task of testifying to the truth about Jesus everywhere.

[5 : 08] Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. There is nowhere where this must not go. And then in Acts chapter 2, we're going to see this a bit later on, I'm doing things backwards. Jesus sent them help in the person of the Holy Spirit.

And Peter gets up on that day that they are filled and preaches and 3,000 people repented of their sin and were baptized. Then what?

That's the question. What did they do? How did they live? In what way did the gospel that they just professed to believe in actually start to transform their lives? Well, that's what we see in Acts chapter 2.

And I want to share with you the four key commitments, the four key things that we see in here that really depict for us what a life together looks like. Here's the first one.

Learning. That's still Hoover, isn't it? Here we go. Learning. Growing in the knowledge of God together. This is a first commitment. Look with me, verse 42. It says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, which basically means that they became students of God's words.

[6 : 14] Now, I think there are two main reasons for that. The authoritative teaching of the apostles, first of all, and the experience of these newly converted believers. When you look, first of all, at the authoritative teaching of the apostles, what you see is that in chapter 1, Luke has gone to great lengths to show us that these apostles had been personally appointed by Jesus.

This isn't going to work, so I'm probably going to ditch it. There we go. Luke has gone to great lengths to show us that the apostles had been personally appointed by Jesus. They carried the authority of the king.

And then verse 43 tells us that the miracles that the apostles performed really served in the way that miracles always serve in the Bible, to authenticate the spoken word, to authenticate the teaching of the person doing the speaking.

So the teaching then and the miracles brought about, as verse 43 says, a great sense of awe, and the church, this new church, knew that God was working through these guys.

And that in order to know this amazing God better, the one that they killed, as Peter said, and the one that has now given them new life, as they professed faith in Christ, they wanted to devote themselves to their teaching, the apostles' teaching.

[7 : 37] Now secondly, I think, that the experience of these new believers, the experience of these new believers really enthused their hearts in regards to the teaching of the apostles.

It's simple, really. Think about it. How did they come to believe the gospel? How did they come to receive forgiveness of sins and new life in Jesus? Well, it all began when they heard the word of God proclaimed.

It's through Peter's preaching. Peter had taken a passage from the Bible, explained it, and applied it to their situation. They believed it, they responded to it, and the preaching of God's word had just transformed their life.

It just reorientated everything for them. It made sense of everything. Not only the immediate events surrounding Pentecost, but of everything.

Their whole lives. And if hearing this teaching led to saving faith, it's no wonder then that we immediately see them giving themselves to learning more and more from the same guys.

[8 : 37] It's simple. They're hungry for more. Isn't that often the experience of a new believer? I don't know if we've got any new believers in the room, people who've been a Christian maybe for a few weeks or just a few months.

I think the appetite of a new believer for learning is an incredible thing to see. I mean, a new believer might ask an older believer, you know, what were you reading today?

And the older believer might say, oh, well, you know, I just finished reading four chapters of Money McShane's reading plan. You know, two of the old, two of the new. What about you? What have you been reading? Yeah, I just read Psalms.

Like, all of them. You know, I just read Romans. Like, all of it. Don't you find that new believers, they've got this great appetite for just devouring the word of God. And I think that's what we see in this text.

There's good reason for it. Their experiences through the proclamation of this word, through the declaration of this truth that God has confirmed in their hearts through their consciences and by the Holy Spirit, that this is what you want to bank your everything on.

[9 : 38] This is truth to a world of lies. This is grace to sinful people. That's why we pay attention. And that's why people who've become Christians listen hard and devote themselves to this teaching.

Now, that level of learning, I want to argue with you, kindly, should never fade. Maybe you've been a Christian for quite a few years. Well, the Christian life is a lifelong devotion to knowing God more and more and being changed into the likeness of his son more and more as we'll see in the next session.

But if you find yourself bored with sermons and Bible studies and Bible reading, you know, you need to watch because your faith might just be weakening. Those are danger signs and not things that you should really put up with.

These are the kind of things where you need each other to talk about these things together. You have to find out why it is that your appetite is waning. Maybe you're a lazy learner.

Maybe it's just the case that there are too many distractions. Maybe it's the case that you've just not become disciplined. Get to the root of that because what you will do is you'll consign yourself to immaturity in the faith and thinking about our life together, you will not develop the kind of maturity that will serve the brothers and sisters around you well.

[10 : 55] So don't think for a second that your lack of Bible reading and your lack of application when it comes to Sunday sermons or Saturday sermons today is just a personal individualistic problem.

No, you make yourself ill-equipped when it comes to ministering to your brothers and sisters and ill-equipped when it comes to ministering to unbelievers. That's serious.

That's really serious. So what does this devotion to the apostles teaching actually look like in terms of application? Well, look at what they did here. It seems like they met in big and small.

Verse 46 says they went up to the temple every day to hear the apostles teach. Acts 5.42 confirms this. This is their daily devotion. Day after day in the temple courts and from house to house they never stopped proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah.

Never stopped proclaiming. Day to day. Big temple. Just because it was a big open space. Not because it was a special sanctuary to go to. It was a huge open space where people could gather.

[11 : 58] And small in their homes. Now I love that. I love what they do there. I love it whenever we gather together. I love it when a local church family gets.

I love being there on a Sunday morning whether I'm in the congregation or in the pulpit at Charlotte Chapel and I just love being with the people of God as we hear it. There's something epic going on.

Like God changes lives in those moments. And God shapes our lives in those moments. things. And it's vital that we do that together.

And if I stop coming to that well that's a problem because I'm a pastor at the church but if I stop going and if I stop being concerned for encouraging one another to pay attention as Jesus said in Luke 8 take care how you listen I want people to tell me about that.

I don't want people to shrink back from actually letting me know. My soul's in danger. You know I want people in Charlotte Chapel to reprimand me for that kind of thing. And you should want that from each other.

[13 : 06] Gentle rebuke of course. But we know that we need more than just the big on Sundays. We need small groups that provide a context for learning and growing as a community of believers. That's where relationships are deepened.

That's where we really get to know each other. And this is vital. So my concern is in our own church and for you today is are you committed to this small. It might be a small group in the life of the church.

It might be three or four of you getting together regularly to do the same things. It doesn't matter. Churches are full of people who are void. I find it again and again and again.

It's really surprising to me. When I became a Christian and I started reading through this stuff and recognising what life together actually looked like I was really surprised how few people were actually committed to it.

I was like I've not had any of this for 19 years of my life. I'd spent most of my teenage years in drug addiction and utter loneliness and come into the understanding that God in the gospel is true it's real and what he does is he pulls people together so that even the families that are dysfunctional or don't work wherever you are like you've got a real family where your ties are thicker than blood then to not engage in that is surprising to me never mind disobedient when it comes to God's words we cannot expect to grow if we don't have people gathering around us and if we're not gathering around other people as we heard in the reading earlier on let us not give up meeting together as someone in the habit of doing let us spur one another on toward love and good deeds and all the more as you see the what the day what's that day the day of the Lord day of joy for us those who believe but a day of severe judgment for those who don't a day when it's preferential to have an avalanche of jagged rocks fall on you than to experience what an unbeliever will experience serious so does word devotion describe your commitment to the apostles teaching this is the word of God of course apostles and prophets do you read it every day do you have a plan ask people afterwards what's your plan how do you read the bible every day are you a mcshane guy do you take four do you take ten chapters a day are you like apollo's mighty in the scriptures or are you actually

[15 : 41] I much prefer two or three verses consecutively a day and I mull it over my head for a long time throughout the day it doesn't matter as long as you read as long as you read and then what about making a priority to attend every Sunday the big non-negotiable you know two things go into your calendar as far as I'm concerned it's Christmas day and every Sunday at church these are things that we must commit to and we wouldn't go a whole day without food of course so what makes us think we can live without the living bread that Jesus said we need daily of course the question here is not just life together in a big setting and a small setting it's really are we interested in one another's lives are we ready to step up to that level of commitment because that's actually what we see in the second point where people devoted themselves to loving one another truly living as the people of God together what we see in this section is that they became involved in each other's lives these people who had just become Christians together with the apostles and the 120 that reported in Acts 1 we see them commit to life together now fellowship is a biblical word that in my opinion has lost its punch

I think many people have neutered it of its meaning fellowship is not just when Christians get together to have a coffee and a chat it's way more than that the root meaning of this word for fellowship is the word common from which we get our word community where we share our common unity profoundly through our union with Christ it's really straightforward and these brand new Christians take life together as something elementary and basic Christianity then involves sharing life together with other Christians and devoting yourself to that kind of commitment actually requires a new mindset if you look with me at verse 44 see if you think these guys are guilty of keeping people at arms laying see if they're guilty of rugged individualism all the believers were together and had everything in common selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need now what we see even in that is that they had a healthy ecclesiology from the start they knew what the church was they just started living it out it was part and parcel of their conversion they understood that God is creating a new people for his own to bear his name indwelt by him to carry the gospel out and that's what conditioned the way they lived they had everything in common it says even their possessions now it should be clear that this is not communism where the state force is sharing this isn't even communalism where no one has any private property no what we have here is genuine biblical community and their sharing is marked by a love for each other and a recognition that what we have is not ours we're just stewards of the stuff that we've got when I was at

Bible college a number of years ago I lived with a friend two days a week as I studied in Glasgow and I would often go up to him and say it's alright if I use your computer I could just check my emails he said feel free it's God's computer you know it started to get a bit ridiculous where I said do you mind if I have a couple of slices of toast before I go to bed he would say it's God's bread you know it's like okay I get it I get it but I mean that that was a strong testimony to me of actually this we're just stewards of the stuff that we've got it's all God's we should be willing to hold to it loosely so that we can help and serve one another as best we can but maybe you know I don't know what this looks like in Bruntsfield for you but I've seen in my own experience in two churches I've been pastoring where people have sold stuff to help another person out you know maybe someone's lost their job the family has not been able to make ends meet you know I've seen people say well let me just see what I can sell on eBay so that I can help out and that's a glorious thing to see and because that demonstrates real love Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written a great book called Life

Together it's worth getting your hands on it and he says loving one another in this way to this extent speaks the Christian language with overwhelming eloquence the problem is sometimes we prefer to be a little less eloquent the idea of a shared life together is a bit of a nightmare for some of us I mean we go out of our way to make sure our conversations at times with fellow believers are mundane arms length very self-protective well if we do that Paul Tripp would say that we become co-conspirators in a church that prefers superficiality to true worship and true life together or worse we shrink our understanding of church to an hour and a half on a Sunday and as a result this would be God's call to us to love one another and to lay down our lives for one another even as Christ has for us so what does devotion to the fellowship look like well I'm convinced that in churches the size of

Bruntsfield it's it's really difficult to do this without finding ways to know each other better than just on Sundays so my encouragement for you is to practice hospitality how many Sundays in the month or even Friday nights or Saturday nights do you have people around your house for a meal how many times do you just invite people who are just like you or how many times do you ask people who are really reflective of the bread to the congregation is there a seat at your table for people who are single is there a seat young people is there a seat at your table for that for an older couple or a widow widower we should be sharing in our life together in intergenerational ways generational ways much in the same way that Charlie and Beth were encouraging us to do earlier this is how we start to know what needs people have and especially as we gather together in our small groups that really serves us very well we've just gone through a complete revolution in our small groups recently at

[21 : 52] Charlotte Chapel and I am stunned at the way that our commitment to reducing the size of the group basing our commitment together and forming our groups around the basis of relationship where people are ready and willing to share and setting up from the very start these are called growth groups because they're going to help us grow to be more like Jesus and the basic gist of everything that people come to do is a reminder for them on every single study sheet that they look at how will this study help us grow more in the likeness of Jesus and love one another and love God better and we just drum that home because it's absolutely vital for us I think this is the kind of thing that we see in the church in Acts as these people who become Christians it's part and parcel of the faith to love each other and live a shared life together what about the third thing praising remembering the gospel of God together of course verse 42 they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread I realize I am taking my life in my hands speaking in a brethren church on this wow what is he going to say he's a Baptist well they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread they became worshipers of Jesus together I should say in this context and in a couple of contexts so for example when Paul later in

Acts is in Troas and he's he's I think in this context in Acts 2 what we're talking about here is the Lord's Supper it's adhering to the command of the Lord Jesus but there are other couple of occasions in the book of Acts where it's not necessarily talking about the Lord's Supper for example it says there's breaking of bread on when Paul is on the boat in Acts 27 I think it is with a bunch of pagans I don't think he's sharing communion with them but I think in the context this is what's going on here they are remembering the gospel of God together worshiping Jesus and that's one of the primary things that we do now the Lord's Supper for these guys wasn't something that's tagged on at the end of a service it certainly didn't involve little squares of bread involved much more of a meal together a meal made very meaningful by the sharing of a common loaf and a common cup and Jesus therefore had commanded these observants of course of this feast until he returns he had said do this in remembrance of me and it's intended as this symbolic remembrance of

Christ's sinless life and atoning death on our behalf it's a proclamation of his death and his resurrection until he returns at the individual level it's an opportunity for self-examination but communion is for the church the people of God shared in together as an expression of the unity of the people in gratitude to God for the gospel you follow me so again in verse 42 it's unpacked further down the page verse 46 they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God now why does Luke want to highlight this commitment as a feature of the early church why does it matter to their life together and to our life together well I think there are three reasons one it's a matter of simple obedience Jesus commanded it two it stimulates the church to praise God for the most important thing that he has ever done for his people it has to be central I don't know about you but when I'm at communion I'm reminded of every time of why I follow

Jesus when I take bread and wine I'm reminded of the fact that I am both torn apart and put right back together again by the gospel and my love for Jesus swells my my my realization of my sin and ongoing sinfulness is unavoidably exposed in the light of his blood and I come as as a sinner as James forces humbly repenting under his welcome and grace and I remember the beauty of the gospel and at times I have a big smile on my face at times I have tears and a smile on my face but on any occasion whatever's going on externally inside my heart is full of joy and gratitude and love that the Lord God himself would do this for someone like me man alive so don't be distracted when it happens when you share in the Lord's

Supper together enjoy it reflect on it and never ever forget that you do it together it's a mark of our life together we encourage one another to remember the gospel together I don't know what you guys do what often we eat at the same time we drink at the same time where we're just saying one great big fat yes to the Lord Jesus for his salvation so what does devotion to the breaking of bread look like for you well again it's like attending Sunday services it's making sure that you have time to and the priority to attend and make the most of it don't let minds wander whether it's to the the roast that's in the oven or whatever just meditate on that I find Psalm 51 comes to mind again and again I've memorized passages of the Bible where there's the gospel in a nutshell which both remind me of who I was what God has done and what I am now those are rich those are the things that when you concentrate on those things or it might be a song for you you know it might be a song don't sing it out loud especially if you're a you're the only one yeah people might not join in that's a bit risky but that's those are helpful things to do to make the most to focus your heart your mind on what you're doing in that moment and what you're doing together lastly I'll make this quick praying asking great things from God together verse 42 again they devoted themselves to prayer where they came as dependent children to a generous father listen when our eyes are open to the majesty and the beauty of Christ we're drawn to desire more of him and prayer is simply the articulation of that heart's love the heart's response to Christ and what he's done and we pray with prayers of adoration but I think in verse 42 what we're here what we're looking at mainly is intercession and the reason I say that is because that's the kind of prayer that saturates the book of Acts it's intercession all the way through in chapter 4 God's people pray together for boldness to speak God's word in the face of persecution in chapter 12

[28 : 55] God's people pray together for Peter's relief release from prison so prayer is something that they ask God to do on account of the fact that they have come to be aware of his great power he actually can do anything isn't it odd that and as we recognize that and understand that that at times we prefer self-reliance we prefer to crack on with our lives the way we think we should do them and forget to take time to pray well prayer is as one author has said the antithesis of this self reliance it what it's what demonstrates our dependence on God that we've grasped the magnitude of his character and honors him as the one behind all the blessings of our life so are we devoted to praying together regularly most churches find it difficult to gather more than a small fraction of their Sunday congregations to either corporate prayer times or even to small groups but I think it's an important thing for us to do and even when people meet to pray we all know how much easier it is to spend time sharing news and requests than actually speaking to

God together in prayer why is this well I wonder if it's because we don't get beyond the religion that we ought to pray to the reality of relationship that we get to pray we get to speak to God so when we devote ourselves to praying together let's pray when we gather ask great things of God together I don't know if you have a membership directory at Bruntsfield but it's useful if you have a knowledge of who are the people in your church whatever you read in the morning by the way just we pray that not just for yourself but for each other didn't Jesus teach us that the Lord's prayer has that outward emphasis lead us deliver us our father it starts with you know it's not a prayer you're meant to pray individualistically it's corporate from the very off so learning loving praising and praying one life that's what we're called to that's what you're called to as a church together if you're new to Christianity I hope that spells it out for you if you've been a Christian for a longer time I hope you'll maintain an emphasis on these things and recognize that they are the heartbeat really of

Brunsfeld Evangelical Church your commitment to these things will serve you well lastly very very lastly how many times does a preacher say lastly he never means it yes what do we see what's the result of this you know this life together I think the big temptation when we look at a subject like this in this sermon like this is that we just think we do all these lives to all these things together it's all about just being a little commune a little closet community together no way no way is that the case you see in this passage that they were not so preoccupied with each other that they forgot about mission it tells us that God added to their number daily those who were being saved and what that means is that they must have been so generous as a community and bold and sharing their faith that their attractiveness as a people their their attractiveness of their shared life together won many people to Jesus so one of the reasons why we commit to our life together is so that we might better display the love of

Christ to people who don't know him and we need to recover then this vision of Acts 2 42 and discover rediscover the expectation then of steady growth in that amen you