

Leader Preparation Guide

They Devoted Themselves

Movement Four: Formation · Acts 2:42-47

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from six verses what St. Luke tells us about the life of the community that followed those conversions, and notice that the answer is four concrete communal practices rather than a program, that the sharing was costly and voluntary, and that the growth in verse 47 is credited to the Lord and not to the community.

Catholic Touchstone

You hand a person to Christ and to his Church, not to yourself. The four things they devoted themselves to in verse 42 are the skeleton of Catholic life, and the Catechism opens its treatment of the communion of saints by quoting this verse.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Four things, and the Greek is worth a minute

Verse 42: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

The apostles' teaching (*didachē tōn apostolōn*). Not their own reading, and not the teaching of whoever led them to Christ. There is an authoritative source, and it is not the person who evangelized them.

Fellowship (*koinōnia*). Not socializing. The word means a real sharing in common. Verses 44 and 45 give one concrete and costly expression of it, the selling of possessions, without exhausting what the word covers.

The breaking of the bread (*klasis tou artou*). Be precise here. The phrase can mean an ordinary meal, and honest commentators say so. Catholic tradition reads it Eucharistically, and it is the expression St. Luke uses at Luke 24:35 and Acts 20:7, where the church gathers on the first day of the week to break bread. Catholic tradition reads it that way, and the Catechism lists "the breaking of bread" among the names for the Eucharist and cites this passage when it does (CCC 1329). Keep the concession that the expression can denote an ordinary meal; the sense of individual Lukan occurrences is exegetically debated.

The prayers (*tais proseuchais*), with the definite article. Not prayer in general but *the* prayers. Acts 3:1 has Peter and John going up to the temple at the ninth hour, "the hour of prayer." The wording, together with Acts 3:1, points to participation in established appointed prayers at customary hours. That is an early liturgical pattern; it is not by itself proof of a distinct Christian office or a fixed set of Christian prayers.

What they did with their possessions, and how not to overstate it

Verses 44 and 45: all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.

Two errors to avoid. The first is softening it into nothing. This was real, costly, and it is reported approvingly.

The second is turning it into a doctrinal mandate for common ownership. Acts 5:4 settles it: Peter tells Ananias that while the land remained unsold it remained his own, and after it was sold it was at his disposal. The sharing was voluntary, and the Church has taught the legitimacy of private property alongside the universal destination of goods (CCC 2402-2406). What is binding is the claim of the needy on the surplus of the comfortable, which is put about as sharply as it can be put at CCC 2446.

Two addresses

Verse 46: day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.

They did not leave the temple. Public, formal, appointed worship in the place where everyone could see them, and then meals in houses. Both, daily. Anyone in your group who wants small groups instead of the parish, or the parish instead of anything personal, has to reckon with verse 46. Do not press the analogy too hard: the temple was not a parish, and Luke does not tell us that the houses held only fellowship and not worship.

Who adds

Verse 47: "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The Lord is the one who adds, and he does it through the apostles' preaching and the community's life rather than around them. This is the question your group carried for eight weeks and answered last session, and tonight is the first time you can point at it directly, because it is now resolved rather than pending.

And be honest about "favor with all the people." It did not hold. By Acts 5:13 St. Luke reports that none of the rest dared join them, though the people held them in high honor, and by Acts 8:1 there is a great persecution. A community with the four devotions running was attractive, and it was also, quite soon, dangerous to join. Do not sell your group a permanent honeymoon.

Why this session sits in a study on evangelization

Because the destination of your friendship is not you. If a person says yes and there is nowhere to put them, you have done half a job and the half you did will not hold.

And there is a diagnostic in verse 42 that your leaders can use on their own parish and their own small group. Four things. Which of them does your community actually do? A parish with none of them has nothing to hand anybody. Tonight's steelman is built on exactly that problem, so do not resolve it early.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

No poor among you

Deuteronomy 15:4: "But there will be no poor among you." Acts 4:34 reports, in almost the same words, that there was not a needy person among them. Acts 4:34 strongly echoes that verse, and may be showing Israel's covenantal ideal realised for a time in Jerusalem.

Word, meal, sharing, joy

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passage is Nehemiah 8:1-12. Read it before the session with Acts 2:42-47 open next to it, and the shape will be obvious to you before your group finds it.

The manna measure

Exodus 16:18: he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack. St. Paul quotes precisely this verse when he asks the Corinthians for money for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:15). The principle is older than the Church.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Justin Martyr describes a Sunday, around the year 155

Writing to a pagan emperor to explain what Christians actually do, St. Justin Martyr describes the Sunday assembly: everyone in the towns and the countryside gathers in one place; the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows; the one presiding gives a talk urging imitation of these good things; all stand and pray; bread and wine and water are brought; the president offers prayers and thanksgiving; the people give their assent by saying Amen; the gifts are distributed, and deacons carry them to those who are absent. Then those who are prosperous give what they wish, and the collection is used for orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, and strangers.

Read that list against Acts 2:42, and then against last Sunday. The same essential elements are still visibly present roughly a century after St. Luke wrote. Do not claim they appear in Acts 2:42's order; Justin's sequence runs readings and exhortation, prayers, Eucharist, then the collection.

St. Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapters 65 to 67 (c. AD 155).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on three things that cannot be separated

Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the Church's deepest nature is expressed in a threefold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other, he said, and cannot be separated from one another.

That is Acts 2:42 to 45 stated as a principle. A community that preaches and does not serve, or serves and does not worship, has not chosen a specialty. It has lost something.

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est 25 (2005).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Chrysostom on whose goods they are

Not to enable the poor to share in our goods, St. John Chrysostom said, is to steal from them and to deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.

The Catechism quotes him in exactly those words. Keep it in view before anyone gets comfortable calling verses 44 and 45 a first-century experiment that does not apply.

St. John Chrysostom, quoted at CCC 2446.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism opens its subsection on the communion of spiritual goods by quoting tonight's primary verse, which tells you how foundational the Church takes these six verses to be.

- **CCC 949.** The Catechism opens its subsection on communion in spiritual goods by quoting Acts 2:42 itself. The treatment of the communion of saints begins earlier, at CCC 946.
- **CCC 953.** Communion in charity: nothing anyone does is done in isolation, and what each does affects all.
- **CCC 1329.** "The breaking of bread" is listed among the names of the Eucharist, with this passage cited.
- **CCC 2178.** The Sunday assembly of the faithful, with the practice traced back to the earliest Christians.
- **CCC 2446.** Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them. The Catechism quotes St. John Chrysostom saying so.
- **CCC 2402-2406.** The universal destination of goods together with the legitimacy of private property. Have this ready when verses 44 and 45 come up.
- Using verse 42 as a diagnostic on your own parish is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread B, now resolved, can finally be named out loud. Verse 47 says the Lord added. Last week the group learned that they are not the cause and not optional. Tonight you may point directly at "the Lord added to their number" and let them hear it as an answer rather than a problem. This is the first session in the study where you are allowed to be explicit about it.

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Building toward Session 12, where it pays off in a single phrase. Tonight it appears quietly in verse 46: they were together, daily. Do not comment.

New question introduced tonight and answered next week: what exactly are you handing someone to? Tonight the answer is the Church and her sacraments. Next week the answer gets sharper: to the capacity to do this themselves.

Watch for. The steelman tonight is about a disappointing parish, and it is the most personally raw objection in the study for anyone who has tried and failed to bring a friend into a cold room. Do not treat it as an excuse. Treat it as a wound and then answer it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group name the four devotions precisely, out of the text, including what "the prayers" with the article suggests.
2. Handle verses 44 and 45 honestly in both directions: real and costly, and voluntary rather than mandated.
3. Establish that they kept both the temple and the houses, daily.
4. Point at verse 47 and let Thread B land as an answer now that it is resolved.
5. Have the group find the Old Testament shape of this community in Nehemiah 8.
6. Work the objection about a disappointing parish without dismissing it, and land the four devotions as a diagnostic they can use.
7. Move the ladder from conversation to a room: bring one of the three into something communal.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung nine, praying for the one who already said no.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:24	Read Acts 2:42-47 aloud twice. It is six verses.
0:24-0:40	Build 1 and 2, the four devotions and "the prayers."
0:40-0:50	Build 3, the possessions, with the honest handling in both directions.
0:50-1:00	Live discovery: Nehemiah 8 beside Acts 2.
1:00-1:10	Build 4 and 5, the two addresses and who adds.
1:10-1:24	Build 6, the build-then-press on a parish you cannot recommend. Give it the full time.
1:24-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Fold Build 2 into Build 1 and make the point about "the prayers" in two sentences. Saves six minutes.
- Run the Nehemiah discovery as a straight reading with one question. Saves five minutes.
- Move Build 4 (the two addresses) to the take-home. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 3 or Build 6.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the group turns verses 44 and 45 into a political argument, stop it quickly and read CCC 2402 through 2406 and then CCC 2446. The Catechism holds both halves better than the room will, and it is not anyone's partisan property.

If someone in the group is in real financial difficulty, tonight can shame them. Make sure the conversation about possessions is about surplus rather than about generosity as a personality trait, and do not let the room congratulate itself.

If someone uses the parish objection to announce that they have stopped going to Mass, do not correct them in the room. Hear them, keep going, and follow up in the week.

Anyone who was received into the Church recently may have strong feelings about how they were welcomed. If that surfaces, let it, and let it be uncomfortable. It is data, and it is exactly what this session is about.

Discussion Guide

They Devoted Themselves

Acts 2:42-47

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on the day three thousand people said yes, you did not leave them standing in the street. You gave them teaching, and each other, and the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. Give us somewhere to bring the people we love, and make us willing to build it where it is missing. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Six minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you prayed daily for someone who has already heard and already declined. What was that like?

Leader: expect flatness or frustration. Receive it. Do not offer hope as a correction; last week's session already did that work and it does not need repeating tonight.

WIN

- ▶ Think of a group you joined where you actually felt like you belonged. What did they do in the first month?
- ▶ When you have brought a friend to something at church, what did you find yourself apologizing for on the way in?

BUILD

Read Acts 2:42-47 aloud twice. It is only six verses and the whole session lives in the detail, so the second reading matters more than usual.

1. Verse 42. How many things did they devote themselves to, and what are they? Be exact.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Four. The apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers.

The apostles' teaching. Not their own reading, and not the teaching of whoever they first heard the Gospel from. There is an authoritative source, and it is not the person who evangelized them. Say that out loud; it is one of the two reasons this session is in an evangelization study.

The fellowship. The word is *koinōnia*, a real sharing in common. Verses 44 and 45 give one concrete and costly expression of it: they sold things. It is not a coffee hour, and material sharing does not exhaust the

word.

The breaking of the bread. Catholic tradition reads this Eucharistically, and CCC 1329 lists the expression among the names of the Eucharist, citing this verse. He uses it at Luke 24:35, at the end of the Emmaus road you studied in Session 2, and at Acts 20:7 where the church gathers on the first day of the week to break bread. Honest commentators note the phrase can also mean an ordinary meal, and the sense of particular Lukan occurrences is debated. Catholic tradition reads it as the Eucharist, and the Catechism cites this verse when it lists the names of the Eucharist at CCC 1329.

The prayers. Next question.

2. Look closely at the fourth one. It is not "prayer." What does the definite article do, and what does Acts 3:1 add?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

It is "the prayers," a specific and appointed set. And Acts 3:1 has Peter and John going up to the temple at the ninth hour, which St. Luke calls "the hour of prayer."

The wording with Acts 3:1 points to appointed prayers at customary hours rather than only spontaneous prayer. Do not push it as far as a distinct Christian office; that is more than the verse carries.

Ask the group which of the four they personally find easiest, and which they have quietly dropped. Do not go around the room; take volunteers.

3. Verses 44 and 45. What did they do with their property? Now read Acts 5:4. What does that add?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They had all things in common, sold possessions and goods, and distributed to all as any had need. Acts 4:34 says there was not a needy person among them.

Acts 5:4 is Peter speaking to Ananias: while the land remained unsold, it remained his own, and after it was sold it was at his disposal. So the sharing was voluntary. It was not a rule and it was not enforced.

Both errors are available tonight and you should block both. Do not soften this into nothing; it was real, costly, and reported approvingly. And do not turn it into a mandate for common ownership; the Church has consistently taught the legitimacy of private property alongside the universal destination of goods (CCC 2402-2406).

What is binding is put about as sharply as it can be put, at CCC 2446, quoting St. John Chrysostom: not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking. This one is unusually satisfying.

Have someone read Nehemiah 8:1-12 aloud, slowly, with Acts 2:42-47 open next to it.

Then ask: what happens, in what order?

What they should find: the people gather as one. The book of the law is read aloud from morning until midday, and the people listen. Levites help them understand the reading. Then they are told the day is holy and they should not mourn, but go eat the fat and drink sweet wine, and **send portions to anyone for whom nothing is prepared**. And the people go away to eat and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words.

The word read and explained, then festive eating and drinking, then portions sent to anyone for whom nothing was prepared, then great rejoicing. That is an anticipatory pattern rather than an identity: Nehemiah has no Eucharist and does not reproduce all four devotions.

Then the useful question: what did the Levites do in Nehemiah 8:7-8, and who does that job now?

4. Verse 46. How many places are they meeting, and how often?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Two places, daily. The temple together, and breaking bread in their homes.

They did not leave the temple. Public, formal, appointed worship where everyone could see them, and then meals in houses.

St. Luke gives both, every day, and shows no sign of thinking there is a tension. Offer this as an analogous pattern of public worship and household life rather than as a proof text about parishes and small groups; the temple was not a parish.

5. Verse 47. Two things are reported. Who is doing the adding?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They were praising God and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord** added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Lord is named as the one who adds. That does not sideline the apostles or the community; Acts shows him working through their preaching and their life. Point at it and let the room sit with it, because this is the question they carried for eight weeks and answered last session. Now it reads as an answer instead of a problem.

And be honest about the favor. It did not last. By Acts 5:13 St. Luke says none of the rest dared join them, and by Acts 8:1 there is a great persecution. A community with the four devotions running was genuinely attractive, and it also became dangerous to join. Do not let anyone leave tonight expecting a permanent honeymoon.

6. Someone says: I cannot in good conscience bring my friend to my parish. The music is bad, the homily is worse, nobody speaks to anyone, and a searching person will not survive it. I will disciple them myself. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. Do not treat this as an excuse. Most people who say it have already tried.

DIG DEEPER

Not a needy person among them. Acts 4:34 is nearly a quotation of Deuteronomy 15:4, "there will be no poor among you." The echo is strong, and may show that ideal realised in Jerusalem for a time.

The manna measure. Exodus 16:18 says the one who gathered much had nothing over and the one who gathered little had no lack. St. Paul quotes that exact verse when he is raising money for the poor in Jerusalem, at 2 Corinthians 8:15.

How long did it last? Acts 6:1 records a complaint that the Greek speaking widows were being neglected in the daily distribution, which is the first recorded administrative failure in Church history and arrives about four chapters after this idyll. The four devotions are a description of a real community, not a golden age.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, and do not be defensive. Somebody in your room means it.

The complaint is often simply accurate. Plenty of parishes are cold, and a first time visitor can come and go without a single person speaking to them. Handing a searching friend an experience like that is not neutral; it can set them back years.

And Acts 2 seems to support the objection rather than answer it. The community St. Luke describes has all four devotions actually functioning. Handing someone to a body that has the sacraments and none of the fellowship is not obviously the same act St. Luke is describing.

For some people there is more than disappointment involved. Anyone who has been failed by the institution, or who knows someone who was, has reasons for hesitation that are not fussiness about music.

And there is a real Catholic principle inside the objection. The family is the domestic church. Formation genuinely does happen in houses, between friends, at kitchen tables, and Acts 2:46 says so.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: verse 47 says the Lord added to **their number**. Added to a visible, identifiable community with apostles, a common life and a common table. Not to a private arrangement between four friends. For the first-day gathering, cite Acts 20:7 rather than this verse. Whatever the state of your parish, the destination in this passage is a visible community.

Second: verse 42 says the apostles' teaching. If you are the sole source of what your friend believes, then you are the authority, and that is bad for both of you. It is also, incidentally, the thing that makes people vulnerable when you turn out to be wrong about something, or when you move away.

Third, and this one is not negotiable: you cannot give anyone the Eucharist. Whatever else you can offer a friend, you cannot offer the breaking of the bread. If you do not hand them to the sacraments, you have handed them to yourself, and you are not enough. Session 4 already said this in the Samaritan town's words: they told the woman that they no longer believed because of what she said, and that was the compliment.

Now grant the objection what it has earned. A cold parish is a real problem and pretending otherwise insults the person raising it. Three honest responses. Go with them, every time, and sit with them. Find the part of your parish that does work, because there is almost always one, whether that is a particular Mass, a

particular priest, a ministry, or four people. And build the missing thing yourself; the four devotions are not a rating system for other people's parishes, they are a job description for yours.

Then hand the group the diagnostic. Take verse 42 and score your own parish, and then your own small group, on four items. The one that scores lowest is the one you are being asked to build.

SEND

- ▶ Take verse 42 and score your parish out of four. Which one is weakest, and what would it cost you to be part of fixing it?
- ▶ If one of your three said yes tomorrow, where exactly would you take them on Sunday? Name the Mass and the time.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 10 of the ladder. From conversation to a room. This week you bring somebody somewhere.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Invite one of them into something with other believers in it. A meal at your house with Catholic friends, a parish event, a service project, a Sunday Mass you go to together. A room, not a conversation.
- Go with them. Do not send them, do not meet them there, and do not leave them standing alone at any point.
- Do not apologise for being Catholic or for bringing them. Notice how strong the urge is.
- Afterward, write down who spoke to them that was not you. Bring the number back next week, whatever it is.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you did not save us one at a time and leave us that way. You gave us a Church, with teaching we did not invent, a table we cannot set ourselves, and people we did not choose. Forgive us for the times we have been embarrassed by her. Make our parishes worth bringing somebody to, and make us willing to be the ones who build what is missing. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:42

Leader Reference Card

They Devoted Themselves

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
Acts 2:42-47	Primary text, read aloud twice.
Acts 3:1	Build 2. The ninth hour, the hour of prayer.
Acts 5:4	Build 3. The sharing was voluntary; Peter says so to Ananias.
Acts 4:34	Build 3 and Dig Deeper. Not a needy person among them.
Acts 5:13; Acts 8:1	Build 5. The favor with all the people did not last.
Acts 6:1	Dig Deeper. The first administrative failure, four chapters later.
Acts 20:7	Build 1. Gathered on the first day of the week to break bread.
Luke 24:35	Build 1. Known to them in the breaking of the bread, from Session 2.
Nehemiah 8:1-12	Live discovery. Word, meal, portions for those with nothing, and great rejoicing.
Deuteronomy 15:4	Old Testament Roots. There will be no poor among you.
Exodus 16:18; 2 Corinthians 8:15	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The manna measure, quoted by St. Paul.
John 4:42	Build 6, the press. No longer because of your words, from Session 4.