

## THE CHURCH THAT JESUS DIED FOR Living In Fellowship Everyday

**Acts 2:42:** *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

**Central Thought:** Community is life-giving and essential to following Christ. Our actions and words best reflect our love for Jesus in the context of community fellowship.

### **Context:**

- The account in Acts follows directly on the story of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit had been experienced powerfully (**Acts 2:1-13**).
- Peter had given the first Christian evangelistic sermon (**Acts 2:14-36**).
- The response to the sermon was tremendous: Three thousand people repented, were baptized, and joined the Jerusalem Christian community (**Acts. 2:37-41**).

So, we have a picture of the church as it existed immediately after the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost.

### **Observation – *What is happening in this story?***

1. **The early church was a learning church.**
  - We see a community of believers.
  - These early Christians made a deep commitment to keep growing and keep learning more and more about this Jesus to whom they had given their lives. They therefore assembled with other Christians on the first day of every week to listen to the apostles preach and teach them everything Christ had taught them.
  - The new community of Christians were deeply devoted and deeply committed.

- They persevered in, adhered to. It was not just a Sunday event, but rather a way of life

## **2. The early church was a worshipping church:**

- It was not to men that the attention of the people was drawn, but to the teaching (“doctrine”)
- The apostles had the responsibility and authority to teach
- This was the study of God’s Word, done on a daily basis!

## **2. The early church was a fellowshiping church:**

- **verses 44, 45** give a clearer understanding of what “fellowship” meant to those early Christians. v44 *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. v45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”*

“Fellowship” to those early Christians = a willful and joyful surrender and sacrifice of their personal belongings for the good of “the whole fellowship” “the whole Church” so that no one would go without food, clothing, or shelter.

- What they had in common was shared, illustrating that true Christian fellowship is primarily a relationship rather than an activity.
- The challenge today, is often commitment to the things of God.
- Fellowship is also about encouraging one another, rather than criticizing.

**1 Thess. 5:11**

## **3. Breaking of bread:**

- They were committed to a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper “In remembrance of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection.”
- These early Christians were in and out of each other’s houses. They were serious about their walk with God and that included being dedicated to each other.

## **4. They were committed/devoted to the prayers:**

- Prayers were a key component of community life
- Notice it says PRAYERS (plural) not PRAYER (singular) They were deeply committed to the prayers.

## Interpretation – *What truths emerge from this story?*

### 1. Devoted:

- The people earnestly desired after fuller knowledge (following their baptism)
- Original language = idea of being persistent or active listeners.
- There was a thirst to hear and learn more about their newfound life of spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ.
- Being in the church of Christ means being devoted to learning God's Word.
- A high priority was placed on the teaching of the Word of God.

### 2. The apostles are the ones who taught:

- The importance of the apostles' message was that it revealed the truth about God.
- The message sought to focus the people's attention upon God.
- It was the message that brought them into fellowship.

### 3. Fellowship ("Koinonia"):

- The Greek word **koinonia** comes from the adjective *koinos* which means "common."

(a) First, koinonia expresses what we share in together, what we have received together, what we participate in together. That is the grace of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, authentic fellowship is Trinitarian fellowship. It is our common participation in the grace and the life and the mercy of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We come from different nations, denominations, and cultures, but we are unified by our common share in the grace of God.

(b) Second, koinonia also bears witness to what we share outward together—not only what we receive together, but what we give together. **Koinonia** is the word that Paul uses of the collection that he was organizing from the Greek churches for the benefit of the poverty-stricken churches in Judea.

- Actually, “Fellowship” literary means sharing something with someone:
  - There is the sharing of a common life with each other through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. So, for Christians, the basis of our sharing is Jesus Himself.
  - And then, from this, flows additional sharing of our time, experiences, wisdom and many other things.
- In other words, Christian fellowship is primarily a relationship rather than an activity.
- Present-day believers meet as a corporate body for celebration services, but then gather in smaller expressions of this in LIFE groups.

**N.B.** However, there is also another dimension to “fellowship” expressed by the Greek word, “Metochos”

**“Metochos”:**

- Sharing together in the sense of **partnership**
- So, fellowship also means that we have been brought into partnership with our Saviour and with each other to fulfill God’s will and glorify Him.
- The Bible teaches that everyone who believes and accepts Jesus as Saviour and Lord, enters into fellowship with Christ (partnership with Him). We are crucified, buried and raised with Christ and we share in all that He has done.
- This bonding to Christ also means that we are bound together.

In summary, there are two significant outcomes of our community fellowship that we can highlight:

**(a) Community fosters love:** Paul held love above all else in his letter to the Corinthians as well as in his letter to the Colossian church: *“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* **Colossians 3:13-14.**

**(b) Community is life-giving** – and essential to following Christ and the Bible says that is why we are better together than when we are alone. **Romans 12:4-5.**

**4. The breaking of bread:**

- The breaking of the bread is evidently the Lord's Supper, though with a fellowship meal thrown in as well.
- This phrase, more often than not, refers to the partaking of the communion that Christ instituted during Passover.
- The importance of this reference in the passage is that it tells us the focus of the apostles' teaching: the cross.

#### 5. Devoted to prayers:

- Early church gathered daily to pray together **in corporate prayer.**
- Prayer is something we utterly need to be committed to. Praying urgently for one another. Praying for the Body. Praying for wisdom. Praying for each other. Putting the needs of others before ours.
- These new Christians considered themselves members of the same body, they were one, devoted, committed to one another, and one way this oneness manifested itself was through devotion to prayer.

#### Application – *How do these words impact us?*

Quote from **Nicky Gumble**: “Bible In One Year” devotion: “**Divine Connections**”

“God has divine connections lined up for your life. There is power in connection. Connections lead to life. When a husband and a wife *come together*, babies are born. When the spirit of a person and the Spirit of God *come together*, new birth takes place. When brothers and sisters *come together* in unity, God commands his blessing (**Psalm 133**). When the disciples *came together* on the day of Pentecost, there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The devil fears connection. His ultimate aim is to cut you off from God. He tries to split marriages, to split friendships, to divide churches, to divide denominations and to isolate people. Although our culture is more connected than ever before through the internet, phones and social media, people are more isolated and lonely than ever.”

#### **Summary**

**Acts 2:42-47** describes a community of faith that operates in the power of God's Spirit.

These were not extraordinary men and women, endowed with gifts that God has not given us.

The virtues of justice, worship, and mutuality are not accomplishments of extraordinary people; they are signs of the Spirit within a community of people

who understand themselves as united in purpose and identity--not a dispersed collection of individual churchgoers, who only connect in the church parking lot.

- Verse 47 tells us the result of such devotion,: **the growth of the church.** Growth in a spiritual sense, but also in a numerical sense
- The life and work of a Christian community can reflect--even if only dimly--the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed while on earth (“The Kingdom of God is here”) and secured through his death, resurrection, and exaltation.
- This passage presents a summary filled with generalizations, yet several details prove instructive. The community of faith in Jerusalem lives a multifaceted witness, one not restricted to a single place or mode. This witness manifests itself in houses and in the Jerusalem temple. It benefits its members and earns the admiration of outsiders.  
**N.B. community exists not for its own sake, but to care for its most vulnerable members and to be a means by which God extends salvation to others** (v. 47).
- It can be hard for some of us to commit to community, especially if we are guarded or prefer solitude. But community is God’s desire for us – and a sign of mature faith, because at the end of the day, when we grow in our relationships with others, we’re growing in our relationship with Him.

### **1. Sunday celebration v LIFE Group (cell group) participation:**

- Pursuing Christ through personal discipleship and private devotion will never be complete.
- Christians are designed to encounter God together with other Christians:
  - Sunday celebration services allow Christians to encounter God as Lord of all in His amazing splendour
  - A LIFE Group (cell group) is an opportunity for the body of Christ to engage God as Father in His radical nearness and intimacy.
  - Disciples of Jesus have always been called to this Gospel balance, through the larger group and the small-group encounter.

### **2. A LIFE Group/LifeNet group is a smaller expression of the larger community of faith**

- By gathering in smaller groups (LIFE Groups), there is the opportunity to get to know brothers and sisters in Christ in ways that can’t possibly take place on Sunday mornings.

- LIFE Groups provide a way for the church to become a true fellowship of believers.

### 3. A LIFE Group meeting holds to the eternal things:

- **God's Word:** The Bible. The teaching witnessed in the early church is done in LIFE Groups through the application of the **Word**, as people are grounded in it.
- **God's glory:** Jesus Christ. The breaking of bread in the early church is expressed in LIFE Groups through **Worship**, which is acted out through praising God.
- **God's people:** The Church. The fellowship of the early church is expressed in LIFE groups through the **Welcome**, which is acted out through loving actions.
- **God's world:** Lost people. In LIFE groups, the evangelizing of the early church is done through **Works**, which requires proclaiming the good news to our "Oikos" (those in our sphere of influence).

Now some LIFE groups hold their regular meetings once a week. For others, these meetings take place every other week, depending on the members' preference, but the principles governing these meetings are the same.

So, you want to see the following happening in your groups:

### 4. The heart of the LIFE Group meeting:

- To edify and build each other up: **1 Corinthians 14:26**
- To reorient our lives in God's presence
- To process truth and affirm each in truth
- To provide a safe place for honest discussion of sin and grace
- Atmosphere of acceptance for "Oikos"
- To offer challenge to move on toward Christ
- To set the place for discipleship - Preparing for the marketplace.

**Meeting Agenda: the "4Ws": Welcome, Worship, Word and Works (or Witness).**

This order enables the group:

- To experience the *one anothers* of Scripture. The **Welcome** time enhances the open sharing of our personal lives.

- To enter the presence of God. We approach God through the **Worship** time and receive His fulness.
- To interact with God's Word; God speaks to us through the **Word**.
- To reach non-Christians; the **Works** time helps the group focus on outsiders.

## 5. The "4Ws" of LIFE Group meetings:

### (a) Welcome (The Spiritual Dynamics/Focus: **From Me to You**)

#### What is it for?

- Openness – a non-threatening way to share
- Building relationships/helping people to connect
- Welcoming one another in the love of Jesus
- To value the individual, their uniqueness and their contribution
- To practice listening

#### How is it done?

- Greeting people as they arrive
- Icebreakers
- Prayer ministry
- Blessing people as they leave

#### Result:

- Group members should be more comfortable with each other and enjoy being together

### (b) Worship (Spiritual dynamics/Focus: **Us to God**)

#### What is it for?

- To place Jesus at the centre of our gathering intentionally
- To reorient our focus away from ourselves
- To encounter Jesus
- To offer Him ourselves and receive His new mercies

#### How is it done?

- Musically: singing, listening, reading lyrics, using instruments, a capella or recorded music
- Praying
- Scripture: reciting, reading listening

#### Result:

- The group is more focused on God and ready for Him to minister to the group.

### (c) Word (Spiritual dynamics/Focus: **God to Us**)

### What is it for?

- Edification and Growth
- Learn from Christ in one another
- Use facilitation questions base on Sunday sermon
- Interact with God's Word – apply it to our lives
- Opportunity to minister, use gifts, intercede, bless.

### How is it done?

- Facilitation – assisting others in applying God's Word to real life
- The 70%-30% rule
- Be a listener more than a talker

### **Result:**

- Group shares honestly and manifests vulnerability before one another; Group learns how to walk more obediently with Christ during the week.

## **(d) Works/Witness (Spiritual dynamics/Focus: **Us to Others/ God through Us**):**

### What is it for?

- To bear one another's burdens
- To be intentional in reaching the lost
- To fish with a net
- Praying and working together to see others (Oikos) come to know Jesus
- To plan for life between meetings

### How is it done?

- Prayer
- Life-sharing
- Follow-up on past updates

### **Result:**

- Preparation for harvest – mentally and personally
- Keeps everyone involved in what really matters
- Members get together more than once a week
- We know one another's "Oikos"
- Jesus working through us (Group members) to reach others.

Many LIFE Groups have great meetings, but the life stops when the meeting is over.

**(e) The “real life” (outside the meetings: connecting in fellowship)**

There are “non-meeting” activities necessary to promote health and lead to growth

General principle: the Biblical community of **Acts 2:42-47**

- Proof that we meant what we said when we were together
- We expand the ways in which our lives intersect
- This is what the world is waiting to see
- This kind of life is accomplished by planned and unplanned burden-bearing, serving, working, rejoicing and living together

**N.B.**

**The family of God provides a solid metaphor for Body Life:**

- Families remain families all the time
- People do not choose whether or not to relate to one another in healthy families
- Family members rub shoulders
- **Key elements of Body Life:**
  - Edify one another
  - Love one another
  - Forgive one another
  - Pray for one another
  - Serve one another
  - Offer hospitality to one another
  - Teach and admonition one another.

**(f) The fruit: Discipleship + Evangelization = Ministry involvement:**

- Win others to Jesus
- Build the believers
- Equip the disciples
- Multiply the shepherds
- Send the called.

**(g) Living In Fellowship Everyday (the early church):**

- **John 13:34-35** – “A new command I give you...”
- **1 Timothy 6:19** – “Command them to do good...”

### **Concluding Remarks**

The church that Jesus died for is devoted to the teaching and learning of the Word of God, to the daily fellowship of believers, to the breaking of bread (in remembrance of why He died for us) and to prayers.