

Gather & Connect with Us at



All In

Acts 2:40-47

If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to Acts chapter 2. We're going to be reading verses 40-47 in just a moment. We're so excited to be here this morning on the first day of a brand new week. I almost lost my voice worshipping this morning, so you will have to let me transition for just a few minutes. This morning we're going to begin a three-part sermon series called, All In. Myself, Kory, and Chris over the next three weeks will be challenging us as folks who attend Hardin Baptist Church to be all in with us here at the church. We're going to ask you to gather and connect with us. We're going to ask you to serve with us. Then we're going to ask you to give and go with us. Then, on September 5th, after the holiday break, we're going to come back and begin a fall sermon series as we journey through two Old Testament books back to back, the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. Hopefully then, you will join us this fall in restoring and rebuilding those things that God wants us to restore in our lives and those things we need to rebuild as a society. We are really, really excited.

Imagine three years earlier being called by Jesus to follow Him, and then three years later, He dies on a cross, stays dead three days, and rises again. Before He ascends back to Heaven, he tells you and one hundred and nineteen other people not to start doing what I've called and commanded you to do until you receive the power from on high. Then, when you receive the power, start here and don't quit until you get way, way out there. All of a sudden, a few days later, you go from one hundred

and twenty people to three thousand one hundred and twenty people in one day. Don't ever tell me again that Hardin is getting too big! We're not close to adding three thousand people in one day. We're going to take a snapshot this morning of the early church and see some characteristics that we pray are here in our body at Hardin. This morning, I've been assigned a topic of gathering and connecting, and I'm going to ask you to be all in, in gathering with us and connecting to us and with us. I will give you three principles in just a moment on how to help us be who we're supposed to be as the body of Christ. Please pray for me this morning because normally I can take one subject and not get it done in one message. The preaching pastors have asked me to take two subjects and quit on time, so would you pray for me as I try to do that this morning. I'm going to need to keep the main thing, the main thing this morning, and that is the main thing.

Scripture

"And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe 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."

(Prayer)

Father, thank You for the opportunity this morning to gather in Your presence on this first day of a brand new week. We're so excited, Father, that we're going to get the opportunity to listen to You speak to us through Your Word. Father, don't let me get in the way, but I pray the thoughts we have this morning are thoughts that come from You as we tried to saturate ourselves in this passage and around this thought of how we, as a church, can be all in, not just part of us, but all of us all in, in two areas that we are called to be all in and that is our gathering and our connecting. Father, please help us this morning to understand as a church how vital it is that we gather together and how vital it is that when we gather together that we don't sit in isolation, but that we truly connect to some people, groups, and ministries here in this body, not so that we can do, but so that we can be. So then, what we do can flow out of our being who we really are. Father, help me keep the main thing, the main thing this morning. Father, don't let the main thing be so general that we don't understand specifically how to be all in. Father, I praise You and thank You for this opportunity this morning. It's in Your precious Son's name we pray, amen.

Have any of you ever tried to take a group picture? Is that one of the most difficult things in life to do? Wow. Can you imagine the picture that the book of Acts reveals to us of the first church, shortly after three thousand new believers were baptized and added to the church? Luke tells us when he takes this early snapshot of the church that the church was devoted. Now this word, devoted, is where we're getting the series title, All In. I think you'll agree with me if you know what it means to be all in; you can't be all in unless you're devoted. If you are devoted, you will be all in to whatever you are devoted to. When you're all in to what you're in to, you'll be devoted to it. These words interchange.

Now the Bible tells us that the early church was devoted to four things: the apostle's teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Notice the definite article, the, in front of each of these four things. This morning, because my assignment is asking us to be all in when it comes to

gathering and connecting, we're not going to talk about being devoted to the apostle's doctrine, or breaking of bread, or prayer; we want to talk about being devoted to the fellowship.

Before we talk about being devoted to the fellowship, let's examine what it means to be devoted. Let's examine what it means to be all in. If you and I were to look up the word, devoted, in an English dictionary, which I have, it would say 'to give up something in order to obtain something else.' So with the thought of being devoted is this thought; if you're devoted, you're being devoted so that you can gain something. But in order to gain something, whatever it is you're wanting to gain will cost you something in another area. The Greek word that our English word, devoted, is actually trying to capture here means to be in hot pursuit of something, and you're pursuing it intently; you're pursuing it with great effort. So that's what we're talking about when we talk about asking you to be all in with us. We're asking you to pursue your relationship with us with great effort, with great intensity.

Now, we want to share with you that if you do this, if you get all in with us, there will be a positive side to this; there will be a great reward to you as you get all in. I want to be honest with you; if you're really going to get the reward of being all in with us; it's going to cost you something. If you're not all in, you'll not be able to get all in doing what you're doing right now because there are some things in your life that's keeping you from being all in with us, from being devoted to the fellowship. Does that make sense?

I don't hear this word, devoted, used very often, but the few times I do hear it used and I haven't heard it in a while, it's usually this context. A group of guys will be together, they've planned to go somewhere and do something, and all of a sudden, they look around and somebody recognizes that one of the men they thought would show up is not there. Somebody will ask where so and so is, and somebody else will say, "Well, you know him; he's devoted to his wife." Everybody goes, "Ahhh!" The other guys in the group don't get it. See, they've all gathered to go fishing, or play golf, or a ballgame, and that's going to be a great reward to them, but there is one guy in the group who didn't show up, who's not going to get the reward because he's not devoted to fishing, golf, or the trip; he's

devoted to the wife. Here is what that one guy knows. He's going to get a reward in being devoted to his wife. That's worth every bit of what he's having to give up in going fishing, playing golf, going on the trip. Please tell me you get it. See, if you're going to be devoted to something, whatever you're going to be devoted to is going to take priority in your life. It's possible to pursue a lot of things, but if you're pursuing a lot of things, you will not pursue a lot of things intently. You can't be devoted to a lot of things because when you pursue a lot of things, that intensity level is just not there.

So what we're calling you to this morning is to be all in, to be devoted to the fellowship. Over the next three weeks, we are going to ask you to consider being all in. We don't want you to make a decision yet because just like Jesus, we want you to know what you're getting into before you make a decision. Have you ever noticed how Jesus didn't trick people into making commitments? He just kind of told people right up front what it was going to cost them, and without any pressure, without any motivational techniques, without any twisting of the arm, He just said consider. That's what we want you to do, consider being all in with us. as our college students get back, as our kids get back in school, as our life normalizes after summer, as a Christian who serves God through the Hardin Baptist Church, we want you to consider being all in when this three week sermon series is over. We not only want you to be devoted, we want you to be an active owner. We want you to take ownership. I hope you realize that as a member of this church, you have a share in this church. I want to be totally honest with you; your share is a little diluted if you were a shareholder forty years ago, because if you were a shareholder forty years ago, you had about 1/80th of this church and now you have about 1/2000th (or whatever it is) of this church. I hope you understand that spiritually your share is as valuable today as it's ever been. I like for you to say and believe, as we look around us in the time we're ministering to you in, that our share is probably more valuable than it's ever been. Do you agree with me?

Now listen to what Luke says. Luke says the early church was all into the fellowship. I think you know this word, fellowship, is the Greek word,

Koinonia, but we have kind of taken Koinonia into our English language. Churches are called that, ministries, blog posts, as well as books written by the name Koinonia, so everybody knows what it is. It basically means to have in common. If you've been with me through the years at Hardin, you know that we've seen the progressive of how this word was used in society, but especially how it was used in the New Testament day. This word started out meaning to have in common, and it talked about having companionship. It talked about two people who were companions because they had a lot of things in common. Then this word began to take on the note, not just of companionship between a few people, but it began to take on the characteristic of a community because a certain community had a lot of things in common. So it bound them together as a community of people. By the time Jesus began to minister and then the church was established and New Testament writers began to write letters to the churches, this word, Koinonia, came to mean partnership. As a matter of fact, in 1 Corinthians 1:9, the Bible says God is faithful and He has called us into fellowship, or the partnership, of His Son Jesus Christ. I think you understand what that is talking about, that is you've been called into the community, you've been called into the partnership; you've been called into the church of Jesus Christ.

Listen to this; your faith is personal, but it's not private. Please let that sink in just a moment. We're living in an age where more and more people are believing their faith is personal and private, and it's not my business about your faith and it's not your business about my faith. That's a lie. Faith is personal and public. When I come to faith in Jesus Christ, my faith was personal, but it was never meant to be private. It was meant for me to be called into a community of believers, to be part of a body that is the body of Christ in this community. Therefore, I am a member of a body, I'm a member of the fellowship, I'm a member of the church, I'm an associate, I'm a fellow partner. There's a big difference in owning something and being the owner, and just being the person who shows up to do a job. Does everybody agree? Responsibility changes dramatically when you become an owner. What we want to ask you to do at Hardin is to take your share seriously and realize you're an owner, therefore, you and I together, under God, are responsible for us being who God has called us to be and

doing what God has called us to. Church is not a place we go; church is who we are. Please tell me you agree.

Have you noticed when we read this description, this picture of the early church, they didn't seem to do things as individuals, they seemed to do things together. They shared possessions together. This may not be big to you, but it's big to me. The Bible even says, day by day when they went to the temple, they went to the temple to gather. Have you ever noticed how when you go out with other couples that when one girl goes to the bathroom, all the other girls in the group have to go to the bathroom too? I have never figured that one out! We guys don't do that, but ladies do. Please hear me! You and I are wired by God to want to do life together, so here is what we want to ask you to be all in on; we want you to gather together with us and we want you to connect together with us. I know to some people this is old fashioned; it doesn't work anymore. But we still believe if we're going to be a biblical church in our modern society, we still have to do thing together. Now to me, I could be wrong here, but this is revolutionary. I have the picture that in the Old Testament when somebody went to the temple, you went to the temple when you blew it. You went out in the backyard, got the lamb, the goat, brought it to the priest, dealt with what was wrong, and gave that to him and he offered the sacrifice for you. So when the Bible talks about going to the temple day by day, understand the Jewish people didn't go day by day to gather, they went individually. Now you have a church whose sins have been forgiven and there was no need to go and offer a sacrifice, but the early church still went to the temple, but now they went to the temple together! I hope I'm not reading too much into this, but I just see he early church saying wow, that temple is big enough for all of us to gather together, so why don't we all just go there together and celebrate what God's done for us in Christ and let other people see us celebrating our new life in Christ together! Does anybody see that? I mean, you still do what you're doing at home in your private devotions, but listen; there's a public aspect of being a Christian. What we want to do at Hardin is to make sure we understand that if we're going to be all in, we're going to be all in to gather together in large group celebration, in some small group discipleships, and for some small group ministries. We need you to gather to celebrate with us. Right

now, we have three large group celebrations the beginning of every first day of the week. We want to be all in on this thought that if I'm an owner of the body and I'm part of the body, when the body gets together to celebrate publicly, I want to be there and I am going to be there unless there is a really good reason for me not to. Would you just consider this?

Let me tell you what is happening nationally. Church attendance is on the decline. Are you aware of that? Have you noticed that group attendance is on the decline everywhere? I was watching the night race at Bristol on television last night when as I was studying. I was there one time. I had to park ten miles away and walk two hours. I had one of the top row seats, which if you've got a ticket at Bristol on the top row; it doesn't get any better than that. When I got to my seat, I could hardly sit down because of so many people there. I watched that race last night and it was a third empty. Did anyone see the Kentucky Speedway race? They had people that looked like fans in the stands so that when it showed on TV, you wouldn't realize how few people were there. Have you been to a football or baseball game lately? I know what you're saying. Why would we go to a large group event when we can sit in our living room and watch it on HDTV? That is exactly my point. Culture, through TV and the internet, is programming us to isolate ourselves from groups of people. Why go somewhere else when you can have it in your very own home? If we're not careful, this happens in the church. There is no longer a belief that we, the church, need to get together for large group celebration.

Chris Allen sent me an article. I liked it so I looked the guy up and started reading some of his other articles. The guy gave ten reasons on why church attendance is in decline in America. Do you know what the number one reason is? Affluency. Thirty years ago, most of us didn't have enough money to do anything else on Sunday except go to church. It was the best show in town! I mean, we could only get channels 3, 6, and 12 in this area, and even Bro Ricky was as good as most of those guys on 3, 6, and 12, so this was the place to be. All of us were from this area; all of our family lived here. We were so poor we couldn't go on a vacation but once every two or three years. Look at us now! I'm not saying being affluent is wrong or a sin; I'm just saying we've got to be careful because with

affluency, we have a whole lot more options now on what to do. We Baptists are not as poor as we think we are anymore. Since some of the other denominations have come along, I will not name them, we've moved up a few socio-economic levels and all of a sudden, we have options. Be careful. That new job, that new investment that you were so going to use for the glory of God; be careful to make sure it's not pulling you away from your ownership in the only group that matters eternally. Right now doesn't count right now, right now counts forever.

I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but this article says the number two reason is a higher focus on kid's activities. If we're not careful, we as parents are focusing much of our life on what our kids want to do. There are some folks out there promoting ourselves and we're following along with the promotion. Many of us aren't just doing what we're doing now as a family; we're doing what we're doing now for our kids. We're giving control of our kids over to somebody else, and we're just sitting in the stands watching. I'm not saying it's wrong to have activity for our kids, but be careful. It can keep us from being all in.

Thirdly, and I think this hits Hardin; we're a mobile society, a mobile church, now. We live in one the best places to live in the world. Do you not agree? With our affluency, with modern mobility, it's really easy to get off on a Friday and be several hundred miles away, and have a two-day event every week. We don't get back home until just in time to get to bed so we can start work five days a week, so that we can have two days for ourselves. Some of us will neglect our ownership in being a part of the body of Christ.

I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings here, but have you noticed a lot of us now go to the doctor, and tell the doctor what is wrong with us because we've already checked out our diagnosis on the internet? All of my doctor friends are saying yes. We're trusting people we don't even know to tell us what is wrong with us! Then we are trying to tell the man who spent his whole life studying to help what's wrong with us, and we doubt what he says. That's what we are doing online spiritually. Many of us are self-diagnosing spiritually, therefore, the more we do this, and we just don't see the need of gathering together. Supplement what we do at Hardin all

you want, but please don't let it take the place of you being offline, not online. Online is impersonal. Offline, face-to-face, in a group of people celebrating who God is and what He's done for us just starts the first day of the week out right. Let's be all in. Let's not just be all in to the large group; let's be all in to a small group. I want to tell you a trend that is happening in this church. There is a trend in this church that is just to be into the large group and we go home and not getting involved in any small group discipleship. I don't think that's wise. I think there needs to be some accountability of us discipling with other people and being accountable to them. In large group, it is real easy not to connect. It's real easy to stay an individual. It's real easy for it to be all about me. It's real easy for me to pick and choose the part I want and spit out the rest, and just say I disagree with Bro Ricky, go on back home, and back to your life. When you're in a small group, there is just some accountability, so we don't want you to just gather in large group at 7:50, 9:15, or 10:40. We want you to think seriously about a small group discipleship. It can be on Sunday morning, during the week, or on Wednesday night. There are a lot of small group opportunities for you to be disciplined here at Hardin.

We want to ask you to do this too if you really want to be all in with us; we want you to gather also to minister. I'm talking about to other people, no thought of you, no thought of how hard this is, no thought about how this isn't fun. Pore yourself into a ministry for other people. Now, it's just kind of cool here at Hardin I think. I know I get paid, but you do realize that I do this three times every Sunday. I really think if I ever (I'm not going to) retired from being pastor here, I think I would come to one of the large group services, then go to one of the small discipleship groups, then I think I would serve at the other hour. I really do. Since I'm an early person, I think I would probably come to the 7:50 worship service, go to small group the next hour, and then serve at 10:40 in the service where we have all those little babies and children. Honestly, I love Evie Kate, Crider, Finley, and Garnet a whole bunch. Why couldn't I love somebody else's just as much? I mean, I like Jack and Jae a whole lot too, my sister's grandkids. You do realize that most of the kids at the 10:40 or 9:15 hours are your brothers and sisters kids. You are still looking at them as strangers! Why aren't we looking at them as family? Does that make sense? Someone

correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't the guy we're following say it is more blessed to give than to receive? Did He not say I did not come to be served, but to serve and give My life a ransom for many? We're Christians following Christ. He was all in; we should be all in too!

But listen, when we gather, don't just gather; connect. I hear people all the time say I just can't connect at Hardin because we're just too big. Are you kidding me? There's a word that I want to use that I'm not going to use. It used to be a good word, but now it's a bad word, so I'm going to use this word; that's foolishness. I promise you this; if we went to a church of fifty people, we wouldn't have a relationship with all fifty people in that church. If we went to a church of one hundred and fifty, we wouldn't have a relationship with all one hundred and fifty people in that church. Satan is so crafty to try to tell that to you and me. I read a study a few years ago that you only need eight healthy relationships in a church. So why don't we just start connecting to the people you worship with in large group celebration? (Please tell me you could name four or five people here.) Then let's go to a discipleship and get four or five people. I promise you that if you get into a ministry, you'll know everybody in the ministry. The next thing you know, you will be connected to about ten to fifteen people, and that's what we need you to do.

Listen to me. A few years ago, I was at the state fair, and I did a study about glue. I wasn't that bored, but I just wanted to study about the nature of glue. Glue has two properties, adhesion, and cohesion. A couple of weeks ago, we started remodeling our bathroom, Jeff Green came over and helped me tear everything out. He asked what we were doing to the shower and I told him, and he said you need to go get some glue, and told me the specific kind to get. In my house, I have the beige plumbing, which is CPVC, not PVC, so he wanted me to get this special glue. We went under the house and cut the water lines because we were taking out the sinks, bathtub, and shower, and then we would glue it back together. When I put the glue on the fittings, I knew the glue would hold because the glue I bought had both adhesive and cohesive properties. Let me explain this to you. Glue has to have the ability to stick to whatever you're sticking it to, and at the same time, it has to stick to itself. It has an ability called

adhesion where it sticks to something, and at the same time, it is sticking to itself. In other words, it's holding itself together. When you glue something together, there is a chemical reaction that takes place. Therefore, when Jeff and I put the glue on the CPVC pipe, for a brief instant there was a chemical reaction where actually the glue caused one fitting and the other fitting to melt a little bit. When they melted, they shared properties and they were glued together. When they glued together, the connection held because that adhesive property was so strong that it stuck. So now, when you turn the water on and get the pressure on, not only does the glue have to stick to what you glued it to, the glue has to stick to itself because if the glue disintegrates, the pipe will break. Do you understand that simple concept?

Now, here is my three points. You need to be devoted. You need to be an active owner. You need to get sticky. Some of us aren't sticky enough. We just have trouble sticking with people. We have trouble connecting to people. The reason we have trouble connecting to people is because we don't love like we should, we don't accept like we should, we don't forgive like we should, and we don't encourage like we should. Be honest. How many of us haven't stuck to somebody in the church because we don't accept them, we don't really love them, or we haven't forgiven them for what they did to whoever they did it to? So when we meet them, we never try to be an encouragement, we just wait for them to rain on our parade! God help us. Somebody tell me who we're following here at Hardin. We're following Christ, and He loved us! He forgave us. He accepted us. He encourages us. Can I be honest with you? He's stuck to me and He will just not let go of me. What would happen if we grabbed ahold of somebody like that and just stuck to them in large group, small group, whether discipleship or ministry? Now, there's been a few times where I've used bubblegum to stick something together. Can I just say that bubblegum will stick to certain things really well, but it doesn't hold together very well. You can just break it apart. Some of us have the ability to stick to other people, but here is where we struggle. It's not that there wasn't a spiritual bond that took place; it's just that through time we disintegrate ourselves. That's called cohesion. There are two properties to cohesion: be holy and be humble. If you're going to get all in with us, you've got to be holy, and

some of us are not holy. We are not set apart from the world. We look just like the world. That's why you struggle to get connected. Then we need to be humble. When you're humble, you don't have any expectations, so you're not going to fall apart because of what somebody else did to you. No, God gives me an ability to be who I am at times because of my relationship with Him. Therefore, He can handle me; I can handle you.

I'm not going to ask you to do anything today. I'm going to ask you to consider being all in. If you would like to do something today, you can go into the foyer; we have some cards to help you get connected. A few years ago, we hired a full-time pastor named Chris Allen to help us get connected. If you're not connected and you want to know how to get connected to this body, talk to Chris Allen. How many of you remember when we used to go to a service station? You pulled your vehicle in, a little guy ran out and asked what flavor you wanted, put the nozzle in the car, and while they were filling up your gas tank, they washed your windows, raised the hood, and checked your oil. Do you remember those days? I don't know if there are any of those left. Now you go to a convenience store, pull your car up, pump your own gas, choose your own flavor, and buy your own milk. They will take your money. That's all they do. They don't pack your milk and bread to the car for you! Maybe we need to quit calling this a worship service because some of us have the idea that somebody else is doing it all for us. No, each one of us has got to be the owner of the church if we're going to be who God wants us to be.