

We're going to be in Acts 2 verses 42 through 47 this morning. Before you get there, I am very thankful to be able to teach this lecture. It's a delight. This is a topic that I actually really love and am passionate about, the fabric of fellowship. I was hoping as you have been here this summer and seen the different speakers that we've had, you've seen it was filled with doctors, and then there's three reverends, and then it was filled with doctors again. And I was hoping the reverends would have sort of taken it down a notch on Reverend Way here, and I'm at the bottom. And then I could kind of help us at least not bottom out, but come back up. Jeff Tell and Jonathan Cruz did such a phenomenal job that you're in for a shock this morning. I'm thankful for Dr. Stewart asking me to speak. More than anything, it displays what we all desire in a minister, his incredible amount of faith. This morning, we'll be in Acts 2, 42 through 47. Before we get to it, let me sort of set you up and walk us through a picture here. Imagine that you're in the upper room. You're a disciple of Christ. You're reclining at table with your Savior, with your Master, with your Lord, who you've come to love. And he begins to speak of his departure. And it's confusing, and it's anxiety-provoking within your life. It stimulates you to sort of recall your history with him. You were a tax collector, and he walked by and said, follow me, and you did it. You were a fisherman, and he came by and said, follow me, and you did it. You were a zealot fighting against Rome, and he came by and said, follow me, and you did it. You could hardly believe you followed him, but there was something about his character. There was something about his tone. There was something about his words. There was something that you foresaw about him that was the love that now you've come to experience. You have experienced his miracles. You've heard his teaching, but it's his love that sticks out to you. And he's served you in remarkable ways. Even this night, he has removed his outer garments and he has washed your feet. It made you recoil, in a sense, because who is the Lord to wash this stinky servant's feet? And yet, he says to you, I came to serve and not to be served to give my life as a ransom for many. Peter recoils at this until Jesus tells him that he must. It's so undignified in a sense of this master, and yet that's who he is. He's a servant, he's a humble servant. He would go even further to serve you, to the cross, but he's loved you like no one else could love you. It's been the best three years of your life. And now in this upper room as you recline at table and he speaks of his departure. Again, you're confused, you're stressed, you're anxious, your heart actually wrenches inside. How could this king of glory die? You don't understand it. And all of a sudden, your heart is flooded with fears. Your emotions take over. Your world starts to go black. The only thing you can feel is that it feels akin to being an orphan. Except orphans didn't always know what they didn't have because they'd never had it, but you had it. You had a family, you had a father, you had a loved one, you loved Jesus, he loved you. And can you imagine that feeling? And then it's as if Jesus reads their minds, he understands their hearts so well that he says this in John 14, if you love me, you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the spirit of truth, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. He begins to speak of this helper, the parakletos in the Greek, the one who comes alongside, who comforts, who helps, who counsels, who aids, who advocates even to your soul that you are a son of God even when you don't understand or believe that in your own heart. He speaks of him four times in this upper room discourse. And he speaks of the spirit of truth three times. And you're trying to understand all of this and then you go out in the garden and you watch the turmoil. you see what seems to be

an unraveling. And he's betrayed, he's arrested, he's killed, he's crucified on a cross, and your world goes completely dark. And then he rises from the dead, as if the sun was brighter than it's ever been. It comes up that morning, and now, 40 days later, he's speaking of his departure again. And all those emotions flood back over you. You can't believe you lost him. You can't believe you have him again. Now you can't believe you're losing him again. And he brings up the Spirit again. And he says to the disciples, stay here in Jerusalem. Don't leave until I send forth my Holy Spirit. And when my Holy Spirit comes, you'll receive power from the Holy Spirit. You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and in the outermost parts of the world. And then he departs. and it's almost a humorous scene. You're staring up into what is described as the glory cloud that actually came down and enveloped the Lord Jesus. He ascends into heaven and you're staring up thinking what just happened and an angel shows up and rebukes you for looking up. It's humorous. He says, what are you looking up for? He's coming back the same way he left and you're to go back and do what you're called to do. You're to go back and wait for the Holy Spirit. There's 120 of you total. which is remarkable in and of itself because Jesus personally appeared to 500 people and there's 120 believers. It tells you something about skepticism and a lack of faith. But there's 120 believers gathered together. And what do you do? You're waiting for the Holy Spirit and then it happens. And Jeff Tell taught on this a couple weeks ago. Or was it Jeff? No, it was Jonathan. No, it was the guy from Dartmouth. What was the guy's name? You got the bio over there, Dan. What was the guy's name from Dartmouth? Come on, don't leave me hanging here. He'll get back to us. It was that guy. He did a great job. It was really good. It was on Pentecost and tongues. And then Pentecost happens. David Irving did it, Dr. David Irving. I would not have forgotten that if I was a doctor. And then in Acts 2, it happens. The Spirit falls upon the disciples. Everyone's gathered together. They're there 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. They're there for what is a normal actual feast, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Pentecost, there's another name for it. It would become a different look after this happened, but to that point, it was just the Feast of Weeks. 50 days after Passover, the people of God would gather together to worship the Lord and thank him for the firstfruits that they'd experienced from the harvest. and to give him glory and praise and thanks. And as they're gathered together in Jerusalem, tongues of fire fall down upon the disciples and they begin to proclaim the gospel and you know the rest. People hear their language. People hear their own tongue. People who don't know Aramaic or Greek or Hebrew are hearing the gospel and they believe and the Lord adds 3,000 to the church. Peter preaches that amazing sermon And they ask what they should do to be saved and he says in verse 38, repent and be baptized 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. And we read that the 120 now grow to 3,120 in verse 41. God does this amazing work and 3,000 are added to the church. But what happens next? It's like an earthquake. What do you do in the aftermath of the earthquake? It's chaos in a sense. It's our entire congregation on the roll becoming believers in one day. What does the early church do? What do the disciples do? Do you go back to doing your old jobs? Do you go back to the high priest? Do you go back to the festivals and the Day of Atonement? Do you go back to those great experiences of old? What do you do? Herman Bavink, the great Dutch reformed theologian of the late 19th and early 20th century said that after creation and the incarnation, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the third great work of God. And so what's next? What was and is the Holy Spirit doing after

Pentecost amongst these believers? He was certainly doing what we've talked about this summer. He continued to regenerate dead hearts. to bring the dead to life, to save the elect. He's continuing to sanctify a people. He will help them persevere until Christ returns for them in glory. We'll talk more about some of those things as the weeks unfold. But Luke gives us a picture here in Acts 2.42 that's beyond Pentecost, and he doesn't make us wait. He doesn't even make us wait as long as this drawn out introduction. From the moment that he adds 3,000 souls to the church, he begins to speak of what's been referred to by James Montgomery Boyce and others as the spirit-filled church. What do they do when all of these people are brought together in Christ? Church, spirit-filled church. And that's how we get to Acts 2 42. Let me pray for our word as we read it. Gracious Father, thank you for your holy word. Use it today, Lord, by your grace and through your spirit to be useful for teaching and reproof and correction and training and righteousness, that we, your people, may be thoroughly furnished in every good work. In Christ's name we pray, amen. Acts 2 42, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers, and all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. There's always been a people of God. In the Old Testament, it was called the Qahal, the congregation of the Lord. They were brought out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness, not to just be there, but to worship. The very first thing they begin to do when they've been brought out of slavery is worship God, and God begins to organize what that worship looks like and how it's to be done before a holy God. In the New Covenant, we should expect the same kind of continuity, God and his people. And that's why Jesus says in Matthew 18, 16, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The ecclesia, as Dr. Ferguson refers to it, the called out together people. That God has always had a people he's called out from the world to be together, united in Christ and in communion with one another. That he's knit together in a body. Or we could speak of the different metaphors that are used to describe the church. The body of Christ, of which Christ is its head. the bride of Christ of which Christ is her husband, the family of God of which Christ is the elder brother who brings us to the father and we're knit together as a family and there are many more illustrations. But the point is this, these common pictures are corporate, they're communal, they're familial. The body of Christ, the family of God, the bride of Christ, they're all communal. In fact, the letters to the New Testament in the New Testament are not written to individuals, they're written by and large. They're written to churches with yous that are plural, you all, y'all. They're written to a family. And the point is this, that when the Holy Spirit does his great work of salvation, bringing us into union with Christ, he simultaneously does a great work of bringing us into communion with one another. That yes, you individually as a believer are in union with Christ, but more importantly, we are in union with Christ. We are Christ's bride. We are God's family. We are Christ's body of which he is the head. When he brings us into union with Christ, he brings us into union and communion simultaneously with one another. It's why in the Apostles' Creed we say that we believe in the communion of saints. That the Holy Spirit connects us to

one another, not simply to Christ individually. And this text tells us what that connection looks like. It tells us that the Spirit knits us together as a family, but then it tells us what the family looks like when the Spirit is at work within her. What does a Spirit-filled church look like when Christ, by His Spirit, unites us together within the church? And it gives us four characteristics and one heart transformation. That's what I wanna look at this morning, four characteristics and one heart transformation. That the Holy Spirit, firstly, knits His people together in a devotion to the apostles' teaching. devotion and the apostles teaching. They've become believers, 3,000 of them, now many of them obviously would have gone back to their home countries and taken the gospel with them, but many of them stayed and what's the first thing that they do? Luke says that they devoted themselves to learning, they devoted themselves to growing, they devoted themselves first and foremost to what God's people have always devoted themselves to, the very word of God. that they gathered together to hear the apostles who were commissioned by God, chosen by God to preach the gospel. That's why Luke says at the very opening of Acts in chapter one, verse one, that his first gospel of Luke, the gospel of Luke was written to display all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up. And so Acts then is the continuation of all that Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit in the church and to the world. That these people understood right out of the gate that what they should do as new believers, what they should do as a new knit community is really what they've always done. They should go to the word and sit under it. They should hear the word. And these apostles then began to teach the Old Testament. specifically pointing to how the fulfillment of that Old Testament was found in Christ Jesus. And they began to teach the Gospels, those things that they had seen and experienced with Christ Jesus themselves as his disciples. And they began to write the New Testament as they were carried along by that Holy Spirit. It was an early group of new believers who loved the word of God. so that they gathered together regularly to hear the word of God, the word of Christ through the spirit of Christ, by his grace, so that he might then sanctify his people until Christ returns for them. Really, nothing has changed. They laid the foundation of the church in which we now continue to grow in, and that foundation for the early church was the word of God. What are we gathered here to do this morning? To hear the word of God. The center of our worship is the Word of God. As Ligon Duncan would say, when we gather together, we pray the Word of God. We sing the Word of God. We don't just sing hymns that we love that are about us. We see the Word of God in baptism in the Lord's Supper. We read the Word of God and then we hear the Word preached. In all of those things, the Word of God is at the center. When I get up to teach, when I get up to preach, or anybody else who's gotten up here to do that, we don't teach and preach our own word, we teach the word of God. The only authority that we have is the word of God itself. When we err from the word of God, we have no authority and we should be kicked off the stage. We preach the word of God. It's why the reformers reoriented worship so that the mass was not at the center, but the word was at the center. and even began to reorient the architecture to display that the mass was no longer at the center, but the word of God was at the center. We don't gather together around a central personality. We don't gather together around an eccentric experience. We don't even really gather together around an evangelistic appeal, although that's obviously part of what the Word of God does, but we don't orient worship around what the non-believer might experience. We orient worship around the Word of God feeding the flock of God with non-believers in their midst

so that they might see and witness and hear that and wanna be a part of it. The Word of God has always been and is at the center. That's why the Westminster divines could say, that the spirit, this is Shorter Catechism 89, that the spirit maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. Be an interesting experiment to say, you're starting a business and you're thinking, What's our business model? How are we gonna spread our product to the city, the state globally perhaps? In the early church, if they had a vision for spreading the gospel globally, their missional objectives would have gone like this. We want the gospel to go to the ends of the earth. Okay, what are you gonna do about it? Well, we're gonna have a guy read a Bible to a group of people and then talk about it. And we're gonna see the expansion of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. It's actually remarkable, it's so simple and ordinary you would think it wouldn't work except the Spirit uses the Word of God to transform the people of God. It has power to transform you through the newing of your mind to regenerate your hearts from death to life. They love the Word, they were devoted to it. Dr. Thomas in his Acts commentary says, the church is a fellowship where the Bible is loved, read, studied, and obeyed. Spirit-filled church is one where he knits people together in devotion to the Apostles teaching in the Word of God. Secondly, the Spirit knits us together in devotion to the fellowship. Here in verse 42, the fellowship. What is it that unites you with other people? What is it that you have in common? The people that you love to be around most, what is it that you have in common with them? Is it politics? You love Trump and you hate Biden. You hate Trump and you love Biden. Almost did the same thing on accident there. We won't go into the debate. Is it sports? You love Clemson and hate Carolina. You love Carolina and hate Clemson. Is it hunting? Is it fishing? Is it golf? Is it coffee? Is it music? Is it classical music? You love Bach and Beethoven's a little overrated. I just said that to sound like I've ever listened to classical music. Disregard that if none of that's true. We talk about what we love. We love what we love. We gather around what we love. We even feast around what we love. And Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit brought together, turn back over to chapter two, starting in verse seven, the Holy Spirit brought together people, really verse 9, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, David Irving went over this with us, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. that the gospel has the power, the Holy Spirit has the power to bring together people who are not anything like each other. Even, the New Testament will unravel, Jews and Gentiles, enemies. that the Holy Spirit brings together people who are enemies, that the church is filled with people not like each other, that we don't gather around our club and that's what unites us, although it can, secondarily. We don't gather around our team only and that's what unites us, although it can, secondarily. There are lots of things that we love, but do we love those things and those people and intimacy with those people more than this? This is the greatest thing that we have in common. In fact, the word fellowship in the scripture, the word koinonia, means a sharing in common. That's the word here. They had the koinonia. They had the sharing in common. They had a common interest. They were knit together around a commonality. What was that commonality? It was Jesus. The thing that united them was Christ, that they were in Christ Jesus. Remember, that's Paul's favorite way of describing a believer, that we're in Christ Jesus. It's used 150 plus times in the New Testament, that the

core of our identity is that we are those who are in Christ Jesus. And when we are in Christ Jesus, we are also united to one another in communion with one another simultaneously. We often tend to think of the work of the Holy Spirit in individualistic terms, or even our relationship with Christ in individualistic terms. The Holy Spirit regenerated my heart. The Holy Spirit helps me in my worship. The Holy Spirit helps me battle my sin. The Holy Spirit is growing me to look like my Savior. The Holy Spirit intercedes for me and all of this is gloriously true, no doubt. We celebrate it and we rejoice in it. But since the enlightenment and then even in evangelicalism in the first and second great awakening with the emphasis upon your personal decision for Christ, yes, praise the Lord, but even on into current day evangelicalism, individual is first, and individual is only. That's all we really think about is individualism. And in America, maybe we're predisposed to this as well, because our individual liberties, and our individual rights, and our vote counts, and all of those things are a major blessing, but sometimes they can distract us from the communal element that perhaps is more important. The communal element that's actually the emphasis. The fact that we're communally united in Christ Jesus. Carl Trueman in his great work, *Strange New World*, how thinkers and activists redefined identity and sparked the sexual revolution. Terms this expressive individualism. And he says this, that expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized. And this expressive individualism is the default setting for understanding ourselves in the 21st century. That who we really are is what we feel inside and that's all that matters at all costs. No wonder people are struggling with loneliness. Because that's not actually who they are. They're image bearers, fallen image bearers of God himself needing to be reconciled to God and brought within a family. and expressive individualism cannot cure that. It only hinders that reality from being experienced in our lives. In fact, what we experience today is what is not new at all. It's what was experienced in the time of the judges, that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. It may be louder today, but it's not new. And so it's no wonder that we're inclined, even in the church, to think of this wonderful work, even of the Holy Spirit, mainly or purely individualistic. My faith is a personal thing. I like to keep that to myself. I like to think of God as, I like to worship God this way. It's all individualistic. It's not a shock that we would think that in this kind of culture, but when we come to the scriptures, we come to the story of God and a people, plural. We come to the story of Christ being the elder brother of a family. And what we have in common is more important than anything that the world could offer us. It's actually more important and more common, more united even than our own biological families. That's a radical statement, isn't it? But that's what the gospels tell us. That bloodline will end. But this family line will never end. We'll be together with Jesus for all eternity. You are more united even than the closest family. That's incredible. What a gift we have through the Holy Spirit. That's why verse 44 and 45 exist. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. They were together. This isn't a form of communism. It wasn't something that was mandated down upon them that the rich have to share with the poor and the poor become rich and they switch roles in some sense. That's not what this was or socialism. This was a joyful noticing of the needs of others and meeting those needs. They knew each other, they noticed each other, they cared about each other

and so they shared with each other. They met each other's needs. And you can't do that unless you actually know one another. This is why one of the early church fathers, Cyprian, could say, he cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother. That to have the one is to have the other. To deny the one is to deny the other. The early group of believers, they understood this. They grasped this reality that to be connected to the Father is to be in the family automatically, immediately where Christ is the head and the elder brother. They loved one another. They spent time with one another. They feasted together. They celebrated together. And the question for us in some sense is, is this our desire as believers? that we would want to linger long with one another, that we love the community of saints, the communion of saints, the fellowship of believers, the koinonia that we have in Christ Jesus. Thirdly, they were knit together by the Holy Spirit in the breaking of bread. And there's some debate over whether or not this is a formal thing because of the article there, the breaking of bread. Is this the Lord's Supper that was happening formally with them? Or is this more of a common meal that they did together that Jews were known for? Or as Dr. Thomas calls it, is this more of a church potluck? that they just all brought their food together and they broke bread together. And they were doing it, verse 46, day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes. And they received their food with glad and generous hearts. There's something that seems to be perhaps formal to it and informal to it. They're in the temple and they're in each other's homes. There's great hospitality sweeping through the people of God and the Spirit loves it, he's all over it. where he's filling the church, there is a breaking of bread together. There's gathering around one another's meals. There's hosting and there's hospitality. He loves to unite believers and he loves to maintain that union and it's actually a call that we're called to as believers. That's why Ephesians can say to us that we should be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. And very often, that happens around the table. Many of you, well maybe, maybe not, probably not. I was not alive when perhaps the most devastating effect to the family meal took over, the television. And now people would no longer gather around their meal, they'd gather around the ballgame, they'd gather around the TV show. But I was alive for the second most devastating effect upon the family meal and that was the TV dinner. TV dinner now you could pull it out of the freezer and it had a meat thing and it had a couple veggies or something or mashed potatoes and a starch and a veggie or something like that and had a dessert and you pop it in the microwave and you could just set it on your lap and never have to talk to your family again. You could go right to the TV. You wouldn't wait till the dinner was over, then go to the TV. You could have dinner and the TV together. You wouldn't even have to host people, and if you did, you certainly wouldn't have to talk to them or listen to them. The TV dinner. And it's only gotten worse, hasn't it? We live in a society where we're so busy with stuff, work, sports, life, whatever, that hosting feels like entertainment, and entertainment feels too much. And the scripture here says they were in the temple, they were in each other's homes, they were breaking bread, they were fellowshiping. And the byproduct was that their fellowship is growing deeper. But also look at verse 47, there's another byproduct. They were praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. There's something of the way this community loves one another that's attractive to a watching world. No doubt they were in the marketplace sharing the gospel, outward sharing the gospel. But the emphasis here seems to be that it's through what

they're doing with one another, it's through the way the Holy Spirit has knit them together in the word and in the fellowship and in the breaking of bread and the prayers that is having an effect on society. That they're watching them come together that they're seeing a love that is greater than anything they've ever experienced in a lonely and depressed culture where someone here said earlier a couple weeks ago that the greatest export we have is our depression and anxiety, that in a lonely and depressed culture, they're longing to be a part of a family, especially in a culture where families are falling apart by the dozens daily. where the father's left the house or the mother's left the house. And they're looking around to see what a real family looks like and they see it around your table in Christ Jesus. And they see it as we gather here and take the Lord's Supper in Christ Jesus. Again, we feast around what we love. And as we feast, there's fellowship and there's hospitality and there's a byproduct of our growth in unity and the growth of the kingdom and evangelism. as a watching world sees and they were added to their number daily those who were being saved. Fourthly, the Holy Spirit knits us together in devotion to the prayers. Just briefly here Again, the article is present, the prayers. Is this a formal prayer? Is this a set Jewish prayers that they were kind of filling out with Christianese, so to speak? They were together talking with one another and talking to God. Isn't it wonderful when you meet with a minister or an elder or a friend and they say, you know, before we even talk about this, can we take this to the Lord? Don't you immediately begin to trust them a little more? because they're humble enough to know that they need the Lord, they're humble enough to know that the Lord's the one that gives discernment, and they go to him in prayer. The Holy Spirit loves prayer, it's our communion with God. He enables us for prayer, he fixes our prayers on the way up. This morning I messed up the closing hymn, for those of you who were at the 8.30 service, and I thank the worship team for fixing my mess up on the way up. They sang the right song. They didn't sing the one I said we were supposed to sing. Praise the Lord, because we'd already sung it. But they fixed it on the way up. And that's what the Holy Spirit does. He fixes our prayers on the way up. And sometimes He even intercedes for us, Romans says. He prays for us when we don't have the words to pray. When we're struggling, when we're suffering, and all we can say is, Father. And that's it. And the Holy Spirit knows, and He prays on our behalf. the word, the prayer, the fellowship, the breaking of bread. It's no wonder that the reformers called three of these the means of grace, the media gratia, media being, think of media that you listen to on TV, a form of communication, gratia being grace. The way in which the Lord communicates his grace to us for saving us, convincing and converting sinners, the confession says, and for sanctifying us, for growing us in holiness and comfort, is through the word, prayer, and the sacraments. And at least one of those you can't even do individually. Baptism and the Lord's Supper. but it's implied that the word and prayer is most effective when we're gathered together around it, together. Yes, we do that individually, but also, corporately, it's what grows us. It's why the confession would say in Shorter Catechism 90 that we need to attend this, particularly the word of God, with diligence and preparation and prayer. Receive the word by faith and love. Lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives. When God's people, love to gather around the Word and fellowship the breaking of bread and prayer, the Spirit has done His great work of uniting us to Christ and to one another. And when God's people love to gather together around the Word and fellowship the breaking of bread and prayer, the Spirit continues to do His great work in growing us in His

grace that we might look more and more like Christ. But before we close, Let me ask one more question. What is it that unites all these things together? There's four characteristics of the spirit-filled church, but what's the thing that unites it together? And I would submit that it's the heart transformation that's taking place in verse 42. They devoted themselves to these things. They devoted themselves. One commentator described this as a constancy in attention. that they were occupied diligently. They were persisting in it. They were busy with it. What is it? Church. They were devoted to church. As Sinclair Ferguson puts it in his book, Devoted to God's Church, which is a great follow-up to this to think about, what does it look like for me to be a believer who loves Christ and his church in a culture that maybe doesn't do that very well? He describes this devotion as a glorious addiction. that they were gloriously addicted to church. Well, of course they were because Christ loves the church and gave himself for her. So the spirit loves the church and draws people into her and sanctifies her. And so believers then will love the church as their savior and their spirit loves the church. Loves the church, devoted to the church. This is the work of the spirit. to bring us into the church, to save a people, a church, to make her one in Christ and to stimulate within her a growing love for Christ and for one another, for the bride that he loves. And our job then is to love Christ and his church. And where we don't have a growing devotion, a growing addiction to both, we should be those who ask that the Lord would grow us in our addiction to Christ and to his people. Addiction to the word and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. And where we don't have that addiction and where we don't love doing that, we would come and do it anyways and ask the Lord to stimulate our joy even in our repentance in that moment. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing. It's not just me and Jesus and no church. It's not me and church and no Jesus. It's me and Jesus and church in a glorious union and loving devotion. I am in Christ, absolutely, I rejoice. But more importantly, we are in Christ together as a body. And when we recognize that we were lost orphans, we had no family, We were alienated from the Father. And Christ by His grace came down. and wrapped himself in skin, there was no load to which he would not go. To go into the orphanage and bring out orphans and put them into a family, it would cost his entire life. It would cost him his lifeblood. He would have to give his life as a ransom. He would redeem and purchase our souls, but when he does it, he brings us out of the orphanage, he sets us within the family where he's our elder brother, God is our father, and we have a new family. Brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, parents, grandparents. We have a new family of God that we get to be with regularly. It's almost like when we get that, we can't get enough of it. Don't you wanna linger long? Like a house guest who's not getting the hints. And the host or hostess has gotten up from the table and began to move towards the door or begin to clean up the items at the table and still don't get the hint. And they've said things like, well, this was wonderful. and you still don't get the hint because you just wanna linger long in a warm and loving family. That's what it should be like for us. And when we understand what Christ has done and what the Holy Spirit's doing and knitting us together, we just wanna linger long until we linger in eternity. When Christ comes back for us and takes us home. If you love church, you're gonna absolutely love heaven. And if you don't love church, you're not gonna love heaven. And you need to ask the Lord to grow within you a love for Christ and the love that he has for his bride that you might then linger long until Christ returns and we get to linger forever. This is the great work of the Holy Spirit as he unites us to Christ and brings us into communion

with one another. Let's give thanks to the Lord. Gracious God and most Holy Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this great work that often gets overlooked or in an individualistic society gets forgotten or we come up with excuses not to be a part of it. Father, thank you that in eternity past you set your affection upon a people. You sent your Son to rescue her. to make her his bride. You sent your spirit to regenerate the hearts of that people and set that people within a family. And you are continuing that work as we meet together week in and week out, morning and evening, around the word and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers, that you would stimulate within us a deeper love for Christ and a great devotion to your people until the day breaks and the shadows flee away and we rejoice in that heavenly church, triumphant, worshiping Christ forever and ever. Would you do this great work in our souls for your glory, in Christ's name, amen.