

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: The Life of the First Church

Acts 2:42-47

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 2:42-47 gives us the inspired portrait of the New Testament church in its first days, and it serves as a pattern and a mirror for the Lord's church in every age. What is doctrinally at stake here is the nature of the church itself: its devotion to apostolic teaching, its worship including the breaking of bread and prayer, its loving fellowship and generosity, and the crucial truth that the Lord, not human effort, adds the saved to His body (v. 47). This passage helps students understand what a faithful church is and how salvation and the church are joined.

Teach clearly that the church is not a human club to be reinvented at will but Christ's own body, built on the apostles' teaching, gathered for worship, and added to by the Lord Himself. Guard against the modern notion that church is optional or that its shape is ours to design.

Yet aim at the heart as well. This passage glows with joy, wonder, generosity, and togetherness. Help students long to be this kind of people and this kind of church, devoted, glad, openhanded, and so attractive in love that the watching world is drawn to Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke says the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (v. 42). What do these four devotions reveal about the foundation and priorities of the Lord's church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke gives us four marks that defined the first church, and the word devoted is strong; it means to continue steadfastly, to give oneself wholeheartedly. These were not occasional activities but settled priorities.

First comes the apostles' teaching. The church was built on the inspired instruction of the apostles, which we now have in the New Testament. This is foundational: a church that drifts from apostolic teaching has lost its anchor. The Word comes first.

Then fellowship, the shared life of believers who belong to one another; the breaking of bread, which centrally includes the Lord's Supper; and the prayers, the church's life of dependence on God. Together these describe a community devoted to God's Word, to one another, to worship, and to prayer.

Help students see these as priorities, not options. A faithful church in any age will be marked by these same devotions. Where any of the four is neglected, the health of the body suffers. This verse is a simple but searching standard for measuring our own devotion and our congregation's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The apostles' teaching as the foundation of the church, now preserved in the New Testament
- Fellowship as the shared life of the body of Christ
- The breaking of bread, centrally the Lord's Supper, as an act of worship
- Prayer as the church's posture of dependence on God
- Devotion (steadfast continuance) as the mark of true discipleship

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the apostles' teaching come first in this list?
- How are these four devotions connected to one another?
- Which of the four most needs strengthening in your own life?

Question 2

Student Question:

The first believers gave themselves wholeheartedly to teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer (v. 42). Looking honestly at your own life, which of these four are you genuinely devoted to, and which has become thin or occasional? What would deeper devotion require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is easy to admire the early church's devotion and harder to examine our own. The word devoted invites us to ask where we are merely dabbling and where we are truly giving ourselves.

Walk students through each one honestly. Am I devoted to the Word, regularly feeding on Scripture and apostolic teaching, or do I graze occasionally? Am I devoted to fellowship, sharing real life with the body, or do I keep believers at arm's length? Am I devoted to worship and the Lord's Supper, or do I attend out of habit? Am I devoted to prayer, or is it an afterthought?

Deeper devotion always costs something, time, comfort, priorities. The early Christians rearranged their lives around these things. Invite students to consider what one of these devotions would require of them if they truly gave themselves to it.

Encourage them that devotion grows by practice. We become devoted not by waiting to feel devoted but by steadily showing up, opening the Word, gathering with the body, and praying, until our hearts catch up with our habits.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination regarding devotion to God's Word, the body, worship, and prayer
- The cost of genuine devotion in time and priorities
- Spiritual habits as the path to a devoted heart
- The integration of faith into the whole of life

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the four devotions is strongest in your life right now, and which is weakest?
- What has crowded out the one you most neglect?
- What is one concrete change that would deepen your devotion this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Among the church's devotions was the breaking of bread (vv. 42, 46). What is the significance of the Lord's Supper, and what does the New Testament show us about its place in the worship of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The breaking of bread in verse 42, set among the church's acts of worship, centrally refers to the Lord's Supper, the memorial Jesus instituted on the night He was betrayed. Jesus took bread and the cup and said, do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

The Lord's Supper is a rich act of worship. It is remembrance, looking back to the body and blood of Christ given for us; it is communion, a sharing together in the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:16); it is proclamation, for as often as we eat and drink we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26); and it is anticipation, looking forward to His return.

The New Testament shows the church observing it as a regular part of its worship. When the disciples gathered on the first day of the week, they came together to break bread (Acts 20:7), and Paul gives careful instruction for partaking worthily (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). The Lord's Supper was not a rare ceremony but a central, recurring act of the gathered church.

Help students recover the weight of this. The Supper is not an empty ritual but a holy appointment with the crucified and risen Lord, given to keep His death ever before our hearts and to bind us together as one body.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's Supper instituted by Christ as a memorial (Luke 22:19)

- The Supper as remembrance, communion, proclamation, and anticipation (1 Corinthians 10-11)
- The first day of the week as the time the church gathered to break bread (Acts 20:7)
- Worthy participation in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)
- The Supper as a central, recurring act of worship, not a rare ceremony

Discussion Prompts

- What different dimensions of meaning does the Lord's Supper hold?
- What does Acts 20:7 show about when the church gathered to break bread?
- How can we keep the Lord's Supper from becoming mere routine?

Question 4

Student Question:

The early Christians broke bread and worshiped with glad and sincere hearts (vv. 46-47). When you come to worship and to the Lord's table, what is the actual condition of your heart? What helps you engage with God rather than going through the motions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke twice mentions the heart-condition of these worshipers: glad and generous, or sincere, hearts. Their worship was not mechanical; it flowed from hearts gripped by what God had done.

It is possible to do all the right things in worship while our hearts are far away. Jesus warned of those who honor God with their lips while their hearts are distant (Mark 7:6). Invite students to examine honestly the condition of their hearts when they gather, distracted, dutiful, or truly engaged.

Explore what dulls our worship: busyness, familiarity, unconfessed sin, coming unprepared, treating the assembly as a spectator event. And explore what awakens it: remembering the cross, coming with expectancy, preparing our hearts beforehand, focusing on the Lord rather than ourselves.

Encourage students that engaged worship is cultivated, not automatic. The early church worshiped with glad hearts because they kept the wonder of the gospel fresh. We can do the same by coming deliberately, attentively, and gratefully into God's presence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as an act of the heart, not mere ritual (Mark 7:6)
- Sincerity and gladness as marks of true worship
- The danger of going through the motions
- Preparation and expectancy in approaching God

Discussion Prompts

- What is the usual condition of your heart when you come to worship?
- What most often distracts or dulls you in worship?
- What helps you genuinely engage with God at the Lord's table?

Question 5

Student Question:

Luke describes the believers sharing what they had, selling possessions to meet the needs among them (vv. 44-45). What does this reveal about Christian fellowship and generosity, and how is this voluntary sharing different from a forced or compelled system?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The early church's generosity was extraordinary. They had all things in common, and as anyone had need, those with means sold possessions and shared. This was love made practical; no one in the family of God went without while others had plenty.

It is important to teach what this was and was not. This was voluntary, Spirit-prompted generosity, not a forced communal system or a denial of private property. We know it was voluntary because later, in Acts 5, Peter tells Ananias that his property and his money remained his own to give or keep (Acts 5:4). The sharing flowed freely from love, not from compulsion.

This reveals the heart of true fellowship. To belong to the body of Christ is to belong to one another, so that another believer's need becomes my concern. The early church understood that the gospel creates a new family with real obligations of love.

Help students feel the beauty and the challenge of this. The same gospel that saves us also loosens our grip on our possessions and opens our hands to our brothers and sisters. Generosity is not an optional extra for the spiritually advanced; it is the ordinary fruit of grace received.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christian fellowship expressed in practical, sacrificial generosity
- Voluntary sharing prompted by love, not a forced communal system (Acts 5:4)
- The body of Christ as a family with real obligations of love
- Generosity as the natural fruit of grace received
- Care for the needy within the body as a mark of the true church

Discussion Prompts

- How do we know this sharing was voluntary rather than compelled?
- What does this reveal about what it means to belong to the body of Christ?
- How does the gospel change our relationship to our possessions?

Question 6

Student Question:

The first believers held their possessions loosely and shared freely so that no one among them was in need (vv. 44-45). How tightly do you hold what you have? Where is God inviting you to open your hands more generously toward others in His family?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The early church's open-handedness presses on one of the heart's most stubborn idols: our grip on our possessions. They held things loosely because they had found something worth more.

Invite gentle self-examination. How tightly do I hold my money, my time, my home, my stuff? Do I see what I have as mine to protect, or as God's to steward and share? Often our budgets and calendars reveal where our hearts truly are.

Generosity is learned by practice. Encourage students to consider one concrete way to open their hands, meeting a specific need they are aware of, giving more freely, opening their home, sharing their time with someone who is struggling.

Frame this as freedom, not guilt. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The generous life is the joyful life, because it mirrors the heart of the God who gave us His Son. Holding loosely is not loss; it is liberty.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewardship of possessions as belonging to God
- Generosity as a learned, practiced grace
- The blessedness of giving (Acts 20:35)
- Open-handedness as freedom from the idolatry of possessions

Discussion Prompts

- How tightly do you hold your possessions, time, and resources?
- Where are you aware of a need you could help meet?
- What is one specific act of generosity God may be inviting you to this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Luke concludes that the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (v. 47). What does it mean that the Lord, and not human effort, adds the saved to the church, and what does this teach us about the relationship between salvation and the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This little phrase carries great theological weight. The church did not grow by human cleverness; the Lord added to their number. God Himself is the one who builds His church (Matthew 16:18) and who places the saved into His body.

Notice the close link Luke draws: the Lord added those who were being saved. The saved are added to the church. In the New Testament, salvation and the church are not separate categories. When a person responded to the gospel as the three thousand did, repenting and being baptized, the Lord both saved them and added them to the body of His people. There is no such thing as a saved person who belongs to no church, because the Lord adds the saved to His church.

This corrects two errors. It corrects the idea that we save ourselves or that church growth is fundamentally a human achievement; the Lord adds. And it corrects the idea that one can be saved while remaining apart from the church; to be saved is to be added by the Lord to His people.

Help students see both the humility and the comfort here. We plant and water, but God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). And every believer can rest in knowing that the Lord Himself placed them in His body and is building His church, which the gates of Hades will not overcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord, not human effort, adds the saved to the church (v. 47)
- Christ as the builder of His church (Matthew 16:18)
- The inseparable link between salvation and being added to the church
- God giving the growth while His people plant and water (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)
- No biblical category of a saved person who belongs to no church

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Lord adds people to the church?
- Why is it significant that the saved are added to the church?
- How does this guard against both human pride and a churchless Christianity?

Question 8

Student Question:

The early church was so full of joy, love, and generosity that it had favor with all the people, and the Lord kept adding to it (vv. 46-47). What part are you playing in the life and witness of your congregation? Are you adding to its joy and health, or merely consuming?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The early church's witness was not only verbal; it was the sheer attractiveness of its shared life. Their gladness, love, and generosity gave them favor with the watching city, and people were drawn to Christ through them.

This raises a searching question for each member. Am I a contributor to the life of my congregation or mainly a consumer of it? Do I add to its joy, its love, its health, and its witness, or do I take from the sidelines while others carry the weight?

Help students see that the body needs every member. The New Testament knows nothing of passive Christianity; each one is given gifts and a role for building up the body (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:16). The health of the congregation depends in part on each member's faithfulness.

Encourage one concrete way to contribute, encouraging someone, serving a need, welcoming a newcomer, deepening fellowship, supporting the work. A congregation becomes the kind of community Luke describes when its members give themselves to one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The attractive witness of a loving, joyful church (v. 47)
- Every member's responsibility to contribute to the body (1 Corinthians 12)
- The body built up as each part works (Ephesians 4:16)
- The danger of consumer Christianity

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more often a contributor or a consumer in your congregation?
- What gift or role has God given you for building up the body?
- What is one way you could add to your church's joy and health this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Taken together, these verses paint a portrait of the New Testament church: devoted to apostolic teaching, gathered for worship, bound in fellowship, generous, prayerful, and added to by the Lord (vv. 42-47). What does this passage teach us about the nature and pattern of the Lord's church, and why does it matter that we follow the New Testament pattern rather than reinventing the church to suit ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, drawing together everything we have seen. Luke is not merely describing a moment of early enthusiasm; he is showing us the nature and pattern of the Lord's church, the church Christ promised to build and purchased with His own blood (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28).

Gather the marks. The Lord's church is built on the apostles' teaching, which is to say on the authority of the inspired Word, now complete in the New Testament. It gathers for worship that includes the breaking of bread and prayer. It is a true fellowship in which members share life and bear one another's burdens. It is marked by generosity, gladness, and devotion. And it is the body to which the Lord Himself adds the saved. This is what the church is, by God's design.

Why does it matter that we follow this pattern rather than reinventing the church? Because the church is not ours; it belongs to Christ. He is its head (Colossians 1:18), He purchased it with His blood, and He has revealed through His apostles what it is to be. When we treat the church as a human organization to be redesigned around our preferences, our entertainment, or the trends of the age, we set ourselves above its Lord. The New Testament is our pattern precisely because the church is the Lord's, not ours.

This is not a call to dead traditionalism but to faithful submission. We hold to apostolic teaching, apostolic worship, and apostolic fellowship because we love the One who gave them. A church that drifts from this pattern may keep the name while losing the substance.

Pastorally, this is both humbling and freeing. We are not burdened with inventing a church that will work; we are invited to receive and live out the church Christ has already designed, and to trust Him to build and add to it as we are faithful. The simple beauty of Acts 2 is still within reach for any people willing to devote themselves to the same things.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as Christ's own, purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), not a human invention
- Christ as the head of the church (Colossians 1:18)
- The New Testament as the pattern for the church's teaching, worship, and life
- Apostolic teaching, worship, fellowship, and the Lord's adding as defining marks
- Faithful submission to the pattern over reinvention to suit ourselves
- The continuing relevance of the Acts 2 church for congregations today

Discussion Prompts

- What are the defining marks of the Lord's church in this passage?
- Why does it matter that the church belongs to Christ and not to us?
- How can a congregation today recover the simple pattern of Acts 2?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this portrait of the first church, its devotion, worship, fellowship, generosity, and joy. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you to help your congregation look more like the church of Acts 2, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone turns admiration into action. The church of Acts 2 is not merely a historical ideal to praise but a pattern to pursue, beginning with each member.

Invite each person to name one concrete step. Perhaps it is to deepen devotion to the Word, to engage more fully in worship, to enter real fellowship rather than staying on the edges, to grow in generosity, or to contribute to the body rather than merely consume.

Keep the focus on transformation and on the congregation. The early church glowed because its members gave themselves to these things together. Renewal begins when individuals take responsibility for their part.

Close by reminding students that the same Lord who added to the first church day by day is still building His church, and that He delights to form a people marked by devotion, love, and joy through their faithful, willing response.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Acts 2 church as a pattern to pursue, not merely admire
- Personal responsibility for the health of the congregation
- Renewal beginning with individual devotion
- The Lord building His church through faithful members

Discussion Prompts

- Which mark of the Acts 2 church do you most want to see grow in your congregation?
- What is one step you can take this week to help that happen?
- How can this group encourage one another toward it?