

**"THE CHURCH ROOTS AND
REACH -**

LESSONS FROM ACTS"

PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

WEEK 2

**SEPTEMBER 9TH
AND SEPTEMBER 10TH**





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THE CHURCH Is BORN

The impact of the gospel is seen in the power and unity found among Jesus' followers.



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, was one of the three major Jewish festivals observed annually. Occurring 50 days after the Passover feast, Pentecost was a joyous celebration marking the completion of the grain harvest. It thus attracted Jews and proselytes from all over the Roman Empire to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festivities. No one could have imagined, though, the supernatural power that would be unleashed during the first Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit marked the formal beginning of the church. The Spirit ignited people's lives with such power that they were able to declare the message of the gospel and be understood in at least 15 different languages (see Acts 2:1-13).

Acts 2:14-40 records the sermon Peter delivered to the crowd in Jerusalem. Peter explained that what had happened was nothing less than the divine fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the dawning of the new messianic age. He quoted from the Book of Joel and from two messianic psalms (Pss. 16; 110), then concluded with a passionate declaration that Jesus—the very One whom the Jews had recently crucified—was both Lord and Messiah.

Peter was filled with the Spirit, but he was also filled with God's Word. As a result, those who heard his message were compelled to reach a verdict about Jesus in their hearts. Consequently, Peter urged his listeners to repent of their sins and be baptized as a testimony of their surrender to Christ.

The response to Peter's message was staggering, as three thousand people became believers. This burgeoning community of Christ followers became actively engaged in listening to the apostles teach; in talking to and encouraging one another, in taking meals together, and in praying together. They demonstrated Christlike love for one another, and they acted with grace toward others in Jerusalem. Furthermore, their example continues to shine across the centuries and to beckon churches today to take up the mission of Jesus.

"GOD'S WORK DONE
IN GOD'S WAY WILL
NEVER LACK GOD'S
SUPPLY."

—Hudson Taylor

➤ ACTS 2:1-4,41-47

Think About It

Identify words or phrases that describe things done by the early church. In what ways do you see these actions being done in your church?

What words or phrases point to the attitudes of the members of the early church? How are these attitudes connected to the actions you identified?

1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. **3** And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.

41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. **43** Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. **44** Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. **45** They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. **46** Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

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➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE SPIRIT GIVEN (Acts 2:1-4)

¹When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.

²Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. ³And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

⁴Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.

The word Pentecost comes from a Greek term meaning *fifty*. Originally, Pentecost was known as the Feast of Weeks because it occurred seven weeks and one day after Passover (see Lev. 23:15-16). This was one of three annual pilgrimage feasts when all Jewish males were expected to travel to Jerusalem and present an offering of firstfruits to the Lord (see Deut. 16:16). The unity of the believers testified to their cohesive focus on Jesus. He consumed their attention. He dominated their thoughts. When we as believers rivet our passion on Jesus in unified obedience, the impact of our witness can be phenomenal.

Why is unity of purpose and focus critical for the church? What's the connection between a focus on Jesus and unity in the church?

The prayer meeting (see Acts 1:14) of believers was suddenly interrupted by a sound similar to the roar of a powerful wind. In the Old Testament wind often represented God's invading presence (see Ps. 104:3; Ezek. 37:9-10). Furthermore, wind signified God's power to tear down and build up. In addition to the sudden and powerful sound, tongues like flames of fire settled on the believers in a visual representation of the Holy Spirit. Tongues represented human speech and the communication of the gospel. Fire indicated the purifying presence of God. The fire associated with God's presence in the Old Testament was reserved for unique occasions, but the image of fire that rested with believers on the Day of Pentecost pointed to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist testified that Christ would immerse believers with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Luke 3:16). Pentecost served as the public fulfillment of that prophecy.

Two important truths can be seen here. First, the power of the Holy Spirit enabled believers to act bravely and to speak boldly. Second, as the context of this passage confirms, their words were clear and understandable in the multiple languages and dialects of the hearers.

What forms of evidence show that the Holy Spirit indwells a believer?

DEVOTED (Acts 2:41-42)

⁴¹So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. ⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

The picture Luke presented about the beginning of the church is beautifully compelling. The Greek word translated *accepted* (see v. 41) carries the idea of a glad reception. The new believers delightfully embraced the truth about Jesus and then demonstrated their obedience publicly through the act of baptism. The inward change and the outward rite underscore the proper order and sequence: faith (conversion) first, then obedience (baptism). In other words, these new believers were not saved by being baptized. Rather, they were

saved when they repented and believed in Jesus. Their baptism was an act of obedience as believers and a testimony of what had occurred in their hearts.

The first activity of the believers' devotion involved spiritual growth through the apostles' teaching. The believers submitted themselves to godly instruction from the apostles. This instruction was life-transforming truth that Jesus had taught the apostles. The second activity the believers were devoted to was fellowship. As a family of faith, the first believers celebrated their shared salvation through Jesus. They practiced a dynamic connection to one another because they were joined by a common faith in the Savior. Third, the believers practiced the breaking of bread together. This could refer either to eating meals together in fellow believers' homes or to partaking of the Lord's Supper in worship. In either case the practice enhanced the believers' shared life in Christ. Fourth, the early believers devoted themselves to prayer. Jews were accustomed to regular times of prayer each day. Jewish believers continued this discipline as Christ's followers, but prayer took on a deeper significance because they could now pray about anything in the name of Jesus (see John 14:13-14).

How does participation in these activities promote unity in a church? Can a church be unified without focusing on these elements? Explain.

TOGETHER (Acts 2:43-47a)

⁴³Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. ⁴⁶Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people.

The purpose of miraculous activity was to draw attention to the gospel message and to validate the gospel messengers. The Bible instructs us in many places to fear God because doing so humbles our ego and

KEY DOCTRINE *The Church*

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws; exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word; and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth

BIBLE SKILL

Look at the original language of a text.

Do a concept study of the Greek term *koinonia*, rendered *fellowship* in Acts 2:42, by considering other appearances of the term in the New Testament. (English words may differ in translations.)

Find and read the following verses:
1 Corinthians 1:9;
10:16 (participation);
2 Corinthians 6:14
(in common); 9:13
(sharing); Galatians
2:9; Philippians 1:5
(partnership); 2:1;
3:10; Hebrews 13:16
(to share); 1 John 1:3,
6-7. How does each
verse help you better
understand the nature
of the relationship
of *koinonia* among
believers?

magnifies His attributes. Fear of the Lord is a disposition of the heart in response to His awesome power.

Scripture exhorts us to worship together, to encourage one another and to love and honor others. These biblical activities are fulfilled in a shared passion for Christ and in a mutual bond with one another. The believers living in Jerusalem demonstrated a deep commitment to Jesus that overflowed in mutual support for one another. As needs arose, they sold their possessions and property to help other believers. There was no expectation that new believers must immediately relinquish all their possessions on conversion. The emphasis in the early church was on compassionate ministry, not asceticism or political socialism. When Christians discovered that someone was facing great need, the grace of Christ moved them to sell items to help relieve the hardship.

At this early stage Christ's followers continued to worship within the structure of their Jewish heritage. They had opportunities in that setting to interact with other Jews and to testify about Jesus. The Greek term rendered *together* (see v. 44) refers to more than the proximity of people to one another; it speaks of people being united in spirit and purpose. Believers were united in their faith in Jesus and in their mission of telling others about the gospel.

The early Christians' life together also included visits into one another's homes for shared meals. Such occasions were marked by "a joyful and humble attitude" (v. 46) on the part of believers. Their lives weren't easy and trouble free, yet the Spirit filled them with joy and hope. As believers today, we sometimes think solemn reverence is more important to the Lord than overt gladness. Certainly there are a time and a place for both, but Scripture teaches us that joy is as much an expression of sincere worship as is subdued seriousness. When we reflect on the forgiveness of our sins through Christ and the eternal hope we have because of His resurrection from the dead, there are more than enough reasons to be filled with gladness and generosity.

Gratitude and goodwill overflowed in abundance. The believers praised God with energetic gratitude and won the respect of others by their joyful, humble fellowship. A vibrant church shines in two directions: (1) upward in adoration to God for the gift of His Son and (2) outward in grace toward others. Both directions are vital.

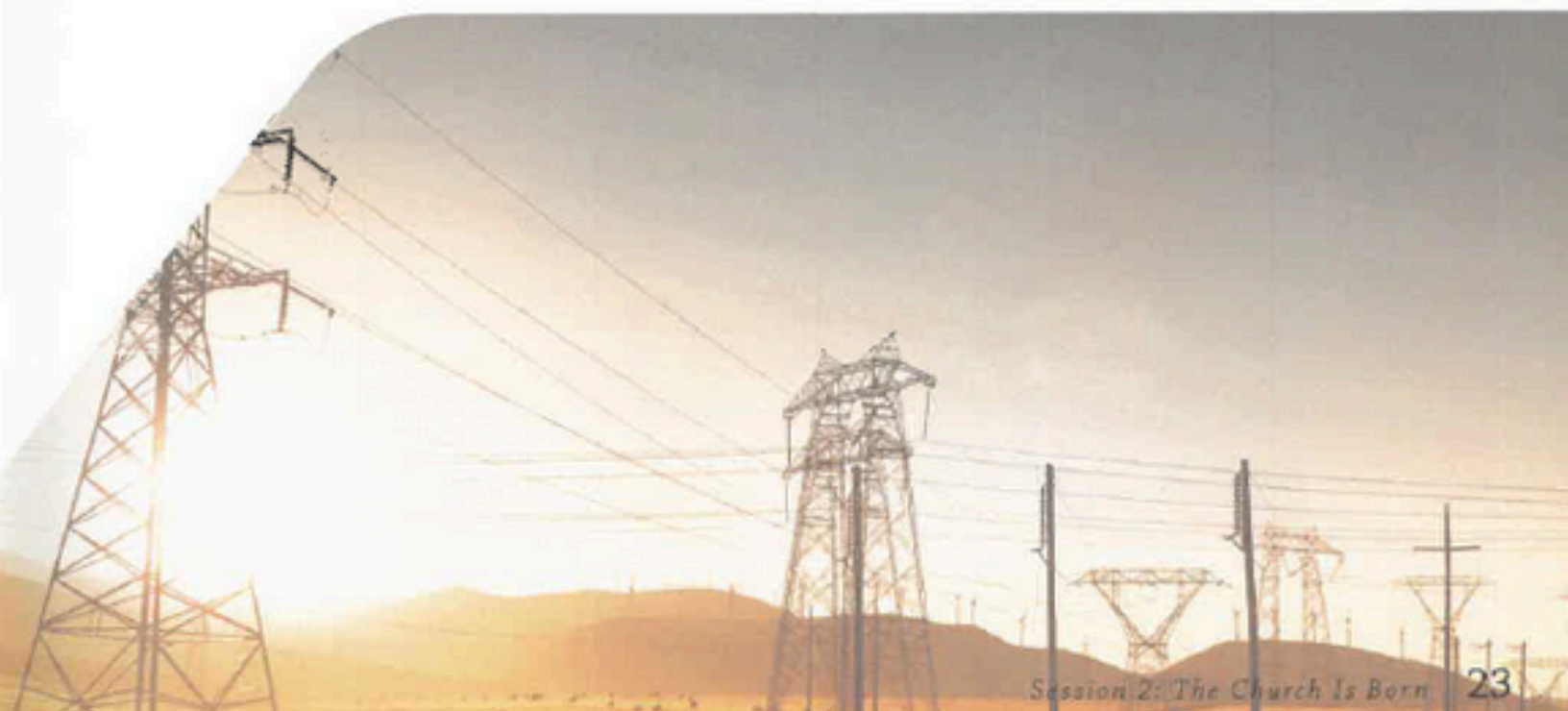
What does a consistent display of sincere adoration of God and grace toward others show about what a church believes about God?

GROWING (Acts 2:47b)

47And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

The early church in Jerusalem was a healthy, witnessing community. Believers testified about Jesus. They related to and connected with other citizens in the city. The Holy Spirit used their testimony to draw unbelievers to faith, and the Lord added to the church "those who were being saved." In other words, the early church experienced both qualitative and quantitative growth. Believers grew in their faith, and more people placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The people being added to the church were those whom the Lord had saved by grace through faith in Jesus. The new believers weren't being saved by joining the church. The church is the community of those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:10-12).

What does Acts 2:1-4, 41-47 teach about the relationship between church growth and church health? How do they enhance each other?





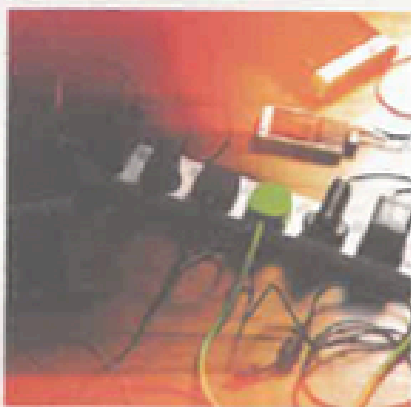
OBEY THE TEXT

Every believer is to be a witness. Believers are enabled by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their God-given mission. To be spiritually healthy, believers need to be connected to other believers. In churches believers can live life together, meet one another's needs, and worship together. God's demonstration of Himself through believers can cause unbelievers to become curious about God and His power. When placed in situations where unbelievers are asking questions, believers can seize opportunities to share Jesus.

If a dozen people were randomly selected to observe you every day for one week, how might they evaluate your devotion to Jesus? Based on this session's Bible passage, what do you think needs to improve in your devotion to Jesus?

What are you doing to help strengthen unity in your church and Bible-study group? Identify some strategies you can apply to deepen and enhance your relationships with others in your congregation and group.

Reflect on ways living life with other believers helps you share the gospel. What can you do to help motivate other believers to share the gospel?



MEMORIZE

"Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude." Acts 2:46

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

