

A STRANGE COMMUNITY

Acts 2:42-47

Most every church has at its core a desire to bring transformation in the world. They want to make a difference. They want to make an impact for Jesus. But how? And why should it? What is it about the Church that the world should be drawn to, to make them say, “They’ve got something I don’t have, but I need.” That’s sort of what we want to look at today from Acts 2:42-47.

Just to remind us of where we are at in Acts, the Holy Spirit has come to indwell believers in Christ and the Church is born. Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, preached the first gospel message and around 3,000 people have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior. So they’re saved, but now they’re learning to be the Church. We’re looking at the atmosphere, activities and priorities of the first, earliest church. It’s an ideal picture of what this called-out community is to be.

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many signs and wonders were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

I. THE KEY PRACTICES OF THE EARLY CHURCH. (V. 42)

Every now and then throughout Acts, we’re going to see Luke sort of summarizing a time period like this, describing the habitual activities that went on within the Church over a period of weeks or months.¹ And this here is a wonderful, descriptive picture of the life of the early, early Church. It’s **an ideal picture** and he’s showing us what a **Spirit-filled church** is like. Later on he will be more of a realist, revealing problems that spring up like hypocrisy and false teaching and how they were dealt with (Acts 5, 6), but for now **Luke just wants us to capture a vision of what this Spirit-filled community is like** and it’s a beautiful thing – I might even say, a heavenly thing. It’s other-worldly. It’s a **strange** community. Strange defined as, *“unseen before, unfamiliar, unusually surprising, something the world looks at and says, ‘they’re different, but in a good way.’”*

And we see in **verse 42** that this strange community was **continually devoted to some 4 key practices**. But first, let me ask you, *what do you think of when you think of continual devotion?* My mind goes to athletes like Olympians who live for the prized medal. Their whole lifestyle is shaped by their desire to win. They eat and drink differently. They wake up earlier. Have strict routines. They give themselves with single-mindedness to the prize.

Continually devoting = steadfast, single-minded, giving of yourself to something

**1. Devoted to Teaching:
They were a Bible-studying church.**

Corporately devoted to teaching (*didache*, doctrine). **A Spirit-filled church is always a bible-studying church.** They were hungry for teaching and they looked to the **apostles' teaching**, these men who were trained by Jesus Himself and were appointed by Jesus to teach others about Him. These were men who could **teach and speak the Word of God with authority**, explaining Christ from the OT Scriptures and how He is everything for us. They probably taught what it looks like to follow Him in light of what He has done – living out the gospel in their relationships.

And what should impress us, if you've read through the gospels, is how they didn't seem to understand much of what Jesus said during but now that the Holy Spirit has come to illuminate the Scriptures for them and guide them into all truth, these men are lean, mean, Bible-teaching machines. The Spirit has strengthened and enabled them for this task.

As a church today, **the same Spirit enables us and we still focus on the apostolic teaching** by giving our attention to the study of God's Word that they wrote. Spirit-filled churches long to study the **apostolic Word** and to obey it. I like this because we are learning from men Jesus Himself appointed. Men, **plural**. Who did these things **publicly**, who were **eyewitnesses** of Christ. Men whose testimonies are **consistent** and men who **gave their lives** for it. We can trust them and this historical record of the Bible. Christianity is not like Islam or Mormonism or Bhuddism where you're following one man's teaching and witness who received their "revelations" in secret. Muhammad in a cave and Smith in the woods or behind a curtain doing sorcery. God affirmed the apostolic teaching publicly **with signs** and **we know false teaching by measuring it up against apostolic teaching.**

What I also like about the early church is that these 3,000 newborns in Christ understood they needed to grow in Christ. They didn't just say, "*I believe,*" then get baptized, and go home with a gospel of John. They saw salvation as only the beginning of the Christian life, not an end in itself. **They needed the Word of God to grow in Christ.** 1 Peter 2:2 says, "*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*"

**2. Devoted to Fellowship:
They were a loving, relational church.**

The word for fellowship is a well-known Greek word you might of heard of: *koinonia*. It means "*sharing in common*" and this is the first of 19 references to it in the NT and has the idea of **giving of yourself in personal investment in one another**. Secular Greek writers might use it to describe the bond between husband and wife who **invest in sharing a common life experience**.

The difference between a *koinonia* church and a *non-koinonia* church is like **comparing the difference between a bag of marbles and a bag of grapes.**ⁱⁱ Marbles are formed individually and

when they come together, they clack and clatter and scratch each other. There's no give. Grapes, however, are formed together on the same branch and when they get shaken together, they open up and melt together and start to drip, producing something sweet. *Koinonia* Christian community is like the grapes. We grow and do life together, participating in a sweet, common experience.

And whether or not we're able to do that is a sign of **Christian maturity**. If you're drawing close to God yourself, you should be **growing in your love for His people**. You're drawn to other Christians. You long for fellowship. Knowledge of God's Word is part of growing, but it is not a sign of maturity necessarily. We want to be a church community, growing together, doing life together, being edified by one another (Eph. 4). That's what makes us a strong body.

Notice here that the church by definition is a **gathering, an assembly**. It's not a building. These folks didn't have a church building yet. They were too big and were meeting in homes or outdoors in Solomon's portico in the temple area (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12).

One of the things I love about Chadron Berean is that as busy as you all are, you want to and **make an effort to spend time together**. Just recently, someone in our church, told me about how the other night out at the Fisher's outdoor fellowship dinner, they felt like this was really the first time they felt like they had friends. Another individual expressed something similar. I'm excited about that! We want to be a place **where community is important and it is enjoyable**.

What makes this even more amazing is all of the **diversity** present. There were Jews and converts from all over the world here, each bringing some of their cultural differences. Yet, in Christ, they're experiencing more unity than we can imagine with far more diversity than we can imagine.

3. Devoted to eating together: They were a hungry church!

You see "*The breaking of bread*" in **verse 42** and "*breaking bread from house to house*" in **verse 46**. Just about every commentator agreed these were references to both **formal and informal meals**. **Formally**, taking communion. That's neat because both ordinances, water baptism and the Lord's Supper, are right there in Acts 2 at the beginning. **Informally**, they were just eating together. Sharing meals. I don't think we realize how important it is to eat together at fellowship dinners and in small groups. Shared meals bring people together. Stomachs and relationships grow at the table.

4. Devoted to prayer: They were a dependent church.

Luke emphasizes throughout Acts that this early church was a community of prayer. **Corporate prayer**, praying together as a church, something that the entire body is engaged in. Prayer is big in Acts because **Acts is a book about dependence on God and His Spirit**. Prayer is how we communicate that dependence. They were seeking Him and His guidance for their lives and bringing the needs of the church body before the Lord. If we want a Spirit-filled church with

satisfying worship, nourishing instruction, sweet fellowship and effective outreach, we need to be a praying church.

II. **THE RESULTS OF THE KEY PRACTICES. (VV. 43-47)**

These **day to day** key practices have results. Don't you like that they weren't stuck in living in their former glory days in the upper room with the noise and the fiery tongues? They didn't live on that mountain top experience. They had a day by day life that God grew them in.

Key Practice Result #1: Wonderment

Verse 43: *“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”* The people went **from panic**, saying, *“What shall we do [now that we've crucified the Messiah?]”* (v. 37), **to awe** as they witnessed God's power and grace to them in this new age. Granted, wonderment was intensified through the apostolic miracles – we'll look at one of their first miraculous healings next time when they heal a lame man – but you've got to think, **the same Spirit of God that lives in them in Acts 2, lives in us.** Same Spirit, same power. He might use us in a different way, gifting us different than apostles, but **He still works wonders in peoples' lives today, transforming them.**

A greater, eternal miracle than healing a lame man is a sinner being saved and their lives transformed. Let's be in wonder today as we see God work in us, little by little. Let's have a sense of expectancy and pray for an awareness of how God is working today in the day to day faithfulness of the church to the same key practices.

Key Practice Result #2: Joy

Rather than the cold, religious legalism and ritualism they were used to, where Pharisees were competed with one another (Gal. 5:15), these believers had **real peace and joy and unity.** They had real *“gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God”*. They had **joyful lives of worship.** *Has your day to day life become more joyous since you've become a Christian?* Mine has! I never used to really sing from the heart. But since I came to know Christ and what He's done for me, sometimes I can't help but overflow with thanksgiving and praise! It's natural overflow (Col. 2:7).

Key Practice Result #3: Generosity.

Verses 44-45: *“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.”*

This is just an incredible description. I want to be a part of this church! I think it tells us that **the Spirit was working through the apostles' gospel teaching.** I say that because selflessness like this and *koinonia* investment in one another is not natural in this world. This world is an, *“I'll*

scratch your back IF you scratch mine,” kind of world. Not, *“I’ll scratch your back regardless because I’m a servant like my Savior.”* What you’re seeing in them **is a Spirit-led response to the gracious generosity of Christ in the gospel.** When you start to realize that what Christ did for you, and you have everything you need in Him (like love, security, significance, etc.), you start to show others that same Christlikeness to others. You end up modeling Christ. You serve others. You forgive others. You are generous with others.

By the Spirit, they started to **care for one another’s needs.** Because they were fellowshiping with one another, they were aware of others’ needs in this **unique situation.** Remember, people from all over the world had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost and were away from home, planning to come for a short time, but **God was doing something new! Lives were being changed and they couldn’t get enough of it! They wanted to stay and see what God would continue to do!** But the limited provisions they brought on their journeys were running out. There was actual physical needs that people were voluntarily meeting. In **voluntary demonstration of love,** some started selling things to provide for them. We’ll see this again in Acts 4&5. Some try to read communism into this but it’s anything but that. It’s not forced, but voluntary use of private property. The Spirit prompted these acts of love in this special situation for God’s purposes.

Countless times I’ve seen people do the same in the church today in small ways. It’s almost a normal thing here. You guys are incredibly generous. People are always stepping up and saying, *“I’ll buy this or that. I’ll give this or that. How can I help? If you need anything, text me or call me!”* I saw it multiple times this week through texts and phone calls, people willing to give time and money for the church painting project – using personal equipment to get it done. It was great!

Think about this: this church was valuing people more than possessions. They had a new kingdom to live for and not this world. And **it’s critical to remember that the valuing other people like this was new.** In the world they were living in, it was the powerful and talented and rich that thrived. It was survival of the fittest and *“the one with the most toys, wins.”* The thought of giving yourself in service to others, investing in others, especially the widow, orphan, abandoned babies, the poor, anybody – was rarer. We saw that through Mark’s gospel as the disciples’ compete for thrones and who’s the greatest. Jesus blew their value system out of the water by washing their feet and saying the greatest are the servants! It’s strange to serve others willingly.

But no Christian should ever walk around with an *“I’m greater than you”* mentality, refusing to serve someone else. The gospel humbles us. It doesn’t make us proud. It makes us say, *“Who am I?”* We should never have a condescending tone or cursing speech to others made in God’s image and for whom Christ died. **We see and value people not based on performance but on inherent worth as someone made in the image of God** (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). **Think of that against the harsh backdrop of the culture and you’ll see why they were so attractive to outsiders.**

History tells us the whole humanitarian efforts system and orphanages and caring for people who can’t contribute much to society started with the Christian community just modeling what Christ did for them. That entire servant-minded segment of society goes back to the gospel and loving

our neighbor as Christ loved us. **This Church, by living the gospel, revolutionized society.** The world hadn't seen this kind of love and grace and humility.

Key Practice Result #4: Attractiveness

Verse 47: *“and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”* You get the sense here that even outside people were appreciate of this new community. They had favor with all the people. **Note the important connection between the kind of community they were and the favor this community experienced with outsiders.** Not every church can say that they have favor with outsiders for what they're like.

I was surprised that in many of the commentaries, there is talk about evangelism when it comes to this verse. Evangelism isn't even mentioned though. Not that it couldn't have been happening, but that's reading between the lines. I think evangelism actually downplays the main point here. **The point is that this new community of believers was so attractive – with their love, unity, peace, joy, generosity, grace, etc. – that people were drawn to them and to Christ through it.** They saw something strange, something different in them, that they were drawn to.

You know Jesus prayed a prayer in **John 17**. You know what He prayed for (verse 21)? That we would be one even as Him and the Father are one **so that** [purpose statement] the world would believe in Him. **Through our koinonia fellowship, the world, Jesus says, comes to believe in Him.** That's something Luke wants us to catch a glimpse of – to strive for, return to, and discover anew how essential the Church's unity in the Spirit is for an effective witness. That's exactly what happened in the early church. *Can it happen in ours?*

This community shined bright in a world of self-centeredness, anger, hate, and division. **It was like they were modeling a new mode of existence that everyone longs for.** I should say it's a **new and old** mode. Old, because loving, harmonious community reminds us of Eden and man being made in God's Triune image. The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) have all been in perfect Oneness for all eternity. That was lost through sin but is regained now through the new creation and regeneration by the Spirit in Christ. Through Christ, God is restoring us to the state of our parents perfectly made in His image (Rom. 8:29-30). The Spirit teaches us community formation and relationships are part of who we are. That people are more important than possessions, than money; than jobs; than the addictions we tend to choose over people.

Through the Spirit and by applying the gospel to our relationships, our relationships can flourish again. It's no wonder this little passage reminds me so much of what heaven will be like. We'll enjoy harmonious community forever like we were created too.

You know, I was part of a life group for 20 & 30 year old Christian **small group** for a few years that was **based on verse 42's key practices.** Looking back, I see these results in that group. The group grew so much that it wasn't a small group anymore. The **food, fellowship in games, study**

and prayer made for a sweet community. It was amazing to be a part of it. We really did life together. I met my wife in that group and we *really* started doing life together!

But let me ask you, Chadron Berean: *Do you want to advance the gospel? Do you want to bring transformation to the world? Then ask yourself, “What is the world seeing in the Church today? What’s the culture of our church? What is the world seeing in your life, who claims to be a part of the Church? Does it look like the world? Are we known for hate and slander? Divisiveness over petty and preferential things that in the end, really don’t matter?*

Or are we strange like the first church? Strangely loving. Strangely generous. Strangely caring. Strangely attractive. Strangely one minded, with one mission: to share Christ and live Christ.

ⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 5* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 60.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 61.