

Explore the Bible Adult Leader Guide Teaching Plans

Session 3: Unified

Text: Acts 2:41-47

Memory Verse: Acts 2:46

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

READ Acts 2:41-47, First Thoughts, and Understand the Context. Take note of the attitudes and actions taken by the early church. Then compare those attitudes and actions to those of your own church or small group.

STUDY Acts 2:41-47, using the commentary provided. Pay attention to how the practices of the early church are done today.

PLAN the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study and More Ideas. Look for ways to encourage the group to contribute to the health of your church.

GROW from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (ministrygrid.com/web/explorethebible).

GATHER THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

Personal Study Guides; A whiteboard and a dry erase marker; or a large sheet of paper and a marker. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: Expansion of the Early Church*); **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline: Acts 1-12*); **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Spring 2016*); **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: Acts 1-12*); **PACK ITEM 6** (*Miracles in the Early Church, Acts 1-12*); **PACK ITEM 7** (*The Apostles' Preaching*); and **PACK ITEM 11** (*Early Church Leaders, Acts 1-12*; also available in PDF form on the Leader Pack CD-ROM).

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: Greet individuals as they arrive, and direct them to silently ponder the PSG question on page 34: *As you reflect on the fellowship that exists in your church, what three words would you use to describe it? What specific examples can you point to that demonstrate this fellowship among the believers?*

GUIDE: Facilitate a discussion about the unity evident in your church, focusing on the positive aspects of the congregation. Guard against negativity, but allow honest dialogue. Ask: *Why is unity vital to a healthy church? Whose responsibility is it to preserve the unity within our congregation? Explain.*

CHALLENGE: Urge the group to do a self-evaluation during today's study. Say: *As we look at the early days of the church, think about your contribution to the health and unity of our fellowship at this church. Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart, attitude, and actions. If your descriptive words were negative, ask the Holy Spirit to show you ways you can be a positive change.*

PRAY: As you lead in prayer to begin this study, pray for your pastor, staff, and other leaders, and for each individual as he or she contributes to the health of the church.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:41-42, directing the group to think of the logistical reality of verse 41.

SAY: *Approximately 3,000 people were saved and baptized on that day. In one 24-hour time period, the early church grew from 120 to more than 3,000.* Direct the group to review other daily miracles listed on **Pack Item 6** (*Miracles in the Early Church, Acts 1-12*).

ASK: *What might an outpouring of God's miraculous grace with an outcome like this mean for our church today?*

STRESS: Call attention to the sequence of events: first, they accepted the message of Jesus Christ; then they were baptized. Emphasize the significance of baptism but reiterate the order—salvation followed by baptism.

STUDY: Using the PSG (pp. 34-35), lead the group to identify the tasks the new believers dedicated themselves to doing. Ask: *How does participation in these activities promote unity in a church? Can a church be unified and not focus on these elements? Explain.* (PSG, p. 35)

CAUTION: Emphasize the necessity of doing life together as a body but also stress the danger of becoming so inwardly focused that we neglect the needs of those who are outside the church walls.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:43-47a, as the group listens for the people's response to miraculous activity.

DISCUSS: *Why is fear of God, or being in awe of Him, healthy for believers? How do we gain a reverential awe toward God? From the PSG: What does a consistent display of sincere adoration to God and grace toward others show about what a church believes about God?* (PSG, p. 39)

REITERATE: Direct a volunteer to read aloud the comments about verse 44 in the PSG (p. 37). Discuss the value of these statements as they relate to life in our congregation today.

ANALYZE: Review the last paragraph under Verse 45 in the PSG (p. 37). Highlight the following sentence: *Too many church members seem to develop an allergic reaction to calls for generosity.* Then discuss the question at the end of the paragraph: *Do you think some believers' discomfort about generosity today is more a problem of insufficient resources or a problem of incorrect priorities?* (PSG, p. 37)

GUIDE: Reread Acts 2:46-47a. Ask: *What example did the early church provide for us as believers and worshipers today? What essentials did they emphasize? Use Pack Item 11 (Early Church Leaders, Acts 1-12) to help facilitate a discussion of this question. Then ask: What was the long-term value of the early church's gratitude, fellowship, joy, and unity? What can we learn from their example?*

GUIDE: Lead the group to review **Pack Item 7** (*The Apostles' Preaching*), and then ask: *What stands out about these early leaders whom God used to establish and grow His church?*

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:47b, as the group follows along in their Bibles.

PROBE: *As we consider the church today, which is more important—qualitative growth or quantitative growth? Explain.* (Use PSG, p. 39 for support.) Emphasize that “the Lord added” but the church members were actively involved in the phenomenal growth of the early church.

ASK: *What does this passage teach about the relationship between church growth and church health? How do they enhance each other?* (PSG, p. 39)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

COMPARE: Write these phrases on the whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper: *Church Growth, Church Health, Unity, Fellowship, Teaching, and Prayer.* Ask: *What's the difference between church growth and church health? Can you experience one without the other? Explain. How do unity, fellowship, teaching, and prayer contribute to church health? To church growth?*

CHALLENGE: Direct the group to silently reflect on the third question set in the PSG: *Reflect on how doing life with other believers helps you share the gospel. What can you do to help motivate other believers to share the gospel?* (PSG, p. 40)

EVALUATE: Lead the group to look back at the three descriptive words written at the beginning of today's study. As you close in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can contribute to the unity and health of your church, either by changing these words from negative to positive or by strengthening the great things God is already doing through your church.

PRACTICE

Consider each member of the Bible study group. Who needs encouragement to be more connected to the body of Christ? How can you provide opportunities for fellowship among the group?

As a leader in your church, examine your contributions to the unity within your church. Take advantage of every opportunity to be an example of an Acts 2 believer.

Encourage members of your group to invite their friends, family, and neighbors to church with them for Easter.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Write these two quotes about unity on the whiteboard or a large sheet of paper. Lead a discussion of each one as it relates to the unity needed within the body of Christ.

“One hundred worshippers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.” — A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

“All for one, and one for all.” — Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

To enhance the examination of Acts 2:41, call attention to and discuss this statement from page 35 of the PSG: *Today many believers around the world take great risk to follow Christ. Their devotion to Christ is greater than their desire for safety and security.* Guide a special time of prayer for those in our world today who are facing great risk to follow Christ.

To supplement the examination of Acts 2:46, lead a discussion of the two locations where the early believers gathered—the temple complex and in the homes of church members. Emphasize the importance of both locations and the strength that comes from corporate times of worship and Bible study, as well as the strength of doing life together with others. To guide the discussion, complete the Bible Skill activity on *koinonia* in the PSG (p. 36).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Direct the group to In My Context on page 40 of PSG. Invite each member to read and respond individually to the bulleted points. After adequate time for reflection, close the session in prayer.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Use the lyrics to “Blest Be the Tie” by John Fawcett to remind the group to connect and contribute to the health and unity of the church.