

# Lessons from the Early Church:

## *How to Build a Church with Mission and Purpose*

Acts chapter two, beginning at verse 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 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. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their bread with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Our focus today is on the phrase "they continued." Success lies in the follow-through, whether in sports or serving God. This message is foundational as we approach our annual business meeting. The church's mission is simple: to make disciples—to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

### The Church's Mission

Just as GM makes cars and Kellogg's makes corn flakes, the church's purpose is to make disciples. The raw material is new converts; without them, we cannot fulfill our mission.

The New Testament church operated with a clear purpose. Every church exists to understand its mission. Jesus said, "I must be about my Father's business." His Father runs a salvage operation, redeeming what others discard. He values the broken and rejected. God's love is redemptive; He came to seek and save the lost. God's work involves saving, reaching, teaching, equipping, and building people for His glory. It's not about building big churches but building big people for God.

### Five Key Areas of the Church's Purpose

Our text reveals that the New Testament church devoted itself to five key areas: discipleship, community, worship, ministry, and evangelism. These define the

church's purpose. I want us to be a New Testament church, one where an apostle would feel at home. These purposes funnel into our mission of making disciples. Success isn't measured by numbers or finances but by how many disciples we make—followers and learners of Christ.

## The Early Church's Values

The early church's values reflected its purpose. They demonstrated sincere concern by sharing resources to meet needs. Outsiders were drawn to their mutual commitment and love. Ministry is about open-hearted availability—loving, sharing, and caring for others. Verse 45 says they sold possessions and distributed them as needed. The early church recognized struggles and rallied to meet desperate needs. They didn't just pray; they put feet to their faith. Ministry starts in the house of God, with believers coming together. Verse 44 emphasizes their unity: "All who believed were together." Biblical fellowship, or *koinonia*, means living connected lives. They shared all things in common: mission, purpose, values, and goals. They prioritized eternal matters over temporary differences.

## The Power of Unity in the Church

Unity is powerful. The early church's love and ministry drew people to Christ daily. I wonder if God looks at the modern church and asks if we'll ever get it together. Division weakens us, and the enemy thrives on it. The church is not a village of separate camps but a single body. As we connect deeply with one another, the world will see something genuine. Jesus becomes real to the world as we become real to each other—authentic, not fake. Our influence is directly tied to our love for one another. Without love, we lose light and impact. Jesus said everyone would know we are His disciples by our love for one another. Love is our calling card and our passport to the supernatural. Romans 5 speaks of God's love poured into our hearts, ready to flow out through the Holy Spirit.

## Steadfast Commitment and Love

Many churches gather, preach, sing, and do good works but lack impact because they've lost their first love—their passionate pursuit of God. Verse 42 highlights the early church's steadfast commitment. They were determined and tenacious, pressing on despite persecution. The power of light lies in its focus.

Diffused light has little effect, but focused light can ignite or cut through metal. Similarly, the church becomes effective as we define who we are in Christ and demonstrate our love for Him. Without love, a church becomes irrelevant—just another building. Lighting the world for Christ is a matter of the heart. We are the body of Christ, but unresolved spiritual issues can hinder us. Conflicts and unforgiveness clog the flow of God's life-giving power. Joy is lost when we're out of relationship with God or each other.

We're human; misunderstandings and hurt happen. If I let you down, talk to me. If we don't address issues, they fester. The church cannot afford spiritual clots. We need to open the arteries of our hearts with God's forgiveness and grace. How we treat each other influences who God sends to us. He can fill this sanctuary if He chooses. I want us to be a New Testament church that God can trust with people and resources. Genuine ministry requires intentionality. We must guard our hearts and reach out with open arms. Like the human body, the church must constantly renew itself, building for the future. When we love authentically, we win. The early church grew in favor with all people, and God added to their number.

## Authentic Fellowship and Ministry

Where is your heart toward God and others? Authentic biblical fellowship attracts outsiders through enthusiastic, intentional, and genuine love. The key word is *authentic*. Speak from the heart, not in clichés. In ancient Greece, actors wore masks; our word "hypocrite" comes from this practice. When we fail to love authentically, we're merely acting. True community begins when masks come off, conversations deepen, hearts become vulnerable, and lives are shared. Accountability flows naturally, and tenderness abounds. Jesus embodied gentleness, kindness, and mercy. Our mission defines our values, which reflect our heart. Let's follow through this year.

Jesus is coming back. I want Him to find us at Duncannon Assembly following through, continuing steadfastly. Don't take people for granted. Love everyone. Care for those who share your pew. When calamities arise, we need better communication to rally around hurting people. No one should suffer or experience loss alone. Let's do better.