

9. Bible Study and Fellowship Meetings – FLOCKS

In our last topic, we introduced the topic of Bible study and fellowship meetings. We mentioned that small group Bible studies provide an ideal opportunity to build our relationships with one another by avoiding the twelve negative one anothers and learning to practice the thirty-one positive one anothers. Today, we will be discussing some other important things we learn from Acts 2:41-47 about some of the purposes of small group Bible studies.

A very easy way to summarize some of the purposes of the small group Bible study is by the phrase FLOCKS that are praying and praising. That phrase gives us eight purposes of a small group Bible study. We will see what Scripture teaches about each of those eight purposes in Acts 2:41-47. For now, we can use FLOCKS to give the following summary:

- F - fellowship
- L - leadership development
- O - outreach
- C - caring
- K - knowledge
- S - service

That are:

- P - praying and
- P - praising

One purpose of a Bible study and fellowship meeting is fellowship. Fellowship was a very important part of the life of the early church as they gathered together in small groups. Acts 2:42 tells us that they continued in the apostles' doctrine (Bible study) and fellowship. Then, Acts 2:46 tells us that they continued daily in the temple and from house to house. The early Christians gathered in small groups for Bible study and fellowship. They also scattered from house-to-house where they could minister to one another. Every Christian needs both fellowship with God and fellowship with other Christians – 1 John 1:3-7.

A second purpose of a Bible study and fellowship meeting is leadership development. Leadership development was a very important part of the early church. This development of leadership was occurring on at least three different levels. One-to-one (house-to-house) meetings gave Christians opportunities to discuss and answer the questions of individuals. Small groups gathered for Bible study and fellowship which provided opportunities to learn to lead small groups. Larger groups were meeting in the temple, which helped large group leadership to develop.

The results of this leadership development can be seen in the early verses of Acts 8 and Acts 11:19-21. In Acts 8:1-4, we see that there was a great persecution against the church. Although the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, as seen in verse 1, most of the rest of the Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, some as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch – Acts 11:19. Acts 8:4 tells us, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." Then Acts 11:20-21 tells us, "But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord

was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” The leaders stayed at Jerusalem, but because the Christians had been given opportunities to develop as spiritual leaders in Jerusalem, they were able to preach, teach, and lead people to Christ wherever they went.

A third purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is outreach. In Acts 2:47, we see that people were being added to the church every day. As we have already seen in the previous paragraph, the Christians went everywhere preaching the Word they had been taught in Bible studies. In fact, Acts 9:31 tells us that this caused the churches to multiply throughout the region, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Within a few more years, Acts 16:5 tells us, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.” The equipping of people for outreach is one of the key purposes of Bible study and fellowship meetings.

A fourth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is caring. In Acts 2:44-45, we see that caring for the needs of others was also an important part of the life of the early church. Those verses tell us, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” The early church realized that everything belongs to the Lord. Christ had taught that His followers were to be good stewards of the things that He had entrusted to them. As a result, they looked for opportunities to meet the needs of others.

A fifth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is knowledge. Knowledge of Christ and His Word is very necessary in order for a new (or older) Christian to become obedient to the Word. As the believers gathered together it was for Bible study and fellowship. As they learned the teachings of Christ, and became obedient to them, verse 42 tells us that it caused them to focus on the death and resurrection of Christ as they broke bread together. This growth in knowledge of the Word of God was accompanied by obedience to what they were learning.

A sixth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is service. Serving one another was one of the ways the early Christians showed their love for God and for one another. They were together. They ate meals together. They invited one another into their homes. There was a singleness of heart that was shown by their actions to help one another.

A seventh purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings was prayer. In Acts 2:42, we see that they spent time praying when they gathered together for Bible study and fellowship. Prayer was an essential part of the life of the early church. In Acts 3:1, we see that Peter and John were on their way to the temple for prayer. In Acts 4:29-31, we see that they handled threats against them through prayer, ““Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

An eighth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is praise. Praise was a vital part of the life of the early church. The word that is translated “praising” always speaks of praise to God, so praise was God-centered rather than man-centered as they gave all glory to God. Today, many churches have made felt-needs the primary focus both of their church services and their small group Bible studies. This often changes the focus from Bible study to a focus on the ideas of men so that it is no longer a study of the apostles’ doctrine. The result is a loss of true praise that gives all the glory to God.

Today, there is a great need for small group Bible studies that focus on these eight purposes. New Christians need a spiritual family where they can grow and mature in their spiritual lives. A small group Bible study with the eight purposes listed above provides a spiritual family where a new Christian can experience healthy spiritual development. In the last three generations, we have moved from the extended family (grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins) to the nuclear family (parents and children) to the fractured family (an increasing number of children growing up in one-parent homes). As a result, when many people become Christians, they have no sense of family.

Scripture says that we are to be the family of God. A small group Bible study with the purposes we have mentioned provides a spiritual family where healthy spiritual growth can occur. Without such a spiritual family, many Christians will fail to mature and will remain spiritual toddlers like those mentioned in 1 Cor. 3:1-3. “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” The word that is translated “babes” speaks of a young child who does not have the ability to speak clearly (a toddler). It is not God’s plan to see Christians remain as toddlers. A small group Bible study provides a spiritual family where Christians can grow and mature.

As you think about the purposes for small group Bible study that we have mentioned above, it might be good to think of Christians who need to get into such a Bible study where they can grow and mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help new and struggling Christians find a spiritual family (a purpose-led small group Bible study) where the new or struggling Christians can experience healthy spiritual growth.