

Last week we ended our study of Ephesians which really gives us a complete and full picture of the church in her maturity. *A valid question we should have When we see the end of a thing, or a perfection of something is how it got there. In other words when we look at something that is complete, we have to understand all of the work that took place to bring something or someone to perfection.* It's not an instant transaction, rather a long and committed practice, a faithful stewarding, and really a lot of hard work towards a goal.

We can look back at the beginning of the church to see the devotions that brought the church to maturity. God's church, Jesus body came to life as the living breath of God filled the 120 praying believers who were unified in the spirit. Immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the church this new body entered into four rhythms that marked the early church that are still the primary Metrics of the church today.

Acts 2:40-47 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 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.

What do you do with 3000 new converts-You must disciple them. It does not end with encounter, or conversion, that is the beginning! Jesus did not say go and make converts, He said "Go and make disciples of nations". The great commission is discipleship. *They experienced power, the fire of the living God but how would they sustain the constant burning?* They would need to apply themselves to a lifestyle of practices that would enable them to keep their heart burning for God and for one another.

We have made 2 major errors in the church The first is power without practices-going after power encounters without bringing people into a spiritual family to be disciplined. The second is teaching people spiritual practices void of the power of God. *Stewarding a fire is much different than a power encounter. One is in a moment "and suddenly" and the other is over a lifetime.*

We must set our hearts to follow the same devotions/rythms of the early church in order to have the effectiveness of the early church. There are no shortcuts, there is not another template. This is how the early church sustained a true move of God. The church was thriving, growing and transforming the known world through a lifestyle that centered all things upon the person and leadership of Jesus. Homes, culture, religion, politics, the marketplace were all, impacted by these disciples

There were 4 devotions that the early church continued steadfastly in, practices that they were fully committed to. We have to move from a way of thinking that church is something we go to and move into God's vision. Church is a spiritual family that we belong to, willingly submit to, are fully committed to, love wholeheartedly, suffer with, give generously to and are yoked together.

Acts 2:42 and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

1. Devoted to The Apostles doctrine

First there is the commitment to doctrine, which refers to the process of teaching and being taught. The first essential for people who've come to Christ and have been baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit is regular, authoritative teaching in the scripture. Before you move into life in the spirit you must take hold of the word of God. The day of Pentecost would have been a disaster without systematic, practical Bible teaching. Every new convert must come in to a greater understanding of the word of God, fall in love with Jesus through the word of God, have others in his life that lead him or her in the word of God. There is no other foundation that will grow and mature a believer.

The Apostolic leadership that Jesus had put in place were His disciples, they knew Him, had walked with Him, They were all witnesses of the resurrection, were all walking in power and authority. The church was a movement, that would need to be led and directed. They were taught the word of God in the power of God. As Paul told young Timothy “Preach the word **2 Timothy 4:2- Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**

2. They were fully devoted to fellowship

We have to understand **the emphasis that God puts on fellowship. Fellowship is actually the end purpose of the gospel. 1Corinthians 1:9- God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Called into indicates our destination. Fellowship is not a means to an end it is the end. Fellowship with God and his people is where we are heading. Let me say it again because maybe it's the first time you've heard it. Fellowship with God and other believers is the end purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I don't know if I've ever spent a lot of focus on this or really set my heart upon it. The great longing of Jesus is oneness, unity, sanctified and perfected fellowship. **The early church immediately brought new believers into deep fellowship that took place in two different platforms. For the Jew who just became a disciple of Jesus Christ there were two major aspects of gathering: large scale platform was the temple/synagogue , the small scale platform was the obvious and practical one that we find being used throughout the entire New Testament and that is the home of the believer.**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,**

The word fellowship actually means sharing together. The fellowship of the early church was expressed in a very intimate kind of sharing. The main thing was obviously Jesus Christ but the early Christians shared practically everything. **Acts 2:44-45 gives powerful example of selling their own possessions and providing for one another ensuring there was no one in need.**

Fellowship is not only the place of deep connection and belonging it is also the place where people will get born again. Deep, authentic fellowship is really the

longing in all of our hearts. Fellowship is not fellowship if you can back out and turn away anytime you please, it demands a commitment to other people.

The body of Christ is interdependent not independent. You won't fulfill your calling in isolation. The church is Spiritual Family and your a part of making the family healthy.

It means you die to independent ideology and willingly yoke yourself to others. We see that fellowship is what created the one accord unity that the Holy Spirit not only fell on but rested on. They had become the dwelling place of God and were responsible to love one another, the same way Jesus had loved them.

Like a marriage we must never enter into the divine fellowship of the family of God with the idea if it doesn't work out I'll just leave. God operates from covenant and so should we. We must be steadfast and long-suffering in love.

3. **They were devoted to the breaking of bread**

The basic form of fellowship is very simple it is eating together. This is so simple that people overlook it. We see a picture of it in acts when Paul spent seven days in the city of troas. **Acts 20:7 (NKJV) Now on the first [day] of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.**

It's astonishing to see how much there is in the book of acts about people eating together. We have underestimated this holy activity that the early church was committed to. Other cultures outside of America truly prioritize time spent around the table together. Eastern Customs states that when you eat with a person you have committed yourself to him, you must not then be disloyal to him it was equivalent to entering into a kind of covenant. If you partook of a man's hospitality you put yourself under an obligation to him that only the most unworthy would violat. Part of Judas guilt was that he first ate bread with Jesus and then betrayed him. You could be with someone in a corporate setting for years and not truly know them but you cannot sit around the table and not experience a greater love for the person who you are breaking bread with.

The root of the Lord's supper/communion is found in the Passover meal. Which was a whole meal enjoyed over extended fellowship. When we take the Lord's supper we are renewing our covenant with Jesus and with everyone else who partakes with us we are pledging our loyalty to him along with the body of Christ. Severe judgments are pronounced on those who take the Lord's supper unworthily precisely because it's a covenant meal. How can you look a man in the face at the table of the Lord and turn around and stab him in the back. We cannot eat together with people and have the same attitudes towards them This is why true fellowship can't be looking at the back of someone's head during the church service or a handshake or quick conversation.

Acts 2:46-47 (NKJV) 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.

Every meal table for the believer becomes a place of fellowship, a place of prayer, a place of praise and thanksgiving and a place where unbelievers who would not go into the temple experienced the presence of Jesus.

Matthew 26:26-28 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

4. **They were devoted to prayer**

They entered into one accord when they prayed in the upper room in Acts 1. They were devoted to prayer in one accord when the Holy Spirit came and baptized them in Acts 2. They ended Acts 2 in one accord. How do you keep a diverse people engaged with the divine purposes of God, focused on first love and sacrifice. They can't just be a people who pray. They become a praying people, cultivating houses of prayer because they were people of prayer, because they were stewarding the Presence. They recognized without the power of the Holy Spirit they could not move forward. Devotion to prayer is how you keep the fire

burning. True Biblical fellowship is not possible outside of prayer! The people that were coming to Jesus need to be discipled in these 4 activities in order for them to encounter God and keep the fire burning. This was not a private devotional Prayer, this was the community commitment to prayer.

A renewal to be committed to these four essentials need to be the priority for the church today. If we want the presence of Jesus and the power they experienced and walked in, we will apply ourselves fully to these practices.

Communion *Luke 22:19-20* (NKJV) 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke [it,] and gave [it] to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 20 Likewise He also [took] the cup after supper, saying, “This cup [is] the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.