

## STUDY GUIDE

### DUTCHTOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

AUTHENTIC

THE DISCIPLINE OF FELLOWSHIP

ACTS 2:42-47

06/12/2016

#### MAIN POINT

One of the surest barometers of the quality of your Christian life is the quality of your fellowship with other believers.

#### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**The previous session's application activity involved practicing the discipline of fasting in connection with a specific situation in your life. If you're comfortable, describe the situation or need you focused on during the fast.**

**What did you experience during and after the fast?**

**What practical lessons did you learn that will help during your next experience with fasting?**

**What were your other biggest takeaways from your experience with fasting?**

**What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word "fellowship"?**

Most people think of fellowship in the same way we think of fun, but fellowship is actually a discipline. It's not something that's only helpful but something that's commanded. As James MacDonald will help us see, one of the surest barometers of the quality of your Christian life is the quality of your fellowship with other believers.

#### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 2:42-47.**

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**What are some of the characteristics of fellowship you can see in these verses?**

**Why do you think it's important to recognize that fellowship is a discipline?**

These verses record the description of the early church after the coming of the Holy Spirit and the miracles of Pentecost. We see here that fellowship is the common life we have together as followers of Jesus. The authentic fellowship we see between

these believers was a necessary part of their spiritual growth and witness. James MacDonald will help us see how to practice this discipline in our lives today.

## **WATCH THE TEACHING SEGMENT FOR SESSION 5 FEATURING JAMES MACDONALD.**

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**What did you like best about James's teaching?**

**What does our culture teach about the practice of fellowship and friendship?**

**Respond to James's statement: "A lot of people don't realize that fellowship is a discipline—not just something helpful but something commanded. It's not just something useful but something needed. And one of the surest barometers of the quality of your Christian life is the quality of the Christian relationships in your life."**

James helped us see that true fellowship requires commitment. Starting a relationship is easy, but continuing in a relationship, especially one that involves pain and day-to-day routines, is difficult. Like any other spiritual discipline, fellowship requires commitment. But as we commit to each other in the discipline of fellowship, we are reminded that the way we treat others is a true reflection of what we are experiencing in our own relationship with Jesus.

**In what seasons of life have you been most content with the quality and quantity of your relationships with other Christians?**

**What are the risks involved in seeking deeper relationships outside your family?**

**What are the potential rewards of cultivating spiritual friendships that go below the surface?**

**Describe the barriers that have prevented you from cultivating deeper friendships in the past. How can these barriers be overcome?**

True fellowship is a risk. We have to be willing to open ourselves up to both give and receive honesty, share burdens, and pursue Jesus with and for the sake of each other. Though we might have been burned in relationships in the past, we must intentionally seek and strive for a continual experience of Christian fellowship.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Fellowship is the only discipline that can't be practiced alone, so it has a great deal of application for the group. What do you hope to gain from this group in the area of fellowship?**

**What will you contribute to strengthen the fellowship if this group?**

**What is one specific way you are going to extend the discipline of fellowship to someone with whom you might not ordinarily interact?**

## **PRAY**

Close your group by praying for the relationships in the group and in the church. Ask the Lord to strengthen the bonds of fellowship in your church.

**Visit [LifeWay.com/JamesMacDonald](http://LifeWay.com/JamesMacDonald) to purchase the study guide for more in-depth personal and group study.**

## COMMENTARY

### ACTS 2:42-47

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2:42. Luke reported four distinctive practices or activities in the Jerusalem church. First, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Eventually, the church experienced persecution, and some church leaders left Jerusalem. The original apostles, however, continued to minister in this church (8:1). Reviewing the sermons and teaching reported in the opening chapters of Acts reveals the major doctrinal themes important to the early church. The apostles could report their own experiences with Jesus during his earthly ministry as well as explaining Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Biblically-based preaching and teaching are still fundamental to church life. Second, the church experienced fellowship. Fellowship translates the Greek word *koinonia*, and means "participation" or "sharing." Third, they shared the breaking of bread. Although some Bible students think this could be sharing a common meal, many scholars believe this is Luke's way of referring to the Lord's Supper. The disciples had celebrated a meal with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem. Fourth, the church devoted themselves to prayers. The early Christian movement was bathed in prayer. Jesus' disciples had asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus had established Himself as a consistent prayer, so His followers should pray as well.

2:44-45. One of the most amazing characteristics of the Jerusalem church was its sharing its material possessions with the needy. The Christians voluntarily shared with anyone who needed help. As part of their fellowship, the early church practiced a community of goods for a short time. Distribution to members of the faith community took place according to individual need. This practice did not last long, likely because it was logistically difficult and fraught with potential abuse (see ch. 4-6).

Later, Luke noted that these church members were "of one heart and soul" (4:32). No one remained needy for long because the church responded quickly and generously to need. The money was brought to the apostles, who were in charge of the distribution (4:34-35). Luke highlighted the role of Barnabas in this generosity (4:36-37), but he also noted the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their actions (5:1-10).

2:46. Although these believers understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Jewish hope for the Messiah (2:36), the members of the Jerusalem church were primarily Jewish in background. They still went to the temple complex. They would not participate in the sacrificial system any longer, since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They may have wanted to demonstrate the continuity between their Jewish heritage and their new faith in Christ. Also, they may have found opportunities to witness to their Jewish friends and relatives.

Besides gathering together in the temple complex, these Christians broke bread from house to house. Quite likely this means they gathered regularly in houses for worship and the Lord's Supper. Christians did not typically build church buildings in the early centuries, so they met in homes. When they gathered in homes, these disciples expressed gratitude for their shared meals. These gatherings were marked by a simplicity or "sincerity" of heart. They did not need to put on airs; they genuinely worshiped God.

2:47. One result of the early church's worship and witness was having favor with all the people. In these early days the people of Jerusalem were generally open to the Christians. Later on, the Jewish leaders tried to restrict their public preaching (4:1-22).

The early church was an evangelizing church. Luke recounted that every day the Lord added to those who were being saved. He did not say how this took place, but it appears that evangelism took place primarily through the gathering of Christians in the temple and in individual houses. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were at the heart of early Christian preaching, which called for immediate response from anyone who listened. Such enormous numerical growth eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish leaders.