

An Awesome Church

Acts 2:42-47 | 2020-02-23 | Dave Geldart

MINGLE QUESTION: What would an awesome church be like?

1. Good Afternoon Tallgrass Church!
 - a. How about that mingle question...
 - i. What are some of the answers you heard?
2. ME SHARE about my 1st experience with what felt like awesome church
 - a. LIFE Group at NH
 - i. Real life, openness, honesty, real loving relationships
 - ii. God really moving, brining people to Jesus, real life change
 - iii. Not just the Sunday go to meeting mentality
 - iv. Coupled with getting disciplined and beginning to disciple others, this was NOT boring, and really itched something deep within my soul for purpose, meaning, connection,
 - v. I could give my whole life to this!
3. We all have some ideas about what an awesome church would be like...
 - a. Some are compatible, some are not.
 - b. Is THIS an awesome church (small group – LIFE Group)?
 - i. Or this? (megachurch – Joel Osteen)
 - ii. Is this what's most important? (big music)
 - iii. Or is it good preaching?
 - iv. Or fellowship? (coffee date?)
 - v. Should we be focused on caring for those in the church
 - vi. Or focused on serving the world out there?
 - vii. Should we be attractional in nature (trying to attract nonbelievers to our meetings)
 - viii. Or incarnational (going out to them on their turf)
 - c. All very important questions.
 - d. The big question looming in this discussion is: WHAT IS RIGHT? AND HOW DO WE KNOW?
4. We've been studying the book of Acts together.
 - a. THE ACTS OF JESUS CONTINUED
 - b. Looking at what Jesus has CONTINUED TO DO though his Holy Spirit after he died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven
 - c. The last couple weeks we've been looking at what happened when the CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST was first born.
 - i. When the Holy Spirit first came and filled the followers of Jesus
 - ii. And how Peter stood up and preached the first Gospel Sermon to the crowds in Jerusalem.
 - iii. And last week we ended with v 41 – 3K people accepted Jesus
 - iv. And the church was born
 1. Day started with 120 believers, no HS
 2. Day ended with HS now filling 3120.
 - a. 96% of the church were brand new believers!

3. Can you imagine what that might have been like?
- d. Many of you may know what happens next, but what if you didn't.
 - i. What would be your best guess as to what would happen to that group over the coming days, weeks, months.
 - ii. Crazy disorganization
 1. Difficulty maintaining control
 2. Complaining, confusion
 3. Quickly split into factions
5. Lets read – Acts 2:42-47
6. ⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
- 7. PRAY**
8. Humanly speaking, this is NOT what we might expect to happen.
 - a. No trace of confusion
 - b. Power grabbing
 - c. Abuse
 - d. Complaining, division
 - e. Nor was there annoyance from the population
9. Instead, right out of the gate, this newborn church was
 - a. Radically united
 - i. Genuinely Loved being together
 - b. Loving, Humble, caring, generous, GLAD
 - c. Serious minded
 - i. Studying the scriptures
 - ii. Praying
 - iii. Taking the Lord's Supper
 - d. Worshipful
 - e. Awe--Experiencing God's powerful work in their midst
 - f. Neighborly
 - g. And winsome
10. In short – an AWESOME church
 - a. The early church was indeed an awesome church
 - b. Embodied the ideals for church living right from the beginning
11. Lets take a few minutes to look a little more deeply at what THIS awesome early church was like
 - a. And as we do, in the back of your minds, I want you to be constantly thinking about how this church description compares with your desires for church ... and your experience with church
12. LIFE

- a. The new church ppl DEVOTED themselves to 4 things:
 - i. DEVOTED is a strong word:
 - ii. LIFE
- b. An acronym that's the basis for the name of our community groups here: LIFE Groups
- c. Learning Biblical Truth
 - i. DEVOTED—strong word
 - 1. They were devoted to learning Biblical Truth
 - ii. DEVOTED to apostles teaching
 - iii. Ppl really wanted to get equipped!
 - iv. Got a clear sense that this wasn't just a show up and sit through the meeting thing, they were WANTING to learn
 - v. No anti-intellectualism here
 - vi. They were self-motivated to learn from their leaders
 - 1. And while we can't go watch a sermon from Peter on youtube
 - 2. Or listen to a podcast from John or James or Paul
 - 3. WE can do the exact same thing
 - 4. We have the teachings of the apostles written down for us
 - a. The new testament
 - b. The Bible.
- d. Intercession (prayer)
 - i. These prayer meetings were WELL attended
 - 1. In most churches (including our own) prayer meetings are typically the LEAST well attended
 - 2. Right behind budget meetings and service projects
 - ii. In many of our churches today, prayer meetings are seen as optional
 - 1. Extra
 - 2. Only for the elite go getters of the church
 - iii. But not so for the early church.
 - iv. They believed God existed, and was actually involved in their lives and world.
 - v. And that prayer was vital to their lives
 - vi. That they were on MISSION for (and with) him.
 - vii. They were devoted to prayer, not just for themselves
 - 1. Their comfort, prosperity, etc
 - 2. But for the mission – God's great work in and through their lives out into their neighborhoods
- e. Fellowship
 - i. Devoted to Koinonia – “common” – did life together
 - ii. DAILY
 - 1. Day by day – in the greek this actually means ----- every day
 - 2. Early church met together in some way or another MOST DAYS
 - a. Gathering Centrally AND house to house

- i. But what's clear is that from the beginning, the early church did BOTH
 - 1. Not either or
 - 2. Both AND
 - ii. We know from later in Acts, and other places in the NT, as well as early church writings, that Christians gathered weekly on Sundays – the Lord's (resurrection) Day.
 - 1. We know these weekly Sunday gatherings included celebrating the Lord's Supper together and gathering around the teaching of the Scriptures.
 - iii. We also see that believers gathered from house to house (most days!)
 - 1. In smaller family-sized communities
 - iv. That's why here at TG we also take a Both And approach
 - 1. We see the wisdom and the need to gather centrally on Sundays AND to gather in smaller home groups throughout the week
 - 3. Early church met together in some way or another MOST DAYS
 - 4. WHAT – WHY?
 - a. Because it was that good.
 - b. They wanted to be together --
 - iii. Real meaty fellowship
 - 1. Far more than hanging out
 - 2. Or showing to a meeting
 - iv. Sharing life from the heart.
 - 1. No fakery here
 - 2. No need to put on a show, or smile and say you're fine
 - 3. But real loving relationships
 - a. Knowing and being known
 - b. Loved and accepted for who you REALLY are
 - c. Because of God's great work for us on the Cross
 - v. It's the best of family and friendship, mixed together
 - 1. The kind of fellowship you were made for
 - 2. LONG for, even if you don't realize it
 - 3. Truly a glimpse, a foretaste of Heaven!
 - 4. And for what we'll live like in eternity, resurrected together on the new Earth
- f. Extending LIFE to others
 - i. This was an OUTREACHING community
 - ii. Truly Neighboring
 - iii. Meeting needs
 - 1. Caring for the real practical needs of the poor in their midst
 - 2. And also being good neighbors in their community: enjoying the favor of everyone

- iv. AND sharing the Good News-the Gospel
 - 1. Not JUST being nice
 - 2. But sharing the detailed news about Jesus and his work for us on the Cross
- v. Following The Great commission
 - 1. Mat 28: ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
 - 2. Apostles doing their job to disciple all people, including teaching them to turn around and do the same.
 - a. This was happening!
 - b. New converts a common, daily occurrence
 - c. The early church didn’t grow through church transfer
 - i. Or big programs
 - ii. Or political power
 - iii. Or marketing
 - iv. Or staff-centered ministry
 - d. It grew by regular church people doing the ministry
 - i. Loving one another well
 - ii. And reaching out to their neighbors with the message of the Gospel
 - iii. AND helping them learn to do the same!
 - e. CHURCH GROWTH the way it SHOULD be
 - i. Not from intra-church transfer growth
 - ii. But REAL growth
 - iii. By reaching the lost with the Good News of Jesus
 - iv. And helping the dechurched discover what it’s like to connect with and commit to a local body
 - f. This has been my prayer from the beginning for our church
 - i. That we would grow PRIMARILY by reaching the lost and dechurched
 - ii. With the love of Christ
 - 3. Ephesians 4 – so that the BODY BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE
 - 4. Discipleship is the backbone of the Christian life
 - a. And of the church
 - b. Discipleship kept it going.... On and on
 - c. Through the decades and centuries
 - d. Down all the way to today. To you and me.
 - 5. AWESOME

13. So, is this really possible today?

- a. Yes.
- b. The Holy Spirit filling them is the same today

- c. People are still people
 - d. Sure our culture is different in some ways, so our challenges are also different.
 - e. But the Spirit and the Mission and the Call are still the same.
 - i. The glorious malleability of the church is that none of it is culture specific.
 - ii. The Church at its core can thrive in any culture, in any time.
 - f. In fact the church IS growing today, like gangbusters.
 - i. In Asia, Latin America, Africa (wikipedia)
 - ii. Just not here.
14. So lets think together for a minute – why do you think that is? What’s hindering us here and now from being a part of an awesome church like the early church? (Why are people discontent with church?)
- a. Consumerism
 - i. We’re consumers. Self focused buyers.
 - ii. What’s in it for me? We want what the best product, the best experience, for the lowest price, and the lowest commitment
 - 1. Otherwise I’ll take my business elsewhere!
 - iii. Sunday go to Meeting mentality
 - 1. It’s about me, getting fed, getting my needs met.
 - 2. Not about going to serve others
 - b. Busyness
 - i. Yes – we’re so busy – or at least we FEEL THAT WAY
 - ii. We’ve stretched ourselves so thin with 1000 different priorities and responsibilities.
 - 1. Our lists are full with work, exercise, Netflix, kids sports, video games, sleep
 - 2. And church isn’t usually at the top
 - iii. If I’ve done everything else I need/want to do and I WANT TO in the moment, I’ll attend a church meeting
 - 1. Otherwise I’ll not feel pressured to attend
 - iv. Sounds great ... but I’m pretty busy with more important things.
 - c. Baggage with church
 - i. Many have been hurt in connection to Christians or a church
 - ii. Taken advantage of
 - iii. REAL OR PERCEIVED
 - iv. And now it’s like pulling teeth to get someone with baggage close to anything that smacks of church or God – especially Jesus
 - d. Inexperience
 - i. Lack of experience, vision/appetite for Awesome Church
 - ii. People just haven’t experienced real church
 - iii. Haven’t experienced a personal real relationship with God
 - 1. Even those who have grown up in the church
 - 2. Been Xians for decades
 - 3. Know how to do church programs, how to try to be good and try not to be bad (and how to cover it up when you are)
 - 4. But their faith isn’t ALIVE

- 5. They've never been a part of a church like Acts 2 – an awesome church
- iv. So they don't long for it.
- v. Don't really know what they don't know
- vi. So they settle for doing church – as little as possible
 - 1. Bored, depressed, lonely, distracted.

15. Applications

- a. We believe Tallgrass can be an awesome church!
 - i. Where are we at with these things as Tallgrass Church?
 - ii. What are some aspects of awesome church we're doing well at TG?
 - 1. Honesty
 - 2. Accepting messiness
 - 3. Grace centered AND Truth centered
 - 4. Value on relationships
 - 5. LIFE Groups
 - 6. Interest to work with other churches/orgs for betterment of our world
 - 7. Leadership Team
 - a. Dream team of leaders here!
 - b. Elder Team amazing – practitioners
 - i. Ron's comment
 - c. Staff team – great heart for ministry, equipping ethos
- b. We need to grow in 3 key areas:
 - i. **2020 Strategic Priorities:**
 - 1. GATHERING CENTRALLY
 - 2. CORPORATE PRAYER
 - 3. DISCIPLESHIP
- c. Take steps to grow in LIFE
 - i. Learning Biblical Truth
 - 1. Begin reading the Scriptures daily.
 - a. So you're learning how to actually feed yourself on God's word
 - b. And you're not showing up to Gatherings STARVED , looking for your ONE SPIRITUAL MEAL of the week
 - 2. Enter into Sunday teachings w/ different mindset
 - a. Take notes
 - b. Ask questions
 - c. Initiate conversations with spouse or friends after
 - ii. Intercession
 - 1. Begin scheduling regular prayer times into your life
 - a. Prayer cards
 - 2. Initiate praying together with your spouse
 - a. With friends when you get together
 - 3. Come to TG prayer Tuesday mornings (spouses can alternate!)
 - iii. Fellowship

1. Push back against pseudo connection, and pursue face-to-face relationships w/ someone in TG/your LG
 2. Show up to CG & LG with consistency
 - a. AND a new mindset
 - b. Come to serve rather than to consume/be served
 3. Invite TGians over to your house
 - iv. Extending LIFE to others
 1. Pray for God to show you 1-3 ppl in your life who you can extend LIFE to
 - a. Circle of 3
 2. Look for opportunities to serve them and initiate conversations about deeper things
 3. Invite them over for dinner or fire pit or playdate
 4. Learn to ask good questions!
 5. And practice sharing the actual CONTENT of the Good News where opportunities arise
 6. See what GOD might do
 - v. Get plugged deeply into a LIFE Group
 1. Will help you grow in ALL these areas
 2. Get into discipleship – forces you to really take scary steps of faith with LIFE
 3. You WONT regret it
16. **END:** It's God's desire for you that you'd be a vital part of an awesome church
- a. His Church
 - b. And it's his desire that TG grows and becomes an awesome church.
 - i. He's got more in store for us.
 - ii. And through us, for our city.
17. **PRAY:** GOD MAKE TG AN AWESOME CHURCH
- a. And show us steps you're wanting us to take, scary steps of faith, to make that become a reality
 - b. And please use us to reach the lost and lonely and hurting in our city with the love of Jesus

--SING--

18. PRAYER TIME OVER ZACH & JENNA + TERRENCE

THE CHOPPING BLOCK

19. Some Other traits of this awesome church are worth mentioning

- a. Awe
 - i. Wonders and Signs – God clearly moving
 - ii. Real tangible, experiences of God in and around their lives
 - iii. God was present among them
 - iv. And they knew it
- b. Gladness
 - i. Praising God
 - ii. Connected to generosity
- c. Radical Generosity
 - i. Shared all material possessions
 1. By necessity
 2. Instant Pot church – 120 → over 3K in one day
 3. All in town from abroad for Passover/Pentecost
 4. Decided to stay
 5. Money would be running out
 - a. Hunger, poverty, real needs
 - ii. Doesn't seem like it was practiced later in NT
 - iii. But principle consistent – radical generosity and rejection of this world's materialism/security
 1. Later in Acts we see Christians still selling their REAL ESTATE and giving the money to meet the needs of other believers
 2. We see even the poorest Christians living radically generous lives
 3. The super poor Macedonian church ppl BEGGING Paul for the chance to give to help the needy in Jerusalem
- d. Favor of ALL the ppl
 - i. Neighboring!
 - ii. Not just inward focus, respect, honor, and FAVOR with outsiders
 - iii. Not just weirdos, out of touch with the real lives and needs around them
 1. They were engaged, caring ppl
 2. Meeting needs in their city
 3. Such that others were impressed!
 4. In a society without welfare
 - a. Christians stepped in and met needs around them themselves
 - b. Adopting discarded babies
 - i. A real problem in Roman empire
 - c. Caring for the sick and dying
 - i. Common for families to neglect or ostracize sick family members
 - ii. But Xians became known for taking these in, caring for them
 - iii. During Bubonic Plague

1. Public opinion swayed!
- d. Education and literacy
 - i. From the beginning, when Christians would take the Gospel to new places, they'd bring education and healthcare with them
5. So much so that outsiders who reviled their beliefs nevertheless had to respect and honor them for their philanthropy

20. What hinders us?

- a. Amusement – ME TIME expectation
 - i. Netflix, sports, leisure, video games, SocMed
 - ii. Those who try not to go crazy with church, who think it'd be WEIRD and even unhealthy to gather with other believers most days
 - iii. Find nothing odd about sitting slack jawed in front of a screen for hours every day
 - iv. Or having no deep human relationships
 - v. *MCCALLUM QUOTE?????????*
- b. Pseudotolerance & Post-Modernism
 - i. It's arrogant to think you have the only right beliefs
 - ii. Live and let live
 - iii. Don't ever tell someone else that they're wrong.
 1. They might feel bad
 2. Feel offended
 - iv. So we'll tolerate anyone and everyone and anything they think or believe UNLESS THEY CLAIM to be true
 1. There is no truth – except ours
 - a. The irony of pseudotolerance!
 - b. It's self-contradictory!
 2. Ie: we'll embrace and tolerate anyone culturally except Christians