

Heart of Worship, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Worship in the Assembly: The Early Church Pattern

Acts 2:42-47

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal issue in this lesson is the pattern of the church's worship and life as it was given by the apostles and embraced from the very first day. Luke names four devotions: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. These are not a random sample of pious activities; they are the shape the Spirit-led apostles gave the church, and they remain the template for the gathered people of God. Help your class see that the church did not invent its worship by preference or experiment. It received a pattern and devoted itself to it, gladly and steadfastly.

Be sure to connect this snapshot to the wider New Testament witness. The "breaking of bread" anticipates the weekly gathering of the disciples on the first day of the week to remember the Lord (Acts 20:7). The devotion to the apostles' teaching points to the authority of that teaching, now preserved for us in the New Testament, as the standard for the church in every age. Present this as the positive principle your congregation treasures: we look to what Christ revealed through his apostles, and we follow it because we trust the One who gave it, not because we are bound to mere custom.

This lesson is also richly formational. Luke does not merely describe a structure; he describes a family ablaze with gladness, generosity, and praise, growing daily as the Lord added to their number. The aim is not only that your students understand the pattern, but that they long to live inside it, moving from spectators to participants, from attenders to the devoted. Help each person feel the difference between checking the box of attendance and giving themselves wholeheartedly to the worshiping life of the body.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke says the believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" first of all (v. 42). Why does the apostles' teaching come first in this list, and what does its priority tell us about the place God's word should hold in the worship and life of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the order. Of the four devotions, the apostles' teaching stands first, and that is no accident. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. Everything else, the fellowship, the table, the prayers, takes its shape from the teaching that came through the apostles.

Stress that the apostles' teaching was not their private opinion but the revealed will of Christ, delivered by the Spirit. To devote oneself to it was to submit to the authority of the risen Lord through his appointed messengers. For us, that same teaching is preserved in the New Testament, which remains the church's authority.

Help the class feel the contrast with our age, which often treats the assembly as a place for whatever inspires or entertains. The first church put the word at the center and built everything around it. A congregation devoted to the apostles' teaching will be shaped by Scripture, not by the shifting tastes of the culture.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The apostles' teaching as the foundation and first priority of the church (Acts 2:42).
- The authority of the apostles' teaching as the revealed will of Christ.
- The New Testament as the preserved form of that teaching for the church today.
- Worship and church life shaped by Scripture rather than by cultural preference.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the apostles' teaching come first in Luke's list?
- What does it look like for a congregation to be genuinely devoted to Scripture?
- How can we tell whether the word or our own preferences is actually shaping us?

Question 2

Student Question:

These Christians hungered for the apostles' teaching and gave themselves to it steadfastly. How would you describe your own appetite for God's word right now, and what is one specific way you could feed a hunger for Scripture rather than merely tolerating it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn the priority of the word into a personal appetite. The first Christians did not merely permit the apostles' teaching; they hungered for it and gave themselves to it. The question presses students to assess their own hunger honestly.

Help them see that appetite can be cultivated. Just as the body's hunger grows as it is fed well, the soul develops a taste for Scripture as it is taken in regularly. Many who feel little appetite simply have not eaten; the remedy is to begin, even modestly, and let the hunger grow.

Offer concrete handles: a daily reading plan, attentive listening in class and sermon, reading the passage before the assembly, studying with another believer. The goal is not guilt over a small appetite but a glad step toward feeding it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A healthy hunger for God's word as a mark of spiritual life.
- Appetite for Scripture as something cultivated through regular feeding.
- The difference between tolerating the word and delighting in it.
- Practical disciplines for growing in love for Scripture.

Discussion Prompts

- How would you honestly describe your current appetite for God's word?
- What has helped you grow a hunger for Scripture in the past?
- What is one concrete way you could feed that hunger this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

The believers devoted themselves to "the fellowship" (v. 42), and Luke shows them sharing life, meals, and possessions (vv. 44–46). What does true Christian fellowship involve according to this passage, and how is it more than simply being in the same room on Sunday?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Define fellowship from the text rather than from sentiment. The word means a sharing, a partnership, a common life. Luke shows it in action: shared meals, shared resources, time together day by day, glad and generous hearts. This is fellowship as a way of life, not a coffee hour.

Help the class see that this fellowship flowed from a shared salvation. People who had been added to the Lord together now belonged to one another. Their unity was not based on personality or preference but on their common life in Christ.

Draw the contrast with mere attendance. It is possible to occupy the same room for years and never share life. True fellowship knows and is known, bears burdens, meets needs, and shows up. Challenge the class to measure their fellowship by this fuller standard.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fellowship as a shared, common life in Christ, not mere social contact (Acts 2:42).
- Practical sharing of time, meals, and resources as marks of fellowship (Acts 2:44–46).
- Christian unity grounded in a common salvation rather than personal preference.
- The difference between attending together and truly sharing life.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Luke show us about what real fellowship involves?
- How is biblical fellowship more than being in the same room?
- Where is our fellowship strong, and where is it merely surface-level?

Question 4

Student Question:

The early church shared deeply and gladly, even meeting one another's material needs (vv. 44–45). Where is God calling you to move from being a spectator in the church toward genuine, costly fellowship? Name one relationship or need you could step toward this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the personal counterpart to question 3. The early church met real needs at real cost, selling possessions to provide for one another. Fellowship was not theoretical; it had a price tag and a calendar.

Encourage students to move from spectating to participating. Many believers hover at the edge of the body, present but uninvolved, known by name but not by life. The text invites a step inward, toward genuine, sometimes costly, involvement.

Make it concrete and doable. Ask each person to name one relationship to deepen or one need to meet this week: a meal taken to someone, a burden shared, a hard conversation entered, a lonely person welcomed. Small, costly steps build the kind of fellowship Luke describes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fellowship that meets real needs at real cost (Acts 2:44–45).
- The call to move from spectator to participant in the body.
- Generosity and burden-bearing as expressions of Christian love.
- The local body as the place where fellowship becomes concrete.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you currently a spectator who could become a participant?
- What is one costly step toward fellowship you could take this week?
- Whose need has God put in front of you that you could help meet?

Question 5

Student Question:

Among the things to which they devoted themselves was “the breaking of bread” (v. 42). In light of the rest of the New Testament, how should we understand this remembrance of the Lord at his table, and why does it belong at the center of the church's gathered worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Address “the breaking of bread” carefully. While the phrase can describe ordinary meals, its inclusion among the devotions of worship, alongside teaching and prayer, points to the church's

remembrance of the Lord at his table. The same community that broke bread house to house also gathered to remember the Lord's death until he comes.

Connect this to the wider witness. In Acts 20:7 the disciples gather on the first day of the week specifically to break bread, showing the Supper as a central, recurring act of the church's worship. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul gives the meaning: a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes.

Help the class see why it belongs at the center. The Supper preaches the gospel in bread and cup, binds the body together in shared remembrance, and lifts every eye to the cross and the coming of Christ. A church devoted to the breaking of bread keeps the death of Jesus continually before its heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The breaking of bread as the church's remembrance of the Lord at his table (Acts 2:42).
- The first day of the week as the appointed time for this remembrance (Acts 20:7).
- The Supper as a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- The Lord's table as a center of the church's gathered worship.
- Shared remembrance as a bond of unity in the body.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the remembrance of the Lord belong at the center of worship?
- What does the Supper proclaim every time the church observes it?
- How does the table bind the body together?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you come to the Lord's table, what is usually happening in your heart? Has the Supper become routine for you, and if so, what would help you come to it each week with the kind of devotion Luke describes here?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make this personal and gentle. The danger with anything done weekly is that it becomes routine. The hands receive the bread while the mind is elsewhere. This question invites honest self-examination without shame.

Help students recover the meaning. The Supper is a deliberate act of remembering: the body given, the blood shed, the love that went to the cross for them personally. To come with devotion is to fix the mind and heart on Christ for those few minutes, refusing to let the moment run on autopilot.

Offer practical help: arriving with the heart prepared, reading a passage about the cross beforehand, picturing the events of Calvary, examining oneself as Paul urges. Devotion at the table is a skill the Spirit grows as we give him our attention.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The peril of letting the Lord's Supper become routine.
- Remembrance as a deliberate act of mind and heart.
- Self-examination at the table (1 Corinthians 11:28).
- Practical preparation that restores devotion to the Supper.

Discussion Prompts

- What is usually happening in your heart during the Lord's Supper?
- How can you keep the Supper from becoming a mere routine?
- What would help you come to the table each week with fresh devotion?

Question 7

Student Question:

The fourth devotion is "the prayers" (v. 42). What does it tell us that the brand-new church, full of the Spirit, still gave itself steadfastly to prayer, both together and continually (v. 46)? What does prayer contribute to the worship and health of a congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the surprise. This was a Spirit-filled church, fresh from Pentecost, and yet it devoted itself steadfastly to prayer. Spiritual power did not make prayer unnecessary; it made the church more prayerful, not less.

Show what prayer contributes. Prayer expresses dependence on God, unites the body before the throne, and invites God's action in the church's life and mission. A congregation that prays together is confessing, with every petition, that the work belongs to the Lord.

Encourage a recovery of corporate prayer. In our hurry we can reduce prayer to a few formalities. The early church gave itself to the prayers, plural and steady. Challenge the class to value and protect the church's life of prayer, both gathered and personal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayer as a steadfast devotion of the church, even at its most Spirit-filled (Acts 2:42).
- Prayer as an expression of the church's dependence on God.
- Corporate prayer as a uniting and empowering practice.
- The priority of prayer in the worship and mission of the church.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would a Spirit-filled church still devote itself to prayer?
- What does prayer contribute to the health of a congregation?
- How can we recover a deeper devotion to prayer together?

Question 8

Student Question:

Luke describes a people of glad and generous hearts, praising God together (vv. 46–47). When you gather with the church, do you bring gladness and praise, or do you often arrive distracted, reluctant, or merely dutiful? What shapes the heart you carry into the assembly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw attention to the emotional tone Luke records: glad and generous hearts, praising God, favor with the people. The early church worshiped with joy, not grudging duty. The heart they brought to the assembly shaped everything.

Invite honest self-examination about the heart we carry in. Many arrive harried, distracted, or reluctant, and then wonder why worship feels flat. The gladness of the early church flowed from hearts full of what God had done for them.

Point to the source and the cure. Gladness in worship grows from remembering the gospel, from gratitude for salvation, from preparing the heart before we come. Encourage students to tend the heart they bring, so that praise becomes natural rather than forced.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gladness and praise as the tone of early Christian worship (Acts 2:46–47).
- The heart we bring as decisive for the worship we offer.
- Gratitude for the gospel as the wellspring of joyful worship.
- Preparing the heart before the assembly.

Discussion Prompts

- What heart do you usually carry into the assembly?
- What tends to rob your worship of gladness?
- How can remembering the gospel restore joy to your worship?

Question 9

Student Question:

This passage shows the very first church, guided by the apostles, settling into a clear pattern of worship and life: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. The New

Testament presents the apostles' teaching as the authoritative pattern Christ gave his church, and shows the disciples gathering on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Why should we look to this apostolic pattern, rather than to human invention or changing preference, as our guide for the worship and work of the church? How is following that pattern an expression of glad submission to Christ rather than mere traditionalism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson. The passage shows the apostles giving the church a definite shape, and the church devoting itself to that shape from the first day. The four devotions are not Luke's suggestions; they are the apostolic pattern, and they carry the authority of the Lord who appointed the apostles and sent the Spirit to guide them into all truth.

Draw the line to the rest of the New Testament. The breaking of bread here connects to Acts 20:7, where the disciples gather specifically on the first day of the week to break bread. The devotion to the apostles' teaching connects to the whole New Testament, which preserves that teaching as the church's standard. We are not left to guess how the church should worship and work; the apostles have shown us.

Present the positive principle plainly and warmly. Following the apostolic pattern is not cold traditionalism; it is glad submission to Christ. We look to what he revealed through his apostles because we trust him, and because his way is good. This guards us in both directions: from inventing worship according to our own preferences, and from clinging to merely human customs as though they were divine commands. The authority is Christ's word, joyfully received.

Guard against two distortions. One treats the pattern as a lifeless checklist, scrupulously kept but drained of the gladness Luke records. The other dismisses any pattern at all, making preference the only guide. The text closes both errors: a devoted people, following the apostles' teaching, with glad and generous hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The apostolic pattern as Christ's guide for the worship and work of the church (Acts 2:42).
- The authority of the apostles' teaching, preserved in the New Testament.
- First-day-of-the-week gathering to break bread as the apostolic practice (Acts 20:7).
- Following the pattern as glad submission to Christ, not mere traditionalism.
- The pattern guards against both human invention and the binding of mere custom.
- Devotion to the pattern joined with glad and generous hearts.

Discussion Prompts

- Why should we look to the apostolic pattern rather than to preference or invention?
- How is following that pattern an act of glad submission to Christ?
- How do we keep the pattern from hardening into a lifeless checklist?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole portrait: a devoted people, steadfast in teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer, glad-hearted and growing. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you to move from attending to devotion, and one concrete step you will take this week to belong more fully to the worshiping life of his church.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use the capstone to gather the whole portrait: a devoted people, steadfast in teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer, glad and growing. Ask students to name where they stand on the spectrum from attending to devotion.

Press for one concrete step inward. For some that means feeding a hunger for the word; for others, entering real fellowship; for others, fresh devotion at the table or a renewed life of prayer. The goal is a genuine move from spectator to participant.

End by lifting their eyes to the Lord who built this church. He is still adding to his people, still calling the devoted, still pleased to dwell among a worshiping family. Encourage the class to give themselves to that family with the same gladness the first disciples knew.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The movement from attending to wholehearted devotion.
- Personal participation in the worshiping life of the body.
- The Lord as the one who builds and grows his church (Acts 2:47).
- Glad belonging as the fruit of the gospel.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you on the spectrum from attending to devotion?
- What one step will you take this week to belong more fully to the body?
- How does it encourage you that the Lord is still building his church?