



**theme:** The People of God (Acts 2:42-47)

**materials:** Bibles, news story, food

## welcome

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Describe your ideal community. It can be a Church or something else, but describe how the people would relate to one another, how they would interact with the world around them, what kind of activities they would get up to, that kind of thing. Where do you get your idea for the idea community? Do you know any communities that actually live like this?

*Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.*

## worship

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Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced community this week? Share some food together, and as you do, have someone read out Luke 24:45-49.

Ask if there are any prayer requests, and spend some time praying for one another.

## word

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(The leader should give a quick background of Acts – who wrote it, what it generally covers, and what has happened in the story so far. See the Leader's Guide for info).

*Read Acts 2:42-47*

Who are these people who are being described in this passage?

Who were the apostles? Why were the new believers devoted to their teaching?

How can we be devoted to their teaching now?

What does "fellowship" mean? What kind of things did the new believers share?

How can we be devoted to the fellowship today? What kinds of things must we share?

What is the "breaking of bread"? Why was it so important?

How can we "break bread" with one another today?

Where and how would this new community worship with each other?

Where and how should Christian communities be worshipping together today?

Why were the people in awe of this new community? Are people in awe of Christian communities today?

What did the evangelism of the new believers look like?

How should Christian communities be evangelising today?

Sum up what you think a Holy Spirit – inspired Church would look like today.

What is the purpose of the Church?



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## witness

The Lord was adding daily to the number of those being saved. How are you as cell members proclaiming the gospel of Jesus in a way that is bringing people into a saving relationship with the Lord?

*If you are in Vancouver, join in with one of our outreach ministries such as League of Mercy, Night Vision, or Street Combat.*

This passage notes that the new believers held everything in common, gave generously, and gave to everyone who had need, even if this required selling their belongings. How is your cell doing at modeling this kind of financial commitment? Are you blessing one another well? Are you ensuring that everyone's needs are met? Are you even asking the difficult financial questions of one another? Talk amongst yourselves about what this kind of commitment would look like for your cell, or for your Church, and make some practical decisions about how to share your resources.

## action points

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

## leader's guide

It may seem an odd thing to do, but we are going to jump from our study of Luke's Gospel to the study of Luke's second volume, called Acts. We will be specifically looking at Acts chapters 2 to 8. We will return later to the rest of Luke's Gospel, and to the opening two chapters of Acts.

Luke's second volume has been called The Acts of the Apostles, or The Acts of the Holy Spirit. Both titles suggest an important emphasis in the stories, that the actions described are those of the apostles *and* those of the Holy Spirit. It is also important to see this book as the Continuing Acts of Jesus Christ. Luke's Gospel details Jesus' ministry while on earth, but Acts details the ongoing ministry of Jesus *after he ascended into heaven*. Christ is shown to be still very much at work, by the Holy Spirit, through his apostles and his Church. Jesus is still at work today, still through the Holy Spirit, still through his people in the world.

We will begin our study of this in Acts 2:42-47. Thus far in the story the disciples have witnessed Jesus ascending into heaven, have been filled by the Holy Spirit through tongues of fire at Pentecost, have spoken in strange tongues after this incredible event, have seen Peter address a huge crowd with the gospel of Jesus and have been overwhelmed by the response of 3000 people being saved. It is at this moment of the story, which has been proceeding at such a break-neck pace, that Luke takes a step back and gives the reader a snap-shot picture of the new, Holy Spirit - inspired Christian community. Luke does this a few other times throughout Acts as well (Acts 4:32-37; Acts 5:12-16). It is a way of showing how the first believers were responding to the great acts of God in their midst, and how this new community was learning to be with one another. It is important to remember that this is a picture of how one Christian community responded (albeit, the first community). It is not



prescribing the details of how every other Christian community should organise itself for all time, but it is showing how a community of Christians, fresh from lives lived amongst Jesus Christ and from the initial baptism of the Holy Spirit, believed they should relate to God, to one another, and to the world around them. We would do well to understand why they responded as they did, and to see how we may be called to respond in similar ways. The lives of these first believers should represent an enormous challenge to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church. Their example should prompt us to ask ourselves the question: What does it mean to be a Holy Spirit-inspired Church?

The description of the new Christian community in Acts 2:42-47 is one of a new, alternative family. It was not simply a new association; it was a new belonging, one that affected every other relationship a person had. A new believer's primary identity would now be as members of the one new people of God. As this new people of God they would devote themselves to learning from the apostles (those who had been companions of Jesus); fellowshiping (sharing what they had, sharing a meal, sharing a common spiritual experience); breaking bread together (eating together, and intentionally remembering and memorialising the Last Supper and the crucifixion as they did so); and praying and praising God together (probably both their own times of prayer and the set times of Jewish prayers).

The apostles' teachings were considered authoritative because they were passing on the teachings of Jesus, and they were now doing so in the power of the Holy Spirit. This power was shown through signs and wonders, the same kinds of signs and wonders performed by Jesus. It is instructive that the new believers, even though they had themselves received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, still found it necessary to devote themselves to the teachings of the apostles. They still wanted to learn more, and understood that they did not yet know everything. This is a vital principle for the people of God today. We no longer have any apostles with us, in the sense of those who knew Jesus while he was on earth. But we can still be devoted to their teaching, which has been passed on to us through the writings in the New Testament. A Holy Spirit – inspired Church submits itself to the Word of God.

The fellowship of the believers describes the way the new community shared with each other in love. The first and most important thing they shared was God. They shared the presence of the Holy Spirit, the new life of Christ, the Fatherhood of God. They had been caught up, as a people, into the reality of the Trinity. The immediate consequence of this was the generous sharing of possessions amongst each other. This was a voluntary, loving response to the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives, one that extended even to the point of some people selling possessions and property to ensure that everyone had what they needed. It seems that many chose to live together, to have joint ownership of things, to pool their resources. Their goods and homes were available to one another, and in particular for the care of the poor. Again, this is not a detailed blueprint of how every community should function, but it does highlight the principle that when the believers were united by the Holy Spirit, their immediate response was openness and generosity with their possessions. This is reinforced at other points throughout Acts and the New Testament, as well, but it only worked when the sense of spiritual unity amongst the believers was exceptionally high. A Holy Spirit – inspired Church is one characterised by this spiritual unity, which manifests itself in deep, sacrificial love and sharing, particularly amongst those in need.

The breaking of bread was the way a normal Jewish meal would begin. In the Last Supper that Christ shared with his disciples he broke the bread and announced that it represented his body that would be broken on the cross. The new believers in Acts remembered and acted out this sacrifice when they gathered to eat together. The devotion was not to the ritual, but to the reality of Christ's sacrifice as the central event around which they gathered and lived their lives. Without Christ's death and resurrection, their new identity as the people of God was meaningless. So they ate together, this common meal in their homes, worshipping Jesus as Lord and Saviour as they did so. A Holy Spirit-inspired Church centres its common life – whether eating, or drinking, or whatever it does - around the remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The first Christian community was devoted to prayer and to worship. They would meet at the Temple, probably participating in the regular Jewish prayers and possibly also still in the daily sacrifices. But they would also meet in their homes, thus showing that the centre of their life of corporate prayer and praise was not just the Temple: it was wherever two or three were gathered, because there also was the Spirit of God. In their homes they would pray, worship, eat, break bread, and experience the joy of fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The significant thing



here is that they were worshipping Jesus. We no longer have a Temple to attend in Jerusalem, but the principle remains that our prayer and worship and fellowship can and should be a daily matter, and that we do not require a special, set aside space to worship. It is not wrong to worship in such a place, but it is not required. A Holy Spirit-inspired Church is one with living worship, where God is seen to be present every bit as much around the table as in the Church building, and where Jesus is worshipped as Lord and Saviour.

The first Christian community was held in awe by the people because of the signs and wonders that were happening in their midst. They were witnessing the dawn of the new age, the presence of God's Holy Spirit come to earth in a new way, and it was exciting and terrifying. That same Spirit exists amongst the Christian communities today, but there is perhaps less of an expectation amongst the Christians themselves that God will act in power.

Just as meeting and praying and praising were daily matters for this first Christian community, so was proclamation. We are told that the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved. Evangelism was a major component of the early church, the primary way in which it was relating to the world around them. They understood that their purpose was not simply to enjoy one another's fellowship, but also to bear witness to Christ to the world through their words and deeds. This has not stopped being the purpose of the Church today, and a Holy Spirit-inspired Church is one that will be involved with ongoing and outgoing witness.