

FOCAL TEXTS

Acts 2:42–47;
Romans 12:3–13

BACKGROUND

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Romans 12:3–13

LESSON FIVE

Fellowship

Introduction

If you only had one hour to disciple a brand new Christian, what would you say? I had that exact challenge a few years ago when I met with a young lady in East Asia less than twenty-four hours after she had given her life to Christ. She had never been to church, had never known any other Christians, and had never seen a Bible until I handed her one. Her questions were mostly about how to live out her faith: What did God want her to do? How should she behave toward other people? Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, I opened her Bible to one of the passages for today because it outlines—in concise, practical terms—how to live in fellowship with others.

Fellowship Lesson Five

Focal Texts: Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:3-13

Background: Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:3-13

Teaching Aim: To lead members to identify the characteristics of a caring fellowship (koinonia) and to determine some of the factors that must be present in order to maintain this fellowship.

Connect with Life: Ask members to recall their favorite church experience. (This may be the church they now belong to.) Ask them to share some of the reasons for their enjoyment of the church they have selected. List these on the board as they are shared. Then tell members that we will compare these experiences to those of the New Testament church to see how they rate. We will also be reminded of our part in maintaining a caring fellowship (koinonia) in our current church.

Guide Bible Study: As Acts 2:42-43 are being read, ask members to listen for the pre-requisites of a caring fellowship. These include the following:

1. Bible study groups. They did not have the New Testament at this point but they were able to hear the apostles tell the gospel story from first-hand experience. These accounts were later written down and preserved for us to study today.
2. They had fellowship. They formed special Bible study groups called koinoia, which means "caring fellowship." "It carries the idea of close association, relationship, and sharing." There were many differences between these early believers "but there was one thing they had in common-they had faith in Jesus as their Savior. That was all they needed to bond together."
3. They broke bread together. This included the Lord's Supper and regular times of fellowship with the sharing of meals.
4. They prayed together. Prayer was an essential part of their caring fellowships. "Although the believers could have prayed together almost anywhere, it was quite possible they were meeting together in the temple area for prayer."
5. The Holy Spirit was at work in their midst. This caused them to be filled with awe and the disciples were able to perform many miracles.

Then read the following summary statement of these pre-requisites to give members a definition of caring fellowship: "A caring fellowship comes from Christians who study God's Word and pray, together, in an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in their midst."

Then ask members to identify the characteristics of a caring fellowship as found in Acts 2:42-47. These will include the following:

1. They were together (44a). This means that they were in agreement as to their primary purpose as a church, which was evangelism. We know this because of 47b which says, "And the Lord added to their number daily (not "Sundaly") those who were being saved." Even though there was a tremendous emphasis upon taking care of one another, it was for the purpose of evangelism, not simply taking care of each other until Jesus comes. Others in the community were attracted to what they saw in this fellowship of believers.
2. They ministered to every one's needs (44b-45). Since many of these Christians had not planned to stay in Jerusalem this long, they had run out of resources. Everyone pooled their resources and shared equally with each other. "This community of believers demonstrated their unselfish love for one another by selling property and other belongings in order to meet the needs of those within the group." "In so doing, the early church became a living example of the ideal community God intended for his covenant people (Deut. 15:7-8)."
3. They had regular times of corporate worship (46a). While these caring fellowships met in homes, the church continued to have corporate times of worship in the temple, synagogues, and in public gathering places. "These were times of worshiping and honoring God."
4. They had regular times of fellowship (46b). It has been said that when Baptists meet, we eat. This was part of the times of fellowship of these early koinonias. "In individual homes, believers would have had more privacy in a relaxed setting and could indulge in longer conversations without being interrupted."
5. They experienced unity in their fellowship (47a). This time of unity was the result of a perfect community of believers practicing the characteristics of a koinonia. "At this early stage, the Christian community was marked by unity, generosity, and worship. Others in Jerusalem admired their behavior to the point that this new fellowship of believers was 'having favor with all the people', much as the young Jesus grew in favor with God and people."

Then ask members to identify ways that each of us can contribute to the unity of our caring fellowship as found in Romans 12:3-13. These will include the following:

1. Maintain a spirit of humility (12:3). "There is nothing more poisonous to fellowship among believers than pride. Paul cautioned the believers in Rome to see their worth through God's eyes according to the gift of faith that had been given them. "Having proper humility is a balancing act" between thinking too highly of yourself or too lowly of yourself.
2. Be part of the body of Christ (12:4-5). "The human body is a fitting analogy for how believers are to relate to each other. Just as the body consists of a variety of limbs, organs, and systems-all serving different gifts and functions that are vital functions-so

the church consists of a variety of believers with different gifts and functions that are vital to the health of the group as a whole.”

3. Identify your spiritual gift and practice it with grace (12:6-8). Write these gifts on the board, discuss each, and ask members to identify their gift(s).
4. Live a life of grace (12:9-13). List and discuss each of the suggestions for living out our faith as found in these verses.

Encourage Application: Ask members to determine at least one action they can take to improve the quality of this caring fellowship. For example:

1. Rediscover my spiritual gift(s) and determine how the suggested way to use this gift will help me find favor with the other members.
2. Determine if pride has slipped in to any of my dealings with others.
3. Select at least one of the thirteen suggestions for living out our faith and practice that suggestion this next week.

Close with prayer for members to pray for this caring fellowship and recommit themselves to its welfare.