

Day 1: True Life Is Relational!

Read Acts 2.41-47. 2.41 shows these early believers entered the church through faith [salvation] and baptism [confession of faith, evidence of salvation]. Let's sort what the first believers were doing in 2.42-47 into three categories by relationship: God, each other, and unbelievers; try this yourself and then compare with the table below.

<u>They were connecting to God</u>	<u>They were connecting to each other</u>	<u>They were connecting to their community</u>
devoted to biblical teaching	devoted to fellowship	good relationships with the unchurched
devoted to prayer	prayed for & with each other	people added to their fellowship day by day
had awe/reverence for God	devoted to sharing meals	
experienced God's work	were together daily & hospitable	
had daily worship	shared their possessions	
praised & thanked God	gave generously to those in need	

The early church realized that Christianity is not to be done alone.

- † It is vital to have an *intimate* connection to God, for only then can we experience his blessings, his presence, and his sanctifying grace that transforms us into the person he created us to be.
- † It is vital to have *intimate* connections to other believers, to experience the "one another" blessings that can only come from Christian fellowship, to receive prayer support, and to participate in the ministry using the gifts God has given each of us.
- † It is vital to have *intimate* connections into our greater community, else we could not offer to share these many blessings with those who have not yet found them.

Sometimes the thought of all this connecting seems daunting, especially if we need relational healing, but being in a small group is the best way to receive that healing from God over time, as his people show you love and acceptance, and as you learn how to relate better to God and others. Even introverts benefit from the right kind of fellowship!

Take a look at the middle column. It is hard to be together daily if you are not neighbors, but let's allow a little grace for that and soften it to "together more than just for church." How much of this list reflects your connection with other believers in the church? What other things would you say characterize good fellowship in the Spirit? How can you help to make true biblical community a reality for yourself? Please pray about joining a small group or finding a mentor.

Day 2: True Life Is Passionate!

Reread Acts 2.42-47. Look at the three columns for Day 1 again. Note the connection between passion for God and passion for each other. Without the first, the latter is meaningless and dies off; without the second, the first is not real [if you don't believe it, read 1 John or James!]. We need not only the encouragement of someone believing in us, but also the encouragement of someone believing as we do about God. Passion and love are contagious. If we become passionate about God, we will love each other, and that will unshackle our group and make the possibilities endless.

What do you think it looks like to be flat out pursuing God? Write down your answers. Then, combine the first column in the list for Day 1 and your list. In which of those ways would you like to see improvement in your own pursuit of God and connection with God? What can you do to facilitate those improvements? What outside help do you need from your friends, small group, or pastor? How can you help others experience deeper relationships with God and believers?

Day 3: True Life Is Purposeful!

In a different translation, read Acts 2.42-47. We created three categories in Day 1 to represent vital connections in life. If we split our relationship with God into categories of worship and growth, and split our relationship with each other into categories of fellowship and service, we have the five purposes from Rick Warren's book, *Purpose Driven Life*. Try sorting the activities of the first church in 2.42-47 into worship, growth, fellowship, service, and evangelism, then compare with the table on the next page.

Worship: devoted to prayer; awe/reverence for God; experienced God; daily worship; praised and thanked God

Growth: devoted to biblical teaching

Fellowship: devoted to each other; prayed for/with each other; shared meals; hospitable and together daily

Service: shared possessions; gave generously to those in need

Evangelism: good relationships with the unchurched; people added to their fellowship day by day

Pray about being more intentional [purposeful] about your spiritual growth. A community of believers who are not growing will not provide greater benefit than a community of non-believers. If you are not growing, you are stagnating [ask someone if they can smell the rot]. Spiritual growth is a tremendously important aspect of Christian community.

We can help each other grow by encouraging each other in the things that lead us toward God and warning each other against the things that take us away from God [Hebrews 3.13; 10.24-25]; by teaching each other as we are able; and by sharing how we have allowed scripture to transform our minds and lives. Notice the early church was devoted to the apostles' teaching. That means they were eager to learn every day, and even in every situation. Be open to biblical teaching from those God has chosen for the purpose, eager to avail yourself of their teachings in church and small group, and eager to spend your own time prayerfully studying God's Word.

How can you be more devoted to learning God's revelation? Write down the blessings you would expect from learning more about scripture. If it is hard for you to make a good sized list, talk it over with someone else in your small group or church. Then pray for those blessings to become reality in you! Make time daily for God to speak to you in scripture.

Day 4: True Life Is Sacrificial!

Take a look in our passage again, and note how the early church served each other. At the least, they were sharing their possessions, being hospitable and generous with each other. They also were purposeful about giving to those in need, even selling off some of their possessions to do so. Recall that God's kind of love for us is sacrificial and unconditional. When we have the love of God in us, that love flows out to others and thus we are willing to sacrifice for them and love them even if they are unlovable. Young adults provide free babysitting so single parents can go to small group; wealthy couples downsize so they can provide more money for the church; teenagers give up spring break to serve the homeless; children save their pennies and donate toys to send to an orphanage; small groups sing hymns for elderly shut-ins; families agree to take in traveling missionaries or ministry interns; adults volunteer faithfully in ministry to our youth and children... there are hundreds of ways that we can give!

God has blessed you with resources: time, money, material goods, skills, spiritual gifts, personality, energy. You might not have much, but you do have what someone else needs. Dream big! If you could help anyone or any type of person, who would it be? If you could do any kind of ministry, what would you do? What kind of passion do you have for helping? How could your small group or circle of friends help each other better? How could your small group or circle of friends help others better? Pray for God's guidance, courage, and blessings in ministry; then talk with your pastor!

Day 5: True Life Is Attractive!

Look at our passage one more time, and note that the outcome is evangelism, as God was adding to their fellowship regularly! How often is it that someone you know becomes a believer? How often do you invite people you know to church or small group? When we are passionately and intimately connected to God and each other, we want to invite, we want to share what we have. When we exhibit passion, intimacy, love, and truth – both with God and each other – it is attractive to those outside the fellowship and they want to be invited to experience it. What the early church had was attractive to other people they knew, and so day by day God was bringing in new believers. If we have true biblical community then all we need to do is put ourselves in a position to invite: pray for non-believers and your opportunity to speak with them about Christ and church; build true friendships with them; exhibit Christ-like character before them; share with them the praise reports of God at work in your life, church, and small group; and invite them to come see for themselves! Pray about who you would like to see come to Christ, and for the courage and intentionality to pursue opportunities to build those relationships and to share Christ with them.