

# Simply Devoted! (Scripture, Fellowship, and Worship Driven Church)

Text: Acts 2:42-47

HP: Sometimes, the most simple acts of devotion to God are the most world changing actions we can take and when we truly know Jesus, our lives are led back to Scripture truth, Fellowship bonding and Joy emanating from Worship.

## INTRODUCTION:

It was the year 1722 and a small group of "Bohemian Brethren", a hidden Protestant sect illegally living among the Catholic empire, arrived at Upper Lusatia, Germany to the estate of a count by the name of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. For 100 years they had been escaping persecution from the Catholic church for their beliefs that were counter to the universal church of catholicism. Zinzendorf, a Christian man who had been writing love letters to Jesus since the age of 6, committed to giving this group of individuals a plot of land that would become known as the town of Herrnhut. This town quickly found itself in turmoil, split by religious views - Count Zinzendorf sprang into action. Proposing something called the *Brotherly Agreement*, Zinzendorf invited the townspeople into a dramatic transformation: to love one another. In the midst of revival and transformation that could only come from being Christ-focused and Spirit filled, these people absorbed a name that many of us know today: the Moravians. But what could a small band of believers devoted to God and each other do? World changing things. Moravian historians identify the main achievements of this groups as:

1. Setting up a watch of continuous prayer that ran uninterrupted, 24 hours a day, for 100 years.

2. Establishing more than 30 settlements internationally on the Herrnhut model, which emphasized prayer and worship, and a form of communal living in which simplicity of lifestyle and generosity with wealth were held to be important spiritual attributes. The purpose of these communities was to assist the members resident there in the sanctification of their lives, to provide a meeting place for Christians from different confessional backgrounds, to provide Christian training for their own children and the children of their friends and supporters and to provide support for the Moravian Mission work throughout the world.
3. Being the first Protestant church body to begin missionary work.
4. Forming many hundreds of small renewal groups operating within the existing churches of Europe, known as "diaspora societies". These groups encouraged personal prayer and worship, Bible study, confession of sins and mutual accountability.

In fact, if you go to Herrnhut today and visit the graveyard, which is nicknamed "God's acre", you will find that all gravestones look alike, but with simple phrases.

"Lily: Translated the Bible into a new language"

"John: Took the Gospel to an unreached country"

"Michael: Started a prayer revival in Austria"

How could such a simple group of people devoted to things like *Scripture, Worship, and Fellowship* have such a significant impact for God? **Because sometimes it's the most simple acts of devotion to God that are the most world changing acts.**

There are two important things to define here. One is the phrase simple. When I say simple, I don't mean simple as in not complex. Christianity is of course simple enough to be understood and received but there's a depth and complexity to the character of God that we have to approach in humility and curiosity. I think a dictionary definition of simple serves best: "uncomplicated in form, nature, or design."

In other words, sometimes it's the most **uncomplicated** acts of devotion to God that are the most world changing acts. There's an uncomplicated form to it, an uncomplicated nature embodying it, and a uncomplicated design that God has laid out for us to grasp in it. In this un-complication, there is a purity that is revealed; these acts are pure in the sense that although the early church wouldn't be perfect in them, these actions would lead them back to being Christ-focused and Spirit-filled... they would lead them through the Spirit to engage in supernatural things as opposed to natural... they would lead the church to change the world.

The other word to define is "devoted". What comes to your mind when you hear this word? For many of us, it might bring our mind to our covenant of devotion towards our spouse; for others, it might translate to an unaltering commitment to something we are passionate about; still for others, devotion might translate to some kind of action. My favorite way of looking at devotion, and the way I want to invite you to look at it today, will be through the lens of love - a love that overflows into action.

As I reflect on Tim's charge to us a couple weeks ago to be a Christ-center, Spirit-filled community and Gary's challenge for us to be filled with and moved by the Spirit, I wonder what the history books will say about the church of our day? I wonder how Fellowship Dallas will be viewed in those pages? My hope is that we would be embodied as a people who were known for their simple acts of devotion to God through Scripture, Worship and Fellowship... just like the early church of Acts 2:42-47 and the Moravians. You may be tempted to ask "but why would we need to concern ourselves with the things that the early church did? And the Moravians lived in a much different time than now!" Yet the very things that this church loved and lived out are the very things that the church is currently in crisis about. According to studies from Barna, Pew Research Center, LifeWay and MinistryArchitects...

**SCRIPTURE:** In 2021, about 50% of Americans said they read the Bible on their own at least three or four times per year. In 2022, that dropped to 39%... a 26 million people decrease. Yet studies show that reading God's Word four times a week decreased the feeling of being lonely by 30% and increased the desire to disciple someone 230%.

**FELLOWSHIP:** In 2019, 34% of Americans attended a religious service at least once or twice a month. In 2021, that fell to 28%. More concerning are the lack of people coming back to in-person interaction... research shows that more than 1 in 4 pre-COVID churchgoers are still missing. Yet Hebrews 10:24-25 says, " And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

**WORSHIP:** In 2022, research showed that around 25% of churchgoers support their church and its mission financially; 45% of regular church attenders serve in a consistent role with the church. In contrast, even the New York Times wrote an article claiming that "generosity is one of the best anti-anxiety medicines."

Church, God doesn't need us to reinvent the wheel; He is leading us back to the simple acts of devotion towards God seen in the Moravians and the early church. There is a pressing need for each one of us to realize just how devoted we are called to be towards our God... and just how much joy that brings. For Fellowship Dallas, for each of you in the seats and listening online, simple devotion is the answer to a city that is marked by distraction, false truth, isolation and idolatry. Let's study our text today: Acts 2:42-47.

## **BREAKDOWN OF THE SIMPLE ACTIONS:**

This passage takes place after Jesus has ascended, the disciples have had the Holy Spirit come upon them, and 3,000 individuals came to know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Although I'm sure we could spend hours dissecting all of the small, devoted actions that the early church were taking, I want to first pull out eight of them and then focus on three primary ones.

1. The apostles teaching (or Scripture)
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking bread (meaning communion AND eating meals with one another)
4. Prayer
5. Sacrificial giving
6. Worship (Temple = Worship)
7. Joy
8. The community (other's coming to know Christ still)

These actions might not seem revolutionary to you and I, but in the midst of a world of over information, we would do well to focus on the basics. These are the things that the early church deemed important to engage in - and these are the things that continued to draw people into God's presence and the community as a whole. These are things that draw us in, don't they church? There is something so appealing to me about being a part of a community that is experiencing these things together towards God. If I go a day, a week or a season without Scripture, I feel dry; if I don't have fellowship with you all, I feel isolate and sad; if I don't engage in worship, even the rocks will cry out! Friends, we come to this passage today realizing that it is for us. Our very souls cry out for this!

On the other side is the danger, as I'm sure you would agree, is that this list of things becomes a checklist. But words such as "awe", "glad", "generous", "praising God" and "favor" seem to indicate a joy that is unique and special. The Moravians were similar, with a love that was spilling over from somewhere... and that somewhere was a someone.

## **DEVOTED TO SCRIPTURE:**

When I was in college, I got the pleasure to work at Kanakuk Christian camps. These were camps in Branson, MO that would happen during the summer. My leader at that camp was a man named Ward Wiebe. Ward was known for his cowboy hat that he always wore and his prowess on the basketball court. One day, when speaking to Ward, I felt like I continued to recognize some of the things he was saying...

"Why is that?" I thought.

Then it dawned on me... it was because Ward was weaving Scripture in and out of his speech seamlessly! Ward loved God's Word so much that it became rooted in his heart and indwelt in his spirit; it poured out of him in conversations and in his prayer life. Ward was known as someone who would wake up everyday and the first thing he would do is get on his knees and pray the armor of God over himself.

That's the kind of person I want to be! Someone who is so in love with God's Word that it is a very part of who I am. And I want to be a part of a church in Fellowship Dallas that shares that desire to know God's Word and therefore know His heart. Don't you? We need this passion and truth in the culture that we find ourselves in. The greatest life we could live is one that stems from Scripture and forms us into Christ-center, Spirit-filled people existing in community together.

When this passage speaks about the early church being devoted to the apostles teaching, these teachings that the apostles were offering would have contained several things: the Old Testament writings, the apostles God-given wisdom (which would by many be formed into the New Testament), and the very life of Jesus Christ Himself.

Old Testament Scripture was not only affirmed as God's infallible word by Jesus and several apostles, but the truth of the Old Testament is identified as truth through the very prophecies it contains, confirmed through the life of Jesus and the things that happened throughout history and the church.

Do you remember in 2012 when a large majority of the world thought the Mayan calendar had predicted the end of the world? It was all the buzz, people were preparing for it, and a movie came out about it. Then... nothing happened. This has been a reoccurring theme in history. Individuals think they've figured out the end of the world and/or when Jesus is coming back, yet time and time again they are wrong. For the Old Testament to be truth, it has to be 100% correct... and up to today, it is. Every prophecy has either come true or hasn't happened yet. Every people group that was doubted has either been found or not uncovered yet. Every site that is accused of not being real is uncovered eventually by archeologists.

I can only imagine what it was like being taught by the Apostles themselves about their lives and what they learned from Christ. If you think about it, those in the early church most likely knew Jesus personally, or were very familiar with Him. Think about what it would have been like to sit at the apostles feet and hear the stories they told about the way that Jesus loved others. Would you have been moved by that towards a great love of Him and devotion towards His Kingdom? These teachings would have drawn those listening into a life of eternal life, fullness, fruits of the Spirit, and service; these teaching would eventually be matured, finalized, and crafted into the New Testament we read today. These teachings are the very words we follow create us into the very person Jesus told us to be because they show us who He is.

And then there's Jesus. Jesus' very life is truth. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He was there in the beginning and is the very Word of God in the flesh. Jesus' life is a testimony of truth. In the Word of God, we find the Word of Life: Jesus! Paul accurately describes the importance of getting this right in 1 Corinthians 15:14-17,

"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

Jesus is the embodiment of truth, joy, grace and love. His life is paramount to the way we live and it is in THIS WORD that we get an opportunity to examine it and know Him more! We don't come to Scripture simply to gain more head knowledge - we come to experience a relationship with the King of kings and Lord of lords. **And if we don't know the true witness of Christ, we cannot expect to be able to identify the false witness of the world.**

## **DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP:**

When Count Zinzendorf was growing up, it's written that he often felt alone and isolated. His parents wanted him to be involved in the politics and government of Germany, as any rich young man should - but that wasn't what Zinzendorf wanted. He was captivated, obsessed, and driven by his zeal for God. This led him to the Moravians, Herrnhut, and the community that he would immerse himself in.

I assume feelings of isolation in the early church was the same. Believing in Christ and following a path of Christianity, many of the Jewish people around them and the culture they had been immersed in would have turned the other way. Being a Christian was the right decision, but it cost something... and also provided so much more. The early church knew just how important it was to be together. In fact, they were modeling what Jesus had modeled all throughout His life... not turning anyone away, but inviting all: the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, the gentile, the others.

It doesn't take much time to feel the same way as the Moravians and the early church as a Christian today. In our workplace, in our neighborhood, even in our very city, we can feel like Elijah in 1 Kings 19 when he claimed "Lord, it's just me that's left to follow you!" But it takes the gentle, constant prompting of the Spirit to remind us of what Elijah was told by God after making this statement: "Yet there are 7,000 that have not bowed down to idols..." In a world where the natural feeling is isolation, the church provides us community; in a city where the atmosphere is busy and bustle, fellow believers offer us stability; in a neighborhood where many beliefs are held, our brothers and sisters keep us grounded in Christ as we minister to and love those around us.

Being a Christian can be isolating. Hard. Lonely. We live in a world that believes in all the things that are countercultural to Christianity. Why wait to have sex until marriage?

You could have it now. Why would you respond in forgiveness and kindness to someone who wrongs you? You could turn to gossip and cut them out of your life. Why would you believe that God has a "best design" for marriage and identity? You can be whoever you want to be.

The commonality of the early church and the simple actions that they were partaking in is that they were **together**. They prayed... together. They ate... together. They worshiped... together. The body of Christ is better as a body: to point each other to the truth of God's Word, encourage one another in our voice and action, and embody the welcoming and inviting love of Christ.

Maybe you read this list, or you're hearing this message, and it feels like a lot. That's okay. But please hear me in this... Christianity and this life on this earth is not meant to be done alone. At Fellowship, I'm thankful to be in a place that worships **together**... serves **together**... eats **together**... laughs **together**. Don't allow the world to tickle your ears and convince you to move you away from the very people who desire to do life alongside you. Be devoted to fellowship as the early church was and as the Moravians were... not to check a box, but to strengthen your heart in Him.

## **DEVOTED TO WORSHIP:**

When I was working in the secular world, I was probably overly cautious about me witness to those around me. I would stress about it, experience anxiety and often become stagnant in my ministry towards others. After becoming conscious of this, I tried to be conscious about simply exemplifying Christ to those I interacted with through kindness and care. Then I started to notice a similar thing that individuals I interacted with would ask me...

"Why are you so happy?"

In other words, why was I so joyful? Don't I know what is going on in the world we were living in? Haven't I experienced the pain and hardship of life? The answer was yes. But I had something that they didn't have yet: Jesus Christ.

You see, a true relationship with Jesus that is focused on pursuing a deeper love for Him and a deeper love for others produces something in excess that the world can



only get in small doses: joy. True joy. We might even argue that the world only experiences happiness; that happiness is even surface level and fleeting. We see this joy emanating from the early church through their consistent worship in the Temple, the giving of possessions to support one another and their devotion to prayer. Worship and joy are intimately intertwined in a way that can often be difficult to put into words.

In our lives...

- We experience joy in worship through praising our God on a Sunday morning, in our cars, in our homes. This praise moves our hearts towards a God who is the only one deserving of glory.
- We experience joy in worship through the giving of the first fruits of our finances in supporting the church and para-church ministries, giving our giftings back to our community, city and world, and giving our full attention to God and those He has placed in our lives.
- We experience joy in worship through engaging in prayer to our Father in heaven, soaking in His presence and reminding ourselves that He is LORD and we are not; we experience joy in worship through praying for our brothers and sisters; we experience joy in worship through submitting our daily steps to God's will.

Now let's be real. In the middle of all of these things is usually an "and". Joy and suffering. Joy and hardship. Joy and sadness. Joy and frustration. Joy and disappointment. Joy is the denominator because while we might be experiencing some of these feelings and emotions, we still find joy in the fact that God has called us to Himself and adopted us as sons and daughters through Jesus' sacrifice. In fact, through the Holy Spirit, we get to experience the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Although I'm focusing today on joy, you can insert any of these fruits into the previous "and" examples:

- Love and suffering
- Peace and hardship
- Kindness and sadness
- Gentleness and frustration
- Faithfulness and disappointment

Through being Spirit-filled, this is the purpose-driven life we get to experience. Joy is the very thing that was underlying the early believers lives. It emanated from their souls and poured out of them as they ate together, spent time with one another, worshipped as a body of believers. It showed itself through their sacrificial giving and the wonders and signs that were being performed among them. It was the true outward marker of a changed heart for Christ... among the others fruits of the Spirit.

If you struggle to worship or are currently struggling to find joy because of your life situation, turn your heart to thankfulness.

How blessed we are to be in Him!

How blessed we are to have each other!

How blessed we are to get to make the decisions daily to fall more in love with Him!

Does joy mark your life? Is worship something that you struggle to contain, or does it scream out of your very bones? Could such a simple action for the Lord create such a monumental change towards yourself and those around you?

## **ACTION STEPS, GOSPEL AND PRAYER:**

There are some of you in this room today who have heard this description of the early church and think that there's no way you can be a part of that. A few of you might even be wondering what this joy is that I'm referencing because you've never experienced it! Others of you are hearing me talk about community but feel so alone and isolated.

The answer only comes through Christ. He is the ONLY one who can satisfy. Forget the promised satisfaction of sex and substances and shopping and sports and... He is the ONLY one who can satisfy. Our world offers things that are contrary to the Good News, but today we are reminded through the early church and the Moravian community of our need for Scripture, for Fellowship, and for Worship. The wonderful thing is like the 3,000 who represent the "they" in this passage, today is your day to join them in the decision they made. Oh, don't you want to be a part of a community like we read about? Don't you want to have a higher purpose? Don't you want to experience true satisfaction?

That can only come through Jesus. If we study the Scriptures and come to God's Word like the early church was doing through the apostles teaching, we will see a man who named Jesus who was born to a virgin in a not-so-glamorous setting. He worked for his father and once He entered into His ministry in His 30's, Jesus would begin to call 12 ordinary men to Himself, alongside other lost souls. He would show them the importance of knowing His Father's Word, living a life in community, sharing meals together, praying and giving to those around them. He would teach them stories of serving their neighbor, submitting themselves to God's will, and pursuing a life of love. He would turn the other cheek when hit and spat upon, experience rejection unlike any other and be betrayed by one of His closest friends. And in the middle of all of this, Jesus would never sin. In fact, He would willingly thread a gruesome path to a cross that He would hang on for the sins of the world... you... me. Jesus lived the perfect life that you and I never could. And after dying and being buried for three days, Jesus would rise again and what I can only imagine spend time reminding the disciples of the life He lived in fellowship with the Father, them and their neighbors. He invited them to live a life of fullness that could only come from emulating the life He lived... and enjoying eternal life that could only come from declaring Him as Lord and Savior.

Today, the same invitation that was extended to the early church 2,000 years ago is available for you. This invitation is not one of expected perfection, but one of devotion.

Today, I want to end by encouraging you to partner with the Spirit in three ways:

1. Practice soaking in His Word

It's the only truth available. If you don't know where to start, read through Matthew or Romans and ask what God was saying to His people then and what He is saying now. Look up "The Bible Project" and immerse yourself in their content. Join your brothers and sisters this fall as we dive into God's Word **together** in our church-wide Bible studies. We need this practice because we need His truth in a fallen world.

1. Practice fellowship together

Fellowship in the context of this passage is believers with believers. This is utterly important and time together that cannot be sacrificed. You can find that on Sunday mornings but more importantly and intimately, through a life group model that allows you to be known and fully know each other. Or start small and ask someone to do dinner this week. Don't miss the love that God wants you to experience through community like this.

### 1. Experience joy through worship

Worship is easy to do today; the defining thing is who or what you are practicing worship to. We have wonderful chances to practice worship through praising God together through song on a Sunday, serving in our giftings towards the church and community, and experiencing the joy of giving God our first fruits and partnering with Him in His mission to reach others. Don't miss it.

We get a glimpse into this at the end of this passage,

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47)

You see, this simple devotion to Christ lead not only to the changed lives of the believers, but also those who were drawn to this profound devotion to the man of Jesus Christ. They most likely had seen Jesus during His lifetime, or at least had heard about Him and the miracles He had done, but now they were in the presence of those whose lives were truly changed by God Himself... this perfect man that walked the earth. Could God really give Himself up in such a gruesome way for what seemed like such fallen and sinful people? It seemed like these individuals life emanated this truth... and they were drawn to Him themselves to be saved by His name alone.

The beauty of the Gospel is that when we engage in simple, pure devotion to Him through Scripture, Fellowship and Worship, we witness His love to a world that is watching.

So, what could God do with a group of believers who were truly dedicated to Him and each other named Fellowship Dallas? What could He do with a group of humble, gentle, and lowly of heart people of all genders, ethnicities, and background? What could He do with you? He could take small, simple actions and make them world

changing. He could take a group of Moravians and impact the world for His Kingdom. He could take 3,000 new believers and bring the Gospel to the known world. He could mobilize Fellowship Dallas into a greater love of Him, each other and their neighbors. Will you join in this joyful pursuit today?

## **PRAYER**