

**Meeting Together**  
**Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:19-25**

What would you go absolutely nuts for? Tickets for the Stanley Cup playoffs with a chance to meet the players afterwards? Front row seats and a backstage pass for your favorite band, a chance to have dinner with your favorite author? Attend a movie premier with your favorite actor or actress? Meet the president of the United States? I'm sure we would be impressed with meeting the Prime Minister of Canada, but... it's not as glamorous, and he's from Calgary so it's kind of like we already know him a bit. Exciting, but not something you'd go nuts over.

But, if you met someone who was able to get you tickets and backstage passes and opportunities to meet these people who you admire and respect so much, you'd not only be nuts with excitement, you would also be grateful and thankful for the person who was able to set this up.

And maybe you were part of a group of people who were given an amazing opportunity like this and after the experience you get together and reminisce about it, talk about it because while

other people might be amazed at your experience when you tell them about it, there is something deeper and more meaningful in sharing it with those who experienced it with you and so you want to be with them in order to do that.

And that's exactly what we see happened in the scripture passage we read from Acts 2. All these people had just experienced hearing the story of how Jesus was really and truly the promised messiah, the one they had been waiting for all these years, how Jesus was able to forgive their sin and how the Holy Spirit would transform them – and they all had the experience of believing this was true, they were given faith in Jesus Christ and finally they knew they were at peace with God.

And as much as they told others about this amazing experience they wanted to be together with others who had experienced it.

So we read that met together daily at the temple courts, they went and had meals together in each other's houses – they were with each other, together as a group

Now I don't know if you've ever had the experience of hanging out with a group of any sort, maybe Scouts or Girl Guides, a sports team, or a vacation tour but usually a group does something – camping, sports, sightseeing whatever....

These early Christians were with each other, and what they did was based on what they had experienced

- They wanted to understand better what they had experienced and who Jesus was – so they studied, they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching.
- They had experienced forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit – so they freely gave to anyone who had needs
- They needed to express their joy and happiness for what God had done – so they praised God in the temple, they worshiped God together, they enjoyed being around each other.

Now in your experiences of groups undoubtedly at some point you've experienced being in a group where you felt like you didn't belong. Something was missing that would allow you to feel like you shared what was needed to belong to the group.

High school is bad for this right? – not popular enough, not athletic enough, not good-looking enough. But it continues on in life too – you don't have the same amount of money, you don't share the same political views, you have a different cultural background from everyone else around you and you don't feel like you belong.

But in Acts 2 what we see happening is that as these early Christians hung out together, doing what they did – other people joined! Now how is that possible? These people hadn't been at Pentecost, they hadn't experienced what the original group of believers had.

But that didn't matter, because when the early Christians gathered together and learned, worshipped, prayed, ate in each other's home and gave to people in need it was like they were experiencing Pentecost all over again – and people who were checking them out, visiting to see what was going on, were able to share in that experience with them, and they joined because they now knew what it was all about – they now shared the experience as well.

This is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit works. When Christians get together and share, and pray and worship and do things that are based on the message of Jesus Christ, other people who visit or who are checking them out will experience Jesus Christ for themselves.

That's why later on in the New Testament Paul speaks so much about this group of Christians who gather together, called the Church, as being the body of Christ.

When we are meeting together, doing things based on the gospel of Jesus we embody Jesus and other people meet Him and experience Him for the first time in their lives.

That's what was happening with the early Church, as the scripture says "The Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved!"

But, once a few years had gone by it seemed some of the initial enthusiasm had faded. The honeymoon was over.

The pressures and stresses of daily life, work, and family, the challenges of figuring out how to live as a Christian in a hostile environment, it took some of the shine off their experience and

diminished their motivation to continue to be together and do things based on the gospel.

We know what that is like, don't we! Church is just one more thing to do in an already full schedule, our culture doesn't make it easy for us to put aside time for meeting together with other believers, the experience of being forgiven and our relationship with Christ has lost its vibrancy, besides we're all pretty good people anyway and I help out with IFTC once in a while.

So gradually people begin to drift into orbit around the church, checking in every so often, with less and less frequency and pretty soon they've drifted off on another course altogether. We've seen this happen.

So what's the answer? Complain that church attendance isn't what it used to be? Go after the drifters, scold them for not showing up to church, emphasize commitment, try to persuade people somehow – put a guilt trip on them?

Friends the answer is in Hebrews 10: 19-25. We, those of us who are still meeting together, need to be reminded of the gospel and how it so powerfully impacted us.

We need to spend some time with it, explore it, meditate on it, and base what we do on it. Not just abstractly or with worn out catch phrases like “being born again” but concretely in how we experienced it.

That’s what the writer of Hebrews does – he goes into a detailed exposition of how Christ fulfilled the temple system with its priests and sacrifices and enabled Jews to come close to God the Father with-out any more barriers – something they had never experienced before.

How have we experienced Christ’s salvation in our lives, his love, his forgiveness and his grace – we need to share that, reminisce on that, remember it, celebrate it – like how we remember and celebrate the memories we share with friends and family...

*Remember when you were 5 and you did this? I just thought it was amazing how you came through that situation! Do you*

*remember when... and even I’m really going through a tough time right now.*

And have you ever noticed that after such a reunion or celebration people are saying things like – *we have got to do this again sometime, call me, here’s my email address, it was really good seeing you again – I hope that situation at work gets sorted out for you, call me if you need anything.*

It works the same way for the church, when we get back to how we have experienced Christ’s love and forgiveness in our lives and we share this with those who have experienced it as well it unites us and motivates us to action.

So the writer of Hebrews can say “because of the gospel let us not give up meeting together, let’s continue to meet together and in addition to meeting together lets also do the following...”

There is a great deal of public pressure to renounce Jesus as the only way to God, but because we’ve experienced the gospel – So let us hold unswervingly to our confession as Christians that Jesus is the Son of God

We're being persecuted and it's easy to stop doing good for others, especially non-Christians, but Christ loved us even when we were his enemies!

-So let us find ways to spur each other to continue to do good deeds to love and serve non-Christians.

We let the worries and stresses of each day choke out the fact that Christ is alive and is coming back for us.

- So let us encourage each other to remember and live out of our experience with Christ and anticipate the day when we will see him face to face.

Friends do you experience church like this? My hunch is that most people get only a small taste of this, not enough to really feast on it, not enough to make it something they'd go nuts for.

Friends, the leadership at Valleyview is committed to changing that – it's why we do what we do in worship and it's also why we have invested a great deal of money and time and energy in starting a small group ministry.

We've just heard how scripture says let us consider how we might spur each other on to love and good deeds. Friends I'm convinced that through a small groups ministry God wants to do that here at Valleyview.

In small groups we will learn how to remember, share and celebrate our experiences of Christ's forgiveness and love with each other

The things we do together in small groups are based on the gospel, and as we meet together each one of us will contribute to that mysterious way in which we as a group *are* the body of Christ. This will lead us to experience Christ in new ways; it will lead to those whom we invite to our groups to meet Christ as well.

Friends are you ready to meet together?

*We're going to have a chance now to put into practice some of what we heard – we learn best through experience and so we want to give you a chance to experience a little bit of what small groups are about.*

## Table Talk

Pick one person at your table to be the facilitator – they are responsible to help ensure each person at your table has a chance to contribute, and that the discussion stays on track and on time.

### Discussion

1. Make sure that everyone has been introduced to each other. ( 2 min)
2. Ask each person to share a short example of some way they experienced Christ's love or His forgiveness or His grace. It doesn't have to be spectacular. (Keep each person to 2 min)
3. What sorts of things do people's experiences of Christ have in common and how do those things impact you as a group? Make a list, explain (5 min)
4. Has learning about others experiences with Christ been a positive, encouraging experience for you?

### Group Exercise

One of the ways in which small groups stay on track with their purpose is by group members agreeing to a covenant with each other. Later when the group is distracted or needs some guidance the facilitator can remind everyone that they agreed to focus around a specific purpose and get them back on track.

If you were to be in a small group with the people at your table what purpose would you agree to. Based on what you heard in

the message tonight, and the scripture passages listed on the exercise sheet, what would your group want, in their own words, in their covenant statement? (10 min)

### Sharing

As early Christians gave to support their brothers and sisters at this point we ask that you designate someone at your table to collect any offerings and bring up them up to the front.

### Closing Prayer

Together as a group say the Lord's Prayer to close your time together. If you feel comfortable enough have everyone join hands together while you pray.

*Our Father in heaven  
Make your name holy  
May your kingdom come,  
may your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil  
For yours is the kingdom  
The power and glory  
Forever and ever, Amen.*

### Any Questions?

We will pause for a minute to allow you to share any questions you might have.

**Small Group Covenant Exercise**

Our Purpose is to... (Hebrews 10: 23-25)

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We promise to treat each other...( Heb 10: 24, 1 Cor 12:14-27)

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We will meet... (Acts 2: 46)

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God helping us we will do our best to keep this covenant.

Group Members Signatures...

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**Sample Small Group Covenant**

Our purpose is to...

*Be a group where people get to know how other's have experienced Christ's forgiveness and love and grace and encourage one another to stay committed to following Jesus*

We promise to treat each other...

*As God has treated us in Jesus, with love and respect and we will keep all that is shared in the group confidential*

We will meet...

*Once a week at various members homes at 7:30pm for 2 hours. We understand that in order for the group to meet its purpose we must all be present, attend regularly and not miss meetings.*

God helping us we will do our best to keep this covenant.

Group Members Signatures...

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