

Intro

This morning we're going to pick up right where Sam left off last week: Acts 2:42-47. So, open your bibles because it will be important for you to follow along. What we're going to see is the beginning of the church, the assembly of believers who belong to Jesus, and the importance of Christian life being lived in community.

Before we jump in, I want to do a quick review of last week. The Holy Spirit came upon those in the upper room and enabled them to speak in different languages. The crowd that gathered, people from all over the world who'd come to celebrate Pentecost, all heard their own language being spoken to them and it freaked them out a little, "What does this mean?"

So, Peter stood up and witnessed to them about Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He reminded them that Jesus was God's choice and that was proven through His miracles, wonders and signs. Through his Spirit-inspired message, Peter helped them understand that Jesus is the Messiah they'd been waiting for. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (1:36). Take a look at verse 41, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." 3000 people placed their faith in Jesus Christ that day. They were baptized—the whole deal.

We don't have an exact count as to how many believers there were before Pentecost. We know there were more than 500 at one point (1 Corinthians 15:6), but Acts 1 tells us that there were about 120 who were consistently gathering (1:15). Whatever the number, I think it's fair to say that adding 3000 to people to the original crew is going to make things interesting. This morning, we're going to see how this gathering of Jesus-

people functioned. We're going to see how vital new believer care is and how crucial it is, for those who belong to Jesus, to do life together and how that life together actually influences our mission.

New Believer Care (v 42)

Take a look at verse 42 [READ]

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Verse 41 says 3000 souls were added that day and the very next verse says, "They devoted themselves..." Luke is talking about the new believers. The new believers were devoted. What you'll notice is that the upper room believers had a deep desire to care well for the new believers through teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer so they too could become witnesses for Christ. They weren't just making converts. They were making disciples.¹

My first days

I remember when I gave life to Jesus in college...I didn't know *anything*. I needed someone to teach me how to live like Jesus wanted me to. I needed someone to show me how to use a bible. My friend, Andrew, just pulled me into his life as he walked with Jesus. I started going to his church, attending the college ministry and he introduced me to people everywhere we went. I participated in the worship services, Bible studies, small groups, social events, the whole gamut. I needed to learn what Jesus wanted to do in and through me. I had no idea how important the friendships I had made with other Christians were going to be. My relationships with those Jesus-people shaped my life.

Apostles' Teaching

Those new believers needed to learn what Jesus Messiah had in mind for them. And who better to teach them than those who had walked with Jesus, asked Him questions, and heard Him speak face-to-face. We don't know specifically what the Apostles taught, but we have a pretty good

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 411). Victor Books.

idea. Take a look at what Jesus said to them in Matthew 28, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”-Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commissioned the Apostles. They lived with and watched Jesus minister for years. They knew what they needed to teach, and their teachings were authoritative because they were the teachings of Christ.

New Christians don’t need pithy quotes and random opinions—they need to know what Jesus thinks is important. That’s why we preach and teach from the Bible, God’s Word—which includes what the Apostles were teaching—and that’s why we urge you to bring a bible or pull it up digitally so you can follow along and study with us. You don’t need my best thoughts, you need His! His perspective, His priorities, His values, His mission, His heart. Solid teaching is foundational to the Christian life. And that’s why it was a priority for new believers.

Fellowship

Caring well for this new batch of Christians meant making sure that they felt like they belonged. You know what that feels like: you feel connected, cared for, known and valued. Fellowship is “the unique sharing that Christians have with God and with other Christians...”² and it’s essential to the Christian life—whether you’re a new believer or you’ve walked with Jesus for seventy years. God created us to live in community and when we learn each other’s names, hear one another’s stories, worship together, reveal our needs and heartaches, pray for each other, and serve one another, we’re enjoying fellowship. If you’re a Christian, God calls you into fellowship with Him and other believers, so don’t walk alone. We need each other. So, quick question: if you’re a Christian, are you good at making others feel welcome at Foothills? Are you helping to build a warm fellowship? We don’t know if someone is new to Christ or just new to Foothills. But we do know that, as people who belong to Jesus, caring for others is non-negotiable. So, you have my official permission to make

² Fernando, Ajith. *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1998), 120.

sure that everyone at Foothills feels welcome & loved (but don't be creepy about it!).

It's also within the fellowship that the Apostles' teaching could be practiced. You could think of the teaching as the *lecture* and the fellowship as the *lab*. It's within the fellowship that you get to practice the things you're learning. In the New Testament, the phrase 'one another' or 'each other' occurs more than 40 times. Everything from loving one another, to serving each other, to forgiving one another...The idea is that you're doing life in community—with one another—and that community is a safe place to put your learning into action.

Breaking Bread

Part of the fellowship experience was breaking bread together and there are two ideas behind that: First, breaking bread points to sharing meals together. You see that also in verse 46. That idea was common in Jewish culture already, so that would have been a no-brainer for the new believers. Sharing meals with other people is an intimacy builder, whether you're going on your first date, getting together with some close friends, dating your spouse or going to the potluck after church, there's something bonding about sharing a meal together.

The second idea behind the breaking of bread also points to communion: The Lord's Supper. Remember, on the night that Jesus was betrayed He was with His closest followers celebrating the Passover and that's when, as part of the meal, He broke the bread and described it as His body, given for them (Luke 22:19). Then He took a cup of wine and called it His blood 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). He told them to take the bread and the wine in remembrance of Him (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Jesus was bringing a whole new understanding to the Passover meal. *He* is the spotless lamb who was killed and whose blood covered them. The new believers weren't there that night and they needed to know the rest of the Passover story. Every time the Passover came, the Christians had the full picture in mind. But the Lord's Supper wasn't just celebrated during Passover, it was

shared whenever they would get together for a fellowship meal. Each gathering would include the sharing of bread and wine to remind them all of the love of Jesus and all that He'd done.

This is why we invite everyone who knows and loves Jesus to share communion with us each month and why we explain what we're doing when we take the bread and the cup. It's a reminder for all of us, together –as one little part of the community of Christ–of how far God was willing to go so that we could be in relationship with Him. The Lord's Supper, the breaking of bread, has been part of the fellowship of believers since the very beginning. We're part of that.

The Prayers

The final element in the New Believer Care package was prayer. Prayer was already part of Jewish religious culture. There were set times for prayer at the temple, which the disciples attended. But there were also times when they prayed on their own. We don't know if these new believers were taught the Lord's Prayer or not, but we know that by the second century they were using it regularly.³

I think it's amazing, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, that He instructed them to begin with "Our Father..." (John 11). Jesus is encouraging His disciples to refer to God as 'Father.' To call God 'Father' is a big deal. To call Him 'Father' is to suggest that He is *not* distant, *or* unapproachable *or* indifferent toward you. Instead, calling God 'Father' points to intimacy; to connectedness. John 1 tells us that when we place our trust in Jesus and take Him as our Leader and Forgiver that we become children of God. Not physically born again, but born of God. That's what the new believers discovered, and it must have blown their minds. 'God is my Father.' Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to be *with* His people. Jesus, God in the flesh, came to be *with* His people and we call Him as 'Immanuel, God *with* us.' And now, since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in every believer! Talk about *God*

³ Ibid, 121-122.

with us! Prayer is an intimacy builder—certainly between the one praying and the God who is *with us*. But it's also an intimacy builder between people who pray together. If you've ever had an extended time of prayer with a friend or your spouse, or your kids, you know what I'm saying. This intimacy between God and us is shared with others through prayer and is one of the joys of Christian fellowship. Prayer is an invitation to draw near to the One who loves you best and most. And praying together knits our hearts with God and one another. Prayer is so important that it's one of four things every believer needed to cultivate in their lives.

The Struggle is Real

I know that most of us have no problem praying by ourselves. Some of us pray aloud (even when alone) and some pray silently. But where it gets rough for many is praying with others. We get tongue tied, wondering if we're going to say the wrong word or sound eloquent enough or be able to string a coherent sentence together. I get it! But let me encourage you: Your Heavenly Father invites you to come close. You already know that He wants to be *with you*, so rest in that. You don't need to sound like a theologian or be eloquent. You don't need to prove anything to anyone because the God of the universe has called you His own and He wants to spend time with you! Prayer is a great opportunity to have a conversation with God—both privately and in community. So, grab your Christian friends, invite them to get together so you can pray with and for one another (see that 'one another'?). Remember to give the Lord a chance to speak, too. So listen at least as much as you speak. If you'll be consistent in your prayer life, you'll discover a several things: that it's easier to do than you thought, you're not as worried about saying things perfectly, you're learning to discern God's voice and you're growing closer to the ones you're praying with. So, grab your friends, your spouse, your family, and go to the Father together in prayer regularly.

I know I spent a good bit of time on one verse, but it's vital that we understand how important caring well for new believers truly is. It's what separates making disciples from simply making converts.

Community Life (v 43-47)

While verse 42 focuses on caring for new believers well, verses 43-47 focus on the community life of the whole church. Follow along while I read 43-47. [READ]

“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

On Display (v 43)

You see some similarities between what happened with the new believers and the whole body, and that makes sense. How the church did life together was a major contributor to the growth of the church. In other words, when unbelievers saw how the church cared, served, shared, enjoyed and supported each other, they were drawn in and wanted to know what made them so different. And, wouldn't you know it, the difference was Jesus and the presence of His Spirit amongst them.

Speaking of the Spirit, did verse 43 stand out to you? *“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”* Look again at what Peter said to the crowd last week, *“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”*—Acts 2:22 Jesus' miracles affirmed that He was God's chosen One and that God was near. The wonders and signs the Holy Spirit worked through the apostles served a similar purpose: to let people know that God was in their midst, and it was His power behind what they were seeing. (Signs and wonders served to announce God's presence and power.) It's one thing to say, “The Lord

is near.” It’s a whole other therapy session to have God’s presence & power revealed dropped on you. Think of those who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, speaking in different languages. That was a demonstration of God’s presence & power amongst the people who gathered, and it simultaneously amazed and mystified them. But it opened the window for Peter to share the truth and for thousands to be saved. That’s exactly what was happening in verse 43. God’s presence & power were on display and both believers and outsiders were awe-struck. People could sense that God was at work because He was.

One Accord (v 44-45)

The believers were all together and shared everything they had. People were willing to sell their possessions to help meet the need of someone else whenever there was a need. Talk about the power of God! And let me be clear: the language suggests that the selling of their belongings wasn’t a mandate. It wasn’t *‘Go! Sell all your stuff and put the money in a pile so everyone has the same.’* No. It wasn’t communism. Having everything in common was love in action. These believers were so moved by the love of God for them that they couldn’t help but love and care for each other. ‘If you need what I’ve got, you can have it! ‘There’s a difference between knowing God loves you and letting that truth soak into your soul and influence how you live. Clearly, the love and influence of God went deep in these people. Unity and generosity are evidence of God’s presence. This is what the Spirit works out in us as we invite Him to fill us each day.

We see a similar kind of Christian love at Foothills all the time. The car breaks down and a friend loans them a vehicle until theirs can be repaired. Such kindness. When sickness hits or a new baby is born, meals come rolling out of homes so fast that we have to stagger deliveries! Widows have people show up at their homes to take care of the house or yard. One of the coolest things that happened during Covid (bet you never thought you’d hear those words ‘cool’ and ‘covid’ in the same sentence): people volunteered to call a handful of others to make sure they were healthy and find out if they needed groceries or errands run.

They prayed together and made sure no one was walking through that mess all alone. Friends, this is what happens when we do life together. God's people are well cared for and those who aren't yet believers are often drawn in because of how we love one another. Jesus said it, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Christian fellowship is powerful. This kind of love, care and generosity is a sign to the whole world that we belong to Jesus and it's His Spirit moving in us that makes it possible.

Make sure you're in fellowship, friends. If you're not already in a small group or Sunday seminar or midweek study of some kind, please jump in. Go to our website, Foothillscp.org [image of home page] and select the *connect* or *grow* drop down menu (on the top right) to find all kinds of ministries, groups and classes to choose from. One of the sweetest joys of Christian fellowship is *knowing others and being known*. Being part of a group outside of the Sunday gathering is crucial.

Day by Day (v 46-47)

It's easy to see, in verses 46-47, that the early Christians were devoted to gathering every day. They went to the temple—just as Jesus and His disciples did—which made sense. "Since the early Christians believed they had a true relationship with God through the Messiah, it was natural for them to take part in the worship of God in the accepted manner."⁴ So, they worshipped at the temple. But they also used the temple—perhaps an outer courtyard—to gather all together and to minister to one another and, very likely, with unbelieving Jews looking on. That's where the signs and wonders we read in verse 43 were likely on display.

So, their large assemblies were at the temple. But they also gathered in one another's homes for meals, the Lord's Supper, and praising God for all He's done. These home fellowships, which later became home churches, were important gatherings in the life of the church. It wasn't just about sharing food, but caring for one another. It was in these smaller

⁴ Marshall, I. Howard. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts*. (Intervarsity Press, England, 1984), 85.

groups that the joyous generosity of the people overflowed. Because they knew and loved each other, they were more than happy to share a meal with anyone—there was no pretense or posturing. They were bonded by the love of Christ and influenced by the indwelling Spirit, so no one was better than anyone else! It's likely that these home groups are where the deep care for one another was most clearly displayed.

We know that unbelievers must have been present during the temple assemblies. They observed the demonstrations of God's presence & power, and they were eyewitnesses to the joy and generosity of the Christians. Because the unbelievers saw all this, they regarded the Christians favorably, and that gave the believers an opportunity to witness about Christ.⁵ When people see the love of God in action, it's attractive. Verse 47 concludes with "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Wrap

Do you see where this morning's text is pointing? Community is essential to the health and mission of God's people. He's called us to Himself, and that call includes community with other believers. It's in community that we learn, grow, serve, give, practice one-anothering, forgive, pray, worship, and witness. Whether you're a new believer or you've been walking with Jesus for decades, Christ has called us to do life together.

Encouragements

So, let me encourage you as I close. If you're not part of a smaller group where you can know and be known, jump in [Join some kind of smaller group]. If you can't find one that fits your schedule or stage of life, start one. We'll help you. Be intentional about seeing and welcoming others to Foothills gatherings. Invite someone to lunch or coffee. You are a part of the body here which means you have the important responsibility to love others well.

⁵ Ibid, 86.

Remember that wherever you find yourself, you bring the presence of God with you [wherever you go.]. Don't hide it. Let it all hang out! When you're at the grocery store, gas station, bank, walking the neighborhood, volunteering at your grandkid's school, playing sports or going to school, if you're a Christian, you bring Jesus with you. Love people well and you may get the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with someone who doesn't yet know Him. When that happens, pull them into the fellowship so that, now that they're connected with Jesus, we can care well for them and help grow to love and serve Him.

Close

This life that Christ has called us to isn't a solo adventure, even though there are times when we're on our own. This life, the Christ-life, is to be lived *with* one another. The Holy Spirit is *with* us and *in* us, and He empowers us to live in unity, love, service and generosity and, when we do that well, the watching world will see that we, that you, are different and they'll want to know why. And that's when you get the privilege of telling them your story and how Jesus stepped in changed you. That's our life. That's our mission. Let's lean into the empowering of the Spirit and do that exceedingly well for His glory and the sake of those still far from Him.

Pray

Thank you that we don't do this alone—but are empowered by your Spirit. Tune our hearts that we would be fully yielded to your leadership moment-by-moment.

Help us to love, serve and share generously wherever we find ourselves. And use us to draw people to You.

Some have come prepared to give tithes & offerings, will You please multiply them and help us to use them to build Your Kingdom.

Bless my friends, remind them of Your deep love and let them rest as they walk closely with You each day.