



Acts:

A Life of Witness

Week Three: Acts 2: 42-47 *The Witness of SHALOM*

Opening Question: The Hebrew word shalom indicates deep peace, wholeness, beauty, flourishing. Is there a physical place that you have visited or lived that fits this description in any way- that feels like a physical picture of “shalom” to you?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: What happened in last week’s passage? How was this new experience of God’s Spirit at Pentecost connected to God’s story throughout the OT? What have we learned so far about this idea of our life as a witness?

Today’s Passage: Our title today speaks of the idea of shalom- a Hebrew word that captures in the fullest way God’s intention for “the way things should be”. The most beautiful picture of shalom in the Old Testament comes to us in the creation account, where God’s breath and voice brings all of creation into flourishing, right relationship with Him, with each other, and with the physical world. God delights in Genesis as He proclaims that His creation is so very good- perfect shalom. Last week we witnessed God’s breath bringing new life to these early believers. And now today, we get to witness this new picture of shalom. What it looks like when the Spirit of God brings a new kind of “the way things should be” to these early followers of Christ. We learn from them why living in shalom is such a powerful witness to the beautiful face of Christ.

CONTENT

Read Acts 2: 42-47 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

As a group on a white board or on a large piece of paper that everyone can see, list all the practices that are part of this new picture of shalom. Then talk through the questions:

1. In vs 42, what word describes the heart of these believers as they listen to teaching, live in community, share in communion, and pray. What does this word bring to mind for you? How is this attitude different than if Luke had chosen to write “committed” or “practiced” or “took part”?
2. Does anything on this list or any of the details around any of the practices stand out or surprise you?
3. What is the emotion people are experiencing in vs 43 as they engage in the practices described in vs 42? Talk about this word. Notice that the miracles and signs listed next are NOT the things eliciting this emotion- it is the practices listed in vs 42.
4. What words would you use to describe the mood of this new way of life?
5. In the second half of vs 47, what do we see happening as this early group of believers lives out this new reality of shalom?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- There is something so captivatingly beautiful about this picture of shalom among the people of God. Church history supports that one of the reasons the early church grew so rapidly was that people were simply attracted to their beautiful way of living as a community. Have you ever been part of a faith community or witnessed a community that seemed to live this out in a way that was noticeable?
- One of the remarkable parts of this passage is the way this community shared their resources. Author C. K. Robertson writes in his study of Acts, “Miracles now and then astound and amaze, but a community that truly takes care of its own is itself a miracle”. Talk about this quote. Do you see any ways that faith communities today are living out this “miracle”? Why is this an important part of being a witness? What might it do for those who share their resources? For those who receive them? For those who watch from the outside?
- We can become overwhelmed when we look at this list and wonder how we can ever live out all of these practices. But there are always small ways to lean into our invitation to witness through shalom. Look again at the list you made. Is there one practice on that list that you can imagine trying this week? Maybe gathering your suitemates for prayer, inviting someone you know is lonely to share a meal with you, finding a way to give away something you own or a small amount of cash to someone you know might need it? Take a few minutes to think and then write down what the Spirit brings to mind. Share with each other the way you might contribute to God’s shalom through your own witness this week. And be ready to share next week what you experienced.

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer taken:

Our God of shalom-

Thank you for giving us this beautiful picture of what it looks like when your kingdom intention is lived out on real soil. We long for the day when we will know your full shalom, but until then, we ask that you would help us see where we might demonstrate a small piece of it in our little corner of the world. We know that what you call us to do you also equip us to do in the Spirit. And so God, we ask today that you might equip us to be people who devote ourselves to the things that matter. That you would stir up in us the kind of awe that only comes when we watch you work. And that you would plant praise in our hearts as we lean into your kingdom vision of shalom.

We pray this in your name-

Amen.