

WHAT IS CENTRAL? "CONNECTION IS CENTRAL" ACTS 2:42-47

People are gifted with natural abilities by *divine design*. While we typically use the term "gifted" to refer to children, often as students who demonstrate extraordinary intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership abilities, or extraordinary abilities in specific academic fields such as math and science, children retain these abilities as they mature into gifted (educated and trained) adults. But what about most of us who don't demonstrate any extraordinary abilities? Is it not true that we are gifted, too? It is if you recognize that giftedness has a broader definition; giftedness can refer to that unique blend of common traits and ordinary abilities that makes each of us unique. So understood, giftedness is not limited to a fortunate few. It's universal—part of the human condition (Ps 139:13-16)—and is made evident by what a person *does best* and is *most motivated* to do.

Christians are gifted with natural abilities by divine design and endowed with spiritual gifts when they believe in Jesus. Paul tells the Corinthians: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same

The Life is one that requires some regular and profound conjunction with others who share it.

— Dallas Willard

Spirit, and *he distributes them to each one, just as he determines*" (1Co 12:8-11). The two, one's natural giftedness and one's spiritual giftedness, complement each other in the life of every member of the body of Christ.

What's more, Paul tells the Ephesians that spiritual gifts, in particular, are given "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants . . ." (4:12b-14a). But how can our giftedness, natural and spiritual, accomplish its God-given purpose, if we're not connected to biblical community? It can't! The infrequent, superficial contact that "church friends" have with one another doesn't cut it. Transformation requires the kind of fellowship the first Christian community enjoyed (Ac 2:42-47).

This Week's Core Competency

Biblical Community – I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, in others' lives, and in the world.

Some animals are social; some are solitary. Among the most solitary are bears, rhinos, leopards, koalas, and wolverines. Wolverines are very strange and solitary mammals. They not only prefer to live alone, they always try to rid their surroundings of every other animal. They are known to seize large areas of land for themselves. No wonder they choose to live in the vast forests of Alaska and Canada. Among the most social, with what might even be called strong family ties, are elephants, wolves, prairie dogs (America's meerkats), chimpanzees, and orcas. Orcas form extremely strong bonds and rarely separate for longer than a few hours. Offspring may even live with their parents for their entire lives. It is said that orcas

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are very smart, have great ability to work together, and an amazing instinct to protect the members of their community.

People are more like orcas than wolverines, albeit a few have the disposition of the latter. People are undoubtedly divinely wired for community—lone rangers and hermits notwithstanding—because an aspect of the image of God in mankind is *community*. One theologian writes: "It is not surprising that ultimately the image of God should focus on community. As the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is community, namely, the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who comprise the triune God. The of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be. Consequently, each person can be related to the image of God only within the context of life in community with others. Only in fellowship with other can we show forth what God is like, for God is the community of love—the eternal relationship enjoyed by the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit" (Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 179).

Given our nature as human beings, it's not surprising that spiritual transformation should take place in the context of community. One author writes: "The fire of God kindles higher as the brands are heaped together and each is warmed by the other's flame. The members of the body must be in contact if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other. Christian redemption is not devised to be a solitary thing, though each individual of course has a unique and direct relationship with God, and God alone is his or her Lord and Judge. But The Life is one that requires some regular and profound conjunction with others who share it. It is greatly diminished when that is lacking" (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187-88). In other words, God transforms us through our relationships with other Christians. Therefore every one of us needs frequent, meaningful contact with other members of the body of Christ in order to mature. Otherwise we run the risk of growing spiritually cold, apathetic, and stagnant.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Cf., Acts 4:32-35

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * In the margin next to v. 42 "they," write, "See v. 41."
- * Bracket "devoted themselves" in v. 42.
- * Circle "everyone," "all the believers," "they," and "their" in vv. 42-47.
- * Box "to" in v. 42.
- * Underline "apostles' teaching" in v. 42.
- * Underline "fellowship" in v. 42 (cf., "common" in v. 44).

- * Underline "breaking of bread" in v. 42 (cf., "broke bread" in v. 46).
- * Underline "prayer" in v. 42.
- * In the margin next to v. 43 write, "See 3:1-10."
- * Circle "temple courts" in v. 46.
- * Bracket "in their homes" in v. 46.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. To whom does "they" (v. 1) refer?
2. How would you describe the relationship of verse 42 to verses 43-47?
3. Explain how devotion to the apostles' teaching is possible today since the apostles are no longer with us.
4. The term "fellowship" (*koinonia*) may refer to the *most important* practice in verse 42. How so?
5. Describe the practice to which "the breaking of bread" refers (see note on v. 42).
6. If "prayer" includes the practice of praying *set prayers*, why do you think we have abandoned this?
7. Comment on *your* level of devotion to the four things mentioned in verse 42.
8. From the context surrounding verse 44, explain the meaning of "had everything in common." (You might want to consider 4:32-5:4 as well.)
9. **Discussion:** Talk about how the extraordinary way of life of the first Christian community might be explained (cf., 2:38b; 4:31b).

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In his synopsis of Acts 2:42-47, one commentator writes: "This passages summarizes the life of the community both internally (v. 42) and with those outside (vv. 43-47). The early believers hold their possessions in common and also go to the temple, reflecting their embrace of the Messiah. This messianic faith has not caused them to separate from Jewish practice and worship. Their interaction and engagement with those outside has sparked even more growth. In Acts we never see a community turned so inward that taking the message to those outside and engaging with those outside is forgotten or ignored" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 149).

Acts 2:42-47 (cf., 4:32-35) describes a kind of involvement and sharing with others that caught the eye and enjoyed the esteem of unbelievers then as well as now. Perhaps it was sparked by the unusual number of Jews in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover—who remained in the city after coming to faith in response to the preaching of Peter (Ac 3:14-41) and necessarily leaned on the fellowship of the locals for their needs—but continued long after they had departed the city for home. Unfortunately, it's too rarely seen today. It was a way of life devoted to the teaching of the apostles and lively participation in community, which included but went far beyond observing communion and praying together. All the believers agreed that they were stewards rather than owners of their belongings, and they also agreed as stewards to use what was entrusted to them for the common good. As a result "there were no needy persons among them" (4:34). Moreover, they did more than see each other once a week at church; they walked around in each other's lives on a daily basis, as evidenced by the fact that they frequently ate together in each other's homes. The fact that their devotion was spontaneous, prompted only by the Spirit (4:31b) rather than in response to an apostolic campaign to "get connected to community," makes it even more remarkable and suggests that it should be considered normative for today.

As another commentator writes: "Verses 43-46 give an ideal portrait of the young Christian community, witnessing the Spirit's presence in the miracles of the apostles, sharing their possessions with the needy among them, sharing their witness in the temple, sharing themselves in the intimacy of their table fellowship. Their common life was marked by praise to God, joy in the faith, and sincerity of heart. And in it all they experienced the favor of the nonbelievers and continual blessings of God-given growth. It was an ideal, almost blissful time marked by the joy of their life together and the warmth of the Spirit's presence among them. It could almost be described as the young church's 'age of innocence'" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 122).

My mother and father attended church every week and took me with them from the time I was born. While I was in Sunday School, they would typically connect with a couple to sit with in their adult Bible class, and then between services, connect with a different couple to sit with in church. Afterward our family would occasionally go out to eat with another family, and every so often a different family would come to our house for dinner. That was it. My parents had "friends at church" but never experienced true biblical community. In fact, they hardly ever saw their "church friends" outside of Sunday church. They certainly never experienced the kind of life together with other Christians described in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. And why not? Perhaps because they only heard about *going to church* and never about *biblical community*. Perhaps because our church life was built around programs rather than a way of life.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Get connected so you can devote yourself to doing the things Christians are to do—together with others in biblical community.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Do you have "church friends" or are you connected to biblical community? Explain what makes you think so.

If you are connected to community, describe how your community engages in the four practices mentioned in Acts 2:42.

Being involved in community involves *give and take*. Identify one thing you give to and one thing you take from your involvement.

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 42 **they** The pronouns throughout refer to the apostles, the 120 believers mentioned in Acts 1:15, and the 3,000 or so that were added to their number on the day of Pentecost (2:41).

v. 42 **devoted themselves** Cf., "continued steadfastly" (NKJV). "The expression 'devoting themselves' has the idea of *persistence* or *persevering* in something (BDAG 881 §2; EDNT 3:172; Barrett 119:162). The imperfect periphrastic construction speaks of the *ongoing devotion* that they have" (Bock, 149, italics added). Some take it that there were four expressions of the believers' communal way of life; others take it there were only two. On the one hand, the latter argue "the breaking of bread" and "prayer" should be taken in apposition to "fellowship," i.e., as aspects of fellowship (see discussion in Polhill, 119). "These new converts, along with the disciples, gave ('devoted,' Gr. *proskartereo*, cf. 1:14) themselves to two activities primarily: the apostles' teaching and fellowship. The grammar of the Greek sentence sets these actions off as distinct from the following two activities that define fellowship" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts," 2017 ed., 65, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf). On the other, each of the four acts are preceded by articles: "the" teaching, "the" fellowship, "the" breaking of bread, and "the" prayers. Practically speaking it makes little difference.

v. 42 **apostles' teaching** "Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians. In keeping with Jesus' teaching to them (chap. 1), this would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus' earthly ministry and teachings" (Polhill, 119). "Matthew 28:19-20 expresses the task as 'teaching them to observe all I commanded you.' It likely would have included all kinds of instruction like what we see in the Gospels and Epistles: ethical and practical teaching and a grounding in the central promise God had given in Jesus" (Bock, 150).

v. 42 **fellowship** A form of the same word is used in v. 44 with reference to believers having everything "in common." The Greek term has a more profound sense than is generally conveyed by the English word "fellowship," which to many denotes occasional get-togethers with friends. The term *koinonia* connotes "an association involving close mutual relations and involvement" (Louw and Nida, 34.5). In the immediate context it refers to a kind of life together that entails sharing to meet the needs of others and might be translated "community." Believers devoted themselves to life together in community. "Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church at all levels (so Fitzmyer 1998: 270). There is a real sense of connection to, between, and for each other" (Bock, 150).

v. 42 **breaking of bread** The question of whether "the breaking of bread" refers to communion or to a common meal—which seems more likely in verse 46 (cf., "in their homes")—is difficult since the Lord's table later became part of a larger meal in the early church. "The 'breaking of bread' is a term that here probably included the Lord's Supper as well as eating a meal together (cf. v. 46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-25; Jude 12). Elsewhere the phrase describes both an ordinary meal (Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 20:11; 27:35) and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Probably these early Christians ate together and as part of the meal, or after it, used their common food, bread and wine, to commemorate Christ's death" (Constable, 65). "The communal meal could not conveniently be eaten in the temple precincts, so they ate 'by households,' as we may translate the Greek phrase (AV 'from house to house' gives the sense fairly well)" (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NICNT, 81).

v. 42 **prayer** "The presence of the article in the Greek text before prayers has led some interpreters to see this as a reference to their keeping the formal prayer hours of Judaism in the temple. They may well have done so to some extent, for their faithfulness in attending temple worship is noted in 2:46 and 3:1. The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private worship" (Polhill, 119-20); cf., 3:24. "The use of set prayer on occasion is likely in light of the facts that (1) set prayers existed in Judaism, (2) a tie to the temple where set prayers were made is expressed in 2:46 and 3:1, and (3) the Lord taught the disciples such a fixed prayer (Luke 11:2-4)" (Bock, 151).

v. 43 **signs and wonders** The apostles' message—regarding the resurrection—was "accredited" by signs and wonders as Jesus' message had been (see 2:22). Wonders are "miracles evoking awe" and signs are "miracles pointing to a divine truth" (Stanley Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 360).

v. 44 **common** A form of the same word translated "fellowship" in verse 42 reflecting their communal way of life, which was not a form of Christian communism for they voluntarily shared what belonged to them (see 5:4). "The procedure is indicated by the Greek: not that everything was sold off at once and put in a common fund, but that possessions were sold off over a period as need arose" (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 36).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

My husband and I bought our "starter" house as newlyweds. It's tiny, and though we've been blessed to be able to add on, we're still a little cramped. Six people with one shower might seem a little crazy, but it's our normal. People often ask us why we never moved; the answer is easy. We love our neighbors. God placed us in an amazing neighborhood that is a perfect fit for our family. The kids have grown up in a safe environment with friends in virtually every house on the block. We all have refrigerator rights and keys to get in many of the houses. I can't tell you how many tools, eggs, and rolls of toilet paper have been passed around the street in an effort to stay home instead of running to the store. Many of our favorite family memories are of neighborhood get-togethers. Countless dinners have been combined throwing whatever was available on the grill. We especially love roasting marshmallows over a fire pit or chimenea. What a blessing it's been to gather together, breaking bread and eating together as we praise God. There is no substitute for biblical community. God created you and your kids to fellowship with other believers. Maybe this is the year your family takes a step toward connecting through Home Group or Community Group. We're here to help you navigate this! I'm praying for your family to dive deep into biblical community that worships and honors God.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Acts 2:46-47

1. What did the believers do every day?
2. What was their attitude and how did they express this?
3. What did the Lord do?

What Do You Think

Why do you think it's important to gather together with other believers?

What R U Going To Do

Ask your parents to take you to a home group this week or invite neighbors over and follow the home group guide (email kids@pantego.org for the guide if you don't have it).

Core Comp

Biblical Community - I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Matthew 22:37-38 – *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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