

# AN ACTS 2 CHURCH

## ACTS 2:40-47

And with many other words he (that is, the Apostle Peter) testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about 3000 souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Churches, like people, come in all different stripes and types... There are *big churches and small churches, formal churches and laid-back churches, mega-churches and intimate-churches, contemporary churches and traditional churches, quiet churches and noisy churches, reflective churches and expressive churches, teaching churches and reaching churches...*

I heard someone describe churches as either *bells and smells churches* or *happy and clappy churches*.

There're *coffee bar churches* and *pot-luck churches*.

My point is, there is no such thing as a typical church. Every church has its own unique style.

In 1980 God called me to start a church in Stone Mountain, Georgia - and my calling was crystal clear...

My goal was NOT to plant a big church *necessarily*. It was to pioneer a certain type of church.

In fact, I knew the kind of church God had put on my heart might preclude it from becoming a large church.

In the South, and particularly in Atlanta, Georgia, we have no shortage of churches. There seems to be a church on every corner - *and many of them are good churches* - places that know how to attract a crowd, and introduce folks to Jesus. I read recently that there are over a thousand churches in metro Atlanta. We rank second to Houston in the most mega-churches.

But in 1980 when I looked out over the church landscape I thought there needed to be more of a certain type of church - with the qualities we find in the earliest church. *And I believe that need still exists...*

My calling is to pastor an **Acts 2 church!**

I want our church to revert back to Ground Zero and model the mother church. I've studied the foundation and formulation of the earliest church, and I feel called to reproduce the initial church in the book of Acts.

Our text describes life in the Acts 2 church. And its summary statement is found in 2:47, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

God could add to this church because He trusted its motives. I'm sure it wasn't perfect - *there is no such thing as a perfect church* - but its heart was right.

This church wanted to be a healthy church - to do church right - to be biblical - to do things by the book.

And of course, at its start, it exploded with growth.

On the church's first Sunday the number of disciples expanded from 120 to 3000... A couple days later the church ballooned to 5000... One New Testament scholar estimates that in its first few months the church in Jerusalem grew from 120 to 25,000 members.

But, the Jerusalem church didn't just have lots of people, it had a purity and power that we need today.

The Acts 2 Church was an explosion of life and joy.

In fact, when a couple played the hypocrite and God struck them dead - *amazingly the church still grew!*

At the end of Acts 4 Luke uses two phrases to sum up this dynamic church: "great power" and "great grace." Wouldn't it be *great* if those two expressions characterized every church - "power and grace!"

The first church is proof that when God finds a *healthy church* He adds people to that church, for He knows *healthy churches produce healthy Christians*.

Thirty-seven years ago I was drawn to this model of church life, and reviving it continues to be my goal.

When Billy Graham brought his evangelistic team to Montgomery, Alabama in the mid-1960s he insisted on breaking the color barrier. He wouldn't come unless the crusade choir included both black folks and white folks.

One newspaper editorial blasted Graham and claimed he would set the church back a hundred years.

When asked to reply, Dr. Graham's response was classic, "If I only set the church back 100 years I've failed in my mission. I desire to set it back 2000 years!"

And this is my goal. I want our church, Calvary CSM to be a healthy, dynamic church - a church with both **purity** and **power**. I want us to be an **Acts 2 church**.

Today, I want to examine the six ingredients of the earliest church. Every southern town has a *First Baptist* or a *First Methodist* - well, I want us to look at the *First Church period*. Six features stand out about the very first church described for us in the book of Acts...

**First, the agenda was spiritual.**

**Second, the aim was social.**

**Third, the atmosphere was supernatural.**

**Fourth, the attitude was one of solidarity.**

**Fifth, the approach was simple.**

**And sixth, the action was steady.**

And by the way, these are ingredients every church can afford. We don't have to spend years saving money to purchase what the early church possessed.

*You don't need a big budget to be an Acts 2 church - or a professional staff - or high-tech equipment - or slick programs - or fancy marketing...*

**You don't even need a building.** All you need is a biblical attitude toward Church - a little faith - some healthy endurance - and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here are the six ingredients of an Acts 2 church...

First, **the agenda of the church was spiritual.**

Some church calendars are filled with aerobic classes, pot-lucks, golf outings. The church functions more like *a country club* than *a house of worship*.

But when the early church came together the reason was not to entertain one another, or pass the time. Meetings were designed to encourage spiritual growth.

Hey, there's nothing wrong with having fun or being entertained - but that should never be the church's ultimate goal. *Our agenda should always be spiritual.*

In one of his commentaries, Pastor Jon Courson makes an interesting observation about youth ministry that I think applies to all the church... **"The world can out-fun us, out-entertain us, and out-slick us every time because whenever Christians try to copy what the world does, they never do it as well. But I'll tell you what we can do with our kids: We can love them and give them the truth like the world never can."**

Christians can do lots of fun things together, but the ultimate purpose behind our getting together should be to strengthen our faith. *God is always our goal.*

Notice the four activities that occurred when this church gathered. Verse 42 lists them, "**apostles' doctrine,**" "**fellowship,**" "**breaking of bread,**" "**prayers.**"

Notice first, "**They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.**" They were habitual about Bible study. When these believers met their conversations revolved around some Bible promise or passage.

*They couldn't get enough of the Bread from heaven!*

You could call them **Bible** junkies. They weren't just dabblers - recreational users - they inhaled! They were dependent on God's Word. They were hooked on Bible study. They had come to base their life on God's truths.

I once read a quote from Marla Maples, of Donald Trump fame. She actually articulated a position a lot of people hold. She said, "**Yes, I believe the Bible, but you can't always take it literally and be happy.**"

*Oh Marla, if you only knew!* The Bible holds the keys to spiritual health and true happiness. *You don't know happiness until you walk in the light of God's Word.*

It's interesting that the denominations losing members today are those who no longer hold to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, whereas the growing churches are those who take the Bible literally.



The teaching of the Bible is the cornerstone of a healthy church. *This is why we at Calvary CSM teach it verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book.*

Another activity on the agenda of a healthy church is **fellowship**. The Greek word is “**koinonia**,” which means, “**to hold in common**.” The best definition I’ve heard of fellowship is “**two fellows in the same ship**.”

Once I attended a pastors’ conference where I heard the statement, “**People aren’t really looking for a friendly church, but a friend at church**.” And I believe that’s so true. It’s fairly easy to find a few people who’ll be friendly, but it takes time and effort to be a friend.

True koinonia is more than a handshake, or a polite gesture, or a friendly greeting - it’s genuine, heartfelt, out-of-my-way concern and care for another Christian.

Here’s a description of what should happen when we fellowship, “**Masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, tenderness flows... People really do become like family**.” It’s all about *knowing and being known, loving and being loved, serving and being served*.

Notice also, they participated in the **breaking of bread**, or *the practice of communion*. I like what Steve Brown says about the Lord’s Supper, “**The world drinks to forget, while the Christian drinks to remember**.”

The bread and the cup point us to Jesus and the cross - where our salvation was won. When we spend time at the

Lord's table our focus remains on what matters most. **The main thing stays the main thing!**

And this is what worship in general does for a church. It not only blesses God's heart - and cultivates a sense of His presence - it keeps our eyes on Jesus!

In one of his books, Greg Laurie tells of the first time he heard true worship. It was at Calvary Chapel. And even though Greg wasn't a Christian, after hearing true praise, he concluded, "I knew these people believed what they were singing. But, more than that, I sensed someone was on the receiving end of their praise."

Worship is more than music. It's more than a few talented folks entertaining the rest of us. We use music to enter God's presence and communicate with Him.

Worship and communion was a dietary staple in the early church, and it's the same in any healthy church.

And the other item on the agenda of the church in Acts was **prayer**. A healthy church will also be meeting to pray - for God unleashes His power through prayer.

Sidlow Baxter once wrote, "Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons - but they are helpless against our prayers." Prayer is our most formidable weapon.

Once I saw a street sign that read, "Electric Avenue."  
It was next to a yellow, diamond-shaped traffic sign that read, "No Outlet." *No outlet on Electric Avenue?*



Every church is located on Electric Avenue - *and there is an outlet!* The Holy Spirit wants to energize us, but we have to plug into His power through prayer.

In the first church, **the agenda was spiritual**, but **its aim was social**. Realize, the church's concept of salvation included relationships. The rallying cry or mission statement of the church was Peter's statement in verse 40, "**be saved from this perverse generation.**"

The early Christians understood that the purpose of the church was not only to save people from sin, but to save them from their sinful surroundings. Their mission was to *rescue people from a perverse generation - rally them around a new identity in Christ - then enroll them in a new community* (an outpost of heaven on earth.)

I'm sure you realize we all have the need to belong. That's why families exist. That's why there's an Elks Lodge - and a sewing circle - and teenage gangs.

And that's a primary reason why the church exists.

God created us for community with each other. God *takes us out to take us in*. He pulls us off the sinking ship of this world, and makes us members of His crew.

We wear God's colors – we join God's gang.

An ad once appeared in a newspaper which demonstrates just how desperate people are for companionship. The advertisement read, "**I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00.**"

Amazingly, it didn't take long for the guy who placed the ad to get 10 to 20 calls a day. It became quite a business - *for people are desperate for community.*

World famous physicist, Albert Einstein, once said of himself, "It is strange to be known so universally and yet be so lonely." Even the rich and famous battle loneliness. God never meant for any of us to be lonely.

He wants to surround us with loving, caring, meaningful relationships. This should be our priority at Calvary CSM. Our goal is to be *the family of God!*

Again in verse 40 Peter says, "be saved from this perverse generation." In the first church a person's salvation had not impacted that person fully if it had only affected him *spiritually* - and not *socially*. Jesus' intent in saving us is to place us in a new community.

*The church should be a taste of heaven on earth!*

If you've ever traveled to Miami, Florida you may've visited little Havana. It's a pocket of Cuban ethnicity right in the middle of a major American city.

And I believe this is God's intention for the church.

He wants us to be a pocket of heavenly ethnicity and culture in the midst of a pagan and lost world.

If you're in Miami and want to learn how people on the streets of Cuba talk, act, and treat each other - all you have to do is travel to little Havana. And if you're in our community - and want to know how folks talk, and act, and treat each other in heaven all it should take is a visit to our church. Here we

want to live Christianity, not just believe it. **Our church's aim should be social.**

Note also in the church of Acts - **the atmosphere was supernatural.** Verse 43 reads, **"Many signs and wonders were done through the apostles."**

There was a spiritual energy in the first church that permeated everything from their fellowship to their missionary endeavors. It was as if God shook up a can of Coca-cola and popped the top. There was a spiritual eruption, an explosion, a gushing that created a momentum in the ministry that was unstoppable!

As a result, believers came to church with an anticipation that God would work in their midst. When they prayed they expected God to be on the other end of the line. Church was a place to plug into the power!

Study the first church and you'll see people were healed - prayers answered - miracles happened...**"fear came upon every soul."** People were in awe of God.

I mentioned earlier the first church was characterized by **"great power"** and **"great grace"** - but Acts 5 adds, **"great fear"** came upon them. Folks knew God was *real*. And this should also be true in every church.

People came to church full of awe and anticipation.

The fourth feature of the church in Acts was **its attitude of solidarity.** Notice verse 44, **"all who believed were together..."** Their togetherness and unity were indestructible.

They hung out together, ate meals together, spent time together, did stuff together.

They lived their lives **shoulder to shoulder**.

Several years ago I spoke at a conference in the Santa Cruz Mountains of Northern California. The little cabin I stayed in was surrounded by redwood trees - these are huge, colossal trees hundreds of feet tall.

You'd think trees that large would have deep roots, *but not so...* I learned that the roots of a redwood are relatively shallow. A solitary redwood is likely to blow over in a mild gust of wind - but these trees gain their strength by growing in groves. Their roots stretch out and interlock with those of other redwoods nearby.

And likewise Christians grow best in groves. We gain strength by interlocking our roots and growing together. It's spiritual solidarity that gives the church its muscle.

The believers in the first church were *shoulder-to-shoulder*, but they were also **hand-in-hand**. There was an incredible atmosphere of generosity and sharing.

We're told in verses 44-45, they "**had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.**"

The attitude was, "**All that's mine belongs to God, and since you belong to God, then all that's mine belongs to you.**" Once this kind of unselfish, sacrificial love and generosity is cultivated within a church - believe me, God is going to add to that church!

I read of a pastor who told his church that when the offering plate was passed, if they had a surplus put some money in the plate - but if they had a lack; then they could take out from the plate what they needed.

The pastor said that on the Sundays the church did this, the treasurer reported record offerings.

I think we should do the same this morning. If you have a surplus put your money in the narrow slot on top of the offering box. If you need to take some money; then take all you can get by slipping your hand through that narrow slit in the box, and help yourself.

*Seriously, if you have a need we want to help.*

The early church was solidly together – *shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand*, and **back-to-back**. They knew that in times of trouble they could count on each other.

This is important. To be the Body of Christ we need to be able to trust each other. A few chapters later - in Acts 12 - persecution will raise its ugly head...

Peter will get thrown into prison... and this same church that put its monies together in Chapter 2 will put their prayers together in Chapter 12. They'll hold an all-night prayer vigil for Peter. And while they're praying God will send an angel to orchestrate a jailbreak.

Every church needs to have an attitude of solidarity: *shoulder to shoulder, side to side, back to back*, and **heart-to-heart**. This first church not only pooled their resources - they divided them to those in need.

They gave together, which is also the mark of a healthy church. **A church that grows will have a heart that gives!** It'll be on the look-out to meet needs.

The fifth feature of a healthy church, was **its approach was simple**. Read again verse 46, “**So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.**” The first church kept church life simple and straight-forward.

There wasn't a lot of red tape, or bureaucracy, or formality. Church life was done in a way that left few hiding places for impure motives, or hidden agendas.

Life in the Acts 2 Church was beautiful in its simplicity. *Why is it our tendency is to complicate stuff?*

There's a sinus rinse on the market that comes with a 32 page booklet of instructions. That's thousands of words on the cautions, and benefits, and operation of a sinus rinse. *I mean the nozzle on the bottle fits any nostril, and it's not hard to squeeze a plastic bottle.* This isn't constructing a bridge, or coordinating a royal wedding. Yet we can complicate even a sinus rinse!

The other day it took me 10 minutes to figure out how to get the new-style security cap off a bottle of ibuprofen... The typical credit card contract in 1980 was 400 words. Today, the document contains 20,000..

You get my point, everything in modern life is becoming increasingly complicated. **Yet complexity doesn't mean better!**



I'm so thankful God calls for life in His church to be simple. They had "*simplicity of heart.*"

A supposed expert on church growth, a man named Peter Wagner, use to say, "Church growth is complex." I disagree! No rocket scientist is required here...

When you look at the growth of the first church there were no fancy programs, or elaborate formats, or hoops to jump through - *just a real simple schedule...*

On Sundays the big group met in the Temple to worship Jesus, and hear the Apostles teach the Scripture... Then Monday through Saturday the believers met in small groups to *study God's Word, fellowship, worship, and pray.* Church was simple.

And likewise churches today should keep it simple.

Finally, notice in the first church **the action was steady.** Believers were consistent. Verse 42, "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...*" Then in verse 46, "*So continuing daily with one accord...*"

The early church was not a fly-by-night operation.

They were diligent, and determined, and dedicated to be the church God intended for them to be.

In a few months, I will have been the pastor of CCSM for 38 years - and I've seen the ups and downs. I've lived through prosperous times and lean times.

I've been around when the mood was upbeat, and stuff was happening - when life was good... I've also survived the times when people were down - and situations had turned grim...

But in both the good times and the bad times we've always tried to be consistent.

People have come and gone - circumstances are always changing - we've gotten older and hopefully better at what we do, *but one thing stays the same...*

We've remained true to our vision and core values, and have been committed to the distinctives of our calling. We know who we are, and we're determined not to be swayed by the latest fads, and fancies, and formulas... **The church in Acts 2 is our example.**

But it's not enough for the leaders of the church to be steadfast, if its members want to get the most out of church life they too can't you be fickle and flighty.

Church members need a quality that's becoming more rare these days. They need **stick-with-it-ness** - as we're told here, the people **"continued steadfastly."**

Just because you get snubbed one week by someone who doesn't reciprocate your friendliness, don't give up on finding the fellowship you need...

Just because there're parts of the Bible you don't get the first time you read them, don't put your Bible on the shelf, and give up seeking to understand the Scripture..

Just because your prayers don't get answered the way you think they should the first time you pray, don't give up on the notion of prayer, and conclude God doesn't care or isn't on the other end of the line...

Hank Aaron hit 755 home runs - but he struck out 1,383 times. Every venture of faith might not end up a home run, *but keep taking your cuts*. God has a lot to teach you, and sometimes it takes time to figure it out.

The Acts 2 church “**continued steadfastly**” - believers were consistent. They had more than a random commitment. They weren’t just one-hit-wonders.

Hey, what’s the difference between **The Baha Men** and **Earth, Wind, And Fire**? The Baha Men had one hit song. *Remember the title?* It was, “**Who Let The Dogs Out?**” *Not exactly a rock-and-roll classic.*

Whereas, Earth, Wind, And Fire had 32 Top 100 songs. Baha Men were a flash in the pan. Earth, Wind, And Fire were a standard of excellence for 30 years...

And this was the case with the church in Acts. It had a spectacular beginning, but more importantly, it had a consistency over the years that was honoring to God.

We need to realize, nowhere does the Bible promise a church instant success. It takes time for spiritual fruit to mature and people to grow. We need consistency.

When times get tough don’t bail-out... There’s a lot to be said for perseverance, and stick-to-it-ness...

Let’s all “**continue steadfastly.**”

Here’s one of my favorite quotes, “**The huge oak tree is just a little nut that held its ground.**” And I resemble that remark. I can relate to this... *I can be a little nut.*

Well, what kind of church do you want to be a part of? A *high church*, a *hip church*, a *hopping church*, a *happy church*, a *helping church*, **or a holy church?**

I believe the Acts 2 church was a *holy church*. It was fashioned after God's design and dedicated to Him.

And we have a record of this church; for God wants us to model its life and habits. Remember, *the agenda was spiritual - the aim was social - the atmosphere was supernatural - the attitude was one of solidarity - the approach was simple - and the action was steady.*

**Let's be the kind of church that God desires!**