Fellowship of Believers

Romans 12:4-13; Acts 2:42-47

Today we are going to continue our study of Romans 12 by first looking at Acts chapter 2.

I will start out with a question. Do you need salvation? I know that most of you understand what that means, most of you know the language of Christianese. But just to clarify, being saved means being brought into a place of safety. Acts 2:40 says “Save yourselves from this crooked generation…” This doesn’t mean, for us, that if we turn to God we will be yanked out of the ugliness and get to live on a peaceful farm off the grid. In fact, God’s safety is meant to be provided in part through His people and even though we don’t like it, Christ’s safety, is a safety **in the midst** of the crooked generation. I might add, that God’s safety in Christs keeps you and I safe even as we sometimes take the crooked path. Apparently, as recorded in Acts, the Apostle Peter’s Holy Spirit empowered preaching was very effective and…

“…*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*” (Acts 2:41, NIV)

They were cut to the heart, they asked “what should we do?” and they obeyed by repenting and being baptized.

So now what? What was next for all these people who had put their faith in Christ and His new and better Covenant? Was a one-time mind-change and dunk in the river enough to sustain them through the trials of life? NO WAY! Acts 2, beginning with verse 42 says:

“*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had 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.*” (Acts 2:42–47, NIV)

This is, generally speaking, what New Covenant church life looks like.

1. Devotion to teaching--People committed to the teachings of the scriptures and especially the (teachings of the Apostles) i.e. The New Testament.
2. Fellowship--People contributing to each others’ well-being by bringing their faith gifts for the benefit of another or the whole group.
3. Breaking of bread—People eating with one another in common meals and in participating in the Lord’s Supper.
4. Prayer—People joining together to get a hearing from God and to hear God’s Spirit
5. Filled with awe—People corporately seeing God work wonders.
6. Distribution of Goods—people making sure that others were not in need.
7. Regular assembly—People meeting together as a source foundational strength.

This is generally what church is all about. So how does that look in a 21st century context, especially in a culture that celebrates independent living and makes heroes of those who don’t need anyone. As the church, we ought to know this is a lie. Every one of us needs fellowship. One writer wrote:

The word *fellowship* sometimes has strange connotations in the church today. If it sounds cheesy, lighthearted, or old-fashioned to you, then you have the wrong idea about fellowship. The first Christians shared their lives with one another. It wasn’t about church picnics, potlucks, or small talking in the “fellowship hall.” They were real people meeting real needs and joining together to fulfill a real mission. They weren’t meeting together because they kind of felt like they should. They shared their lives because in Christ they had everything in common. They truly loved each other. They cared deeply about God and His mission on earth, so they joined with the other Christians around them and worked together toward the goal.

Potlucks, snacks in the fellowship room, and picnics are all great ways of fellowshipping, but only if these things are done with a sincere desire “…to be real people meeting real needs and joining together to fulfill a real mission.”

In the 21st century church mission and vision statements are a big deal, catch phrases are all the rage.

At BLCC our Vision is “To know Christ and Make Him Known.”

And our Mission is:

To know Christ intimately,

Grow in Christ like maturity,

Show Christ’s love practically,

Go make Christ’s disciples actively.

I think this is great because it rhymes and is fairly easy to remember, but today I want to share with you the mission and vision I have drawn up, for me, based on BLCC’s mission and vision.

Mission—To live life, with others, in the growing knowledge of the truth, love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vision—To see faith and faithfulness, in Christ, strengthened in every person who knows me.

How:

Power of the Spirit (Love, Joy, Peace, etc…)

Preparation (Prayer, Study, Meditation, Humiliation)

Proclamation

Personal involvement

Patience

I would encourage you to think about your own role here at BLCC. These are my overarching life aims and I want to make everything I do subject to these.

These goals are not number oriented, they may not even be particularly measurable, but this is what my life is about.

Whether I am preaching, being a husband, being a father, being a friend, being a church member, playing softball, coaching baseball or being a member in the community all are under this umbrella. Our lives are meant to be lived together to mightily display the wonders of God’s love, truth, and grace.

How are you contributing?

How will you decide to contribute? Will you devote yourself to living unto God?

Bonney Lake Community Church and the Community of Bonney Lake needs us. What is your vision and mission?

Make sure it isn’t “Make enough money so that I can retire and do whatever I want, whenever I want.” There is no such thing as independent living. We need each other, in fact, we were made for God and each other.

“*…let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” (Hebrews 10:24–25, NIV)

Ask God for direction. Ask Him to give you the path of wisdom that resonates with you.

As we live the mission and vision that Christ gives to each of us, He will give us favor with others and will add to our numbers those who are being saved. We will make mistakes, that is for sure, but the more that we are in line with the mission and vision that Christ has given us, the more that even our mistakes and epic disappointments will reveal to others the truth, love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Devotion to Christ’s teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayer
5. Filled with awe
6. Distribution of Goods
7. Regular assembly

This leads us appropriately into the book of Romans chapter 12, in which, the apostle Paul talks about spiritual gifts…

**4**Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, **5**so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

**6**In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. **7**If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. **8**If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

**9**Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. **10**Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. **11**Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. **12**Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. **13**When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Romans 12:4-13

This is actually what Christian “Fellowship” is all about. It is about exercising your natural talents and sharing your spiritual giftedness among the Body of Christ and the rest of the world. First, let’s differentiate between a natural talent and a spiritual gift.

I’m not going to go deep into the differences between the two, I will simply say, Natural talents and spiritual gifts both come from God and are meant to show His greatness. But natural talents vary according to genetics and hard work, while spiritual gifts vary according to God’s grace and our willingness to trust in it. One is measurable, the other is kind of mysterious. In fact, if you meet people who are trying to establish a formula between spiritual giftedness and your hard work, I would be very cautious in what you take to heart.

Spiritual gifts are just that…Gifts, and every Christian will be gifted from God, in at least one of these ways…

1 Corinthians 12, says:

**7**A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. **8**To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. **9**The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. **10**He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. **11**It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

There is an old expression that says it takes a village. Another says, “No man is an island.”

Let me pose it to you another way.

In my opinion, Russell Wilson is one of the most rounded quarterbacks of all-time. If I was going to pick a quarterback for my all-time all-star team, he wins the spot, by a landslide.

But what about the other 10 players?

Would it be good for me to clone Russell Wilson 10 times so I had 11 of him?

Can you imagine Russell Wilson (5’9” 205) trying to block Aaron Donald (6’1” 280) or Nick Bosa (6’4” 266 pounds)?

It takes 11 different players to make a football team successful. And it takes a variety of natural talents and spiritual gifts for Christ’s church to be complete.

Maybe you are saying “Ok, I want to get involved, but I don’t know what my natural talents are and I’m not sure how God has gifted me spiritually.

As far as natural talents go, I would say, what seems to come a little bit easier for you than for others you know?

And what do you enjoy doing?

What activities resonate with you?

When I was in Jr High and High school, I had no trouble throwing my body into someone as hard as I could on the football field.

I’ve coached kids at the Middle school level who I would say a natural aversion to violent collisions. Football is not for them.

However, I tried strumming a guitar one time and I felt like my fingers belonged to another person’s hands. I couldn’t make them go where I wanted them to go.

For some, playing a musical instrument, feels like something they were meant to do. I’m not saying it doesn’t take practice, just some are naturally gifted.

This leads me to the spiritual giftedness part of things. In my time as a pastor I’ve hear many tell me that they just don’t know what their “gift” is. People take tests to try and find out how God has gifted them. That is okay. But the advice I would give is…stop trying to figure out exactly how it works. Instead, do things that you enjoy and have a natural giftedness towards and, in that, God will give you **His** gifts to be used for the building up of **His** body.

If you look at biblical accounts of miraculous events. God always used something of the natural to bring about the supernatural. Think about the following gifts:

* Prophecy
* Leadership
* Healing
* Apostle
* Service
* Teaching
* Exhortation (Encouragement)
* Giving
* Mercy
* Wisdom
* Hospitality

All of these things have a natural aspect that God uses to bring about His supernatural gifts that strengthen His church.

Even when Jesus healed a blind man He used spit and dirt, something natural.

If God wants to dispense the gift of prophecy (or proclamation of His Truth) he will use a man or woman of His choosing, and they will write or speak and through their writing or speech, God will speak to the hearts of the hearers.

Or what about mercy?

Say someone owes you money, or an apology, some kind of debt. You decide you aren’t going to hold them to pay back what you owe. You show them mercy. It is God who works supernaturally if they are going to truly accept your mercy.

What about hospitality?

Is it possible that God can work supernaturally through you offering someone a meal, or through inviting them on a hike, or offering them a cup of coffee, or loaning them a dirt bike? Maybe having them over to watch the Seahawks play?

God’s gifts are dispensed supernaturally as we carry out actions in the natural world.

So I’m going to leave you with this…

1 God gives supernatural gifts to every believer

2 God’s gifts are meant to build up and strengthen His church

3 The Holy Spirit’s gifts are given supernaturally as His people do things naturally

4 Do things. Don’t try to wait until you can figure out “what your gift is.” If Jesus can incorporate spit and dirt into healing a blind man. If He can make water come from a rock by striking it with a stick; He can use us for the spiritual empowerment of others.

As Paul wrote to the Galatians:

**9**So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up. **10**Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

Galatians 6:9-10