



Know Group Community

Summary and Goal

Biblical community is critical to the health and continuity of spiritual growth. Because it is so important, having a shared understanding of what it means to be in biblical community and what the expectations are for those in biblical community is foundational to success. The model of the early church provides a pattern for those expectations.

Main Passages

Acts 2:42-47

Session Outline

1. Building the Fellowship (Acts 2:42-43)
2. Ministry to One Another (Acts 2:44-45)
3. Contagious Fellowship (Acts 2:46-47)

Theological Theme

Biblical community shapes those within it and reaches those outside of it.

Christ Connection

Jesus modeled the community that is found in biblical community in His relationship with His disciples. As the Church was born, His disciples employed what they had learned from Jesus to move new believers forward in their discipleship.

Missional Application

Biblical community provides the environment in which believers can grow and find support as they serve their friends, neighbors, co-workers and the world.

Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-29; 28:1-16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30-31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30-63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

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Session Plan

Know Group Community

? For Further Discussion

Describe a life situation you experienced that would have been dramatically different if all of the conversations you had were via technology and without physical contact. Who were the people in your life that so significantly shaped that situation by their presence?

Introduction

Before your group time, show this video: <https://vimeo.com/364391591>

- ? Why do you think it is so tempting to settle for shallow, superficial connection instead of pursuing real community?
- ? When you think about transparent, open community, what hesitations do you have? What aspects of it intimidate you?

In this week's session, Luke recorded the manner in which the explosive response to the gospel preached at Pentecost was transformed into biblical community. The manner in which the new believers were connected with one another demonstrated the importance of being grounded in Scripture and humbly serving one another. In doing so, their love for one another spread to the lost and searching community around them.

1. Building the Fellowship (Acts 2:42-43)

The events that led to up to Luke's account of the biblical community in the New Testament Church were absolutely unique to that moment in history. Despite the uniqueness of those events, however, there were great patterns for ministry established as the apostles constantly sought answers to the challenge of such explosive growth. One of the most basic challenges was the creation of a new faith family that encompassed believers from numerous different backgrounds.

- ? What would you imagine to be the most difficult hurdle to overcome in helping a new group move toward meaningful relationship? Why?
- ? Application: What are some expectations you have for what you will experience in a biblical group? Why is it important to acknowledge those expectations at the start?

2. Ministry to One Another (Acts 2:44-45)

Having been immersed, literally and figuratively, in the truths of the gospel and the practice of Christian worship, personally and collectively, the believers were unified in mind and purpose. The evidence for their solidarity was in the management of their physical resources. Holding all

things in common had to do with the relinquishing of personal claim to any possessions in favor of blessing others or providing for needs others could not meet for themselves. This attitude reflected a practice that Jesus modeled during His earthly ministry (John 12:6). It was not that the sharing of possessions was a radically new idea that came upon the new believers via the Holy Spirit. Rather, they were adopting the practice Jesus had modeled in their own journey of following Him.

- ❓ How does Luke's description of the early church having all things in common differ from your experience of asking a friend or neighbor for help? How is it different from your attitude when a neighbor asks to borrow a tool?
- ❓ Application: Is it easier for you to meet a need with physical labor or by sacrificing financially? If your group wanted to help someone from the group go on a mission trip, would you go? (Brentwoodbaptist.com/missions)

3. Contagious Fellowship (Acts 2:46-47)

The impact of the selfless nature of the biblical community had a ripple effect throughout the various spheres of society. The believers met together daily! What an incredible thought. There was no norm for Christian worship services saying they should meet at particular intervals. Instead, the believers desired community with each other so fiercely that they devoted themselves to meeting daily. They began in one of the larger areas of the temple for public worship and public witnessing of their new faith. Shortly after the time of public worship and witnessing, the community moved to a common meal for the purpose building fellowship.

- ❓ Why is it significant that the believers spent part of their daily time together witnessing to others about their faith in Christ? How does that challenge your expectation of what a biblical group should be like?
- ❓ Application: Luke mentioned that the believers ate together with "joyful and sincere hearts." What do you think a modern biblical group would look like if the members came to it with sincere hearts? How would that differ from the other organizations you participate in?

Conclusion

- ❓ In what ways do you enjoy serving others? What areas do you have expertise or fulfillment? How can you leverage that in your own group?
- ❓ Who is the most legitimately joyful person you've ever known? As you watch them, what impact do you see that they have on other people? How does that resonate with this Acts 2 passage?

❓ For Further Discussion

Who are the unbelievers your groups is praying for?

What is your default response when conversations about applying the Bible become challenging or passionate? Why is it important to continue to engage in those moments?



Expanded Session Content

Know Group Community

Introduction

Before your group time, show this video: <https://vimeo.com/364391591>

As culture becomes increasingly isolated, the notion of being in a group has rapidly changed meetings. Now such networks and interactions are largely done through a screen for a short period of time, and the interaction can be extremely superficial. Such an understanding of community, though, fails in the moments of life when human contact is needed. It fails in the seasons of a lost loved one. It fails when the anxiety of a decision leads to restlessness and an absence of any sense of peace. It fails in moments of jubilation when celebration of blessing, provision, or healing is needed. It fails when accountability is needed in the face of deeply engrained sin in order to bring about restoration.

Realistically speaking, the forms of community just mentioned are a foreign concept to many. The idea of what it means to have a deeply personal, transparent, genuine friendship is like speaking a language they've never heard before. For the body of Christ, though, community is a key part of growth and discipleship. Believers are wired to desire the presence and friendship of other believers in order to reflect the community that God Himself enjoys in the Trinity (Genesis 1:26-27). How is a group to function, then, in order to move toward accomplishing that monumental task?

At the very beginning of the New Testament church, after Pentecost had come upon the believers, the apostles faced the very same challenge. No one had ever been in a Christian group before because they didn't exist. The only model was Jesus and His disciples. Fortunately, Luke recorded what those groups looked like and how they functioned in Acts 2. Using them as a model provides great insight for what biblical community should look like in the church today.

- ❓ Why do you think it is so tempting to settle for shallow, superficial connection instead of pursuing real community?
- ❓ Describe a life situation you experienced that would have been dramatically different if all of the conversations you had were via technology and without physical contact. Who were the people in your life that so significantly shaped that situation by their presence?



When you think about transparent, open community, what hesitations do you have? What aspects of it intimidate you?

Session Summary

In this week's session, Luke recorded the manner in which the explosive response to the gospel preached at Pentecost was transformed into biblical community. The manner in which the new believers were connected with one another demonstrated the importance of being grounded in Scripture and humbly serving one another. In doing so, their love for one another spread to the lost and searching community around them.

1. Building the Fellowship (Acts 2:42-43)

The events that led to up to Luke's account of the biblical community in the New Testament Church were absolutely unique to that moment in history. Never again would the world see the initial indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the empowered preaching of the gospel in numerous different languages at Pentecost, or the 2,500% growth of the Church after one sermon. Despite the uniqueness of those events, however, there were great patterns for ministry established as the apostles constantly sought answers to the challenge of such explosive growth. One of the most basic challenges was the creation of a new faith family that encompassed believers from numerous different backgrounds.

As Luke pointed out in Acts 2, the first step in moving believers from unconnected to becoming a faith family was building fellowship among them. Because the defining element in this new family was their new faith in Christ, the fellowship was built around the core the gospel and gathering together. Following Christ meant a completely different way of living, so the believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles in order to learn how to rightly live and believe as followers of Christ. According to F.F. Bruce, what made the apostles teaching unique was that it "was authoritative because it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles in the power of the Spirit."¹ Being grounded in Scripture as the beginning point of their community secured the growing community in truth. The ground rules of their fellowship were the teachings of Jesus Himself, taught through those who followed Him closest and who were inspired and led by the Holy Spirit as they taught.

The truth of Scripture found expression in the community cooperating together. As the truth of the Bible was proclaimed, it was celebrated through "the breaking of bread", prayer, and fellowship. The breaking of bread was an allusion to the celebrating of the Lord's Supper. The prayer was a communal experience in which the believers shared prayers together. The significant aspect of that for future believers was the immediate response to

the truth taught within the group. The fact that the response involved the entire group continued to form the familial bond among them.

- ❓ What would you imagine to be the most difficult hurdle to overcome in helping a new group move toward meaningful relationship? Why?
- ❓ Application: What are some expectations you have for what you will experience in a biblical group? Why is it important to acknowledge those expectations at the start? Did your group discuss a covenant or list of agreements when it started?

As a result of the believers' devotion to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, these experiences left the believers in a collective sense of awe. This movement of God was formative to the community. Luke added the signs and wonders being performed by the apostles as a further catalyst for their collective awe and God's life-changing activity among the believers that solidifies the bonds of your fellowship.

2. Ministry to One Another (Acts 2:44-45)

Having been immersed, literally and figuratively, in the truths of the gospel and the practice of Christian worship, personally and collectively, the believers were unified in mind and purpose. The evidence for their solidarity was in the management of their physical resources. Holding all things in common had to do with the relinquishing of personal claim to any possessions in favor of blessing others or providing for needs others could not meet for themselves. This attitude reflected a practice that Jesus modeled during His earthly ministry (John 12:6). It was not that the sharing of possessions was a radically new idea that came upon the new believers via the Holy Spirit. Rather, they were adopting the practice Jesus had modeled in their own journey of following Him.

Such selflessness was at the core of what it meant to follow Jesus. In fact, the event that served as the speed bump for holding things in common occurred later in Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira perverted this act of ministering to one another. Making their posed generosity an opportunity to draw attention to themselves in the corporate gathering, they decided to sell property and claimed to give the whole amount to the poor of the church, while actually keeping some of the profit themselves. Selfishness snuck in and unity was ushered out, demonstrating a temptation that would always be with the church. It was against such fragmentation and lack of care for one another that Paul wrote, "...make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone

should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:2-5)

- ❓ How does Luke’s description of the early church having all things in common differ from your experience of asking a friend or neighbor for help? How is it different from your attitude when a neighbor asks to borrow a tool?
- ❓ Application: Is it easier for you to meet a need with physical labor or by sacrificing financially? If your group wanted to help someone from the group go on a mission trip, would you go? (Brentwoodbaptist.com/missions)

The idea of biblical community was based on the model of Jesus with His disciples specifically and Jesus on behalf of the world generally. Jesus set aside the glories and riches of Heaven in order to become a man so that those who could not save themselves could be freed from the grip of sin and death; the believers modeled a similar selflessness by foregoing their claim to that to which they were rightly due for the sake of meeting the desperate needs of others.

The need of the sacrifice was great as, for many of the new believers, their faith in Christ would have meant ostracism socially and commercially. They not only needed the ability to secure basic sustenance, but also needed a new family. So it was in the biblical community—everyone brought whatever gift, ability, or material resource they had into the community to minister to others in any way they could. There were no freeloaders or passive members, they shared the load. Everyone was fully devoted to the fellowship and to the cause of Christ.

3. Contagious Fellowship (Acts 2:46-47)


The impact of the selfless nature of the biblical community had a ripple effect throughout the various spheres of society. The believers met together daily! What an incredible thought. The believers desired community with each other so fiercely that they devoted themselves to meeting daily.

They met in host homes and enjoyed a fellowship meal that combined Bible study and community. In addition, the meal was a time of great joy and sharing.

- ❓ Why is it significant that the believers spent part of their daily time together witnessing to others about their faith in Christ? How does that challenge your expectation of what a biblical group should be like?

Adopt the Attitude of Christ

Paul’s letter to the Philippians stressed unity, joy, selflessness, and love more than of his other letters in part because he was trying to heal a significant rift in congregation between two of its leaders, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3). As the rift threatened the gospel-effectiveness of the congregation due to its turning inward, Paul repeatedly encouraged them to have the attitude of Christ.


-  Application: Luke mentioned that the believers ate together with “joyful and sincere hearts.” What do you think a modern biblical group would look like if the members came to it with sincere hearts? How does this group differ from the other organizations you participate in?

The Common Meal

According to Bruce, “The community was probably organized along the lines of a voluntary type of organization called a haburah, a central feature of which was the common meal.”² The etiquette of the meal was a relaxed pace, intimate conversation, and fellowship.

Interestingly, the last effect that Luke mentioned of the nature of the community that defined the believers was that they were “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” This comment introduced a change of focus. As the community was praising God in their public meetings, in their house groups over their meals, through Bible study, and in their various interactions, the favor they enjoyed with all the people increased as well. So who are “all the people”? “All the people” could not refer to the relationships among the believers, as Luke had just spent five verses discussing the various manner in which the believers enjoyed their developing faith family. Instead, “all the people” linked the actions among the believers from the previous five verses to the end of verse 47, namely, “Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

The close of verse 47 demonstrates the beauty of biblical community done well. As the believers modeled the life and character of Christ to one another, the difference was so stark to unbelievers that they wanted to be around the believers. The believers had great favor with the unbelievers because the believers were demonstrating the selfless, joyful, generous, Christ-community that all of humanity was wired at creation to desire.

-  Who are you praying for that you would love to see baptized this year?

Conclusion

Luke’s chronicling of the early days of the New Testament church is extremely helpful for how modern believers go about defining group life. Here are some application points for biblical community today.

First, biblical community must be grounded in the Bible. While that may sound like an obvious statement, studying and applying God’s Word to daily living can occasionally lead to some transparent and challenging conversations. Discipleship is not always easy, but the relationships that result from having those delicate conversations are the relationships that become family. Spiritual growth should always start with daily personal time with God in His word, which leads us to living in biblical community. If you are interested in following the weekly sermon for your daily devotions, they are available at Brentwoodbaptist.com/daily-devotional.

Second, everyone has a part in a biblical community. Share the load. There can be no freeloaders or passive observers. Part of modeling Christian community is serving one another, which is the great reason God invested spiritual gifts in His people. The blessing in everyone participating in ministering to others is that nothing forms those family-level bonds faster and stronger than serving one another. Brentwood Baptist's membership process has a time of discovering your spiritual gifts. For more information, see Brentwoodbaptist.com/discover

Third, biblically functioning groups have a great capacity to share Christ with others. Many people have "heard" an explanation of the gospel before, but far less have ever seen what the gospel lived out looks like. There is nothing more compelling for the gospel than the beauty of the love of Christ being lived out in His people. Invite your friends, neighbors, and co-workers into a group. Pray for a chance to have a gospel conversation with them.

Fourth, because the love of Christ lived out is so compelling, the group that functions biblically has great potential to establish great favor among unbelievers.

- ❓ Who are the unbelievers your group is praying for?
- ❓ In what ways do you enjoy serving others? What areas do you have expertise or fulfillment? How can you leverage that in your own group?
- ❓ Who is the most legitimately joyful person you've ever known? As you watch them, what impact do you see that they have on other people? How does that resonate with this Acts 2 passage?
- ❓ What is your default response when conversations about applying the Bible become challenging or passionate? Why is it important to continue to engage in those moments?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer, thanking God for the gift of biblical community. Ask Him to move our church further into community that honors Him.

Additional Resources

- *DiscipleShift* by Jim Putman
- *Multiply* by Francis Chan
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

For Next Week

Session Title

- Disciples Making Disciples

Main Passages

- Matthew 4:19, Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8, Acts 2:42-47

Session Outline

1. Gospel: Share Your God Story Often (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19)
2. Groups: Connected to Others Who Live Out Acts 2 (Acts 2:42-47)
3. Go! (Matthew 28:19-20)

Memorize

⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

- Acts 2:46-47a

Extended Commentary

Acts 2:42-47

2:42. At various times in Acts, especially in the early chapters, Luke gives summary reports of how the church is doing. Here we have the first. In it our author describes what a biblical church really looks like, not only in the first century, but in every century from the Lord's ascension until his second coming.

A biblical church is marked by teaching. Thousands of new converts needed to understand precisely how Peter linked Old Testament text with the ministry of Jesus. Theologians call it "Messianic Christology". It became the core of New Testament doctrine.

Furthermore, the new Christians engaged in fellowship. Someone called the church "the colony of heaven." Here the believers fulfilled the words the Lord gave his disciples just before the crucifixion: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

Then the believers joined in breaking bread—Luke's term for what Paul calls "the Lord's Supper." Quite possibly they practiced it differently than many churches do now, likely with a full meal. Still, the memorial to the Lord's death until he comes again remains the central theme of believers breaking bread together. Quite likely, the phrase also describes Christians fellowshiping together at meal time.

Their worship also included prayer, in our text literally, "the prayers." New prayers and old. Probably public and private.

2:43-45. In addition to their worship, these believers became actively involved in the work of the Lord. Luke uses the same language to describe the apostles that he used of Jesus in 2:22. The miracles showed evidence of a new era. God gave miracles when Moses brought down the law and when Elijah and other prophets thundered a new message across Israel. "Miracles" does not appear in Acts after chapter 15, even though God continued to do miracles beyond that point.

Their work also included learning how to live and love together. They sold their possessions and made sure everybody had plenty. Communism? Absolutely not—this was voluntary, contemporary, and discretionary.

2:46-47. The early church was marked by faithful attendance—meeting together daily in the temple courts. They prayed, gave, ate, and rejoiced together. They practiced the presence of Jesus—still a good idea for his people. Luke makes good use of the Greek word *homothumadon*, translated together, applying it in 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; and 5:12.

Their witness included a demonstration of hospitality. No home would be large enough to house even a small group of believers for a short time, so they literally went house to house. Luke wants us to see how good it was—they enjoyed favor with the people. Not the Sanhedrin, but common folks all around the city. Witnessing may be the main theme in Acts, but praising certainly represents a secondary strain common in Luke's writings (the word *ainountes* is used nine times in the New Testament, seven by Luke). What happens to believers who worship, work, and witness for their Lord? The Lord grows the church. Let's not miss the order—first godly relationships with each other, then growth.³

References

1. Bruce, F.F. *The Book of Acts*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988.
2. Ibid.
3. Gangel, Kenneth O., and Max Anders. *Acts*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN.: Holman Reference, 2006.

Author Bio

F.F. Bruce (The Book of Acts)

F.F. Bruce (1910 - 1990) was a distinguished scholar on the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, and wrote several studies the best known of which is Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free (published in the United Kingdom under the title Paul, the Apostle of the Free Spirit). He also wrote commentaries on several biblical books including the Gospel of John, Acts, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Kenneth O. Gangel (Acts)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Max Anders (Acts)

I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and earned my doctorate at Western Seminary. I have taught on the college and seminary level, was an original team member with Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, am a veteran pastor, and have authored over twenty-five books, including the best-selling 30 Days to Understanding the Bible (a new 30th Anniversary edition was recently released). In addition, I am the creator and general editor of the thirty-two volume Holman Bible Commentary series. I am also the founder of The 7 Marks Resource Group, a content-creation group dedicated to providing information, strategies and resources to guide and accelerate spiritual growth (see my blog at www.maxanders.com).

Jim Putman (DiscipleShift)

Jim Putman is the co-founder and Senior Pastor of Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, Idaho. Real Life was launched in 1998 with a commitment to discipleship and the model of discipleship Jesus practiced, which is called, "Relational Discipleship." Outreach Magazine continually lists Real Life Ministries among the top one hundred most influential churches in America. Jim is also a co-founder and leader with the Relational Discipleship Network.

Francis Chan (Multiply)

Francis Chan is the best-selling author of Crazy Love, Forgotten God, Erasing Hell, You and Me Forever and the host of the BASIC.series (Who Is God & We Are Church). Currently, Francis is planting churches in the San Francisco area and recently launched a countrywide discipleship movement called Multiply with David Platt.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Life Together)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi dissident, and key founding member of the Confessing Church. His writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential, and his book The Cost of Discipleship has been described as a modern classic.