

The Church

New Testament, Week 4; Multiply #22

DAY 1: The Early Church

1. The early church started with about 120 new believers. We have a summary of what their church life was like!

2. Below, list what strikes you about each one of the "marks" of the early church:

Acts 2:41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles':*

- *...teaching -*
- *...fellowship -*
- *to the breaking of bread -*
- *and the prayers -*

⁴³ *And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles -*

⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common-*

⁴⁵ *and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need-*

⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together -*

- *breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts,*
- ⁴⁷ *praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

3. Is there something from this list that needs your attention?

DAY 2: Devoted to ...

*Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' **teaching** ...*

1. What did the apostles teach? They taught the Old Testament, the life of Jesus, the person and work of Jesus, and the teachings of Jesus. Much of this became the four gospels and the epistles (letters).
2. Would you say you are devoted to the teaching? If so, how?
 - a. "I try to regularly apply what I know I need to apply and obey."
 - b. "I make an effort to listen and process the Sunday message."
 - c. "I make an effort to spend some time daily in God's word."
 - d. "I make an effort to attend a bible study group."

*Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching **and fellowship**...*

3. "Fellowship" is not chit-chat, or small talk. "Fellowship" ("koinonia") means "community." He is describing people whose lives are intertwined. They shared their lives with one another.
 - a. Have you ever seen a group of people who share their lives with one another?
 - b. What does that look like? What are the "pieces?"
 - c. It takes some initiative to share your life with a group of people. It doesn't just happen? Joining a small group that meets regularly is the fastest way (and easiest) to get started.
 - Are you in a group? Do you attend regularly?
 - Are you sharing your life with at least one other person in the group?
 - Does there seem to be at least one other person who is sharing their life with you?
 - d. It's one thing to share your "outside" world, the parts that everyone can see. It's another thing to share your "inside" world, what no one else can see. Everyone needs a trusted friend, someone who you can share your challenges, difficulties, victories and defeats with. Is there someone like that in your life? If not, who comes to mind that you could trust with your inner most life?

DAY 3: Devoted to ...

*Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the **breaking of bread**, and the prayers...*

1. "Breaking of bread" likely refers to both the Lord's Supper (Communion) and regular meals together.

a. What does the Lord's Supper mean to you?

b. What does sharing a meal with someone mean to you?

*Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, **and the prayers**...*

2. Why was the early church devoted to "the prayers?"

3. How devoted to prayer are you?

4. One of the big ideas of the Acts 2 passage is that church is not a bunch of individuals who happen to like the same place or leader. The western church is centered around individuals: "Me and my church." The focus, like western culture is too focused on the individual.

The irony is that when the church as a whole is more important than the individual, *the individual takes on more meaning!!!!* Focus on the individual, and you lose both!

a. When *you* think about church, do you think more about you or about the church as a whole?

b. What would it mean for you to be more "church as a whole" focused?

Acts 2:43 And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles...

5. In the early church, God performed miraculous deeds to demonstrate that the Spirit of God was alive and in the church. Though God can and does "miraculous deeds" today, the biggest miracle is when a human being starts becoming more like Christ! How have you seen this in your own life?

Day 4: A Certain Kind of Community

1. When people think of different churches, they think of different pastors or the kind of worship music a church uses. While this is true, there is something else which distinguishes churches more than those: **the kind of community they aspire to be!**

That is true of the early church. Let's continue on in our Acts 2 passage.

Acts 2:44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common,⁴⁵ and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.

2. What *attitudes* do you read into "they had all things in common?"

3. What strikes you about 2:45?

4. What attitudes undergird 2:45?

Acts 2:46 And day by day, attending the temple together breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts...

5. What attitudes undergirded this church community?

a. What is a "glad heart?"

b. What is a "generous heart?"

Acts 2:47 ... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

6. "Praising God...." What words or pictures come to mind? What kind of effect would "praising God" have on a church community?

7. "Having favor with all the people." What attitudes in the early Christians undergirded this effect on the people around them?

8. What strikes you about this early church *community*?

DAY 5: An Imperfect Church

1. Talk to a lot of people about the church and you'll hear, "I believe in Christ, but I don't go to church." Or, "I just pray on my own. I'm not into 'organized religion.'"

People just expect that church-going folks like us are somehow "farther along" than we really are. It's even easy for us **IN THE CHURCH** to have the same expectations! As Christians, we are sinners saved by grace. The process of changing the "sinner" part of that phrase is a long and narrow road!!!

2. When we read the New Testament epistles (letters) we get an eye-opening view of the church, a very realistic one. Problems everywhere!

3. What Christ is working on is not making us a "perfect" church. He is teaching and transforming us *through* our sins and hang-ups and conflicts. He is teaching us how to live in a sinful and messy world. In one sense, the church is our laboratory of life!

4. As we close this week, make any notes below that are pertinent to you...

The church is HIS church when it responds to His Word with DEVOTION...

- A church DEVOTED to the CAUSE and CROSS of Christ...
- Celebrating our PLACE, not looking for something "else"...
- DEVOTED to His Word
- DEVOTED to One another
- DEVOTED to COMMON-UNITY
- not for stuff
- not for fun
- but for God's Word
- Fellowship
- Prayer