

August 2
Christian Community, Daily Disciple, page 223



[Psalm 79:9](#)
[Acts 2:42-44](#)

Digging Deeper: Finding out, discussion and sharing

1. Taking Psalm 79:9 and [Acts 2:38](#) together, it is safe to say that a fundamental characteristic of the Christian community and its own self-understanding is rooted in forgiveness. In your own view, how does this help us with our basic view of fellowship and what the church is all about? What does forgiveness include?
2. This early Christian community seems to have been made up of local and global Jews. God-fearing Gentiles also were in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. With our own culture becoming less God-fearing and less steeped in the Judeo-Christian heritage of salvific stories and God's way in the world, how do you think the church, the Christian community, can get its message out into the world so that another "Pentecost" can occur?
3. Peter described the culture of his day as "crooked" (*skolias*). Read [Philippians 2:15](#) and then discuss how you think that the present age, current generation, is "crooked." What values do you hold as a small group that is at odds with the culture today? Make a list and have everyone compare and discuss their lists.
4. Why do you think the word "worship" is missing from [Acts 2:42-47](#)?
5. Where did the early Christians continue to meet everyday?
6. Do you think that Jewish temple worship had any effect on defining how the early Christian community looked?
7. Twice in this paragraph (Acts 2:42-47) mention is made of Christians breaking bread. Was this a common meal, or was this communion? Substantiate your answer.
8. The table fellowship was characterized as being enjoyed by Christians with "glad" and "sincere" hearts. What were they glad about? Why was it important for Luke to record this description of their hearts a "sincere?" The word "sincere" (*apheloteti*) was translated in the King James Version as "singleness" of heart. The word actually carries the notion of "simplicity, unencumbered." Discuss how you think their hearts were now "simplified" and "unencumbered."
9. Discuss how your own experience in small group life has enriched and deepened your view of fellowship. Share your favorite Bible verses on fellowship.
10. Would you say that your own study time in the small group would qualify as "continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine?" In your estimation, what would this include?

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

COUNTER-CULTURE The early church was a counter-culture in the first century. At a deep, fundamental level there has always been a tension between the culture and

Christianity. In fact, from the very first “gospel sermon” in Acts 2, the apostle Peter admonished his listeners to “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” It is the fundamental corruption of culture that is at odds with the kingdom of God. The word “corrupt” that Peter uses is *skolias*, meaning crooked, perverse, corrupt. Phillips translation and the New English Bible interestingly translate this word as “warped.” At the core of this word are the ideas of “unscrupulous, dishonest.” This points to basic difference in values between society at large and the new Christian community formed on the Day of Pentecost.

DEVOTED The early Christian community was devoted to a simple lifestyle that fed their spirituality and community. They were devoted (“continued steadfastly in”) to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. In Acts 2:42-47 we have the earliest description of the Christian community and its activities. In this description the word “worship” is conspicuously absent. The concept of worship began at this point to be re-defined. “Worship” according to the New Testament is a daily experience that is God-focused and other-focused. Though we are not supplied in this meager description with the details of their devotion, it is not hard to fill in some of the blanks. The apostles’ teaching focused on the person, life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It no doubt included many of the sayings and teachings they remembered when they were in His presence. They passed these on to the early church.

They were also devoted, literally, “in the fellowship.” The early Christians immersed themselves in the lives of their fellow Christians. “The” fellowship is specific. Too often we use the word “fellowship” in a general sense, but the first Christians were “in THE fellowship.” Fellowship is about interacting with people with names and faces. It is being involved in, and working with, agonizing with, praying with, being with others.

They also continued steadfastly in the “breaking of bread.” Much ink and computer paper has been used to try and figure out whether or not this was a common meal or the Lord’s Supper, communion. In the first century church, especially in Jerusalem, no one would have thought of asking this question or trying to make such a distinction. The fellowship meal provided the context for the Lord’s supper. Communion was exactly that: a common meal providing the relationships, atmosphere, and elements to be partaken and the Lord to be remembered until he returned again.

Prayer was another thing they continued steadfastly in. We are not told what kind of prayer, but perhaps we can envision intercessory prayer, thanksgiving, adoration, blessings, praise, petitions, etc. There are many different types of prayers and even methods for praying them. No doubt, many of the prayers were sort of chanted in unison, along with some of the ancient Psalter providing the very language for such prayers. I suspect that prayers for commitment and steadfastness were offered because many people were leaving Judaism and other religious beliefs behind to become a part of the newly formed Christian community.

COMMONALITY Acts 2:44 provides us with an incredible insight into the life and perspective of those early Christians: “*All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*” This demonstration of hospitality and concern for all being cared for was sort of unique for the early church. Because of the Day of Pentecost and the unique setting where thousands of Diaspora Jews had come into Jerusalem, many of those converted could not return home to work and be received with blessings from their families. For many, no doubt, excommunication was waiting in the wings. Because of such glaring needs on the spot, the church immediately responded with individuals selling their possessions and goods and providing a “communal repository” so that brothers and sisters in Christ could be cared for. The philosophical and interpretive question that has to be raised is this: is

this a model for all time, and must Christians in every age live a communal life described here by Luke? In the sweep of church history, there have been many “utopian Christian” movements started with this passage of Scripture as the basis for such experiments.