

Lesson 11 | February 11, 2024

Life in Christian Community

Study Text: Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 2:19–22; Colossians 1:3–14

Central Truth: God wills for His followers to live in close fellowship.

Key Verse: Acts 4:32

The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (KJV).

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine what it means to say that Christians live in a state of community.
- Students will identify the dangers and realities of divisions in the Church and commit to unity.
- Students will pray that God will help them live in a way that reflects the hope and transformation they have received through Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: *Responsibilities.* This word can sometimes make people cringe. We all have responsibilities we deal with every day, and they aren't always fun. But responsibilities don't have to be seen as a burden.

Opening Activity—Responsibilities

Ask: What are some ongoing responsibilities in your life that feel like a burden? What are some that you enjoy?

Say: A personal responsibility is anything that needs to be done—and you're the one who needs to do it! But not all responsibilities are equally important or demanding. Some tasks in your career and personal life just have to get done—like catching up on paperwork or sorting the mail every day. Others are enjoyable and enriching. They are necessary and pleasant at the same time. When we think of the good that comes from completing these tasks, we can find joy in doing them well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today's lesson explores what it means to live in Christian community. As we will see, the Scripture gives each of us responsibilities—to God and to each other—that benefit the church community as a whole. As we mature in the faith and keep in mind the good that comes from working wholeheartedly together, we find that these responsibilities can be enriching and enjoyable.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Acts 2:42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Ephesians 2:19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Colossians 1:9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12. Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Acts 2:42. All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

43. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

44. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

45. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

46. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—

47. all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Ephesians 2:19. So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

20. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

21. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

22. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Colossians 1:9. So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

11. We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy,

12. always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

13. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son,

14. who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—A Worshipping Community Devoted to Fellowship

Acts 2:42–43

Say: What does “church fellowship” mean to you? Maybe you think of a church potluck or visiting in the foyer after service. But Acts 2 reminds us that fellowship in the body of Christ includes much more. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the huge crowd gathered in Jerusalem and explained the miracle they were seeing. “Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all” (verse 41, NLT). This verse tells us the gospel was spreading quickly in the early days of the Church. It also tells us the fellowship pattern we see in verses 42–46 was part of this dramatic growth. From the Church’s beginning, God has always intended that deep, compassionate, personal fellowship would be part of the life of His Church.

[Act 2:42-46 KJV] 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Luke (the writer of Acts) described what church life was like amid this dramatic growth. First, believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (verse 42, NLT). The doctrines the apostles taught are available to us in the inspired Scripture. A major focus of the New Testament is **ensuring believers have a proper understanding of Jesus’ commands as described and applied by the apostles** (Ephesians 4:11–15). While the apostles’ evangelistic preaching told unbelievers about the gospel, their teaching instructed believers about the Christian life.

[Eph 4:11-15 KJV] 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:

Next, Luke noted that the believers “devoted themselves . . . to fellowship” (Acts 2:42, NLT). This kind of fellowship goes beyond faithful church attendance and includes partnership. Together, believers fulfilled the Church’s purpose and shared in its

message and work. They leaned on each other, realizing that life in Christ includes life in the body of Christ.

The believers were also devoted to sharing meals, which referred both to table fellowship (like modern-day church meals) as well as the Lord's Supper (verse 46). We know the Lord's Supper took place in homes rather than the temple, which means early believers shared relationship with each other beyond their congregational worship meetings.

Finally, the believers were devoted to corporate prayer. Life in the body of Christ was not an individual pursuit. The community valued prayer, recognizing that believers grow together when they pray together.

In a sense, verse 43 describes the impact of verse 42. Because of the apostles' teaching and the work of the Holy Spirit in their community, "fear came over every soul" (KJV). Scholars note this reaction emphasized the apostles' unique authority. This would have been an important designation for that original Jewish audience, who held the authority of Old Testament prophets and patriarchs in high regard. But it is important for us as well, since it reinforces the authority of the apostles' inspired writings.

The apostles' teaching was also accompanied by amazing miracles, which confirmed the Word they taught and proclaimed (Mark 16:20). Miracles continually accompanied the preaching of the gospel once the apostles set the pattern. Only a few chapters later, the ministry of Stephen (who had been chosen as a deacon) was accompanied by "great wonders and miracles" (Acts 6:8, KJV).

Discuss

? What are some ways Christians today can devote themselves to the teaching of the Word?

? Why is corporate prayer important in addition to private prayer?

Devoted to Each Other

[Act 2:44-47 KJV] 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Say: God has always had special concern for vulnerable people. That kind of compassion at work in His people plays a vital role in the Church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 2:44–47 forms one of the most beautiful pictures of mutual devotion in all of Scripture. The phrase “met together” in verse 44 (NLT) demonstrates having one mind. The believers’ unity was emotional and spiritual. They “shared everything they had” (NLT), including the proceeds from the property and possessions they sold. The purpose was to show compassion and love for those in need, not pursue an ideal of economic uniformity. People gave out of their own generosity rather than being coerced.

There was a family dynamic among the believers. Everyone cared for each other and made sure no one lacked what they needed. They gathered for worship at the temple and for the Lord’s Supper at one another’s homes. They lived in community, and the result was both joy and generosity. Such a lifestyle ultimately bore witness to those around them (verse 47). Amid the miracles, joy, and generosity, many were being saved and joining the Church.

These circumstances were unique and not intended to set a pattern for communal living as we would define it. In fact, later New Testament teachings on unity and compassion contrast with the situation in Acts 2. In the earliest days of the Church, travelers to Jerusalem who remained after their conversion would have needed help during their extended stay. The Church’s priority was to show generosity to those in need. Their care for one another and the meaningful relationships that developed serve as an example for us today. Those among us who have plenty should give generously to those in need.

Resource Packet Item 1: Church Checkup

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it on their own at home. Emphasize this activity is intended to be a guide for personal prayer. If you choose to discuss the content generally as a class, keep the conversation positive and constructive.

Discuss

- ? How would you define the word *fellowship* based on Acts 2:42–47?
- ? What are Christians’ responsibilities toward one another?

Part 2—A God-Built Household No Longer Strangers

[Eph 2:19-20 KJV] 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];

Say: It’s human nature to notice the differences between us and sometimes allow them to become barriers. But Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reminds us the Church should erase the lines that divide us so God’s people can live together in unity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Unlike Paul's other epistles, his letter to the Ephesians doesn't focus on correcting doctrinal errors or confronting false teaching. Instead, Paul wrote extensively about God's plan to bring forth the Church—a community of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul clearly explains the gospel's purpose: It offered reconciliation with God to the entire world. From that perspective, everyone stands on equal footing. This teaching reaches a crescendo in 2:11–18, which describes how God made peace between otherwise hostile groups of people, unifying them through Christ.

The church at Ephesus was largely made up of Greek converts to Christianity. Verse 19 says these converts were “no longer strangers and foreigners” (NLT). “Strangers” refers to short-term visitors, while “foreigners” refers to residents without full citizenship rights. Before Jesus came, Gentile converts to Judaism were considered outsiders, but now they were “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (KJV). All hostility and division had disappeared. The two groups were made one in Christ (verse 14).

Paul illustrated his point with building imagery (verse 20). The moment these Gentiles became Christians, they were set on the same foundation as the Jewish Christians (1 Corinthians 3:11). Not only is Jesus the foundation, but He is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). This stone literally joined two walls at the corner, holding the entire building together.

Most of us don't face divisions in our churches as severe as the one between first-century Jews and Gentiles. But any chasms that still exist between people groups must be bridged in the body of Christ. The answer is not ignoring our differences, whether they are related to culture, ethnicity, class, race, or religious background. Instead, unity means we don't allow our differences to determine the value we place on one another. The Church is made up of people who are first and foremost our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Discuss

? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church?

? What are some common sources of division in the Church today? How can we counter them?

A Holy Temple for the Lord

[Eph 2:21-22 KJV] 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Say: With Christ as our cornerstone, we are all joined together to become a temple where the presence of God dwells. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ephesians 2:21–22 gives insight into why this figurative building, the Church, is so important. In it, all believers are being joined together into a sound and steady structure without cracks or divisions. We are “becoming a holy temple for the Lord” (verse 21, NLT). As His temple, the Church is a “dwelling where God lives by his Spirit” (verse 22,

NLT). We serve the same purpose that the temple in Jerusalem once served: We are God's dwelling place in this world (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Not only are we His temple, but Ephesians 2:21 says we are His *holy* temple. The Church is set apart and consecrated for God's presence. This puts us in contrast with the world around us. The Church's holiness is both a gift from God and a response to God. We are sanctified or made holy through Christ (Hebrews 10:10) and cannot attain holiness without Him. Having been made holy, we are called to live in a way that reflects His holiness (Ephesians 1:4).

The ongoing process of being joined together takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are people of the Spirit. He must play a central role in our churches and our lives.

Resource Packet Item 2: Brought In and Built Up

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the questions as a class. Think about how your church can help heal divisions in your community.

Discuss

? What are some ways churches can demonstrate the unity we see in Ephesians 2:19–22?

? Practically speaking, what is the evidence that the Church is a “holy temple for the Lord”?

Part 3—Faithful and Holy Community

Growing in the Faith

[Col 1:3-8 KJV] 3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love [which ye have] to all the saints, 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; 6 Which is come unto you, as [it is] in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as [it doth] also in you, since the day ye heard [of it], and knew the grace of God in truth: 7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Say: One common accusation against Christians is that we don't practice what we preach. Whether our critics have a point or not, this comment reminds us the world is watching. And they expect us to be different. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Colossians 1:1–14 introduces Paul's letter to a group of mostly Greek converts in the church in Colossae. They were enduring many challenges to their faith—facing false teaching from within while striving to serve Christ in a hostile environment.

Paul thanked God for these Christians and commended them for actions and attitudes that expressed genuine, growing faith in Christ. They were people of hope, and their lives reflected their assurance of the world to come. This kind of faith in the promise of eternal life naturally impacts the way we live here and now.

The Colossian Christians had heard the Word of truth and cultivated it within their lives and their church. Paul mentions their faith in Christ and love for one another (verse 4). These two qualities provide fertile ground for spiritual growth. They had placed a strong priority on both their relationships with God and other believers.

Paul closed this section with an interesting phrase. His fellow worker, Epaphras, had been discipling the Colossians. He told Paul “about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given” the Colossians (verse 8, NLT). Their love for others had been awakened by the Holy Spirit, testifying to their genuine faith. As Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, God “has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5, NLT). This kind of love is more than mere human concern and compassion. Instead, it is the kind of sacrificial love that only comes from God. The bonds of unity are supernaturally strengthened when we rely on the Spirit to put His love in our hearts.

Discuss

? What are some ways the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance can impact our relationships with each another?

? How does your hope of eternal life shape the way you live each day?

Living Worthy of Christ

[Col 1:9-14 KJV] 9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard [it], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; 12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: 13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son: 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins:

Say: Paul then tells the Colossians exactly how he prays for them. We would do well to follow his example and pray the same things for ourselves and our church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul prayed the believers in Colossae would be filled with the knowledge of God's will (Colossians 1:9). In its broadest sense, God's will is that we would imitate Jesus' life, ministry, sacrifice, and teachings by the power of the Spirit. The spiritual wisdom and understanding Paul mentions don't come naturally. They come from the Word of God.

From this foundation of knowledge and wisdom, "the way you live will always honor and please the Lord" (verse 10, NLT). God gives knowledge and wisdom with a practical intent. He doesn't demand we somehow make ourselves worthy. Instead, He intends that our lives reflect the blessings of His mercy and grace at work in us. As we "learn to know God better and better," we continue to grow and "produce every kind of good fruit" (NLT).

Not only does Paul pray for the believers' external fruitfulness, but he also prays for their internal spiritual growth as well. His vision is that the Spirit would empower them to patiently endure trouble and be filled with joy and gratitude. He concludes his prayer with a reminder of their new identity. Christ "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (verses 13–14, KJV).

As we endeavor to honor Christ in our community life, may Paul's prayer become our own. We grow closer to God and each other as we seek Him together.

Discuss

- ? How does the Spirit help us grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding?
- ? What does it mean to live in a way that's worthy of the Lord?

Resource Packet Item 3: A Body, a Building, a Bride

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Challenge students to think about how they fit into the life of the Church.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Church is a community of transformed people. We have been changed by Christ and now live by the Spirit. That kind of community life is naturally different from what the world is used to. It is a shining example of unity, love, and holiness.

Living It Out Ministry in Action

- Find ways your class can help encourage a sense of community within your church.
- Ask God to examine your heart and show you any attitudes that would bring division or disunity into the church.
- Pray daily for God to help you live a life that is worthy of the incredible blessings and gifts He has given you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Covenant Assembly.
Joshua 8:30–35

Tuesday:
The Feast of Tabernacles.
Nehemiah 8:13–18

Wednesday:
The Assembly of the Upright.
Psalm 111:1–10

Thursday:
Fellowship of Ministry.
2 Corinthians 8:1–7

Friday:
The Right Hand of Fellowship.
Galatians 2:6–10

Saturday:
Fellowship with Christ and Christians.
1 John 1:1–7