

TOTALLY DEVOTED

INTRODUCTION

Now that we are done with our path, we have moved into the next phase – “Take the City” this is going to mean growth for our church. How do we grow our church? How do we make an impact for the Kingdom of God? How do we move to the next level.

I would like to add that it is impossible for the church to grow unless we are also growing as individuals, so whatever I say about church growth today can also be applied to our personal growth as believers.

As I prayed for the Lord to show me what to speak about, He reminded me of the first church. The church in Acts, which was launched in a spectacular way on the day of Pentecost.

I want to highlight a few things that happened in those amazing exciting...and scary early days, and I want to encourage us to apply these same practices to our lives and in our church today. God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and I believe that if we can learn from the church in Acts, we can see the same explosive church growth and personal growth.

MESSAGE

A SUPERNATURAL VISIT

Acts 2:1-4 (NKJV) When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

For a supernatural visit of the Holy Spirit to take place we can see some things that are required:

- The people were all in one accord – There was unity!
- They were all in one place – Everyone was not just doing their own thing.
- They were praying – They were not just sitting around waiting for something to happen.
- They were obedient – In Acts 1:4 Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the “Promise of the Father” - that was the Holy Spirit.

Then on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out. The people spoke in tongues and as Peter preached to the crowd that had gathered to witness this supernatural visit, 3000 people received Jesus and were saved!

My first question to you tonight is, are you willing to stand together in unity, to be in one place and to pray in obedience with God’s word?

THE CHURCH IS BORN

We get so excited about the fact that so many people gave their hearts to the Lord on one day, but that created some problems all of its own:

- The people had to learn what Christianity was all about – 3000 people had to be discipled and after that even more!
- Many of the people were Jews or from other religions. When they went home, many of them would have been kicked out by their own families for betraying their family's faith – This must have resulted in many poor and desperate people, and this brand new, baby church would have had to look after them.
- Out of this situation, the early Christian church developed, and we find some keys for church growth emerging. We can apply those same keys today.

Acts 2:42-47 (NKJV) 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.

Please note it says they "continued steadfastly", other Bible versions say they "devoted themselves", hence the name of this message is "Totally Devoted".

What did they devote themselves to and continue steadfastly in?

- **The Apostles' Doctrine**
- **Fellowship,**
- **The breaking of bread,**
- **Prayers.**

What does it mean to be devoted? Here's a quick example:

A little boy came home after his very first Sunday School class; Mom asked who his teacher was. Little boy answered, "She was a real nice lady. I don't remember her name, but she must've been Jesus' grandma or something, because she didn't talk about anybody else all morning."

It's obvious this woman was a devoted teacher and a devoted Christian. The question this story and this passage asks us is: "Are we as devoted?" Do our actions and our conversation reflect our love for Jesus? Do our words and actions give away our relationship with the Savior? What our hearts are full of will come out of our mouths.

I submit to you today that we need to be devoted to these keys to church growth if we want to grow the church and grow spiritually.

DEVOTED TO THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE

What is the Apostle's Doctrine? It's simply the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Peter preached it in his message on the day of Pentecost

I would like to say they devoted themselves to studying God's Word.

- We learn about God, are drawn closer to Him and become better disciples through Bible study and that has to result in worship.
- As we study and become confident in God's word, we become able to teach others about it – this is called discipleship.
- If we don't know enough about God's word, it will be difficult for our church to grow because how will we be able to teach new converts the wonderful truth in God's word and disciple them?

So... devoting ourselves to God's word results in both personal growth, and growth for the church.

According to Barna Research Group ours is a generation of Biblical illiteracy. In a recent survey they found that only 61% of Christians know that Jonah is a book in the Bible. And 30% didn't know where Jesus was born. 24% of Christians surveyed thought that the book of Isaiah was in the New Testament or didn't even guess where it could be found.

How about you? Have you been spending time in God's word? Have you been growing spiritually through spending time in God's word? Do you know how to witness to others using God's word? Do you know enough of God's word to be able to teach a baby Christian how to grow?

DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP

"They devoted themselves to fellowship." This is an extremely important aspect of our faith. God created us to be in fellowship with one another. God didn't create us to be alone. It's always easier when two people share the load.

Just think about the when we have a church breakfast or meal. We have a whole team on duty. It would be pretty hard if we tried to do it on our own! It's the same with our faith.

Jesus said, in **Matthew 18:19-20** (NKJV) "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

- Think of the amazing times of praise and worship when we gather together as a congregation, and the level of the power and presence of God when we are together – it's not the same when we're on our own.
- The people were together having fellowship and praying when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost.

Hebrews 10:24-26 (NKJV) And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not 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.

Fellowship with one another, stirs up love and good works and we get to encourage one another. This must result in both personal, and church growth.

Are we devoted to fellowship or have we been neglecting it, seeing it as non-essential? The early church was built on fellowship. They helped one another, encouraged each other and even sold goods to help meet their newly found brothers and sisters needs!

DEVOTED TO BREAKING BREAD

In the early church breaking bread had two meanings – it either meant sharing a meal together, where bread, which was a part of their staple diet, was broken as part of the meal. It also meant breaking of bread as in Holy Communion.

Think of the people who had lost their homes because of their new-found faith. They needed to eat. This was one way of looking after them. But it didn't stop there. Holy Communion was a key to who these Christians were.

- They were declaring the New Covenant blessings over their lives.
- They were identifying themselves as believers
- And they were teaching the new believers to trust in Jesus broken body and shed blood.

There is a very rich blessing that comes from sitting down across from a friend and fellow Christian and eating together. It reminds us of the meals Jesus shared with his disciples; especially the Last Supper.

Just think how much enjoyment there is when we have a meal together in the church. Much love and care can be shared when we eat together. Friendships develop and we start to feel part of a family. This attitude will make new believers and visitors to our church feel at home.

Of course, when we take communion together, it builds up our faith and it honours our Lord Jesus Christ.

***When last did we invite someone from church over for a meal?
Is communion still important to us? Do we remain devoted to these important aspects of church life?***

DEVOTED TO PRAYER

"They devoted themselves to prayer." Prayer keeps our hearts and minds on God.

Let's try an experiment. Look around you and find five things that have blue in them. Go ahead, it won't take long. With a 'blue' mindset, you find that blue jumps out at you: a blue dress, a blue book, blue skies, and so on. Have you ever noticed how after you buy a new car, you start see that make and colour everywhere? That's because people find what they are looking for.

At times in our lives, God seems strangely absent or very distant, but the problem isn't that God has disappeared. The problem is that we simply lack a 'God' mindset. When we develop a "God" mindset through prayer, we begin to see God's work everywhere. The early Church devoted themselves to prayer and grew daily.

In my mind, our corporate prayer meetings are the fuel required to have powerful supernatural meetings in the presence of our Lord. Lives are impacted, people are called in and growth takes place both for the prayer as well as for the church.

How many are devoted ourselves to prayer?

How is our prayer life? As individuals do we speak to God regularly?

The answer is obvious... we need to pray more.

WHY WAS THIS DEVOTION SO IMPORTANT TO THE EARLY CHURCH?

The early church devoted themselves. But why? Scripture tells us they devoted themselves to Christ in these ways because:

- They had experienced the saving grace of Jesus Christ in their lives - the love of God and the forgiveness of their sins. T
- They experienced the reality of the promise and hope of the resurrection and as a result, their lives were changed and they became good stewards of God's message.
- "Many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles."

It resulted in this, "**the people had glad and generous hearts; they praised God, and God added daily to their number those who were being saved.**"

That's why it's so important to be devoted to these four things!

CONCLUSION

What about us? Are we TOTALLY DEVOTED to the Apostle's Doctrine, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and Prayer. These aspects are pillars for personal and church growth!

Has Jesus made a difference in our life? That's basically what it's all about. Let us become TOTALLY DEVOTED so that we can grow, and so that our church can grow!