

“What Do We Do?” Acts 2 Shane Hatfield 8/22/21

If you want to know more about our church, you're in luck because we've been going through a series of sermons called “The Ethos Way,” where we are learning about our mission and vision and values. First, we started out by asking this question: why do we exist? And we saw that we exist because of God's transforming grace, and we exist to see His grace transform all of life. Then the next few weeks we studied our values. We said, “How Do We Behave?” Our behavior is embodied in our three core values. They are gospel centrality, impassioned worship, and restorative community. Those are the things that we feel like make us unique as a body of Christ. Well now, we're going to answer a very practical question and that is, what do we do? So, if you think about three different circles, we've started with the very center circle of why we exist, and then we moved out to the next circle of how we behave, or how we live out why we exist, and now we're on the third circle, the outer ring of like, what do we do? What are the practical ways in which we do those things?

We have done some practical application on the way because I try to preach good sermons and you can't preach good sermons if you don't have practical application, so some of this is kind of a crossover from some of those other sermons, but repetition is the mother of learning right, so hopefully if we say it enough it will get into all of our bones. If you want to go back and listen to some of those sermons you can find them on iTunes. But hopefully, what we begin to do is create a beautiful vision for who God is and what He has done, and what He wants us to do as His people. This week hopefully the answer will be very practical. You can go home with some very practical ways for how you can live this out.

The passage we're going to look at is Acts 2:40-47. Hear the word of the Lord.

“⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

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.”

All men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of God stands forever. Let's listen to it.

I want to start out by reading to you the mission statement of one of the greatest companies of the history of the world. I'm going to take out the name of the company and I'm going to take out what they do, and I want you to see if you can figure out who it is. Listen to this mission statement from this great company. “_____ Incorporated provides its customers with quality _____ products and the expertise required for making informed buying decisions. We provide our products and services with a dedication to the highest degrees of integrity and quality of customer satisfaction, developing long term professional relationships with employees

that deliver pride, creating a stable work environment and a company spirit.” Now what company do you think that is? Is it Apple? Or Macintosh? Or Standard Oil? Or the East India Trading Company? No. It is the company of Dunder Mifflin Incorporated from the fictitious mockumentary they call “The Office.” Did anybody actually know that that was their mission statement? No. Joshua I saw you nodding your head back there I thought maybe you had it. No, you didn’t have it. That is the mission statement of Dunder Mifflin from “The Office.” It is supposed to be a joke. There are so many clichés in that mission statement that it’s just over the top, funny, cliché, joke mission statement. If you’ve seen “The Office,” you know that that mission statement really doesn’t have anything to do with what they do on a day in and day out basis. But what makes “The Office” special is that they do one very simple thing every day. They sell paper. But in the midst of all these people coming together to do this very ordinary mundane task of selling paper, all of these extraordinary things happen. Career dreams are achieved. People fall in love. Babies are born. Customers are served. Michael Scott becomes a legend. Dwight Schrute becomes the boss. Sorry, I spoiled it for everybody. I’m good at that. But you have all these beautiful things that happen over the course of thirteen seasons or whatever, but it all comes in the context of one simple thing and that is selling paper.

Well, if you think about it, there are a lot of things in this world where you do very simple things, very ordinary things, and they can make extraordinary things happen. If you think about music, you start out in music by learning the scales and learning very basic notes, and over time as you play the scales over and over and over again, you begin to make beautiful music like Charlie and the band and Daniel is a musician, I can’t do anything musically. But I do sports, and a lot of you probably did sports, and you know that in sports, every sport has their fundamentals. They have their basics. And every day you go to practice, you do those basics over and over and over again, and as you do them, they become second nature and then you go out there and these amazing things happen in the game because you did all these ordinary things in practice. Or in art! I’m not an artist either but imagine in art there are very simple brushstrokes that you make and very ordinary things that you do with the colors, and you do them over and over again and you paint these beautiful paintings. If you want to be very much humbled, have a Bob Ross night, and watch Bob Ross paint those beautiful happy trees and try to do them along with him! You will find out that it looks very simple, but it is not simple. It’s fun, but it is challenging. The point is in all these areas you do all these ordinary and then out of this ordinary comes these extraordinary beautiful things. It happens over and over again in life.

Well in the church, one of the questions that the church has sort of continually asked throughout church history is “What do we do?” What does the church do? If you go all the way back to the Reformation, that was one of the questions that they really struggled with as they tried to reform the church. The Reformers looked at the worship service and they said, ‘Look at all of these things during the worship service. What is essential to being a church? What does a true church do during the worship service?’ And they had different opinions about which elements they should add and which elements they should take out to have true worship.

Well, you fast forward a long way and you get to the ‘70s and ‘80s and people were leaving the church and they felt like they were not being evangelistic, so they decided to bring in all of these different elements to the worship service to make it more seeker sensitive. When they did that, then Christians weren’t happy, so they added more and more programs outside the worship service to make Christians happy and to help them grow and they put millions of dollars into all of these programs. One of the leaders in this sort of seeker sensitive movement, just a few years ago, a decade ago, they went back and did some research and they wanted to find out what

was the most fruitful ministry that they had. Where were their people growing and what were the programs that were helping people grow? After years of studying, after studying their church and other churches, and thousands of responses, they found that their programs weren't working. They were attracting a few new people, but once those people got in and they got involved in their programs, they weren't growing. They weren't growing in their faith. And so, they had to wrestle with, "What does the church do?" How does the church help people grow?

And I would imagine that coming out of COVID, the church is going to wrestle with the same thing. What does it look like to grow spiritually, to grow the church, to do ministry after COVID? I think when we look at Acts 2 we see a very simple, ordinary, but powerful template. God shows us right here. Here are the ordinary things that the church does. As the church does these ordinary things, I, God, am going to do extraordinary things through you. So, we're going to look at the four things that they devoted themselves to here in Acts 2. It says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Now, to devote yourself means to give yourself to it completely and consistently, to give yourselves over to these habits, these patterns of life, these rhythms, these routines. God uses these habits to do His extraordinary work of transforming people and transforming this world through His grace. So, we're going to look at those four habits. Kids, what I'd like you to do is write down these four things and then I want you to circle one of them and afterwards I want you to ask your parents more questions about it. I want you to really dig in and try to pick your parents' brains and find out what they know about one of these four things, okay?

So, the first thing is "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings." Now, the apostles were a very specific group of people. These were the people that were with Jesus from the beginning, okay? He called them. They walked around with Him. They saw His miracles. They heard His teaching. They saw His death on the cross and then after He rose from the grave, they witnessed the resurrected Jesus. These weren't just anybody. This was a very small focused special group of Christians. They have a unique place in church history. Now, what was their teaching? Well, they taught what Jesus said and did during His ministry. And then, if you read their sermons like Peter's here in Acts 2, right before this passage, you'll see that what they did was they saw the Old Testament and they saw how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and they brought those two things beautifully together, this Old Testament foreshadowing and the gospel. They brought all of that in and said, 'This is how Jesus fulfilled all that stuff. This is what He did in His life and in His ministry and now this is how we should live.' We have that recorded. We have their teaching in the New Testament! The New Testament is the inspired teaching. It is the inspired word of God that was given through Jesus and through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and they recorded this teaching. The teaching was circulated. It was read throughout the churches.

By the end of the first century, all of the books of the Bible that we have in the New Testament had all been written and by then, they had already separated out which books were inspired and were authoritative, and which books were good simply for teaching. And so they said, these are the inspired books that we have in the canon here, and there were other teachings like the Shepherd of Hermas that they said, 'That's a good teaching but it's not inspired.' That was by the end of the first century. By the end of the second and third century, we see in church history already lists of the books of the Bible that they were already circulating and that they had recognized as authoritative. So, the early church grew as they devoted themselves to this teaching, as they gave themselves wholly and completely to the teachings of the apostles.

So, what does it look like for us to be devoted to their teachings? What does it look like for us to be devoted to the Scripture? Well, every week we gather together, we call this corporate worship or gathered worship, we gather together because of God's word, to study God's word, to sing about God's word, to meditate on God's word. Scripture is a central focus of our time together. As we teach, we teach through books of the Bible. We call it expository preaching. We teach through books of the Bible, or we teach through major sections of the Bible or major themes of the Bible. You know, we just came out of a season where we studied basically the second half of the gospel of John, and then we did this little topical series, and then we're actually going to start a study of Covenant Theology in the fall where we're going to study the different covenants throughout the Old Testament, and it's going to give us a framework for how God has worked throughout redemptive history to bring His gospel. So, we devote ourselves to Scripture here corporately. We hear this gospel week in and week out as we study the word.

Now, what I think we can improve on and what we want to improve on in the future, I think, at least since I've been here, I've only been here for eight months now, but what I hope is that we develop a culture where we're also encouraging individuals to read the Scripture on their own, to study it and apply it to their own lives, and we're encouraging our Ethos Groups to read and study Scripture and we're encouraging people to get together in ones and twos and devote themselves to the Scriptures.

One of the interesting things that came out of that study that I was telling you about earlier is called "The Reveal Study." One of the interesting things that came out of "The Reveal Study" around 2008 was they said that the one thing that separated people who were growing and thriving and growing and thriving churches from other churches, it wasn't all the programs, it was Scripture. The churches where people identified that they were growing and thriving, not just as new Christians, but as older Christians, were the ones that were devoted to Scripture and teaching their people how to meditate on it and reflect on it, in the service and outside the service. So, that's what we want to do as a congregation. We want to see how we can see all of life through the lens of the Scripture.

Whenever our youngest daughter, Frances, was little, we noticed that she had a hard time seeing, she was having vision problems. So, we took her to the doctor to get her eyes checked out and the doctor ran some tests and said, "You're right, she's far-sighted. So, she can see really well far away, but she can't see anything up close." So, he put some glasses on her in the office, and Shari said whenever Frances put those glasses on, she looked down at her feet and she began walking around just staring at her feet, and it dawned on Shari that that was the first time she had ever seen her feet, because she was so far-sighted. Talk about a terrible parenting moment! She was probably four years old, three or four years old, or something like that. But those glasses helped her see life the way it really was. She really had feet she just couldn't see them before! The Scriptures are our glasses that the Lord gives us so we can see life how it really is. So, that's why we come in here each week and we devoted ourselves to that. It helps us see life and flourish in ways that we could never have imagined. That's the first thing, we devote ourselves to the apostles' teachings, we devote ourselves to Scripture.

The second thing is they devoted themselves to the fellowship. The Greek word here for fellowship is *koinonia*. It means an intimate, mutual relationship where you're involved with each other. This early church had two things in common. They shared the Spirit. They shared the common life of the Spirit. All believers in Jesus Christ are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are united to God. Through the Spirit, they are united with each other. One of the beautiful things about the fellowship of the Christian church is the diversity within the church. Every believer, no

matter what their race, their class, their culture, they are all brought into the family of God. Friendships are always about something, and Christian friendships transcend everything because we're connected through the Spirit. Our friendship is based on God.

So, they had that in common, but they also had this mutual sharing of resources. This word, *koinonia*, is used also by Paul for taking up a collection, an offering. The same root word is used for generosity. You see in this passage that these people were radically generous with each other. In the Old Testament, most of you probably know that God commanded the tithe, and the tithe was given to the church, the tithe was a tenth, or ten percent, it was given to the church to use to support the Levites, which were the priests, and to take care of the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the alien among God's people. Well, as you can tell, they didn't have this command, but because of the filling of the Holy Spirit, they are led to radical generosity, to give to each other! They are helping everyone in need. It says that they shared the resources and gave as there was need, so there was no poor among them. Now everybody I listened to on this passage made this joke, so I feel like I've got to make this joke, but this doesn't support Christian communism. I didn't think that when I read it, but I felt like I should say it, if Tim Keller says it, then I should probably say it. There was no Christian communism here, there was no command that everybody has to sell everything and give it all to some central government so they can disperse it. We know that they still had other resources because it says later in the passage that they had homes. What was happening is people were led to give by the Holy Spirit and they were dispersing that out as everyone had need. They were caring for each other.

Now, what does that look like for us? When we gather corporately each week, we gather as a body. It is a cross cultural, multi-generational body of believers, a family that God has brought together. The Spirit is drawing us together from all different walks of life and as a part of that worship, like I said earlier, we give tithes and offerings. The tithes and offerings go toward paying for our ministries, paying our staff, supporting our missionaries. It all goes right back into the ministry. So, as you sacrifice your finances, your resources, you are giving to the life of the body. Now, what we also do is we take up benevolence offerings. Benevolence offerings are taken up, they are set aside, and they are used specifically for people in need. When we have people in the congregation with car troubles, bill problems, or they have a loss in their family or something like that, we use that offering to help them. That's a way that we are committed to this fellowship.

From the stories I've heard about our congregation throughout the years, God has really worked to bring together a beautiful congregation of different people. One member was telling me that he loved worshipping at Ethos because you would have extremely wealthy people and extremely poor people worshipping together side by side loving each other in Christ. That's what the church is. It is a multi-generational, cross-cultural, Spirit-filled family that shares as they have need. So, they devoted themselves to the fellowship, and we're devoted to our fellowship as well.

And then lastly, sort of the third and fourth things they did were they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and of prayers. So, this adjective here where it says *the* breaking of bread and *the* prayers, means they were engaged in a very specific activity. It means they were engaged in the Lord's Supper and they had some very specific prayers that they were praying for each other. Maybe they were the Psalms, or maybe it was the Lord's Prayer, or maybe they were going to very specific prayer meetings. But together they were engaged in these activities of communion and prayer.

These took place in formal settings and informal settings, so one of the great questions throughout church history is, which is more important, the institutional gathered worship that we're doing together right now, or the informal day to day worship that takes place in homes, and the day-to-day fellowship and communion that takes place in homes? And the answer is both! They're both important. You see them both here in this passage. They were going to the temple together to worship God and to go to prayer meetings together. Now, they probably didn't participate in the sacrifices at this time, I think they probably knew at that point that the sacrifices were fulfilled in Jesus, but they were still participating in their local temple in some way, whether that was attending prayer meetings, or maybe even preaching the gospel to the Jews so that they would come to Christ. But they were in this formal setting together, but they were also in informal settings. They were gathering together in each other's homes. They were sharing meals together. They were breaking bread. They were praying for each other.

One of the fun sort of story lines you can follow throughout the Bible is the storyline of meals. You'll notice that there are these pivotal meals all the way through the Bible. If you think about it, in the garden God offered Adam a meal. He said he could have the fruit of any tree in the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and then what did Satan tempt Adam and Eve with? A meal. And then whenever God rescued His people and He brought them out into the wilderness, what did He give them to celebrate His salvation? He gave them meals. When they were in the wilderness. He gave them a meal through the manna. Right? So, there are all these meals throughout Scripture. And then Jesus, when He gets together with His disciples before He dies, what does He do? He gives them a meal, the Passover meal, and He says, 'I am the Passover lamb.' He calls us to gather together as bodies of believers, and what does He give us to do? He gives us a meal that we get to take. This ordinary meal week in and week out, and it's through this meal that God does extraordinary things in our fellowship and He draws us together. We take this meal together and we pray together.

We pray these prayers together. We have several prayers in the service. We have the pastoral prayer by the elders, usually I come up and pray a prayer of need, I would say it's a need, we need God to speak to us through His word, after the sermon we pray a prayer of supplication to help us apply it, and then we receive God's blessing over us as we leave. There are all of these prayers that we pray together. These habits shape us and form us. I got ahead of myself a little bit. One of the things that maybe you've noticed is we practice communion regularly because we believe that this is a way that the Holy Spirit works, that God is with us during this time. Informally we gather in Ethos Groups, right? We have Ethos Groups that are co-ed that are families that are multi-generational where the houses are busting at the seams, and we have Ethos Groups that are men's and women's and those are times when we get together and we gather together for fellowship, for communion, for this intimate fellowship, for praying, for studying Scripture. What we want is we want Ethos to be a place where people are connecting with God, they're connecting with each other, and they have the care they need, and they are loved. We want everybody in here to be known and loved. When you have a problem, we want to be able to help you.

Whenever I was a kid, sometimes I would get to stay up late, and I would get to watch tv late. I know, kids, that's strange, but I would get to watch TV, we didn't get to watch it on screens we had actual TVs with like dials you had to turn, and sometimes one of the shows that I would get to watch late was Cheers, and Cheers had a theme song that would always come up at the beginning and I remember that theme song. How did the Cheers theme song go? "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, where they're always glad you came. You

want to be where people can see your troubles are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name.” We want Ethos to be a place where everybody knows your name and where somebody knows your troubles and when you need somebody to step in and help you, somebody is there. That sort of fellowship comes through these ordinary means of taking communion together, of breaking bread in each other’s homes, and of praying for each other.

So, those are the four things that the early church did. That’s what they did. That’s what churches do and through that God did amazing things, extraordinary things. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, and what did God do? They were filled with joy and they were filled with generosity. They were filled with awe and praise. They were transformed as a community. They were respected by outsiders. Their devotion created a magnetism that brought thousands of people to Christ. Celsus was a second century philosopher and an opponent of Christians. He fought against Christianity, but he attributed their growth to their charity for each other, that means their love. He said, “See how they love one another. As they loved one another in these ordinary ways, they exploded, and out they multiplied, and in about three hundred years the whole Greco-Roman culture was transformed.” That’s what we want to see in our lives. That’s what we want to see in our congregation. That’s what we want to see in this world. We want to see this kind of church created.

One pastor said it like this, I wish I would have come up with this, it was too good, I’ve got to say somebody else came up with it, but I want to share it with you. He said, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching like Presbyterians. They displayed dynamic worship like Pentecostals. They served the poor like mainline denominations. They were evangelistic like Baptists. And they were intimate like house churches.” They were the church, right? The denominations that we see are a display of the beauty of the body of Christ. We don’t want to just be one of those things as the body of Christ, we want to be all those things, right? Because that’s what the church does! That’s who the church is. For that to happen, we have to open ourselves up to God, the way He opened Himself up to us, and we have to receive His grace week in and week out.

If you see these habits just as a way to save yourself, they will crush you. Mark Twain famously said that he had this reoccurring nightmare of a gigantic Bible sitting on his chest crushing him and suffocating him. If we come in here week after week and we try to engage in these habits without the gospel, then it will crush us. But, if we come to these habits as a means of grace, and we say, “This is where God meets with us. This is where God showers His grace and kindness on us in Jesus Christ,” then these habits will become the pathway to life, and through them we’ll see Jesus! We’ll see Jesus. If the apostles’ teachings begin to make you weary, if they weigh on you, if they begin to drain you, then look to the one who gave Himself for you so that you could be a part of His family, so that He could draw this body together. The prayers and the communion, without grace, they just become this rote discipline that we do. But with grace they become an oasis in the desert. If grace is present, if we’re experiencing grace in these things, then this sanctuary becomes a place where we can rest, a place where we are renewed and a place where we are transformed. It’s a place where we want to be together and experience God together.

Let me close with this. I know that one of the things that’s been happening, COVID has made it challenging for people to come to worship. I was talking with a member this week and the member was saying that she has so many things going on in her life and she’s so exhausted by just the way that life is, she feels that if she comes, she can’t give anything. She can’t do

anything. Life in general takes so much out of her that she's got nothing to give when she comes. And I said, 'Well then, just come and let us give to you.' In relationships, there is always give and take. You guys know this. There are times whenever one person is giving in 80% of the effort and one person is giving in 20% and then something happens in life and then it flip-flops and the other person is putting in 80% and the other person is putting in 20%. That's just how life is. If you come in here and all you have is 1%, then come and be with us in your 1%. Our hope is that through the gospel, maybe you'll leave with 2% or 10%. Don't feel like what we do is something that is going to crush you. We want what we do to fill you with life, so just come. Just come. Just come and be here no matter where you're at, no matter what's going on, no matter how you feel, just come and be with us. Let's pray that God would make us that kind of community.