

Series: Becoming like Jesus and Living for Others

**Open Hands**

Acts 2:42-47

Sermon by Men's Minister Josh Brage

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, February 15, 2026

A reading from Acts 2.42-47: "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," the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Josh: Thank you. Thank you, Liz. What a beautiful reading. Good morning. Is it just me, or does it seem like Sunday mornings and Monday mornings are from two entirely different worlds? Is that just me? I come here on Sundays, and I love Sunday mornings. I am a church boy, if you have not noticed that, but I come here, I see all of my buddies, I see all of my friends, I worship with you all. What a beautiful time together this morning. That was so fun, but by the time I get out of my car Monday morning at work, I am like, "Am I even a Christian? Like, based on that commute, based on that argument with my wife, based on that thing that happened with the kids, am I even saved?" Is this just me, or does it seem like the week is a little bit different than the weekend? I think so. I think a lot of us feel that way. Not just that, but my weeks tend to be filled with all kinds of different things, probably like yours. My week is filled with way too many meetings. I do not know how we are still doing meetings in 2026, with kids' sports, with work, with extracurricular activities, and with house projects. My evenings are spent right now watching the Americans just continue to fall on their faces or rumps in the Olympics, and sometimes it feels like what we talk about on Sundays has so little to do with what I do during the week. I sometimes wonder if what I do during the week actually matters at all for the kingdom. Maybe that is just me. I think some of us resonate with that. I think some of us feel this gap that I am probably the only one who is willing to say it out loud, so you're welcome. You're welcome.

In this series, what we have been doing is unpacking what the Lord is asking us to become. Since the beginning of the year, we have been unpacking these values, and these values are behaviors or things that we want to define our culture by, not just as individuals, but as a church. We feel the Lord has called us as a church to be on mission, to become like Jesus and live for others, but I think the thing that stuck out to me the most about this series is this is not just a series for us when we are in here. This is about who we are the other 166 hours of the week, and so I was wondering as I was approaching this last value, that's what we are doing today, our last value. What does, where do we turn? Where do we turn for our last moment? How do we connect our worlds? Before we look forward to our last value, I want us to look backwards, and this is what Liz just read. Today we are going to look at the standard by which all other churches are measured, and that is the first church. I think for us to know where we are going, we need to know what we're supposed to be doing, what we are supposed to be becoming.

Here's something super interesting. I found a book by an American sociologist who studies all kinds of things, and he spent years studying the early church, and his question was, how does a small, ragtag group of underfunded, not funded, underfunded, poor, persecuted people, 120 of them, grow to over six million Christians in about three-hundred years, large enough that the entire Roman Empire that had spent three-hundred years persecuting them adopted Christianity as the official state religion? How does that happen?

It is very important that we go back to the early church and study what made them tick, what made them work, what made them so influential, and here is what he found, and I think this is so fascinating for us to study today. What he found was not that they had amazing leadership, and he found that it is not that they had amazing strategy or amazing initiatives that they rolled out. Here's what he found. What he found was that they were a community whose daily life was so visible, so radically different from the world around them, that people could not look away. He actually found that their daily life, their Mondays through Fridays, is what made the early church so explosively impactful. I think this is really important for us to study today and to hear today. It is what makes them tick. Here is a question it raises for me. What fueled them? What closed the gap for them between Sundays and Mondays? What made their lives so integrated and so valuable and so full of the Spirit? That is what we are going to study today. Acts chapter two has a lot of these answers for us, so if you have your Bibles or your app, get it open to Acts chapter two. Yes, they asked the charismatic boy to preach Acts chapter two, so hold on tight. Hold on tight.

Acts chapter two drops us into the immediate aftermath of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Just fifty days ago or so, that is about from here to Christmas, fifty days ago, the two Mary's came bursting into the disciples' home and declared the gospel for the very first time, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Amen. He then proceeded to teach them and live with them for a few days, and then He ascended, but before He ascended, He promised them the coming of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that is how Acts chapter two starts. Acts chapter two starts with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and He comes in dramatic fashion. That tends to be how the Holy Spirit comes. He comes in fire and wind and in power, and in the very first afternoon when the Holy Spirit descends, is unleashed upon this earth, in the very first afternoon, over 3,000 people hear the gospel for the first time, and it compels them to believe, and they repent, and they get baptized into the early church, so on day one, the early church goes from 120 to 3,120. This is fascinating.

This is how the Holy Spirit starts to move in our lives, but here is the thing. I have read this. Let's read Acts chapter 2, 42 and 43: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." What we are getting here is an on-the-ground report of what this initial community, these 3,000 people, what were they doing? What was their church like in the very first days of the church? Here is what we found: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, and everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles." What a picture. I wish I was a part of this church. What do we see? We see complete devotion. We see awe. We see wonder. We see excitement. We see commitment. We see a community of people giving themselves over entirely to this new movement of the Spirit, but here is the thing. I think when we approach this passage, we often read it upside down, and I will show you what I mean.

I think when we read this passage, what we see is a list of things to do. Who here loves a good checklist? Yeah, sometimes I do. It depends on what I am doing. I think when we approach this scripture, we hear a lot of good things that the church did, and we are really quick to say, “Okay, great, they did all of those things, so if we want the Lord to move in a certain way, then we need to redouble our efforts and commit to doing all of the same things that the early church committed to doing.” I think that is actually upside down. Here is what I think. I think this passage is not about what the early church did. I think it is about what God gave them. I do not think this passage is about what the early church did so much as what God gave them to succeed and to thrive. Let’s look at it. These people were brand new believers, brand new leaders. They did not have a plan. They did not have a system yet. They were just going, and you look at all of the things that God was generously pouring out in their lives.

Let’s look at the list. First, the apostles’ teaching. These men started to get up, and just days ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Can you imagine the urgency of their message? This was a gift that God gave the church. Peter, James, and John, who had spent three years of their lives walking alongside Jesus, they had just had their lives completely disrupted by Jesus. They left their families, and they left their vocations. It is almost like Jesus changes everything, and He did for these guys, and then Peter, on the day of Pentecost, the same Peter who just weeks ago denied knowing Jesus, stands up in the city of Jerusalem, and filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly declares that Jesus Christ is Lord. He says Jesus came, and He lived, and He died. He was crucified, He was buried, and He was raised to life on the third day, and that message was so palpable, so on fire that these people responded immediately. Think about the urgency of this message.

What else did God give them? He gave them fellowship, deep, actual, practical community. The gospel, especially early on, was breaking all kinds of rules. It was bringing people together in a really profound, unifying way. It was breaking down social boundaries, and breaking boundaries even across gender and across political affiliations. The gospel would spread to eventually break down ethnic and religious boundaries. This community was unique and special. The Lord gave them breaking of bread, gave them communion and prayer, “My body broken for you, my blood shed for you,” and these people were experiencing the presence of God in entirely new and profound ways.

Finally, the last thing that the Lord gave them was many wonders and signs performed. If you just even flip the page there to chapter three, the next story is Peter encountering a man who could not walk, and he says, “Silver and gold have I not, but what I do have I give. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk,” and the man does. Jesus’s ministry continues through the book of Acts with many signs and many wonders, and what are these things that we see in this verse? This is not a list of initiatives that the church rolled out. This is a list of things that God generously and abundantly poured out into his community for them to thrive and to flourish. Which leads us to the very first thing that I think they got that we need to get. Here is the very first thing that I think they were based on that we can’t miss. We can’t miss this. God is consistently, relentlessly, and mind-blowingly generous. Their community was not built on their activity. Their community was built on God’s generosity.

I think this is the first place that we need to remember God’s overflowing and abundant generosity. All of scripture points to this idea. From the opening pages of Genesis to the last pages of Revelation, what we see in scripture is that God is a giver. In the garden, He gives life, and He gives creation. He gives

identity. He gives provision. He gives relationship. In the garden, He gives Adam and Eve everything they needed to flourish, and what did they do? They rejected his generosity. We all do, and when they reject Him, what does He do? He comes to them, and He doesn't pull back. He gives to them again. Actually, in Genesis 3, He gives them covering for their shame and their sin, and He gives them a promise that He will not leave them or abandon them.

He gives again throughout scripture. He gives Abraham a new family when he has none. He gives Moses a new identity when Moses is lost and confused. He gave the people of Israel manna from heaven on the daily. Every day, bread fell from the sky for an entire nation of people for forty years, fire by night, cloud by day, water from the stone, and bread from the sky. This is how generous God is, and not just to hundreds of thousands of people in the desert, but one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is God providing for a broke, desperate widow in the middle of a famine, who is down to her last handful of flour, and the Lord in His generosity sees her and comes to her and gives to her. He gives her so much that her jar never runs out. Our God is a generous, giving God. Amen?

It is so important that we ground ourselves not in our activity, but in His generosity. Psalm 103 says it like this. "Forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Our God gives forgiveness of sins. Our God gives healing and deliverance. Our God gives redemption and salvation. Our God is a generous God who lifts people up out of the pit, who shows up when nobody else does. Our God is a God who welcomes people who are rejected. Our God is a God who lifts and blesses instead of puts down and curses. Our God is a generous, outpouring, giving God. The question for us is, what has God given you? Are there people in this room right now who remember the generosity of God in their life? Do we remember on the daily? Are we grateful for the gifts that He has given us?

As I was preparing for this sermon, I spent some time making a list. I guess lists are coming up a lot today, and I made a list of some of the ways God has been generous to me. I remember when He first broke into my bedroom as a young teen. I remember, I grew up in church, but I remember the moment when God became something more than a fairy tale to me. Has it happened to you? I remember the moment in church when I was 16. I was in a worship service just like this one, and an old couple that I did not know came over in the middle of worship and began praying and speaking over my life, a complete stranger, and they spoke words of purpose and calling over my life that I hold with me to this day. That is God's generosity to me. I remember sitting across from Hannah for the first time at Village Roaster, having a cup of coffee, and walking away knowing that my life was different. I remember the gift of my first son and of my second, but if I am really honest, it took me a second to write that list, not about Hannah. It took me a second, because I think it is easy to forget his benefits. I think it is easy to get distracted. I think it is easy to drift away from gratitude and instead focus on all the things that we think we still need in this life. Maybe that is just me. "Forget not all his benefits." So, this is the first thing that the church had that we need so badly, to remember his generosity.

The second thing that we see is that this generosity that was fueling this movement did not just stop with them. Let's look on. Let's look at verses 44 and 45: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." Here is what

we see in this passage. The first thing is that they are receiving his generous a gift, and the second thing is that God begins to give not just to them, but through them. God begins to use this community as a conduit for his generosity. They have everything in common. They even begin to experience radical life-style changes, and what they begin to discover is that generosity flows.

The design of the world is that generosity comes to us and through us to other people. Eugene Peterson says it this way: "Giving is the style of the universe. Giving is woven into the fabric of existence. All life is given. It must continue to be given to stay true to nature. God so loved the world that he gave. Giving is the way the world is. God gives everything that is. If we try to live by getting instead of giving, we go against the stream," against the stream. I think this image of a stream from Pastor Eugene is really potent here. I love going up to Pine with my family. We go up there when we can, and sit next to the Platte River, and the boys play in it, and I do what I do, sit by it. I am mostly a sitter, I guess, but what an image we have of a stream of generosity. Think about a mountain stream. It is full of cold, clear, fresh water, and all around it are life, wildlife. We have trees, we have an abundance of nature, and even in it, we see trout darting and dashing and avoiding fishermen. That is what they are trying to do. What we see is this movement. The one thing you can't say about a stream is that it is boring or dead. It is full of life. This is a picture of God's generosity that was designed to flow in our lives.

The hard part is when we try to, instead of receiving, instead of going with the flow, we start to try to get, and we try to hold. Have you ever stood in a stream and tried to stop it? It doesn't really work, and it probably just frustrates you. Why? Because you are going against the design of nature. When we live by getting instead of giving, we go against the stream. The trick is, the world is designed to convince us that there is more that we need. This is the hard part. The world is designed to convince us that there is more we need to get, but I think the early church knew that it was not about what we get. It is about what we give. God's generosity was moving through them.

So, a question for us is, are you going with the flow, or are you clinging to what you think is yours? We are a really generous church, a really generous church. Even just on Christmas Eve, we gave a generous amount to one of my favorite ministries, which is Royal Family Kids Camp. This church, this room, gave over \$28,000 to this camp. Yeah, that is worth celebrating, because God is generous. Royal Family Kids Camp, if you did not know, is a camp for kids in the foster system, and it is a beautiful camp where one week a year we give these kids something they do not get the rest of the year, attention, focus, love, a commitment to love them in spite of their circumstances, because of their circumstances. One of the questions that I have for us is, camp is coming up. Camp is coming up. There is more for us to do than just write a check. Waterstone has been supporting Royal Family for over fifteen years. We have been a sponsor chapter, and we provide money and volunteers, and we need help. This camp does not happen without us stepping up to lead and to serve, so I do want to invite you. We have an information meeting today right after church. If you have ever felt, "How can I do anything in this crazy, broken world, especially around foster care?" RFK is making a difference, and I would invite you to stop by and hear how you can fit in. There are all kinds of different ways you can support and help, but the flow of God's generosity is so much more than our bank account. Who knows that?

For some of us, that is where the Lord may be convicting us right now. He may be asking you to give more. Maybe you are doing your taxes, and it is time for you to give more this year than you did last

year. That could be happening, but God's generosity flows in all kinds of other ways too. Maybe for you, going with the flow of generosity looks like finally texting that person that you have been meaning to check up on. Maybe for you, it means opening your home to a small group. Let me tell you a little secret about opening your home for a small group. No one cares if your house is messy. Just no one cares. No one cares. Do not let a perfect home or lack thereof be some sort of barrier to community. We all prefer going to a slightly messy home. It makes us feel comfortable. It just does. Maybe for you, the flow looks like saying no to some extracurricular activities, so you have time and space to spend with your kids. Or maybe it looks like being the kind of person at work who has time for people, time for interruptions, even if you are caught in back-to-backs all day.

Generosity is designed to flow to us and through us, because God is a generous God, and this is what this church was experiencing, and before we move on, I want to focus on this for just a second. Remember we started with the question of how did their daily lives match their faith so well? How are they so connected? This is why. Their daily lives were so connected to their faith because they were experiencing God's generosity in entirely new and exciting ways, so if you have experienced some of this disconnect, lean into how generous our God is. It does not just stop with them.

Let's go on to our last verse here: "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 people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved," and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. What we see here in this community is that God's generosity begins to spiral outward. Do you see this? It starts with all the good things God gives them, preaching and communion, and then it moves into giving them a community, but then it starts to move outside of scheduled church meeting times, and it actually overflows into their home life. Not only does it overflow, but also does it actually overflow in such a way that the people begin to notice, their neighbors begin to take notice, and they like it. People began to notice the laughter in this community. People began to notice the care that they had for one another. People began to notice that one house down the road that had all the camels parked out in front of it every Thursday night. People began to pay attention to the fact that this community worked a little bit differently. They cared for each other. They were not selfish. They were not trying to use each other, and the people liked it, and you can look at what the Lord did with that. He added to their number daily.

Here is the big point. Here is the pinnacle of today. The primary strategy of the Holy Spirit for growing and expanding the kingdom is us. The primary strategy of God is not a perfect plan. It is not perfect preachers. It is not perfect strategies and initiatives. No, the plan of God to grow His kingdom is to use a community of people who are committed to understanding, recognizing, and sharing His generosity with the world. This makes our Mondays through Fridays really important to what God is doing here. This is what our sociologist found. He found that the early church grew not just because of their message, but also because of who they were. They grew because when the pandemics would hit, when the epidemics would hit cities, everyone would leave, but the Christians would stay and care, and the sick that they cared for would get better, and when they got better, they would find themselves in a community surrounded by loving, affectionate people. They found a community that treated women differently than the society around them, treated babies differently than the society around them. They lived in a society

where often infants were unwanted and discarded, but the early church found those infants and brought them into their homes. What the sociologist found was it was not their message, but it was who they were that grew and exploded the early church. This idea has profound implications for us. When an entire community of people says yes to God's generosity, the kingdom of God breaks through. Are we going to say yes to His generosity?

This leads us to our last value of this series, open hands. We give because God first gave to us, whether it is time, money, attention, or presence. We live with open hands, trusting that generosity creates space for the kingdom to break through. Open hands mean two things to me. One, it means open to receive. recognizing and receiving the gifts that are in our lives like what they are, gifts from above. Two, open hands mean quick to share, quick to let go, slow to hold on, quick to give. I think that is what open hands look like, and open hands are exactly how the kingdom breaks into our community. I feel really humbled and honored to be asked to preach this message today.

As we close, I just want to share a personal aside. This message for me is not just something really abstract. This message is what I have experienced here. Waterstone, I started here back in 2010 when I met Hannah here through a couple that was a part of this church, and what I have experienced here since then is an outpouring of God's generosity in my life. What I have found in this community is a place to launch my family. We have had our boys here. We are now raising them here. Our marriage has thrived because of the place we have been planted. I have found friends, lifelong friends here. I have found healthy theology here. That is what I have needed to thrive in this season. I have found stable, healthy leadership here that has provided me with stability. This church has been here for me on the best days of my life. Getting married in the hub in 2011, that is one. Winning a softball championship here with some of you, and on some of the worst. This place, God's generosity has shown up on the worst days of my life, and they have shown up, they have walked in, and they have sat down, and they have cared for us. This is the way God uses community, so when I pray about Waterstone, I pray that I could give back anything that would help say "thank you."

My first prayer is always of gratitude, but my second prayer that follows really closely is that the Lord would do it again for other people. It can't possibly be just about me and what I and my family receive here. It has to be about other people who are getting invited into the kingdom. My prayer for Waterstone is that we would be a place where the kingdom does not just come to us but comes through us. My prayer is that more and more people come to know faith because of this community, come to know the saving generosity of our Lord Jesus through us. I pray this, and I pray this regularly. I pray that the Lord will do something that is new here. I pray that He would use this place in other people's lives, in those same ways He has used it in mine. This message is important to us. It is important to me. The early church did not set out to change the Roman Empire. Let me just be clear. What they did was open their hands, and the Lord did everything else. Whatever the Lord does here, it is not going to be because of you or because of me. It is going to be because the Lord is a good and generous God. Amen? Amen.

All right, to wrap up this series, I would like to ask you to stand with me, and what we are going to do is we are going to read through these values together as a church. We are going to read through them together as a way not to just believe them, but as a way to align and affirm that we believe and we are

going to commit to these same things together. These are not just values on a website. They are things we are choosing to become together, so would you read these aloud with me?

We live like Jesus changes everything. We follow Him because He transforms people, places, and purpose. We pursue presence over program. We prioritize being with God and each other. We know that together is better. We resist the pressure to perform and commit to being a place where people are seen, known, and valued. We value process over product. We do not expect anyone to have it all together. Everyone is welcome, everyone is safe, but no one stays the same. We embody soft hearts and steel spines. We hold convictions with grace. Our hearts remain tender to people. Our spines remain strong in truth, and we live with open hands. We trust that generosity creates space for the kingdom to break through. Amen. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, you are the giver. You have given us more than we could ever have imagined or even thought. You have given to us generously, freely. You have given us, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. I pray right now that this church would be a church built on your generosity, not our efforts, and I pray right now, Lord, that you would do it again. I pray that the past forty years are just the start of the next forty years here in this church. I pray that more and more people would come to know you. I pray that we would see the needs in our community and meet them, not because we are good people, but because you are a good and generous God. I pray right now over the workplaces, over the neighborhoods, over the families, over the sports leagues, over the schools represented in this room right now, and we pray your kingdom come and your will be done in these places. We pray that your peace and your grace and your truth will spread. We pray that your generous overflow, abundant life will flow out of us and into the places that need it so badly. Finally, I pray right now, I pray for the future of this church. I pray that this is the kind of place that my children inherit and receive the same kind of life and grace, the same kind of salvation and forgiveness that you gave us. May the next generation know what we have found. Use us to find them. Use us to serve them. We are not a perfect church, but Lord, we are committed to becoming what you want us to become. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you. Let's respond in worship.

He reigns, He reigns, He reigns. Just one more thought. The hard part about this message is that it makes it about us, and whatever it is that the Lord is going to do here, it is not about what leadership rolls out, what plans we make. None of that really makes a difference until we decide that what we want is the kingdom, that what we want more than anything else in our life is to see His kingdom come in our zip codes. That is why I am honored to preach this. It is on us. Would you extend your hands openly? No other better way. May you go from this place with open hands, trusting that generosity creates space for the kingdom to break through. He is generous. He is not finished, and we are just getting started. Go in peace.

33:34 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

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