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“Devotion: Lessons from the Early Church”

Acts 2

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What does a healthy, Christ-centered church really look like? In this message from Acts 2, we will explore how the early church devoted themselves to God’s Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer—and how those same disciplines help us grow spiritually, overcome life’s challenges, and become more like Jesus.

1. The Gospels

- a. Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven.
 - i. Jesus used parables to help put the kingdom of heaven in simple terms for the disciples to understand.
- b. A summary of the Gospels
 - i. Jesus entered our world in the form of a baby.
 - ii. Jesus chose 12 disciples.
 - iii. Jesus encouraged people to follow Him.
 - iv. Jesus was crucified for our sins.
 - v. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day.
 - vi. Jesus then walked among His followers for forty days, telling them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to preach the Gospel to the nations.

2. **Acts 2:42–47** – “[42] And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. [43] Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. [44] Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, [45] and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. [46] So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

a. Context

- i. Jesus ascended.
 - 1. In **Acts 1**, Jesus ascended to heaven, telling His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ii. The Holy Spirit descended.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit indwelt the Believers who were gathering during Pentecost.
 - 2. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, preached the Gospel to thousands of people who had come to celebrate Pentecost.

3. When the people, convicted by Peter's message, asked what they must do, Peter told them to repent and be baptized.
4. The new church "*continued steadfastly,*" or "*devoted themselves*" in other versions.
- b. The example of the early church
 - i. The early church devoted themselves to four things:
 1. God's Word
 2. Fellowship
 3. Communion
 4. Prayer
3. The church devoted themselves to God's Word.
 - a. **Psalm 119:11** – "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*"
 - i. The word "*hidden*" is also translated in other versions as "*stored up.*"
 - ii. Storing up God's Word in your heart makes fighting temptation easier.
 1. Pastor D.L. Moody of the Moody Bible Institute said, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible."
 2. **DISCUSS:** What is one verse or passage you have stored up in your heart, and why?
 - b. **Psalm 119:105** – "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*"
 - i. In a dark world, we need God's light to bring us clarity and be our example.
 - c. **Psalm 1:3** – The godly "*shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.*"
 - i. Trees planted by rivers do not rely on periodical rain to grow.
 - ii. Similarly, Christians can grow steadily and bear fruit instead of withering when trials come if we are planted in Christ.
 1. **DISCUSS:** What are you planted in? How can you plant your roots in Christ?
4. The church devoted themselves to fellowship.
 - a. Relief from persecution
 - i. Those who chose to turn to Christ often lost their jobs and support communities.
 - ii. The early church would fellowship (**koinonia** in the Greek), looking after each other.
 1. The Greek word suggests a community and unity found in joining team Jesus.

2. The Bible uses terms like “the body of Christ” and “family of God” to describe Believers because we share the same God, the same future, and the same sufferings.
3. **DISCUSS:** How can we care for the suffering body of Christ around us and around the world?
4. **Romans 8:17** – *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”* (NIV)

b. Relief from loneliness

- i. Fellowship helps us realize we are not alone in our struggle against sin, dealing with hurt.
 1. **DISCUSS:** How has the body of Christ helped you in your seasons of struggle, hurt, and loneliness? How can we look for those who feel alone and help them in their struggles?
- ii. Fellowship requires active participation for the good of the team.
 1. **1 Corinthians 12:12** – *“As the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”*
 2. God put people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, personalities, and sexes in the church so they would use their various gifts to compliment and bless one another.
 3. **DISCUSS:** How have you seen the body of Christ work together, using one’s strengths to help the other’s weaknesses?
- iii. Fellowship encourages you to live with eternity in mind.
 1. **Hebrews 10:25** – Christians should *“not [be] forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

5. The early church devoted themselves to Communion.

a. Communion as a reminder

- i. Though they were not many years away from Jesus’ death and resurrection, they wanted to remember Christ’s sacrifice.
- ii. **1 Corinthians 11:23–26** – *“[23] I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; [24] and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ [25] In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ [26]”*

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

- iii. **DISCUSS:** How does Communion bring God's sacrifice to mind? How does the reminder of His love motivate you?

6. The early church devoted themselves to prayer.

a. Prayer can include:

i. Confession of sin

- 1. **1 John 1:9** – *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
- 2. **2 Chronicles 7:14** – *"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

ii. Appreciation or thanksgiving for what God has done

- 1. **DISCUSS:** How can we be grateful people? What are some obstacles that get in the way of appreciating what God has done for you?

iii. Praise for who God is

- 1. **DISCUSS:** What do you love most about God? What inspires you to worship and praise the character of God?

iv. Requests

- 1. **Philippians 4:6b** – *"With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."*
- 2. **Matthew 11:28** – Jesus said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* (NIV)
- 3. **1 Peter 5:7** – *"... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*

b. Balance in prayer

- i. If we only come to the Father to make requests and we never repent of our sins, our relationship with Him is shallow.

- 1. **DISCUSS:** Do you confess your sin, give thanks, praise God, and make requests when praying to God throughout the day? What is one sort of prayer in which you can grow, and how do you plan to improve?

7. The goal of the four pillars

- a. Faithfully executing the disciplines of time in God's Word, fellowship, Communion, and prayer is not the goal.

- i. Closeness with God—so we can be conformed to His image—is the goal.

1. Jesus was frustrated that the Pharisees confused the disciplines for the goal.
 2. The Pharisees added about 39 extra rules to the Sabbath alone.
 3. **DISCUSS:** How do you know whether you have made the disciplines the goal rather than the means to draw close to God and be conformed to His image?
- b. The disciplines were meant to puff us up, but to prepare us for God's work in and through us.
- i. **Acts 2:43** – *"[43] Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. [44] Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, [45] and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. [46] So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."*
 1. The fruit of early Christians' devotion:
 - a. The fear of the Lord
 - b. Proper use of spiritual gifts
 - c. Unity in Christ
 - d. Concern for, and generosity with, one another
 2. When we struggle with our flesh and are not bearing fruit, we can go back to the four disciplines.
 - a. **DISCUSS:** How has abiding in Christ empowered you to do what you could not do in your own strength?
8. Barriers to the goal of the church
- a. Suffering can get in the way of us being more like Jesus.
 - i. Suffering can lead us to turn inward, focusing on our problems more than others' problems.
 1. Suffering can lead us to doubt God's love, presence, and promises.
 2. **John 16:33** – *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
 - ii. Men and women of God throughout the Bible had moments of doubt but remained faithful.
 1. John the Baptist doubted Jesus when he was imprisoned.
 2. The prophet Elijah doubted God.
 - iii. Amid their trials, God was faithful. He was with Joseph when he went to prison for a crime he did not commit.

1. We can always come to God for aid, comfort, and encouragement.
 2. God's Word—not our feelings—assure us of His love for us.
 3. **DISCUSS:** What are some feelings you have amid trials that run contrary to the truth? What verses can you store in your heart so you can instruct your heart toward the truth when your feelings lie to you?
- iv. We should not neglect fellowship when we're suffering.
1. People can pray for us, remind us of God's Word, and bring us a word of encouragement.
 2. **DISCUSS:** Do you seek solitude when you're struggling? If so, why? How can you remember it is better to fellowship amid your struggles?
- b. Selfishness can get in the way of us being more like Jesus.
- i. Selflessness is not in our nature.
 1. As the saying goes, "I looked in your cup to see if you had enough. You looked in mine to see if I had more than you."
 2. **DISCUSS:** Are you looking into others' cups to see if they have more than you? Or to see if they need help from you? How can you learn to love others better, as Christ loves us?
 - ii. Jesus bore His cross for us, leaving us an example so that we may take up our cross for others.
 1. God calls us to be selfless even when it costs us.
 - iii. Practicing the four disciplines helps strengthen our faith and focus our attention on God rather than self.
 1. By walking in God's power, we bring God glory and make His name known.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)