

(Acts) What the Church Should Look Like

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the early church's model in Acts 2 as a blueprint for the modern church, highlighting the need for a fear of God, a total dependency on the Lord, and a lack of sin in the church.

Duration: 52:13

Scripture: Joel 2:28, Habakkuk 3:17-18, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:42-43, Romans 12:12, Philippians 4:4

Topics: "Church Community", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the practices of the early church as described in Acts 2:42-47. The four foundational things that the early believers focused on were continuing steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, being in fellowship, sharing together in the Lord's Supper, and being steadfast in prayer. These practices led to the church becoming a learning, loving, and worshiping community. The speaker emphasizes the importance of individually applying these principles to gauge our own walk with the Lord and encourages the audience to examine if they have fallen short in any of these areas.

Transcript

Acts chapter 2, let's pray. Lord, you are the God who bled for us. Lord, you're the God like no other gods.

You're the great, the awesome God, and Lord, you're full of love and compassion and mercy. And Lord, you delight to dwell among your people and to work in our midst. And so, Lord, do that here with us tonight, we pray.

And Lord, as we look at once again, your word, speak to us about the things that we need to be instructed in. We pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

So we come tonight to the end of the second chapter of Acts. We in our last study a few weeks ago, we looked at the 42nd verse alone. And you remember the background, the setting of the whole thing Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost as that massive crowd had gathered in Jerusalem, Jews from every nation under heaven.

And there is the spirit came down upon the disciples and they went out and they began to speak in tongues and the curiosity of the crowd was aroused. And they asked the question, what does this mean? And Peter went on to tell them that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, that in the last days God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh. And then Peter went on to preach the gospel to them.

And that day, 3000 souls were added to the church. And then verse 42 tells us about what they then began to do, how they began to gather together. And this became the practice of the early church.

But we pointed out that this isn't merely history being recorded for us, but the book of Acts itself is a model that God has given to us of what the church is to look like in each successive generation. And so in our last study, we looked specifically at verse 42 and we saw that there were basically four foundational things that they were doing back then that every church ought to be doing today and that the church always should have done throughout all of its history. And those things, when they are done, they lend to God's blessing, God's presence, God's power, God's great work in the midst of the people.

And so as we pick up in verse 43 tonight, we're going to now see the things that really followed this, the practice of these early believers as they took these four things, continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, being in fellowship, sharing together in the Lord's Supper and being steadfast in prayer as they did these four things. There were other things that just sort of were part of everything that was going on. But I think they were the outcome of these four foundational things.

Remember, we pointed out that based upon these four things, you could say that the early church was, first of all, a learning church. Secondly, they were a loving church. And then thirdly, they were a worshipping church.

And then fourthly, obviously, because of prayer, they were a praying church. And now verse 43 says this and fear came upon every soul, fear came upon every soul. Now, the fear that's being talked about is a reverence.

There was there was a sense of awe among the first Christians there. There was a sense, I think, of the presence of the Lord. And because there was this real sense of the presence of the Lord, there was this fear of God.

There was as a result, no doubt of this fear of God. There was a great concern for holiness. There was a great concern for purity.

There was a great concern to be free from sin. And that, of course, will come when we are steadfast in his word, when we are committed to true fellowship, when we are recognizing the Lord's death for us through the breaking of the bread. And when we are people of prayer, when all of these things are working together in our lives and in our midst, this will lend itself to a real fear of the Lord.

I think one of the great missing ingredients in the modern church is the fear of God. There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of fear of the Lord today. There seems to be a very casual sort of an attitude towards sin and just, you know, the mentality that says, well, you know, I'm a sinner.

I know that and I I can't help it. And God will forgive. And, you know, that's not the attitude that was displayed there among the first Christians.

They were committed to holiness. There was a fear of God. There was a sense that we don't want to do anything that would be out of sync with what the Lord desires.

We don't want to do anything to grieve the spirit or to quench the spirit. The spirit was moving powerfully and the spirit will move powerfully when there's purity within the body of Christ. But when sin infiltrates the church, then you find a diminishing of the spirit's work.

It's inevitable because sin quenches the spirit and grieves the spirit. But these people, they were living and walking in the fear of the Lord. And God help us to live and walk in the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord will keep us from sin. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil.

And if we fear the Lord, we're not going to be dabbling around with sin. And every time we step into sin willingly, it's because we've lost the fear of the Lord. We've lost a perspective on who God is and his holiness.

And we've forgotten what Jesus went through for our sakes, how he died upon the cross. You know, if you ever wonder. Just what God thinks about sin, all you have to do is read Isaiah 53, read Psalm 22 or read one of the crucifixion accounts in the four gospels in the New Testament, and you'll find out what God thinks of sin.

He absolutely abhors it. He hates it passionately. And that's why Jesus had to die the brutal death that he died.

So we need to keep that in mind before we, you know, move into an area of sinning, thinking that, well, you know, it's OK, God will forgive me. We need to remember the cost of sin. We need to remember the price that was paid for us to be forgiven.

And we need to be reminded that we're not to willfully sin. If we willfully sin, if we go back into those things and have that cavalier attitude, then we're really just grieving the spirit of God enormously. And so there was a fear among them.

There was a sense of awe. There was a sense of reverence. And it said then and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The early church was a powerful church. Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. A lot of people ask the question, well, how come we don't really see wonders and signs today? And some respondents say, well, you know, that was just for the early church and that was for the apostolic age.

And once the apostles passed off the scene, then the miracles ceased with their ministry. But there's not really any biblical support for that. Others say when you ask the question, well, what about miracles today? People say, oh, there's miracles happening all the time.

You know, let me tell you about this place I went where this guy, his one of his legs was shorter than the other. And and we saw him and they healed him and they stretched his leg in it. And he walked out with two legs the same length.

You see, miracles and wonders are happening. I don't think those are the kinds of miracles and wonders that we're talking about here. That's more like a sleight of hand, sort of a parlor trick kind of a thing, you know, but you hear stories.

Oh, man, you know, God's giving people gold fillings all over the world. Miracles are happening. These people that used to have.

Amalgam fillings, silver, lo and behold, they went to a worship session and they came out with gold fillings. And other people are getting sprinkled with gold dust. And then they say the spirits moving and miracles

are happening and people are falling down and people are laughing hysterically.

That's not what we're talking about here. These are all just fabrications. These are all things that are just manifestations of the flesh.

When we're talking about signs and wonders, we're talking about powerful things happening. We're talking about God healing people, God raising people from the dead, healing people of serious illnesses and things. So we've got people that say it doesn't happen anymore, we've got people who say all this stuff happens all the time, you're just missing it.

What's the truth? Well, I think the truth is these things do still happen. But again, I think that a lot of times they don't happen among us, perhaps because there's so much sin in the camp. And when and when the church is infiltrated by sin again, that quenches the spirit.

And of course, the power, the signs, the wonders, these are all the true workings of the Holy Spirit. And if the spirit's being quenched to some degree, then we're not going to see these things going on. But I absolutely believe that these things are things that we should be experiencing today.

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. We have no reason to say that the Lord doesn't work miraculously anymore. He doesn't perform wonders and signs.

I think where you still see this going on is in the church today, where there is a total dependency on the Lord. In the church, perhaps under communist persecution or perhaps in the churches under Islamic oppression or in places where there's, you know, just extreme difficulty in the living circumstances of the people and there's an utter clinging to the Lord. I think a lot of times we're missing out on the miraculous because we've it's all been done for us already by modern technology and all those other things we don't even think.

To depend upon the Lord to do anything miraculously. In some senses, our Western civilization, we've. In some ways, almost, you know, done away with the need for God.

In anything. We've got so many things, inventions and all that that we've made that we depend on for the things that people at one time and still in some places depend on God for. But I believe that.

Again, if we're living in the fear of the Lord. And if we're depending on the Lord, if we're believing him, trusting him, that we can anticipate that at times we will see wonders and signs as well, not those gimmick kinds of things that I was mentioning earlier, but the real thing. You know, sometimes I think when it comes to the miraculous power, some people have really in their great desire to see God do something, they've sort of diminished the greatness of God by.

Just some of the impressions that they give. I was in a meeting one time a while back and somebody was leading the meeting and it was a time to pray for healing and all of that, which is all good stuff. And yet, you know, as we went on in this meeting, I was noticing that all of the healings that were being called out were, you know, for things like somebody here stubbed their toe.

God wants to touch that stubbed toe. Someone has some pain in their back here tonight and the Lord is speaking. He wants to touch the pain in the back.

You know, someone has an outbreak of acne and God wants to minister that tonight. And, you know, I'm sitting there listening to this and I'm thinking, OK, I know that in this room there are people with serious illnesses. I know they're in that room.

There were people with terminal illnesses. I know there were people with chronic illnesses. I know there were people that had serious, just viral kinds of infections at this, you know, at that present time.

And as I'm sitting there, kind of just, you know, involved in this thing, I'm thinking, now, what is this? Does God specialize in minor cuts and bruises? I mean, is that really when we're talking about the miraculous, when we're talking about healing, when we're talking about the power of God, is that all we're talking about? And a lot of times in these healing services and things like that, that's the kind of stuff that's going on. But, you know, in the days of Jesus, Jesus was healing people of terminal illnesses. He was healing people of cancer.

He was healing people of all kinds of deadly diseases. He was restoring people to perfect health. And when the Lord works, when he moves in miraculous power, those are the kinds of things that we can expect to see happen.

Not to say that the Lord will not minister to minor things as well. But when that's all that seems to be going on and we know that there are all kinds of other serious issues here, I personally have to wonder, is the Lord really in this? Or is it just, you know, a person or people just so desperately wanting to see something happen that they're you know, they're just out on a limb themselves kind of saying, well, you know, God's saying this, but maybe the Lord's not saying that at all. There were many wonders and signs that were done by the hands of the apostles that were powerful things going on, things that demonstrated that Jesus Christ was still alive, even though they'd crucified him.

Remember, they were proclaiming the resurrection and they're proving that Christ is still alive by the fact that they're doing the same kinds of things that he was doing. And so they were a reverent church. They were full of the fear of the Lord and they were a powerful church.

And I believe that as we in this Western culture, as we look at. The lack of power in the church. I believe that instead of dismiss it and say, oh, well, you know, that doesn't happen anymore, that died with the apostles or to say, oh, no, it's really happening, you know, come on over and let me show you these gold fillings that God installed in this person's to instead of that sort of thing, I think we need to look and say, Lord, is there something amiss with us? Have we become too dependent on other things? Are we no longer depending on you? Is there so much sin in the camp that we're grieving you and quenching your spirit? Those are the things that I think we need to consider, because this being a model, not merely a historical record, tells me that we should expect to see the miraculous.

And I might add this, we do. We do still today, we see people that are genuinely healed, we see God working in miraculous ways, but I personally think that there could be a greater manifestation of these things. But I think it goes back to the former point that a lack of fear of God, a multiplication of sin among the people of God, quenches the spirit and prevents the wonders and signs from occurring.

But that's what was happening back then. And then it says, and all that believed were together and they had all things common and they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all as every man had need and they continuing daily with one accord. So notice this, that there was a communal thing that developed here.

Now, I think partially this developed because remember, there were people from all over the the known world who had come to Jerusalem, had gotten saved. And a lot of them, I think, didn't want to leave. They were not anxious to go back home.

They wanted to stay as long as they possibly could. And so because of that, they, of course, would have had needs that were to be met, and so I think what's happening here is the local believers, especially everybody was pulling their resources together to take care of people during this time as they were there in Jerusalem.

This obviously was not the ongoing practice of the church because we don't read about this thing really beyond Acts chapter two here. Some people look at this and say, well, this was an early attempt at communism. But I don't think there's any reality to that whatsoever.

This was a communal effort. There's a there's a vast difference between communalism, living in a commune situation and everybody sharing things together, having agreed on that principle before entering into it. And communism, which basically talks about the redistribution of wealth and what's yours is really mine sort of a thing.

Communalism, or especially in this context of the church, communalism would have said, you know, what's mine is yours here. Let's share it. I want to share it with you.

Communism says what's yours is mine. You better give it to me or I'll kill you. That's what Marx basically taught, and that's what his disciples, beginning with Lenin and all the way down through to the dictators of today.

That's what they emulated. So this was not an early attempt at communism, but rather a communal situation that developed as a result of the immediate need there in Jerusalem. And it didn't go on like this indefinitely.

But I will say that what we do see from this is that the first Christians were very giving. They were generous, they were hospitable, and I would imagine that all of that was the case because they really had a heavenly focus. You know, if we're greedy here on earth, if we're holding on to the things of this world, then it just shows that we don't really have a heavenly perspective.

Now, that doesn't mean that you just go down to your bank and withdraw your savings and go out on the street here and find a few people and just here, let me give you this. You know, I've got a heavenly perspective on life and I don't need this. That's not what we're advocating.

Because, of course, we need to be responsible, we need to help people be responsible. And this wasn't the kind of situation here where, you know, any and every freeloader could just come into the church and expect to get a handout and never have to get a job or anything like that. Some people think that that's the responsibility of Christians is to, you know, take care of people who choose not to work and to choose to live on the streets and all of that.

That's not our responsibility. I went up to Skid Row a few weeks ago. A friend of mine asked me to go up because God's been putting that area on his heart and wanted to see how we might get involved in some ministry.

And then he met a ministry there in the local area and, you know, was starting to develop some plans to work with them. And so, you know, he asked me to come along and just kind of see what I thought. And so we went and we had a great time.

We met the one of the men that was working in the ministry there with his church right there in the heart of Skid Row. And he told us everything they were doing and, you know, really some good things going on. And and as we were sitting there talking and the few guys that I was with, everybody was excited about getting involved and wondering, well, what should we do? You know, and how can we get involved? And and I could sense that among the group that was with me, there was sort of a feeling like, wow, it's really our responsibility.

We've got to get out and feed all these homeless people and all. And, you know, as we sat and talked, one of the things that really struck me was how he was telling me that really the majority of adults in that Skid Row community are not interested in the gospel, but the kids are the ones that are interested. And that's where they've been targeting.

That's where they've been putting their efforts, ministering to the children. And every day after school, five busloads, school buses dropped the kids off at their church so they can do their homework. And, you know, they don't really have homes.

Some of them live in tents and things. But anyway, as we were talking and I was kind of just praying, Lord, how would you have us to get involved? And as we began to talk about the homeless thing, all of a sudden, the Lord reminded me of something that I think up into that moment, I'd kind of forgotten. He reminded me of of all my past dealings with homeless people.

When I was pastoring in Vista, we dealt extensively with homeless people because there's a large number of them in that community. When I was living in London, my goodness, you had so many homeless people there. And by and large, my experience with the homeless is that you can't help them because they don't really want to be helped.

They like what they're doing. A lot of them are very proud of the fact that they can live on the street and you can't do it and they'll just get right in your face and tell you that, of course, they got their hand out because they want you to give them some money as well. And now I'm generalizing.

There are, of course, those exceptions to the rule, but that is the rule from my experience. And so as we're sitting there and we're talking back and forth and trying to get wisdom from the Lord, all of a sudden the Lord reminded me of that and then showed me that the kids, they're the ones, they're the victims. They're the ones that we really needed to reach out to and minister to.

And I told you that whole story because of this. A lot of times when it comes to the poor, when it comes to the homeless situation like we're confronted with here today in our society as Christians, we just don't know what are we supposed to do about this? And quite honestly, a lot of homeless people take advantage of Christians because we're the nicest people around, you know, most other people tell me, get lost, go get a job. Christians don't do that to them generally.

So what happens is they start to take advantage. But we've got to remember, the Bible does say to be generous. The Bible says to give.

But the Bible always balances everything out. And Paul, the apostle himself said, if a man does not work. Implying that a man is capable of working and work is available, but if he will not work, then neither shall he eat.

So you see, it's not my responsibility to go feed a person who doesn't want to work, who won't work, but chooses rather to live this kind of life. That's it's not my responsibility to take care of that person. I can share the gospel with most of the time they really don't want to hear it.

One of the sad things and one of the things that really got us, you know, kind of redirected on this as we were sitting there talking, this guy told me his his ministry is right next to the Union Rescue Mission. He said every day they serve twenty five hundred meals at the Union Rescue Mission. And he said, everybody that goes through there and gets a meal, hears the gospel three times a day and they've heard it three times a day for several years, the majority of them.

But you see, it just goes in one ear and out the other. That's not they're not interested in that. They're just simply interested in the bowl of soup or whatever it is.

The early church, they were a giving church and every church ought to be a giving church. And we as Christians are to be generous people, but we're not to be stupid. We're to be wise.

And when we do give, we need to make sure that we're giving to places that God wants us to be giving to where we're actually going to help people not. Perpetuate their problem. To use the psychological term, enable them.

We become enablers, we enable them to keep living that lifestyle. Years ago, when I was an intern pastor here, you know, when you're 22 years old. And you're serving the Lord.

Well, for me anyway, I didn't have a whole lot of wisdom at the time. And so, you know, I get my paycheck and I'd give half of it away before I ever got home. And that was fine when I was single.

But I get home and Cheryl would ask for the paycheck. And I, oh, well, I spent half of it already and I gave it to this guy. And she what? What about, you know, we need to take.

And, you know, I was naive, to say the least. But I'll never forget, there was a guy that came around here. And he was, you know, a drunk, basically.

And he started coming around and I started sharing the Lord with him and trying to minister to him and, you know, being as naive as I was, as I would minister to him at the end, he would always charge me for it. Basically, I didn't realize he was doing that then. But now I look back, that was it.

I had to pay him to share with him, because every time I'd finished paying him, he'd stick out his hand, OK, now give me a couple bucks, you know, and I'm hungry. So I'd give him a couple bucks, assuming he was hungry, that he was going to go buy something to eat. Well, what he was actually doing is going and buying something to drink.

And what happened one day is I went through that whole scenario with him. I, you know, talked with him and gave him the money like he wanted. And then about two hours later, I ran into him in the bathroom back here and he could barely stand up.

And he turns around to me and goes, hey, I need some money. I'm hungry. He's so drunk.

He doesn't even know I'm the guy that gave him the, you know, five bucks two hours ago. I said, you know what? What do you mean you're hungry? I gave you five dollars to get something to eat. Obviously, you drank it.

And so I told him, you know, get out of here. I'm tired of dealing with you with this. I was starting to wise up a little bit.

Well, he kind of kept coming back around, you know, and I'd see him here and there. But one day I get a call. Right here in the office, I get a phone call and the girls say there's a guy that wants to talk to you, so I get on the phone and it's this guy and he says he says, look, I need some help and this is where I'm at and you better get down here right now.

And so I thought, all right, I'm going to go see, you know, maybe maybe he's ready now. Maybe he's softened up. So he calls me to this building over on Harbor and Adams.

I live right by there now. So every time I drive by, I think that's the place where this, you know, and I pull up. He's standing out in front.

And the minute I get out of my car, he holds out his hand. And you know what he said? Here's the thing. You know, he said to me, he said, give me some money.

And he said, and if you don't. There's a prostitute right upstairs and I'm going to go up there and I'm going to be with her. And I said, well, guess what? Go ahead.

I don't care. He was threatening me. Basically, he was telling me unless I gave him money, he was going to go sin.

And then I was going to be responsible for him sinning because I didn't give him money. And I just told him so long, Charlie, that's it, you know, and I never did see him again. But.

Don't be naive. Because you'll get taken and there's nothing godly. Or noble or right about helping people to live in sin.

We need to help people come out of sin, and so we need to be very wise as Christians when it comes to giving. We need to be wise as a church when it comes to giving to people. We can tell you tons of stories.

Do you know how many people it's amazing how many people there are whose cars break down just far enough from the church that you can't see it, but for sure it's there. And if they can just have a few bucks to get gas, I mean, there are hundreds of people who break down just far enough away from this church that we can't quite see where the car is. But trust them.

Give me the money and I'll go put some gas in it and I'll be on my way. And you know what? They come in every week. It's a scam.

Christians are nice, Christians give Christians are suckers, basically, that's the that's the the word on the street for a lot of them. One last story and then I'm going to get off the subject. When I was pastoring in Vista, we we used to give to a local soup kitchen that was part of our ministry.

And, you know, I always would wonder now, is this really being effective? You know, I mean, is this doing anything for anybody? But we would do it. We gave a few hundred dollars a month, I think maybe four

hundred bucks a month or something to the soup kitchen so they could feed the homeless people and all. But I always wondered, is this the right thing to do? But, you know, you just keep doing it.

And of course, if you even suggest that you're not going to do it, people get all mad at you and everything. And so we were doing it. And one morning.

Some friends and I, we used to go to a little park and play basketball, and this was a Saturday morning and a number of us showed up over at the basketball court and we were there in the basketball court and there were about 15 drunks over there in the park and they were just hooping it up and laughing their heads off and drinking and fighting, you know, just being wild and crazy guys. Eight o'clock in the morning, they're all stone drunk and they're all loud as can be, you know, and I overheard one of them saying, man, have you been to that soup kitchen? It's great. Those stupid Christians, man, they feed us and, you know, we get our bellies full and then we're out, you know, and they were just mocking the Christians who were taking, you know, basically feeding them and, you know, just having a big laugh over it and standing there guzzling the wine as they were doing it.

And boy, I overheard him say that and I said, OK, that's why I haven't felt like we should keep doing this. That's what's happening. That's exactly it.

They're taking advantage. And so we are to be generous, we are to be giving, but we're not to be stupid and we're not to perpetuate people in their sins. And so the early church, they were a giving church, but I'm sure they gave wisely.

And I'm sure when the time came, they made the adjustments that they needed to make. Now, they continuing daily with one accord, notice this, this one accord, this has occurred. A few times already, as we've been reading here just through the first couple of chapters, and the emphasis here is on the fact that there was a real unity among the believers.

They were there with one accord, they had one heart, one mind, they were they had that focus together and they did this daily in the temple and they did it also from house to house. So they were they were worshiping in the temple, the temple was a very large building and there were different sections in the temple and Solomon's porch was one of the favorite places where Jesus would go and minister with his or with the disciples. And so perhaps they continued on just as Jesus had the habit of meeting there in Solomon's porch and some portion of the temple they would meet on a daily basis.

And they probably would meet around the prayer times, which would be nine in the morning and three in the afternoon. But they would all come together. But then they would also go from house to house and they were basically having churches in the home.

That's how the early church originally was set up. A lot of the churches were set up in the home. On occasion, they would be set up in a in a more of a synagogue type of a setting.

But here's where we see the home fellowships, even in the early days of the church there, and they did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart or simplicity of heart or sincerity of heart or purity of heart. This word can be translated all four ways. So there was just a purity among them.

There was something. That was guileless, there was something that was pure and beautiful, there was no infiltration of sin at this point, there was no ulterior motive, nobody was there for the wrong reason. Oh, that just throws a wrench into a fellowship when when people start coming with the wrong reasons and

and that will happen later on as the church goes, you know, Satan originally tried to destroy the church from without, but in failing to do that, he decided at one point to join it and that would be a more effective way to bring it down.

And that's what he's been doing quite effectively for thousands of years now. But at this point, nothing like that had infiltrated the church. That's the implication that there was just an absolute purity.

You know, it seems in the early stages of a work of God, there is that that simplicity and that purity so often. And then as time goes on, like everything else, I guess, with the passing of time, there's the deterioration and the corruption sets in. And that happens in the church, unfortunately, as well.

Initially, there's just a real purity and then people look on and they say, oh, I could get some I could capitalize on that right there, those naive little Christians and they come in and they've got ulterior motives. There was one man years ago who came around here and he saw what was going on and it was a good thing, it was a pure thing, and he thought, oh, I can I can benefit myself through this, really. And he had an ambition to be a great leader.

He had an ambition to lead a great movement, but unfortunately, somebody was already here doing that. And so that was a real frustration to him. But eventually what he did is he undermined the ministry and took a fair number of the churches with him and went out and started his own ministry.

But his motive was to be great, his motive was a very selfish motive, and those are the kinds of things that happen. That's just one example of something that happened right in our own midst. But there was a purity, there was a beauty, there was something pure about what was happening there.

And verse forty seven says, and they were praising God, they were praising God, they were. A joyful church. There was the joy of the Lord right there in their midst and, you know, the joy of the Lord ought to be in our midst.

And if we're lacking joy. You know why we're lacking joy, because we've got our eyes off the Lord and onto our circumstances, circumstances can always bum you out. They can always rob you of your joy.

But, you know, if you keep your eyes on the Lord. It doesn't matter what the circumstances are in Habakkuk, I was reading this this morning and I've just kind of been meditating on this little couple of verses here in Habakkuk, but it's really been speaking to me about this very thing. Listen to what the prophet says regarding the joy of the Lord, he says, although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labor of the olives shall fail and the field shall yield no grain.

The flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no hurt in the stalls. What do I do then? Oh, I get depressed and down and think that God has forsaken me. No, he says, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will joy in the God of my salvation. Basically, he's describing just miserable circumstances. Everything's going wrong.

There's no. Nothing's budding on the trees, the vineyard is barren, the olive crop has failed, and basically he's describing just one disastrous circumstance, domestic kind of circumstance after another. Maybe you've had a series of domestic circumstances, disasters.

And of course, the tendency is toward depression, the tendency is toward anger, the tendency is toward losing your joy and your peace. He said, yet I will rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of my salvation. Literally said, yet I will jump up and spin around for joy in the Lord.

You think, well, how can you do that? Well, he could do it because he just kept looking at the Lord. The Lord doesn't change, even though my circumstances change. He doesn't change at all.

He never changes. His plan is just as sure today as it was yesterday or a thousand years ago. And it'll be just as certain tomorrow as it is today.

And he's working out his plan. And even though circumstances in our lives vary and fluctuate and sometimes they become miserable, yet the Lord is always the same. So he said, the Lord God is my strength and he will make my feet like Heinz feet and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

They were a joyful bunch of people. The joy of the Lord was their strength. They were praising God.

And now notice this. And they had favor with all of the people and they had favor with all the people. Here's an interesting thing to me.

The common people we read. In the Gospels, the common people heard Jesus gladly, the common people love Jesus. It was the rulers that hated him.

They were the ones who were envious of him and threatened by him. And they're the ones, of course, who conspired against him and had him killed. But the common people heard him gladly.

They loved him. And that's the same thing that was happening here with the early Christians. The common people love them.

They had favor with the people, people were looking on at the church at that time, and they were impressed by the church. I believe this when a church is what God wants it to be, that church will have favor in a community. If the church is out of touch with the community, if the church is irrelevant, if the church is obnoxious to the community, I think that most of the time it's because the church is not what God wants it to be in the first place.

But when the church is all the things that we're reading about here, when the church is a learning church and a loving church and a worshiping church and a praying church and a reverent church and a powerful church and a giving church and a unified church and a pure church and a joyful church. Guess what? People like that. People are intrigued by that.

People are interested in that. People want to know about what's happening over there at that church. When when nonbelievers meet individual people who are learning about the Lord, learning about God and and then being molded into his image and their characters being formed like into his character, when they meet people who are loving people and people who are true worshipers and people who are truly people of prayer.

When they meet people who really genuinely fear the Lord and have this sense of power in their life and all the way through, people are attracted to that. And the reason why the church has failed in so many societies and so many periods in history since its beginning is because inevitably it loses track, it gets off the beaten path, it moves away from what the Lord had for it, and then it falls out of favor with the general

population. How can we bring the church back into favor with the local community? What do we have to do? Some people say, well, we've got to become more relevant.

We've got to drop the Bible teaching and show movies and stuff like that. You know, that'll get them in. Let them know that we're really cool.

We're not geeks like they think we are. We're really just like them. That's that's a philosophy of a lot of people today.

No, that's not it. What we need to do if we find that we've fallen out of favor with people is we need to get back to God's model for what the church is supposed to be. And you start being with what we're supposed to be.

And guess what great things happen in Newcastle, England. We have a fellowship there. A young couple went over and started a work there and in Newcastle, there's a park that is visited daily by hundreds and hundreds of young people who are who, you know, basically the the it's a gothic kind of a thing.

Everybody's dressed in black and everybody looks like a skeleton with a little bit of skin. And they're all junkies. And, you know, they're in every imaginable kind of sin and so forth.

And this young couple that's been over there ministering, they've been reaching out to these kids and as they've been reaching out to them, some of these kids have been getting saved and then going back and telling their families, their parent or whoever takes care of them what's going on. And the parents have become enraged. And in one situation a while back, they took a young girl that was saved and they baptized her in their bathtub.

Not good public relations as far as the community thought, and so there was a big outcry against them. The police actually came to their house and and threatened them, said, if you you know, if you go out and talk to people again and you try to do anything like this, we're going to kick you out of the country. Then a while later, a young man got converted and they were just sharing the word with them and teaching him the scriptures.

And somehow or another, the issue of homosexuality came up and they they just took him to the scriptures and showed that the Bible teaches this is wrong. And so he went back and told others. And another outcry and the police came again and once again threatened him, told him they were going to arrest him, told him they were going to kick him out of the country and so forth.

And that was kind of the way it stood for a few weeks. Interesting thing happened. This policeman.

Who was doing the investigation. He had a friend who was a police officer in America, says a British guy. He calls his friend to see if he can find out anything about this Calvary Chapel.

He's sure it's a cult. He's sure that this is something, you know, deadly that's invaded Britain and they got to purge it. So he calls his friend.

He says, hey, I've got this group and this is what's going on. And have you ever heard of Calvary Chapel? You know what the guy tells him? The guy says, Calvary Chapel is one of the best things that ever happened to America. Man, I'll tell you, wherever they go, the crime rate goes down.

Junkies and the dealers and the thieves and the drunks and they all get they go to church and they change and Calvary Chapel is wonderful. The guy says, really? OK, well, good. Thanks for the information.

Went back and just said, you know, never mind. Do what you're doing. You know, that's that's a true story.

But my point is this and that, you know, that's the case. And I love the testimony that this church has in this community, it's a wonderful testimony. You know, if a police officer is killed.

They call Calvary Chapel, they want to come here, they want to have a funeral, we've had thousands of police officers here and, you know, Pastor Chuck and some of us have been able to address it a while back. Remember the the plane that crashed right out here off our coast? Great Glory was called upon to do the memorial service for that. And, you know, these are the kinds of things that that should happen.

A church in a community should be seen as something that's that's good, that's helpful. That is a blessing, and I believe the way for that to happen is for us just to be the people that God wants us to be by following the model that he laid out in his word, not compromising. We don't have to compromise to get people's favor.

People think that a lot of them think, oh, man, don't you know, don't preach, don't pray, don't do don't say anything about Jesus, because then, no, that's wrong. It all depends on how you go about it. It just depends on how you do it.

You have to have wisdom, but you do it by the leading of the spirit, and that brings the church into favor. And that's where they were. They had favor with all the people and the Lord was adding daily to the church those who were being saved.

And that's what happens when a church pleases God. It comes into favor with men and it draws people in. The Lord is adding to the church.

And so as we look at this model of the church. Of course, remember this, we all know this, but let's just think it through real quickly. The church is made up of individual people.

So when we talk about when we look at this model here and we say, is this our church? We have to stop for a minute, say, well, wait a minute. What does that mean? Is this our church? It well, the building can't fit into what said here, the grounds, you know, there's no connection there. What are we talking about? We're talking about the people and we're talking about individual people.

Ultimately, are we a learning church, a loving church, a worshiping church, a praying church, a reverent church, a powerful church, a giving church, a unified church, a pure church, a joyful church, a favored church. A growing church. Well, that all will depend on where we're at individually.

Because each one of those things are things that have application to us as individual people who together collectively make up the church in this community. And so this is the model. And as we look at it.

It's a thing that I think we can use to sort of just gauge our own walk with the Lord. And if we find that we've fallen short in an area, maybe we've stopped learning, maybe we're not in the word like we once were. Maybe we stopped fellowshiping.

Just, you know, pop into church every now and again, sit by yourself, get up and get out as quick as you can, and there's no fellowship going on. Maybe we've stopped worshipping. Maybe we stopped praying.

Maybe we stopped fearing the Lord in some way. Maybe we've allowed sin to come back in our lives. Maybe we've lost the power of God, whatever the case might be.

All we need to do if we realize that there's something amiss is just turn to the Lord and say, Lord, I want to get back to that model that you laid out. I want to be that person that you've called me to be. So your church collectively can be all that you want it to be.

God, help us to do that. Let's pray. Father, we thank you.

That we are your people. And Lord, as we live right here in this place, in this generation. Lord, the one thing that I think is clear is that.

Lord, we need a fresh outpouring of your spirit upon us. And Lord, we need your touch so that we can find favor once again among people and that through that people would be drawn in to your kingdom, to your family. And so, Lord, we ask you to work in our hearts and as we look at this list here before us tonight, as we evaluate ourselves in light of it individually.

Lord, show us areas where we might be falling short and by your grace, strengthen us and bring us Lord back to that place. Lord, that place of our first love, where we're just so delighted to be learning about you and so excited about being together with the people of God, so anxious to worship you and so inclined to prayer.

Walking in the fear of the Lord. Lord, do that among us, we pray. We thank you for your goodness.

And Lord, may we as a church. Be all that you want us to be in these dark days that we could indeed be. That city set up on a hill that can't be hidden and that people would be drawn in as they see the light, we pray this in Jesus name, amen.

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