

Better Together

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[0 : 00] I want you to turn, if you would please, to Acts chapter 2 and verse 42 through verse 47.

! I'm going to read a passage today that probably is one of my favorite of all the New Testament Church in its purest form. What's happening here is that right after Pentecost, the church got together like no other time. You remember Pentecost and it was celebrated. It's coming up this June the 2nd, I believe, is Pentecost this year. It's celebrated and there was a great gathering in Jerusalem and that's when the Holy Spirit did something incredible and then he fell upon the people that were gathered in the upper room as they were together. And something great happened. They were able to speak in languages that they did not go to school for. They were actually able to go and speak in unknown languages. They had no other way of knowing how to do that and yet there were so many people that were so many people that were so many people that were so many people that were in the upper room. And suddenly you got 3,000 people that responded to an invitation. You can imagine there was some administrative problems and that's not what I'm going to talk about.

But you'll wait till Acts chapter 6 and then you can figure out what was going on. It was because people are just people. And people are still people today.

And in our church today, I want us to get to the point where we understand what it really means to be together. What it really means to be a church.

What it really means to be a church. There's a lot of interpretations of the churches these days and what a church is really supposed to be and how it's supposed to be and how it's supposed to operate and all of those different things.

[2 : 17] And so we see church. Some people see a church as a little group of people out on a country road in a little country chapel. Other people see the other extreme where they see a church of a 15 to 20,000 people that are maybe gathered in several different locations.

And there's a pastor who preaches and he's up on a screen in these different locations. And we have one church in our world today that is about, in our country today, that is about 30,000 people that are meeting on a Sunday, but they're at different locations.

It's amazing. And they say that's church. But for the most part, churches in Oklahoma are about 100 or less. As a matter of fact, our church is a large church in comparison to the rest of the church in Oklahoma.

So we're about 150. So we're not a normative church. Most of the time, churches are about 175 or so, and they gather together in little towns and little places as they're gathered together even today. But what is the church really supposed to be? You can say, well, that's the interpretation of a local body, or you can say, well, it's this or that, or it's a style of music, or it's a certain person that I like to listen to, or it's this or that that's going on, or it's a certain theology or all those things.

[3 : 32] I want us to get to the crux of what the church is supposed to be in its purest form. And I believe it's given to us here in these verses of Scripture, verses 40 through 47.

As is our habit here, or our tradition, let us stand as we read the Word of God. I'll be reading today from the New International Bible. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were being done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone who had a need.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Thank you. You may be seated. My many travels around different states.

[4 : 40] I was recently, well, five years ago, as soon as five years ago, I was, I was, we lived in South Carolina and I was on the state staff there. One day I went to a church way out in the middle of nowhere in the little town.

And I ran into the church, I ran into the town and got around a corner and I found that there a church that literally had an eight-foot fence around the parking lot.

And I thought to myself, how welcoming this group of believers are. As I got closer, it was not the church I was going to, thank you, but it was the church, the church in the town.

As I got closer, I realized there was not only an eight-foot fence, there was barbed wire on top of that eight-foot fence. And there were signs that were not welcoming at all. It was like, if you don't, if you don't go here, go away.

That was basically what they were saying. And the problem was, is that they had a high crime rate in the, in the town. And as a result, they put that fence up.

[5 : 45] But what they were really saying was, we don't care about you. We don't care about anything. This is our church. Now, unfortunately, that's not what the Lord intended.

It's not what we should, we should see as we see the church. Many people see the church as a bunker to run into. Many people see the church as some place we've got to guard ourselves from the rest of the world.

And instead of putting up a fence, we actually put up a wall around the church. And walls around our hearts. It's very evident when people from the outside and not part of the church come to the building, that it is a closed group.

It's a group of people who, who like each other and care for each other, but have little care at all for the rest of the community. Today, I want to share with you some things that have to do with being together.

And as we do, I want to, I want to take these scriptures and I want to lift them out and, and give you some things, hopefully, that you'll go away from here, knowing that God would have you be a different person with a different attitude and a different spirit because of what the word of God literally says.

[7 : 04] You see, when, when God wants to gather, Satan wants to scatter. When God starts to bring people really together and, and, and there's a, there's a newness in their heart and, and they begin to take off all the masks and they become real with one another.

When that begins to happen, sure as the world, Satan will throw something in the middle of that. It's, it's what I call a Satan grenade. He puts that in the middle of that and there's so much damage that the church is no longer together and they scatter as a result.

Today, I want you to see first of all with me in the verses there, verse 44. You'll find there what they, what, what I really want to say about they were together.

All the believers were together and everything in common. In, in chapter two, verse one, it says, when the day of Pentecost came, they were together in one place.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is, it is important that you understand that these people were not just meeting. They were not just having, now, now, now hear, hear what I'm saying.

[8 : 19] We have so many meetings. Amen. Is there, is there anybody here that would, would disagree with me? We have a lot of meetings. I was going to bring my, my bulletin up here. You've got your bulletin. Isn't there something here in our church about every day?

I mean, we got, we get together and we have meetings and we have parties and we have meals and we have all these things. And I, I think those things are important. That's not what I'm talking about, Heber.

The literal translation here is these people were together, together. Now, I know some of you are English teachers or have been, have an English major or whatever, and that's probably not great grammar, but stay with me, okay?

They were together, together. They had decided as one group and one people that they were going to gather in that upper room, that after Pentecost, even all 3,000 of them, although they couldn't be all in the same place, they were still going to be together, together.

The Bible literally says every day, they're a good Baptist. They like to go to meetings. Will Rogers, I think, said one time, politicians build roads and Baptists wear them out going to meetings.

[9 : 38] That sounds like something Will Rogers would say. We go to so many meetings these days. There's so many things that we do. Now, don't hear me saying I'm against that. I'm not against that.

What I'm for is that when these meetings, and especially on Sunday mornings, when these meetings happen and we're together, that we're not just showing up, that we're literally together, together.

How does that happen? It happens by an opinion that is shared, then decisions are made, and they are made together. Now, I've been a Baptist since I was minus nine months, okay?

So I know how this happens. When I was a little kid, I used to love to go to business meetings. You know why? It was a fight. You know, we Baptists like to show up to a fight.

You know, they've had to change the SVC venue from Charlotte to New Orleans next year because people are showing up. You know why they're showing up? There's a fight going on, okay? That's what's going on.

[10 : 37] So I used to love that when I was a little kid, and I'd watch Brother So-and-So argue with Brother So-and-So, and it was just so much fun. And they were arguing about things I didn't realize, but, you know, they'd get red in the face and holler at each other.

You say, really? In your church? Yes, in my church. It was crazy. Now, we don't do that a whole lot anymore, I guess. Oh, yeah, we do. Never mind. But I used to just love that.

Instead of having just a church meeting and showing up, how about let's come to the place in our lives where we really invest ourselves in one another?

When was the last time you just invested in a fellow believer? You know, one of the things we've lost in our churches these days is discipleship.

Folks, there's no greater discipleship than to be one-on-one with each other. In those business meetings, we would take a vote. You know, we were big on votes back then.

[11 : 35] We didn't have elders and all that other. We just, you know, something. Let's just, Brother So-and-So, I know Brother So-and-So very well. He used to just take stuff off the wall. You know, I'll make a motion that we sell the bus just to see what would happen.

You know, it was like, you can't sell that bus. My mother gave you the money for that bus, and that was in 1962, and I've got to have it. You know, it's just crazy. It was just nuts.

Instead, you've got to have an opinion. Then the decision is made together, and we've invested in the lives of one another so much that we're together together.

You've probably heard me say, you put two Baptists in a room, you get three opinions. Everybody has an opinion. But when the decision is made in together, then that's when you really need to go forward.

Somebody has asked me one time, how do you know all this stuff? How do you know about all this church conflict? Well, the last 20 years, I've dealt with people who are in church conflict.

[12 : 50] And by the way, every church has conflict. Well, not every church. The only churches that don't have conflict are dead. Okay, if you go to a church and there's no conflict, it's just a dead church because it is love, love, love each other.

It's just so wonderful. But most churches who are alive, and by the way, this church is one of those alive churches. Praise God for that. There's going to be conflict. There's going to be things that happen.

My first church out of seminary was the Crestview Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. I was the 13th pastor of that church. The only problem with it was that church was only 22 years old.

The average pastorate was one year and one month. They had had, yeah, 12 pastors since 22 years, and I was the 13th.

The longest tenure there was 17 months. And I was right out of seminary, and I thought, oh, sure, this is where God is calling me. All my friends said, what in the world are you thinking of?

[14 : 00] What seems to be your problem? What's the matter with you? And I didn't know. I just felt like God wanted me to preach and be a pastor somewhere, and so I took it. It was a church out on the corner of a little place out on the edge of Oklahoma City.

Little clapboard building so bad that they had a door over here on the side and around it. You could see all the sunlight that was coming through.

One day it was very, very windy, as it is here in Oklahoma, and it literally blew the notes off the pulpit that I was trying to preach that day. It was not a great place. I heard a story that one of the

ladies there told me about just a few pastors before me, and so it wasn't very long before, you know, because they weren't there very long.

And she told the story of the pastor who got so frustrated in the business meeting that he decided one day that he would start running the business meeting like a judge runs a courtroom.

And so he went to search for a gavel. He couldn't really afford one, and so he decided that he would just find something to help him out. And so what he did was he went to one of the back buildings. There were several outbuildings there.

[15:10] He went to one of the back buildings, and he found a hammer. And so when business meeting came, he knew what was going to happen. Brother so-and-so was going to fight with Brother such-and-such, and here's the interesting part about it.

There was a center aisle, two places. Brother so-and-so said over here and Brother such-and-such said over here. And sure enough, it didn't matter what was coming up. It didn't matter what the subject was. If Brother so-and-so said it, Brother such-and-such didn't like it.

And if Brother such-and-such said it, Brother so-and-so didn't like it. And so they would just fight. It would just be a big, huge, almost a knock-down, drag-out fight. It would just argue, you're just an idiot.

You know, all that kind of stuff was going on. It was just hollering and all that stuff. And the pastor was just so frustrated. But he had this hammer. Now, this is a true story. It's not a preacher story, okay?

This is a true story. The reason I know it's a true story is because when I got there, the hammer marks were still on the pulpit, okay? And so what happened was, you know what happened.

[16:08] Brother so-and-so got out of order, and the others, they started arguing. And in the middle of the argument, the pastor took the hammer and went, Wop-wop-wop-wop-wop. You're out of order. Well, the first couple of times, it just shocked them.

You know, what? And so they kind of calmed down. And the third time, however, it happened. And he went, Wop-wop-wop-wop-wop. Brother such-and-such came over from this side of the building and began to come toward the pastor.

And he did. And he took that hammer out of his hand. And he began to chase him around the building. I'm going to get you. I'm going to get you. And he chased him around the little building and kept on going around. And went out the side door. And they went out in the parking lot.

It was a gravel parking lot. And they were just shuffling around, went around the parsonage. The parsonage was just a little building right there next. They were going around and around and around. I'm going to get you, preacher. You're not going to ever do that to me again. And it all came to an end.

When the lady who was telling me the story had a heart attack. And they had to call the ambulance to come and get her. Now, you may think, well, that's a weird story.

[17:09] Why would you ever go to that church? And what happened? Well, there's another parts of it. I can tell you. It turned out pretty good. But I went to that corner Friday.

I was in town in Oklahoma City. The buildings are no longer there. Well, while we were there, Cindy and I were there. And we led them to move the building.

And we moved away. And we sold it to another church. And the buildings now are gone. It was kind of sad. Not really, but kind of. Because the church was infested with rats.

I would sit in my office. It was very, very entertaining. But anyway. They tore it down. I guess the rats all scattered.

And they tore it down. Folks, on that corner right now. Is a Buddhist monastery. In Oklahoma City.

[18:10] I'm not talking about San Francisco. I'm talking about Oklahoma City. There's a Buddhist monastery. The story goes that when they installed in the little building.

Before they built another building. The Buddhist. They had to take out a piece of the roof. And get a great big crane. And lower the golden Buddha down through the ceiling.

And the Buddhist set. Where I preached the gospel for about a year and a half. Serious business. If we're not going to be together together.

Then why are we having church? If we just show up for meetings. Then what's the use? My challenge to you today.

Is to say to your own life. How am I investing in somebody else today? How am I investing in the person that sits on the other side of the sanctuary.

[19 : 22] That I never see or talk to. How am I investing my life. So that we become as these people were. Together. Together.

Folks I want you to hear this today. Get in there. Invest yourself. Invest yourself in each other. Don't just invest yourself in your job. Or in your other people. Get it out in the open. And get in there. Get in the game.

Let me just chase the little rabbit here. Okay. I'm not going to keep you all that. Well yeah. I might keep you a long time. Anyway. We're all thinking.

Oh they're going to overturn Roe versus Wade. Oh we're going to just. Oh abortion is going to come. Did you see the protests. Of the people. That don't want that to happen.

[20 : 21] Can I tell you something church? Listen. They may overturn that. But if the church doesn't step up. Nothing's going to change.

Now's the time. If it's going to. We're talking about something historic. That's getting ready to happen. This is something we prayed for. For years and years and years. Now you may not agree with me. And that's fine.

But most of us. I think here probably agree. That we want the abolition. Of abortion. We don't want it in our world anymore. But if it's going to happen.

Then we as the church. Had better get it together. And invest in the lives. Of some foster children. Invest in. Because there's going to be. A lot more children born. If that happens.

You understand that? The millions who've been killed. Since 1973. They're going to show up. In our world again. And we as the church. Had better get it together.

[21 : 18] And quit. These little. Bop, bop, bop. Little things that don't matter. And actually. Invest ourselves. In one another. So they were together.

Together. And they were. They were sharing everything. With each other. They had taken off their mask. And I'm not talking about the COVID mask. I'm talking about the mask. And they became. Real. With one another.

And it was so wonderful. And so pure. Okay. Quickly. Let me go to the next one. They were together. In one fellowship. Look at verse. 46. And 47. Every day.

They continued to meet together. In the temple courts. They broke bread. In their homes. And ate together. With glad and sincere hearts. Praising God. And enjoying the favor. Of all the people. So they were together.

In one. Fellowship. You know what I. When I hear the word. Fellowship. You know what I think of. Fried. Chicken. Okay. That's. Yeah.

[22 : 16] You know. I used to love it as a kid. When I was growing up in church. And they said. We're having a fellowship tonight. Yes. We're having fried chicken. You know. And sure enough. We did. It was. It was. That's what I think about. That's not what I'm talking about here.

Okay. Well it may be. Yeah it is. Because I'm going to talk about that in a minute. But it is more than that. It is the word. Koinonia. In the Greek. The Koinonia word. Means they had koinonia.

In their homes. They were sitting with one another. That is where you are most vulnerable. Now you can be fake. And you can be not real.

But they had their food together with gladness. They actually sat at the table. With one another. They. They put their. Their cells. Now they didn't. They didn't have the chairs like we. They reclined at the table.

Some of us still do that. But anyway. You know. But these people had. Together. And they were. They were eating together. And it was. It was. It was so good.

[23 : 15] That they were having. This fellowship. They were open. For others to see. As I said. The mask came off. They were vulnerable. See there's a difference. Between being. Transparent. And being vulnerable.

Transparency says. You can look. But you can't touch. Vulnerability says. I can't do it without you. Here I am.

I'm most vulnerable. And I can't live this Christian life without you. That's exactly where they were. They were not fake. They were sincere.

And the words. The words here are so important. Because all these masks came off. And as a result. They were real. You know.

Satan wants you to be fake. He wants you to go around. With this. With this fakeness about you. And not be real with one another. Have you ever.

[24 : 10] Has anybody ever come to the place. Where you know somebody so well. That when you ask them how they're doing. They actually tell you. Now some of you don't want to hear that. And I understand.

And that can be carried away. You know. I used to have a friend. I'd say. How you doing? Well. Well. And then he'd go on forever. You know. Just tell me.

About all these aches and pains. You know. Most of us don't want to hear that. But. But what we really need to say is. How are you? Not fine. Okay. When in our heart. And in our lives.

We're absolutely. Desperate. Or. We're had a celebration. You know. Most of us don't realize. Don't remember how to celebrate. We think.

Oh. It's just terrible. Life is the crock. Blah blah blah. No. We need to be able to celebrate too. And so. Satan wants you to be fake. He wants you to put on this. This great. These great airs.

[25 : 04] When what we really need to do. Is to be real. And so. They were together. In this one fellowship. And joining the koinonia. Understanding who they were.

And not being. Fake. The Bible says here. That they had gladness. They were glad. They. They were glad.

Because they were together. Taking. Their food. They ate together. With glad. Hearts. They were glad. To be together. You know what happens. A lot of times.

When we get together. With food. It ain't fried chicken. So we don't show up. We're having. Well. What's going on. At the. The thing that I.

Well. They're having a potluck. Oh. I don't do potlucks. How come. I don't want to. I don't want to eat anything. Somebody else has prepared. And. Sometimes. It's church spaghetti.

[25 : 58] And I don't like church spaghetti. You know church spaghetti is. It's all in one big pot. It's just. Oh. I don't want to do that. And. And I sure don't want to be someplace. Where somebody's prepared something.

That I don't know where they. Have you ever been to a restaurant? Well. Yeah. I've been to a restaurant. Hello. Walk back to the kitchen sometime. And see what you think. You won't probably go back to that restaurant again.

Okay. You see. We focus on the food. Or the preparation. That's nothing but an excuse. That's nothing but an excuse to say. Oh. I just don't want to be with God's people.

You see. The fellowship has to outweigh the food. They. They have. They said they brought their food together. And they were glad. They had gladness in their heart. Because they were not because of the food.

But because of who they were. And because they were dealing with one another. And they were glad to be with one another. How many of you are so glad to be here today? See. I got up. You all ago. And I said.

[26 : 54] It did good to me in the Lord's house. Sound like a bunch of cows. Come on now. Come on now. I've been in so many churches. You know. I was in a church one time.

And this guy said. He was leading music. He said. Y'all. Y'all. We need to get together. We need to sing. He was trying to get the crowd going. He said. Now. Now y'all smile. Come on. Smile. He said. Smile. Come on. Smile.

Make like a cowboy. You know. OSU. And put these. Put your. And then go. Like that. And smile. Come on. Smile. Oh my gosh. You're just a little bit too much. You know.

But we're really at the point. Where we've got to say. Oh wait a minute. Wait a minute. What is this really about? They were glad. And also said they had sincere hearts.

They were not fake. In the 1860s. The. There was a new. Saying. It was called.

[27 : 49] Putting on the dog. Anybody knows what that. Anybody heard that before. Putting on the dog. Now I've shared. That expression. In Latvia. And they thought I was talking about Putin.

It wasn't good. So I had to go back. And you know. Anyway. So. Because I said Putin. Anyway. So anyway. A lot of us haven't heard that. That expression. What the. What the deal is.

Is that. It was made up in the 1860s. Of these ladies who would come together. And they would dress to the hilt. And they would. Put on their makeup. And they would put on their girdle. And they would put on.

What is not a girdle. Anyway. They would put on. Everything would look different. And it was all these great big dresses. And hoop skirts. And blah blah blah. And then. At the end. They would sit in these big chairs.

As they were beginning to bring the people. Into the home. And they all had a little lap dog. You know. One of those little yip yip dog. You know what I'm talking about. One of those. Pomeranian things. You know.

[28 : 43] Some of y'all got Pomeranians. I just offended you. Well. That's fine. Anyway. They came and did this. And they put it on their. They put it on their lap. And that was called. Putting on the dog.

You know. Some of us are so fake. It's. It's just amazing. Some of us are just so. We're not real. Now ladies. I'm not saying. Don't put on makeup.

Please. I'm not saying that at all. Okay. Please. What was I talking about?

Oh yeah. Don't. Some of us are just. We've got to get to the point. Where we're real. We're sincere. We're sincere. Our heart is sincere.

We have gladness in our heart. We have sincerity. In our heart. And they were praising God. We used to have a man. In that first church.

[29 : 37] I was talking about. After we moved the building. He joined our church. And. I would say something. About something. And instead of saying amen. He'd say. Praise the Lord. There you go.

I wonder if it was going to happen or not. This guy was so disruptive though. It was just. He said praise the Lord at the wrong time. One time I got up. And I said. Well. Our organist is not here today. She is just really sick.

And he said. Praise the Lord. Wasn't good. But anyway. I'm not necessarily talking about that. But I am talking about. That they were praising the Lord.

In their hearts. Of everything that was going on. They were praising. The Lord. Praising the Lord. Literally. What's just talking about here. Is not only praising the Lord. With their hearts.

With everything going on. But also the singing. They were praising the Lord. In the singing. Now. Now. I can just tell you. I hope. If I get in trouble with this. I'll be all right. But I can just tell you that.

[30 : 32] Our worship. Search. Search team. Is in the process. Of trying to find someone. And I want to tell you. There. It's a little. Lee. I hope this is okay.

I'm going to share it anyway. We're at the. If it isn't. You can kill me afterwards. We're at the point. Where. We can't find a lot of resumes. There's just not a lot out there. But I want to tell you.

That. We're still working. And God is still moving. And we're going to find the person. That God wants us to have here. To lead us in worship. Because it's so. So important. It is so.

So important. That we sing together. And that we raise our voice. You see. When you have a heart. That is full of. Praise. You can't help. But. Not sing about him.

You say. I don't like them songs. I don't know that song. How come they're up there. Playing them drums. What's going on with that guitar. How come that lady's up there. Playing that violin. What are we doing. Where's the organ at. I don't know. I'm not talking about.

[31 : 27] I'm talking about. When you praise the Lord. You can worship anywhere. Sing out the hymnal. By the way. I got all the songs in the hymnal. Memorized. I was told you. I've been a Baptist.

Since I was minus nine months. I got a memory. Okay. And here's the thing. It doesn't matter. If it's contemporary. Seven, eleven songs. You know. Seven words. Eleven times. It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. You're praising.

The Lord. From your heart. And from your life. Now you've got a preference. Sure. Sure you do. But you're actually singing. And you're singing. From your heart. I had a guy over at Eastern Heights. He's still over there. And he used to sit right back over here on the left. I. He's a full blood Cherokee. And I said. His name is Jack. And I said.

Jack. About. I was about three years in. I said. Jack. I think. That your Cherokee name. Is crosses his arms across his chest. And that's back in the day.

[32 : 26] We used to sit on. Sit up here. You know. Preachers just sit up here. I just watch him the whole time during the worship service. I just dare you to bless me. Go ahead. I just dare you. And I said. Jack.

I couldn't sing preacher. I know. Okay. That's fine. Mouth. The words. Okay. You know. Just act like you are singing. Whether you can sing or not. It doesn't matter.

Praise the Lord. With mouth. Mouthing the words. And he started doing it. I was there about. How long was it honey? About two or three months ago. Other two or three months ago. He's still mouthing the words. He's still back there. And he hasn't done this anymore.

Well. Yeah. He does that. Anyway. But still. Still. You understand what I'm saying? We. When I was growing up. In Oklahoma City. We had a guy. That was the fill in music guy for us.

His name was Carl Richardson. We had our regular guy. Who was kind of goofy. But anyway. He. He had to be gone. Every once in a while. And he'd ask brother Carl. To fill in for us.

[33 : 22] It was. It was. So great as a kid. That brother Carl. Was going to fill in for us. That Sunday. You know why? Because you know. That back in the day. When they used to do this. And keep. They don't do that no more.

We just kind of stand here. But. But. But back in the day. They used to do that. Well brother. Brother Carl. Used to do it. Like he was holding a fish. And sing.

My son. Oh. And one. You know. He'd really get the one. Oh. You know. Oh. He caught a big one. You know. We thought. That was just great.

And we were praising the Lord that day. All of us. Eight year olds. On the back row. You know. We were laughing and carrying on. But anyway. You understand what I'm saying. We need to get to the part. Where we understand.

That is about. Praising God. Not just singing. But praising God. With our whole hearts. And our whole lives. They were together in one favor. In one fellowship. Last.

[34 : 20] Of this part. They were together. And they were friendly. With one another. They were friendly. It says they were gaining favor. With all the people.

It didn't say some of the. Some of the people really like those Christian people. No. It said. No. They were gaining favor. With everybody. Why was that true? How many of you.

Think that. If you sit down. Next to somebody. That's just a random person. And you begin to talk about. Who you really are. That they're really going to say. Hey. I really like that guy.

He's a. He's going to. Not likely. Now. I haven't been on an airplane. Very much. Here lately. But. Most of the time. When I used to get on airplanes. I'd sit down next to somebody.

And sure enough. They begin to. Some of the people. Don't want to talk at all. You know. But something. You know. I get a talker. Get somebody. I want to talk. And so. I talk back. And they. They talk to me. And I talk to them. Until. They ask me.

[35 : 16] What I do for a living. And I used to make up stuff. Well. I'm a. I'm a leadership development guy. I help. Leaders. And then.

They keep on talking. But when I told them. When I would tell them. Oh. I'm a. Pastor. I'm a. State person. Or I'm a. Associational missionary. Whatever it may be.

The conversation. Would end. Folks. Here's the truth. Most people. In our world today. Don't want anything. To do with church.

That's the truth. 15 to 20 percent. Of the people. In. In Oklahoma. Are in church. This morning. The rest of them. Are at Denny's.

Or down here. We don't have a Denny's. Do we? I hop. Or down here. At. The breakfast place. It's full. On Sundays. Not anything wrong with that. I'm just telling to you. Telling you this.

[36 : 13] They don't want anything. To do with church. You know why? Because they. Don't see. Real. People. Here's something. That might happen. If we started to be real.

And took ourselves. To the point. That we were vulnerable. Enough to be real. With one another. And actually take off. The mask. Of who we are. And what's going on. It's amazing. What might. Exactly happen.

What will probably happen. Is. The people. Of our state. And of our town. And of our. Community. Will begin to say. What's wrong.

With those people. Up there. At Highland Park. Baptist Church. In a positive way. What they'll say is. Wow. What's going on. Up there. At that church. I want to be a part of that.

How. Tell me what's going on. And the truth is. It's not about our church. And it's not about the activities. It's not about the meetings. It's not about the. The pastor. I love our pastor.

[37 : 10] And he's a great guy. I love him. He preaches the word. He's great. He's my friend. I love him so much. It's not about him. It's about the sincerity. Of heart. And the loving about one another.

And that you're one. In one. Fellowship. And when somebody comes in the back door. It's not something that says. Well. I guess you could probably show up. But I've known everybody here for 50 years.

So you're going to have a hard time. Getting into my little group. Listen. It's not about that. It's about being open. And caring. And loving. And open. And caring.

And loving. To the point. That they want to be a part of it. We will gain favor with all the people. When we proclaim Jesus as Lord.

And we are in one fellowship with one another. Last. They were together in one Lord. The last verse says.

[38 : 07] Verse 47. The last part says. And the Lord added to their number daily. Those who were being saved. Notice here who was adding to their number. Not the apostles.

Not anyone else. But the Lord. In my years of dealing with churches. The question always comes up.

Who's in charge? A few years back. I. Got a phone call.

From a pastor. And he said. Not here. Back in South Carolina. He said. Well. He was crying. When I got on the phone.

He was crying. I said. What's the matter? He calmed down enough. And I said. Well. He said. Well. They fired me last night. I said. Brother. What? He.

[39 : 04] Up until this point. Up until the time he called. I knew what his church was going through. And I knew what was happening. It was a great little church. And they said. Hey. They fired me last night. I said.

Why? And he said. Well. They got into an argument. About. Who was going to mow the cemetery. What? Yeah. They started arguing about. Who was going to mow the cemetery. You see. There was a family. Who had mowed the cemetery. For. About.

30 years. The grandpa. Had. Had. Had. Mowed it. The son had mowed it. And now. The. The little. The. The other. The grandson. Had mowed the cemetery. And then. They were going to pass it on. To the great grandson. So that they could mow the cemetery. And. By the way. It was about money. Oh. They weren't doing it for free. They were getting paid.

[40 : 02] Well. A new group came along. A new family. They had only been there 20 years. That's a new family. And they said. Hey. We'd like a chance. To mow the cemetery.

And what are they charging? They're charging \$250 a month. Oh. Well. We'll do it for 200. Oh. And they started arguing. You see. It was a family tradition. They mowed the cemetery.

They got paid for doing it. But. So they got into an argument. About who's going to mow what. And when they're going to mow it. And all that kind of thing. And they got to that point. And the pastor took the side of the quote unquote new family.

And got outvoted. The old family kept them mowing the new cemetery. And as a result that same night. The old family. Who had been there mowing the cemetery.

Made a motion that they fire the pastor. Because he voted. For the wrong group. To mow the cemetery. Now I've told that story a long time.

[41 : 05] A lot of times. Let me just tell you what I usually say. Who cares? The people out there don't care. You know. Who mows the ground. Who cares?

But we get into these things. And listen. Guess who's in charge? Who would you say? Go ahead and tell me. Who would you say is in charge of the Highland Park Baptist Church?

Whose church is this? It is the Lord's. Now we have an organization. We have elders. We have all these deacons. We have all this other stuff going on. And we have all these meetings.

But it is the Lord who is in charge of this church. And until we make up our mind. That that's going to happen. Then we're never going to continue to do what God would have us to do.

Am I saying there's a bunch of trouble going on in this church? Absolutely not. You know why?

Because of what you just said. The Lord is in charge. And we do everything as he would have us do in order.

[42 : 07] But let me tell you this. God will do a great work. If we'll decide that we are going to come under his umbrella.

And that we are going to be together. Together. And be the real people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray that we will. Some of you here today don't have any idea what I'm even talking about.

Because you've never trusted the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

You don't know what that means. I want to invite you today to find out what that means. We're going to have what's called an invitation in just a minute. And it's going to be a time when these steps and these altars here are open.

I'll be here at the front. We'll have other people here at the front that can help you to understand what that really means. And it doesn't matter what age you are. It doesn't matter what you've done.

It doesn't matter where you've gone.

[43 : 16] What matters is that, yeah, you're ready. And as Eric was talking about, the young lady who gave her life to Jesus, you can give your life to Jesus too. And there's more to it than that, of course.

And we want to talk to you about it. Some of you here are here today and you'd like an opportunity to join the church. Now, we do that a little different here. We can't just come.

You can't just come and join the church. Of course, we have some other things we need you to do. But if you have a desire to do that, of course, we'd love for you to come during this invitation and say, I'd like to start the process of joining the church.

Or maybe you need to be baptized. You've never been baptized. Now, baptism is not salvation, but baptism is the outward sign of what's happened in your life. And as a result, you want to do just that.

And then the altar today is going to be open. There's some of us who are covering up some things that we need to put out in the open. You say, well, if I put that out in the open, they'll not accept me.

[44 : 15] I'll be embarrassed. The people will not be a part. Yes, they will. Because all of us in this room are sinners and we realize what's going on and we realize that we're saved by grace.

And yes, we will deal with you with grace just as much as God has dealt with us with grace. Some of you need to come. Pour your life out here on this altar and just say, God, I'm sorry.

I'm ready. I want to be real. I want to be the person you want me to be. So the question today is, would you do it? Would you?

Well, let's pray together. I ask that every head be bowed and every eye closed for just a few moments. Just be quiet before the Lord. I wonder today, is it your desire to be together together? Do you really have a desire in your heart to allow God to be real in your life? Is there a fakeness about you?

[45 : 22] Is there a sin? Has God gathered something in your life but Satan seems to be scattering it? Would today be a good day to let him gather that back up?

Would today be a good day? Would today be a good day? To get past it and begin living for Christ again?

The answer is yes. It is a good day to do that. And we want you to do it. Would you? I invite you to come today.

Father, be with us today. As we take this invitation, you take it. You do whatever you want to do during this time. And may you be glorified as result.

In Christ's name. Amen.