Greetings friends,

I ask that as we begin our spiritual journey together we begin to take some time daily (if you are not already) to read the Scripture and pray. I thought it would be beneficial for us to focus on the same passage of Scripture for the week. This week, we will focus on Sunday's texts (See below). If you were not present in worship on Sunday and have not yet watched it, I encourage you to do so. The Scripture used on Sunday was **Acts 2:42-47**. The book of Acts focuses on the beginnings, growth, and development of the church and early Christian mission. This passage describes the early church at its inception, as a growing community of believers in Jesus Christ. People who responded to the message of Christ began to gather together to worship, pray, learn, and build relationships with one another.

The church expanded to include Gentiles along with the Messianic Jews, as well as mixing people who were slave and free, rich and poor, of all sorts of different backgrounds- it grew in openness and acceptance of others as it also expanded geographically. Many, many people came to know Christ as their Savior and churches were planted. There was also much persecution of believers, especially for those willing to share their faith. Acts is the longest book of the New Testament and covers a wide range of ideas, themes, and cultures. However, all of it is focused on how God moved to take the message of God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ to the (then-known) world. The book of Acts needs to be seen as "part two" of Luke's work, following the Gospel that bears his name. Luke is not only an author, but a researcher, historian, medical doctor, and theologian.

Format-this is a repeat from every week, and will be consistently present for anyone new and as a reminder for all. It is listed at the bottom for review and for anyone who is new to this exercise. Please remember that it is a suggestion. There is no pressure to do it in the format suggested, to do everything on the days that are listed, or to even to answer all the questions. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. If one question takes up the time because you are moved in your spirit, then stay with it. The idea of this is to spend some intentional time with the Scriptures, in the presence of God, and in prayer and reflection- in whatever way that works for you!

Scripture: **Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)**

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread
and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the
apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property
and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together
in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere
hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their
number daily those who were being saved.

Other Scriptures referenced:

Acts 1:8 (Jesus said to the disciples right before he ascended) “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The story of the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is found in Acts 2:1-4. The story continues, and Peter preaches to the crowds in vv. 14-41, ending with “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

DAILY QUIET TIME WITH GOD:

Monday: v.42a “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”- “they”- beyond the 12 apostles (they had chosen Matthias to replace Judas in Acts 1:12-26), were about 120 believers that were with them before Pentecost (Acts 1:15), and about 3000 more that were added on the day of Pentecost- and the numbers continued to grow. “Devoted” is *proskarterountes* in the original Greek, and is defined as persisting, persevering, to continue steadfast in, “to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty” (biblehub.com). Are there some things in your life that you believe reflect this definition of being “devoted?” What causes you to be devoted? What does your devotion look like? Would anyone else perceive your devotion, and if so, how? Consider devotion to God- would you describe your own faith as being “devoted?” If so, how did you determine that? If not, why not, and what do you believe needs to change to be “devoted?” Take a moment and pray, asking God to reveal your devotion, and allow God to penetrate your heart and mind. Be open to revelation, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. Pay attention to any thoughts or images that come to mind, as well as anything felt in your body. Ask questions of God, listen for God’s will, and determine to follow it. What would this practice have to do with devotion? As we move through this text throughout the week, be mindful of the full definition of “devotion.”

“Apostles’ teaching”- the term “apostle” means messenger, someone who is sent. “Disciple” means students following and learning from a teacher. After Jesus ascended, the disciples became apostles, spreading the Gospel message to the world, and creating many disciples.

“teaching”- we must remember that the Bible had not yet been written, and yet many were coming to know Christ’s message of grace; about Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Being Jewish, the apostles would’ve already known the Old Testament Scriptures, including the Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Living and traveling with Jesus for the three years of his ministry would’ve reinforced that understanding, and the Gospels relate many times that Jesus taught the disciples about how he was the Christ and all that entailed. Jesus also taught throughout his ministry about the kingdom of God, and what that looks like and lives like. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gave what is referred to as the “Great Commission,” which included him saying, “Therefore go and make disciples… teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would be there to guide them in this, saying, “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). What do you believe the apostles were teaching the most, and why? What impact do you believe their teaching would have on those who were hearing and learning? If you were to select key teachings for unbelievers and new believers today, what would you choose, and why? Is it the same or

different, and why? Consider that much of what the apostles shared would've included their own personal testimonies- stories of their own encounters and experiences with Jesus. If you were to share your own personal encounters and experiences with Jesus with someone, what stories would you share, and why? What do those experiences teach about who God is and what God does? What would be the benefit of sharing our personal faith stories with others- believers, new believers, and unbelievers? Take some time and pray about what "God Moments" God would want you to share, and with whom. Ask for clarity, opportunity, and courage to do so. Ask that the hearer be receptive, open to the message and the Spirit moving. Thank God for all the experiences you have had, for guidance, and for grace.

Tuesday: v.42 cont. (they devoted themselves to) "fellowship"- is *koinonia* in the original Greek, and it's not simply an expression of small talk, potluck suppers, coffee hour, etc. (though those are all good!) but also community, togetherness, intimacy, and sharing. It is believers coming together in Christian love, support, encouragement, caring, etc.- doing life together. Do you believe there a difference between the fellowship of the early church and what is often regarded as fellowship in the church today? Why, or why not? Consider throughout the New Testament all of the "one another" statements, and how it relates, and is lived out today (for example: Mark 9:50; John 6:43; Romans 12:6, 15;5,7; 1 Corinthians 11:33; Galatians 5:15, 26, Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; James 4:11, 5:9,16…) What has been your experience of fellowship in our church? What about any experiences with other believers outside our church? What has been the impact of fellowship on your faith and life? Consider that this growing group of early believers was an ever-evolving group of people, so the early church would've most likely been participating in fellowship with people they did not know well (if at all) yet. Does this idea change anything for you in idea or practice? Take a moment to reflect and pray about Christian fellowship in your own life and in our church. What do you perceive? What is God asking you to do?

(They devoted themselves to) "the breaking of bread"- scholars believe that the word "the" preceding "breaking of bread," and especially with it being bundled with other spiritual activities, sets it apart from an ordinary meal and more likely indicates the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. Communion is a sacrament, that uses "sign-acts"- breaking of bread- as Jesus' body, pouring of cup- as Jesus' blood, all to represent Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is a celebration where we remember- as it says in the Communion liturgy, "in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." This liturgy would not have been written at the time of this passage, but the practice and similar words relaying the story for remembrance would have been used. What does it say to you about the apostles and the believers that they celebrated Communion together? Why do you believe they did that? Why do we do it? Take some time and consider all that is reflected and remembered through the sacrament of Communion. Pray with thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done.

Wednesday: v.42 cont. (They devoted themselves to) "Prayer"- consider prayer for a moment- how would you describe it? What is its purpose? Since we are in the book of Acts, let's use the commonly used acronym ACTS to name some aspects- A is for Adoration, to bless, praise, and

worship God- to exalt God for who he is. C is for Confession, as we humbly bow down and deal with our sin before God with a repentant heart, asking for forgiveness and grace. T is for Thanksgiving, to express gratitude for all that God has done, is doing, and will do, including salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life. S is for Supplication, petitioning for your own needs, while also interceding on behalf of others. We do this humbly, seeking God's will and not our own. There is certainly more than the acronym holds, such as prayers for spiritual warfare, prayers for healing, prayers for deliverance, prayers for guidance, opportunity, growth, etc., as well as speaking in tongues, which is a form of prayer. We can pray the Scriptures, write out our prayers, speak our prayers, sing our prayers, dance our prayers, etc. We can use a labyrinth, prayer beads, journaling etc. We can pray alone, with others, or corporately. We can have a listening prayer of silence and opening ourselves to hear God. They may be memorized prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, something scripted- written out prior, or free flowing from your heart. Can you name any other forms, processes, or intents of prayer? Are there any listed that you tend to gravitate to, and others you have never done? I invite you to begin broadening your practice and expression of prayer. Journaling prayers, either as you pray or after in order to remember, is a very helpful practice. Consider that In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul writes that we should "pray without ceasing." Prayer is absolutely vital in the life of a Christian, and for our church. It's not just us talking at God, it is conversation, which means being open to and expecting to hear God in return. It is inviting God into every situation, relying and trusting God. The early church was "devoted" to prayer. Consider your own prayer life. Would you consider it "devoted"? If not, what steps is God leading you to in order to move toward devotion in this spiritual practice? Pray about it. Ask God, listen, and respond.

Thursday: v.43 "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles"- "Everyone was filled" the original Greek is "There was coming then upon every soul" (biblehub.com) and "awe" is *phobos*, which may also be translated as fear, reverence. What does the fuller definition bring to mind about what was going on within and among the people? Imagine the transformation that happens in someone's heart to have "awe" of God. How would you describe the change? Do you have that same "awe" with God? Why, or why not?

"Wonders and signs"- the power of the Holy Spirit moving, with miracles that point to the power of Jesus Christ. Think healing and deliverance, perhaps revelation, people being touched by a miracle. This wasn't done as a show, like doing tricks. God brings power through love and compassion, as seen throughout the Scriptures, all for the glory of God. "Performed by the apostles"- however, the apostles knew very well that it was not them doing the wonders and signs, but God working through them. What does God doing wonders and signs through people say to you about God? Have you witnessed or experienced any form of wonders and signs in your own faith walk? If so, describe it. If not, pray for it in humility and expectation. Open yourself to God moving through you in a powerful way.

Though in this passage it was the apostles performing the wonders and signs, this expanded to include all believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit- remembering that it is always God and not the person. Throughout history, there are countless testimonies of wonders, signs, healing, deliverance, miracles, being done in the name of Jesus through believers. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, also experienced this, and the Methodist movement was formed with

the Holy Spirit moving powerfully through people. There was great renewal and revival! Pray for that today in our church! Pray for the movement of the Holy Spirit to flow through our people, through our worship, prayer, and love. Pray for our congregation to experience healings, deliverances, and miracles, in the name of Jesus. Pray that our church becomes a sign for others of the love and power of God through Jesus Christ. Pray with hope and expectancy. Pray with openness and submission. Pray for courage and boldness to move through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray thanks to God, because God is willing and able! Continue to pray for this! Let's pray for breakthrough and revival!

Friday: v. 44 "All the believers were together and had everything in common"- "all, together"- reflects the unity of the early church, though as we read on through Acts we will soon discover that where people are gathered, issues will likely arise. But the intent for unity is certainly there, and as issues developed, unity continued to be sought. What does that say to you about relationships with other believers, and as a church body? For this passage, consider the influx of the 3000 that were saved on Pentecost, plus all those who continued to be added. Those people were visitors in Jerusalem, so they were not employed there. The Jewish people were customarily hospitable during any major feast, including Pentecost. Visitors were welcomed into private homes and their basic needs provided for, all without charge. The early church expanded this idea of radical hospitality to be an everyday practice. What radical hospitality do you believe God is calling you and our church to? How and why? Pray about it.

"Everything in common"- this wasn't a version of early communism. It was temporary, voluntary, and the Jerusalem church was in constant need of financial support from other churches. It's more that as the church people saw the need and they did what they could to help. It was radical hospitality and generosity. It was a sharing of resources for the benefit of others. "In common" in the original Greek is *koina*. Notice that it is the root for *koinonia*, fellowship! What does that say to you about God's purposes through it all?

v.45 "They sold their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need"- notice that people chose to do this. God uses people to do his work. Though having faith that God would provide, and most likely praying for guidance, people needed to step in and take the action of doing something to take care of the need. They made real sacrifices for others. What do you believe was the underlying belief, feeling, and teaching that inspired them to do so? Take a moment and pray about needs. Be open to what God brings to mind and places on your heart. Ask God what he would like you to do about it. Is God calling you to share resources in some way, more than you already are? Ask for willingness and boldness to do what God is calling you to do. Pray for radical hospitality and generosity to increase, not only through you, but through our church. Thank God for his provision, and for using his people, including you, in ways that care for others.

Saturday: v.46 "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts"- literally, from the Greek, "And every day they were steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple" "Every day"- every single day! This wasn't an hour set aside once a week, this was a total life commitment. Faith in Jesus became the priority, and it infiltrated every aspect of their life,

including what most of us regard as our most prized possession, our time. Take a moment and consider what was compelling their choice for this action- what belief, feeling, motive? Consider the time you spend with your faith, whether it be attending church, serving in ministry and mission, praying, reading and studying Scripture, etc. How would you describe it? Ask God for a vision of what he sees, and listen and watch for God's revelation. Is God asking you to continue, add, change, be more intentional?

"Continued to meet together"- steadfastly continuing gathering together. Being with one another, with other believers. In the Greek culture, associations typically met once a month. The Jewish culture practiced the Sabbath once a week. Scholars note that the daily gathering was unusual in antiquity, and resembled more of how people were with family. Why is this so important? Consider how it felt during covid when we were unable to gather together. How did it feel? As I consider it, I am reminded of the many that are still unable to gather, homebound due to age or illness. Pray for them, and prayerfully consider reaching out in some way.

"Temple courts"- the base of the believers, beginning with the apostles, was Jewish at the start. Jesus was the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies, and the promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At the very end of the Gospel of Luke, after Jesus ascended, he tells us that the disciples (now apostles) stayed continually at the temple, praising God (Luke 24:53). Being at the temple not only continued and increased their expression of faith, but it also put them in contact with large amounts of people that they could share and witness to about Christ. What does this say to you about what God calls all of us to do?

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" "broke bread, ate together"- in this instance the language indicates the sharing of an ordinary meal together. Table fellowship. "In their homes"- believers continued radical hospitality and generosity. Soon after, homes would be used as churches. "Glad hearts"- "Glad" in the Original Greek is *agalliasis*, and means exuberant joy. Other times when this word is used it is translated as "wild joy," "ecstatic delight," "exultation," and "exhilaration" (biblehub.com). What does that say to you about the relationships that were forming, and the way believers were expressing faith with one another. Why do you think it made them feel this way? "Sincere hearts"- not a show, not faking it with a pasted on smile, but real, authentic positive feeling toward others. What does that say to you about what God desires for us?

v.47 "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" "praising God"- they were praising God together in their homes! How do you think they were doing that? Consider today's church- the wider church and our church- how is it the same and how is it different, and why?

"Enjoying the favor of all the people"- as the believers lived out the Gospel, they were an example of transformation, of the power of God, of abundant love and grace. As believers, we need to always be mindful that we are Christ's representatives in the world- no matter where we are or who we are with. Unbelievers are watching, noting, and may very well be moved closer to God through an experience of you.

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” “Those who were being saved”- those who accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who gained forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a church family! AMEN, HALLELUJAH, WAH-HOO, YEAH GOD!! “The LORD added”- this is huge! The disciples focused on God and one another, and it was GOD who added the people! Pray for God to do it again! Pray that we, as the church, will focus on discipleship, growing deeper in our faith, and that we all will be a witness in the world for those who do not yet know the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Take a moment and pray, asking God for guidance, opportunity, and for any ways that you need to grow in your witness for Christ. Pray thanks for your own salvation, and thanks for the people God will be drawing to salvation through Christ. Glory be to God!

Other items:

Responsive Reading (adapted from Colossians 1:3-6)

Leader: We thank You, God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

People: Through Christ, we have love for one another and the world

L: You give us hope through Your Word of truth, the Gospel

P: As we receive, understand, and grow in Your grace

L: We seek to bear fruit

P: Growing in spiritual depth

L: We seek to bear fruit

P: Growing Your kingdom

All: As we lift our voices and sing songs of faith and hope in You

Unison Prayer (adapted from Colossians 1:9-11)

Lord, Fill us with the knowledge of Your will,
In all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
That we may lead lives worthy and fully pleasing to You,
Bearing fruit in every good work.
As we grow in the knowledge of You,
Make us strong by Your glorious power,
Growing within and growing Your kingdom,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Song Lyrics:

Lift Every Voice and Sing UMH #519 v.1,3

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won

God of our weary years
God of our silent tears
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way
Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light
Keep us forever in the path, we pray
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee

Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand
True to our God
True to our native land

Shout to the North by Robin Mark

Men of faith rise up and sing
Of the great and glorious King
You are strong when you feel weak
In your brokenness complete

Shout to the north and the south
Sing to the east and the west
Jesus is Savior to all
Lord of heaven and earth

Rise up women of the truth
Stand and sing to broken hearts
Who can know the healing power
Of our awesome King of love

Chorus 1x

We've been through fire
We've been through rain
We've been refined
By the power of His name
We've fallen deeper
In love with You
You've burned
The truth on our lips

Chorus 1x

Rise up church with broken wings
Fill this place with songs again
Of our God who reigns on high
By His grace again we'll fly

Chorus 2x TAG

<u>O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing</u> UMH #57 v.1-4
1. O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

2. My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of thy name.

3. Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

4. He breaks the power of canceled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

Format (this is a repeat from last week, and will be consistently present for anyone new and as a reminder for all):
Find a <u>quiet place and time</u> to focus on the Word, and to hear from God through it. It doesn't have to be long, for some it will be longer than others. I encourage you, if possible, to do this practice in the <u>morning</u>. You will then find that God brings it to your mind throughout your day.

For greater impact I encourage you to get some paper and a pen and journal daily what thoughts and impressions God brings to mind. Write out also your own thoughts and your own prayers, making sure to leave space within your time for God's response. Listen intently, and notice what rises up within you- what you are thinking, feeling, memories that arise and ideas that spring up. It may be something God would want you to address within yourself and/or with others. It may be something God is inspiring you to begin or end. God's possibilities are infinite! After time, it is often beneficial to go back and read what you have written, and notice how God has been moving in your life (and praise God for it!).

Begin with prayer, quieting yourself within and opening up to hearing what God would like to reveal to you. Praise God for who he is, for loving you, being with you, and more. Then ask God to speak to you; to open your heart and mind to hear his message. (if you are journaling, you could write out the prayer)

Read the Scripture passage over twice; once as a read through, and the second time slowly, meditatively. Notice what God illuminates for you. Notice what words or ideas are "jumping off the page at you," impacting you from the Scripture. Ask God why that is being highlighted for you. What is God saying to you? What is God asking you to say, do, change, pray about, etc.? What is the application for my life today? **Most importantly- what am I going to do about it? (If you are journaling you could write it all out, which reinforces it in a greater way)

I have put together some daily questions based upon the Scripture. You may use those, but also feel free to deviate away from it if God is leading you there. They are simply offered to prompt contemplation with God. There is much more in this passage, feel free to delve in more!

At the end of your time pray again. I recommend praying throughout, but the ending prayer would include praise, thanking God for revelation, and asking for the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal, bringing to mind God's will. Ask God for the courage, empowerment, and opportunity to do what you have determined God is asking you to do.