God’s Original Design for the Church: Part 1
Acts 2:42-47 (NKJV)

In the early years of Wildwood, some of our staff went up to the mountains to pray and seek the Lord. While we were there we started asking the question, what was God’s design for the church? And it was while we were seeking the Lord that He put it on our hearts to go to the early church. So we studied these first few chapters in Acts and it was here that the Lord spoke to our hearts. We did not need something new—a new paradigm, a new program, or even a new and trendy mission statement. It wasn’t really something new that we were looking for as much as something that was biblical and that honored God, and we found that in His Word. We found that in the first church and it was here that we found something that has become a foundation for us here at Wildwood.

- It’s found in Acts 2:42…

Vs. 42 – “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Steadfast: to adhere closely, to attend, to continue, to be constant, diligent.

- Now that 3,000 people had repented, put their faith in Christ, and been baptized, they continued on. It was not just a ticket to heaven; it was not just a onetime religious obligation or duty.
- It was a relationship that they were continuing in.
- Notice what they continued in, the first thing they were committed to—the apostles’ doctrine.

1. The early church was a Bible believing church.

It was 14 years ago that the Lord put it on my heart to start a Bible study in Wildwood canyon. We were a small group of believers, just getting into the Word together. That’s what we did every time we got together—we opened up our Bibles to seek out God’s heart and plan for our lives. We did not seek to grow numerically, we sought to grow biblically. We just wanted to know Him and we would let Him take care of the rest.
Today, I look around and we’re just a big home fellowship still doing the same thing—getting into the Word of God together, seeking to know the heart of God for our lives. And when we move into our new facility, we will continue to do the same thing—we will open up God’s Word together. It’s why we buried the Word of God in the foundation of the building—we want to stand on the Word.

- God designed His church to be a place where His Word is proclaimed and explained.
- After Moses had faithfully served the Lord and then ultimately went on to be with the Lord, then the Lord spoke to Joshua who had been Moses’ assisting pastor.
- He calls Joshua to take the place of leadership over Israel, to lead them into the Promised Land. Listen to what He says…

“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:7-8 (NKJV)

- How can you and I have good success in life? How can pastors have success in the ministry? How can we as a church be successful in equipping the saints? How can we take part in the last day’s harvest? How will we overcome doubt and unbelief? How will we see God’s favor in our finances? How will we keep an eternal perspective?
- By being committed to reading, teaching, and abiding in God’s Word.

“If you see a Bible that is falling apart, it probably belongs to someone who isn’t.” – Vance Havner

- Listen to what the apostle Paul told young Timothy as a young pastor in the ministry...

“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the
laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:13-16 (NKJV)

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV)

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NKJV)

- Scripture is food for the believer and without it we will cease to grow, without it we won’t have success in ministry or in life.
- I like what one commentator said…

“The Christians who have turned the world upside down have been men and women with a vision in their hearts and the Bible in their hands.”

- That was the early church and that is God’s plan for the church in the last days, and that’s what we will continue to do here at Wildwood.
- And then notice, they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and in fellowship.

2. The early church was a fellowshipping church.

Fellowship = koinonia: partnership, participation, distribution.

- Sometimes, we hear the word “fellowship” or the word “koinonia” and we think of food, or we think of Starbucks.
- Koinonia is not just hanging out and having a “cup of Joe” together—it’s much more!
- Listen to what we see in scripture about koinonia…
• First, *koinonia* with the body of Christ comes through a relationship with Christ.

“…that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3 (NKJV)

• When we come to Christ we have a spiritual union with the living God—it’s like no other fellowship, no other union we have.

Some of us would never have crossed paths except that Jesus brought us together.

• *Koinonia* happens in the body of Christ because we have a relationship with Christ.
• Second, *koinonia* happens best when we are giving and serving the body of Christ.

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NKJV)

In these last two weeks, there has been some sweet fellowship going on at Wildwood: serving together, cleaning up the new building, picking up trash, cleaning up the rooms, painting, washing, vacuuming, and moving our offices out and onto the new site. It was cool to see moms and dads come down with their kids and help. There was giving, there was sacrifice, there was time spent, there was sweat flowing, and some of you took time off and it cost you—awesome!

• Some of the most powerful and potent *koinonia* we can have is when we are serving one another, when we are laboring together for the kingdom.
Third, we can have *koinonia* with the Lord in our suffering.

“…that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death…” Philippians 3:10 (NKJV)

It’s amazing the fellowship that we can have with each other when we are going through trials.

- So, as you can see, biblical *koinonia* involves sacrifice—it’s much deeper than just a “cup of Joe” or a barbeque at our home fellowship.
- Our fellowship with the Father came at a great sacrifice; the Father wanted to have *koinonia* with us, so He gave His only Son, and the Son gave His life.
- And now He calls us to have fellowship with one another.
- The Bible never envisions the Christian life to be lived separate from one another; instead, He calls us to stir up one another and we do that best when we are serving one another.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)

- *Koinonia* best happens when we are giving and serving. Jesus did it, the early church did it, and God’s desire is that the church in the last days does it as well.
- Notice, the third distinctive in the early church was they broke bread together…

3. The early church was a Christ-centered church.

- This did not mean they went to Panera Bread together, or that they were only vegetarians.
- This spoke of communion—coming to the table and celebrating the new covenant. It was a way to put Jesus in the center of all that they did.
- Communion does that—it keeps our focus on Christ and the cross.
That’s why we offer it so often: once a month on Sunday morning services, every Sunday night at the House of Prayer, and every Wednesday night at our midweek services. We want to keep Christ at the center of all that we do, and communion does that best.

- Paul told the church of Corinth that communion was to be done in remembrance of what Christ had done for us…

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NKJV)

- And then he tells them to examine their hearts—that it should be a time of self-examination.

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” 1 Corinthians 11:28 (NKJV)

This is where I think some can go wrong. When we examine our hearts and see there is some sin in our lives, and we opt out of communion because we think our hearts are not right, our hearts are dirty, we are making a mistake. That’s like saying to the doctor, “I will get well before I come and visit.” Or like saying to the loan officer, “When I get some money I will come and see you.”

The Lord’s Table is the very place for the person struggling with sin, or wrestling with temptation, or caught up in carnality, not to check-out but to check-in. It’s at the table we say, “Lord, I desperately need you to work in my life. Lord, I want to be right before You and as I eat this bread and drink this cup, I want to thank you for forgiving me and cleansing me.”

It’s a time to celebrate the cross—the finished work of the cross.
• The early church gave themselves to the apostles’ doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, but then fourthly, they gave themselves to prayer.

4. The early church was a praying church.

• The early church was eagerly and persistently engaged in the ministry of prayer; it was not an afterthought, it was how the church was birthed and it was something that they were faithful in.
• It’s amazing how many times the word “steadfast,” “earnest,” or “continue” are used in relationship with prayer.
• It’s used 10 times in the New Testament, and half of those have to do with prayer.
• Paul in speaking to the church in Colossae...

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving…” Colossians 4:2 (NKJV)

• Paul in speaking to the church in Rome...

“…rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer…” Romans 12:12 (NKJV)

• In speaking of the early church at Pentecost...

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Acts 1:14 (NKJV)

• When the apostles chose the first seven deacons to take care of the food distribution, it was so they could commit themselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word...

“…but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:4 (NKJV)

• Do you think the Holy Spirit is trying to get something across to us?
• The early church gave themselves earnestly to prayer. Jesus had promised them that whatever they asked in His name, He would do it, and they walked in this belief.
• They sought divine help because they knew without it they were powerless.

It’s why the House of Prayer has become such a big part of what we do as a church, because it’s there we experience the God of the scriptures, it’s there we see doors open, the sick healed, marriages saved, prodigals come home, and the will of God worked out.

It’s why we have called our elders, “prayer elders.” We have 30 men who are committed to praying for the body of Christ. I am praying for 70 of those guys. It’s why our pastors go on prayer retreats 4 times a year to pray.

• In verse 42 we find God’s original design for the church—it worked for the church 2,000 years ago and it still works for the church today.
• We don’t have to reinvent how we do church—it’s already laid out for us—so let’s commit to doing church God’s way and watch God continue to bless it!