

Sunday, May 11, 2025 | Filled

Week 7 | Acts 2:42- 47| “Church DNA”

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Every church is unique. Some are large while others are small. Some play traditional music while others play contemporary. Some have a simple design aesthetic, while others are more ornate. And, depending on who you ask, you'll get various opinions on what sort of things should be underscored in church. Someone might say that a healthy church has programming for all ages, from the young to the old. Someone else might argue that a great church emphasizes missions. Still others would assert that a thriving church prioritizes helping the poor.

However, while size, style, programming, and demographics are important factors to consider when judging the condition of a church, such things are too subjective. How small is too small, or how big is too big? Programming is good, but which programs are better than others? Everyone likes music, but not everyone likes the same kind of music. What style is best? The subjectivity of such issues makes it impossible to make any firm conclusions. This is why the standard by which a church should be judged is the standard of Scripture. This may sound obvious, but too many Christians overlook this key principle, choosing instead to evaluate a church with their personal preferences rather than biblical principles.

In today's passage, we'll learn the church's DNA. We'll see how the Bride of Christ should behave and look. These characteristics are the metrics by which every church ought to be evaluated.

I want you to notice four things:

**i. Vs. 42 – The Piety of the Early Church**

**Vs. 42** – The term "devoted" refers to an intense, continual action; it carries the idea of dedication and determination. And Luke tells us, their devotion was directed to four things:

- (1) **Instruction** ("the apostles' teaching") – Believers didn't listen to any kind of teaching; they adhered to the apostles' doctrine. A church that learns together stays together; it ought to abide by objective **doctrinal** principles rather than subjective personal preferences. **Novelty in the pulpit is a bane to the church.** The bride of Christ ought to desire nothing but the unchanging word of God.
- (2) **Connection** ("the fellowship") – The Greek term translated as "fellowship" is **κοινωνία** (*koinōnia*), and it was initially used in a commercial context to describe business partners.<sup>1</sup> The NT uses the term in a spiritual context to demonstrate a Christian's standing with God, Christ, and other believers. **There is a togetherness to church life that mustn't be discarded, diminished, or denied.** A church that comes together stays together; it ought to maintain **relational** attachments. God is triune; he's a being of community. Likewise, his people should prioritize meeting together (cf. Heb. 10:24-25). **Christianity cannot be lived in isolation.**
- (3) **Nutrition** ("the breaking of bread") – This doesn't refer to communion, but it does refer to a common meal (cf. Lu. 9:16; 22:19; 24:30, 35; Ac. 27:35-36). A church that provides for each other stays together; it ought to meet the **physical** needs of its members. If we harden our hearts to the needs of our fellow Christians, **we can hardly say we are of the household of faith** (cf. Ja. 2:14-17). Put simply, believers ought to have each other over for dinner. It is completely natural to eat with family and friends. And it is entirely appropriate to share a meal with someone from your Christian community.
- (4) **Supplication** ("the prayers") – A church that prays for each other stays together; it should continually seek **spiritual** guidance from the Lord. If the Temple was supposed to be a "house of prayer" (Lu. 19:56), we who are the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19) ought to be a people who pray.

## **ii. Vs. 43 - The Persona of the Early Church.**

<sup>1</sup>

Peterson, David G., *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2009), p. 160.

**Vs. 43** – The term 'awe' is the Greek word *phobos*; it is more often translated as a 'fear' (cf. Ac. 5:5, 11; 19:17). However, in this context, it signifies a deep sense of reverence and respect. All the things that occurred on the Day of Pentecost gripped the hearts of the people in such a way that they became reverential. People tremble when the Lord's presence is undeniable (cf. Heb. 12:18-21). Everyone could see God's hand at work, and they were living in unprecedented times. This realization unsettled them.

We're told that *"many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."* Peter will heal a lame beggar (cf. 3:1-11), a man of palsy (cf. 9:33-34), raise a woman from the dead (cf. 9:36-41), and so on. Paul will also heal a cripple (cf. 14:8-10), perform an exorcism (cf. 16:16-18), restore a boy to life (cf. 20:9-12), and so on. As with Jesus' miracles (cf. Lu. 5:24; Ac. 2:22-24), the Twelve were conduits for God's miraculous power. These miracles authenticated the apostolic teaching; they proved that the things they said were authoritative (cf. Heb. 2:3-4).

### iii. Vs. 44-45 – The Philanthropy of the Early Church

**Vs. 44-45** – Luke returns to the idea of *"fellowship"* by describing how the believers *"were together and had all things in common."* He explains that they sold *"their possessions and belongings"* and distributed *"the proceeds to all, as any had need."* The verbs "sell" and "distribute" are imperfect, indicating these actions were ongoing. The Christians helped each other out time and time again.

To be clear, this is ***not*** a proof text to support communism and/or socialism.<sup>2</sup> This is evident for four reasons. First, this passage is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Though a general lesson about generosity can be drawn from these verses, saying that every church should act exactly like this ignores what the text does; its primary purpose is explanatory, not obligatory. Second, the faith community is in view. These donations supported those *within* the church, not those *without*. Third, the believers had possessions of their own; the church did not take possession of them until they were donated.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, they gave away their belongings willingly (2 Cor. 9:7); they were not compelled to do so by coercion or law (cf. 5:4).

This is not to say we should only help those within the church community. The Parable of the Good Samaritan shows the folly of defining "neighbor" too narrowly (cf. Lu.

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, David W., "Does Acts Teach that Christians Should Be Communists?" November 16, 2015, *Center for Faith & Culture*, <https://cfc.sebts.edu/faith-and-economics/does-acts-teach-that-christians-should-be-communists/>, [accessed May 9, 2025].

<sup>3</sup> Peterson (2009), p. 163, "It is important to note that this sharing of possessions was voluntary and occasional."

10:25-37). Proverbs 19:17 states, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.” So, yes, we ought to give to the poor as often as possible (cf. Deut. 15:7-11). However, a Christian’s charity should be most prevalent within the faith community. Christians take care of their own.

This was a community that was **generous** to each other. **They took care of one another’s needs** (cf. 4:32-37). As Bock explains, “That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material needs are also a concern and are being generously provided.”<sup>4</sup> James 2:15-16 says, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” **Don’t say, “I’ll pray for you,” when it is in your power to say, “I’ll help you.”** Jesus said, “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lu. 12:33-34). The heart of the early church was with the church people. They saw their brothers and sisters in need, and they were quick to meet those needs. They could not bear to see their fellow Christians going without the basic necessities of life.

#### **iv. Vs. 46-47 – The Pattern of the Early Church**

**Vs. 46-47** – As with vs. 42, Luke gives us another summation of the early church. This time, he discusses their “day by day” activities. Luke stresses “the regularity of all the events he records here.”<sup>5</sup>

- (1) Day by day, the believers attended “the temple together.” Today, Jews and Christians don’t mingle. But, considering that at this time, Jews were the only Christians, it shouldn’t surprise us that they worshiped in the Temple. After all, Christianity is the continuation and culmination of Judaism.
- (2) Day by day, the believers ate meals (“breaking bread”) in each other’s homes. It is one thing to go with someone to the temple. Inviting that same person back to your house for dinner is something else entirely. Their fellowship didn’t end when the service ended; it carried on outside the walls of the Temple.

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<sup>4</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2007), p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Peterson (2009), p. 163.

- (3) Day by day, the believers “received their food with glad and generous hearts.” “Generous” in the sense of simplicity or sincerity (cf. Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22).<sup>6</sup> A healthy faith community is one that *sincerely* gives thanks. This wasn’t a community that complained or grumbled. Neither were these believers meeting together under compulsion. They were “glad” to get together; it was a joy, not a chore.
- (4) Day by day, the believers were “praising God and having favor with all the people.” Their focus was toward God and toward others.<sup>7</sup> Christianity was, at least initially, considered positively by all. The community could see how the believers treated each other, and they couldn’t help but approve.
- (5) Day by day, “the Lord added to their number...those who were being saved.” Peterson’s puts it quite right when he says,

“[The believers] gracious attitude was a significant factor in the turning of many more to Jesus as Lord and Christ. In the process of what is often called ‘church growth’, Luke highlights both the behavior of believers and the sovereign determination of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Though seated at the Father's right hand, the Lord is at work, adding new converts to the church. And, by and large, he uses the believers' way of life to impact the community around them. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:33-35). When the church lives on mission and loves each other well, people are drawn to Christ, and salvation decisions are made. A good reputation is a good evangelistic tool (cf. Pro. 22:1); it's infectious. As Bock puts it, “When the early church said that God cared, the care they gave their own demonstrated this.”<sup>9</sup>

**So, what’s the takeaway?** The early church was a learning, fellowshiping, loving, worshiping, and evangelizing church.

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<sup>6</sup> BDAG, p. 155, ἀφελότης, ητος, η

<sup>7</sup> Bock (2007), p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Peterson (2009), p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Bock (2007), p. 155.

## **Video Description:**

### **Filled | Week 7 | “Church DNA” (Acts 2:42-47)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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## **Sermon Manuscript:**

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Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: [info@GracePointeLife.com](mailto:info@GracePointeLife.com)

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

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