

Series: The Faith Family

Title: A Family With Purpose

Text: Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Additional Scriptures: Acts 2:36-47, Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:1-8, John 13:34-35, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 10:19-25

Sermon Summary: This message looks at the early church in the 2nd Chapter of Acts. It looks at four purposes of the church which can be found from our text: The Family of God has a message, a method, a motive and a mission! For the method portion of the message we will look at some additional Scriptures from the writer of Hebrews that gives a more detailed breakdown of some of the methods behind what the church does! The end of the sermon details some of the opportunities people have to connect with the faith family at Northshore Church and to help it accomplish its God-given purposes!

"On the cross the work was finished, God You poured out Your Life just to give us new life" Sometimes I'll tell someone Jesus loves them and they'll say, "I hope somebody does!" To which I reply, "He gave His life for you on the cross, you can't get more love than that!" And because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we are able to be adopted into the family of God! What an awesome privilege and responsibility at the same time! Let's pray and ask God to teach us today with His precious Word about spending time with the family of God. Let's ask Him to prepare our hearts for what He will speak to our hearts! PRAY

Over the past few weeks, we've talked about being the family of God. We've talked about the amazing fact that once we allow God to bring us into His family, we are no longer outcast! We also talked about how God has reasons for us being a part of a family and that He is building us into a house of living stones, a breathing, active church with a great purpose! Today I'm going to set the church back a couple thousand years. That's right, you heard it right. Today I want us to set the church back a couple thousand years! Why? Because sometimes modernization is not good. Sometimes our advances are not advances! Sometimes we try to improve on something that doesn't need improving and we hurt ourselves in the process.

So many advertisements today boast the label...

New and improved! Better than ever! Now with more powerful ingredients! Longer Lasting! Better Results! I have a question for you: "Do you think new is always better?" I've had this thought...

When will someone come out with something like...

"Not new and improved, why mess with perfection?" or

"Same package, same look, same quality product, 50 years and counting!"

Do you remember when Coca-Cola came out with New coke! It was a Failure! People didn't want them messing with their beloved coke! Sometimes, you shouldn't mess with a good thing! Right! With that in mind, we're going to go back and look at the first church. One of the first gatherings of Christ followers as the church, as the family of God, occurred in the Book of Acts,

chapter 2. It is here that we begin to see clearly the purpose God has for His Church, for us! That purpose is found in some of the unique things we find in the family of God!

1. The Family of God has a Message!

When God started His Church back in the book of Acts, it was very organic, and truly genuine. A true move of God and an outpouring of His Spirit took place and thousands of people were transformed. Peter preached a sermon and something amazing happened... Listen to a short part of his message and then to what followed...

Acts 2:36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Acts 2:37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Peter was on fire for God when he preached this message because Jesus' instructions to him were fresh on his mind! The church was off to a fabulous start! They eventually reached the known world with the good news of Jesus Christ! Many, many lives were changed.

The church was a powerful influence in the world because of its people, their commitment to God, each other and the message. Here's the sad thing. Something changed as the years went by. Some thought they could improve on God's plan for His Church. Improving on God's plan does not usually turn out very good. In fact, it never does. The church that started out with a purpose, lost sight of that purpose. The church had a message so powerful it changed the known world! Our message should be clear to the world that anyone who is willing to repent of their sins and allow Jesus to come into their lives by way of His Holy Spirit, they can become a child of God and a part of the family of God, our family! A huge part of our purpose is to share that message with the world! And our purpose is enhanced and strengthened by something else unique to God's family...

2. The Family of God has a Method

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer! What a method! And they were devoted to the method! What does your devotion look like to the family of God! In Northshore Orientation we talk about our method of doing church and it is based on what we see in the New Testament Church for a reason! Led by the Apostles they studied the Word of God! They fellowshiped with one another. They worshipped by observing the Lord's Supper, and they prayed!! Again, what a method! For a further explanation of the methods of the Family of God, I want to turn to the writer of Hebrews. Stay with me! This is almost like a sermon within a sermon. Our main text is about the early church in the book of Acts, but there was some great development of the method of the New Testament Church by the time the book of Hebrews was written. The church had had some time to develop and grow in its maturity, but they needed to be reminded of some things that began with the early church and that the basic method was still awesome. The writer of the book of Hebrews was concerned with the spiritual health of the individual believer and with the spiritual health of the church family. Here's what he had to say...

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers...

Notice he starts off by saying brothers. He's speaking to the family of God, and this includes not only the brothers, but you sisters as well! We are family! He goes on to say...

Hebrews 10:19 ... since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

A Method of Grace!

We are confident of our place in God's family, not because of how good we are, or our religious activity, but because of the precious blood of Jesus. We just talked about the message of the church and it was obvious the teaching of the apostles was based on what Jesus had done on the cross which fulfilled the holy requirements of the law and offered us the grace and mercy of God to be adopted into the family of God! Remember the verse we've read several times over the last few weeks...

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

Ephesians 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

In the family of God we are spiritually flesh and blood relatives by grace! Grace is the tie that binds!

The writer of Hebrews goes further...

Hebrews 10:19 ... since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10:20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

A Method Based on the Life and Sacrifice of Jesus!

Now this was one time when "New and improved" was in order!! Becoming a part of the family of God was no longer based on our ability or inability to follow the letter of the law. It was based on the perfect life Jesus lived and the perfect sacrifice He made when He died! And did you notice it said through the curtain that is His body? Listen to the following words written by commentator Charles A. Trentham...

"Through His flesh is used allegorically to represent the veil of the tabernacle which shut man out of the presence of God. When the flesh of Christ was pierced on the cross, the very heart of God was laid open to our view. Now we know His infinite love, so we need have no doubt about His disposition toward us. When the Savior died, the veil of His flesh and the veil of the Temple were torn into. Then God and man stood face to face."

The writer of Hebrews, goes on to say...

Hebrews 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

A Method that Recognizes Jesus as The Head of the Family!

That great priest is none other than Jesus Himself! The One who is at the right hand of the Father always making intercession for us. Jesus is the head of the family who provides for our spiritual needs! So since we have such a high priest representing us what does God's Word tell us?

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

A Method that Allows a Personal Relationship with God!

We can draw near to God every day. Not just on the Sabbath. Not just on Sunday mornings, but 24/7. And it says we can do this with full assurance of faith. Why? As the priest in the old days would sprinkle the blood of the animal sacrifice on the altar, our hearts have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus! This takes away our guilt!! Having our bodies washed with pure water symbolizes the fact that the blood of Christ not only takes away the penalty of sin, but also gives us the power to live a different kind of life. A life of purity that will bring honor and glory to God and a life that will bring peace and purpose back into our lives. Through the blood of Christ, what sin has taken away, the blood of Christ restores!! The writer continues...

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

A Method that Brings Us Confidence!

He had already said we have confidence through the blood of Jesus to enter the most Holy Place and now the writer says we should hold tenaciously to our blessed hope because the One

who has promised to fulfill our hope is faithful: always and forever faithful!! Because of this hope and the fact we are a part of the Body of Christ, the writer speaks about our responsibility to spread this hope to the family.. He says...

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

A Method of Encouragement!

If we're going to consider how we are going to spur one another on toward love and good deeds, we must have some family time! We're going to have to hang out as a family! We just can't spur one another on toward love and good deeds, if we only see one another for passing moments at the gathering on Sunday morning. Meaningful relationships just can't be developed as we pass each other coming and leaving in-between the two services. Remember in our main text it says the members of the church...

Acts 2:42 ...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

I think the writer of Hebrews was thinking about those glorious times in the book of Acts when he goes on to say...

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another —and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

I know we are living in different times, and some of you are worshipping from home. That's completely understandable and I have great respect for those who are playing it extra safe! Many of you know I'm one of those who likes to err on the side of safety! During the buildout of our facility some years ago, I got the nickname of Mr. OSHA! We've tried to take seriously the need to protect one another and observe the six foot distancing, and our forward facing volunteers wear mask! We also have the overflow room in the student center where folks who would like to remain masked the entire time and observe a bit more distance, can safely do so. But I don't think anyone would disagree with me that we should pray that we can get beyond this pandemic and get back to gathering together in full, because we need each other! But back to what the writer of Hebrews was trying to get across... He was not just concerned about people not meeting together, he was concerned about an alarming trend where people were gathering for religious services and no longer being connected together as the Body of Christ through meaningful, personal relationships. The trend had shifted away from fellowship, and serving one another, and encouraging one another, and loving one another! Of course a new and living way had opened up for every individual to have personal access to God, and this was a beautiful and glorious thing, but God did not mean for us to no longer gather as a family. The priesthood of every believer was never meant to isolate us from each other, but rather to call us together to minister to each other, pray for each other, to serve each other, and to love one another, like they did in the first church! Here at Northshore, we want to make it easy for you to

have family time with God's people. And we want to do this in a way that doesn't take away or destroy your ability to have time with your family at home. So we've provided lots of different ways for you to get connected. I'll talk about that in just a moment, but as we look back at the first church in our text we see that God's purpose for His Faith Family happens because...

3. The Family of God has a Motivation

Acts 2:44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Acts 2:45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Acts 2:46 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,

Acts 2:47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people....

What a witness to the world around them. People saw this motivation of radical love for one another in the lives of these new Christ followers! It moved people! It caused the faith family to be respected by people around them. The people around them might not agree with their message, or accept their message but they sure had a hard time arguing with what they saw in their changed lives! In fact Jesus had talked about this with His disciples...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The greatest way to make disciples and the greatest way to be a witness is to love one another. What could be a greater witness to the world than for them to see God's family loving each other, serving one another, fellowshiping together, praying for one another, being there for one another during hard times. If people see this happening, they're going to want in! If we're doing this we will begin to transform the world one heart, one family, one neighborhood at a time! Northshore Church's Vision is ...

"To raise up a healthy church that will impact the Northshore and ultimately the world with the life changing message of Jesus Christ!"

If the church is healthy, it will be effective. The New Testament Church started off healthy. They were loving God and each other and the world witnessed a beautiful thing. Tragically something changed down through the years with the church. Something happened. The impromptu gathering in homes, fellowshiping, praying together, and sharing of needs became less and less a part of the daily life of believers. In other words, they quit having "Family Time!" And if you don't have family time, you're not going to be very effective at making disciples or being a witness to the world.

History shows that the church eventually became more of an institution with buildings, and bureaucracies. Gatherings were programmed. Instead of gathering as the church, people added going to church to their religious chore list. The church became irrelevant and began to decline.

Leaders started trying to artificially grow. They started trying to regain relevance. In modern times churches have started trying to market themselves to the world as the genuine thing. Well, here's the problem with that: If a church is real, relevant, and has genuine love for one another, and for people who are lost, they won't need to put it on a billboard. The world will be blown away by what they see in our lives!! I'm not against billboards or advertising our events, but we shouldn't have to advertise that we are authentic or genuine. That should come across when people get to know us!!! Churches that advertise what they don't have, well, that's called false advertising!

I'm so thankful that here at Northshore Church, if we were to advertise those things, it wouldn't be false advertising! But I would rather people discover those things personally!! I'm so glad for the love, fellowship, and service to God and to others that I witness here. We have our Meals that Heal ministry, our missions ministry that goes and builds houses for people and have taken several medical trips, our pastoral care team, and we have men who are willing to help out when there's work or help needed for some of our widow's and single moms! We have our greeters and ushers who make people feel welcome from the time they walk in the door to the time they find their seat. Then there's our prayer team, and the list goes on and on. We do these things because we are motivated by His love! However, we have only touched the surface of what God wants to do with and in our family.

4. The Family of God has a Mission

Acts 2:47 ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, just before He was to ascend back to the Father, He told his disciples what He wanted His church, His faith family, to accomplish in this world. We find His instructions in Matthew's gospel and in the book of Acts. These were Jesus' final and last words to His beloved faith family! Let's see what He said...

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matthew 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

One thing Jesus taught by example was that it takes time to make a disciple! He made it clear that He wanted His family, His church to make disciples. A disciple is one who follows Christ! The original Greek language actually says, "As you are going, make disciples!" In other words it is a lifestyle thing. Listen to what Luke said about Jesus' instructions in the Book of Acts in the verses just before our text for today...

Acts 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus wanted His family to be His witnesses! He said to start at home, Jerusalem, then the region, Judea, then those people you don't really like so much, Samaria, and don't stop there, the whole world needs Jesus!!

Can you see it? The faith family of God has a divine purpose! A purpose that could and should change the world for the better!! And in order for Northshore Church to fulfill its purpose...

"To raise up a healthy church that will impact the Northshore and ultimately the world with the life changing message of Jesus Christ..."

...we need to know our message, our method, our motivation and our mission! Where do we learn those things? We have so many opportunities for you to get plugged in. Again, Covid has impacted our groups and we understand that some of you will not want to gather in groups until there's been more progress made on the pandemic, but some of our groups do have the ability for you to gather virtually!

Now I know what some of you are thinking. That would be great pastor Larry, but I just can't add another thing to my list right now. I don't have another night to give. Someday I'll get connected, when I can clear up some space on my calendar. I'm just juggling too much right now. I understand. And the last thing I want to do today is put a big guilt trip on you. But we all know when we say someday, many times someday never comes. And that's not only true with our faith family, this also happens with our personal family! The staff at Northshore Church, genuinely cares about you and all that you have going on. We've thought long and hard about this and we have asked God to help us find ways for all of us to get connected. Like the New Testament Church we have different opportunities for you to get involved - in the gathering, in the community and in the world! So here's some of our offerings to help you to engage in fulfilling the purpose of God's faith family! We have...

Northshore Orientation - This is our new member class that teaches our Purpose, Mission, and Vision, along with our core beliefs, our core values, and our methods and processes.

We have...

Disciple Groups - D-groups for short. These are groups that gather for the purpose of growing as followers of Jesus! Learning how to read and study the Bible, how to develop a personal quiet time with the Lord, how to share your faith with others and ways to get involved in ministry!

We have...

15 Community Groups - These groups provide the opportunity to both engage in on-going Biblical Community with other believers and reaching out to our community with the life-changing message of Jesus. Some meet in homes, and some meet here at the church!

Ministry Teams - Meals that heal, Pastoral Care, Cancer Care, Prayer Team, Missions teams, Administrative team, Shore Kids, 180 Student Ministry, Greeters and Usher teams, Hospitality, Media, Worship, Men's ministry and Women's ministry.

And one last thing. Maybe you've been to Northshore Orientation and a D-group, but just haven't found a small group that fits you. I'm about to surprise some of you. Are you willing to get one of the daily Bible reading guides and start getting a little more involved by doing that daily? Maybe you could take one of your work breaks and see if anyone would like to talk about spiritual things and use the sermon discussion guide our team puts together based on the sermons and talk about how it applies to your lives? Or maybe you're a student and have friends at school you could invite to do this with you once a week. Others might see this and ask to join in! How cool would that be? Very cool! You may already have a family in the church you're connected with. Maybe you get together once a week to watch a ball game, or to cook out, or to play games. Here's my question, would you and that other family or couple, be willing to take 15 or 20 minutes to go over the sermon discussion guide? That would be a small group in a very organic way and would be like what was happening in the Book of Acts with the very first church! If we started doing this it would set our church back about 2,000 years, but it would cause us to become much more healthy. It will help us become the Family God wants us to be and will be a tremendous witness to the world of our love for one another! Let's pray!