

Acts 2:42-47
The Church's Rhythms
ACTS: HTCWP

Series Recap

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Acts 2. Pray.**

RAY ORTLUND:

If you were here last week, you heard me intro us with this formula for thriving as a church and as a Christian. That you need two ingredients: **Gospel Theology** (right beliefs, right doctrine, right thinking about God) and **Gospel Culture** (right living, lives lived in relationship with and obedience to God).

- **Gospel Theology - Gospel Culture = Hypocrisy.**
- **Gospel Culture - Gospel Theology = Fragility.**
- **Gospel Theology + Gospel Culture = Power.**

Last week we looked at Gospel Theology - what is the gospel, this central truth and reality to all of life with God. That God is good, we as humans are not, Jesus saves, so the call is to repent and trust in Him. And we said that as believers the gospel is not just the ABC's of our life with God, but the A to Z. We continually go back to the gospel as the way forward in maturity.

Well this week we're looking at the 2nd part of that formula - **Gospel Culture**. How we live, how we order or structure our lives corporately as a church family and individually as followers of Jesus. What should our day to day lives look like and include and be about.

Passage Introduction

I want to start tonight by asking you a question that will frame up what we're going to talk about:

If everyone in our church followed Jesus the way you did, how healthy would our church be?

- If everyone in our church had your prayer life, are we a praying church?
- If everyone in our church viewed their money like you, are we a generous church?
- If everyone in our church showed up on Sundays with the same heart as you, are we a worshipful church?
- If everyone read their Bible the amount that you did or applied it as much as you did, do we have a church committed to God's Word?

If everyone in our church followed Jesus the way you did, how healthy would our church be?

TRANSITION: In Acts 2 we are in the middle of the story of the early church. The Holy Spirit has come, the gospel has been preached, and suddenly 120 followers of Jesus have turned into 3,000.

But now Luke is going to do something really interesting. He's going to take us out of the timeline of the story and give us a **summary paragraph** of what this early church in Jerusalem is like. What the believers do, how they live their lives, what their rhythms and habits and routines are as they live out their faith collectively together.

What we're going to see today as we close out Acts chapter 2 is the markers of this earthly church. What their rhythms and routines were as a people. This is a passage you might be familiar with. It's one that people will refer to often when they talk about wanting to be a "New Testament Church".

And it's easy to read these 6 verses and ask if our **church** looks this way. It's easy to read these 6 verses and ask if our **community group** looks this way

There can be a temptation as we read this passage today that so beautifully describes the lives of the early church, and then turn around and use it as a metric to judge our church or our group - well they don't act that way. They don't love me like that. They're not generous like I see here. What's wrong with my group? There can also be a temptation to push it off onto other people. I wish my church prayed more. I wish my church did more for the poor or marginalized in our city.

But I want to invite us to flip that tonight. I think what is most helpful for us this evening is to ask the question as we look at these things: **Am I this way? Is this passage how someone would describe my life?**

"I am they, and you are they". I remember talking to another pastor one time and he was sharing with me about his idea for a shirt. He had been having meeting after meeting where church members would complain about their church or their group. And they would say things like "well **they** just...Well **they** won't...well **they**..." and he said he wanted to start wearing a shirt that said **"I am they, and you are they."**

And it's a funny anecdote for a true reality. If we look at this passage only through the lens of what the church should be doing, it can be easy for us to grow disheartened or disillusioned or prideful or bitter - "Well my church doesn't look like that. Well Citizens isn't doing that. Well my CG isn't meeting this standard. They aren't living lives that reflect this passage." And instead we need to realize - **"I am they."**

Does my life reflect these markers of a life changed by the Holy Spirit?
That's where we're going today. **Acts 2:42-47.**

These markers of the early church. These markers of a healthy church and healthy church members. How we structure our lives around the good news of the gospel - our gospel culture.

3 things we'll see in this passage. The early church was:

- 1. Devoted to God**
- 2. Devoted to each other.**
- 3. Devoted to the lost.**

I know we just read it, but let's read it again and then we'll dive in.

Acts 2:42-47

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

“Devoted”

Verse 42 starts out by saying **“They devoted themselves.”** Before we get into what they were devoted to, let’s talk about this idea of devotion.

The Greek word here for devotion is the word **“Proskartereo”** (προσκαρτερέω) and it means at its root - **To persist, to persevere, or to continue steadfast.**

So when you hear “devoted” I don’t want you to think like *Grease*, **“Hopelessly Devoted to You”**, (Does anyone get that reference? Just me? Cool...) It’s this song where Olivia Newton John is singing about how she’s not going to give up on John Travolta and it’s all about these feelings and emotions and being lovestruck and whipped into a frenzy. Also, it’s the creepy tik-tok song.

Anyways. It’s not like that. This idea of devotion in Acts 2 is much more about **discipline, than desire.**

These things that marked the early church were acts they were committed to, not simply out of emotion or feeling, but even when it got hard. They were set on persevering. They were going to give themselves to these rhythms and routines and habits, no matter the cost. It’s much less - I’m gonna call my bf or gf because I like them, and much more - I’m going to force myself out of bed to go workout because it’s better.

We talked about that concept a lot back in the fall during our series ‘Rhythms and Formation’. Where we talked about how these spiritual practices - Bible reading, prayer, fasting & feasting, sabbath, silence & solitude - are not simply things we do when or because we feel like. But they are conscious choices of action and discipline we take even when we don’t feel like it because we’re committed to, we’re devoted to God and life with Him.

They were devoted, persistent, committed, steadfast in these things. **So what were these things they were devoted to? Let’s look at them together.**

1. Devoted to God

The primary devotion, allegiance, commitment of the early church was in their relationship to God. This is, after all, the first and greatest commandment as Jesus taught His disciples - **That we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.**

And there were some specific ways they lived out and practiced their devotion to God. Some specific commitments they had that were evidences and ways they were devoted to God:

➤ **They were devoted to right doctrine and teaching.**

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...

When the believers gathered together, the 12 apostles would have taught on Jesus, on the faith, and on essential doctrines the people were to know and follow.

Some scholars argue Luke puts this first because it is the basis by which everything else in these verses flow. That first and foremost these Christians had to get their doctrine correct. They had to think rightly about Who God is, what the Gospel is, who Jesus is, all of that before they can then live rightly, which is simply *doctrine applied*.

These were a bunch of new Christians. They needed to make sure they were all on the same page as far as what is true about God. They needed gospel theology that then drove them to gospel culture. **Right doctrine that fueled right living.**

Some Christians today have a wrong idea that theology or good doctrine and right living are opposed to one another. Some neglect doctrine or theology saying - "Why do I need to know that theological point or nuance, as long as I'm living the right way and doing the right things?" Some neglect right living, because they think all they need is doctrine. But again - one leads to hypocrisy and one leads to fragility.

But right doctrine and right living as followers of Jesus are not opposed, they work in tandem. We cannot live as Christ calls us to live without first knowing who He is and what He has taught us. And if knowing who He is doesn't lead to transformed lives, then we have to ask if we actually know the truth about God. Both/and. Not either/or.

Author Jen Wilkin puts it this way, **"The heart cannot love what the mind does not know."**

Right theology should not be in opposition to right living, rather it should be fuel for right living.

➤ **They were devoted to remembering the cross of Christ.**

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread...

Now later on in this passage we'll read about the breaking of bread in each other's homes which most likely has to do with sharing meals and food together. However, this breaking of bread is not about eating together, but about a specific bread - that which is celebrated in the act of communion, or The Lord's Supper. This was the bread they broke together in the worship service, the "fellowship" here in vs 42.

This act of communion we do every Sunday where we eat a little wafer and drink from a cup of juice signifying and remembering Christ's body - given up for us on the cross, and His blood - shed for us on the cross. The finished work of Christ's death so that our sins would be paid for and we would be justified, or declared as righteous, before God. Not based on our own efforts or works or deeds, but based on what Christ has done.

All the stuff we hit on all last week - The early church was committed to remembering the cross, to remembering their crucified and risen Savior. The centrality of the gospel to the Christian life.

➤ **They were devoted to prayer.**

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The early church was devoted to seeking the Lord in prayer. Not simply content to talk about God, but to talk with God. That's what prayer is. Prayer is talking with God. Hearing from Him through prayer and His word, bringing our praise, confessions, requests to Him.

Prayer is an ongoing marker throughout the book of Acts. Right after this chapter, for the rest of the story things are going to get pretty dicey for the early church. Imprisonments, persecution, opposition, suffering. The gospel is still going to spread, people are going to get saved, the church will be established, but there will be so much hard in the midst of all that good.

And so these believers know - we need God to show up. We are dependent upon Him. That's why they were devoted to prayer. It came out of a deep desire and deep need for God to show up.

It's such a natural part of these early followers of Jesus. And it should be an ongoing part of our lives as well.

- **Romans 12:12 - "Be constant in prayer."**

- **1 Thess 5:17 - "Pray without ceasing."**

Prayer is meant to be a pivotal part of our walk with Christ as we realize more and more our dependency on God.

➤ **They were devoted to corporate worship and praise of God.**

[Skip down to vs 46] **46 And day by day, attending the temple together....**

We talked about this a ton on January 3rd in our sermon on "Why We Gather". It's on the website if you didn't catch it, would recommend you listen to that.

But the early church was committed to corporate worship. That's what that "attending the temple together" means. At this point the church was too large to simply gather in one house, so they would have gathered in the courtyard of the temple, this open space, where they could worship God together.

SUMMARY:

God's Word. The gospel. Prayer. Corporate Worship. This is what it means to be devoted to God. To have this vertical relationship in order.

2. Devoted to Each Other

The early church was not only devoted in their vertical relationship - them and God, but they were also devoted in their horizontal relationships - to one another. They were committed to each other. They took what Jesus said was the **greatest commandment** seriously - To love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. But they also took His **2nd commandment** seriously as well - to love their neighbor as themselves.

They knew that when they repented, turned from their sin and towards God, that not only did God welcome them as their Heavenly Father, but He also gave them brothers and sisters in Christ. That other Christians were now their family.

And when they said "family", they meant it. Church family wasn't a buzzword for them. It wasn't something cool to say they were a part of, it wasn't just a term they threw around - it was a lifeline. They needed each other to survive.

How did their devotion to one another look? Two specific things, we'll hit them quick:

➤ **They were devoted to generosity.**

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

They were generous people. They were committed to taking care of each other. They were committed to stepping up at great cost to themselves, so that their church family was taken care of. If there was a need, they would meet it.

This is gospel-fueled generosity. They understood - God has been so generous to us. We are guilty. Our sin put Jesus on the cross. And yet God willingly provided that sacrifice so that we could be forgiven and washed clean and made new

and reconciled to Him. We didn't contribute anything to this. God did all of it. He chased us when we were His enemies. He pursued us when we didn't want Him. He forgave us because of Jesus, not because of us.

Look how generous God has been to me - how can I not be generous to those around me?? My stuff is not my own. Everything I have is a gift from God. I'm not an owner, I'm a steward of God's possessions. So I'm freed up to have money, not let money have me. And I can be generous when others are in need.

Later on in Acts 4:34 we'll read **"There was not a needy person among them..."**

Why? Because if there was someone in need, people would step in and help and if they couldn't afford to step in and help, they'd go sell some stuff and then bring that to come step in and help. They were so committed to it → In this church family - no needs go unmet.

Moped for Cameron. I remember in college some friends of mine were in a Bible study group, a bunch of 18-22 year old broke college dudes trying to follow Jesus together. And one of the guys in the group got in a pretty bad car accident, totaling his car. Couldn't afford a new one. Worked 20 minutes from his house. Immediately - "Let's pool our money together and buy him a car. Well, we can't afford a car, how about a motorcycle. Well we can't afford a motorcycle, how about a moped." And guys legit sold whatever they could reasonably sell and we pooled as much money as we could, and we got him a moped.

How would this look for us?

- If someone loses their job - how can we help? Resume? Connections? Groceries?
- If someone gets sick - how can we help? Meals? Care packages? Phone calls?
- We still got folks trying to move up here to be a part of this from Columbia - How can we help? Moving? Need me to carry some boxes? Need a place to stay for a few weeks? Few months?

This church? No one's allowed to be in need, you guys. We are family.

➤ **They were devoted to hospitality.**

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

They ate together. They welcomed each other in. They practiced hospitality. Not like Joanna Gaines everything is perfectly orchestrated and decorated hospitality. I mean like - come over regardless of how my house or my life looks, you're welcome here kind of hospitality.

Not simply by opening up their homes and sharing meals together, but by opening up their lives to one another. They had **glad** and **generous hearts**. They were happy to live life together. To share all of life together.

Listen - this is Kingdom of God stuff right here. You could do at least a whole sermon, if not sermon series, on the Kingdom of God being released through hospitality. Sharing a meal with other people in our church family - **that's kingdom work**. That has eternal significance. That's the stuff of being family. To eat together. To put our phones down and sit and listen and share conversation that is glorifying to God. To listen to each other's stories over a chicken casserole. That's the Kingdom.

I want to keep hitting this drum over and over again. **STOP THINKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ONLY IN THESE INCREDIBLY BIG, SHOCKING MOMENTS.** The ordinary Saturday night gathered around a table with a few of your

brothers and sisters in Christ - that's the Kingdom of God come to earth. That's powerful. That's ordinary, but ordinary is not insignificant. That matters. They were committed to it.

CITIZENS ASIDE:

One of the parts of this passage that is so encouraging to me for this season that our church is in, is that it comes right on the heels of the first mass conversion. The church went from 120 to 3,000 people in one sermon. And remember - these people were from all over the place.

So that means **all these people are new**. They didn't have all these pre-existing relationships. They didn't have years of memories and experiences with each other. They didn't have a depth that really only comes through time. But they were committed from the start - even though our relationship is new, and maybe the friendship side of things has some catching up to do, we are family now. So I'm all-in with you and caring for you and your needs now.

If I can just give you a pastoral word of encouragement right now - we're all new. Our church does a really good job of letting "Citizens Church" as like an organization or an entity be new. You guys really do. I hear feedback all the time that is so gracious and loving - hey I know we're still getting started and getting our feet under us, I'd love for us to think about this moving forward or in the near future. I love that.

Some of us have known each other for a while, some of us met a few weeks ago, or a few months ago. **And we're trying to figure out how to be family with strangers**. And that's going to come with some bumps and bruises, some mountain tops and some valleys. And that's ok. Can we have some grace for each other and ourselves in this?

Can we have the same amount of grace for our relationships? We're new! We're figuring it out. We're getting our feet under us. It's ok if you don't feel like life long best friends, because you aren't. Relationships take time and effort over the long haul.

But let's not let that stop us from living as family. Caring for one another, serving one another, stepping up for those in need.

Devoted to God. Devoted to each other.

3. Devoted to the lost

...47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Mission, being a witness for Christ, taking the gospel to their surroundings and to the nations **flowed out of their devotion to God and to each other**. Evangelism was not some out there thing they occasionally stepped into. It was a natural overflow and result of them committing themselves to God through prayer, teaching, worship, communion and committing themselves to each other through generosity and hospitality.

As they let the love of God and the gospel take root in their lives, that then led to mission. People saw the way they loved each other. People saw the way they worshipped God. Remember we said - Gospel Theology + Gospel Culture = Power. The Lord just kept on adding people as they were faithful to love Him and love each other and let that love spill out into the watching world.

There's honestly way more we can say on this, but we hit it in the sermon a few weeks ago, and we are talking about mission for the next three weeks coming up so we'll leave it at that for now.

Conclusion

They were devoted to God.

They were devoted to each other.

They were devoted to the lost.

“**Runner**”. At the beginning of my sophomore year of college, I started doing something that I had never in a million years dreamed of doing - I started running. I played sports all growing up and even throughout high school - predominantly basketball, baseball - and I loved those sports, I loved competing, I loved playing - but my absolutely least favorite part was the running. I dreaded off season training camp and conditioning drills. I'd much rather just go play the game. But my sophomore year I became friends with some folks who loved to run and they talked me into signing up for a half marathon. Now, up until that point the farthest I had ever run in one single time was 2 miles. But they were persuasive, so I signed up. I trained, did the race, loved it. So much so that even once the race was over, I kept up with running.

I learned after this that other people who run start asking you this question - “**Are you a runner?**” And I always thought that was weird, until I understood that there is a distinct line between *someone who runs* and *someone who would consider themselves a runner*.

And based on my astute observations (that's a joke), I noticed that in order to consider yourself “**A runner**” you had to do four things:

1. Talk about the fact that you run.
2. Own expensive running shoes from a brand you can't pronounce.
3. Be willing to run in the freezing cold or pouring rain.
4. Read running magazines and blogs.

All jokes aside, there are markers of actually being a runner. You can call yourself a runner all you want, but the proof is in the running pudding. Do your habits reflect that identity? Does your schedule mark it? Does how you spend your hard earned money reflect this fact?

In Acts 2:42-47, we get markers of a life changed by the gospel. Devotion to God, devotion to other believers, and devotion to the lost. Deep rooted commitment.

And the question we ask as it relates to this series and these things should be:

“Is our church devoted to these things? But if I want my church to be devoted to these things, I have to wrestle with → Am I devoted to these things?”

“I AM THEY”. **If everyone in our church was as hospitable as me, as generous as me, as committed to prayer as me, as committed to worship and God's presence as me, as committed to the teaching of God's Word as me, how healthy is our church?**

And we can say we are devoted, and we can try to fool others into thinking we are devoted, and we can even try to fool ourselves into thinking we are devoted, but ***the proof is in the pudding.***

Does your life reflect what you say is true about yourself?

In what areas are you falling short?

In what areas are you not devoted or committed?

PRACTICAL:

And so we need some evaluation this week. This is your application. Take out your phone or whatever so you can write this down. I'll put it to you straight forward. Take an hour, parents switch off.

- 1. Write down this list of things the early church was devoted to: doctrine, the gospel, prayer, corporate worship, generosity, hospitality, and evangelism.**
- 2. Take out your calendar and your budget [texts?] from the past 2 months.**
- 3. Be honest with yourself and the Holy Spirit.**

And then I want you to have some honest evaluation time with the Holy Spirit. There's freedom to be honest, Jesus died for you, none of us are perfect in this. But let the Holy Spirit bring some conviction and ask the question: **Does my calendar and my budget reflect a devotion to God, to church family, and to the lost? Or to the modern day gods of myself, my comfort, my security, and my control?**

Here's some tangible things to look for:

- How many times out of the past 2 months did we have non-believers into our home?
- How many times out of the past 2 months did we have someone in our church family into our home?
- How often did I spend time with God in prayer and Scripture?
- How many gatherings did we attend in January?
- Are there any credit card transactions that weren't spent on me, my needs and my wants?
- How many times have you encouraged someone in the past 2 months? Prayed? Confronted in love or spoken truth to someone?

- 4. And where it does line up - praise God. Thank Jesus and the Holy Spirit.**
- 5. Where it doesn't - that's a chance for you to repent, to bring it before community, and to change by the power of the Spirit.**

I don't want to be a hypocrite, I don't want to be fragile. I want HS power.

(Encouragement: do this before group time.)

Gospel — you're going to fail. There was only one person in history who was ever perfectly devoted to God, to the church, and to the lost. His name was Jesus and he was also fully God.

Communion. Prayer.