

Heart of Worship

Lesson 3: Worship in the Assembly: The Early Church Pattern -- Acts 2:42-47

The day had been like no other in the history of the world. The Spirit had fallen, Peter had preached, and three thousand people had been cut to the heart, had repented and been baptized, and had been added to the Lord in a single afternoon. By evening, Jerusalem held a community that had not existed that morning: the church of Jesus Christ, brand new, Spirit-filled, and utterly unsure, you would think, of how to live. They had no buildings, no programs, no centuries of custom to lean on. And yet Luke tells us, in a few unforgettable verses, exactly what they did. They did not improvise a religion. They gave themselves to a pattern.

“They devoted themselves,” Luke writes, “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Read that sentence slowly, because it is a snapshot of the church at its purest, before division, before drift, before any of the corruptions that would later creep in. Four things held them together: the teaching that came from the apostles, the shared life of the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. This was not a list someone invented. It was the shape the apostles gave the church, and the church embraced it with a devotion that comes through in every line.

And notice the word “devoted.” It is a strong word, the kind you would use for a soldier at his post or a runner who will not quit. These were not casual attenders sampling a new spiritual option. They steadfastly persisted in these things, day after day, with glad and generous hearts. Luke says they were together, they ate together, they praised God together, and they enjoyed favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily. Worship was not an hour they attended; it was the beating heart of a new family that could hardly bear to be apart.

We live a long way from that upper room, and it is easy to let the assembly become something small in our minds: a service to attend, a box to check, an obligation that competes with a hundred other Sunday options. This passage calls us back. It shows us what God’s people look like when worship and life are woven together, when believers devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to one another, to the Lord’s table, and to prayer. Read these verses and let them stir a holy longing in you, not merely to attend the assembly, but to belong to the kind of community God created on that first day.

Group Discussion: Luke says the first Christians “devoted themselves” to four things: the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. If an outsider watched our congregation for a month, what would they conclude we are most devoted to? Where do you see us reflecting this early pattern, and where might we have drifted from it?

Personal Reflection: The word “devoted” describes a wholehearted, persistent commitment, not a casual attendance. Honestly, which word better describes your own relationship to the assembly and the life of the church right now, “devoted” or “attending”? What would need to change in your heart or your schedule for devotion to grow?

Read Acts 2:42-47

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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.

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 20:7, the disciples gathered on the first day of the week to break bread; Hebrews 10:24–25, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, but encouraging one another; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, the church gathering and giving on the first day of the week; Colossians 3:16, the word of Christ dwelling richly as we teach and admonish one another; Acts 2:38–41, the gospel response that created this worshiping community in the first place.