



First Baptist Church Selmer

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH • BIBLICAL COMMUNITY • ACTS 2:42-47 • 8/27/2023

MAIN POINT

The ultimate mark of a healthy church hinges on the unity around the mission to know Jesus and make Jesus known to others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Whenever you are in need of someone else's help, who do you typically turn to?

Why that person? What is it about them or your relationship with them that leads you to count on them in a time of need?

The popular game show *"Who Wants to be a Millionaire"* debuted in 1999 and consisted of contestants being asked a series of trivia questions that would ultimately lead to a chance of winning \$1,000,000. The show was a success and one that many families would tune in weekly to see how well they would fare at answering the questions.

The contestants received three 'lifelines' that could be used as needed throughout the questions. First, you could poll the audience. Secondly, you could have two of the four multiple-choice answers removed giving you a 50/50 chance of guessing the right one. And lastly, there was an option to phone a friend. Each contestant would have a person that they could call during their 'time of need' to help them answer the question in hopes of getting it right.

Much like the gameshow, we too have times in our lives when we need to phone a friend. We were created to live in community with others, but that is all the more true when we are in times of need. From its outset, the early church became the center of community

for its members, primarily because individuals were there for one another when they were in need.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 2:42.

42 "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (ESV)

Why was belonging to a community of believers so important to these first Christians? What made these believers want to get together?

There are four purposes of the church here in Acts 2. What are they?

The 'first' church listed four activities that characterized their gathering together. First, was the teaching of the apostles. The apostles were the ones in the direct presence of Jesus and passed on His teachings to those around them. Secondly, there was fellowship. The word used here means 'sharing'. Those gathered were committed to sharing in all things. Thirdly, they participated in the breaking of bread. This ordinance was established before His crucifixion when Jesus led them at the Last Supper. The first church would continue to observe this meal with one another often. And lastly, the first church prayed for and with one another. Prayer was essential in both the receiving of the Holy Spirit as well as His leading to share the Gospel.

Why are these four areas vital to the church?

How important are these four areas in the church today?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 2:43-47.

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." (ESV)

Why did the early church experience "awe"?

Do we have the same awe and reverence for God in today's time? Why or why not?

As the new believers began to join the early church, we learn that awe (fear) came over everyone. This type of fear carries a unique connotation. It is a healthy fear, a reverent fear of God. Accordingly, this fear arose as many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. These actions were performed to demonstrate God's hand in the organization of the church.

According to these verses, what are the marks of a healthy church?

What attitudes accompanied these actions?

Although there are multiple marks of a healthy church, one vital ingredient must be present. A healthy church is a church that works together on mission for the Kingdom of God. If the mission is to know Jesus and make Him known, then the mission must be what determines everything else a church does. If there is no clarity of mission and no unity in accomplishing the mission, very little else the church does will have a lasting impact. The 'first' church knew the mission and was in unity in accomplishing it.

What is the mission of FBC Selmer?

How has your small group rallied around the mission of our church to "See People Saved and Serving Jesus"?

The mission statement of our church is a more simple re-statement of the Great Commission. It is the mission that Jesus gave to the apostles prior to His crucifixion and one that is still expected for the church today.

How easy is it to lose sight of the ultimate mission of the church?

Which of these actions—fellowship, worship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism—do you more naturally gravitate toward?

Why is the balance of all five important for the individual Christian and the church as a whole?

The unity of the church was a testimony to God's presence, and "every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved" (v. 47). The early church was a growing church. They first had a reverent fear for God that guided them in their daily living (see v. 43). Next, they made loving other believers as themselves a priority for their fellowship, even to the point of selling private property to provide for members in need (vv. 44-45). They followed Jesus' great commandment to a "T." As a result, God honored them for that by blessing them with new members every day.

For first-century Christians, what was the draw of becoming part of a local body of believers? Is it the same draw today? Why or why not?

What are some of the unique challenges we face as we practice biblical community?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Would people outside of our church say we model the characteristics of the Acts 2 church?

Where do we excel, and where might there be room for improvement?

What can your small group do to help?

PRAYER

Ask God to bless the church with a unity born of genuine love that Christians have for one another. Ask God to build up the faith of each person so that he or she may love God with all his or her being and that each might truly demonstrate love for one another. Thank God for His commitment to growing disciples. Pray that God would continue challenging our view of His church and our role in it.

COMMENTARY

| ACTS 2:42-47

2:42 Luke reported four distinctive practices or activities in the Jerusalem church. First, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Eventually, the church experienced persecution, and some church leaders left Jerusalem. The original apostles, however, continued to minister in this church (8:1). Reviewing the sermons and teaching reported in the opening chapters of Acts reveals the major doctrinal themes important to the early church. The apostles could report their own experiences with Jesus during his earthly ministry as well as explaining Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Biblically-based preaching and teaching are still fundamental to church life. Second, the church experienced fellowship. Fellowship translates the Greek word *koinonia*, and means "participation" or "sharing." Third, they shared the breaking of bread. Although some Bible students think this could be sharing a common meal, many scholars believe this is Luke's way of referring to the Lord's Supper. The disciples celebrated a meal with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem. Fourth, the church devoted themselves to prayers. The early Christian movement was bathed in prayer. Jesus' disciples had asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus had established Himself as a consistent prayer, so His followers should pray as well.

2:44-45 One of the most amazing characteristics of the Jerusalem church was its sharing its material possessions with the needy. The Christians voluntarily shared with anyone who needed help. As part of their fellowship, the early church practiced a community of goods for a short time. Distribution to members of the faith community took place according to individual needs. This practice did not last long, likely because it was logistically difficult and fraught with potential abuse (see ch. 4-6).

Later, Luke noted that these church members were "of one heart and soul" (4:32). No one remained needy for long because the church responded quickly and generously to need. The money was brought to the apostles, who were in charge of the distribution (4:34-35). Luke highlighted the role of Barnabas in this generosity (4:36-37), but he also noted the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their actions (5:1-10).

2:46 Although these believers understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Jewish hope for the Messiah (2:36), the members of the Jerusalem church were primarily Jewish in background. They still went to the temple complex. They would not participate in the sacrificial system any longer, since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They may

have wanted to demonstrate the continuity between their Jewish heritage and their new faith in Christ. Also, they may have found opportunities to witness to their Jewish friends and relatives.

Besides gathering together in the temple complex, these Christians broke bread from house to house. Quite likely this means they gathered regularly in houses for worship and the Lord's Supper. Christians did not typically build church buildings in the early centuries, so they met in homes. When they gathered in homes, these disciples expressed gratitude for their shared meals. These gatherings were marked by simplicity or "sincerity" of heart. They did not need to put on airs; they genuinely worshiped God.

2:47 One result of the early church's worship and witness was having favor with all the people. In these early days, the people of Jerusalem were generally open to the Christians. Later on, the Jewish leaders tried to restrict their public preaching (4:1-22).

The early church was an evangelizing church. Luke recounted that every day the Lord added to those who were being saved. He did not say how this took place, but it appears that evangelism took place primarily through the gathering of Christians in the temple and individual houses. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were at the heart of early Christian preaching, which called for an immediate response from anyone who listened. Such enormous numerical growth eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish leaders.