COMMUNITY

Core Value #1: COMMUNITY

The God that we worship models community. He exists in a community of three. Any examination of the early church in the book of Acts finds it existing, growing, and thriving in community. When the church was birthed in Acts 2, it existed as a group of people devoting themselves to the truth of the apostles, experiencing life together, eating together, and praying together. That dynamic community of believers who share life together is the church. This community was on mission together through serving the world around them. They met in homes together and then deployed daily as missionaries. God added to this community daily those who were being saved. Connection Church values community. We believe that truth is digested in community. We believe that mission happens in community. We also believe that the journey of transformation to which God has called every Christ- follower, happens in community.

Christian Community within Connection Church
Rooted in Acts 2:42–47 and Early Christian History

The Foundational Text — Acts 2:42–47
Luke describes the first believers with four core commitments:
"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers…" (Acts 2:42)

This passage shows **not a program**, but a *shared way of life*. The early Church functioned as a spiritual family shaped by worship, learning, generosity, and mission.

We can organize early Christian community into **six defining pillars**.

1. Devotion to Apostolic Teaching (Formation Through Truth)

Acts 2:42 — "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.*"

Early Church Practice
- Teaching centered on:
  - Jesus' life and resurrection
  - Old Testament fulfillment
  - Ethical transformation (Sermon on the Mount living)
- Instruction happened **daily**, often in homes or public spaces.
- Literacy wasn't required — teaching was communal and oral.

Early Christian Writings
- *Didache* (1st–2nd century): Provided practical instruction on Christian living, prayer, fasting, and morality.
- Church Fathers like **Ignatius of Antioch** emphasized unity around apostolic teaching to guard against division.

Modern Church Application
Christian community today reflects this through:
- Scripture-centered teaching, preaching and discipleship
- Small groups focused on spiritual formation
- Shared theological grounding rather than individual interpretation alone

Community is formed by **shared truth**, not just shared preferences.

2. Fellowship (Koinonia) — Shared Life, Not Social Time

Acts 2:42 — "the fellowship" (koinonia)
Koinonia means participation, partnership, and mutual *belonging*.

Early Church Reality
- Believers saw themselves as a **new family** transcending ethnicity, class, and status.
- Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, men and women gathered together.
- Hospitality was central because many Christians were socially displaced.

Historical Insight
- Roman observers noted Christians' unusual love for one another.
- Tertullian (2nd century) recorded pagans saying: "See how they love one another."

Modern Church Application
True Christian community includes:
- Intergenerational relationships
- Emotional and spiritual transparency
- Shared burdens and joys
- Commitment beyond Sunday attendance

Fellowship is **shared life under Christ**, not merely friendship.

3. Breaking of Bread — Worship and Table Community

Acts 2:42, 46 — "breaking bread… in their homes."
This likely refers to both:
1. Ordinary meals
2. The Lord's Supper (Eucharist)

Early Church Practice
- Communion was integrated into real meals ("love feasts").
- Worship happened primarily in homes for the first 300 years.
- Eating together reinforced equality and *belonging*.

Early Sources
- *Didache* gives Eucharistic prayers used by early Christians.
- Justin Martyr (2nd century) describes weekly gatherings including Scripture, prayer, communion, and offerings for the poor.

Modern Church Application
Christian community grows through:
- Shared meals and hospitality
- Communion as communal identity, not private ritual
- Homes as ministry spaces again

The table creates belonging before programs ever can.

4. Prayer as the Community's Center

Acts 2:42 — "the prayers."
Notice the plural — structured, shared prayer rhythms.

Early Church Patterns
- Continued Jewish prayer rhythms (morning, afternoon, evening).
- Corporate prayer during persecution and decision-making.
- Prayer expected God's active intervention.

Historical Evidence
- Early Christians prayed Psalms regularly.
- Catacomb inscriptions show prayer for one another even after death.

Modern Church Application
Healthy Christian community includes:
- Corporate prayer gatherings
- Prayer as first response, not last resort
- Intercessory care within the body

Prayer formed the Church's identity before strategy did.

5. Radical Generosity and Mutual Care

Acts 2:44–45 — "They had all things in common."
This was not forced communism but **voluntary sacrificial generosity**.

Early Church Reality
- Wealth redistributed according to need.
- Widows, orphans, and the poor were cared for internally.
- Giving was worship, not obligation.

Early Christian Witness
- The Church became known for caring for plague victims abandoned by society.
- Emperor Julian (4th century) complained Christians cared not only for their own poor but pagan poor as well.

Modern Church Application
Christian community today expresses this through:
- Benevolence ministries
- Practical help (meals, finances, childcare)
- Economic empathy within congregations

Community becomes credible when love becomes tangible.

6. Missional Presence and Attractive Witness

Acts 2:47 — "enjoying the favor of all the people… and the Lord added to their number daily."
Growth flowed from lived community.

Early Church Expansion

- Christianity spread relationally through households and networks.
- Conversion often happened through observing Christian life.
- Community itself was evangelistic.

Historical Insight
Rodney Stark (historian of early Christianity) argues the Church grew because:

- Christians stayed during plagues
- They practiced equality
- Women and marginalized people found dignity

Modern Church Application
Evangelism happens through:

- Visible love and unity
- Authentic relationships
- Communities that embody hope

The early Church didn't market itself — it embodied something people longed for.

The Early Church Model Summarized

Pillar	Early Church Expression	Modern Church Expression
Teaching	Apostolic instruction	Discipleship & biblical formation
Fellowship	Shared life	Deep relational belonging
Breaking Bread	Meals + Eucharist	Hospitality & communion
Prayer	Rhythmic corporate prayer	Prayer-centered ministry
Generosity	Radical sharing	Practical care & justice
Mission	Attractive witness	Relational evangelism

Theological Insight: Why It Worked
Early Christian community succeeded because it answered humanity's deepest needs:

- ***Belonging*** → spiritual family
- **Meaning** → shared mission
- **Identity** → life in Christ
- **Security** → mutual care
- **Hope** → resurrection-centered living

Christian community was not an activity added to faith — **it was the environment where faith lived and grew**.

What the Modern Church Often Misses
Acts 2 shows community that was:

- Participatory, not spectator-based
- Daily, not weekly
- Relational, not program-driven
- Sacrificial, not consumer-oriented
- Spirit-formed, not institution-centered

The challenge today is not recreating first-century culture but recovering **first-century priorities**.

A Simple Modern Definition

> **Christian community is a Spirit-shaped family devoted to Christ, formed by shared truth, shared life, shared worship, shared care, and shared mission.**