

# **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 1**

## **The Most Important Sermon You'll Ever Hear**

**Dr. Derek Morris**

Preaching passage: Acts 2:42a  
Subject: To what did the early Christian devote themselves  
Complements: the apostles' teaching  
Exegetical idea: The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.  
Homiletical idea: **Authentic Christians are passionately devoted to Jesus.**  
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to Jesus and His Word.

### Introduction

For the next four sermons, we are going to focus our attention on a single verse of Scripture. You say, "Wow! That must be an important text!" And it is. This single verse of Scripture gives us the four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community. We are going to consider one of those essential characteristics each week for the next four weeks. It's my prayer that in the days and weeks ahead we would all learn and live the truth that this text contains.

So where is that single verse of Scripture that contains four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community? It's found in the book of Acts, chapter 2:42. And I hope you brought your Bible with you this morning. Let's look at that text together. Acts 2:42 The Word of God says, concerning the early Christians, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Before we begin to unpack the meaning of that text, let's take a moment to look at the context. What is the setting for this verse of Scripture? The apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with wisdom and holy boldness, has just preached a powerful sermon on the day of

Pentecost. He's somewhere in Jerusalem, with the other apostles, and thousands of people have gathered to listen to his testimony. His sermon title? I don't know for sure, but we might choose something like this: "The Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth... about Jesus."

Everyone in Jerusalem has heard of Jesus. Everyone is talking about Him. But who is He? The Messiah or a madman? Son of God or a deluded and defeated visionary?

And the apostle Peter answers that question in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Look with me at Acts 2, beginning with verse 22. "....." (Acts 2:22-24, 36)

And how do the people respond? Acts 2:37. Some of those listening are convicted by the truth of his words. "....." The Holy Spirit is not only working through Peter and the other apostles. The Holy Spirit is working on the hearers, convicting them of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. And when you come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you need to act on that conviction. You need to do something. And so they cry out to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter gives the answer, in Acts 2:38-39. "....."

Luke tells us that with many other words Peter warned them. Acts 2:40. "....." Praise the Lord, more than three thousand accept Jesus as their Messiah, their Savior and Lord. And they confess their faith in Jesus through baptism.

And then comes our single verse of Scripture which describes this authentic Christian community which has just been formed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 2:42, "They, these early Christians, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Four essential characteristics of this authentic Christian community, formed by the power of the Holy Spirit. "They devoted themselves to the apostles'

teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The verb translated “devoted” in Acts 2:42 is an interesting one. When you’re studying your Bible, and you want to discover the meaning of a key word, you have several options. You can use a lexicon. That’s like a dictionary which examines the meaning of the word in the original language. If you don’t have a lexicon, you can look up the text in different translations. For example, the NIV says “they devoted themselves....” What does it say in the KJV? “they continued steadfastly....” The Message puts it this way: “They committed themselves..” In today’s language, we might say “they were passionately committed to the apostles teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”

Today, we’re going to take a closer look at the first characteristic of an authentic Christian community. These early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. Question. What was the apostles’ teaching? Well, we don’t have to guess. We’ve already heard the apostles’ teaching on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:36, 38-39. “.....” The apostles’ teaching on the day of Pentecost was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...about Jesus. Jesus is the Christ.

Some time later, the apostle Peter preaches another sermon at the Temple gate. This is a short sermon. Only two sentences. But it’s powerful! Peter and John are on their way to the Temple and they encounter a crippled man at the temple gate. You know the story. The man holds out his palms and asks for some alms. And what does Peter say? A two-sentence sermon! And the sermon isn’t about money. The sermon is about Jesus, the truth about Jesus. Peter say, “Silver and gold I have none but such as I have I give to you....in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” A two-sentence sermon. Peter declares that Jesus of Nazareth is

the Christ. Notice how he refers to Jesus. What does he say? He calls Him “Jesus Christ.” That’s his sermon, right there. The truth about Jesus. Jesus is no ordinary Rabbi. Jesus is no ordinary religious teacher. Jesus is the Christ. The Messiah. The Savior. That was always the heart of the apostles’ teaching. Jesus is the Christ.

As a result of that powerful sermon, Peter and John end up in jail. The next day, Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders asked a question: “By what power or name did you do this miracle?” We can read Peter’s response in Acts 4:8-12.

“.....” This was the apostles’ teaching—Jesus is the Christ!

And it wasn’t just the apostle Peter who preached the message of Jesus as the Messiah. Look with me at Acts 5:41-42. “.....” This was the heart of the apostles’ teaching. Jesus is the Christ!

After Saul of Tarsus was called to be an apostle of the Risen Christ, following his conversion on the Damascus Road, what was the message that he preached? Acts 9:19-22.

“.....” This wasn’t just Peter’s preaching. This was the message of all of the apostles. Including the apostle Paul. Just one more example. Acts 17:2-3.

“.....”

Some people in our culture are uncomfortable with the exclusive claims of Jesus. He doesn’t just say “I know the way to heaven” or even “I am one of the ways to heaven.” Jesus boldly declares, “I AM the way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” That sounds exclusive, but it’s the truth. There aren’t many ways to be saved. You can’t just make up a way that seems good to you. The apostles had clearly understood the teaching of Jesus when they declared “there is no other name under heaven given among men

whereby we must be saved.” And “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” In other words, if you believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be, if you trust Him as your Messiah, your Savior and Lord, you will be saved. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

That’s the message that the apostles proclaimed. And it is the message that every authentic Christian community proclaims. We devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching—that Jesus is the Christ!

I wonder what impression people get when they visit our church here at Forest Lake. Do they see an authentic Christian community? I pray that they do. And if they do, one of the characteristics of that authentic Christian community is a people who are devoted to the apostles’ teaching that Jesus is the Christ. People ought to leave here saying, “Those people are really devoted to Jesus! Amen? Those people really focus on Jesus. Those people are passionately committed to Jesus.

Some of you might be thinking, “The apostles taught more than just “Jesus is the Christ.” And you’re right. The truth about Jesus was the heart of their teaching. And it was out of that devotion to Jesus that they gave the rest of the teaching. Because the apostle Peter was devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, he encouraged fellow Christians to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18. Because the apostle Paul was passionately committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, he encouraged fellow Christians to “follow my example as I follow the example of Jesus.” 1 Cor 11:1. Because the apostle John was devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, he encouraged fellow Christians to consider what manner of love the Father has given to us through His Son Jesus, and in preparation for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to purify

ourselves even as He is pure. 1 John 2:1-3 Everything centers in Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, and being passionately committed to Him.

I'm always moved when I hear stories of men and women who are passionately committed to Jesus. Some years ago, I heard the story of brother Abel. He lived in the African country which is now called Zimbabwe. It was during the time of civil war. One day, freedom fighters came to his villages. They ordered all of the villagers to gather in the village square. When they learned that brother Abel was a Christian, they mocked him and ordered him to renounce his faith in Jesus. "Say, 'Down with Jesus!'" they demanded. Brother Abel refused. "I am a Christian," brother Abel declared. "I cannot say 'Down with Jesus!'" The freedom fighters beat him. Suddenly, it began to rain, and so the freedom fighters locked brother Abel in a small building and found shelter from the rain. While in that small building, brother Abel wrote a short note to his son. When the rain finally stopped, the freedom fighters returned and dragged brother Abel out into the open. Again they yelled at him: "Say down with Jesus." But brother Abel was passionately committed to Jesus. He was an authentic Christian. He could not say "Down with Jesus." When he refused, the freedom fighters shot him in the head. Brother Abel died a martyr's death that day. His persecutors left him lying in a pool of blood.

When brother Abel's family came to retrieve his body, they found the note that he had written to his son. This is what it said. "Son, I have prayed for you all of your life. Be faithful unto death."

And that's my prayer for you, my brothers and sisters. Not that you would be powerful, or popular, or prosperous. I pray that you would be faithful to Jesus. I pray that you would be passionately committed to Jesus. Because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus is the

only Savior. Jesus is our soon coming King.

May it be said of each one of us, whether in life or in death, they were devoted to Jesus. They were passionately committed to Jesus. The most important sermon you'll ever hear is a sermon about Jesus. It's a sermon telling you the truth that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And that the wages of sin is death. But God so loved the world, praise His holy name, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. It's a sermon that tells you that God did not send His Son Jesus into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.

And this morning, I want to invite you to confess your faith in that Jesus, who is the Christ, the Savior of the world. I want to invite you to be passionately committed to Jesus. I want to invite you to be an authentic Christian. Authentic Christians are passionately devoted to Jesus.

Some years ago, I was preaching at the McDonald Road SDA church, near Collegedale, Tennessee. I was a guest speaker. In fact, it was my first time speaking at that church. During the first stanza of the closing hymn, the Lord impressed me to make a call, to invite people to trust in Jesus as their personal Savior. At first, I struggled with that. I said, "Lord, we're singing the closing hymn. I'm new here. The people don't even know me. We don't just interrupt closing hymns to do things like that!" But the conviction remained. "You need to invite people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior." So after we had completed the first verse of the closing hymn, I turned to the organist and went like this. Then I stepped up to the pulpit, and said, "Brothers and sisters, while we were singing this hymn, the Lord impressed me to give an

invitation for people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. Perhaps you've heard today, and you've never accepted Jesus personally. Or perhaps you've wandered away from Jesus, and you need to come home. I want to invite you to make that commitment today. While we're singing the closing song, I want to invite you to come forward and confess your commitment to Jesus Christ."

And then we began to sing the second stanza of the hymn. And almost immediately, a young man about five rows back popped up and, with tears running down his cheeks, he made his way to the front of the church. Then another came, and another and another. I was amazed. And so was everyone else. And we were filled with joy. And there is also joy in the presence of the angels of God when one person recognizes that he or she is a sinner in need of a Savior.

I met with the group of about 15 men and women after the service. And what impressed me the most was the testimony of that young man who popped up on row five. He said, "During the closing hymn, I noticed that you were troubled. And the Lord said to me, "I'm troubling him to make a call." And that young man said, "Lord, if he makes a call, I'll go forward!"

I'm eternally thankful that I gave the call that day. For that young man, and for the other men and women who responded, that was the most important call they ever heard. And I thank God that they responded to the invitation to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

When we began this sermon, I asked you to put a response sheet in the front of your Bible. I want to invite you to take that out right now. Perhaps you've never made a conscious decision to accept Jesus as your personal Savior. You know about Jesus. You believe that Jesus is the Christ. But you've never made a conscious decision to say, "Jesus, I accept you as my Savior." I invite you to make that decision today. Check that box on your response card.

Others may read “I’ve wandered away from Jesus and I want to come home” and you say, “That’s me.” I used to be passionately committed to Jesus, I used to be devoted to Jesus, but I’ve wandered away. And I need to come home. I invite you to come home today. Check that box on your response card.

Some of you may sense the need to experience a deeper relationship with Jesus. You want to learn more about what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus. We have a Bible study class that will help you on that journey. Just check that box.

And then there’s a box for all of us. We, as a pastoral staff, want to commit to pray for you and those that you love. There’s someone you know, someone you love who needs Jesus, who needs to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. I want you to write their name in the space provided. We want to join with you in praying for that person. And I’m also going to pray that you would invite that person to church!

After you’ve checked the appropriate boxes, just write your name, phone number, and e-mail address at the bottom of the response sheet. We want to pray for you by name, and follow-up on the commitment to Jesus that you have made today. As you leave church today, please give that response sheet to one of the pastors or one of the elders standing at the door.

Next week we’re going to talk about another essential characteristic of an authentic Christian community. But let’s start with this one. Passionate devotion to Jesus. As we come here to church each week, as we live our lives each day, may we exhibit this first characteristic of authentic Christians. May it be said of us, “Those people are passionately devoted to Jesus!”

**AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 2**  
**The Most Important Virtue You'll Ever Develop**  
**Dr. Derek Morris**

Preaching passage: Acts 2:42  
Subject: To what did the early Christian devote themselves  
Complements: to the fellowship  
Exegetical idea: The early Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship.  
Homiletical idea: **Get connected!**  
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to fellowship with God and with each other.

Introduction

This log may not look that special to you. It's rough. There is spalting on the wood. That's a fancy way of saying that it's partly rotten! But this log is special to *me* because it reminds me of the most important virtue that any of us can ever develop. It reminds me that **the Lord wants us to be connected together in love**. And if you stay tuned, you'll hear the rest of the story!

This is the second sermon in our series on Authentic Christian Community. If you were with us last week, you will remember that we are focusing on a single text of Scripture. That text of Scripture is a description of a Christian church that was raised up in a single day by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in that text, we discover four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community. Does anyone remember where that text is found? The book of Acts, chapter 2, verse 42. Let's read it together. "....."

This authentic Christian community, raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit, was devoted to, passionate about the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Last week, we considered what it meant to be devoted to the apostles' teaching. And

what did we discover was the heart of the apostles' teaching? One sentence. What was it? Jesus is the Christ. Everything else that the apostles taught flowed out of that single, foundational truth. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is both Savior and Lord. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community then is this: they are devoted to the message about Jesus being the Christ. They are passionate about Jesus.

This morning, we want to consider a second essential characteristic of an authentic Christian community which Dr. Luke mentions in our text, Acts 2:42. This Christian community not only devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching that Jesus is the Christ, they also devoted themselves, my bible says, "to the fellowship."

The word translated "fellowship" is the Greek word *koinonia*. This is the first time that the word *koinonia* is used in the New Testament. It comes from the Greek word *koinos*, which means "common," and *koinonia* has the idea of connectedness, partnership, participation, fellowship.

The apostle Paul uses this word, *koinonia*, in his letter to the Christians in Galatia. It's an interesting reference. Gal 2:9. "....." Paul says, "They gave me the right hand of *koinonia*, the right hand of fellowship. They welcomed me as one connected with them in the Lord Jesus Christ."

This *koinonia* fellowship which is one of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community has a two-fold dimension. It is clearly a fellowship between individuals who are devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. This fellowship, connectedness, partnership, between

believers was manifested in some very practical ways in the early Christian church. Look back in Acts 2, at verses 44-47. “.....” What a beautiful picture of Christian koinonia, Christian fellowship. It’s little wonder that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. And that koinonia, that Christian fellowship between brothers and sisters in Christ didn’t just last for a few days after Pentecost. Look with me at Acts 4:32-35.

“.....”

Someone might say, “That looks a lot like communism. Having everything in common.” But this Christian koinonia is as far removed from the 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon known as communism as the east is from the west. This Christian koinonia not only has the horizontal dimension of individuals being connected together. Christian koinonia also has the vertical dimension of also being connected to God. Koinonia fellowship has God at the center. Listen to the testimony of the apostle John in his first letter. 1 John 1:3 “.....” We have koinonia fellowship with one another as we also have fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul adds, in Ephesians 2:1, that we also have fellowship with the Spirit. That is what makes true Christian fellowship so life-changing. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is at the center of our connectedness with one another!

In this koinonia fellowship, they called each other “brother” and “sister.” Do you remember when we used to do that as a church? Call each other “brother” and “sister”? That wasn’t just an old-fashioned form of address. It was a way of saying, “We’re family!” We are part of the family of God! You are my brother. You are my sister. And as part of the family of God, redeemed by the His grace, these early Christians were connected together in a loving

fellowship. In fact, Jesus had told His followers that expressing love to one another was the sign that they were His followers. You can read the words of Jesus, recorded in John 13:34-35.

“.....”

Koinonia fellowship, is a loving connectedness with God at the center. And this koinonia fellowship, this loving connectedness with God at the center is another essential characteristic of an authentic Christian community.

You remember the log? This log is special to me because it is a symbol of koinonia fellowship, being connected together in love. Let me explain. This log came from a tree in my back yard. Hurricane Frances visited our neighborhood a few weeks ago and she made a terrible mess. I was ready to start up my chainsaw and begin cleaning up. But my wife was a little apprehensive. You see, I don't have a good track record with chainsaws. One time, I was using a chainsaw to cut down a tree, and I got so excited when the tree started falling over that I rested the chainsaw bar on my thigh, while it was still running! Not a good idea. That mistake ruined a good pair of jeans, and part of my leg.

On another occasion, I was using a chainsaw to cut a tree down near our house. I thought I had it perfectly planned. I cut my wedge in the right place. Then I made my back cut. But instead of falling that way, the tree got caught up in the branches of another tree. If I had been smart, I would have got some help at that point. Instead, I just made another cut, trying to whittle away at the part of the tree that was still attached at the base. What I didn't realize was that when I did that, the tree would rotate and fall in another direction, right on my storage shed.

Now you understand why my wife was a little apprehensive about me getting anywhere near a chainsaw. So we were both very grateful last Sunday when a group from Forest Lake Church showed up at our house. I don't think that they have an official name, but I call them the CCC, "the Charitable Chainsaw Crew." I'm sure that some of their wives thought that they were just out playing. But they were actually demonstrating the most important virtue that you'll ever develop. They were expressing God's love in action. They cut down all the trees that were broken and the dangerous limbs that were hanging in the trees. And I want to publicly thank Les McCoy and Mark Offenback, and Doug Gondera, and his son Douglas, and Chris Gray and his sons Colin and Devin. I know that ours wasn't the only house the CCC visited that day. Thanks for demonstrating true Christian community, being connected together in love.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you should all join the CCC, the Charitable Chainsaw Crew. Some of us would do well to stay away from chainsaws! But we can all find creative ways to express love to one another as part of an authentic Christian community. Being devoted to the fellowship, expressing love to one another with God at the center is not optional. It is one of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community.

If someone visited the Forest Lake Church for the first time, would they leave saying, "Those people are really passionate about a loving fellowship with God at the center?" In my short time as part of this church family, I've seen many evidences of love being expressed with God at the center. And I praise God for that. Can we do better? Absolutely.

So how can we nurture that koinonia fellowship in our midst? First, we need to realize that the agape love God wants us to express to those around us is not worked up. It's prayed

down. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:5. “.....” This agape love is a gift from God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. I want to encourage you to pray each day that God would fill your heart with His agape love, His perfect love, His unselfish love, His self-sacrificing love. That’s the love that He wants us to share with those around us as part of a life-changing fellowship.

A second way to nurture koinonia fellowship is to get connected with a small group within the church family. This is a large family, and it’s a great blessing to gather together in Jesus’ name and worship God. But I believe that koinonia fellowship can best be nurtured in a small group setting. In the early Christian community, the believers met in each other’s homes, in small groups. They shared meals together. They shared lives together, with God at the center. And that model for nurturing koinonia fellowship still works today.

Back in July, I visited a very large Christian church in Seoul, South Korea. In fact, it’s the largest Christian church in the world. They have 750,000 members. It was like going to a huge camp meeting. And they have seven services on the weekend. You say, “How in the world can you experience any kind of true Christian fellowship in a church that large? I’ll tell you how. They have 40,000 small groups! And it’s in the small groups that people connect, sharing lives, loving one another with God at the center.

There are many koinonia fellowship groups that flourish in our church. Some of them are connected to ministries of our church, like the Forest Lake Church Choir, (which incidentally needs some more gifted members) and the Thrift Store Community Service team, and Prayer Ministries. I’m thankful that attendance doubled last Wednesday night at prayer meeting

because we had over 400 specific prayer requests from last Sabbath! And then there's the Quilting ministry. Bodil and I had the privilege of tying some prayer knots in one of those quilts this past Wednesday evening. The quilting ministry team is going to give that prayer quilt to a family that is in crisis. It's a tangible way of saying "We love you" and "We are praying for you." That's beautiful, isn't it? In fact, it's more than beautiful. It's Christian. It's authentic Christian community in action.

There are many other small ministry-focused groups that meet together, and serve together, and are connected together in love with God at the center. And there are other growth-focused groups that meet together—men's groups, women's groups, Bible study groups, Sabbath School groups. All of these small groups are settings where people can connect together in love with God at the center.

I've asked a couple to share this morning how being part of a small group has been life-changing for them. How being part of a small group has helped them to experience koinonia fellowship, where they feel connected together in love with God at the center. Paul and Michelle, would you join me here on the platform?

What was your first contact with the Forest Lake Church?

What helped you to feel more connected in the midst of a large church?

How has being part of a small group changed your lives?

Michelle, you made an important decision last Sabbath. Would you be willing to share that decision with your church family so that we can rejoice with you?

What a powerful testimony! Praise the name of the Lord Jesus! Paul and Michelle, thanks for sharing with your church family. **The Lord wants us to be connected together in love.** Being part of a small group is a wonderful setting to nurture that loving koinonia fellowship within the church family. In that small group setting, our lives are connected together in love with God at the center.

Some of you might be listening and thinking, “I want to get connected! Why can’t I be a part of a koinonia fellowship group? I need to experience true Christian fellowship where God is at the center!” Well, here’s the good news. You can. If you’re longing to experience true Christian fellowship, one of the essential characteristics of authentic Christian community, but you haven’t had the opportunity before, now is the time!

Next Sabbath, we have arranged for various small groups in the church to have tables in the foyer. Come early or stay after the service and explore some of the opportunities to connect with a small group within the church. Some of the groups are ministry-focused. Other small groups are growth-focused. All of those small groups are an important setting where we can get connected, and experience true koinonia fellowship within our midst. And if you have an idea for a new koinonia fellowship group, a young mom’s group, or a widow’s group, or an every man’s battle group...just come and talk to me, or to Pastor Tim, our discipleship pastor, and we’ll help you get connected!

I was part of a small group at the Calimesa church in California. We started as three men meeting together, once a week on Sunday evening from 7:00-8:00 PM. Our group eventually

grew to 8. Now it's 7, because I had to leave. I came to love the men in that group as my brothers. We prayed together. We shared together. We studied God's Word together. We laughed and cried together. A few weeks ago, one of our group members had brain surgery. We prayed for him. We visited him in the hospital. We didn't have to call the visitation pastor. We were there. Because we were connected. And his first Sunday evening home, one of our men's group picked Steve up in his pajamas and brought him over to where our group was meeting. I love those men, and I miss that group. So I'm joining another men's group here at Forest Lake Church. Why? Just for something to do. No. I'm joining another small group because I need to be a part of a small group fellowship, a place where I can get connected together with others in love with God at the center. I need that. And you do too.

**The Lord wants us to be connected together in love.** So get connected! Get connected with God every day, praying that He would fill your heart with His agape love. And get connected with a small group within the church family where you can experience true koinonia fellowship. And then when we meet for worship, we can rejoice together that we are part of an authentic Christian community. We are passionately devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are connected together in love, with God at the center.

In some ways, the church is like a puzzle. When all the pieces get connected, people will look and say, "Hey, that's a beautiful picture!"

# AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 3

## The Most Important Church Service You'll Ever Attend

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Acts 2:42  
Subject: To what did the early Christian devote themselves  
Complements: to the breaking of bread  
Exegetical idea: The early Christians devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.  
Homiletical idea: **Authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.**  
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to worship.

### Introduction

There are many powerful symbols in the Christian community. The cross. The blood of the Lamb. Light. But perhaps no Christian symbol is more significant than bread, and particularly the breaking of the bread.

This is the third sermon in our series on Authentic Christian Community. We are focusing on a single text of Scripture. In this text, Dr. Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, records an inspired description of an authentic Christian community. Can you tell me where our text is found? Acts 2:42. In that text, we discover four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community. Let's look at the text together. Acts 2:42.

“.....”

The word of God tells us that the early Christian community devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. In the first sermon of this series, we noted that this early Christian community devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And what was the heart of that teaching? One sentence? Jesus is the Christ! They

were devoted to Jesus Christ. And any authentic Christian community will have Christ at the center! Amen? Everything centers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Without Jesus at the center, we are not an authentic Christian community.

Last week, we noted that this authentic Christian community, raised up in one day by the power of the Holy Spirit, also devoted themselves to koinonia—fellowship. They were connected together in love with God at the center. I hope that you noticed on your way into church that there is a “Get Connected Fair” in the lobby. You’ll see numerous opportunities to connect with a small group for ministry and personal growth, so you can get connected in a loving koinonia fellowship. I got connected this past week! I joined a men’s group, and my first meeting is tomorrow evening! A second characteristic of an authentic Christian community is that they are devoted to koinonia fellowship. They are connected together in love, with God at the center.

And then Dr. Luke mentions the third essential characteristic of this authentic Christian community, and, I pray, also of our church today. Let’s look again at our text in Acts 2:42. The Word of God says that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to...the breaking of bread. “ Literally, the breaking of the loaf.

What is that all about? The breaking of bread. Is Dr. Luke simply telling us that the early Christians liked picnics and potlucks?! I don’t think so. There’s more to this expression “the breaking of bread” than that. So what does it mean? They devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread,” “the breaking of the loaf”?

There is only one other place in the New Testament where this precise phrase is used. Does anyone know where it’s found? It’s in reference to Jesus. And it’s also recorded by Dr. Luke, in his Gospel record. Luke 24:35. Dr. Luke records, “.....” Let’s look at

the rest of the story, beginning with verse 13. Luke 24:13-27: :.....” What a Bible study that must have been! Because all of the Scriptures point to Jesus. “These are they that testify of Me,” Jesus said.

Then Dr. Luke continues, in Luke 24:28-35, “.....” Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Literally, “in the breaking of the loaf.” That’s the exact same phrase that we find in our text, Acts 2:42. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.

Now, I have a question for you. Why did the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus recognize Him when He broke the bread? Did they see the scars in His hands? Perhaps. Or was it something about that symbol of the bread and the breaking of the loaf? What do you think?

Where else do we see Jesus breaking the bread? At the Last Supper in the Upper Room. Let’s look at that narrative together. Luke also records this story in Luke 22:19.

“.....” I don’t know if Cleopas and his friend on the Emmaus road were there in the Upper Room when Jesus instituted what we call the Communion Service. Probably not. Scripture records that Jesus was with the Twelve. But I’m sure that the other disciples of Jesus, including Cleopas and his friend, heard what happened. They heard the Eleven repeat the words of Jesus when He broke the bread: “This is my body which is broken for you.” And now, as Jesus broke the bread with the disciples that He encountered on the road to Emmaus, I’m sure that they weren’t just thinking which piece was the biggest! That’s what I always used to think when I was little and something was being divided up! Which piece is the biggest! But I don’t think that’s what these disciples were thinking. The breaking of the bread was a symbol. It

reminded them of something else. The Bible tells us that they recognized Him by the breaking of the loaf.

And so every time the disciples re-enacted this Last Supper and broke the bread, it was a time to remember, a time of worship, a time of sacred communion with their Crucified and Risen Lord. And the early Christian community devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. They were a Christ-centered worshiping community. We don't know how often the early Christian community celebrated the Communion service. Was it every day? Every week? We don't know. But what we do know is this: They were devoted Christ-centered worship. They were devoted to the breaking of bread.

The New Testament gives us no specific instructions regarding the frequency for sharing in the Communion Service. Some Christian communities share in the Lord's Supper once a year. Others share four times a year. Others once a month. Others, once a week. Others every day. Is one more appropriate than another? That's something that each believer needs to be persuaded on in his or her own heart. The Lord simply says, "As often as you drink it," speaking of the symbol of His shed blood, "do it in remembrance of Me."

I can remember times when I was a young man, and I would visit other churches in London. If I had just celebrated communion, and I went to another church that was celebrating communion, I was very distressed. I didn't know what to do! After all, I had just celebrating communion just a week or two before! What a strange attitude! I'm not sure where I got that from. The Scriptures set no limit on how often we can break the bread in sacred communion. We should rejoice to share in the breaking of bread in remembrance of Jesus whenever the opportunity arises. I've been to wedding services that share in the breaking of bread. Is that

appropriate? Absolutely. I've participated in retreats where the participants share in the breaking of bread. Is that acceptable? It's not only acceptable. It's a sacred privilege. The early Christian community devoted themselves to the breaking of bread in remembrance and worship of Jesus.

Have you noticed that when some churches celebrate Communion some people stay away? Why is that? It can't just be because the service is longer! Why do some people stay away? I had a student some years ago in my Life and Teachings of Jesus class at Southern Adventist University who told me that it had been more than 5 years since she had participated in a communion service. I asked her "Why?" She said, "I feel unworthy. I've sinned and I don't feel worthy to come to the table of the Lord." And do you know what I said? "We're all unworthy! The sacred service of communion is not for worthy people. We come because we're not worthy. Only Jesus is worthy." Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain! (Hold up the symbols of the stained wool and the cross). Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain! We come to worship Jesus. He allowed His body to be broken for us and He allowed His blood to be shed for us to save us from the death that we all deserve. We come to celebrate His mercy and His grace. We come to participate in Christ-centered worship. And to say with the heavenly hosts, "You are worthy, O Lord." "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever!"

I shared this with my student, and some time later she came to me, with a smile on her face, and said, "I participated in the communion service, and it was wonderful!" Yes. The communion service is wonderful, because Jesus our Lord and Savior is wonderful! And when we take the symbols of His broken body and shed blood, we are saying YES again to Him as

Savior and Lord. Authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread

So I appeal to you. When the next time comes to share in the breaking of bread at the Communion service, don't stay away. It's the most important church service you'll ever attend. Highlight that worship service in your calendar. Don't miss it. A characteristic of an authentic Christian community is that we devote ourselves to worshipping Jesus our Savior, particularly in the breaking of the bread.

While most commentators agree that this expression in Acts 2:42, "the breaking of bread" is a reference to the re-enactment of the Last Supper at a time of sacred communion, some commentators suggest that this expression "the breaking of bread" may also refer to sharing a common meal or an agape meal. Can you think of another time when Jesus "broke bread" besides the Last Supper? That's right! The feeding of the five thousand. Dr. Luke records the story in Luke 9, beginning with verse 12. "....." This was a regular meal, not a communion service. And yet even this meal had special significance. The next day, Jesus said to His followers, "I am the bread of life." That bread which Jesus broke when He fed the 5000 was also a symbol of Himself. "I am the living bread," He said. And so every time the disciples shared a common meal, and broke bread, this was also a time of sacred communion with each other and with the Lord. That's why the word of God records in Acts 4:46, "they broke bread together in their homes and ate with glad and sincere hearts."

So every time you sit down at a meal, whether with brothers and sisters in Christ, just with your own family, or by yourself...every time to take a loaf of bread and break it, that can also be a time to worship Jesus, a time of sacred communion. When you break the bread at a

common meal, you can rejoice that Jesus is your bread of life. You can rejoice that Jesus is your living bread. You can rejoice that Jesus has made your life more than a dusty scuffle across some meaningless terrain. You can rejoice that because of Jesus, your life has meaning. Because of Jesus, your life has purpose. You are a loved child of God, redeemed at an infinite cost by the precious gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every meal can be a time of worship, a time of sacred communion. What an amazing thought!

I have two special invitations that I want to give you this morning. The first one doesn't come from me. It comes from Jesus. It's a personal invitation to share in the breaking of the bread next Sabbath, October 9, at 5:00 PM in the Upper Youth Room here at the Forest Lake Church. If you're sitting by the center aisle of the church, you'll see a stack of invitations beside you. Please take one and pass the pile of invitations to others on your row. This is an invitation that is sent with love, from Jesus. I pray that as a result of this sermon, you'll be inspired to share in this time of sacred communion next Sabbath, October 9, at 5:00 PM. Put that personal invitation in your Bible. Take it with you. And if you know someone who isn't here today, invite them to come too. Tell them that this is a special time to worship Jesus, our wonderful merciful Savior. And if you know someone who is unable to come to that service but would like to share in the breaking of the bread, please talk to one of our pastors or elders and we'll make provision for them too.

The second special invitation that I want to give you this morning isn't for next Sabbath. It's for now. Some day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. But I want to invite you to join with me in worshipping Jesus right now! When you think about our wonderful merciful Savior, there is no more

appropriate response than worship. That's why authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.

So we're going to close this worship service by singing a song of worship. And as we sing, there may be someone who wants to come to the cross this morning in a special act of worship. Perhaps to accept Him as your personal Savior. Perhaps with a heart filled with joy and thanksgiving, to worship Him. As we sing, I invite you to worship Jesus with all of your heart, as the Spirit leads you. Let us stand as we sing! And sing with all of your heart! Worship Jesus with all of your heart!

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we praise you. We worship you, wonderful, merciful Savior. We thank you that you allowed your body to be broken for us. Holy Father, we thank you that you so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life! Holy Spirit, we praise you for moving in our midst this morning. Please set us free as authentic Christians to be passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.

This is our prayer, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Invitation card: (sample)

You are personally invited to come and commune with Me. We will be breaking bread together on Sabbath, October 9, 2004, at 5:00 PM in the Upper Youth Room of the Forest Lake Church.

With all my love, Jesus

Symbols:

The cross - in the center of the platform

Ball of white wool with red stain (i.e. blood stain) - on table

Light (candle) - on table

Bread (loaf) - on table

Children's story

I want to talk with you this morning about symbols. Not cymbals, spelled with a "C" at the beginning, like you play in a marching band or orchestra. But symbols, spelled with an "S" at the beginning. A symbol is something that reminds us of something else. A symbol represents something else. This is a symbol. What is this? (A flag). This flag is a symbol of which country? (The United States of America). You're right. This flag reminds us of the United States of America. How many of you were born in the USA? Then this is your flag!

Here's another symbol. What is this? A cross. This cross is a symbol. What does it remind us of? (Jesus). And what about Jesus? (That He is our Savior. He died for our sins). That's right. The cross is a symbol.

I'm going to talk today in the sermon about another symbol. Does anyone know what this is? (Crackers? Unleavened bread). On the night before Jesus was crucified on the cross, He was eating a special supper with His disciples. And He took some unleavened bread. And He decided to make that unleavened bread into a symbol. He wanted that unleavened bread to remind His disciples, and all of us, of something else. He said to them, "This is My body which is broken for you." Now, it wasn't actually His broken body, was it? No. He hadn't even died yet. But it was to become a special symbol. Every time His disciples ate that special meal, which we call Communion, the unleavened bread would remind them of His broken body. The unleavened bread would remind them that Jesus loved them and died on the cross to save them from their sins.

I brought some unleavened bread this morning. It hasn't been blessed or set apart as holy for the Communion service. But it is still a special symbol. And you can take a piece if you want to. When you eat it, remember that Jesus loves you and that He died to save you. It's a very special symbol for Christians. OK? You can take a piece as you go back to your seats.

## **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 4**

### **The Most Important Prayer You'll Ever Pray**

**Dr. Derek Morris**

Preaching passage:	Acts 2:42
Subject:	To what did the early Christian devote themselves
Complements:	the apostles' teaching fellowship the breaking of bread prayer
Exegetical idea:	The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.
Homiletical idea:	<b>An authentic Christian community is a praying community</b>
Purpose:	To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to prayer.

#### Introduction

I visited Amazon.com this past week and did a book search on “prayer.” Can you guess how many books titles came up? 98797! Obviously, a great deal has been written about prayer through the ages. Those 98797 books currently available on Amazon.com are just a few of them! My favorite definition of prayer in all of my study through the years comes from a little book called *Steps to Christ*. Listen to these profound words, in a chapter entitled “The Privilege of Prayer”: “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.” (p. 93) This morning, we want to focus our attention on the most important prayer you’ll ever pray.

This is the fourth sermon in our series on Authentic Christian Community. For the past three weeks we have been studying a single text of Scripture. This text describes an authentic Christian community raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In this

one text of Scripture, we have noticed four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community—back then, and also today. Where is this text found? Acts 2:42. These Christians, according to Luke’s testimony in Acts 2:42, devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

We noted in the first sermon of this series that the apostles’ teaching can be summed up in one sentence, as evidenced in Acts 5:42. “Jesus is the Christ.” The truth about Jesus is the heart of the apostles’ teaching. Jesus is at the center, and that is true of any authentic Christian community. If Jesus is not at the center, you can call the community what you will, but it is not truly Christian. It’s my prayer that this church would be an authentic Christian community with Jesus Christ at the center. Isn’t that your prayer too?

A second characteristic of an authentic Christian community is devotion to koinonia, devotion to fellowship. We defined koinonia as being connected with one another in love with God at the center. And this true Christian fellowship is demonstrated in very practical ways: loving one another, caring for the needy in our midst, bearing one another’s burdens. And I’m excited to see a growing commitment to true Christian fellowship in our midst. That’s not just an optional extra. Koinonia fellowship is one of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community.

Last week we noted that this group of Christians described in Acts 2:42 not only devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, but they also devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. We decided that this term, the breaking of bread, did not primarily refer to picnics and potlucks. Rather, “the breaking of bread” was primarily a reference to the Last Supper where Jesus said, “This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of

Me.” The early Christians were devoted to the breaking of bread. It was a time of sacred communion, remembering what Jesus had done for them. I’m excited that this afternoon we have the opportunity to break bread together. God has impressed us this week that this service will be a time of profound spiritual blessing. And so I want to personally invite you to the agape communion this afternoon at 5:00 pm in the Upper Youth Center. I could try to motivate you to come by telling you that Stephanie Jensen and her team will have the Upper Youth Center beautifully decorated and an agape meal prepared. I could tell you that my wife and I will sing a beautiful Scripture blessing from her new CD. I could tell you that you’ll be challenged by a powerful message from God’s Word. But those aren’t the reasons to come to the breaking of bread. We come because Jesus invites us to come. We come because authentic Christians are devoted to the breaking of bread. So I’ll be looking for you this afternoon, and I’m excited to see what God will do.

And then comes the fourth characteristic of an authentic Christian community. Let’s look at our text again, in Acts 2:42. Not only is there devotion to Jesus, the heart of the apostles’ teaching, not only is their devotion to fellowship, not only is their devotion to sacred communion, but there is also devotion to what? Devotion to prayer.

At first reading, this might seem like the easiest characteristic to comprehend. Devotion to prayer. **An authentic Christian community is a praying community.** Do you believe that? I do. **An authentic Christian community is a praying community.** People who worship with us, people who work with us, people who live near us....they ought to say, “Those Christians are praying people!”

But I have a question for you. What kind of praying were those early Christians devoted

to? As I mentioned to you at the beginning of this sermon, there are 98797 books on prayer currently available on Amazon.com. Should we just randomly choose one of those to teach us about prayer? Or perhaps trust the bestseller as being the most accurate? I don't think so. If we're wanting to be an authentic Christian community, like the community described in Acts 2:42, a community raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit, then I think we should look at the inspired record of Scripture and learn how those early Christians prayed. Does that make sense to you?

So what kind of praying were those early Christians devoted to? It's true that the apostle Paul encourages Christians to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. But was there a special focus to their prayers? I believe that we can learn some important lessons about prayer from these early Christians who devoted themselves to prayer.

The word used in our text, Acts 2:42, "they devoted themselves to prayer," is  $\text{B}\Delta\cong\Phi,\Lambda\text{P}\text{I}\text{Z}$ . This Greek word for prayer,  $\text{B}\Delta\cong\Phi,\Lambda\text{P}\text{I}\text{Z}$ , is made up of two words:  $\text{,}\Leftrightarrow\text{P}\text{I}\text{Z}$ , which means "a wish" and the prefix  $\text{B}\Delta\cong\text{H}$  which means "to" or "towards." To make a wish towards. This is not just wishful thinking. This wish is directed towards someone. Who is this wish directed toward? God. So prayer, in this context, is expressing a heart desire to God. The opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Would this always involve words? Not necessarily. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:26 that "we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Sometimes these heart desires are expressed to God in words. Sometimes in tears. Sometimes in silence. But whether with words or with tears or in silence, these prayers are directed toward God. Because those early Christians believed the word of the Lord when He said, "Call upon Me, and I will

answer you and show you great and marvelous things which you have not known.” Jer 33:3

The first reference to prayer among early Christians in the book of Acts uses this same noun, ΒΛ≐Φ,ΛΠΖ. To make a wish toward. It’s found in Acts 1:14. Let’s look at that text together. Acts 1:14 “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Here is a picture of a community that is devoted to prayer. What was the heart wish, the heart desire that they were expressing to God in their prayers? Was it “Dear Jesus, Help me to have a nice day?” Or “Dear God, Help me to make more money?” I don’t think so. But we don’t have to guess. If we carefully investigate the inspired record, we can find some clear indicators regarding the content of their prayers.

What happened immediately prior to this special prayer time recorded in Acts 1:14? Look at the beginning of Acts 1. What has just taken place? Jesus has ascended to heaven. And what had He told them before His ascension? Look with me at Acts 1:4-6, 8.

“.....”

So what wish, what heart desire, do you think that these early Christians were expressing in their prayers of Acts 1:14? They were not praying that the Holy Spirit would come. His coming was promised by Jesus. So what was the content of their prayer? Not, “Heavenly Father, Please send us your Holy Spirit!” But rather, “Holy Father, Let my heart be open to receive your Holy Spirit who will surely come as Jesus promised!” And is that all of the preparation that is necessary to receive the Holy Spirit to be with us and in us as Jesus promised? Is it just a matter of asking, of being willing? Look again at Acts 2:38. “.....”

Do we just need to pray, and ask for the Holy Spirit that we might have power to be witnesses for Jesus? No. We also need to repent. What does it mean to repent? To turn away

from our sins. To have a change of mind. A change of heart. And that is a supernatural work of God. We can't convert ourselves. But we can cry out to God to turn us around! And that repentance is visible, through the sacred service of baptism, and day by day, through a change of behavior.

I want to suggest that part of the prayers described in Acts 1:14 and Acts 2:42 were prayers of repentance, prayers of surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, that they might be ready and receptive when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

What else was included in their prayers? Well, let's read one of their prayers, recorded in Acts 4:24-30. "....." Their prayer included praise to God. Sovereign Lord, creator of heaven and earth. And then comes a request, a petition, in verse 29.

"....." And what was the result? Acts 4:31. "....." They prayed for holy boldness, and for power to fulfill the mission that Jesus had given to them. And in response to their prayer, the Holy Spirit came upon them with power.

So this devotion to prayer was not just a private spiritual exercise. This devotion to prayer was focused. These Christians wanted to be all that Jesus intended them to be—His witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The most important prayer a Christian will ever pray is a prayer of repentance and surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, asking that you might be open to His Spirit to do the work He has called you to do.

Earlier this year, I had a privilege of attending a prayer conference at Pine Springs Ranch, in Southeastern California Conference. What a blessing! One of the presentations by Ron

Halvorsen was on claiming our communities, claiming our neighborhoods for Christ.

One practical suggestion that Ron Halvorsen gave for impacting our neighborhoods was prayer walking. Praying for our neighbors to know Jesus. A lot of us walk in our neighborhoods anyway. Why not pray for our neighbors while we walk? Why not claim our communities for Christ? Ron got the idea of prayer walking from the experience of Joshua. Joshua walked around Jericho and claimed it for God. What do you think Joshua was doing while he was walking around the city? Sight-seeing? No! He was praying. And the priests, who were carrying the Ark? They were praying. And the trumpeters? They were praying while they were playing. And the singers? They were praying while they were singing. They were prayer walking-claiming that territory for God.

And the Lord told Joshua, when you enter the land of Canaan, "every place that the sole of your foot will tread I have given you." Josh 1:3 And so Joshua prayer walked the land. And I believe that we need to do some prayer walking too. Have you noticed that Satan is making inroads in our neighborhoods? Are we going to just sit back and do nothing? Are we going to barricade ourselves inside our homes and inside our beautiful

church and ignore everyone around us? I pray that the answer is "No!" As authentic Christians, we must devote ourselves to prayer. Prayers of repentance, prayers of surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, prayers that we will be open to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prayers that the mission of Jesus will be fulfilled in us and through us.

Ron Halvorsen told the story of an elderly lady who started prayer walking in her community. She was too timid to give Bible studies. She didn't want to talk to anyone. But she said that she was willing to pray for her neighbors while she walked each day. And so she prayer walked day after day. One day, she was walking by a neighbor's house, and the strong impression came to her: "Knock on that door." The thought startled her. She didn't know who lived there. She had no invitation. So she passed on. But the conviction came again. "Knock on that door." So she turned back and knocked on the door. She probably was hoping that no one was home. But the door opened. She said, "I'm a prayer warrior! I'm praying for people in the neighborhood. Do you need prayer?" And the neighbor began to cry. Her husband was sick, in the hospital, and this woman sensed a great need for prayer. And so this elderly prayer walker prayed with her neighbor. Several days passed. Then one

day, while the prayer walker was passing by that same house, the door flew open and the neighbor called out, "Prayer warrior. Come in and meet my husband. He's home from the hospital." Now that elderly lady has business cards printed which reads "Prayer Warrior." On the back of the card it says, "If you need someone to pray with you, call....and there's her telephone number! What a transformation! Hallelujah!

My wife and I were so impressed by that story that we decided to start prayer walking in our neighborhood. We walk almost every morning. Usually we pray for each other, for our children and for special needs that the Lord has brought to our minds. But we decided to start praying for our neighbors as well. We want to claim our neighborhood for Jesus. So we began to pray as we walked. And just a few days after we had started prayer walking, as we were almost finished with our walk, my wife Bodil was impressed to go up to a neighbor's front door and knock. Now, for those of you who don't know my wife, she doesn't just go up to strangers' houses and knock! But that morning she felt compelled by the Holy Spirit. And so she walked up to our neighbor's door and knocked. And waited. And waited. Nobody came to the door. I was already halfway down the driveway, and Bodil had turned to leave when finally the

front door opened. And the lady said, "Hi there. Come in!" We turned, walked back to the front door and went inside. Within less than 60 seconds, the neighbor said, "God sent you here at just the right time. I'm going to unburden my heart to you, if that's OK." And her eyes filled with tears. For the next hour, she poured out her heart. And as we listened, I thought, "This is amazing!" No. God is amazing! We were able to pray with our neighbor, and ask God to bless her and guide her.

I want to personally challenge you to start praying for your family, for your neighbors, for your community. You can prayer walk, or prayer drive. You can gather with some friends to pray. Pray over the phone. You can come to one of the prayer services at church: on Wednesday morning, Wednesday evening, and early Sabbath morning. You choose. But pray somewhere. And not just "Dear Jesus, Help me to have a nice day" prayers. Authentic Christians are humbling themselves before God in confession and repentance, asking that they might be open to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that they might have a part in fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ to the world.

Remember, **an authentic Christian community is a praying community.** May it be said of us, by God's grace, and by His Spirit, "those Christians are praying people!" That's an authentic Christian community. They are devoted to Jesus, devoted to true Christian fellowship, devoted to Christ-centered worship in the breaking of bread, and devoted to prayer.