



## Discussion Guide

### Plant the community—Acts 2.42-47

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

o Who has free access to your refrigerator, really? What gives them this access?

**Setting the Stage:** *Mission starts with one another, with our fellow Christ-followers. That seems, at first glance, to be counter-intuitive. Mission, the spread of the gospel, cannot begin with one another. That seems so insider-focused, so oblivious to the reality that there are people out there who need to hear the gospel. How could anyone ever think that mission, especially a successful one, starts with one another? Maybe the real issue is in our understanding of mission. Is mission something that starts with what we proclaim or is mission something that starts with what we live? Is the gospel a message to which we want people to give mental assent or is the gospel something that we want people to open themselves to so that it changes how they live, not just what they think? If it is the former, then mission must start with what we say and how and where we say it. But, if the gospel is more. . . then mission is much more foundational, more rooted in life than we could ever imagine. If the gospel is something that really transforms the very fiber of our being then where can mission start other than with the people of God as those who are being transformed?*

**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.)

- Read Acts 2.42-27. (Note: You might wish to provide context by reading and summarizing Acts 2.1-41.)
- In what ways did the early believers demonstrate mutual care and concern for one another?
- What were the outcomes of living out this care and concern for one another?
- How might you account for these outcomes?
- If you saw people living as these early Christ-followers did, what would your reaction be? Can you elaborate?
- The reality is that most people do not live as these early believers. Why do you think that is so?
- The early followers of Jesus expressed mutual care and concern for one another as they responded to the gospel. In what ways is the gospel leading you to express mutual care and concern for your fellow Christ-followers?
- Are there areas in your life that you do not see the gospel leading you to express mutual care and concern? Can you elaborate?
- What steps might you consider to open your life to the transformation of the gospel?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

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## Group Notes

### *Plant the community: Acts 2.42-47*

#### **Context and Background**

**Acts:** The book of Acts is actually the second volume of the two volume work Luke-Acts. Luke originally penned Luke and Acts to a person by the name of Theophilus in order to provide an accurate understanding of God's redemptive movement through the person of Jesus and his disciples (Luke 1.1-4, Acts 1.1-2). Somehow in the formation of the New Testament, these two works were separated by the Gospel of John. Acts simply continues the narrative that began in the Gospel of Luke by describing how the ministry and movement which Jesus began functioned and grew in his physical absence. The description of the community of Christ-followers is one of ever-expanding mission. This mission is geographical with Christ-followers sharing the gospel starting in Jerusalem and moving to the ends of the earth (Jerusalem: Acts 1-8; Judea and Samaria: Acts 9-12; ends of the earth: Acts 13-28). The two main characters in the book of Acts are Peter and Paul. However, in the background, the true main character is always the Holy Spirit mediating the presence of Jesus (John 14-16) and working through people like Peter and Paul. The book of Acts ends abruptly and without a satisfying conclusion to both the ancient and modern reader. One is left wondering what happens next. This ending was probably intended by Luke as it creates an invitation for the reader to finish the story. They are invited as a follower of Jesus to write the next chapter of gospel expansion with their own lives, to allow the Holy Spirit to work through them to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

**Fellowship:** The word "fellowship" is the translation of the term *koinonia* in the language of the New Testament. This word and its cognates have no direct equivalent in English but seem to refer to the ideas of communion and close relationship. The term is used by ancient authors and can refer to the sharing of possessions in reference to utopian-like societies. When it is used in the New Testament, it always refers to either the common bond between Christians and God or Christians with one another. The term is used several times by Paul but it is used only once in Acts (Acts 2.42). The use of this term in Acts seems to be strategic for several reasons. First, the term is found in the first summary section of Acts describing the nature of the early Christian community. As such, the term seems to highlight a natural outcome of the gospel's work among people. Second, the use of the term in this summary section seems to be purposeful in that the term is defined in the verses that follow (Acts 2.43-47). The term is not used to refer to a utopian idea but to the very realistic outcome of mutual care and concern initiated by the gospel. The depth and extent of this concern and care are detailed in what may be a prescriptive rather than descriptive manner for later generations of Christ followers. Finally, the term is used in reference to the expansion of the gospel; that is, Luke makes a firm tie between *koinonia* and the effectiveness of mission (Acts 2.47). The richness of the term, as it is filled with meaning by both Luke and Paul, may necessitate qualifiers when using the term today. One cannot simply refer to *koinonia* as "fellowship" and communicate the deep implications of the word. Another option is the invention of another word or phrase that

contextualizes the term for modern audiences so that they understand.

#### **The Text**

**The outcome of the gospel (Acts 2.42-47a):** In Acts 2.42-47 we encounter the first summary passage in Acts. Luke uses eight such passages in Acts to detail for his reader the implications of the story to that point and to transition to the next parts of his story. In this first summary section, Luke summarizes the effect of the gospel on those who first heard it. The scene is the conclusion and outcome of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus and Peter preached a message that led to three thousand expressing faith in Jesus (Acts 2.1-41). Basically, Pentecost is the first time the gospel moves forth apart from the physical ministry of Jesus. As it moves forward, Luke summarizes its effects. He lists four effects: the devotion of Christ-followers to (1) the apostles teaching, (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) prayer. As we consider this list, we probably only have two items listed, teaching and fellowship with items three and four being subsets of fellowship. Interestingly, Luke does little to expand upon the devotion to the teaching of the apostles. Rather, he seems to use the summary passage to expand upon the term "fellowship." (See *Fellowship*.) Luke fills the term "fellowship" with the ideas of mutual care and concern among the early followers of Jesus. These people have been transformed by the gospel so that they have an attitude that they are one people, that they are not alone (Acts 2.44). They have developed an openness to share with one another (Acts 2.44). The believers commit to the responsibility of caring for one another's needs and sacrificing to do it (Acts 2.45). Finally, they begin a new lifestyle in which they worship and share life together (Acts 2.46-47a). What Luke is describing is the formation of a new community, one in which the attitudes and practice of mutual care and concern run deep. With the placement of this description of the early Christian community right after Peter's Pentecost sermon, Luke seems to be describing the first-level implications of responding to the gospel. The gospel leads to a transformation of people that expresses itself in mutual care and concern for fellow Christ-followers. One might describe this concern by coining the term "oneanotherness"; that is, the intense desire to and practice of caring for a fellow Christ-follower.

**The outcome of "oneanotherness":** The first outcome of the gospel was a transformation so that they expressed mutual care and concern for one another. The outcome of this "oneanotherness" was that the early Church enjoyed the favor of people. Further, the Lord added to their number every day. Somehow the outcome of living out the implications of the gospel formed a solid foundation for mission and its expansion. **Application:** Mission starts by living out the implications of the gospel in our lives. The gospel starts its transformation in us by turning us to follow believers so that we express and practice mutual care and concern. As we allow the gospel to do this work in us we become for the world a living testimony of the life God intends for people, a life of deep connection with Him and one another. Through this witness of the gospel at work in us, the gospel becomes effective and does its work in the world.