

A Shared Focus

REAL COMMUNITY #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 15, 2024 - Acts 2:42-47

INTRO: Good morning church! We're concluding our sermon series today entitled "REAL COMMUNITY: 4 Devotions for Authentic Fellowship." We're unpacking the four foundational devotions that led to the tremendous blessing of the New Testament Church.

ILL: When you visit another country or even another part of our country, you'll notice several unique features to their community, to their culture. What they believe, whether they are relational, friendly or not, what kind of food they eat and of course what language or dialect they speak. A shared language is one of the key marks of any community.



So, I try to at least learn the local greeting when on a mission trip. **In Guatemala:** "¿Hola, como estas?" **In Indonesia:** "Halo apa kabar?" **In Rwanda:** "Bonjour, comment allez-vous?" **In Uganda,** the official language is English, but in Kisoro, they speak in a dialect called, Rufumbira. My first visit there, they taught us to greet one another with, "Yesu ashimwe!" So I started greeting everyone with "Yesu ashimwe!" Which is great at the churches, but in the town, people gave me a strange look. Apparently, "Jesus be praised!" isn't the standard greeting with everyone there. Just with the believers.

Trans: The same was true of the first century church. They had their own way of greeting one another. They had a shared language—it was the language of prayer. It was a shared focus, one that focused on spending time together talking to God in prayer.

Need: How are you doing in this area? Do you pray? Do you pray with your spouse, with your kids? Do you pray with your family? How about with other believers? Are you devoted to praying together with God's family? I know some of you may struggle in this area. Perhaps you don't know how to pray. You don't know the language of prayer. Or you are nervous about praying with others...

BODY: In the book of Acts, Luke described the "authentic community" of the first century church. He said they were marked by four "devotions." They were: - A shared faith - A shared family - A shared food - A shared focus.

We can experience this authentic community when we pursue these four devotions. Today, we're going to focus on the 4th devotion, "A Shared Focus." The text gives **three steps** to having a shared focus of prayer.

Read text: Acts 2:42-47 (ESV) ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

How to share the focus of prayer in Christ's community:

1. Grow up together in **communicating with God.**

EXP: ⁴²And they devoted themselves to ... the prayers.

"Devoted" (42) – (Greek: *proskartereo*, *pros* – to face towards, *kartereo* – strong, steadfast) to earnestly attend to, to continue in, to be constantly diligent towards, to adhere closely to, to give oneself to wholly.

"Themselves" (42) - They made praying **together** a priority. They were devoted to praying together.

"Prayers" (42) (ταῖς προσευχαῖς, *tais proseuchais*) - lit., the prayers. Why plural? Because there are **different occasions** for prayer: "Not only in their closets, and in their families, but in the church; in the public prayers of the church, they observed all opportunities of this kind, and gladly embraced them" (John Gill). And **different kinds** of prayers:

Ephesians 6:18 (NIV) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...

1 Timothy 2:1 (ESV) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people

A Shared Focus

REAL COMMUNITY #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 15, 2024 - Acts 2:42-47

ARG: The disciples learned to pray from Jesus. And the church in Acts learned from the disciples.

Luke 11:1 (ESV) Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

The prayer Jesus taught did not say, “My Father,” but “Our Father.” It didn’t say, “Give me” but “give us.” Not “Lead me,” but “lead us.” It was a prayer teaching them to pray together with other believers.

ILL: How did you learn to talk? Did you take a class? No. There’s no baby talking class. You learned by living together with your parents and siblings and hearing them talk. How do you learn to pray? How do you grow in your prayer life? Praying together with other believers.

APP: How did the disciples learn to pray? From Jesus. How did the church in Acts 2 learn? From the disciples. Just as the Lord’s disciples learned to pray by listening and learning together with Him, so we grow in our prayer life together. Would you like to grow in prayer? The best way to grow in prayer is to pray together with others. Join a CG and start praying together.

2. Pray together as the family of God.

EXP: ⁴²And they devoted **themselves** ... ⁴⁴ And all who believed were **together** and had all things in **common**...

⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple **together** ...

“**Themselves**” (42) - They prayed “together” like a family.

“**Common**” (44) (κοινά, *koina*) - Root word for κοινωμία. Praying together brought them closer together.

“**Together**” (46) ὁμοθυμαδόν, *homothymadon*) - with one mind, one accord, one passion. “So continuing daily with **one accord** in the temple” (NKJV). “A family that prays together stays together.”

ARG: Notice how the church began at Pentecost, praying in “one accord.”

Acts 1:14 (ESV) All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

At Pentecost the disciples prayed 10 days waiting for the Holy Spirit as Christ had commanded at His ascension. They prayed for 10 days, Peter preached for 10 minutes and 3000 people got saved.

Unity and prayer are connected. Praying together both helps and exposes unity or its lack.

1 Peter 3:7 (ESV) Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

ILL: I’ve noticed in my international travels that American Christians don’t pray together like those in 3rd world countries. We tend to depend on our own experience and financial resources, while they are lacking in these areas, so instead depend on God in prayer.

APP: Will you commit to praying together with other Christians? Will you pray with your spouse, your family? Oh that we would have men and women’s groups who would meet together for prayer at breakfast or lunch regularly. That our CGs, ministry teams, staff, children’s ministries... would make prayer a priority! Do you have a sense of calling to pray with people? Join the prayer team.

3. Come together seeking the presence of God.

EXP: ⁴³ And **awe** came upon every soul, and many **wonders and signs** were being done through the apostles...

⁴⁷ **praising God** and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord added** to their number day by day...

“**awe**” (43) (φόβος, *phobos*) - “Awe” - “an overwhelming feeling of reverence, produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful.” Have you been in prayer together when the awe of God fell upon you?

A Shared Focus

REAL COMMUNITY #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 15, 2024 - Acts 2:42-47

“**Wonders and signs**” (43) - Miracles followed the 4 devotions, perhaps especially their devotion to prayer.

“**Praising God**” (47) - Their devotion to prayer resulted in praising God which had an effect on their community. God gave them favor and people were receptive to the gospel. Prayer is like a plow that prepares the soil of the heart to receive the seed of the gospel. It's the furnace that heats up the church!

ARG: **Notice how God shows up in these two prayer meetings:** (In the first, Peter and John had just spent the night in jail for healing a lame beggar in Jesus' name.)

Acts 4:23-31 (ESV) When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, **they lifted their voices together to God** and said, “Sovereign Lord... look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they **were gathered together was shaken**, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

(In this 2nd prayer meeting, the Spirit spoke to them and directed them to send Barnabas and Saul. In these prayer meetings, they sought not only the will of God, but the hand and the face of God. They really seemed to know their God and expected to hear from Him and be directed by Him.)

Acts 13:1-3 (ESV) ¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after **fasting and praying** they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

ILL: “You can tell a great deal about a person’s relationship with God by listening to him or her pray. You can tell if a man or woman is really on speaking terms with God.” — Tim Keller, *PRAYER*, p.23.

What we do at our PMT retreats is begin our time in prayer seeking God to shape our agenda. We pray ourselves empty, stilling our hearts and minds, th

APP: Praying together, ask “God, what is your will for us? What are You focused on that we might focus our prayers there and join you in your work?” Seeking His will, we also look for His face! We learn more about Him from the prayers of others. When we devote ourselves to praying together, focusing together on what God wants, we will see God at work in our families, our church, our city, our world!

CONCLUSION: Every real community has certain traits: a set of beliefs or values, regular times they fellowship together, food they eat and language they speak. People are looking for real community today. They often look in the wrong places.

But the most authentic community, the community that you and I were truly made for, is the one that puts us in right relationship with God and with others. This is the Community of Christ’s Body, which is the Church! The 1st Century believers were devoted to a shared faith, a shared family, a shared food and a shared focus of praying together in the Name of Jesus, so that they might see the Father’s kingdom come and will be done in the world.

Will you...

1. Grow up in praying together? Learning from one another?
2. Pray together as God’s family? Building unity with one another?
3. Come together seeking God’s presence and will in prayer?

Let’s pray together now.

A Shared Focus

REAL COMMUNITY #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 15, 2024 - Acts 2:42-47