
GENUINE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS – (ACTS 2:1-47)

The following are resource questions that you can use with your Care Group for discussion. They are based on the sermon preached on Sunday, November 1, 2009, by Pastor Arnold Wong at the Grace Baptist Church, Singapore. The sermon is available online at <http://www.gracebap.org.sg/worship/series.html>.

November 1, 2009

Context:

The Church begins to grow. The day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Church—not of any particular church but of the one worldwide Church, the glorious fellowship of all who are baptized into the name of Christ.

Luke gives us a glimpse behind the scenes into the invisible, internal life of the community (v. 32). It is just as important that the whole inner life of the church should also show the power of God's Holy Spirit at work. Luke's picture of the infant church (in its first week of life) is one in which the life of the Spirit is visible in the way believers relate to each other. This, in many ways, is the most basic function of the Spirit (much more basic than 'gifts'). Paul calls it the *koinonia* or 'fellowship' of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13), and it has profound implications for the way believers are called to live out their lives together in the actual realities of congregational life.

Baptism is the beginning of a new lifestyle and Luke gives us four pillars that mark out and nourish that lifestyle (v. 42).

I. WHAT THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH DID:

A. Teaching of the Apostles:

The new disciples will need to learn from the Twelve what they had learnt from being with Jesus (1:21-22) and what Jesus had entrusted to them in those 40 precious days between Easter and The Ascension (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-4). This is the foundation for the Christian life and there is no substitute for it. It also means keeping up the habit of discipleship, realizing that students never stop learning—not just from the words of their teachers, but from the actions of their teachers as well.

B. Fellowship among the believers:

Being a Christian is about acquiring a new allegiance, following a new Lord, but that is not just a private matter between God and us. There is also a horizontal aspect to this new allegiance: whether we like it or not, we are part of something bigger. We are setting out on a journey with a band of fellow pilgrims—and we are there to

sustain and support each other. Trying to be a Christian on our own is not going to be easy or possible.

C. Breaking of Bread (Eating) Together:

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, '*breaking bread*' together is the quintessential expression of Christian fellowship—this unique act sets believers apart from others. Breaking of bread is also a practical way of building community and an act of remembrance of Jesus' death (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:20-34). Breaking bread is clearly something distinct from 'taking nourishment' (v. 46), although both happen together in the believers' homes and both are expressions of Christian fellowship. Breaking of Bread speaks about worship of Christ rather than mere nourishment.

D. Praying Together:

The church's regular life of prayer (v. 42) continues as the foundation behind all these early chapters, something that goes on all the time even though we only occasionally get a glimpse of it (compare 4:24-31). As we see in Acts 3, the temple is the natural place to go to pray—prayer is the focus for the worship life of all God's people. There are also set hours for prayer—times when all God's people will be setting aside 'time to be holy'—something that Luke expects his readers to appreciate as the standard pattern of the spiritual life.

II. WHAT WE CAN DO (FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION):

Luke has already described on every practical outworking of *koinonia*: it means that Christians hold everything in common (*koina*) for the relief of those in need (Acts 2:44), and it evokes the ideal picture of the wilderness community in Deuteronomy 15. We know that the Qumran community operated some form of monastic pooling of property and this provides corroboration that such practices were part of the world of the early church. But Luke doesn't mean an early form of communism so much as a willingness to put everything at the disposal of others. Believers held their private property as a trust to be used by God. The details become clearer in verse 34: those who could afford it, sold their possessions as need arose, and what people sold was not their own homes but any disposable property that they happened to have (Acts 2: 46 and 12:12 make it clear that believers still kept their own homes). The object is not to disadvantage themselves but to use their surplus assets to raise money for those in need.

- Definition of genuine "Christian fellowship includes:-
- Description of genuine "Christian fellowship", vs. 44-45
- Details involved in genuine "Christian fellowship"
- Love & acceptance, Ephesians 3:17-19; Romans 15:7
- Honesty & humility, Ephesians 4:25; Philippians 2:3
- Concern & restoration, Galatians 6:1-2
- Confession & forgiveness, James 5:16; Ephesians 4:32
- Assemble & encourage, Hebrews 10:23-2

III. THE CHALLENGE: *KOINONIA*

It is easy to dismiss Luke's picture of the early church as 'utopian.' The fact is, however, that the interactive social care practiced by the early churches for their poorer members made a huge impression on outsiders and unbelievers and played a vital part in the mission and growth of the church in the early centuries. This is an idea that rather frightens those of us in the affluent modern Singapore, and it is worth wondering why, but this is a fact that keeping a loose connection with our personal property and seeking to resist the tyranny of the acquisitive ('I want more') society has always lain close to the surface for those who seek to follow Jesus.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Someone once said, 'I can't hear your words because your actions are shouting too loud!' All too often, it's the inner, private behavior of Christians towards one another and towards others that prevent people from hearing the gospel message.

1. How far are we willing to go to share with those who are genuinely in need?
2. What are the tangible ways we can share and demonstrate care for people going through difficult times?
3. How much is enough for my/my family's needs in modern Singapore?

End of Study.