

June 16, 2024

## United: Acts 2:41-47

Believers are united through a shared commitment to Jesus. ←

### Focus Attention

**Ask** the group to name dynamic duos from pop culture or history.

**Explain:** From Batman and Robin to Roosevelt and Churchill pop culture and history are full of people who teamed up to accomplish a task. Some of us do not like relying on other people to accomplish a task. We might say that it is just easier to do it ourselves. Or we think our way is the best way and we do not want other people to interfere with our ideas. But some things in life require two or more people. One of those tasks is the Great Commission. Just before Jesus left this earth, He commissioned His disciples to reach the entire world with the gospel message. It would take more than 1 person or 12 people to accomplish that task. To help accomplish this task the Father sent the Spirit to empower His followers. He also created the church as a means of accomplishing His Kingdom purposes. The church equips believers to live holy lives and go on mission for the Lord. An essential component of the church is unity. A church that is not unified will struggle to accomplish the mission of God. On the day of Pentecost, God increased the number of followers in Jerusalem from 120 to over 3,000. Today we will examine the practices that united these believers in their Kingdom work.

**Introduce the Passage:** Last week we examined the power of the Spirit when He came upon the believers. We saw that the Spirit of God empowered Peter to deliver the first sermon of the Christian age. Let's look now at what happened after Peter closed out the invitation to "repent and be baptized." (Acts 2:38)

### 1. DISCIPLINED (ACTS 2:41-42)

**Read or have someone read** Acts 2:41-42

**Explain:** While in many of our Bibles, these two verses are separated from Peter's sermon by a heading, it might be better to see them as a conclusion to the Pentecost narrative. In these two verses, we see a summary of what these 3000 new believers did in response to the gospel. The practices of the new believers mark a change in their lives and signify a changed way of life. Two of these practices are one-time events and the others are ongoing practices of the Christian life.

First, we see that they accepted Peter's message and were baptized. To accept the gospel message is more than a mental assent. The word accepted can mean to "believe as true" or to "think favorably about" something. Many people in our world might think favorably about some

#### Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte

"Quite possibly v. 42 should be viewed separately, as a conclusion to the Pentecost narrative. Thus viewed, it provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts were incorporated into the believing community." (NAC, 118)

things in Scripture. Some might even believe the Bible is true. Yet it does not affect their lives in any meaningful way. The word can also mean to “welcome [or] receive with warmth.”<sup>1</sup> Those who heard the message of the gospel on the day of Pentecost received it with warmth and wholehearted acceptance.

**Discuss:** What changes might take place in a person’s life when they receive the gospel with warmth?

**Explain:** The answers to that question can be varied and wide-ranging. Accepting the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit will change the way a person thinks, feels, and acts. They will be changed on the inside and the outside. That change is reflected in baptism. On that day in every pool and spring in Jerusalem, 3000 people declared through baptism that they had died to their old selves and had been raised to life in Christ. However, their salvation did not end at the edge of the baptismal. Accepting and believing is only the beginning of the Christian journey. Luke tells us that they committed themselves to four things: (1) the teaching of the apostles (2) “the fellowship” (3) “the breaking of bread” and (4) prayer. These commitments were not checkboxes on a commitment card. They did not simply say, “Yes, I will study and come to church and pray.” Instead, the language used by Luke shows that these four practices marked their new lives. Translated literally this verse “says, ‘They were *continually* devoting themselves to [these things] ... It denotes a steadfast and single-minded devotion to a certain course of action.’ (Preaching, 47) Let’s quickly examine these four practices and see how they apply to our lives.

**Devotion to the apostles teaches:** The early church did not have the letters of Paul. They did not even have the four Gospels. All they had was what we call the Old Testament. The only source of Jesus’ teachings were the Apostles who had spent three years learning directly from the Master. In addition to His direct instruction during those years, Luke tells us that the risen Jesus helped them understand how His life and ministry relate to the Old Testament. The Gospel of Luke tells us that “<sup>44</sup> [Jesus] told them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” (Luke 2:44-45) The teachings of the Apostles applied the truths of the Old Testament to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and helped the new believers learn to live in light of that reality.

**Discuss:** In what ways can we show our devotion to the Word of God?

**Apply:** The primary way we continually devote ourselves to Scripture is to continually live lives guided by it. We can only live that kind of life if we

Notes:

“Being filled with the Spirit and being filled with God’s Word go together...Where the Spirit reigns, a love for god’s Word reigns.”  
(Preaching, 47)

<sup>1</sup> James Swanson, [\*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)\*](#) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

know what Scripture says. That means we must devote ourselves to learning from Scripture. We can do this by reading it daily, reading devotions, and studying it using tools like our Personal Study Guide.

**Devotion to the fellowship:** In this verse, fellowship is more than donuts and coffee. It is more than a fish fry at the church. The Greek word for fellowship “emphasizes sharing life together and actively participating in the experiences of others.” (ETB LG, 40) Later, Paul will use the word in his letters to Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul encourages the church to give generously. In verse 13 he speaks of their “sharing.” The word for sharing is the same word Luke uses for fellowship. This use relates to the secular use of the word that involves “the sharing of goods.” (NAC, 119). In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul uses the word in relation to the Lord’s Supper. When we take the bread and juice, he says we are “sharing” in the suffering of Christ. These two examples show us that “the fellowship” of the early church was a life sacrificially connected to others and a life connected to the sacrificed Savior.

**Discuss:** In what ways can we sacrificially connect to other believers?

**Apply:** We sacrificially connect to others when we serve them with our time, talents, and resources. We also give sacrificially by stopping and listening when people need to talk. Finding our place of ministry in the church is another way. Serving in areas that are “beneath us” or “outside of our comfort zone” is essential to sacrificially connecting to others. This type of true fellowship is only possible through the work of the Spirit. It is a miraculous gift of God and an answer to Jesus’ prayer. In John 17:20-21 Jesus prays to the Father and says, “<sup>20</sup> I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. <sup>21</sup> May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.”

**Devotion to “the breaking of bread:”** Their devotion to fellowship helps us understand what Luke meant by “the breaking of bread.” We will talk more about this later in the lesson, but it means both the Lord’s Supper and practicing hospitality over a meal.

**Devotion to “the prayers:”** The prayers of the early church were both traditional prayers to the God of Israel and new personal prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit and directed to the God who saves.

**Transition:** Luke uses these four practices to give us a snapshot of the changed lives of these 3,000 new believers. The practices consistently mark the lives of these men and women. They should also mark the lives of all followers of Jesus in the first century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the next passage, Luke is going to broaden the focus and give an example of how “the fellowship” of these believers manifested in Jerusalem.

## 2. UNIFIED (ACTS 2:43-45)

**Read (or have someone read)** Acts 2:43-45

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**Ask:** Ask the group to name a time when they felt awe. (Allow a few moments for discussion.)

**Explain:** In this passage, Luke broadens his focus from the initial 3,000 to the larger situation. He reports that “everyone was filled with awe.” When he says “everyone,” he is probably referring “to those outside the Christian community.” (NAC, 120) “The Greek wording [for awe] can also be rendered as ‘fear’ or ‘panic.’ However, Luke used it to describe a reverence or respect for God’s work in the early church.” (ETB LG, 42) The people of Jerusalem were standing around slack-jawed at the situation. We have to ask, why did the people experience awe? Was it the devotion described in verses 41-42 or was it something else? It seems that while the practices in verses 41 and 42 are remarkable, it was the activity in verses 43-45 that led to awe. Let’s examine those activities.

The activities listed are all works of the Spirit. The signs and wonders performed through the Apostles were not humanly possible. We will see an example of these signs and wonders in Chapter 3 when a lame man is healed. Note that Luke calls the activities like the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost and the healing “wonders and signs” not miracles. While they were miraculous, they were signs meant to point people to the Savior and the gospel message. It was not just the wonders that caused the people to experience awe. The Spirit-empowered unity of the believers was also awe-inspiring.

**Read** verse 44 (<sup>44</sup> Now all the believers were together and held all things in common.)

Luke describes them as “together.”

**Discuss:** In what ways might unity manifest in the church (what does it look like)? What does disunity look like? (Allow a moment for discussion)

**Discuss:** What are the results of unity and disunity in the church?

Unity is essential for the church to function as God intended. Disunity can show up in big and small ways. In big ways, it can be manifest as outright rebellion against godly leadership. More often, disunity manifests in grumbling and complaining or passive-aggressive words or actions. Unity is evident when church members coalesce behind a movement or idea. Church members also demonstrate unity when they seek a solution to a problem or gladly sacrifice for the greater good. These sacrifices can be financial. Sacrifices can also come when a small group is asked (or volunteers) to give up their room because a growing group needs more space or because a kids group needs to use it.

The results of disunity are a faltering mission-less church that fails to reach its community with the gospel. Unity leads to excitement and passion for the mission of the church and reaching the lost for Christ.

Notes:

“‘Everyone’ probably refers to those outside the Christian community who were awed by apostolic miracles (cf. 5:12–13).” (NAC, 120)

TEACHERS’ NOTE: You could ask the group to discuss these questions in groups of two or three and then report back. This will provide a variety of answers from the group.

**Ask:** What does verse 43 tell us this unified group of believers did? (“they held all things in common”)

**Explain:** Upon hearing this, our American, capitalist brains kick into high gear. Younger generations might not react as quickly as those who grew up during the Cold War. But even they might look sideways at this description of the early church. Luke, though, helps us understand what “held all things in common” means in the next verse. Verse 44 tells us that they sold their possessions and property when the need arose to help someone. In a world in which ATMs and saving accounts were not the norm, this makes sense. Today when someone is in need, we might dip into our savings to help them. In that day, if a widow was in need or a family experienced some type of tragedy, other believers would sell something and use the proceeds to help.

We should not get too caught up in the mechanics of their benevolence. Instead, we should remark on the Spirit-empowered heart behind the generosity. Remember we are examining this activity in relation to verse 43. Just as the “wonders and signs” produced awe in the people so did the church’s generosity.

**Discuss:** In what ways might a church member or a small group practice benevolence or generosity?

The first element of an individual life or small group marked by benevolence is the indwelling of the Spirit. The prompting and leading of the Spirit will ensure that the right needs are met in the right way. Second, a person or small group must prepare to meet needs before they arise. Many churches have a benevolence fund, and that is helpful when someone comes to the church for direct assistance. However, many times a church member or small group will know about a need before the pastor or staff member. They can be prepared to help by planning and setting aside funds to help. An individual can do this by “socking a little money away” in the cookie jar or mentally assigning an amount in their savings account for benevolence. Small groups can do this by having a monthly or quarterly in-class benevolence offering that someone is responsible for maintaining. Again, the mechanics of benevolence are secondary to the essential principles of listening to the Spirit and being prepared to help.

**Transition:** After 3,000 people came to faith in Christ in one day and began to live differently, the leaven of Spirit-led activity filled the city. Those who did not know Jesus were in awe, but they experienced something else as well. Luke tells us about that in the next passage.

### 3. IN COMMUNITY (ACTS 2:46-47)

**Read (or have someone read)** Acts 2:46-47

#### Notes:

“The point is the fellowship of the early church rested on mutual generosity and sharing. Fellowship cost something in the early church, in contrast to our use of the word *fellowship* today.” (Preaching, 49)

“The imperfect tense is used, indicating that this was a recurrent, continuing practice: their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose”. (NAC, 121)

“This was marvelously balanced. It was both formal and informal, in the ‘the temple’ and ‘in their homes.’” (Preaching, 52)

**Explain:** Luke continues to provide a snapshot of the early church in Jerusalem. Beyond benevolence, the church committed to meeting daily in the temple complex. This makes sense for several reasons. First, following Jesus, the Messiah, was a fulfillment of the promises pictured in the temple. These believers were gathering in the Temple to worship and fellowship together. Moreover, “in Jerusalem the temple was the primary place where crowds would be found, and there the Christians went to bear their witness (3:11–12; 5:21, 42).” The presence of this messianic community in the temple was a witness to the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament and the promise of new life in Christ. Not only did they meet in the temple they “broke bread from house to house.” There were not many places in the city where this 3,000-member church could meet. Luke explains that instead of trying to gather as a large group they went from house to house to practice the Lord’s Supper and eat meals together. These meals were joyous events. The citizens of Jerusalem who passed by the homes of believers during mealtime heard laughter and fun coming from inside. Not only were the Christians joyous, but they also engendered goodwill from the people they encountered. Luke is revealing the effects of a united, spirit-filled, joyous community.

**Ask:** In the second half of verse 47 Luke reveals the outcome of this type of living. What was the outcome? (Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.)

**Explain:** “As Robertson says, ‘It was a continuous revival day by day.’” (Preaching, 50) The believers in the city provided a witness for the gospel through their everyday activity. However, for new people to come to faith they must have been explaining why their lives were changed. They must have been sharing the gospel with their mouths as well as their lives.

**Summarize and Transition:** Unity in the church and joyous Christian living are essential to the spread of the gospel. They are the means through which the leaven of heaven spreads through the community. These glimpses of heavenly living provide an opportunity to share the gospel vocally and call others to “repent and be baptized.” (v. 38)

## CONCLUDE

**Guide and Summarize:** Guide the group to page 36 of their Personal Study Guide and review the summary points for the lesson.

- “Believers should help others grow as followers of Jesus.
- Believers demonstrate their faith through unity and meeting each other’s needs.
- The way believers treat each other affects their witness for Christ.”

**Ask:** “Which of these can you observe in your church? How could these aspects be enhanced?” (ETB PSG, 36) (Allow time for discussion)

## Notes:

“If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship.” (NAC, 121)

“The Greek phrase κατ’ οἶκον can be translated ‘at home’ or ‘from house to house.’ The latter is probably preferable, depicting the Christians as individually opening their homes to the larger fellowship. With such a large membership, the picture is probably that of a number of home fellowships.” (NAC, 121 fn 152)

“What happens to believers who worship, work, and witness for their Lord? The Lord grows the church. Let’s not miss the order—first godly relationships with each other, then growth.” (HNTC, 32)

“Luke’s summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.” (NAC, 122)

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**Follow up** the question in the PSG with an application question: How can our group enhance these aspects of the Christian life in our church? (Allow time for discussion.)

**Pray:** Ask the Lord to help your group members to live attractive, Spirit-filled lives in the community and activity seek to build unity in the church.