

Intro: Church means a lot of different things to a lot of different people, but one thing is seen almost across the board. When people think about church, they think about relationships. With God, With Pastor, With Others
In fact, those who study churches tell us two things about relationships in church, regardless of size, location, denomination
 1. *Number one thing that KEEPS people going to any church: Relationships: In fact, New: 6 mths...1-12 relationships*
 2. *What causes people to NOT stay in a church: Relationships. When they go bad...non existent...seek another place*

That is exactly what you see taking place in the book of Acts: Acts 2:24-47: Look at the RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS
 Acts 2:42-47 Page 772
 “*They devoted themselves to the fellowship!*”

Devoted: Lit = *steady persistence; to persist obstinately in; to adhere firmly to*
Fellowship: Lit = *Participation; fellowship; contribution: (some translate fellowship; life that is lived together!)*

So, lets break that down some, OK? Exactly what does the NT mean when it says that they: *Fellowshipped or, Shared life?*
 3 Key Elements of Shared Life In The NT Church

1. A Commitment to Building One Another Up Spiritually.

Heb 10:24 “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*”

- **Consider:** *Continually think about how to do something Look for ways to encourage someone*
- **Spur:** *To poke or to provoke; to sharpen, to stimulate or to incite to do something*

Every relationship in your life is going to do one of two things

1. It is going to pull you up spiritually, or down!
2. It is going to pull you closer to the Lord, or pull you further away!

What the author of Heb is saying...and what the people in Acts were doing was, They understood that...

They were LOOKING for ways. Always thinking about ways, Always finding ways, to help their friends go forward spiritually

How Do We Build Each Other Up

- **Teach:** 18:24-26 Apollos with Priscilla and Aquilla He was on right track...Needed help! (Group/SS Class)
- **Pray:** 13:1-3 Paul and Barnabas Missionary Journey Church in Antioch: Fasted and Prayed (Prayer Chain)
- **One Another:** As many as 32 different ways to “One Another” others in NT: 100 times; 97 verses
 Love; Bear Burdens; Pray for; Encourage; Build up; Comfort; Greet; Serve;

Illus: Just this week I got two calls from someone that said of two different people...Hey, I haven’t seen so and so for a while I simply replied, We will reach out...we will “poke them a bit, provoke them a bit, encourage them a bit...”
 That is what builds relationships...when you have someone that is spiritually looking out for and encouraging you!

2. A Commitment To Genuine Physical Care For One Another.

One of the marks of the early NT church in Acts is that they did not separate the spiritual from the physical!

When you were a part of the NT church, there was an ongoing commitment to taking care of your physical needs.

- Acts 2:45: *Selling their possessions and good they gave to anyone as he had need.*”
- Acts 4:32: *No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything (houses, land)*
- Acts 4:36: *Barnabas sells land and give money to the apostles to distribute to those in need*
- Acts 6:1-4: *Distribution of food to widows*
- Acts 9:36-39 *Dorcas making clothes for the widows*

Illus: At Riva Food Bank Lit 100’s of people a month; Thousands of Pounds of food!
 CityServe All kinds of people we took care of (Ramp, Porch replacement; Yard Work)

Medications, Mortgages, Electric Bills, Water, Car repairs, Tires, Counseling
 Winter Relief 40-50 people for a week
 Tyler Heights Thousands of dollars in donations, clothing, basic needs, gloves, socks, food
 Benevolence Last year almost 30K on our members; Apart from those other things!

Jesus: Matt 25:31-46 Least of These

Relationship: Here is what I know about those things. When we as the people of God DO them...blessed two ways
 1. The people we serve are blessed: We are living out the life and work of Jesus. We are His hands and feet
 2. WE are blessed! As we serve God together...There is a shared relationship that is built up! Hearts are knit together
 3. When we meet a need...a REAL need...it creates a bond that goes beyond anything we ever expect

Illus: Something happens in your heart when you are used by God to meet the needs of others.
 When you make yourself available...your time, money, resources, talents
 And God uses you to truly touch someone spiritually...
 There is something that happens in your heart that says...I was MADE for this! NEVER be satisfied without it

3. A Commitment To Authentic Relational Unity

Most Christians I know have very unrealistic expectations when it comes to how we relate with one another in church
They think that because we are all Christians, all love Jesus, are all seeking to go to same place, all basically believe same thing
That there is never going to be any kind of relational conflict or disunity in Church
And WHEN it happens...and it Does...They get discouraged, disappointed, feel let down and often leave church, others, God,!

The thought that you can put hundreds of imperfect people together...in any organization...and have them DEEPLY committed to something as important as sharing the message that makes the difference between heaven and hell, eternity with God and eternity without God...and NOT have them have conflict...is foolish!

Illus: I have know churches that went into major conflict over what color the carpet should be!

Blue...Like Heaven

Green...Like Earth

Red...Like the Blood of Jesus!

Listen...Godly little grey haired men and woman incensed...Cause someone's Going to HELL over color of carpet!

Acts is FULL of Relational Disunity...To be Expected: All you have to do I READ the book...everywhere!

Key is: Not that they didn't HAVE it...but how they HANDLED IT!

- Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira Money problem in the church
God handled that one (Sometimes He does...Just say...Don't want to be in THAT position!)
- Acts 6:1ff Distribution of food Racial problem (Jews and Gentiles) Addressed it Directly Made plan to fix
- Acts 8:9-24 Simon the Sorcerer: Power/Ego problem Confronted sin directly (Peter called it out!)
- Acts 15:1-29 Got to be a Jew to be a christian? Spiritual Disagreement on how to follow Jesus
Reached a spiritual consensus TOGETHER "Seemed good to the HS and Us!" Dependence on Him
- Acts 15:36-41 Paul/Barnabas disagreeing over John Mark Personal Conflict Parted Ways...NOT Relationship!
2 Tim4:9-11

Applic: Conflict is to be expected: It will never go away as long as we live in this world

Key here is HOW you handle it...NT and Jesus have a lot to tell us about that!

In the book of Acts you see a commitment to Authentic Relationships...Not glossed over; Hidden; Ignored; Handled

Here is what I want you to see:

Every single thing we talked about adds another strand in the bond of relationship we have with one another

And the NT church was COMMITTED to having REAL Relationships!

They Did that 3 ways

- *Spiritual Encouragement*
- *Physical Care*
- *Relational Unity*

CONCL: Golden Gate Bridge Support Cable!

Made up of 61 smaller Cables

And 27,572 individual wires

Each one is laid, twisted in, painstakingly one at a time.

No individual one would ever be able to sustain the weight of the Bridge...let alone the traffic

But, after they are all twisted together, knit together as one...they can support then entire structure...and traffic!

That is how it is with relationships in the Church:

The more I am engaged in...the stronger my Bond to You...and To US...and To God is!

EVERY time I serve in Food Bank add a wire,

Every time I small group, add wire,

Stand out Cold...Trunk...Wire

Some of us...we have 1 little relationship...far from a distance...Once a month...or every other month

Never Add another...

Challenge: Start Laying the Foundation for Genuine Spiritual Relationships

- Be Consistent: Can't do it haphazard
- Be Committed Wed night a couple weeks ago a man came to me apologized for clothes
- Be Available When you see the call go out...Winter Relief...Tyler Heights
- Be Sacrificial It's Not Discipleship if it doesn't cost you anything!
- Be Engaged Don't just watch...Stand up...Get in the game!