

The Primary Practices of a Healthy Church **Acts 2:42-47**

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Every year the winner of the Super Bowl is awarded the Lombardi Trophy. That trophy is named after Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers. He won 74% of his regular season games and 90% of his postseason games. His teams won five NFL championships in seven years. He also won the first two Super Bowls in 1967 and 68.

In 1961, on the first day of training camp, Lombardi gathered his team of 38 professional athletes. Holding the ball in his hand, he said, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He proceeded to talk to his team about the importance of fundamentals. He challenged them to commit to the primary practices of a successful football team.

When we open our Bibles to Acts 2:42-47, it is as if Luke shows us this profile of the earliest Christians and says to us, “Friends, this is a church.” **In these verses, we discover the four primary practices of a healthy church.** These are basic practices that should define a church in every generation.

Note that v. 42 says they were devoted to these things. The term means to persist in something with intense effort or to persevere in something. These were ongoing commitments. Of course, circumstances and contexts change from one generation to the next. But these practices are not contextual nuances or optional variations. These practices are primary and fundamental to the identity of God’s people.

To get our bearings contextually, look back at v. 41. This is the result of Peter’s sermon recorded in vv. 14-40. A great crowd of Jewish people who had gathered in Jerusalem for a feast called Pentecost heard this sermon about God’s provision of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Three thousand of them received the gospel message and were baptized to identify themselves as followers of Jesus. This was the beginning of the church. You will also notice that these people were referred to in 2:44 as those who “believed.” This is not just a crowd of religious people. This is a community of believers in Jesus Christ. Luke is describing the church.

So, what are the four primary practices of a healthy church?

I. A healthy church is devoted to the practice of teaching.

A. They were committed to the apostolic teaching.

1. The apostles were engaged in fulfilling Jesus’s commission to teach these new disciples to obey all he commanded them.
2. The new disciples were committed to being taught. They were hungry to learn how to faithfully follow Jesus.
3. This practice emphasizes two things.
 - a. The activity of regular teaching for the purpose of discipleship. This was taking place as they met in the temple courts day by day.
 - b. The content of the teaching – apostolic teaching. The good news about Jesus and its implications for life. This teaching would have come

primarily from the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus.

B. How do we carry on this practice since we don't have apostles?

1. We have the words of the apostles and prophets as inspired by God in the Bible.
2. As we teach the Bible, we are following in the steps of the early believers by being committed to the apostolic teaching.
3. One of the primary tasks of pastors and elders is to teach God's people. Think of how often this comes up in the letters Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus.

A church cannot be healthy without a commitment to teaching the Word of God. You will never be a healthy Christian without a commitment to learning the Word of God.

But let me remind you that the purpose of teaching and learning God's Word is not to stuff our minds with truth that we have no intention of using. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us...

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Scripture is given to us to teach, reprove, correct, and train us so that we are mature and equipped for service. The teaching ministry of the church must always be oriented toward life change. This is not a game of religious "trivial pursuit."

In what way are you expressing this primary practice in your life? Are you in a Bible study? A Sunday School class? Do you interact with God's Word in community with other believers?

II. A healthy church is devoted to the practice of fellowship.

- A. The word *koinonia* means sharing or holding things in common. In this context, it refers to the common life in Christ that is shared among believers.
2. The idea here is that there was a loyalty, a devotion to the common life shared among these believers. In the original, there is a definite article here - "the fellowship." It was not devotion to an activity. Rather it was a sense of loyalty and commitment to their association in Christ.
 - a. This is seen in action in vv. 44-45. They shared their material possessions with each other as needed. We see this later in 4:32-37.
 - b. This is seen in v. 46. They were continuing with one mind in unity. They were meeting both in the temple and in their homes. They were eating together. They were praising and praying together.

Two things stand out in this description of the fellowship of the early Christian community.

- *Commonality* – the new life they shared in Christ unified them deeply. This common life in Christ became a major emphasis in the early church. It overcame ethnic barriers, economic barriers, and social barriers. Galatians 3:27-28 is a prime example of how the common faith of these believers transcended barriers.

We must be careful that we do not allow secondary differences to trump our primary unity in Christ. There will be lots of ways in which we are different in the church. But devotion to fellowship means that we will strive toward unity because of the common life we have in Jesus.

- *Costliness* – fellowship is costly. Note the emphasis on giving in this text. Their devotion to fellowship cost them something.

Fellowship will cost you time. You cannot be devoted to fellowship if you are not willing to give your time to other believers. It will cost you money. There will be times when you need to give materially to help another believer. It will cost you relationally. Fellowship will require you to be humble, willing to forgive, willing to confront, vulnerability to be hurt. But it is a necessary price to pay to honor the common life we have in Jesus Christ. Look up the “one another verses” in the NT and you will have a good picture of the cost.

III. A healthy church is devoted to the practice of the Lord’s Supper.

A. Breaking of bread.

1. This phrase in v. 42 is most likely a reference to the Lord’s Supper. This is the ordinance Jesus established for the church to remember his sacrificial death.
2. In the early church, the Lord’s Supper was practiced in the context of a meal shared by the community of believers. Paul describes such a meal in 1 Cor. 11.

B. Why was this a primary practice?

1. Because Jesus instituted it as an ongoing practice. His words, “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19) indicate that Jesus intended his followers to continue this practice.
2. The Lord’s supper is a reminder of Jesus’s death which purchased our salvation.
3. The Lord’s supper is a reminder of the oneness of the church. Paul explains this in 1 Cor. 11.

Friends, every time the church celebrates the Lord’s Supper it is an opportunity to remember two crucial things. Jesus gave his life for us. He suffered on the cross and poured out his blood so we could be forgiven of our sins and enter his kingdom. At the same time, it reminds us that we are a forgiven community. We do not just celebrate “my” salvation. We celebrate “our” salvation. To be united to Christ is to be united to a fellowship of believers.

IV. A healthy church is devoted to the practice of prayer.

A. Devoted to the prayers.

1. In v. 42, we are told that the church was devoted to "the prayers." Again, there is the definite article. This is most likely an indication that there was a formal time of prayer among these early believers. At the least, it tells us that when they did gather, prayer was an important aspect of their shared life.
2. As one reads the NT, it is an inescapable conclusion that prayer was a vital part of the life of the church. The remainder of Acts demonstrates this. We find the church praying together (3:1; 4:31; 12:12).

ILL: A.C. Dixon said, “When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; When we depend upon education, we get what education can do; When we depend upon man, we get what man can do; But when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.”

John Piper describes prayer as the “splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven.”

Friends, can I be painfully honest with you today? There may be many praying individuals among us, but we are not a praying church. We do not spend enough time together in corporate prayer. I accept responsibility for that. We have got to do a better job of making corporate prayer a regular part of our church life.

The commitment of these believers to these four practices produced a community of people that were noticed by those around them.

- They had favor with all the people. The people around them looked upon them with a kind of respect. They saw God at work in this community.
- Many were being saved. There was something attractive about the love, joy, and sincerity of this community of believers that gave their evangelistic efforts some traction.

God is still saving people today. It may be that you have attended church for a long time or maybe this is your first time, but you have never trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty that our sins deserve. He rose from the dead in victory over sin and death. Anyone – including you – who will confess their sin and trust in Jesus who died and rose again will be forgiven of their sin. They will receive new life, true spiritual life. They will become part of God’s family, the church. What about you? Have you been saved? You can be if you will turn to Jesus and trust in him. Why not now?

Conclusion

A healthy church is devoted to the practices of teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer.

That sounds great doesn’t it! We read this passage in Acts and we say, “I want to be part of that church. What a great church!” And you’re right. I want to be part of that church too. But here’s the issue – a healthy church is a community of healthy believers who are committed to these practices. You and I must take personal responsibility for our own commitment to these things.

Here is what I am saying. If we want to have that kind of church, then each of us must commit to be that kind of Christian. We are the church. You and me – all of us who are believers in Jesus and members of this body – we are the church. It will not rise to a level of health any greater than the collective health of the people who make up this body.

If you find your devotion in any of these areas has grown cold and your obedience in one of these areas is lacking, today is a time to repent and recommit yourself to the basics. You can be restored to spiritual vitality and health. Repent. Be restored. Get back on track. Recommit to prioritizing these practices in your life and return to spiritual health.

