



The First Church

Acts 2:42-47

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**This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We're in a series in the Book of Acts called "Church Afire," and we've come to chapter 2:42-47. The Holy Spirit has just filled all of the believers who were gathered together in worship, and they all started speaking in other tongues about the wonders of God. There was such joy in the gathering that the bystanders thought they were all drunk, but Peter the Apostle stood up and preached the greatest sermon ever preached, and the church grew in one day from 120 to 3000 people.

3000 people! The first church became a mega-church! These days, mega-churches are easy targets, and there is a lot of criticism thrown toward the rich, modern-day church. Many of them bring it upon themselves for their luxurious spending or partisan political influence. However, just because a church is a mega-church does not mean that it should be criticized. There are a lot of large churches doing amazing works for the Lord, using their abundant resources humbly and wisely.

The first Christian church became a mega church in one day, and the Holy Spirit worked through faith-filled believers to make that happen. Our passage this morning gives a basic blueprint of how the early church functioned; what the early church was devoted to. This is an excellent blueprint for the church to follow, but it is truly the Holy Spirit working and empowering believers within the church to bring it to life. Without the Spirit of God, the church is spiritually dead and more likely filled with the spirit of the world.

I invite you to open to Acts 2:42-47.

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV).

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 2:42–47.

The Word of God for the people of God.

This passage should be forever stamped on the entry ways and walls of all churches. I would love to see our church devote itself entirely to this blueprint and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so. Now, we are devoted, and we do try to walk in step with the early church, but I think we can be even more intentional. Our leadership team and I can work to lead us in more practical ways to live out the Lord's call upon his church. I think we can be even more willing to be led and empowered by the Spirit of God. Amen?

Five-Fold Function of the Church

From this passage, we see quite clearly five main functions of the early church: teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism. This is the basic blueprint of the early church—teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism. Through each of these five functions, the Lord empowers his people and builds his church.

Every dying church here in America needs to take a hard look at what they are devoted to and how their devotion lines up with the early church and the Holy Spirit. It's impossible for a church to die while faithfully fulfilling these five functions and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the basic path to flourishing, and this is the basic path for us to walk down—this is the basic path for all of us individually in our own lives.

A thriving, growing church is not about being a cool church with all the latest technology and flash. It's about being empowered by the Spirit of God in teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism. When I say church, I'm really talking about us. Let's dive briefly into each of these five functions.

They Devoted Themselves to the Apostle's Teachings

First, they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching. Now, what is the Apostles' teaching? I love that this does not say, "they devoted themselves to the pastor's teaching." There are way too many pastors who have made up their own teachings and are not teaching the Apostles' teaching. The original Apostles were the twelve disciples of Jesus minus Judas, the betrayer. They were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Simon, and Matthias. Paul was also identified as an Apostle of the early church. These Apostles were charged with laying the foundation of the early church through their teachings—they taught what Jesus taught them. They wrote or presided over the writing of scripture that would become the New Testament, and they used the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Son of God.

So, the Apostles' teaching for us today is not whatever the pastor teaches. The Apostles' teaching is the New Testament and the Old Testament interpreted through the lens of the New Testament. The Apostles' teaching is the whole Bible. The New Testament and the Old Testament—that is, the Old Testament interpreted through Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters, I want to challenge you to devote yourself to the teachings of the whole Bible—the New Testament and the Old Testament together. Devote yourself to the teachings of the whole New Testament and find Christ in the Old Testament. The Apostles only had the Old Testament in the early church, and they had the oral teachings of Jesus—so what they did was they used the Old Testament to point to Jesus, and they taught everything that Jesus commanded them, everything that they heard Jesus say.

The Apostles Revealed the Resurrected Christ Through the Power of the Holy Spirit

As well, the Apostles were inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit to further reveal the resurrected Christ to the early church. Verse 43 says, "everyone was filled with awe at the many signs and wonders performed by the Apostles." The Apostles didn't just teach about Jesus, they followed in his steps and performed signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in so

doing, they proved that Jesus was resurrected. So, the church was filled with life and hope, a very tangible presence of the Holy Spirit, and the power of Christ's resurrection.

My hope, and my goal, as your pastor is to be inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit to miraculously reveal the resurrected Christ to you through Bible-based sermons. My teachings aren't enough for you though—you must devote yourself to the teachings of the whole Bible—you can do that with or without my help, but you cannot do it without the help of the Holy Spirit. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to you as you study the Bible. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles in our church.

Speaking of miracles, the greatest miracle to me is the miracle of the changed life that happens when a person gets in touch with the resurrected Christ. The miracles of changed lives are the types of miracles I pray will happen at this church every day. The power of the Holy Spirit is what turns the Bible's teachings from boring text to exciting life. Getting in touch with the resurrected Christ is what turns the Bible from a religious book to real life. Amen!

They Devoted Themselves to Fellowship

Second, they devoted themselves to fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship here is "koinonia," and this is where the word is first introduced in the New Testament, so it is associated with the NT church and very important to the function of the church. The root meaning is about commonality; or sharing.

We tend to think of fellowship as hanging around chatting with each other before or after church or during a church function. Well, that is one small part of New Testament fellowship. Koinonia is more importantly associated with sharing. It is the sharing of oneself— one's own experiences—or the sharing of one's possessions or resources. Verses 44-45 expand on this kind of fellowship, saying, "all the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need." Giving and the sharing of one's possessions with one another was foundational to the early church.

When Yam and I were coming back to the states off the mission field, we literally had nothing. A friend sold his old car and gave us the money, which we used to fix a broken-down car that was given to us. That is an example of true fellowship in the church. It's not just about chatting with each other; it's about sharing and caring for the needs of one another.

Koinonia is also about sharing in another person's experiences—their burdens, sorrow, and grief as well as their celebrations, joys, and excitement. Rom. 12:15-16 says to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another, which means bearing with one another in patience and love. This is about friendship. They broke bread in their homes together; they shared meals with each other. There is something special about sharing a meal with each other in friendship. This is true fellowship in the church.

Fellowship is broken when self-seeking takes over. Wherever criticism, selfishness, back-biting, spreading of false rumors, power struggles, and abuse take over, fellowship breaks down. For the church to thrive, true fellowship must prevail. I encourage you to devote yourselves to true fellowship, to being generous to one another, to giving of yourself to one another, and to sharing in each other's life experiences. Fellowship enriches the church and frees the power of the Holy Spirit to work amongst us.

They Devoted Themselves to Worship

Third, they devoted themselves to worship through breaking bread together in holy communion and through praising God. The experience of the upper room with Jesus on the night he was betrayed became a central feature of the early worship of the church. The early Christians gathered together from the beginning, literally 10 days after Jesus ascended to heaven, to worship Jesus by eating the bread and drinking the wine. The bread and wine represented participating in the sufferings of Christ—it represented fellowship with the sacrifice of Christ, and it represented the worship of Christ as the sacrificial Son of God. 1 Cor. 11:26 says, “whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Communion is an act of worship—it is acknowledging that Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who will return to us again. The early Christians replaced the whole Jewish sacrificial system of worship with the Communion table—this became the center of their worship.

Along with worship at the communion table, they praised God together. Praise to the Lord is a Spirit-inspired function of worship in the church. Praise can come through many forms—through singing songs and hymns of praise; through speaking out words of praise and thanksgiving—if you can’t sing, speak out the praises of God instead!

Praise can also come through acting out expressions of praise, such as clapping, dancing, jumping, sign language, even playing instruments, striking strings or hitting drums to the Lord. Praise can come through loud cheers, whistling, making joyful noises to the Lord for what he has done or promises to do. The church building itself can become an expression of praise through Spirit-inspired architecture and art on the walls that point to the risen Lord or invoke praises to God. The church is the people of God, but our homes and church buildings can be set up to inspire praise to the Lord. Amen?

The Devoted Themselves to Prayer

Fourth, they devoted themselves to prayer. Prayer might be thought of as a discipline of worship by some, but I prefer to consider prayer as its own discipline apart from worship, though prayer can be a part of worship. The Greek word for prayer in this passage is Proseuche, and it is a petition addressed to deity. Simply put, prayer is a petition to God, a request made to the Lord.

This is why I consider prayer to be different than worship—worship is ultimately about sacrifice, surrender, and expressions of praise to God. Prayer, on the other hand, is fundamentally about making your requests known to God. Phil. 4:6 says, “do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition—petition here means an urgent request to meet a need—in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Prayer is a Spirit-inspired function of the church, a necessary part of our lives that encourages us to bring our needs and burdens to the Lord. Prayer opens up the line of communication between us and the Lord. Prayer helps us to know that we are not walking in this journey of life on our own, but that we have a God in heaven who cares for us and will provide for our needs and bear our heavy burdens. Prayer also reminds us that we are dependent upon God for our life, for everything. In this sense, prayer is a humble act in which we acknowledge our lack to God. Even when we seemingly have everything we need, the Lord still calls us to prayer. For it is in prayer

that we come to know that apart from Christ, we are lost and without purpose. I don't think a church can pray too much. That is why we have several moments of prayer in the service—prayer is a function of the church.

My brothers and sisters, I encourage you to devote yourselves to prayer in every situation. Seek the Lord for direction in your life. Seek the Lord for your joy and excitement. Seek the Lord in your pain and sorrow. In every situation, with the faith of thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and his peace will guard you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

They Devoted Themselves to Evangelism

The fifth function of the church is evangelism. Verse 46 says, "every day they met together in the temple courts," and vs. 47 says, "[they enjoyed] the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Now, the evangelism that happened in the early church was the best kind of evangelism—it was unforced evangelism. It was evangelism that happened naturally because they were meeting every day in the temple courts telling people about the resurrected Christ. They were engaging in the community as salt, light, and the fragrance of Christ in ways that garnered favor from the people.

There are two things about evangelism of the early church that we can take away from this. First, they brought the church to the people who were searching for God and willing to listen to them. The temple court was the place the Jews went to seek God's face, and it was also a place of fellowship. The temple court was the central place for community activities, meetings, social gatherings, and more. So, the church was very active in this central place for community activity, and they spoke to the people who were willing to listen to them. Now, later, the temple religious leaders stirred up the people against them, but the early church was able to speak to the heart of those who would hear them.

Second, they garnered favor from the people. The early church was able to integrate with the community in ways that blessed all people. Jesus called us the salt and light of the earth, and we are called the fragrance of Christ to those who are perishing without salvation. That sounds the opposite of what too many unsaved people think of the church these days.

My friends, we the church must do whatever we can, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the salt and light of the earth and the fragrance of Christ in our community. Like the early church, we need to go out to the centers of activity in our community and speak to those who are willing to hear us. We need to integrate with the community to find ways to bless them—to bring righteousness, justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit in the places that are overwhelmed with all manner of darkness, injustice, conflict, and despair. Salt is most noticeable when sprinkled on tasteless food. Light shines brightest in darkness. A sweet fragrance is most welcome in stale places. Let us garner favor from people by being the salt and light of the earth, and the fragrance of Christ. Amen.

In closing, these are the five functions of the 'church afire':
Devotion to the whole Bible, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism.

Finally, here are 3 application points from this sermon:

1. Devote yourself daily, not occasionally.

The early church didn't sample teaching, prayer, fellowship, worship, or evangelism—they devoted themselves to them. Think of how you can devote yourself this week: open the Scriptures, pray in every situation, and make space for the Spirit to work in your life.

2. Practice real fellowship, not surface Christianity.

Go beyond greetings and attendance. Share your life. Share your burdens. Share your resources. Look for someone to rejoice with or someone to carry in prayer and practical care. The church becomes powerful when love becomes tangible.

3. Be the church where you already are.

Bring the presence of Christ into your everyday spaces—your home, workplace, neighborhood, and community. Live as salt, light, and the fragrance of Christ, trusting that God will open doors and add to His church as you walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Let's pray.

Study Questions*Read Acts 2:42-47*Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What specific practices were the believers devoted to in Acts 2:42, and how often did they engage in them?
2. According to verses 44–45, how did the believers relate to one another in terms of possessions and needs?
3. What results do we see in verses 46–47 from the way the early church lived and worshiped together?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. Why do you think devotion—not convenience or preference—is emphasized as the foundation of the early church?
2. What does the believers’ sharing of possessions reveal about their understanding of community and discipleship?
3. How are worship, prayer, and evangelism connected to one another in this passage?

Application Questions (*How should we respond?*)

1. Which of the five functions—teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, or evangelism—do you personally need to be more intentional about, and why?
2. What is one practical way you can practice true fellowship (*koinonia*) this week within the church community?
3. How can you make prayer a more consistent expression of dependence on God in your daily life?
4. Where has God placed you to be salt, light, and the fragrance of Christ, and what might that look like in a tangible way?