

Sermon Response Guide - May 5, 2024
Acts 2:42 "Devoted to Discipleship"
Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

For the next few weeks we are going to explore what it looks like to be a Spirit empowered church. We are going to spend most of our time looking at Acts 2:42-47; however, we will continue to place this passage in the broader context of what happened at Pentecost. The church's devotion to discipleship, generosity, fellowship, and outreach is the result of the outpouring out of God's spirit.

We notice at the outset of our passage, that the people were devoted to following Christ. This verb is very significant. It implies that these first believers have had an encounter with God that has reoriented their heart. They are not driven by guilt, obligation, willpower, pride, or self-interest. They are driven by a devotion to or love for God.

In his book Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard observes that there are three important movements to discipleship or spiritual formation. Willard uses the acronym VIM - to describe how we grow spiritually. This stands for Vision, Intention, Means.

We often jump right to the last step when we think about spiritual growth. We look at the means or methods by which we grow. We talk about how we need to engage in practices like scripture reading, prayer, service, fellowship and so on. However, Willard argues that we won't engage with these means of discipleship over the long haul if we are not first captured by a compelling vision of what it means to follow God. Furthermore, we will not engage in these means of discipleship unless this vision leads to a reorientation of our heart and will. We have to ask whether we actually have the intention or desire to follow God. So before we get into our conversation on what it means to pursue discipleship, we need to begin with a more foundational question - What are you devoted to?

What we love functions like a compass. What we love directs our lives and sets our trajectory. What we love decides what we invest in, work toward, and put our energy into. The problem is that our compasses are often mis-calibrated. We can easily lose our true north. The desires of the flesh, the deception of the evil one, and the influences of the world can distort our desires. Often we find ourselves devoted to things like money, power, status or comfort.

Two really effective ways of determining what we are devoted to, is to look at our calendar and our bank account. These documents will show what our priorities are, what we are invested in, what we are devoted to.

These first disciples are devoted to Christ. The reorientation of their heart happens when they are captured by a compelling new vision. During Pentecost, they encountered a more powerful, beautiful, and hopeful vision of life. In Acts 2:25-28 Peter says that Jesus has come to fulfill the promises of Psalm 16, which reads

'I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will live in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.

In Christ, we find security. In Christ, we find hope over death itself. In Christ, we find a path to true life. In Christ, we encounter a deep joy in God's presence.

Peter casts a vision of the gospel that captures the hearts of the disciples. Notice how the people respond.

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" " Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God desires to fill our lives with good things, but in order for that to happen, we need to make room. Our hearts are too crowded with our devotion things of this world. May we turn back to the Lord and allow his Spirit to fill us with good things.

When this change of heart happens, a commitment to discipleship will follow. We will naturally begin to engage in the means or methods of discipleship. This is what happens for these first disciples. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The main picture we get, from this picture of the early church, is that discipleship was central to their lives. They did not relegate discipleship to an hour on Sunday. These practices were embedded into their daily lives. They didn't add a bit of Jesus to their week, they were devoted to following Jesus.

Dallas Willard comments, "We must flatly say that one of the greatest barriers to meaningful spiritual formation in Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of 'regular church services,' of whatever kind they may be. Though they are vital, they are not enough." Discipleship is an all encompassing call on our lives.

Friends, the priority of this Spirit led community was to attend to discipleship. My prayer is that this will be our priority as well. For this to become our priority we must begin with this foundational question. What are we devoted to? What desires are driving and directing our lives?

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. What are you devoted to?
3. What things compete with God for your love and devotion?
4. What needs to happen if we are to experience a reorientation of our heart?
5. What practices in Acts 2:42 have been most formative in your life? What practices need more attention right now?