

Life In God's Family

The Biblical Example

Acts 2:42-47

The early chapters of the book of Acts provide a practical picture of the various ministry contexts in which the early church lived and functioned. Although this picture of the early church occurred before Paul's letter to the Ephesians concerning the APEST gifts and before he wrote to the Roman church concerning the maturing process of KNOW, CONSIDER, PRESENT, we believe the Spirit was working in these ways within the early church to help the church move toward spiritual maturity as the family of God.

As we seek to move deeper into "Relational Discipleship" within the family of God for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus, the principles in this section of Acts help us as a church to consider the various [ministry contexts](#) in which the APEST gifts can flourish in ways that help God's family members work through the [spiritual maturing](#) process of KNOWING biblical truth, CONSIDERING how that truth challenges the lies that they have embraced, and PRESENTING themselves to God and their members to his purposes through the process of repentance.

In verse 42 of Acts 2, we see the church devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. As we read further, we see some of the ministry contexts for these devotions and how they presented themselves to God in a variety of ways.

"Apostles' Teaching"

Recall that these apostles were the ones who had spend three years with Jesus, being equipped and trained by Him as they all spent much time together. They had also received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost who would remind them of what Jesus taught them, teach them, and empower them to be his witnesses. Peter's gospel message to the Jews at Pentecost is an example of the Spirit's work in and through the apostles. Under the power of the Spirit, we believe the apostles were gifted to uniquely teach Biblical truth to the early Church.

The first step in the process of maturity is to know and understand Biblical truth. The church devoted themselves to KNOWING and understanding this truth by making the choice to place themselves under

the authority of the gifted APEST **teachers** within the early church. Their **ministry context** for this is mentioned in verse 46 where we read that day by day they attended the temple together.

“Fellowship, Breaking Of Bread, And Prayer”

Verse 46 also indicates that day by day they broke bread in each other’s homes. After spending time together in a larger corporate gathering at the temple to listen to the apostles’ teaching, they divided up into smaller groups in each other’s homes. The concept of breaking bread in each other’s homes has two possibilities:

- **Observing the Lord’s Supper.** When Jesus observed the first “Lord’s Supper” with his apostles, he broke the bread and gave it to them, indicating that it symbolized his body that would be broken for them. He also then took wine and after He gave thanks, they all shared in drinking the wine together as a symbol of his blood that would be shed for the forgiveness of sin.
- **Eating Together.** Much of the time, the Lord’s Supper in the early church was observed around a time of eating a meal together.

It’s quite plausible that verse 46 is communicating that they spent time eating together and observing the Lord’s Supper daily. Recall, they also spent time listening to the apostles’ teaching daily. So, while they were fellowship, eating, observing the Lord’s Supper, and praying together, they were 1) reflecting on what was taught by the apostles, 2) having conversations about how what was taught challenged their thinking and living, and 3) encouraging and challenging one another to adopt this new way of thinking and living that centered on Jesus.

These fellowshiping, breaking of bread, and prayer times were ways the believers were deeply CONSIDERING the truth of what the apostles were teaching.

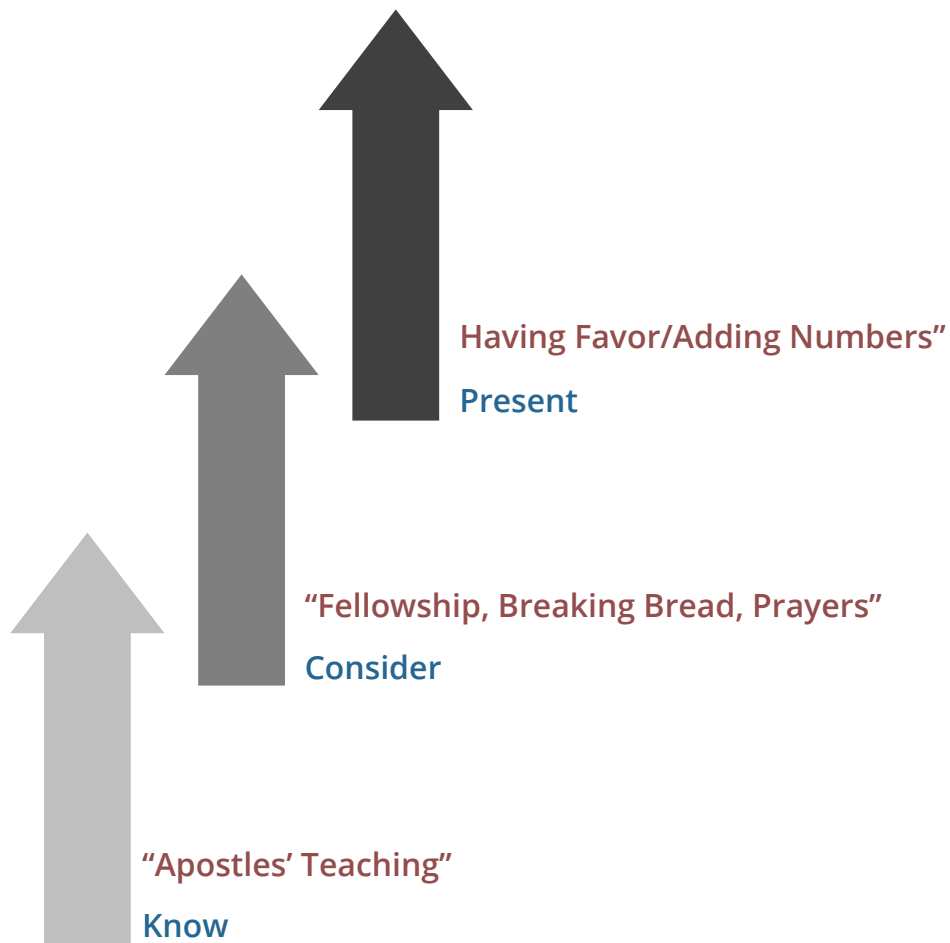
“Having Favor/Added Numbers”

The Greek word for “fellowship” in the New Testament means “participation and sharing in.” Obviously, eating a meal together was a way of “sharing” together. But, the early believers went beyond this into actually selling their possessions and sharing the proceeds with any who had need (verse 45). They viewed themselves as members of the family to the point of caring for one another as family. Although the verses do not explicitly say that the instruction they received from the apostles included this lifestyle, it is safe to assume that this was part of their instruction in viewing themselves as family.

In conclusion, we see the early believers receiving instruction from the apostles’ teaching so they could KNOW God’s truth. We then see them in smaller groups in each other’s homes where they would CONSIDER this truth at deeper levels through fellowshiping together. We also see them responding to this considered truth by PRESENTing themselves to God and their body members to His righteousness by praying together, praising God together, and taking care of the needs within God’s family (and likely the needs of unbelievers who were their neighbors, co-workers, and biological family).

Presenting themselves to God in these ways had two results:

- **The had favor with all the people.** When God’s love was put on display in tangible ways, all needs were met and people took notice. Everyone saw the believers in a favorable light. Because of this, it created space in people’s hearts for God’s Spirit to draw them to Jesus, thus fulfilling John 17:21-23.
- **The Lord added to their number.** God’s Spirit moved among those being touched by His love through the believers. They became open to hearing the gospel and believing on the Lord Jesus, thus, being added into the family of God. Verse 47 says that his was occurring day by day.



The Biblical Example Applied To HCC

Ministry Context And The Maturing Process

When considering Acts 2:42-47, each **ministry context** was conducive to particular aspects of the **maturing process** aided by various APEST gifts.

- **Know.** Their **larger corporate gatherings** at the temple allowed for God's Spirit to work through the gifted TEACHERS and APOSTLES of the church to teach God's truth to the family as a whole so they could **know** his truth.
- **Consider.** Their **smaller gatherings** in each other's homes gave prime opportunities for the believers to have conversations with one another about the truth that was taught by the apostles. Those in the smaller groups who were gifted APOSTLES, SHEPHERDS, and TEACHERS helped the believers **consider** this truth at deeper root levels where their thinking needed to be challenged.
- **Present.** In the model of Jesus, it can also be safely assumed that there were many **one-on-one conversations** between believers where those who were gifted PROPHETS, SHEPHERDS, and EVANGELISTS challenged others to make changes in lifestyle based on the truth that they had considered from the teaching of the apostles. To **present** themselves to God, they made lifestyle choices in alignment with this truth.

A Word On The Use Of APEST Gifts

Although we have made judgment calls on which APEST gifts are most conducive in particular ministry contexts, it does not imply that the other APEST gifts could not or should not also be used in that context. We recognize that, if we are open to God's Spirit working, He may employ whatever gift is necessary and move those certain gifted people to operate in any ministry context at any point in time.

General Principles From Acts

As we consider how best to operate together in unity for the overall spiritual growth of Hope Community Church, it is important to deduce the principles modeled in this Acts passage. The principles are as follows:

- Large corporate gatherings create a prime opportunity for gifted teachers to deliver God's Word so the family of God can know truth.
- Smaller gatherings are conducive to help believers consider (at deeper levels, through conversation) the truth taught at the larger corporate gatherings.
- Personal discipleship of two or three people creates space for accountability and personal challenges to step into the truth taught at the larger gatherings and considered at the smaller gatherings.

Application To Hope Community Church

The ministry contexts in HCC are intentionally designed to align with these principles.

- **Central Teachings.** Our central teachings (CT's) provide the large corporate gatherings that create a prime opportunity for the gifted teachers of HCC to deliver God's Word so the family of God can know truth.
- **Missional Communities.** Our missional communities (MC's) provide a context for the smaller gatherings that are conducive to helping believers consider (at deeper levels, through conversation) the truth taught at the larger corporate gatherings.
- **Personal Discipleship.** Personal discipleship groups, primarily between two or three people within a single MC, provide opportunities for accountability and personal challenges to step into the truth taught at the larger gatherings and considered at the smaller gatherings.

The diagram below shows the relationship between the various ministry contexts and the spiritual maturing process. Although we have identified KNOW as the primary for the Central Teaching ministry context, it is not to say that considering or choosing to present doesn't happen as well. In the same way, we have identified CONSIDER as a primary process that should occur in the MC Gatherings. Yet, we realize knowing will happen and even a conviction to present could occur. Likewise, knowing, considering, and presenting could all happen in a personal discipleship context.

