



# FIRM FOUNDATIONS. FRESH FAITH.

## Sermon Study Guide

### Week 4: Community

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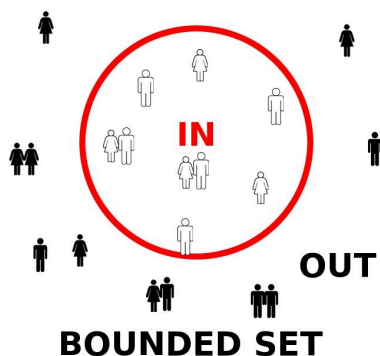
Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

The early church in Acts was marked by a profound commitment to learning and living together. They were devoted to understanding the ways of Jesus and to sharing life in deep, meaningful community. This is not a rigid blueprint for church structure. Instead, it offers something more valuable: essential ingredients that characterise a thriving Christian community. Their shared journey of faith is not just an example for us, but a call to consider the depth of our own commitment to knowing Christ and to truly knowing one another.

This week we reflect on what it looks like to be a community orientated towards Christ at our centre, committed to walking together and called to living wide and deep for the sake of the world.

### Read Acts 2:42-47

Paul Helbert, a missiologist who grew up in northern India among missionary communities, describes two models for understanding community.



#### The Bounded Set

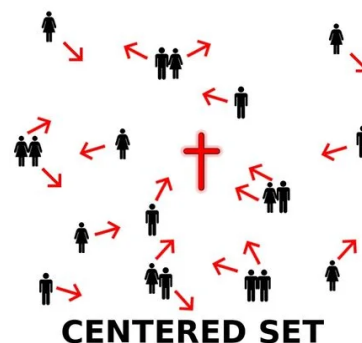
A bounded set defines who is “in” and who is “out” by drawing clear boundaries. These might be formal or informal, spoken or unspoken. They may be unintended, but every community develops norms—ways of speaking, behaving, and belonging that subtly signal who fits and who does not.



This raises a confronting question: what unwritten boundaries are a part of our church community today?

### **The Centred Set**

Instead of focusing on boundaries, the centred set model focuses on direction. The question is not “Are you inside or outside?” but “Which way is your life moving?” Is a person turning toward Christ? Is the trajectory of their life oriented toward Him?



This approach recognises that no one has “arrived.” Everyone is somewhere on a journey. As the book of Acts unfolds, it becomes clear that they wrestled with conflict, misunderstanding, and growing pains. What matters is not perfection, but direction. They were a community moving towards Jesus at their centre. We are called to be the same.

1. What “unwritten boundaries” might exist in your church or social circles that subtly determine who belongs? Who are the people or kinds of people you find hardest to welcome fully and how might God be inviting you to reconsider?
2. As you consider the “arrow” of your own heart, in which area of your life do you sense a gentle invitation from God to turn more fully toward Jesus?

### **Read Matthew 9:9-13**

The centred set model reflects how Jesus gathers His people. He called those from vastly different backgrounds—including Matthew, a tax collector aligned with Roman power, and Simon, a zealot ready to resist Rome by force. They were opposites in worldview and temperament, yet both were welcomed because both were willing to follow Jesus.

A centred community makes room for curiosity, doubt, exploration, and growth. It welcomes people not because they meet a standard, but because they are drawn toward Christ. That is what it means to be wide.

However, openness alone does not sustain a community. The early church was not only wide, it was also profoundly deep. Acts describes believers who were devoted. They shared resources, homes, and daily rhythms centred on Christ.



This was not a club built around shared preferences. It was a Kingdom community built around shared transformation. A club asks, “Do I enjoy this? Does this serve me?” But a Kingdom community asks, “How do we live faithfully together?”

1. Think about the people Jesus welcomed. What stands out to you about who he included?
2. How does deep community shape spiritual growth in ways individual faith cannot? What is one step you could take to become more deeply connected in Christian community?

## Read Acts 2:44-45 and Romans 12:2

Walter Brueggemann speaks of the church as embodying a “prophetic imagination.” This means offering the world a living picture of how life could be different. It is a contrast to “royal consciousness”, the mindset that accepts inequality, normalises injustice, and assumes the world cannot change. The church is called to stand as an alternative.

Where culture says accumulate, the church practices generosity.  
Where society promotes isolation, the church embodies belonging.  
Where systems numb people to suffering, the church remains awake to both pain and hope.

Christian community lives between what God created and what God is restoring. It stands in the gap, embodying glimpses of what is coming and the conviction that the present order is not the final word.

1. Where do you see signs of “royal consciousness” in the world around you, such as normalised injustice or resignation to the way things are?
2. How could Christian community offer a visible alternative in those areas?

## Optional Reflection Activity

Fresh faith is not about starting something entirely new. It is about rediscovering what has always been at the heart of Christian life—people turning toward Christ together, sharing life deeply, and welcoming others into the journey. This kind of community does not appear accidentally. It requires attention both to the centre and the edges.



Those who feel on the margins are invited inward—to explore, question, participate. Those who feel firmly planted are invited outward—to notice, welcome, and make space.

Both movements reflect the heart of Christ. Sometimes discipleship means stepping deeper into community. Other times it means helping someone else take their first step in.

Invite group members to sit quietly for a minute and consider:

- Is God inviting me to become more wide: more open, welcoming, or attentive to others?
- Is God inviting me to become more deep: more committed, engaged, or rooted in shared faith?

Encourage participants to write down one personal response.

## Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of community and for the ways you draw us toward one another as we follow you. Shape us to be people who are open in love, deep in faith, and centred on Christ in all we do. Help us to welcome those on the edges, care well for one another, and live as a witness of your hope in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.