



SESSION 3

UNSTOPPABLE LOVE

▶ ***The Point***

Loving people is a powerful expression of loving God.

▶ ***The Passage***

Acts 2:41-47

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Many businesses are famous not just for their products and services, but also for their work environments. For example:

- ▶ An Internet-related company offers its employees on-site vehicle maintenance, a laundromat, hair salon, and nap pods during work hours.
- ▶ A toy company offers paid time off for school-related absences like parent-teacher conferences or field trips.
- ▶ Other companies offer physical perks such as on-site gyms, pools, and even bowling alleys.⁷

These companies have created an inviting culture that draws people to work and keeps them happy. The church is known for a culture that is far deeper than corporate perks. The early church's culture overflowed with love—love that reflected Jesus Christ and drew people to Him. Their example in Acts 2 challenges us to continue that reputation and be a church immersed in a culture of love.

▶ ***The Setting***

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus. These disciples were empowered by the Spirit to speak to the Jews present in Jerusalem for Pentecost, and to speak to them in their own languages. As the people became more and more amazed, Peter preached to them, telling them about Jesus and the good news of the gospel. Acts 2:41-47 reveals that about 3,000 people believed after Peter's sermon; the passage describes the growth of the early church.

What does the Bible say?

The fellowship (v. 42)—The Greek word *koinonia* comes from a root word meaning “common.” In this context, *koinonia* expressed shared interests and concerns, along with full engagement in a community of believers.

Breaking of bread (v. 42)—Most likely this refers to the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, which is a reminder of Christ’s body and blood sacrificed for the salvation of those who place their faith in Him.

Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹ **So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them.**

⁴² **And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.**

⁴³ **Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.**

⁴⁴ **Now all the believers were together and held all things in common.**

⁴⁵ **They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need.**

⁴⁶ **Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude,**

⁴⁷ **praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.**



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Acts 2:41-42

41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

READ: Acts 2:41-42 on page 85 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the second paragraph on page 85 of the PSG in order to set the context for verses 41-42.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 85 of the PSG: **“What aspects of church life have been especially meaningful to you?”**

SUMMARIZE: Focus on the theme of prayer by highlighting the main points from pages 85-86 in the PSG:

1. “Let’s focus for a moment on that crucial last element: *praying*. Every great movement from God starts with prayer and is confirmed by prayer.”
2. “Prayer is the key to effective evangelism. We don’t change people’s hearts with our convincing arguments or clever presentations.”
3. “Prayer allows God to change *me*—the one praying.”
4. “Praying for others leads to caring for others.”

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 86 of the PSG: **“When have you seen the transformational power of prayer?”**

Note: Because this question is asking group members to share a personal story, be sure to give them enough time to think. It can take as much as 30-60 seconds for people to examine important events from their past and decide what they are willing to share.

TRANSITION: As we continue with verses 43-45, we’ll get a deeper look at some of the characteristics that made the early church so influential.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some words that describe your experience with prayer?

Acts 2:41-42 Commentary

[Verse 41] On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered Peter's words and brought conviction to the people (see Acts 2:1-40). As a result, many Jews **accepted his message** and **were baptized**. Baptism identified them as followers of Jesus—people who have died to their old way of life and entered into a new life where Jesus is their focus. Luke noted that **about 3,000 people** became followers of Christ during that one day.

[Verse 42] The events noted in verses 42-47 cover an extended period of time, during which the new community of believers developed and grew. Their fellowship was characterized by several distinctive activities. In fact, Luke wrote that they were **devoted** to these things; they were persistent in doing them day-by-day.

A disciple is first a learner, which is why **the apostles' teaching** was an essential element in the new community. Each day, the apostles taught the new believers what they had learned from Jesus, as their goal was to help believers become more like Jesus. This apostolic instruction could have included Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ; Jesus' resurrection; as well as what Jesus taught about God and His kingdom, including faith, prayer, giving, relationships, and priorities. The apostles most certainly shared personal stories about Jesus' life and ministry that served as examples to believers and gave direction for the disciples' lives.

The new community of believers was also devoted to **the fellowship**. The Greek word used here points to the early believers' unity with Christ and with each other. Even today, all Christians have a common connection with God, and we share His Spirit living within each of us. We also have a common mission. The unity of the believers in Jerusalem was expressed by their actions—which would have included worshipping God together, eating meals together, being physically present and emotionally supportive in times of distress, and even giving material possessions to help meet others' needs.

Another common action the disciples carried out consistently was the **breaking of bread**. More than a regular meal, this was most likely a celebration of the Lord's Supper, which represents God's new covenant that was initiated by Christ's sacrifice (see Luke 22:14-20). It also symbolizes the believer's communion (relationship) with Christ and with others in His body.

A fourth activity that characterized the new community was **the prayers**. These were surely more than the memorized prayers offered in the temple service. They could have included prayer for unity, boldness, wisdom, provision, guidance, and strength.

Acts 2:43-45 Commentary

[Verse 43] Because of what was happening in and through the believers, Luke noted that a sense of **fear came over everyone**. This was not the feeling of dread or panic people experience when they are afraid. Instead, it refers to a deep respect, admiration, or reverence. This was not just a one-time occurrence, either. The verb suggests an ongoing action—everyone continued to experience this reverent awe.

Surely the believers were amazed and probably even overwhelmed by what God was doing in and through them. But likely the response of reverent awe refers more to those who were not believers, especially the Jews in Jerusalem who witnessed the work of God in ways they might never have seen before. Part of what they witnessed or heard about was the **many wonders and signs** that God did **through the apostles**. These were miraculous actions (similar to those performed by Jesus) that met physical needs, demonstrated the power of God, and pointed people to God. These wonders and signs were a reminder of Joel's prophecy of the last days that Peter proclaimed on Pentecost (see Acts 2:19).

[Verse 44] This summary verse from Luke was another reminder of the close fellowship of **all the believers** in the fledgling community of Christ. The word **together** emphasizes the unity of the Christian community. The believers also **held all things in common**. This was a completely voluntary action they engaged in because of their love and concern for one another.

[Verse 45] Because of their love for each other, the disciples determined to take care of **anyone who had a need**. Thus, **they sold their possessions and property** to help meet one another's physical needs. Again, this was not a required action for any disciple. The believers obviously held a loose grip on their belongings and allowed God to use whatever they had whenever there was a need to be met.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Acts 2:46-47

46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

READ: Acts 2:46-47 on page 88 of the PSG.

RECAP: Read the second paragraph on page 88 of the PSG:

The early church certainly prayed and cared for others. But they didn't stop there. Perhaps if the believers had done only these two things and nothing more, none of us would know about Jesus today. At some point, in addition to praying for and helping people, they had to tell them about Jesus—who He is and why He lived, died, and rose again. They had to give voice to the message behind their loving acts.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 88 of the PSG: "**Loving others involves praying, caring, and sharing. In which of these areas would you like to grow?**"

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you seen practical love result in spiritual fruit?

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Pray, Care, Share" on page 89 of the PSG.



Think of someone in your sphere of influence who would benefit from experiencing the love of Christ. Use the questions below to plan out how to pray for that person, care for him or her in a practical way, and share the message of the gospel.

When will you pray for this person each day?

What's one practical step you can take in the coming week to show this person that you care?

What will you communicate to this person when an opportunity appears to share the good news of the gospel?

Acts 2:46-47 Commentary

[Verse 46] On a daily basis, the believers continued to meet with each other in **the temple complex**. The mention of the temple is a reminder that the believers at this time still saw themselves as Jews. They had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, but they still held to many of the tenets of Judaism and continued to observe many of the Jewish practices. Even as the believers met **together** in the temple courts, they had in mind their witness to Jews who were not followers of Christ. Every day crowds of Jews came to the temple to participate in worship, so it was natural for the believers to gather there. And it was a natural place to share their faith. They wanted others to experience the forgiveness and life they knew because of their relationship with God through faith in His Son Jesus.

While larger, public group gatherings in the temple were important, it was just as important for the believers to spend time together outside the temple. Thus, they also gathered **from house to house**—that is, in many different homes throughout the city. It was in these intimate small groups where they **broke bread**. This probably refers to a regular meal, which could have concluded with an observance of the Lord's Supper. Such combination meals were a regular practice for the early church (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34).

The love of the early believers in Jerusalem for one another and their unity in the faith resulted in a **joyful and humble attitude** within their fellowship. The Greek phrase translated *humble attitude* occurs in the New Testament only in this verse and literally means simplicity of heart.

[Verse 47] One other notable characteristic of the believers was their time spent **praising God**. Their worship undoubtedly included words of thanks to God for all He had done for them—not only for the eternal life they experienced because of Jesus, but also for the abundant life they enjoyed because of the Spirit's presence within them.

The believers did not live their lives in isolation. Rather, the community of Christ was well-known throughout the city. Luke noted that they enjoyed the **favor of all the people**, that is, the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. The believers' lives and their fellowship were characterized by great love, and thus became a witness to others, just as Jesus had promised: "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

The results of their sacrificial love and ongoing witness were astounding. The Holy Spirit empowered their witness, just as Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8, and **every day** people were **being saved**. As a result, **the Lord added** these new believers to the community of faith.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 90 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for loving others this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray.** Take a prayer walk through your neighborhood. Pray for the spiritual, emotional, and financial needs of each household—and pray especially for their salvation.
- ▶ **Care.** Actively look for someone in need this week. Determine to give sacrificially, whether of your time, money, or other resources to help that person in the name of Jesus.
- ▶ **Share.** Think of someone you’ve prayed for or helped in practical ways but never talked to about Jesus. Bring Jesus into your conversation with that person. Let them know your concern for them is motivated by the love of Christ in your life.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the conclusion from page 90 of the PSG:

As members of the church, we have an opportunity to create a culture that’s way more attractive than anything a corporation could produce. But it starts with you. Choose to pray, care, and share as a witness of Christ.

PRAY: Conclude by affirming your desire for your group to be a place where people experience community and the reality of God’s love.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra