



First Baptist
MADISON

THE ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

ACTS 2:42-47

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **Would you describe yourself as an extrovert or introvert? Do you enjoy large group settings or do you prefer being with a few close friends?**

- 2 **What do you enjoy most about being part of a community of believers?**

- 3 **How would you describe being part of a church family to a non-believer?**

UNDERSTANDING

> Read Acts 2:42.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

2:42. Luke reported four distinctive practices or activities in the Jerusalem church. **First**, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Eventually, the church experienced persecution, and some church leaders left Jerusalem. The original apostles, however, continued to minister in this church (8:1). Reviewing the sermons and teaching reported in the opening chapters of Acts reveals the major doctrinal themes important to the early church. The apostles could report their own experiences with Jesus during his earthly ministry as well as explaining Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Biblically-based preaching and teaching are still fundamental to church life. **Second**, the church experienced fellowship. Fellowship translates the Greek word *koinonia*, and means "participation" or "sharing." **Third**, they shared the breaking of bread. Although some Bible students think this could be sharing a common meal, many scholars believe this is Luke's way of referring to the Lord's Supper. The disciples had celebrated a meal with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem. **Fourth**, the church devoted themselves to prayers. The early Christian movement was bathed in prayer. Jesus' disciples had asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus had established Himself as a consistent pray-er, so His followers should pray as well.

- **What four things did the early church devote themselves to?**

- **How would you describe the difference between “devoting” yourself to something and merely participating?**

- **Which of these four things would you say our biblical community focuses on? Which aspect do you enjoy the most? Explain your answer.**

- **Why is fellowship an important aspect of Christian community?**

> Read Acts 2:43-47.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

2:44-45. One of the most amazing characteristics of the Jerusalem church was its sharing its material possessions with the needy. The Christians voluntarily shared with anyone who

needed help. As part of their fellowship, the early church practiced a community of goods for a short time. Distribution to members of the faith community took place according to individual need. This practice did not last long, likely because it was logistically difficult and fraught with potential abuse (see ch. 4-6).

Later, Luke noted that these church members were “of one heart and soul” (4:32). No one remained needy for long because the church responded quickly and generously to need. The money was brought to the apostles, who were in charge of the distribution (4:34-35). Luke highlighted the role of Barnabas in this generosity (4:36-37), but he also noted the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their actions (5:1-10).

2:46. Although these believers understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Jewish hope for the Messiah (2:36), the members of the Jerusalem church were primarily Jewish in background. They still went to the temple complex. They would not participate in the sacrificial system any longer, since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They may have wanted to demonstrate the continuity between their Jewish heritage and their new faith in Christ. Also, they may have found opportunities to witness to their Jewish friends and relatives.

Besides gathering together in the temple complex, these Christians broke bread from house to house. Quite likely this means they gathered regularly in houses for worship and the Lord’s Supper. Christians did not typically build church buildings in the early centuries, so they met in homes. When they gathered in homes, these disciples expressed gratitude for their shared meals. These gatherings were marked by a simplicity or “sincerity” of heart. They did not need to put on airs; they genuinely worshiped God.

2:47. One result of the early church's worship and witness was having favor with all the people. In these early days the people of Jerusalem were generally open to the Christians. Later on, the Jewish leaders tried to restrict their public preaching (4:1-22).

The early church was an evangelizing church. Luke recounted that every day the Lord added to those who were being saved. He did not say how this took place, but it appears that evangelism took place primarily through the gathering of Christians in the temple and in individual houses. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were at the heart of early Christian preaching, which called for immediate response from anyone who listened. Such enormous numerical growth eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish leaders.

- **What was the atmosphere like in the early church (see vv. 43,45)?**

- **Why might awe and generosity have been prominent in the early church?**

- **How often did these Christians meet? What kinds of things did they do together?**

- **What was the result of their evangelism efforts?**

- **Why do you think the Lord blessed their evangelism efforts so abundantly?**

- **Early believers devoted themselves to prayer. What types of things do you think they prayed for?**

- **Why do you think some Christians tend to avoid biblical community?**

- **What are the downfalls of being disconnected from a community of faith?**

> Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

10:23. For the writer of Hebrews, a commitment to Christ included a commitment to His church. The writer offered three strong exhortations to his readers in 10:22-24, each beginning *let us*. The first exhortation was to *draw near to God*. The second was to *hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering*. We might have expected an encouragement to confess our faith, rather than hope, since the author would move on soon to the great faith chapter (Heb. 11). Hope, however, was also a major concern for this author. Our “confession” is a profession of belief rather than confession of sins. We should hold on to our confession without wavering. The reason our confession can be so consistent is that we trust the God who is faithful to keep His promises. The Bible often testifies to God’s faithfulness (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13). Unlike the pagan gods of the ancient world, God is faithful and consistent in His character. We can trust Him because He is trustworthy.

10:24. The third exhortation is to be concerned about one another. Our concern for one another has, according to the author of Hebrews, a specific focus. We should promote love and good works. He would not be satisfied with a feel-good type of concern. Our concern for one another should produce more loving attitudes in the church and good deeds. The author devoted chapter 11 to some heroes and heroines of faith; they could serve as role models for Christian behavior. Later in the book the author pointed to our imitating mature Christian leaders (13:7). Above all, the book highlights Jesus as our

inspiration for living the Christian life. The author also encouraged his readers to meet together. Some of his original readers might have been worried about persecution if they identified too much with the church.

10:25. The author added another motivation for Christians meeting together. He saw the day drawing near. He did not specify exactly what “day” he had in mind, but generally scholars see this as a reference to the return of Christ.

- **What does it mean for believers to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”? How does our church family help us do this?**

 - **Re-read verse 24. What did the author say our attitude should be toward fellow believers?**

 - **What did the author warn against in verse 25?**

 - **Practically speaking, what can we do to encourage one another as we follow Christ together?**
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- **How can we, as a church family, show concern and care to fellow believers?**

- **Are there believers you haven't seen at church in a while? Have you contacted them? What can you do to get them re-engaged?**

APPLICATION

- 1 **Are you regularly and actively engaged in biblical community? If not, what can you do to get more plugged in?**

- 2 **What does it look like for us to devote ourselves to our faith and to one another as the early church did in the Book of Acts?**

- 3 **Do you know someone who needs to be engaged in biblical community? If so, how could you extend an invitation to them to join you in a worship service or Bible study?**

PRAY

Father, we thank You for the privilege of being part of a faith family. Help us devote ourselves as the early church did. We pray our church would be a vibrant and growing community that faithfully shares the gospel.

