



LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM

WHATEVER IT TAKES
for the gospel

COTTONWOOD CREEK CHURCH

Lesson 1: Whatever It Takes To Work Together

Main Passage: Acts 2:40–47

Focus Verse: Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Big Idea: We are called to do God's mission together.

This entire series is focused on how we can develop a “Whatever It Takes for the Gospel” mentality. This first lesson is all about unpacking the importance of community as we look at pursuing the mission of God together.

What is the mission of God? This is why God exists: That He would receive all the glory and worship from all things. If that's God's mission, then what does that mean for us? We were created to carry out His mission! In everything we do, we have a call to represent Him so that all creatures will worship Him. But we aren't made to do this alone: We are called to do this together.

Four Truths About Working Together:

1) You Have a TEAM

Acts 2:42, *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.*

In the first chapters of Acts, Jesus ascends to Heaven, the Holy Spirit comes, Peter preaches at Pentecost and thousands are saved. What happens next? They begin meeting together! When you become a believer, you join a team. God did not leave you alone. Notice how the team of the early church functions: meet together regularly, fellowship, pray, eat, serve together and share the Gospel. We were not made to carry out God's mission alone.

Discussion Questions:

- Based on this passage and the pattern of the early church, how would you answer the person who claims that they have no need to be plugged into a community to grow spiritually?
- Read through those verses again. In what area(s) does your group operate in a similar manner? Are there area(s) where you need to improve?
- Why is a team important in the life of a Christian?

2) Your Team Has a PURPOSE

Acts 2:36, *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

Every team needs a unified purpose. Antione de Saint-Exupery once said, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” What does this mean? *Don’t teach team members to hammer planks. Talk to them about the ocean.* What was the early church’s unified purpose?

In summary, this verse is the Pentecost sermon in its simplicity. Make much of this Jesus who is ruler over all and Savior of all. We exist as a team to make much of this Jesus and Lord. What happens when we lose sight of this? We get sidetracked and start making other things more important. We go our own way and do our own things and we fail to be “purpose driven people.”

Discussion Questions:

- How does having clarity of purpose help your team accomplish its goals?
- What is the purpose of your group? Is there consensus or differing of opinions?
- How do you help your team accomplish its purpose?

3) Your Team Has a MISSION

Acts 2:37, *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* ³⁸ Peter replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* ⁴⁰ *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”* ⁴¹ *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

If purpose is “why” something exists, then “mission” is how you go about fulfilling that purpose. We exist to make much of Jesus because He is our Lord and Messiah! How do we do that? What are we called to do?

In order to make much of Jesus, we must live out the transformation of Jesus in our lives in actions and words. We are called to look different than the rest of the world. This is not simply to be a good person, but to show the world who Jesus is. We also need to speak the Truth of Jesus. Tell the world that Jesus alone saves, and help people come face to face with the reality that they need a Savior. We exist to make much of Jesus and we accomplish this by living out the transformation of our lives in word and deed.

Discussion Questions:

- Is living out the good news of the Gospel of Christ central to your group's mission? If so, how do you know how your team is doing? (Do you track any metrics? Highlight and celebrate encounters – both positive and negative? Actively train people to be comfortable living out and sharing in a variety of different situations?)
- If this isn't an area that is currently being measured, what could be done to change that?
- How do you encourage your group to remain focused on their mission?

4) Your Team Has the POWER TO SUCCEED

Acts 1:8, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

The apostles were only able to accomplish all they did through the power of the Holy Spirit. By His might, the Church has a guaranteed plan of success in carrying out God's mission. This doesn't mean everyone will repent or everyone will welcome us with open arms. But this does mean that when we are dependent on Him (keeping in mind our team, purpose and mission), we will make much of Jesus with our lives.

Discussion Questions:

- How can you tell if you're being led by the Spirit?
- Where are all the places God has placed you to be a witness?
- What does a “Whatever It Takes” attitude look like in your biblical community?

Lesson 1 Additional Commentary (Acts 2:42-47)¹

2:42 This section comprises the first extensive “summary” in Acts. Luke perhaps provided two summaries here: v. 42 pictures the community life in itself and has much in common with the more extensive treatment beginning in v. 43. Quite possibly v. 42 should be viewed separately, as a conclusion to the Pentecost narrative. Thus viewed, it provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts were incorporated into the believing community. Verses 43–46 thus would appear to introduce a new section that deals with the life of the whole Christian community and to prepare for the narratives of the witness in Jerusalem that follow in chaps. 3–5. That this is so is supported by the fact that the latter summary begins with a reference to the apostolic miracles (v. 43), one of which follows immediately after the summary (3:1–10).

In v. 42 the believers are said to have “devoted themselves” to four practices in their new life together. First was the teaching of the apostles. 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. The second activity to which they devoted themselves was “the fellowship.” The Greek word used here (*koinōnia*) is one Paul often employed, but it appears only here in all of Luke-Acts. Its basic meaning is “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.” In secular Greek it could involve the sharing of goods, and Paul seems to have used it this way in 2 Cor 9:13. It was also used of communion with a god, especially in the context of a sacred meal; and Paul used it in that sense in 1 Cor 10:16. Since it appears in a list in Acts 2:42, it is not easy to determine its exact nuance in this context. The key may be to see the terms “breaking of bread” and “prayer” in apposition to “fellowship.” The meaning would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together. If this is so, then the meaning of the third element, “the breaking of bread,” would be further clarified. Joined with fellowship, it would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper. It probably also involved as well their participation in a main *agapē* meal together. The fourth and final element of their life together, another expression of their fellowship, was “the prayers” (RSV). 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 house worship.

2:43 The longer summary gives a fuller description of the life of the entire Christian community. It begins in v. 43 by referring to the miracles performed by the apostles. The miracles are described with the characteristic combination “signs” and “wonders.” The same phrase continues to be used of the apostles’ miracle-working in 4:30 and 5:12 and is applied to others as well: Jesus (2:22), Stephen (6:8), Moses (7:36), Philip (8:13), and Paul and Barnabas (14:3; 15:12). It is interesting to note that the phrase is no longer used after chap. 15, although Paul continued to work miracles.

¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 118–122.

An example of one such miraculous sign is given in 3:1–10. Luke’s summary statement would indicate that this healing story is only one example of many miracles worked by the apostles in this early stage of their ministry. The response of the people is a reverent fear (*phobos*, “awe,” NIV). “Everyone” probably refers to those outside the Christian community who were awed by apostolic miracles (cf. 5:12–13).

2:44–45 Verse 44 elaborates on the fellowship enjoyed by the Christians. The word *koinōnia* is not used, but other terms express the same reality. First, they are said to have been “together” (*epi to auto*). This Greek phrase is notoriously difficult to translate, occurring five times in Acts (1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 4:26). It seems to depict the gathered community, with a strong emphasis on their unity. This unity is further expressed by their holding “everything in common” (which is described in v. 45 as selling their goods for the benefit of others whenever a need arose).

Here two ideals for a community of goods seem to be combined. First is the Greek ideal of a community in which everything is held in common and shared equally. It is a basically utopian concept, which can be traced as far back as the Pythagorean communities and is often expressed by the same phrase Luke employed in v. 44, “holding all in common” (*echein hapanta koina*). Verse 45, however, speaks against the early Christian community adopting a practice of community ownership. The imperfect tense is used, indicating that this was a recurrent, continuing practice: their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose. This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that “there will be no poor among you” (Deut 15:4f.).

2:46–47 Verse 46 sets forth the dual locale of their life together. They remained faithful to their Jewish worship, devoting themselves “with one accord” (“together”) in the temple. The word translated “with one accord” (*homothymadon*) is commonly used in Acts to express unity of purpose and particularly applies to the “one heart and mind” (4:32) of the Christian fellowship (cf. 1:14; 2:1; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). F. Stagg, however, points out that single-mindedness is not always a good thing. The same word is used of the angry mobs that rushed upon Stephen (7:57) and Paul (19:29). For the Christian community, fellowship and unity of purpose are salutary only when rooted in fellowship with Christ and in the unity of his Spirit. The structure of Acts should remind us of this—the unity of the Christian community derives from and is guided by the gift of the Spirit that lies at the heart of its life together.

The Christian presence in the temple testifies not only to their remaining faithful to their Jewish heritage but also evidences their zeal for witness. In Jerusalem the temple was the primary place where crowds would be found, and there the Christians went to bear their witness (3:11–12; 5:21, 42). If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship. In the intimacy of the home setting, a common meal was shared together, probably including the Lord’s Supper as well. It was a time marked by rejoicing in their fellowship with one another and with the Spirit and by their own openness and sincerity (*aphelotēs*). On the giving end, they expressed their joy by praising God for his presence in their life together (v. 47). On the receiving end, they experienced the favor of the nonbelieving Jewish community in Jerusalem. God responded to their faith and blessed the young community, adding new converts daily. Indeed, as with the young Jesus, so it was for the growing church—favor with God and favor with humanity (Luke 2:52).

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 of 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." The subsequent narrative of Acts will show that it did not always remain so. Sincerity sometimes gave way to dishonesty, joy was blotched by rifts in the fellowship, and the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials. Luke's summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.

Lesson 1: Whatever It Takes To Work Together – Missionary Story

C. T. Studd (December 2, 1860 – July 16, 1931)

Charles Thomas (C.T.) Studd was born on December 2, 1860, in the United Kingdom. He was the son of a very wealthy family and grew up with great privilege. An outstanding athlete, C.T. excelled in the game of Cricket. He was known throughout the United Kingdom as one of the best Cricketer's to ever play the sport.

The Gospel was introduced to C.T. and he accepted Christ as his personal Savior early in his college years. Before he graduated college, he had fully committed his life to serving Christ and made the decision to go to China as a missionary. He, along with six other young men from Cambridge University, became part of the China Inland Mission and began their preparations to go to China. This small group of committed young men began to be referred to as the Cambridge Seven and captured the imagination of the public throughout the United Kingdom. Perhaps it was because C.T. and three of the others were all well-known athletes and one was an officer of the Royal Artillery. Each of the Cambridge Seven had turned their back on promising careers to follow God's leading to take the Gospel to a foreign land. C.T., accustomed to being a part of a winning team, now demonstrated that same drive and determination with this team so that he and his teammates could take the Gospel to China.

His purpose shifted from being a successful athlete with a promising future to being a submitted and committed servant of Christ trusting fully in God to direct his steps. C.T. wrote that he went down on his knees and gave himself up to God, praying *Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to thee*. The same words as the words of Frances Ridley Havergal's consecration hymn.

C.T. believed that he was to trust only in Christ; and Christ would work in C.T.'s life to do His good pleasure.

A significant amount of money was left to C.T. from his father's estate. However, he believed that to fully trust God and not be diverted from his new purpose he must divest himself of his fortune. So, he sent large checks to several different ministry groups leaving himself only a small amount of money which he planned to give to his wife when they married. He was engaged to Priscilla Stewart, a single missionary from Ireland, who was serving in China. C.T. told her that he had given away all his fortune except for this small amount that he was giving to her. Priscilla also believed that they should trust God for all their needs. She sent the money that C.T. had given to her to another missionary whom she knew had a significant need due to an illness. Together C.T. and Priscilla shared the purpose of being fully consecrated to Christ and depending on and trusting only Him with their every need.

During his years as a famous Cricket player, C.T.'s mission had been to win the game. However, after his conversion to Christ, his mission changed. Now his mission was to take the Gospel to as many people as he could. This mission to preach the Gospel took him not only to China but also to India and finally to Africa where he preached the Gospel until his death.

After serving almost 10 years in China, the Studds returned home to England in 1894 for a time of rest and to recover from ill health. C.T. and Priscilla each served as single missionaries, then married and four daughters were born to them during the 10 years that they were in China. (Two children did not survive infancy.)

C.T. was not to be deterred from his mission of preaching the Gospel even by his own ill health or that of Priscilla's. As soon as his health improved, he began to travel throughout the United Kingdom speaking

at colleges, universities and churches sharing the Gospel, and when he wasn't speaking to groups, he was visiting his own family members that were not saved, in order to share the Gospel with them.

In 1900 C.T. and his family had the opportunity to go to India for him to preach the Gospel in the same area where his father had made much of his fortune. C.T. had long felt a responsibility to take the Gospel to this part of India. This initial preaching trip ended with he and his family staying there and ministering for six years before returning to England to rest. Another reason that they returned to England was for the girls to have an opportunity to attend school. Their intention was to someday return to India to continue his mission of preaching the Gospel in India.

However, God has a way of expanding "our" mission to accomplish "His" mission. This was true for C.T. In 1908 after returning from India and while in Liverpool, C.T. saw a sign that captured his attention, "Cannibals want missionaries." His reaction was that of being a little amused and somewhat curious. He went into the building where he saw the sign to learn more. It was there that he met a man named, Dr. Karl Kumm who had walked across Africa and was telling his story to a group a people gathered in the building. He related that there were numbers of tribes in Africa who had never heard the story of Jesus Christ. Dr. Kumm related that many explorers, big-game hunters, traders, etc. had gone to the African continent but no Christian had gone there to tell the people of Jesus. C.T.'s heart was pricked with compassion for these lost tribes; however, his heart was also conflicted by his desire to return to India. He didn't believe that his health would allow him to be approved by physicians to go to Africa. He also knew that Priscilla's health was too fragile to embark on such an undertaking. However, the burden on his heart did not subside and he began to pray for God's clear direction as he also began to explore the possibility of taking the Gospel to Africa.

Once again C.T. Studd witnessed God's miraculous power on his mission as one by one the obstacles were overcome, and he succeeded in taking the Gospel to Africa. On December 15, 1910, C.T. Studd set sail for Africa. The team looked a little different on this trip. This time C.T. was alone on the voyage while Priscilla and the girls remained in England due to Priscilla's fragile health. Through the 20 plus years that C.T. Studd served the Lord in Africa, his team was comprised primarily of Africans who heard the Gospel message through his preaching. From time to time someone from England would join him for a short time to help with the preaching. During those same years, Priscilla served the Lord and served the mission of taking the Gospel to Africa by speaking to groups in England to encourage prayer and financial support, writing letters of encouragement and keeping the home fires burning. The Heart of Africa Missions founded by C.T. Studd ultimately became the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade with each separate field having its own title, i.e., Heart of Africa, Heart of Amazonia, etc. as the organization grew and more areas were reached with the Gospel.

Studd's work in Africa saw thousands accept Christ, churches established, and scores of African workers become a part of His team to reach Africa with the Gospel.

C. T. Studd's life was marked by his courage for Christ and his willingness to sacrifice for Him – doing whatever it takes to spread the Gospel. He once said: "I have searched into my life and do not know of anything else that I can sacrifice to the Lord Jesus." Alfred Buxton, his son-in-law, and fellow pioneer in Africa, stated "C. T.'s life stands as a sign to all succeeding generations that it is worthwhile to lose all this world can offer and stake everything on the world to come. His life will be an eternal rebuke to easy-going Christianity. He demonstrated what it means to follow Christ without counting the cost and without looking back."

C.T. Studd was a whatever it takes Christian.