

TAKEAWAY:

God grows His church through devotion to His ordinary means of grace. Commit to the church God uses, not the church you consume.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- If someone observed your life for a week, what would they conclude you're devoted to?
- Give an example of someone in your life who is devoted and faithful.
- What does Church mean to you? What does community mean to you?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 2:42-47.

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- The early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and prayer. How does this compare to typical church involvement today?
- The believers shared meals, possessions, and life together. What would this kind of fellowship look like in our context?
- The passage says "the Lord added to their number." What does this teach us about church growth strategies?
- What are some contemporary challenges we face in imitating this early Christian community?

APPLICATION:

- What prevents you from being more devoted to God's Word and prayer? Devote time each day this week to be in prayer and Bible study before you open your phone. Return back to group next week with encouragement. Text your group during the week to be an encouragement to them.
- Are you serving in the church? If not, think about how God has gifted you and reach out to church leadership about how to get connected and serve this week.

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Go Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

A Consumer vs Devoted Believer: They “devoted themselves” to the fellowship. This word “devoted” implies a stubborn, persistent allegiance that survives difficulty and inconvenience. In contrast, a consumer mindset evaluates the church based on how well it serves personal preferences.

- In what specific ways does a 'consumer' approach to Christianity actively undermine the biblical definition of Christian fellowship: Fellowship one with another (a) as in a relationship amongst individuals? (b) Fellowship as in an assembled and acted community of believers worshipping together but also serving and doing life together?
- Why are you a part of Apex Baptist Church—that is, what rationale of yours has caused you to be a part of this fellowship? In the past, what has caused you to leave a church?
- Are you here at this fellowship of believers to serve? Be served? Both? If the church stripped away all programs that serve you personally (music style, kids' programs, coffee, etc.), leaving only the opportunity for you to serve others and hear the Word, would you stay? Why or why not? The important thought in these answers are the words “balance,” “both/and” not “either/or.”
- Think of the last time you were frustrated with this church or another one. Did you react like a customer with a complaint or did you act like a family member willing to help fix the mess, who is committed for the long haul for better or for worse?

The Scandal of “All Things in Common”: Read vv. 44-45. Luke describe a radical economic community where believers "had all things in common" and sold possessions to meet needs. While the sermon rightly notes this is not state-enforced communism but voluntary love, it is easy for modern believers to dismiss this as culturally descriptive rather than prescriptive. However, the principle of radical stewardship remains binding on the life of a Christian.

- The early church practiced a radical hospitality where private property was held loosely for the good of the community. While we may not live in a communal compound, how does the principle of 'all things in common' challenge our modern idol of financial autonomy?
- What is the modern, functional equivalent of 'selling your possessions' to meet a brother or sister's need?
- Read verse 47. How does our cultural insistence on privacy and financial independence grieve the Spirit and hinder the world from seeing the 'favor' of the church?"
- "The early church was strikingly different from the culture around it in this way - the pagan society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its body. A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everybody their money... Generally speaking, we say movements are united by compelling vision, not just by rules... Almost as soon as the church is born, it begins to develop some institutional marks... Acts 2:42-47." (Tim Keller)
- Tim Keller notes that while pagan society was "stingy" with money and "promiscuous" with the body, the early church was the opposite: generous with money and disciplined with the body. How does Keller's insight transform Acts 2:42 from a list of religious duties into a strategy for cultural engagement?
- The early church recognized that the spiritual bond of the Gospel created material obligations. *Koinonia* extended to the wallet. This pushes against the privatization of resources. If believers are merely stewards of God's resources, then those resources belong to the family of God when a need arises.

Quotes:

- “Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don’t consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God... ..And if they hear that one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of their redeemer, they all give him what he needs – if it is possible, they bail him out. If one of them is poor and there isn’t enough food to go around, they fast several days to give him the food he needs... This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them.” Aristides of Athens, 2nd century apologist
- "In both Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:3, the New English Bible translates *koinōnia* as 'sharing a common life.' This is the most basic meaning of koinonia, or fellowship. It is sharing a common life with other believers—a life that, as John says, we share with God the Father and God the Son. It is a relationship, not an activity." J. I. Packer
- "He did not add them to the church without saving them, nor did he save them without adding them to the church. Salvation and church membership belonged together: they still do." John Stott
- “It may fairly be said that unless one enmeshes himself in this redemptive fellowship of the church, he lessens his chances of steady growth and effectiveness, in his Christian life and experience.” Samuel M. Shoemaker
- "Fellowship cost something in the early church, in contrast to our use of the word fellowship today. Fellowship is not just a sentimental feeling of oneness. It is not punch and cookies. It does not take place simply because we are in the church hall. 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." R. Kent Hughes

PRAYER:

Pray for deeper devotion to God's Word, genuine fellowship in your church, and trust that God will produce growth as you're faithful.