

## “THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES”

Acts 2:42–47

Key Verse: 2:42

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Are you passionate about anything? We can get enthusiastic about many different things. And then, there are things we have to be forced to do. In today’s passage we see a large number of new believers who get passionate about life in Christ. What’s their focus? Why do they focus on these things? How can we apply their example to our own lives? May God speak to us through his word.

In the previous passage, through Peter’s Spirit-filled preaching, suddenly 3,000 people joined the fellowship of 120. Thousands of people repented and accepted the forgiveness of sins in Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit. How exciting! An initial enthusiasm can wear off quickly. But not so with these people. To keep going forward in their new life in Christ, what do they do? Read verse 42 again. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

They began by being “devoted.” “Devoted” is a powerful word. Today it’s popular to be “chill,” not to get too intense about anything, and to be devoted only to ourselves. But these new believers began to center their lives on something outside themselves. In Greek, “devoted” literally means to be “attached.” It expresses a commitment that’s single-minded, laser-focused, and steadfast. In 1:14, the original 120 followers of Jesus “were devoting themselves to prayer” before the Spirit came on them. Now, they’re not just teaching that others should be devoted; they’re modeling the spirit of devotion for all these new believers. We human beings can get devoted to many things: our studies, jobs, families, interests or hobbies. But these new believers are devoted to four things. They are: 1) the apostles’ teaching; 2) the fellowship; 3) the breaking of bread; and 4) the prayers. Their new community isn’t just a human gathering. These four activities are the substance, the content, of the life of a real church of Jesus, anytime, anywhere. Let’s think about each one.

**First**, “the apostles’ teaching.” It’s first on the list, suggesting it’s their top priority. The apostles’ teaching includes many things, but the primary focus is on Christ himself: who he is and what he did. Jesus is the sinless Son of God. But he humbled himself to suffer and die for the sin of the world. Then God raised him from the dead to conquer death and give those who believe in him a living hope in his eternal kingdom. God exalted him to his right hand and made him both Lord and Christ (2:36). He’s the one who pours out the Holy Spirit and makes us witnesses of his resurrection. The apostles’ teaching is all about who Jesus is and what he did, and it tells us to base our faith and our lives on him.

The apostles' teaching also includes what Christ commanded through the Holy Spirit (1:2). We find his holy commands in the author's other book, Luke's Gospel. Our Lord Jesus told us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23). He told us to count the cost in being his disciple.<sup>1</sup> He told us to show mercy and compassion to the wounded and hurting (Luke 10:25–37). He told us to prioritize listening to his teaching over being busy with activities (Luke 10:38–42). He told us to practice humility and to embrace outcasts (Luke 14:7–14). He told us to repent of our own sins,<sup>2</sup> not to judge (Luke 6:37), and to forgive.<sup>3</sup> He told us to put our hope in God's kingdom, not this world.<sup>4</sup> He told us to always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). He told us not to be hoarders but to share what we have with the needy.<sup>5</sup> He told us to be good stewards of what God gives us (Luke 19:11–27). He showed us how to respect and work with women.<sup>6</sup> Above all, he told us to spread his salvation to all people on earth.<sup>7</sup> The apostles didn't pick and choose what they liked, or drift to trendy topics. They passed on and taught all the holy commands of Jesus to these new believers.<sup>8</sup> To have a healthy spiritual "diet," we need to be studying "all Scripture," which makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>9</sup> As we do, we also need to move from "milk" to "solid food," to have our powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Heb.5:12–14).

What a privilege to have the original disciples of Jesus right there in their midst! Being devoted to their teaching, these new believers could learn to put the words of Jesus into practice and build a rock solid foundation for their new lives of faith (Luke 6:47ff.). They could become spiritually strong and be saved from the crooked generation around them (Acts 2:40). In obeying his teachings, they became the spiritual family members of our Lord Jesus (Luke 8:21). We all need to hear his warning: "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away" (Luke 8:18). We don't have the original apostles with us anymore. But we have their teachings, God's "precious and very great promises" (2 Pet. 1:4) preserved in the Bible. Moreover, it's good to seek out those who know Jesus personally and attach ourselves to them, to learn from and imitate them.<sup>10</sup>

**Second**, "the fellowship." Fellowship is familiar to church people. But what is it, really? The Greek word is beautiful and rich in meaning. It means to participate or to share, and thus, to become partners, companions, friends. These new believers centered their fellowship on Christ himself, on worshiping him (13:2). Genuine Christian fellowship is always deeper than just

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:57–62; 14:25–33.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 6:37; 11:4; 17:3–4; 23:34.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 4:43; 6:20; 9:2; 11:2; 12:31–32; 18:24–25.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 12:15–21,33.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 8:1–2; 23:27,49,55; 24:10.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:30–32a; 13:29; 24:47; Acts 1:8.

<sup>8</sup> It's also known as "the word of God" (1 Thess.2:13) or "the traditions" (1 Cor.11:2; 2 Thess.2:15; 3:6).

<sup>9</sup> Luke 24:27; cf. 2 Tim.3:15–16.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor.11:1; 2 Thess.3:7–9; Heb.13:7.

hanging out to have fun. It means to confess our sins to each other and pray for each other so that we may be healed (James 5:16). It also means not to neglect to meet together, but to keep on encouraging one another (Heb.10:25). Basically, it means to build close friendships in Christ. To do it, it's good to get involved in a small group that meets regularly for Bible study, prayer and sharing. As believers, we're not meant to be loners. The cross is a symbol of two essential relationships. First, God calls us into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor.1:9). So, we all need to be growing in a personal relationship with Christ. At the same time, God calls us to live in real fellowship with those who have fellowship with him and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3)—not just people we know or feel like being with. As we grow in this cross of relationships, vertical with God and horizontal with others, we strengthen and support each other. Such fellowship can begin with our peers, people we can relate to. But it needs to develop into spiritual relationships based not on human qualities, but on our common faith and love in Jesus. And for it to become genuine, we can't just be "off and on," showing up on occasion, keeping a safe distance. As verse 42 says, we've got to get "devoted" to this fellowship as priority number two, right next to the apostles' teaching.

**Third**, "the breaking of bread." What is this? In a sense it means to have meals together regularly. We shouldn't just rush in and out of meetings or worship services. Taking the time to share fellowship over a meal is a great way to get to know each other better and deepen our relationships. Again, we need to make it a priority. But the author adds an article here: "the" breaking of bread. Because of this, many believe "the breaking of bread" also refers to celebrating the Lord's Supper together. It shouldn't be just a habitual ritual. When we get together to celebrate his cross, we should examine ourselves soberly in God's holy presence and feed on the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus.<sup>11</sup> When we're devoted to this, we don't become spiritually weak and ill (1 Cor.11:30).

**Fourth**, "the prayers." The Bible tells us to be "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph.6:18a). Philippians 4:6 says, "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Here, "the" prayers seems to refer to praying at regular times throughout the day. As new believers joined the Christian community, they learned this new way of life, a life of prayer.

Most of all, "the prayers" recalls the one specific prayer our Lord Jesus gave us. He said that when we pray we don't need to use many words (Matt.6:7). He told us to pray simply: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2b–4). Becoming devoted to this prayer is God's wisdom, because this prayer addresses all our needs: our relationship with God as Father; our need to live a holy life for his honor and glory; our need to stay focused on his coming kingdom; learning to depend on him daily for our most basic needs, both physical and spiritual, and especially, to be asking him for forgiveness for ourselves and others, and to avoid temptation. As we devote ourselves to praying for these things, we grow in a healthy spiritual life. And as we pray these things for each

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor.10:16; 11:24–29; cf. John 6:51–59.

other, we encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thess.5:11). Personal prayer is so important. But so is praying together in community. Our Lord Jesus told us: "...if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt.18:19–20). Based on these words of our Lord Jesus, praying together is actually vital to our spiritual life.

What happened when new believers devoted themselves to these four things? Read verse 43. People grew in holy reverence for God, which is key to living with real faith. And in such a God-fearing environment, God could work mightily. We live in times where the principle "nothing is sacred" is the dominant mentality and lifestyle. Everything is one big joke. But as believers in Jesus, we need to develop this holy reverence for God in our daily lives and discern the great things God is doing. Read verses 44–45. God also opened people's hearts to want to be together, to share life and even their possessions, and to be mindful of each person's needs. It was truly a beautiful, unselfish, life-giving fellowship. Read verses 46–47. Their fellowship was "day by day," meaning regular. Their fellowship was both public and private, in a large group and in small groups. Their fellowship was glad and generous. Their fellowship was full of praise to God and a blessing to outsiders. When they had such a fellowship, God kept adding people who were being saved. It was a source of life and blessing.

All this was possible because "they devoted themselves." In any endeavor, devotion is key. Without it, nothing happens. Read verse 42 again. May God help us to devote ourselves to these four essential things, and make our community a beautiful place of wonder and grace where new people can truly grow in their salvation.