

**GOING DEEPER**  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
**October 12, 2014**



*Life was not meant to be lived alone-*

# Discussion Guide

## We Share

Acts 2.42-47

### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you were young, did you find it easy or difficult to share? What did it feel like when you shared?

### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the background and context of Luke's description of the early Church in Acts 2.42-47.
- Read Acts 2.42-47 aloud. Pause. Read Acts 2.42-47 aloud once more, seeking to imagine the events being described.
- In what ways did the early Church intentionally foster connection (fellowship)?
- How might you sum up these practices?
- What were the outcomes of these practices? Do any of these surprise you? Could you elaborate?
- One might sum up practices of the early Church under the umbrella of sharing. The early Church intentionally pursued community by sharing their lives and resources with one another. Do you see people within the Church sharing in this way today? Why might this be the case? What is the outcome?

- Do you find that it is easier to share or to ask that someone share with you? Why might this be the case?
- Why might deep connectedness with the Church require both a willingness to share and a willingness to ask that someone share? Could you elaborate?
- What steps might be taken to foster sharing within a local Church family? What steps might be taken to foster sharing in this group? (If time and interest permits, consider viewing the video for The Table Project at [tableproject.org](http://tableproject.org). This is a new social media platform we are launching at Union Center as one way to foster sharing among our congregation.)
- Conclude your time together in prayer for the Church, your group and for one another. You might consider praying for the grace to share with one another.

## Context and Background

### *Fellowship*

The term "fellowship" represents the biblical term *koinōnia*. In classical Greek, authors used *koinōnia* to refer to close relationships and associations between individuals. One could experience *koinōnia* with a god; that is, one could have a close connection with a god, typically through the experience of worship or a sacred meal. One could also experience *koinōnia* with another person; that is, a person could have a close, brotherly connection with another person in which mutual concern was expressed.

In the New Testament, *koinōnia* is one of the terms used to refer to the proper relationship between Christ-followers and at times to the relationship one might experience with Christ. The term was a favorite of Paul, appearing thirteen times in his letters. Paul typically used the term to refer to a deep bond between Christ-followers that motivated them to share their financial resources (Romans 12.13; 15.26; Galatians 6.6; Philippians 4.15; 2 Corinthians 8.4; 9.13), but he also used the term to refer to the relationship one might experience with God (1 Corinthians 1.9; 2 Corinthians 13.14; 1 Corinthians 10.16). Luke used the term once to refer to the ideal state of the early Church (Acts 2.42), utilizing the term to refer to a deep connectedness and association between Christ-followers that led them to share not only their financial and physical resources but also their very lives (Acts 2.43-47).

While the term itself is difficult to translate as can be seen in the various ways it is translated throughout the New Testament, we simply do not have a word in English that fully translates what is conveyed with this term. However, in view of its overall usage within the New Testament, one might understand *koinōnia* as a state or action which promotes “togetherness” or “one-anotherness;” that is, to experience *koinōnia* is to be deeply connected to another person (or God) in such a way that all of one’s life is marshalled for the well-being of the other.

## The Text

### **Acts 2.42-47: *The connected church***

In the opening chapters of Acts, a major shift occurs as Jesus departs and the Holy Spirit arrives, empowering and indwelling the early believers (Acts 1.1-2.13). These events embolden the small band of Jesus followers to proclaim and explain the events surrounding the coming of the Holy Spirit and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to those gathered in Jerusalem celebrating Pentecost. The result of these events is the amazing decision of about three thousand to follow Jesus as the sole-leader of their life (Acts 2.41). With these events, the early church is launched, in a big way. At this point in his narrative about the early church, Luke pauses to give an inside look into how the early church functioned. Rather than focusing on structures or doctrines, Luke focuses on the regular practices and rhythms of the early church.

Luke notes that the early church had four main practices to which they devoted themselves: learning from the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Some have argued, and perhaps rightly, that Luke only has two practices in mind, teaching and fellowship, and that the shared meal (could this have involved the Lord’s Supper?) and prayer are part of the fellowship activities. Such a view fits more naturally with the description Luke provides as he only discusses the activities of the church within these two larger categories: teaching (Acts 2.43) and fellowship (Acts 2.44-47).

Luke glosses over the teaching of the apostles, noting only that those who witnessed their teaching were amazed by the wonders and signs they performed (Acts 2.43). The presence of signs and wonders is not surprising in light of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-13), and they provide a direct connection with Jesus’ own ministry which was marked with signs and wonders. For those familiar with Jesus or his ministry, the presence of signs and wonders, while remarkable, was not surprising.

What stood out to Luke (and others) was the prevailing devotion to fellowship in the early church, their deep devotion to fostering connection among themselves. (See Fellowship.)

Luke notes that all the believers were together (literally “in the same place”). While one might interpret this in terms of conformity, Luke seems to be alluding to a deep unity which was present among the early believers. While Luke assumes that such a unity flows out of the connection these people have with Christ and the resulting indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-13, 41), he focuses upon the actions and behaviors they intentionally take up which foster the unity given to them through Christ (Acts 2.42; Ephesians 4.3).

The early church sought to maintain their unity (connectedness) by seeking to share their resources and their lives. The sharing of resources rested upon a common decision to hold every possession in common. While some have argued that this is an allusion to an early form of Communism, Luke does not say that the Church assented to common ownership of property, but rather, that those within the Church agreed to use their individual property for the common good. One might envision the free sharing of goods among the early believers. When need arose that required something not possessed by a member of the Church, people who possessed property (the only thing of real value in the ancient world) sold their property so that the need might be addressed, i.e. the item might be purchased.

The early church also sought to maintain their unity (connectedness) by freely sharing their lives with one another. This sharing of life blurred the lines of the sacred and secular spheres of life, something Luke has already alluded to in verse 42 (fellowship involved both shared meals and prayer). The believers shared life by choosing to worship together daily in the Temple, but they went beyond the formalities of worshipping together to the mundane activities of daily life as they shared meals and rejoiced together in their homes. These common times together, in turn, resulted in opportunities to worship in less-than-formal-ways (Acts 2.47).

The activities Luke outlines are far from common or easy, but they require great intentionality (devotion!). Their uncommonality may be the very reason Luke highlights them. However, these uncommon activities have an amazing result. People outside the Church notice the deep bonds among the believers (fellowship) and they approve; that is, they are pleased with what they see.

Further, some are convinced to follow Jesus personally and join the fledgling Church (Acts 2.47). This is in line with Jesus' prayer for unity among his followers (John 17.20-23).

### **Real life with Blake:**

I want to connect with others. God has wired this into the deepest parts of me, in the deepest parts of all of us (Genesis 1.26-27; 2.18). The problem is that I am not sure how to go about getting connected. I understand that it is possible because of the work of Christ (John 17.20-23), but living out what has been done for me seems so elusive most of the time. What strikes me in these verses is that connecting takes great intentionality. I shouldn't be surprised at this as Paul states we are to make every effort to live into the unity we possess (Ephesians 4.3), but somehow I imagine this effort to be something relatively easy. Luke echoes Paul's thought as he speaks of the devotion of the early believers to ways of being which foster connection, but their devotion is to practices which are anything but easy for me. The early Church pursued unity by embracing a willingness to share. This is difficult for me. Somewhere along the way I picked up the idea that what was mine was mine and you should go get your own. This is my time, my money, my car, my house, my clothes, mine, mine, mine. It isn't that those within the early Church didn't say "this is mine." They simply said, "This is mine and you can use it if you need it." "This is my time, but I freely give it to you." "This is my plow, but you can use it to plant your crops." "This is my money, but you need it to pay a bill." "This is my food, but I share it with you in my home as you sit in my favorite chair." Somehow this rubs me the wrong way because what is mine is for my use, not our use. Yet this was the intentional practice of the early Church, and it knit them together. How so? It seems that in sharing they learned that each person was needed as they possessed something another needed. Oh, and each person learned they needed other people. Need bound them together as they provided for one another. Perhaps this is one of the reasons I struggle with connection with others. I am convinced that I am not needed, and more than a little afraid to admit when I am in need, but when I share my need and the need of others come to the surface in a mutually edifying, connecting sort of way.

### **Real life with you:**

One of our deepest desires is to connect with others. One of our greatest struggles is how to actually connect with one another. The good news is that for those who follow Christ, the potential to connect has already been given. In Jesus, all dividing walls have been destroyed (Colossians 3.11), but we must intentionally choose to connect with one another now that the walls of division have been torn down. We are not sure how to do this. Luke instructs us in how to connect by giving us a portrait of the early Church, a connecting Church. They intentionally devoted themselves to the process of connecting by willingly and graciously sharing their lives and resources with one another. In so doing, they admitted that they could not live apart from one another. They could not live alone. This week, consider one way in which you could share your life with another person. You might choose to share your financial or physical resources with another person within the Church. Perhaps you have something they can borrow so that they do not have to purchase their own, or perhaps you have extra which they do not. Consider sharing it. You might consider sharing your time. Invite someone you sit next to on Sunday mornings over for a meal and a time of playing board games, or something similar which you enjoy. If you feel that you have nothing to share, ask someone to share with you. If you have a need, make it known to someone personally, or join The Table and make your need known to the congregation. You can pick up more information about The Table at the Info Desk.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at [BlakeShipp.blogspot.com](http://BlakeShipp.blogspot.com)



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