



Devoted

Kicking It Off

If you had to describe your ideal Sunday morning routine with no obligations or responsibilities, what would it look like?

Read

Acts 2:42-47

Summary

Many times we have a misunderstanding about what church is. We go in thinking, "What am I going to get out of this today?" We treat it kind of like going to a movie, where we're there to receive something. But that's not really what devotion looks like.

Think about it this way. If someone says they're devoted to their spouse, but only on the good days when everything's going smoothly, that's not devotion. Real devotion means you're there no matter what, whether you feel like it or not.

The early church in Acts was devoted to four simple things: learning Scripture together, showing up for each other, sharing meals (including communion), and praying regularly. That's it. Not a hundred programs or fancy productions. Just those four things, done consistently.

What's interesting is that a lot of churches try to create this amazing experience, like something you'd feel at a concert with lights and smoke machines. And there's nothing wrong with good quality stuff. But you can't manufacture that sense of awe. It actually comes naturally when people commit to the basics. When a group of people decides to show up for each other week after week, read Scripture even when it's uncomfortable, pray even when it feels routine, something shifts in the atmosphere.

The same goes for generosity. The early church was generous and shared what they had. But that wasn't the thing they were devoted to. They were devoted to each other, and generosity just flowed out of that. You can't force yourself to be generous. But when you genuinely care about your community, giving becomes natural.

All this devotion actually produces joy. Not the other way around. We think we need to feel happy before we'll show up. But it works in reverse. When you deny your

feelings and commit anyway, something changes inside. You start to experience a gladness that doesn't depend on circumstances.

Stop asking what you'll get out of it. Just show up. Be devoted to the simple things, whether you feel like it or not. That's where the real transformation happens.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. True devotion means showing up consistently regardless of how we feel, whether that's in marriage, family, or faith. In what area of your life do you find it most difficult to remain devoted when you don't feel like it?
3. The early church devoted themselves to four practices: Scripture, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. Which of these four is most naturally part of your life right now, and which one feels the most neglected?
4. We often approach church asking what we'll get out of it rather than what we'll bring to it. How might your experience of Christian community change if you shifted from being a consumer to being a contributor?
5. Deep relationships are built by staying present even when it's uncomfortable, rather than choosing the path of least resistance. What is one relationship in your life where you could practice more consistent devotion?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Devotion is being loyal, is being consistent always. It doesn't matter how you feel. Someone who is devoted is there rain or shine, in sickness and in health. It has nothing to do with what you receive. It has everything to do with you making the decision that I am devoted to this thing."

"What makes relationships deep and strong is that when it is uncomfortable, you're still there. We long for deep friendships and wonder why we don't have these close connections. It's because we have not been devoted to the fellowship. Every opportunity we have for an exit, we choose the path of least resistance."

"You can choose to be devoted to the apostles' teachings. You can choose to be devoted to the fellowship. You cannot manufacture and be devoted to awe. Awe comes and goes. Generosity I cannot produce week in and week out. You're devoted unto one another, and out of devotion is produced generosity."

"You are learning to deny your feelings about how you feel about things. And guess what? It produces gladness in you. It's this beautiful thing where you deny how you feel, and God gives you from that self-denial. He gives you gladness. He gives you joy."

Sermon Notes

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.

Outline

1. The Practices of Devotion (v. 42)

- a. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."
- b. Devotion defined: unconditional loyalty regardless of feelings or circumstances
- c. Four non-negotiable practices the early church committed to:
 - i. Apostles' Teaching: Scripture reading, study, and wrestling with the word even when uncomfortable; proclaiming Christ as the only way to salvation; healthy churches are built on devotion to Scripture
 - ii. The Fellowship (koinonia): Prioritizing the gathering of believers; showing up rain or shine; extends to small groups, accountability partners, family meals; deep relationships require consistent presence even when inconvenient
 - iii. Breaking of Bread: Sharing meals together as an expression of community; communion as self-reflection on Christ's body broken for us; participating whether we feel like it or not
 - iv. The Prayers: Habitual, regular prayer, not just as-needed; building rhythms of prayer into daily life; pausing to acknowledge God even in inconvenient moments
- d. These are what we are called to be devoted to, not programs or outcomes

2. The Atmosphere of Devotion (vv. 43-45)

- a. "Awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common."
- b. Awe and generosity are byproducts, not the object of devotion; devotion to the four practices changes the culture and atmosphere of a community
- c. Common misreadings: making signs/wonders the focus; mandating communal living or pooled resources; attempting to manufacture awe through production values
- d. The early believers were devoted to fellowship, and when they saw needs, generosity was the natural response; you cannot manufacture awe or force generosity; you choose devotion, and these qualities emerge organically

3. The Fruit of Devotion (vv. 46-47)

- a. "They received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."
- b. Internal fruit: gladness and joy produced through self-denial and consistent devotion; giving of yourself, not just money, produces joy; joy comes from participating in building God's kingdom
- c. External fruit: growth added by the Lord, not manufactured by human strategies; growth is both slower (not on our timetable) and faster (transformation happens

quickly when God acts) than expected; favor with neighbors as a byproduct of living with awe and generosity

- d. Challenge: Be people of devotion, not because it is easy, but because Christ is worthy; ask this week how you can be more devoted

Notes

When we think about church, what comes to mind? For many of us raised in American Christianity, the image might include large sanctuaries, professional worship teams, and polished productions. There is nothing inherently wrong with these things. Good teaching is valuable. Excellent worship can move us. But somewhere along the way, many of us have developed a subtle misunderstanding about what church is actually for. We approach Sunday mornings asking, "What will I get out of this?" We evaluate services based on how they make us feel. We become consumers of religious experience rather than participants in something far more demanding and far more transformative.

The word that reorients everything is devotion. True devotion is not conditional. It does not depend on circumstances or emotions. Consider what devotion actually means in other contexts. If someone claims to be devoted to their spouse only when that spouse makes them feel good, only on the days when everything goes smoothly, we would rightly question whether that constitutes devotion at all. Devotion, by definition, means showing up rain or shine, in sickness and in health. It has nothing to do with what you receive. It has everything to do with making a decision that transcends your fluctuating feelings.

We understand this instinctively in other areas of life. Sports fans demonstrate remarkable devotion to their teams. They check scores during important events. They watch games in terrible weather. They remain loyal through losing seasons. The committed fan understands that the sweetness of victory tastes better when you have endured the difficult years. They do not abandon ship when the team performs poorly.

Acts 2:42 provides a surprisingly simple framework for what the early church devoted themselves to: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Four practices. Not dozens of programs, not elaborate organizational structures, just four non-negotiable commitments that shaped how early believers lived their lives.

The first is devotion to the apostles' teaching, which means devotion to Scripture. This involves reading the Bible, listening to explanations of biblical texts, engaging in study, and wrestling with what Scripture says even when it proves uncomfortable. A healthy church prioritizes Scripture and makes it central to community life. This comes at

a price. Some biblical teachings will create controversy in a world that prefers different messages. Devotion means proclaiming Christ as the only way to salvation, teaching difficult commands about turning the other cheek, loving neighbors, and extending radical forgiveness, even when such teachings are countercultural. Devotion to Scripture is not about always loving what the Bible says. It is about wrestling with it and remaining committed to it regardless.

The second is devotion to the fellowship, the Greek word koinonia. This means prioritizing the gathering of believers. Yes, it is easier to sleep in on Sunday. Yes, it is more comfortable to stay home when the weather is bad. But devotion is not about finding the path of least resistance. When playoff tickets are offered in a downpour, devoted fans show up anyway, because the object of their devotion is worth the inconvenience. We serve a God worthy of at least as much commitment. The fellowship extends beyond Sunday services to include small groups, accountability relationships, and meals with other believers. We long for deep, meaningful friendships, yet we wonder why we lack these connections. The answer often lies in our failure to be devoted to the fellowship. When every opportunity for an exit presents itself, we choose the path of least resistance. A year passes, and we wonder why our relationships remain shallow. What makes relationships deep and strong is precisely the commitment to show up even when it is uncomfortable.

The third is devotion to the breaking of bread, which carries a double meaning. On one hand, it refers to sharing meals together. There is something beautiful about gathering around tables to enjoy food and conversation. Ministry is meant to be done over meals, in casual moments where we talk about both significant and ordinary things. On the other hand, breaking bread refers to communion, the practice of remembering Christ's body broken for us. Jesus reinterpreted the Passover meal to point to himself, and in partaking of communion, we engage in self-reflection and acknowledgment of what makes our worship possible: the Lord's forgiveness of our sins. Devotion to communion means participating whether we feel like it or not, wrestling with our sin and our standing before God.

The fourth is devotion to the prayers. The Greek includes a definite article, "the prayers," suggesting specific, habitual prayer rather than occasional communication with God on an as-needed basis. Making prayer a habit, whether before meals, before bed, or at other regular times, demonstrates devotion. Even when it feels inconvenient, even when it creates awkward moments, the devoted person pauses to recognize God. This 15-second or 30-second acknowledgment becomes a rhythm that shapes life around the reality that everything belongs to the Lord.

What happens when a community actually devotes itself to these four practices? Acts 2:43-45 describes the result: "And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."

This passage has generated tremendous controversy because churches have sometimes made these results what they are devoted to, rather than understanding them as the natural byproduct of proper devotion. Some charismatic churches have made the awe, the signs and wonders, the central focus of their gatherings. They attempt to manufacture awe through smoke machines, laser shows, and production values. There is nothing inherently wrong with professional quality, but devotion is not directed toward the production. Our worship should not be qualified by the presence or absence of smoke machines.

Similarly, some communities have read the passage about selling possessions as a mandate for communal living, arguing that Christians should not own property and must pool all resources. But this misses the point. The early believers were devoted to the fellowship, and when they saw needs within their community, generosity was the natural response. They sold what they had because they wanted to give, not because giving itself was what they were devoted to.

When people devote themselves to apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers, the culture of that community changes. Awe and generosity become the atmosphere, not the objective. You cannot manufacture awe or force generosity. You can only choose to be devoted to the right things, and when you do, these qualities emerge organically. When the Spirit creates community around these practices, the result is a group of people who increasingly grasp the grandeur of God and who respond to that grandeur with open hands.

Acts 2:46-47 reveals the fruit that grows from proper devotion: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The devoted community produces internal fruit: gladness and joy. For those seeking happiness, who want to escape a spiritual funk, the answer may be surprisingly straightforward. Be devoted. Commit to the fellowship. Engage consistently with Scripture. Make prayer habitual. Participate in communion. The counterintuitive truth is that when you deny your feelings about whether you want to do these things, God gives gladness from that self-denial.

This is close to what prosperity gospel teachers proclaim, but with a crucial difference. The prosperity message suggests that giving money produces more money, that generosity is a transaction that yields financial return. The biblical message is that giving of yourself produces joy, that learning to be a devoted person transforms your inner life. Life becomes about building the kingdom of God, and the joy of participating in that building project is inexpressible. Those observing from the outside may think you are wasting your resources. They may question your irresponsibility. But devotion, properly directed, brings a gladness that defies external calculation.

The devoted community also produces external fruit: growth. The Lord added to their number day by day. Notably, it was the Lord who did the adding, not human marketing strategies or program development. Yes, you could fill a building by giving people what they want, by crafting entertaining experiences and comfortable messages. The Romans filled coliseums through spectacle. But that is not what the early church was devoted to. They were devoted to Scripture, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. And from that devotion, genuine growth emerged as God drew people to himself.

This growth moves both slower and faster than we might expect. Slower, because revival does not come on our timetable. Faster, because when transformation happens, it happens quickly. Someone who seemed far from God suddenly grasps the power of the gospel. The scales fall from their eyes. What changed? God changed them. Human methods cannot ultimately produce that transformation. The Lord adds to his church. Our role is faithfulness to the practices that keep us rightly oriented.

The early church also enjoyed favor with all the people, not with the governing authorities who persecuted them, but with their neighbors, the ordinary people they encountered. This favor was not something they pursued. It was another byproduct of their devotion. When people live with genuine awe for God and authentic generosity toward others, their neighbors notice.

The challenge is straightforward: be people of devotion. Not because the crowds make it easy. Not because feelings make it convenient. Be devoted when it is hard. Be devoted when it is difficult. Be devoted when you feel alone. Make a stand, not for any institution, but for Christ, for your Savior. Ask this week how you can be more devoted, what you can do to demonstrate that you are with him in sickness and in health, in richer or for poorer, until the end of your days.

Blog

They weren't attending church. They were being the church.

That distinction matters more than we might realize. When three thousand people responded to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, they didn't sign up for a weekly religious service. They entered a new way of life. And what Luke describes in Acts 2:42-47 isn't a program or a strategy. It's a portrait of what happens when the Spirit creates community.

We tend to read this passage with a kind of wistful nostalgia. The early church seems so far removed from our experience that we treat it like a golden age we can admire but never recover. Or we swing the other direction and turn these verses into a checklist, as if we could manufacture authentic community by doing the right activities in the right order. Both approaches miss the point. Luke isn't giving us a template to copy or a memory to treasure. He's showing us what the Spirit produces when people give themselves fully to Christ and to one another.

The passage opens with a single verb that controls everything that follows. They devoted themselves. The Greek word is proskartereo, and it means to persist obstinately, to hold fast, to be steadfastly attentive. Luke uses this same word to describe the disciples' prayer before Pentecost and the apostles' later commitment to prayer and the ministry of the word. It's what the people of God do when they mean business. These believers weren't experimenting with Christianity. They weren't fitting Jesus into their existing lives. They were all in.

And their devotion had specific objects. Luke lists four: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. The definite articles matter here. This isn't generic teaching, casual fellowship, ordinary meals, and occasional prayer. Luke describes something specific, something structured, something central to the community's identity.

The apostles' teaching came first because it formed the foundation for everything else. These were not self-appointed teachers offering their own opinions. They were authorized witnesses transmitting what Jesus had taught them. The content included the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, the proper interpretation of Old Testament prophecies, and practical instruction for living as God's people. The church was built on apostolic teaching from its very first days. A community that neglects sound doctrine will eventually lose its way, no matter how warm its fellowship or sincere its worship.

But teaching alone wasn't enough. They also devoted themselves to the fellowship. Koinonia means shared participation, a common life rooted in common faith. This was more than friendship or social connection. It was the recognition that belonging to Christ meant belonging to one another. They didn't just believe the same things. They were

bound together in ways that reshaped their daily existence. The fellowship had both a vertical and horizontal dimension. Their communion with God expressed itself through communion with each other. You couldn't have one without the other.

The breaking of bread points to the centrality of shared meals in early Christian practice. This almost certainly included the Lord's Supper, likely celebrated in the context of a full meal. Luke connects this phrase to the Emmaus road, where the risen Jesus was made known to two disciples in the breaking of the bread. The table was where theology became tangible. When believers gathered to eat together, they remembered Christ's death, celebrated his presence, and anticipated his return. The sacred and the ordinary were woven together. Eating was worship. Fellowship was sacrament.

Finally, they devoted themselves to the prayers. Again, the definite article suggests something specific, probably set times of prayer that structured the community's daily rhythm. These believers continued attending the temple at the regular prayer hours while also gathering in homes for distinctly Christian prayer. Their dependence on God wasn't occasional or spontaneous. It was built into the fabric of their shared life.

These four practices weren't options on a menu. They were essential ingredients of healthy church life. A community that neglects teaching will drift into error. A community that neglects fellowship will fracture into isolated individuals. A community that neglects the table will lose its connection to Christ's ongoing presence. A community that neglects prayer will rely on its own strength until it has no strength left. The early church understood that devotion to Christ expressed itself through devotion to these practices. There was no other way.

But Luke doesn't stop with the practices. He goes on to describe the atmosphere they created. Awe came upon every soul. The word is phobos, often translated as fear, but it means something closer to reverential wonder. The presence of God through his Spirit was palpable. People noticed. Signs and wonders authenticated the apostles' message, and the community lived with a sense that they were caught up in something beyond themselves. This wasn't manufactured emotion or religious hype. It was the natural response to God being genuinely present among his people.

This atmosphere of awe produced a remarkable unity. All who believed were together and had all things in common. Remember who these people were. The crowd at Pentecost included Jews from across the Roman world, speaking different languages, coming from different cultures. Yet the Spirit bound them together into a single body. Their diversity didn't disappear, but it was transcended by something deeper. They belonged to each other because they belonged to Christ.

And this belonging expressed itself in radical generosity. They were selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds to anyone who had need. Luke uses the

imperfect tense here, indicating ongoing action as needs arose. This wasn't a one-time redistribution or a mandated commune. It was voluntary, spontaneous, and continual. When believers saw others in need, they responded. They held their possessions loosely because they held each other tightly.

We should be careful not to turn this into an economic system. The selling was voluntary (Ananias and Sapphira's sin in Acts 5 was lying, not keeping property). But we should also resist domesticating what Luke describes. These believers genuinely shared their resources with one another. Their faith had economic consequences. A gospel that doesn't touch our wallets hasn't really touched our hearts.

The final verses describe the fruit of this devoted community. Day by day they attended the temple together and broke bread in their homes. Notice the dual rhythm: public gathering and intimate fellowship, large assembly and small group. They received their food with glad and generous hearts. The word translated glad and generous is *aphelotes*, which suggests simplicity and sincerity. There was no pretense, no calculation, no holding back. Their hearts were unburdened and open.

And the result was praise to God and favor with the people around them. Authentic Christian community is attractive. These believers weren't trying to be relevant or culturally sensitive. They were simply being the church. And people noticed. The watching world saw something they couldn't explain, something that drew them in.

The passage ends with growth. The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Notice the agency. The Lord added. Growth was God's gift, not human achievement. The church didn't have an evangelism program. They had a devoted community, and God used that community as the context for salvation. Mission wasn't something they did. It was something that happened when they were fully themselves.

So what do we do with this passage? We can't manufacture what only the Spirit can create. We can't program awe or mandate generosity. But we can position ourselves to receive what God wants to give. We can devote ourselves to teaching, fellowship, table, and prayer. We can stop treating church as something we attend and start embracing it as something we are. We can hold our possessions loosely and our brothers and sisters tightly. We can structure our lives around daily dependence on God rather than fitting him into our schedules when convenient.

The early church wasn't perfect. The very next chapters in Acts reveal conflicts and failures. But in these few verses, Luke shows us what the Spirit produces when people are genuinely devoted. It's a vision that inspires us and convicts us. It exposes how far we fall short and invites us into something better.

The church has always been at its best when it stopped trying to be impressive and simply devoted itself to the basics. It's an invitation. The question is whether we'll accept it.