



## NextStep 104: Connecting in Community



### Week #1 – Community ... What is it? Acts 2:42-47

#### Key Concepts:

- Community is Awe-Inspiring
- Community is Radically Other-Centered
- Community is Relationally Life-Changing

#### Context of Acts 2:

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8** – Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and raised. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to many witnesses.

**Acts 1:8** – In one of the important thematic verses of Acts, Jesus Christ promises His disciples that they will receive power from the **Holy Spirit** to carry out God's kingdom work.

**Acts 2** – Eleven disciples are waiting for this promised power when the day of **Pentecost** comes. They begin speaking in **tongues** (known foreign languages) and they are accused of drunkenness. Peter responds in *Acts 2:14-40* with his first evangelistic sermon.

Peter instructs his readers to **repent** and be **baptized** (*Acts 2:38*). This marks their entrance into the biblical community of the first century church. In response to Peter's sermon, 3,000 people were saved and subsequently baptized. This is the world's first mega church!

#### I. Community is Awe-Inspiring (*Acts 2:42-43*)

The people of the first biblical community (i.e. the early church) devoted themselves to:

##### 1) The Apostles' Teaching

The "apostles' teaching" refers to the original **apostles'** teachings about **Jesus Christ**; who He was and what He accomplished. This act of teaching is consistent with the public teaching or reading of God's word since the beginning of the Jewish faith (*Exodus 24:7; 2 Kings 23:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:13*).

## 2) Fellowship

“Fellowship” (or Koinonia) refers to the sharing of close relationships with one another. Fellowship includes: 1) the breaking of the **bread** (i.e. Communion; *Luke 22:19-20*) and 2) **prayer**.

As a result of their lives together, they experienced a sense of **awe** (or reverential fear) at what God was doing in their midst. This also served as an outward **sign** for those watching who did not believe in Jesus Christ. In this way, the church was fulfilling its primary purpose of communicating God’s **truth** to the watching world (which is what we should also be doing today).

### Questions:

1. What do you think this first church “community” would have been like? Is it similar or different from the church “community” of today? What is similar? What is different? Do you see a problem with the differences today?
2. Have you ever experienced the reverential fear or awe of God when you have been together with your church community? Why are communion and prayer so important to experiencing fellowship within a church community?

## II. Community is Radically Other-Centered (*Acts 2:44-45*)

Notice how the people in this first century biblical community voluntarily **gave** of their property (real estate) and possessions to those in need. Caring for those in need is a big deal to God (*Exodus 22:21-24; Romans 12:10-13; James 1:27*).

The church community was not an extreme communist **organization**. Rather it was a life-changing communal **organism** (i.e. the body of Christ). Giving was done out of love, not obligation.

The people of the first biblical community thought that God's **kingdom** was coming soon and that their time on earth would be short. We should embrace the same perspective, shouldn't we?

### Questions:

1. Have you seen radically sacrificial acts by people in the body of Christ? Have you ever been radically loved by those in your small group community? Share examples of how you've seen this "other-centered" phenomenon lived out in your life.
2. How would you live your life differently if you believed that God's kingdom was coming at any time? How does the Bible say we should view God's coming kingdom (*1 Thessalonians 5:2*; *2 Peter 3:10*; *Revelation 3:3*)? What might you need to do differently?

### III. Community is Relationally Life-Changing (*Acts 2:46-47*)

Biblical community is clearly rooted in **relationships**! You cannot be a "community" of one **person**, but you can be a community of one unified group of people (*1 Corinthians 12:14*).

#### Look at what the people of the first biblical community did together every day:

- They met in the courts surrounding the temple in Jerusalem; Here they worshipped God publicly as well as proclaimed His truth publicly.
- They partook of communion together and remembered Christ's death and resurrection.
- They met in the houses of those within the church; the ministry of the early church was incredibly relational since the home was the place where meals were shared (an important part of first century culture).
- They practiced these things with gladness (which was joy that often resulted from experiencing God's miraculous work) and humility.
- They also praised God on a daily basis.

The early church was anything but **isolated** (and it contained over 3,000 people!). It was the world's first "mega-church," but it was comprised of intimate **smaller groups** of people. The lonely, hurting, and broken had a place to go. Authenticity was the key for life-transformation back then just as it is the key for life-transformation today.

As a result of these dynamic relationships, the church lived out her **purpose** and God carried out His work of salvation. The Lord responds to authentic expressions of biblical community by adding more and more people to that biblical community every day.

### **Questions:**

1. Do you believe that "community" really is life-changing? Have you seen this life change happen through your experience with a Community Group, ABF, etc.?
2. Why do you think isolation within the church is such a dangerous thing? Have you known anyone who, through their choice to remain isolated, has harmed themselves or others?
3. How should we apply these truths from *Acts 2:42-47* to our lives today?

## Key Terms:

Community  
Apostles' Teaching  
Fellowship  
Breaking of the Bread  
Prayer

## Key Verses:

Acts 2:38  
Acts 2:42-47  
Luke 22:19-20

## Scripture Memory:

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42, NASB)

## Homework Assignment #1:

- 1) Know definitions for Key Terms.
- 2) Memorize Acts 2:42.
- 3) Search for passages in the New Testament that address the subject of community. Write down the passages and choose the top three that teach the importance of spiritual community.
- 4) Write down the names of people who constitute your small group (Community Group or spiritual community). If you are not part of a Community Group, write down the names of people with whom you could possibly form a Community Group at the end of this class.
- 5) Review class notes.

**NextStep APPLICATION:** Be praying for the people listed under #4 above. Ask God to work in their lives and to use you to serve them.

**Next Week: Community ... We Were Made for This! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)**