

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## A Church Devoted

Acts 2:42–47

Go ahead and take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Acts. Today we are going to look at a shorter section of this book, Acts 2:42–47. But there's enough in these six verses for us to chew on and apply into our lives in one sermon.

Sometimes we can get the impression that the book of Acts is just a circus of evangelistic frenzy that moves from one spectacular event to another. Certainly we see dramatic, fantastic events within the book of Acts. But we also see little glimpses of the day to day activities of the church.

We've already seen that in Acts 1 when the 120 disciples were praying in the upper room, during the week between Jesus's ascent and the Holy Spirit's descent. There was prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. There was nothing super thrilling about that week. It was just faithful disciples doing faithful ministry within the context of fellowship and togetherness.

Then all of a sudden the Holy Spirit is poured out and a miraculous encounter with God propels the church forward in Jerusalem. The church goes from 120 people to 3,000 people in one day.<sup>1</sup> It was an amazing event. And other amazing things like that happen again and again throughout Acts.

But that's not all that happens in this book. It's not just an endless parade of the fantastic. There are calmer, less dramatic moments as well that are just as important.<sup>2</sup> And our text today is going to describe one of those calmer moments.

This passage, in fact, is one of the seminal passages in the NT on the life of the church. When people ask the question, "What does the church do?," oftentimes Acts 2:42–47 is quoted. When people ask the question, "What are the important objectives of the church?" or "What are the activities that the church should prioritize?" or "What things should churches be devoted to?"—those questions, at least in part, are answered here.<sup>3</sup>

Should the church prioritize potlucks and parachurch ministries? Should the church prioritize social gatherings and softball leagues? Should the church prioritize affinity groups and exercise programs and social networking and chili cookoffs? None of those things are bad, in and of themselves. But should these be prioritized as a main objective within the church? And if not, what are the main objectives? What are our priorities?

Well let's read this passage together and think this through. Let's stand together for the reading of God's Word.

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together

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<sup>1</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 185: "We know of forty-six people by name who belonged to the community of believers in Jerusalem at any time before AD 70. In addition to the Twelve (1:13, 26), the Seven (6:5), and the brothers of Jesus as well as Mary, Jesus' mother (1:14), the list includes names such as Agabus, the prophet; John Mark, eventually a missionary who traveled with Barnabas and Paul; his mother Mary; Joseph Barnabas, eventually a missionary in Syria and in Cyprus; Joseph of Arimathea, an aristocrat and member of the Sanhedrin; Nicodemus, another aristocrat and member of the Sanhedrin; Silas-Silvanus, later a missionary coworker of Paul; Simon of Cyrene, who had helped to carry Jesus' cross; and Addai, the first missionary in Edessa."

<sup>2</sup> See Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 174 calls these "Luke's Summary Statements" and gives a chart.

<sup>3</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 185: "Luke's extensive summary of the life of the Jerusalem church is not only a historical statement about the first months of the Christian movement. It is also a theological statement about the presence of God in the community of believers, an ecclesiological statement about the priorities of an authentic church, and a missiological statement about the process of church growth."

and had all things in common.<sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.<sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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Today I want to give you four priorities of a devoted church, and then afterwards I'll give you four outcomes of a devoted church.<sup>4</sup> You can see these in your notes. Four priorities and then four outcomes. The priorities are what we do, and those are found exclusively in verse 42.<sup>5</sup> These are our commitments as the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> These are things we prioritize in the life of the church.<sup>7</sup>

John Calvin said about these four priorities in Acts 2:42 that “We must keep to these things if God and the angels are to judge us the true church and not just boast to be such before men.”<sup>8</sup> It's not that these are the *only* priorities of the church. But any list of church priorities better have these four things!<sup>9</sup>

And then after we discuss priorities, we'll discuss the outcomes. And the outcomes are up to God. The outcomes are found in verses 43–47 and I see these as the natural aftereffects of a church that prioritizes the activities of verse 42.<sup>10</sup>

So let's start in verse 42.

Four Priorities of a Devoted Church [What we do]:

The first thing a devoted church prioritizes is...

1) **Scripture** (2:42a)

<sup>42</sup> And they [that's the 3000 believers from verse 41, saved, baptized, assimilated into the church] devoted themselves<sup>11</sup> to the apostles' teaching...<sup>12</sup>

Now let's be very clear about this. You might ask, what's the difference between the apostles' teaching and Scripture?<sup>13</sup> Well, there is very little difference. Those terms are essentially synonymous. The apostles taught the OT. We saw an example of that last week when Peter preached and interpreted the Word of God. He taught the OT and he taught Christ's fulfillment of OT.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 172: “In the incident of 2:42–47, Luke now describes what effect their conversion to faith in Jesus had for these new followers of Jesus.”

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 5, Kindle: “Four things happened (or better, happen) in the church where the Spirit reigned. They were then, and still remain, keys to spiritual growth and maturity.”

<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 80 says about Acts 2:42 that “This was really a church, nothing more and nothing less.”

<sup>7</sup> Contra Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 160 who says, “Luke is giving a description of the ministry of these disciples to one another in a variety of contexts, not simply telling us what happened when they gathered for what we might call ‘church’.” Vickers, “Acts” in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 363 is probably closer to the mark: “Luke leaves us a model not for how to ‘do’ church but for what the people of God should look like in terms of priorities, actions, service, and practice.”

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Acts*, edited by Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995), 48.

<sup>9</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 185–6: “The summary list of characteristics in 2:42 is not an outline of the sequence of the agenda in the worship services of Jerusalem church. But it certainly describes the fundamental essentials of the church which experienced God's presence and continued to grow.”

<sup>10</sup> Vickers, “Acts” in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 361 is correct that “these verses are both descriptive and prescriptive—that is, they describe the situation and also leave us with patterns we are meant to follow.” But overwhelmingly they are prescriptive. He states likewise, “Teaching, prayer, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper are all aspects today's church can and should emulate.”

<sup>11</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 149: “The imperfect periphrastic construction speaks of the ongoing devotion that they have.” Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 119–20: “Devoting” (*proskartereo*) is the same word as is used in connection with the persistent devotion of the disciples to prayer in 1:14 (translated ‘constantly’ there). This word occurs six times in Acts. ‘The meaning is that they continued in faithful adherence to the newly formed community.’ The word is used often with the idea of ‘persisting obstinately in’ something—a meaning that is appropriate here.”

<sup>12</sup> For parallel statements about the “apostles' teaching” and “the Word of God” see Acts 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 6:2, 4; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11; 20:20; 21:21; 28:31.

<sup>13</sup> The KJV has “apostles' doctrine.” But “teaching” is a better translation of the Greek διδασχῇ than “doctrine.”

<sup>14</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 119: “Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians. In keeping with Jesus' teaching to them (chap. 1), this would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus' earthly ministry and teachings.”

Peter used his Bible, the OT, to bear witness to Christ.<sup>15</sup> Eventually the apostles' teaching was inscripturated in their writings and canonized as the NT. And so, as the disciples gathered, they studied the OT. And they studied the "apostles' teaching," which later became the NT.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus told his disciples before his ascension, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20).<sup>17</sup> So the apostles' teaching wasn't just the OT. It was Christ's teaching as well. It was the sum-total of God's revelation up to this point of human history. The early church was devoted to this. **And we should be too! We don't have apostles in our day going around and delivering the apostles' teaching. The apostles died out. But their teaching prevails. It was recorded here in the Scriptures, by the Holy Spirit, for our benefit and edification.**

**By the way, I'm praying for revival here in San Antonio and here in Texas. And revival is actually facilitated by the preaching of Holy Scripture. I feel like people try to paint us into a corner sometimes by asking "Are you a Bible-preaching church or are you an evangelistic church?" Yes. We're both. Those things are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary.**<sup>18</sup>

**Lewis Drummond, the great professor of evangelism said once, "A spiritual awakening always soars on the wings of the Word. No matter how long people neglect the truth of God, one day it will surface and accomplish its wonder work." That was true in Acts.<sup>19</sup> That was true of the awakening called the Protestant Reformation. One of the battle cries of the reformers was *Sola Scriptura*. It was true during the First Great Awakening in this country. It was true during the Second Great Awakening in this country. Don't ever let anyone paint you into a corner of being *only* evangelistic or being *only* Biblical. Don't fall for that false dichotomy. The early church was both: biblical and evangelistic.**<sup>20</sup>

You know one of the things that I find fascinating here in Acts 2 is that after this great supernatural event at Pentecost where 3,000 people got saved and baptized, the Bible says that these new believers got steeped in the apostles' teaching. They got steeped in God's Word.<sup>21</sup> They were devoted to it.<sup>22</sup> They weren't out and about trying to recreate Pentecost. No, they were getting acquainted with God and his Word.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 82: "The fact that the new believers continued devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching proves that their responses to Peter's preaching of the gospel were not just emotional."

<sup>16</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 177–8: "Sermons were an integral component of the Sabbath services in the Jewish synagogues; they usually followed the reading from the Torah and the Prophets (Haftarah) and were often related to the latter (cf. Luke 4:16–22). The teaching of the apostles followed the same pattern... Israel's Scriptures (the Old Testament) are read with newly opened eyes concerning the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus, his Messiah and the Lord of Israel. The teaching of the apostles would thus have included readings from the Torah and the Prophets, as was customary in the synagogues of the first century."

<sup>17</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 150: "Matthew 28:19–20 expresses the task as 'teaching them to observe all I commanded you.' It likely would have included all kinds of instruction like what we see in the Gospels and Epistles: ethical and practical teaching and a grounding in the central promise God had given in Jesus."

<sup>18</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 68: "There is no such thing as a Spirit-filled Christian who neglects the study of the Word of God. There is no such thing as a Spirit-filled church that does not give itself continually and steadfastly to the study of sacred Scripture. The first sign of a Spirit-filled church is one in which the Spirit-filled people do not flee from Scripture and seek a substitute for it but are driven to it to have their spiritual lives rooted and grounded in the Word of God."

<sup>19</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 67: "In the revival that took place on the day of Pentecost it was the Lord who added to the church three thousand people. Therefore, I assume that every last one of those added to the church that day was converted and regenerated by God the Holy Spirit. God built His church initially with people that He converted, that were the fruit of His action in their lives, not as a result of the things that people do to try to prime the pump."

<sup>20</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 149: "In Acts we never see a community turned so inward that taking the message to those outside and engaging with those outside is forgotten or ignored."

<sup>21</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 132: "Openness to being fed by the Word is key evidence that one is truly regenerated."

<sup>22</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 67: "The early church was a Bible-studying church, steadfastly, continually devoted to devouring the Word of God that came from the Apostles."

<sup>23</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 5, Kindle: "In a non-reading, experience-oriented culture, solid Bible teaching is sometimes hard to find. Believers should beware of churches or Christian fellowships where the people do not carry their Bibles. Read your Bible. Mark it up. Each of us must make sure that sometime, somewhere in our week we are being taught."

## Here's a second priority of a devoted church:

### 2) **Fellowship** - κοινωνία (2:42b)

Luke tells us in **verse 42**,

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the **fellowship**...<sup>24</sup>

This young church, just a few days' old, was devoted to "the apostles' teaching" and "the fellowship."<sup>25</sup> Which prompts the question—what exactly is "the fellowship?"

I ask that question because it's a term that is thrown around a lot in evangelical Christian circles, but it's not understood very well. Some people think that fellowship is just two guys or two girls drinking coffee together. Some people think that it's just gathering a group of Christians together to watch football or shoot pool. As if all you've got to do is gather a bunch of warm bodies in the same room together, and you can call it fellowship.<sup>26</sup>

But the Biblical concept of fellowship is more than that. The Greek word κοινωνία means "close association involving mutual interests and sharing."<sup>27</sup> Communion is one way to translate this word.<sup>28</sup> Not communion as in the Lord's Supper, we'll talk about that in a moment, but communion with each other that takes place in a community.<sup>29</sup> There's communion (κοινωνία) with God and there's communion among God's people.<sup>30</sup>

Here's one way to think of it—κοινωνία-fellowship means "mutuality of soul."<sup>31</sup> This is relational capital built one-to-another. This is togetherness and connectedness as we work towards a common goal. We worship Christ together. We walk with Christ together. We work for Christ together. We love one another. We serve one another. We bear one another's burdens. That's devotion to "the fellowship."

**Hear me on this, if your relationships with people in the church are not substantively different than your relationship with people outside the church then you are in error. You need to repent. If you are walking out of your small group saying to yourself, "Well, that was no different than my conversations at work," then you aren't experiencing the κοινωνία-fellowship that was exemplified by the early church.**

**Let me just linger on this for another second or two. One of the things that we really struggle with in America is a sense of community. We pride ourselves on individualism and isolationism to our own detriment. We build our houses bigger and bigger and put taller and taller fences around our yards. We**

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<sup>24</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 119: "The Greek word used here (*koinōnia*) is one Paul often employed, but it appears only here in all of Luke-Acts. Its basic meaning is 'association, communion, fellowship, close relationship... In secular Greek it could involve the sharing of goods, and Paul seems to have used it this way in 2 Cor 9:13. It was also used of communion with a god, especially in the context of a sacred meal; and Paul used it in that sense in 1 Cor 10:16.'"

<sup>25</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 150: "The acts are each highlighted with articles—'the' teaching, 'the' fellowship, 'the' breaking of bread, and 'the' prayers."

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 5, Kindle: "Fellowship comes through giving. True fellowship costs! So many people never know the joys of Christian fellowship because they have never learned to give themselves away. They visit a church or small study group with an eye only for their own needs (hardly aware of others) and go away saying, 'There is no fellowship there.' The truth is, we will have fellowship only when we make it a practice to reach out to others and give something of ourselves... Do you want to have fellowship? You must be a giver."

<sup>27</sup> BDAG, 552.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 5, Kindle: "The root idea is 'commonness' or 'commonality.' New Testament Greek is called koine Greek because it was the common Greek of the day — the street language of the people."

<sup>29</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 125: "According to the Bible the entire Christian life, including spiritual growth, battling sin and Satan, and serving God, are intended to be done in community."

<sup>30</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 68–9: "A word of caution: the primary reason we are to come to church on Sunday morning is to worship God. However, we are told by the polls that the primary reason people come to church on Sunday morning is to enjoy fellowship with their Christian friends. What motivates people to come to church is not worship but fellowship. Maybe, if we are going to be truly Christian, we ought to do away with fellowship, since it competes so strongly with worship. However, that would be an error in the opposite direction. We see in the early church the model of how church should function. They came to hear and study the Word of God, but they also came to enjoy the friendship and camaraderie in the fellowship of believers in the church."

<sup>31</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 120: "Paul speaks of the pillars of the Jerusalem church giving him and Barnabas 'the right hand of fellowship' (Gal. 2:9) as a sign of their accepting them as legitimate servants of Christ."



**don't want anybody; we don't need anybody. Just leave us alone. We aspire to be lone-rangers. We aspire to be a kind of John Wayne figure in one of his cowboy epics where he's all alone and doesn't need anybody. Let me just tell you, church, that is not biblical!**<sup>32</sup>

And all of us as Americans have a propensity for isolationism and individualism and selfishness. I struggle with that sometimes. And that mentality finds its way into the church. People say to themselves, **"I'll just come to church and do my thing and worship God and check that box, then the rest of my time is mine."** If that's you this morning, then you are in error. We need each other in the church. And God has called us into biblical relationship and biblical togetherness and *κοινωνία* -fellowship in the church. It's a priority of his church. It's something that Christians should be devoted to.

**One of the things that we want to accomplish in our small groups and in our interactions with each other is getting beyond the shallow and evasive forms of communication: 1) How about that weather, huh? 2) Nice clothes, where'd you get that outfit? 3) Did you see that game last night?**

**I had a friend in Illinois who introduced me to this question. This is a great question to facilitate *κοινωνία*-fellowship. He would ask, "How's your soul, Tony?" That's not a question that you ask your coworkers at the watercooler.**

**And I love that. Let's get beyond surface-y, shallow conversations. Let's ask better questions of each other. Things like this: 1) "What's on your heart right now brother, sister?" 2) "How's your soul?" 3) "What are your fears, your failures, your aspirations, your heart-breaks?" 4) "How can I pray for you right now?" Those are the kinds of questions that facilitate genuine fellowship in the church. And we need that. It's a priority in the church.**

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**Here's a third priority of a devoted church. Write this down.**

3) **Remembrance** (2:42c)

Luke writes,

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

**And to that you might ask, what's the breaking of bread? Well, it's at least in part, the taking of communion together in the church body.**<sup>33</sup> **It involves taking what we call "the Lord's Supper."**

**Look, let me be honest with you about something. This is pastoral confession time. Throughout most of my adult life, I have been very resistant to anything that you might call tradition or ritual. I have a bit of an anti-establishment streak in me. And that comes out sometimes when dealing with traditions. And that's because I think some traditions become rote and routine, and therefore are rendered meaningless.**

**And here's my view on that. If it's a dumb tradition... or if it's an unbiblical tradition, then get rid of it. Who cares! Shuck it. But if it's a good tradition, then use it. It's not worth the risk of legalism to embrace something that's not beneficial to the church body or something that is not explicitly biblical.**

But as a church, it's important to embrace the concept of "remembrance." Just as an example of this, God spends a lot of time instituting the Passover as a remembrance for his people. God wanted his people to remember every year the triumphant defeat of the Egyptians. So this yearly festival was instituted as a reminder to the people.

Well in the NT, the Passover celebration is commemorated through the Lord's Supper. We observe two ordinances here at VBVF: 1) Believer's Baptism and 2) The Lord's Supper. And concerning the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (see **Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:18–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25**). Jesus took the bread which signified his body and the cup of wine that signified his blood, and his disciples ate and

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<sup>32</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 131: "The joy, enrichment, and security that come from a caring community outweigh by far the pain and inconvenience that come with getting close to people. So the time is ripe for Christians to present to the world a community that is radically different from the existing social structures of society."

<sup>33</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 179: "While many scholars suggest that the phrase refers to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, i.e., Jesus' last supper with his disciples, which took on this designation from the opening act of a Jewish meal, and while some argue that this is a reference only to ordinary meals, there is the distinct possibility that it refers to both."

drank with him as an act of remembrance. Jesus said, “this is my body” and “this is my blood of the covenant.” Jesus told his disciples to eat and drink in remembrance of him.

And that tradition was continued in the NT. It was a priority of the early church:

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread ...

Here’s what John MacArthur writes about this statement: “[T]he breaking of bread [is] a reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, or Communion. This duty is not optional, since our Lord commanded it of every believer... Communion acknowledges the wondrous work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. [It] further exemplifies the unity of believers, since in it all partake together symbolically of the same Lord... Communion calls for self-examination and purging of sin, thus purifying the church. Nothing is more vital to the church’s ongoing, regular confrontation of sins in the lives of its people than the thoughtful expression of devotion to the remembrance of the cross.”<sup>34</sup>

Now theories abound about how Christ’s words “this is my body” and “this is my blood” should be understood during communion. Some believe in what’s called “transubstantiation,” which means Jesus’s body is actually present in the bread and wine. Others, Lutherans specifically, believe in what’s called “consubstantiation” which means that Jesus’s presence is in and around the elements when they are partaken. This is Martin Luther’s theology of the Lord’s Supper. I love Martin Luther, you guys know that. But Luther’s view on the Lord’s Supper is essentially unintelligible. That’s not my view.

Other groups in Protestant Christianity, like us, believe that Christ is symbolically represented in the elements. And so communion is a time of sober reflection and somber remembrance of Christ’s work on the cross. It looks backwards at Christ’s sacrifice, but it also points forward to a day when we will eat and drink again in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25).<sup>35</sup>

And that symbolism is important. It’s important as an act of remembrance. Christ is with us in a unique way. Not physically but supernaturally he is with us when we celebrate communion. And remembering Christ’s work on the cross through the Lord’s Supper is a high priority in the church.

**We don’t celebrate communion every week here at church, but we do it regularly. We do it monthly, so that this act of remembrance is commemorated often in our worship gathering.**

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**And here’s the fourth priority of a devoted church. Look at the end of verse 42.**

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.<sup>36</sup>

**The fourth priority is...**

4) **Prayer** (2:42d)

I heard a pastor say once, “Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of [God’s] omnipotence.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 84–5. This is Calvin and Luther’s view. See Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 35. So also Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 5, Kindle: “I believe ‘the breaking of bread’ refers to the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper, for two reasons. First, the reference comes between two religiously-loaded terms in verse 42 — ‘fellowship’ and ‘prayers.’ And second, in verse 46 the phrases ‘broke bread’ and ‘ate together’ are purposely separated.” Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 161 disagrees: “The term describes the initiation of an ordinary meal in the Jewish fashion of breaking a loaf with the hands and giving thanks to God (e.g., Lk. 9:16; 22:19; 24:30, 35; Acts 27:35 note). To ‘break bread’ was to eat together. The adoption of this term as a title for the Lord’s Supper is not formally attested until the second century ad (cf. *Did.* 14.1; Ignatius, *Eph.* 20.2). When Luke mentions in v. 46 that they were ‘breaking bread in their homes’, he goes right on to say (literally), ‘they were partaking of food’ (*metelambanon trophēs*).”

<sup>35</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 132: “In reacting to an overemphasis on the presence of Christ in the elements (transubstantiation), we may have forgotten that Christ is indeed present at this communion meal in a special way (1 Cor. 10:16).”

<sup>36</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 151: “Of eighty-five NT occurrences, the verb ‘pray’ (προσεύχομαι, *proseuchomai*) appears thirty-four times in Luke-Acts, sixteen of which are in Acts (Luke 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12, 28; 9:18, 28–29 [2x]; 11:1–2 [3x]; 18:1, 10–11; 20:47; 22:40–41 [2x], 44, 46; Acts 1:24; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:9, 30; 11:5; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8). A community at prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life. It seeks God’s direction and is dependent upon God because God’s family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction.”

<sup>37</sup> I’ve heard this attributed to Charles Spurgeon. See also MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 85. It is attributed to Martin Tupper in the book *Dictionary of Quotations from Ancient and Modern English and Foreign Sources Including Phrases, Mottoes, Maxims, Proverbs, Definitions, Aphorisms, and Sayings of Wise Men, in Their Bearing on Life, Literature, Speculation, Science, Art, Religion, and*

Those of you with an ESV Bible will notice that **Acts 2:42** says “the prayers” not “prayer.” But I wouldn’t make too much of that. Some people think that this means they were devoted to the daily prayers in the temple three times a day. But I think this means they were devoted to different kinds of prayers: petition, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, etc. In other words, they varied their prayers. They were committed to both corporate and personal prayer, just like Jesus was.<sup>38</sup> In other words, this is Luke’s way of saying, **“They did a lot of praying in the early church.” And that’s what devoted churches do. That’s what devout Christians do! They pray.**

When I was a kid, I had a pastor who was a bit of a character. He loved to joke around and tell the same jokes over and over again. Well sometimes when he was asked to pray for food before a meal he would say, “Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks God for the grub.”

But then, of course, he would follow with a serious prayer that would include thanksgiving and petition and supplication. I think he started those prayers with a joke to lighten the mood so that people didn’t think of prayer as this somber, boring, repetitive, ritualistic thing. It was communication with God. Sometimes you smile; sometimes you cry. But you never fake it. You never just go through the motions.<sup>39</sup>

I had this other pastor friend who would always rebuke me for praying before my meals. He would say, “Oh, there’s no need to pray over your food. That’s just mindless ritual.” That guy, unlike my childhood pastor, was a nuisance. I didn’t pray over my food because I *needed* to. I did it because I *wanted* to. I still want to! I want to express my love to God and my gratitude to him before I eat. What’s wrong with that?

And it’s really quite amazing how much is written on prayer in the pages that follow in **Acts** and in the rest of the NT. There’s really no way for me to overemphasize prayer as a priority in the church of Jesus Christ. It’s one of our core activities as the church. **But here’s a question for you. Is it a core activity in your life?**

**I heard a pastor say once that you know how popular the church is by how many people come on Sunday morning. You know how popular the pastor is by how many people come on Wednesday night. But you know how popular God is by how many people come to the prayer meeting.**

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Okay. So here are four priorities for a devoted church. Here’s what we do: **1) We study the Bible** (i.e. the “apostles’ teachings”), **2) We fellowship**, **3) We remember the Lord through breaking bread** (i.e. the Lord’s Supper), and **4) We pray**. This is pretty simple stuff. But that doesn’t mean it’s easy. **Actually I think one of the problems that contemporary churches have is that they get bogged down with a lot of unnecessary and unmandated peripheral stuff, and they forsake the fundamentals.**

What follows in the next five verses is **“Four outcomes of a devoted church.”** These aren’t things that we do. These are things that God does.

And the first outcome is found in **verse 43**.

<sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

So the disciples were busy studying the Bible, fellowshiping, praying, and breaking bread together, and as they did that “awe came upon every soul.” The Greek word here is φόβος, which we get our English word “phobia” from.<sup>40</sup> It means “fear” or “terror” or “awe.”<sup>41</sup>

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*Morals Especially in the Modern Aspects of Them*, compiled by Rev. James Wood, (F. Warne and Company, 1893):

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Dictionary\\_of\\_Quotations\\_from\\_Ancient\\_an/9L9UAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Dictionary_of_Quotations_from_Ancient_an/9L9UAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)

<sup>38</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 179–80: “The plural implies regular prayer practices of the Christian believers, perhaps also a reference to the traditional prayers that Jews regularly recited. Luke does not clarify whether private or communal prayers are in view, but 1:24 and 4:23–31 indicate that the latter are certainly included.”

<sup>39</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 122: “The fourth-century Bible expositor John Chrysostom defined prayer as ‘conversation with God.’”

<sup>40</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 151: “Luke-Acts has twelve out of forty-seven NT occurrences of φόβος.”

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 181: “The term for ‘panic, fear, terror’ (φόβος) also denotes ‘reverence, respect.’”

The disciples were awestruck as they gathered for worship. The disciples were entranced and enthralled by an awesome God. And as they pursued God and as they prioritized the things of God, one of the outcomes was a “holy reverent, fear of God.”

**Here’s the first Outcome of a Devoted Church:**

**Four Outcomes of a Devoted Church [What God does]:**

1) **Awe** (2:43)

That’s not “aw” as in “Aw, look how cute that baby is!” That “aw” is spelled a-w. What we’re talking about here is a-w-e, as in God is “awe-inducing” and “awe- inspiring.” What a difference a letter makes!

**A-w-e is about being filled with “awe” or “fear” or “marvel” or even “holy terror” at the Creator of the Universe. We are awe-struck before our awesome God: Father, Son, and Spirit.**

And that’s not something you can manufacture or mandate. **“Hey you! Fear God!”** You can’t muster that up. You can’t mandate the “fear of God.” God brings that about. And I imagine that this group of people who had seen God move in such incredible ways and continued to see awe-inspiring miracles and wonders and signs done through the apostles had no problem fearing the mighty power of an awesome God.

By the way the “every” in **verse 43** probably includes all the people in Jerusalem, not just those who had become part of the church. In other words, God must have brought a holy dread upon the people at large, and this is probably why they were left alone during this season and weren’t persecuted. That’s not going to last forever, as we’ll see later in the book of **Acts**.

And speaking of awe-inspiring miracles, **verse 43** says,

<sup>43</sup> *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*

We’re going to see one of those miracles next week as Peter heals a lame beggar just by saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (**3:6**). When you see those kinds of apostolic gifts and abilities on display, you can’t help but stand in awe before a powerful God.

**The question for us is how do we get to that place? How do we cultivate a fear of God among the people of God? Because I don’t have Peter’s apostolic gift of healing. I can’t just walk around and heal people on command.**

**Let me suggest to you that even in the early church it wasn’t the apostles job to produce a fear of God in God’s people. That was God’s job. That was an outworking of the prescribed duties of the early church which were Scripture, fellowship, remembrance, and prayer. You go and do those things. You be devoted to those things. As a church, these are the priorities that we are prioritizing. And we leave the outcome of bringing awe “upon every soul” to the Lord.**

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**One of the outcomes of a devoted church, is “awe.” Here’s another outcome:**

2) **Generosity** (2:44–45)

Look at **verse 44**.

<sup>44</sup> *And all who believed were **together***<sup>42</sup>

Notice the emphasis on togetherness again.<sup>43</sup> Have you got that theme down yet in the book of **Acts**? Obviously Luke wants to communicate to us the importance of being together.

<sup>44</sup> *And all who believed were **together** and had all things in common.*

The Greek word for “common” here is κοινός. It means “mutual” or “common” or “shared.”<sup>44</sup> It’s etymologically linked to κοινωνία. The word κοινωνός is the adjective, and κοινωνία is the noun.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 181: “All believers ‘were together’ (ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό). This expression probably should not be understood in a local sense (‘all believers were gathered at one place’). Rather, it emphasizes the unity of the believers, which is described in 2:46 with the term translated as ‘unanimously’ (ὁμοθυμαδόν).”

<sup>43</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 152: “The expression of their being ‘together’ (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, *epi to auto*) recalls the unity depicted in 1:15 and 2:1. This expression is repeated in verse 47 (4:26 completes the occurrences in Acts, five of ten in the NT).”

<sup>44</sup> See *DBL Greek* 3123 κοινωνός (*koinos*) #1.

<sup>45</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 160: “The *koinōn*- words in Greek normally mean ‘to share with someone in something’ above and beyond the relationship itself, or ‘to give someone a share in something’. The sharing in this case could simply refer to



<sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in [κοινός]. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings<sup>46</sup> and distributing<sup>47</sup> the proceeds to all, as any had need.<sup>48</sup>

The fellowship that the early church shared was more than just a “Hey, let’s hang out and enjoy each other’s company” kind of fellowship. There was a mutuality of soul and a mutuality of spiritual experience.<sup>49</sup> And that mutuality involved their material possessions.<sup>50</sup>

No doubt, part of this included tithes and offerings and the pooling of resources for the benefit of the church. Even in Jesus’s day, there were followers of Christ that supported financially his ministry (see e.g. **Luke 8:1–3**). Part of this also included benevolence. If someone had a need in the church, they didn’t look to the government to meet that need. They took care of their own.<sup>51</sup>

Later in **1 Timothy 5**, Paul sets down some strict rules for church benevolence. Possibly that’s because some of the goodwill of the early church led to abuses within the fellowship.<sup>52</sup>

**John Calvin said this when he was commenting on this passage, “We need to beware of two extremes here. Some hide what they possess, do not give to the poor, and in a self-righteous way refuse any gifts they are offered. Others want everyone to give everything away.”<sup>53</sup> Calvin was especially critical of idle monks who lived off the generosity of others. He said, “It is wrong for monks to say that because they own nothing they are following the apostles’ teaching, for they do not sell anything, nor do they help people in need. They just fill their idle stomachs with the blood of the poor.”<sup>54</sup> Yikes. Tell me what you really think about monks, John Calvin? I wonder if Calvin ever spoke those words to Martin Luther when he was a monk. Probably not!**

Let me just add to Calvin’s caution a few other cautions about this passage. **I think the Holy Spirit communicates these truths to us to inspire generosity in all ages of the church. So don’t forget that. God wants us to be generous.** But let me add three disclaimers to that statement.

**1) Generosity is not something that can be mandated. Giving can be mandated. But generosity cannot. And whenever giving becomes compulsory not voluntary, and whenever gifts are given begrudgingly not**

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material blessings, as described in vv. 44–45, where we are told that the believers had everything in *common* (*koina*). Yet this sharing was clearly a practical expression of the new relationship experienced together through a common faith in Christ (cf. vv. 38–41)... It may be best, therefore, to give *koinōnia* its widest interpretation in 2:42, including within its scope ‘contributions, table fellowship, and the general friendship and unity which characterized the community’.”

<sup>46</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 121n149: “Two types of property are probably to be seen in v. 45, possessions in general (ὑπάρξεις) and real estate (κτήματα).”

<sup>47</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 121: “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. This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that ‘there will be no poor among you’ (Deut 15:4f.).”

<sup>48</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 153: “As people are having (εἶχεν, *eichen*) need, they receive help... the verb is used with iterative ἄν, *an*... This means that people did not sell everything all at once. The picture is of a community that cares for all of its members, even those in material need.”

<sup>49</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 155: “The biblical picture is not of what someone receives from the church, although one does receive a great deal, but of what one gives and how one contributes to it. The portrait of the early church in Acts shows that community and the welfare of the group were a priority. This attitude reflected spiritual maturity that allowed the church to grow. In the case of this earliest community, the believers’ preaching was matched by their community, making a powerful testimony for their mission. When the early church said that God cared, the care they gave their own demonstrated this.”

<sup>50</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 181: “The fellowship of the Jerusalem believers was anything but shallow. They were willing to use their material possessions for the needs of their fellow believers... Theirs was not a utopian vision, but the expression in real life of the love and care that believers in Jesus extend in very practical terms for one another.”

<sup>51</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 70: “Some in the early church were living in desperate poverty while others were prospering under the hand of Providence. The sharing and distribution was driven by something that should drive the church of every century—generosity. Christians are not required to give up all their private property, but we are required to be generous because we live under the hand of the most generous God.”

<sup>52</sup> For more on this, see my sermon “Honor and Care in the Church Family,” 08-27-23: <https://www.vbv.org/honor-and-care-in-the-church-family-1-timothy-lesson-9#gsc.tab=0>

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Acts*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 49.

cheerfully, the spirit of generosity is lost.<sup>55</sup> These individuals in **Acts 2** sold their possessions voluntarily and gave them to those who have need.<sup>56</sup> This is a God-thing. This wasn't a mandate from the apostles or even from God; this was something that welled up inside of them as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2) I don't want anyone to get the impression that somehow the early church lived in communes like a bunch of hippies, or that there was no category for personal property in the early church. That's simply not the case. The Greek in **verse 45** indicates by the imperfect verbs "selling" and "distributing" and by the clause "as any had need" that this was a continuous process of selling and distributing as needs became known, not a once-for-all-time selling of everything you owned and giving it to the church.<sup>57</sup> That's clear from the grammar of this passage but also from **verse 46** where we are told that there was "breaking of bread in their homes." Whose homes were they? The answer is the church parishioners.<sup>58</sup> So obviously people still owned their homes.<sup>59</sup>

In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira are put to death by the Lord not because they retained some of the money from the sale of their piece of property, but because they lied to the church about it! Peter says to them, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (**Acts 5:4**).<sup>60</sup>

3) Let me just say that everything belongs to God anyway. And maybe the disciples did get a little carried away here. And maybe they got so excited about what was happening that they forfeited their private property. So what! It's all God's anyways.<sup>61</sup>

**All our personal property ultimately belongs to God, and there's such a freedom that comes from accepting that reality. It certainly doesn't belong to the state. We're not communists who forfeit our possessions to big brother.<sup>62</sup> It belongs to God in the end, and you can't take it home with you.<sup>63</sup>**

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<sup>55</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 70: "The Lord loves a cheerful giver. He doesn't just love givers—anybody can be a giver. He loves *cheerful* givers. He loves people who love to express their gratitude to Him by building the kingdom of God."

<sup>56</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 163: "It is important to note that this sharing of possessions was voluntary and occasional. Their needs were related to the physical and social environment in which they found themselves. Their progressive isolation from unbelieving Israel must have made the economic situation of many quite precarious. Here was no primitive form of 'communism', but a generous response to particular problems in their midst (cf. 4:34–5). The examples given in 4:37; 5:4 show that people did not necessarily dispose of their whole estate but only certain portions of it. Believers continued to maintain their own homes and used them for the benefit of others in the church (cf. 12:12)."

<sup>57</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 181: "The statement 'they held all things in common' (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά) can mean that the believers sold everything they owned and pooled the proceeds (as the Essenes required their members to do). Or it can mean that they remained owners of their property while being willing to use their possessions for the common good of the fellowship of believers. In view of the details given in 2:45 and 4:32–5:11, the second meaning is preferable."

<sup>58</sup> For another view on this matter, see the comments of Anabaptist Peter Walpot that border on the extremes of Utopianism in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 37–38.

<sup>59</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 182: "Among the possessions and property that were sold were land and houses (4:34), which indicates that some believers were wealthy, owning land and houses on which they did not depend for their own daily needs. In 4:37 Joseph Barnabas, a Jewish believer from Cyprus, is presented as a positive example for this behavior, in 5:1–11 the couple Ananias and Sapphira are described as a negative example."

<sup>60</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC, 362: "It is evident from the later portions of Acts and from the Epistles that early Christians did not sell everything and move into communes or compounds (cf. 12:12; 16:15; 18:7–8; 21:8, 16; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). Paul, for instance, recommends that believers with sufficient means should eat at home, rather than eating from a common meal, so that those in need will not go without (1 Cor. 11:22)."

<sup>61</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC, 362–3: "Such generosity is one of the clear manifestations of the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers, as they begin to live for the sake of others and not only for themselves. This other-centeredness is a fundamental tenet of the faith (cf. Phil. 2:5ff.), as it manifests obedience to the great commandment to 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). Taken together with fellowship around the apostles' teaching, common meals, and prayer, the practice of free sharing is evidence of salvation through the power of the Spirit. Believers are not only brought to agree with teaching about Jesus; they are fundamentally changed in the way in which they live, demonstrated in extraordinary generosity and concern for the well-being of others."

<sup>62</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 182–3: "The Jerusalem believers did not share their goods—they sold their goods to support the needy. Luke does not describe a community that denies the appropriateness of private property (as in a monastic order), nor does he propagate a world-denying 'communism of love.' Rather, Luke presents a pragmatic ethics concerning possessions in which the needs of the poor take center stage. The motivation to sell possessions and share the proceeds with believers in need was grounded in their

**I do think we have a problem in our country with materialism and consumerism. But I don't think the solution to that problem is church-sanctioned poverty. We don't need to divest ourselves from all our material resources because we've got a materialism problem. "Let's just get it out of our hands because it's evil and I don't want to deal with it." The remedy for materialism isn't poverty; it's generosity. And that's a God-thing that stirs up in the hearts of his people.**

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**Here's another outcome of a devoted church.**

3) **Gladness** (2:46)

**Look at verse 46.**

<sup>46</sup> And day by day, <sup>64</sup> attending the temple together<sup>65</sup>

I assume regular attendance at the temple was customary during this transitional time of the church, at least until the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Probably the temple was a place for evangelism if nothing else.<sup>66</sup> This was especially the case when the church started meeting on Sundays to worship together outside the context of the temple.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together<sup>68</sup> and breaking bread in their homes

They fellowshiped, took communion together, and ate meals together in homes. These were house churches, if you will.<sup>69</sup> There really wasn't any other option for the early church. The opportunity to buy and sell land and gather as larger congregations in church buildings didn't come till later.<sup>70</sup>

and breaking bread in their homes they received their food<sup>71</sup> with glad<sup>72</sup> and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God<sup>73</sup> and having favor with all the people.

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concern for the poor and their needs (χρησίαν εἶχεν), as well as in Jesus' teaching about not hoarding material possessions (Luke 6:30–36), but renouncing them (Luke 12:33–34)."

<sup>63</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 70: "Totalitarian governments that impose communism bring great affliction on people. Another affliction is government-imposed socialism in which wealth is redistributed by government coercion. Both communism and socialism are far removed from the New Testament principle."

<sup>64</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 125: "Nowhere is it stated that Christians should continue to meet daily as they did in the first days of the Jerusalem church (v. 46). Considering the responsibilities one has in family life and in witness and vocation in society, it may not be a good idea for Christians to have a program in church every day of the week. History has shown that usually at the start of a revival there are daily meetings. After that it tapers off into a less frequent but regular pattern. Certainly it is helpful for new believers to be with Christians daily until they are more stable in their faith."

<sup>65</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 183: "The statement does not necessarily mean that every believer met every single day. Luke could simply say that every day there were meetings of believers in Solomon's Portico on the Temple Mount. Nevertheless, it is not impossible to assume that all believers met daily at a certain time, perhaps in late afternoon or early evening, to worship God, to listen to the apostles' teaching, and to have fellowship—perhaps at three o'clock in the afternoon at the 'hour of prayer' (3:1)... The temple platform that Herod I had constructed in order to place the temple building with its inner courts in the middle of a large outer court (*rachavah*) was surrounded by colonnaded halls. A meeting of three thousand people could be easily arranged in this gigantic complex... As the believers met in Solomon's Portico, in the eastern part of the outer court, listening to the apostles' teaching, having fellowship, and praising God for his work of salvation through Jesus, Israel's Messiah and Lord, they turned the entire temple complex into a "house of prayer" as Jesus had announced and demanded (Luke 19:45–46)."

<sup>66</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 121: "If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship."

<sup>67</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 153: "Regular attendance at the temple reflects Jewish practice for those in Jerusalem. Nothing about this is seen as unusual for Jewish believers in Jesus."

<sup>68</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 121: "The word translated 'with one accord' (*homothymadon*) [ESV: 'together'] is commonly used in Acts to express unity of purpose and particularly applies to the 'one heart and mind' (4:32) of the Christian fellowship (cf. 1:14; 2:1; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). F. Stagg, however, points out that single-mindedness is not always a good thing. The same word is used of the angry mobs that rushed upon Stephen (7:57) and Paul (19:29)."

<sup>69</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 71: "They did not have a building big enough to house the three thousand, so they went from house to house at different times in different homes, where they shared their faith together."

<sup>70</sup> That doesn't make home churches better or churches that gather in church buildings worse. There's no better or best option here. These are just different ways to gather as the body of Christ. In some settings, church buildings are not an option and so house churches are the norm. This is especially the case in some places in Asia or Africa where Christians are a persecuted minority. In places like North America, freedom of religion allows for church buildings that accommodate larger crowds and a better distribution of gifts for edification.

There was gladness in their heart. There was a supernatural joy that welled up inside of them.<sup>74</sup> And that joy was expressed in praise.<sup>75</sup>

**You know I'm so thankful for our worship team and the work they put into our Sunday service. Our services each week are full of joy and gladness. And I don't get the sense from them that they are working that up or they are faking it on Sunday. They genuinely love God and enjoy God and want to praise God. My heart is stirred every Sunday by their labor to worship God and by their joyful expressions on Sunday.**

But the truth of the matter is they can't make you worship on Sunday. They can't put joy and gladness in your heart where it doesn't exist. And I imagine that there are some people who come into this building on Sunday and think to themselves, **"What's wrong with these people? What are they so happy about? Why are they singing so loud?"**

Here's why. Gladness is the by-product of a grace-transformed life. Joy emanates from a heart that has been passionately moved by God. You can't mandate that. You can't force people to experience that. That's a God-thing. That's something that God brings about in a devoted church.

**And here's the final outcome of a devoted church.**

4) **Favor** (2:47)

**Verse 47** speaks of favor with other people, and favor with God.<sup>76</sup> This church was...

<sup>47</sup> *praising God and having favor with all the people.*<sup>77</sup>

My assumption is that that means both inside and outside the church. In other words, even the non-believing Jews showed them favor in Jerusalem.<sup>78</sup>

I really struggled with that this week as well as the rest of **verse 47**, because I know that that's not always the case. The outside world doesn't always show favor to the church. Even in the pages that follow in **Acts** we'll see a lack of favor shown to the church.<sup>79</sup>

But I see this verse as akin to **Matthew 5:15**, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." **Or even amidst the sufferings of the**

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<sup>71</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 183–4: "The construction of the hypotactic (subordinate) sentence in 2:46–47 suggests that the believers shared meals both in the temple complex and in their private houses... The food that was consumed would have been bread, legumes, eggs, perhaps olives, dates, and figs, and sometimes fish."

<sup>72</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 184: "The communal meals of the believers in Jerusalem were marked by exuberant joy (ἀγαλλίασις), surely prompted by God's presence through his Spirit, by the assurance of salvation through Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation, and by the experience of new friendships and the privilege of giving and receiving."

<sup>73</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 123: "When God's people come together and enjoy fellowship, 'praising God' is the natural result (v. 47a). True fellowship focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things he has done, which, in turn, causes praise."

<sup>74</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 122: "It was an ideal, almost blissful time marked by the joy of their life together and the warmth of the Spirit's presence among them. It could almost be described as the young church's 'age of innocence.' The subsequent narrative of Acts will show that it did not always remain so. Sincerity sometimes gave way to dishonesty, joy was blotched by rifts in the fellowship, and the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials. 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."

<sup>75</sup> AUGUSTINE: "One who wishes to make a place for the Lord should rejoice not in private joy but in the joy of all (*gaudio communi*)."

Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 37.

<sup>76</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 154: "A vibrant community extends itself in two directions: toward God and toward neighbor. A veiled reference to obedience to the great commandment appears here."

<sup>77</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 184: "The Christians of Jerusalem 'enjoyed the respect' (ἔχοντες χάριν) of all the Jewish people (λαός) living in Jerusalem. The phrase also shows that the followers of Jesus were recognized as a specific group early on."

<sup>78</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 122: "On the receiving end, they experienced the favor of the nonbelieving Jewish community in Jerusalem."

<sup>79</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 129: "The early Christians also enjoyed the favor of the people outside the church (v. 47), which is often the case with a new work of God. Unfortunately, such favor does not always last for long, for those who admire the life of Christians soon come to realize the implications of their message. They realize they are being challenged to make a decision about adopting Christianity and rejecting their own cherished religion. Vested interests of some powerful groups become jeopardized. Thus, admiration is replaced by fear and opposition. This happened in Jerusalem especially as a result of the ministry of Stephen. Note 8:1: 'On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.'"



Christians described in **1 Peter**, Peter writes, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (**1 Peter 2:12**).

And as far as favor from the Lord is concerned, look at the end of **verse 47**. Luke writes, *And the Lord added to their number<sup>80</sup> day by day those who were being saved.*<sup>81</sup>

The Lord does that, not us. The Lord grew the early church.<sup>82</sup> **The Lord grows our church, not us. Our job is scripture, fellowship, remembrance, and prayer. Our job is** “Go into all the world and make disciples.” **Our job is worshipping and working for Christ.**<sup>83</sup> God grows the church according to his sovereign plan.<sup>84</sup>

Now I do believe that healthy things grow. And as a truism, not as a promise, fruitfulness typically follows faithfulness. **But ultimately we’ve got to leave the growth of our church to God and trust that his favor will be shown to us however he determines it. And God will get done what he wants to get done in the church.**

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Several years ago I remember marveling at the fact that I’ve spent my entire life involved in the local church. That began when I was just a little guy in Austin, Texas. I went to church with my parents every Sunday. And get this, we prayed together. Just like we do now at VBVF! We worshiped together. Just like we do now! We listened to the pastor preach. We took communion regularly. We fellowshiped together in meaningful ways. I’ve been doing that for 40+ years. Talk about a heritage.

I told Kyle the other day, when I was a teenager in my church in Austin, I was a part of the A/V team. My pastor had this overhead projector with slides. He would give me like twenty transparencies for his message. And he would turn the projector off and on. And when he turned it off, I would go up and change the slide. That was my job in the church.

But just think with me for a moment. Your involvement in the church may go back thirty or forty years. It may go back eight years or eight months or eight decades. But really that’s just a drop in the bucket. In reality, what we do here at VBVF is not unlike what they did 2,000 years ago, at the beginning of the church in **Acts 2**. They studied the Scriptures. We do that too. They prayed together. We do that too. They fellowshiped together. They took communion together. We do that too! This is our heritage. This is what we do as Jesus Christ’s church! And we’ll do that till Christ returns. Amen?

Bow with me in a word of prayer, and then we can sing together.

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<sup>80</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 154: “As it is the Lord God who calls (v. 39), so it is the Lord God who adds to his community.”

<sup>81</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 184–5: “Luke’s formulation carefully preserves the primacy of God in the ‘success’ of the Jerusalem Christians. It is the Lord who increased the number of believers (ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει). God is the author of the salvation of the new converts (note that σφραζομένους is a passive participle).”

<sup>82</sup> Tommy Nelson said once, “All you can do in a church is all you can do. You can teach the Word. You can pray. You can take communion. You can praise God. You can love each other. You can fellowship. You can witness. But ultimately what has to happen for someone to be converted? God must move.” See his sermon entitled “Big Church,” 11-22-15: <https://dentonbible.org/sermon/big-church/>

<sup>83</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 155: “One can share Christ not only by what one says about him but also by showing the transformation that following him brings about.”

<sup>84</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 187: “Numerical growth is authentic church growth only if and when people find faith in Jesus, the crucified, risen, and exalted Messiah and Savior, and when they receive the presence of the Holy Spirit of God, who visibly and powerfully transforms their lives.” Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 124: “But it was ‘the Lord’ who ‘added to their number.’ Ultimately, God is the evangelist. Paul wrote, ‘I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow’ (1 Cor. 3:6–7). God does use our efforts and our techniques, but we must ensure that we are in the place where he can use us and that our techniques are acceptable to him.”