

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
Dale Wallace  
Series: Stories from Acts  
July 3, 2022

### The First Church

Acts 2:42-47

**42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 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.**

Good morning, Harris Creek. How are we doing? Here we go, here we go! Firsts are always the standard. You know what I mean by this? There's restaurants where it's like, this is the OG. This is the place where it all began. It is where the magic happens. That's where the true burger is. That is where the true Mexican food started. That's it. Do you know of this? Any places in particular that come to mind that you're like, man, the best is the first? Any restaurants come to mind? (A member from the crowd shouts) Chick-Fil-A? Atlanta, I don't think it even started as Chick-Fil-A. It was some small shop, but yes. Okay, anything else? (more people shout from the crowd). Mi Casita, I don't know what that is but I'm sure the original is the best. Any others? (more shouting from the crowd) Rosa's! Thank you! So good! I agree.

When I moved to Waco all of my friends started talking about one restaurant in particular, Ninfas. They were like man we've got to go to Ninfas. We've got to check out Ninfas. I'm from Houston. Y'all, Ninfa's in Houston is the jam. That is where it's at. That is the OG. That's the first Ninfa's. It is hard to get a seat at lunchtime at Ninfa's in Houston. The first is where it's at. There's other places, apparently Rosa's is one of them, Mi Casita. I don't know about Chick Fil a. Does anyone even know where the first Chick Fil A was? (someone from the crowd speaks) Georgia, Atlanta, I think you're right. There we go, somebody's on it, they have read the book by Truett Cathy.

Anyways, I even think back to even making a pilgrimage, so to speak, to Llano, Texas, and there was this Bar-B-Q place I wanted to show my wife. I'm like, this place is historic! Cooper's Bar-B-Q. It is where it's at. This is one of those places where they open up the pit and it's just filled

with meat and you're like "I want that one. What is that?" You know you just have no idea. It's amazing! You leave there and for days you smell like Cooper's Bar-B-Q. And you want to talk about it. It's amazing. My wife doesn't even really like Bar-B-Q and she loved it. She was like, "This is amazing!" It wasn't quite what she expected, but it's amazing.

And I start with that this morning because so often the first is amazing and then they become chains. And then there's other Cooper's in other places or other Ninfas in other places and they are just not quite the same. They don't measure up to the standard which is the original, the first, the very first. They just can't measure up to the original.

And so, as we're continuing in our series, Stories from Acts, we're going to look at the first church. It's the OG. It's what we ought to compare ourselves to. It's the very thing, as we read the text, we should think "Is this what we at Harris Creek look like?" What's crazy about this text is since 2019, 2020, 2021, this has been preached on every year and now 2022. It's this overwhelming thing. As the new guy on staff, I was like, "Man this has been preached on every year. Am I going to have to teach it in a new way? Am I going to have to present a new Greek word that hasn't been presented before?" I even talked to JP about this and he was like, "Bro, just teach the text." As I was even praying about it myself I was thinking God must really want us to look like an Acts 2 church. He keeps bringing us back to it. He keeps saying, "Hey is this what you look like? This is the standard!" He keeps bringing us back to it.

So, if you'll turn with me to Acts 2, we're going to start in 42. We're going to see that the first church is daily devoted, sacrificially generous, and joyfully evangelistic. Before we jump in I just want you to know this text is almost completely applied in the context of a life group or a community. So this may be challenging if you're here and you're not in a life group, that might be the best application for you today. There's other takeaways you can take away but the reality is we exist, as Harris Creek, and we hope that you'd be connected to community through life groups. There's all these different words, life groups. This is best applied in the context of that.

The reason why this is so important is we're not drifting into community in 2022. It's very unnatural to have true biblical community. In fact, there was a study done recently of adults and the study showed that 49% of adults have 3 or fewer friends, 49% of adults. In fact, 12% said they have zero friends, which is so sad, but it also just shows us our culture isn't drifting towards community. It's actually really drifting towards loneliness. It's unnatural. What we're going to see today is unnatural. I worked with college students for 6 years before I came on staff and what I would always tell college students is when you leave here, don't go and find community, go and make community. It's hard to find but really the challenge for all of us, and especially those watching online, maybe Seattle, Houston, wherever, it's really important that we make it. Even if we're here in the room, it takes making it. It's hard to find. We as a body we have to make community. We have to create it. That's what we're called to. So this is best applied in the context of community.

As I mentioned, we're continuing in our series, Stories from Acts, immediately following what Nate's just taught us about the spirit of God coming, and then we see what the spirit lead church, what the first church is like. Again, starting in verse 42, in Acts, this is what it says:

**42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe<sup>d</sup> 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.**

That's our text this morning. Let's turn back to verse 42 to hear our first point. **42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.** The first thing we see in the first church is that they were daily devoted.

### *1. Daily Devoted*

I took the word daily from "day by day" in verse 46. The first church was daily devoted. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship. Those are the things that they were devoted to. First the apostles' teaching, which then would've been listening to what the apostles had said and even what Jesus had taught them to tell others. But for us, that's God's word. We have the luxury of having access to the scriptures. So, what this is, is the first church was committed and daily devoted to the word of God.

The other thing that they were devoted to was fellowship. Fellowship is the Greek word *koinonia* which means like it's common. They had a common union. It's part of where we get the thinking for community. It's another way of thinking about communion. Another way to think about it also though is participation. It's participation. This fellowship is gathering and participating. That's what they were devoted to. When you think about devotion, and when I think about devotion, I think about college football. Anybody excited about this fall, college football? (Dale raises his hand and looks around for others raising their hands) Okay, here we go. I was expecting a little bit more than that but that's okay. I'm excited about it. I'm excited about college football and this fall.

And when I think about people who are devoted, I think about a few fans in particular at Baylor that I'm like, "I know them. They're always wearing the jersey. They're jumping up and down the whole time. They're amazing. They haven't missed a game since 1992." You know these people. They paint up, they paint their bodies, they wear the jersey, and if they're lucky, if they have hair, they paint their hair. You know, if God's given them the gift of hair. And like that's what they do. They're at every game and even when they're not at the game they're wearing the

Baylor belt, you know what I mean? And they've got the Bear socks on. You never know when they're repping. They're devoted. Those are the people that are devoted.

Those are the devoted people but what's interesting about this text as we apply it and we think about this is like we're not just devoted to being there and being fans. Being devoted to fellowship means we're devoted to like participating, to being a part of community. And so it's almost more like we're devoted to being the athletes that are IN the sporting event. Like we're actually the players that are in the field. God is using us, that's it. And those are the things that we're devoted to. We're devoted about so many things in this world. We're devoted to so many things. My question is, are we devoted to the most important things: God's word, and the fellowship?

If you remember the text you notice that I skipped over breaking bread and prayers. It's not because I don't believe in the scriptures. I actually really think, and what I know, is that the breaking of the bread and the prayers is describing the fellowship. That's what we need to know. So they were daily devoted to all of these things. They were participating in these things: breaking bread together, praying together. The reality is, COVID has really, really hurt devotion. Like for the most part, it has really, really hurt the gathering of believers around God's word and even community and fellowship with one another. So many of us took COVID, when COVID hit, and then we've just taken a break from church and all these different things. Maybe it's less in the room and maybe it's more me looking at the camera for those on the other side. We're meant to be daily devoted.

What it creates in verse 43, what daily devotion creates, one of those things, one of the fruits of that, is awe, which is reverential fear. So, if you're struggling with awe, you're here and you're like, "I wouldn't necessarily describe my walk with Jesus as being filled with awe right now". Here's one of the possible reasons. Maybe we could be more devoted. There could be others, absolutely, there could be other reasons. But maybe one of the reasons is that we aren't devoted the way we are meant to be. We aren't devoted the way we were meant to be.

So, how do we apply this to our lives? First, we're devoted to community, so join a life group. If you're not in one, I invite you to join one. If you're online, make a community. If you're not here with us, then go and make a community, as I've already challenged you. And for those that are in community, how do we apply this? Let's look to the text. We can grow in these areas: breaking the bread together, sharing a meal with our life group. We can grow in sharing God's word with one another, being biblical, spending time in God's word. Lastly we can grow in prayer in our life groups. We could pray more in our life groups. I don't think most of our life groups are marked by prayer. I'll pick on my own life group, because even this week when the guys met, it so much easier for us to talk about sports than it is to pray for one another. I get it. This week we talked more about sports than praying for another. Prayer was what we did at the end. It almost felt more like a transition. Family, prayer is not a transition. It's what is meant to mark our life group and our community just as it marked the first church.

So, the first thing we see, is that the first church was daily devoted.

Verse 44, let's go back to the text. **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.** So verse 44 through 46 is showing us this generosity that's among this first church. But so often in Waco, even when I was reading this I was reading, "Okay, so they all lived together, they moved together, they shared everything in common, it kind of sounds like a cult". And in Waco, there was a cult and it didn't go very well. And so we read this, and we're like "Ah, red flag!"

In addition, some of us read this, or hear this, and we're like "communism, or socialism", you know, all those political red flags that also go up. Immediately we're like, "this text is for the past. This is absolutely describing something that isn't for us today." Here's the deal. Let me just pause for a second and acknowledge those thoughts. Very simply, his was voluntary. So communism, socialism, those things, that's not voluntary. Cults aren't voluntary. Like this is voluntary and they weren't distributing the proceeds to all evenly. They were distributing to those all that had needs. They were caring for the people that had needs. Even specifically, people would have been losing their jobs because of them believing that Jesus was the Messiah. So there were people with serious needs and that's what the church was doing.

So what I want us to take away from this passage, from this part of the scripture, is that the first church is sacrificially generous.

## 2. *Sacrificially Generous*

That is what marked the first church. They are the standard for us and we see that they are sacrificially generous in the way that they care for one another. They share in their abundance. And even have the humility to share their needs. You see, I want to take a quick aside. I'm new on staff. I've been learning the building blocks that we have here for community. And it's authentic, biblical and committed. And what I've been encouraged by is that those building blocks don't seem like we made them up out of thin air. They really are, even in this text, they were devoted, which is committed, to the apostles teaching, which is God's word. Then, when it comes to being generous with one another, when I think about having needs, I think about authenticity.

So often, at Harris Creek, we think authenticity is just confess your sins. But authenticity can also be us sharing, "Hey, I need help with this." I actually want to even double down. I actually think it's more authentic and more vulnerable to share that you have needs than it is, "Here's the sin I've done." Here's why: because when we confess sin, we know it's been paid for by God's grace through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. That's what we're called to do, but we also know that's been taken care of. When somebody comes and says, "Hey, I have this need. I need

help with these things,” that’s vulnerable and authentic and they don’t know if it’s going to get taken care of. They don’t know how. The sins, we know how they were taken care of, because of what Jesus has done. And so this first church was sacrificially generous.

And before just immediately applying this to our lives, I want us to think about: why was the first church sacrificially generous? Like why were they crazy? You know we read this and we’re like “These are some crazy people.” All the red flags. We read this and I want to know why. Let’s think about it. First, I think Jesus taught them to be generous. I think Jesus taught them to be sacrificially generous. Matthew 6 He says when you give to the needy. Luke 21, the two widows coins were more than the wealthy giving out of abundance. Luke 12 He says sell your possessions and give them to the poor. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. First reason why the church was sacrificially generous is because Jesus told them to be and they are his witnesses. (See Acts 1:8) He told them to be generous. In addition, as Nate taught us last week, this is the Spirit of God giving them courage to be sacrificially generous. This is what the Spirit does. It helps us to have courage to give up things, to sacrificially give.

And then, lastly, and this is the one I think that we miss, maybe the most, they thought Jesus was going to come back... soon. They really were like I’ll give up my house in Jerusalem, Jesus is going to return and there’s going to be a New Jerusalem. So, it’s all good. And if He comes tomorrow, I want to make sure that I’ve given enough today. Then I won’t have a chance. If He comes tomorrow, then I won’t be able to give it up then. It’ll be too late. They almost lived like Jesus was going to return. The first church knew it. 2,000 years later, for some reason, we don’t think He’s going to return. We’re less understanding of Jesus’ return. The early church, the first church, they knew. It’s so, so hard to look at this. We’re like, “How can we give so sacrificially? How can we be so generous? This feels crazy!” It’s almost like Jesus was our example. It’s almost like Jesus was THE example of being sacrificial, to the point of death, death on a cross.

In God’s sovereignty, I met with my financial advisor this week, which is terrible timing with this passage and being sacrificially generous. And he was informing me about all these different things about life insurance and disability and even retirement. We’re talking through all these different financial decisions. And I left the conversation, he told me he was going to tune in (Dale looks right at the camera and waves) Hope you’re doing well, see you Chad. He told me all of this, and we get off the zoom and I thought to myself, “I really think that this industry may exist because the church doesn’t do what it’s supposed to do.”

Like, I really think that part of what he was inviting me to do and take care of financially was what I honestly think the early church, the first church, would’ve taken care of other peoples’ needs if something crazy had happened. Like the “what ifs” and the reasons why we would invest in those things, that’s where I think the church would’ve stepped right up and cared for one another. Here’s the deal, I’m not a financial advisor. In fact, I’m not telling you whether or not to invest in retirement or life insurance or all these different things. I’m not telling you to do any of these things. Do not take that away. Do not send an email. Do not. I’m inviting you in to

wrestle with me. We should be at the intersection of sacrificially generous and wise. And I'm telling you the world will think that's crazy. Somebody should look at your finances and go, that feels crazy, and that's okay. When the world is watching they won't understand, but that's where we're meant to be. I'm inviting you to wrestle with me. I don't know how much I'm supposed to set aside. I don't know what's wise, and I don't know what's sacrificially generous. I'm going to prayerfully figure it out with my life group.

And so that's how we apply this. That's how we apply this. We don't apply this by moving in with your life group. You don't have to do that. It's okay, I know you were worried about it. You don't have to do that. If you want to, whatever. You don't have to get one bank account and all share it in your life group. It's fine, you don't have to do that either. But I do want you to prayerfully be sacrificially generous and talk with your life group about what that looks like.

I'll be the first to say, I'm in a newly married life group, we just started about seven months ago. And just to let you in on what our interactions are like, I'm not sure sometimes if we're on a handshake basis or we're on a hug basis. We're still like, how do we interact with one another? We're still just learning to care for one another and meet together and it's been so awesome. Our life group is amazing. It's truly amazing. But if we're not sure if we're on a handshake basis or a hug basis, how are we supposed to care for one another in that way? What's funny is this week I opened up the text and I read it to the guys and I was like, "What do y'all think this means for us?" And I was so encouraged. We're not sure if we should handshake or hug but my entire life group was like, if there's needs here, we're going to take care of each other. I was like, whoa! Should we hug next time? (crowd laughs) I mean this feels amazing! This feels encouraging!

And it is like absolutely, this is what it looks like to apply this. So maybe share needs. If you're in a life group and you have needs, be sure to share it. If you're not sure if your life group can cover those needs, talk to your shepherd. That's okay. Let us know. I've been so encouraged by generosity. I think one of the blessings of being in ministry is getting to see generosity. I get to see it more than maybe other people get to see it. I've seen people let other people have their cars. I've seen people give back houses or houses or rooms or places to live. Even give rent, help with rent when things don't go well. Help with medical expenses. I've seen people give up their kidney to a brother in Christ. Like give up a body part. I'm like I have seen sacrificial generosity. I've even experienced it even recently. Somebody in my life group gave me all these tools for a project that I could work on at our house. He just saw his tools as my tools. His dollar as my dollar. Why? Because all of our dollars and all of our tools are all God's. And so we're meant to be sacrificially generous. That's what the first church was. My question is, is that what we're like?

Let's see the last thing that marks the first church starting in verse 46. We're going back to verse 46. This is such a cool verse, too. **And day by day, I love that. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to**

**their number day by day those who were being saved.** The third thing the first church is, is they were joyfully evangelistic.

### 3. *Joyfully Evangelistic*

Let's first talk about the word joyful. It comes from the glad and generous hearts. The sincere, unified, praising hearts. When you're joyful the world will see and they'll wonder what's different about you. Stocks have been down over and over. We're in the financial business, you should be sad. What's different about you? What's different about you? How do you have gladness and joy?

The point is joyfully evangelistic. Where did I get the word evangelistic from this text? That's a valid question. Verse 46, **And day by day, attending the temple together.** You see, when we read that, as a church, we think they went to church a lot. Like I think they really were devoted. Man, alright, we get it, they were daily devoted to it. And here's the reality. When they were going to the temple, it wasn't like they were going to church. That's where the Jews were. What they were doing daily is, they were going to tell people that Jesus was the Messiah. Evangelistic means gospeling. That's what it literally means. It means to share the gospel. They were evangelistic day by day. They were sharing their faith in the temple. They were joyfully evangelistic.

I heard one pastor say it this way: it's like fishing. And if you know me, you know I like to fish because my dad loved to fish. And what very little I know about fishing is whenever you want to catch fish, you go where fish are. It's very simple, right? I'm not a good fisherman but that's what I know. You look for places where there are fish. That's exactly what the first church was doing. They were saying, who can I tell about Jesus? Let's go share our faith. Let's go day by day and joyfully be evangelistic. That's what marked the first church.

Even Jesus said in Matthew 10, **everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.** They weren't ashamed of Jesus. They weren't ashamed of the gospel. This is the first church and this is a healthy church. And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. Growth isn't what makes a healthy church. New believers are what make a healthy church. That's the leading indicator of a healthy church: are those who are being saved. God bringing people to know him. That's the first church

So, what does this mean for us? It means we should share our faith. This week we should share the gospel to somebody. I was thinking about this. I for whatever reason can't remember in the last few weeks like sharing my faith. So as I was preparing for this, I thought, man, this isn't right. I need to grow in sharing my faith, even myself. This is something I need to grow in. And I just thought, man, I've been to life group, really the last two times, I've said when it comes to reading God's word and confessing sin and then the third part is how have you shared your faith



or how have you served? And I've been like man I haven't really shared my faith. So, I realized what we as a church need is something to do when week after week we have the same challenge, which is we haven't shared our faith, then what we should do is mark out an hour in our week that we're going to go prayerfully try. You don't have to be perfect. It doesn't even have to be crazy successful. I'm just saying mark out an hour of your week, say hey I'm going to go work from a coffee shop during this hour and I'm going to pray God would bring somebody that I could share the gospel with. Or eat a restaurant or take your whole family, know that you're going to go to Cameron Park, I don't care where. Take one hour, if you have been struggling to share your faith, and let's prayerfully ask that God would bless that hour and bring somebody to us. That's how we can grow. That's how we can apply this.

So, in summary, the first church was daily devoted, sacrificially generous and is joyfully evangelistic. The first church, it's way better than Cooper's Bar-B-Q, but it is the standard that we can just say, hey, how are we doing? How do we compare? That's the question I want to ask of us this morning.

Two quick things, or one quick thing and then we'll get to the close is, this sounds crazy to read this passage sometimes. But it really feels a little less crazy because my wife is on staff here, she's a part of the external focus team, and next August, the plan and the hope is there will be a group of people that would all move into the same area and they would pray together daily and they would share needs with one another and then they would share their faith and all of this would be under, the whole purpose of this, is church planting communities so that people that feel called to go to unreached places, which is places that don't have access to Jesus or the gospel, they could be prepared to go to those places. It's called a church planting community. In order to prepare people to go somewhere else to grow a church, to plant a church, in an unreached place, they practice these things. That's how they prepare and see if that's what they're really called to. In fact, we just added somebody on staff, named Cameron Koe, who's going to be on the external focus team. He's been living in that. Like he's experienced this. It's something that doesn't feel crazy to me, to truly live this out. Like I see people doing this. The first church is our standard. How are we doing?

The other thing that you might have keyed into as you saw communion on your chair this morning, and I kind of glossed over it, that the first church broke bread together. That means two things in this passage. Yes it means to share a meal but it also means to take communion. So, you can grab that cup. You don't have to pray yet. Here's the deal, when we hear a sermon like this, I'm the first to be like, alright we've got to be more devoted. Alright, we've got share and be more generous. Alright, we've got to go and share our faith this week. Like let's go, go, go, go, go. Let's do, do, do, do, do. Let's do these things. And what we have to realize is, breaking of bread was in this passage twice. What they were doing as they were gathering, one of the things they were devoted to as they were gathering together, is they were devoted to reminding themselves of the gospel. They were devoted to reminding themselves that they weren't working

for God's love. They were acknowledging that God loves them and it was proven through Jesus. His life, His death, His resurrection. So, I want us to take communion together today. I think some of us, we're Baptists and we're like, ah yeah, it's the communion. I'm like that. The other day I threw the elements to JP during a membership class and he kindly was like, "Dale, you can't throw the elements. Like this is divine." And I realized I too often take this too lightly. This is a sacrament. It means it's sacred. It's something that is sacred. It is something that's divine.

And in fact, the scriptures tell us that before we take of it, that we're meant to examine ourselves. We don't just rush into it and take it, and eat it and drink it. It's something that we are meant to examine. And so I want to invite you in this moment, I want you to pause. I want you to confess any sin to God that the Spirit brings. Or if you have a conflict with somebody else that the Spirit brings to mind, then go and resolve that conflict with your brother or sister in Christ. That is what we are called to. That is what the scriptures say. This is not something that we lightly just rush into. Let's pause and let's examine ourselves.

And this morning, if you don't have a relationship with Jesus, we just would ask that you wouldn't take communion with us. We would love to talk with you about Jesus and you going away and knowing Him today. We just invite you not to take that. And so church family, Jesus told us to do this in remembrance of Him. The bread would symbolize the body. The body of Christ, broken for you (Dale takes it and eats it). And this is the blood that washes us white as snow. The blood of Christ poured out for us (Dale takes the juice and drinks it).

Father, we just give you thanks and praise for the good news of the gospel. We thank you Jesus for sacrificially giving up your life for us, shedding your blood so that we could be forgiven. We just remember the good news. We celebrate that. We thank you for giving us your Spirit. We thank you for the example of the first church. Lord, would you grow us in looking more like the standard, the first church. Help us to be daily devoted. Help us to be sacrificially generous. Help us to be joyfully evangelistic. And Lord by your grace would we grow with new believers here at Harris Creek. Would your hand be upon us, and would you give favor to that. Would you use us? May your kingdom come here in Waco, and would the ripples reach the nations? We ask this all in your son Jesus' name. Amen.