

Acts 2.42-47 Sermon / COB / 12.06.15

Introduction

- † [Video: <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/25253625/watch-shirtless-tim-tebow-endures-strange-yet-arduous-workout>] This is a video of Tim Tebow working out. The NFL suggests that fans learn to work out like their favorite players. Last year at this time I tore my rotator cuff doing simple pushups; I assure you I would not survive trying to emulate Tebow.
- [Slide 1: title] There are other times when the ideal is a good yardstick and a worthy objective. The Bible holds up Jesus – even more magnificent and wondrous than Tebow! – as our example to follow, as the example of what a person is created to be.
 - And today, we will try to learn from the earliest church; indeed, we will look at the very first days of the church. I think we will find some of the secrets of true life in this passage!
- † Open your bible to Acts 2.42. Our passage begins with the Greek word “δε” which signals a shift to a new topic, but one related to what just was told. So we need to know our context...
- So let me tell you: 120 faithful believers were waiting in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them as Jesus had promised; the Holy Spirit did come upon them, which we consider the launch of the church age.
 - The effects of this miracle so astounded the people of the city that a crowd of thousands collected around the believers. Then Peter gave the first church sermon: He preached about the long awaited New Covenant with God, the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies, and the fact that these same people had just conspired to murder the Messiah-savior, Jesus.
 - At the end, Peter commanded the non-believers to repent of their lack of faith in the Messiah, and to be baptized in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of their sins, for then they too could have the Holy Spirit within them!
 - That day, about 3,000 people came to faith! Now let’s read how God inspired these roughly 3,120 people to live over the next few weeks...
- † [Slide 2: Acts 2.42-47] Acts 2.42-47 NET: ⁴² [δε] **They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship...**
- In Greek it reads, “*the fellowship*,” i.e., they were devoting themselves to the church community they were founding.
 - **They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread** [socializing over meals] **and to prayer** [both of which were essential in that fellowship].
 - ⁴³ **Reverential awe came over everyone** [literally, it was arising in every soul!], **and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles.**
 - There’s probably a two way causality there: the more they experienced God’s supernatural work, the more they were in awe; but also the more that reverential awe came over them, the more open they were to seeing what God was doing and to experiencing God for themselves. Missionaries in third world countries say the American church rarely experiences the miraculous power of God because we don’t really believe in it!

- ⁴⁴ **All who believed were together...**
- The implication is they continually were gathering in the same place together...
- **All who believed were together and held everything in common, ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as [or “to the degree that”] anyone had need.**
- ⁴⁶ **Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts...**
- They were *devoted* to this, the Greek text uses the same word here as was used earlier to describe their devotion to the apostolic teaching.
- **Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts...**
- Oh, but “glad” is such an understatement! The Greek text says they were full of exultation! They were elated, rejoicing! Because they were thankful and full of praise and awe of God, they felt elated; and the more they exalted and glorified God the more humble they became, and the more humble you are the more in awe and praiseful you become such that you are filled with even more exultation about what God has done for you in salvation through Christ!
- ⁴⁷ [they were] **praising God and having the good will of all the people.**
- Or the Greek could mean having good will *toward* all the people; either way, this indicates they were interacting well with non-believers.
- **And the Lord was adding to their number every day [day by day] those who were being saved.**

1. True Life is Relational!

- † What a great description of the first church! Do you see anything attractive in how they lived, in how they experienced church? Let’s see whether we can learn something from their example.
- **[Slide 3: Relationships]** One thing that jumps out at me is that true life is relational! Notice the text stresses three types of relationship. Salvation makes it possible for us to connect with God and experience his transformative love; this leads us to connect with each other and experience healing and encouraging love from God’s people; and that leads us to connect with people outside the church to enthusiastically share this love with them. So three key relationships.
 - **[Slide 4: Relate to God]** In the earliest church, they pursued their relationship with God: they were devoting themselves to biblical teaching and to prayer; does that sound like they did it only two days a week, that they did it only when they were not too busy? They were devoting themselves to biblical teaching and to prayer; developing an attitude of awe and reverence for God; experiencing God’s supernatural work [initially miracles by the apostles, but later through everyone’s spiritual gifts]; and gathering daily for worship, which included being thankful and praising God. Their relationship with God was their highest priority in life.
 - **[Slide 5: Relate to each other]** Notice they did not pursue these activities separately or alone, they did them together! And as they communed with God together, they developed better relationships with each other. They were devoted to the fellowship; they prayed for and with each other; they ate together and shared their food with each other; they were hospitable and spent time with each other *daily*! They shared their possessions and even sold some to meet each other’s needs! What a vibrant and loving community they had!

- **[Slide 6: Relate to unchurched]** They also were connecting with non-believers in their neighborhoods and workplaces and wherever they went, and we see that God was adding people to the church day by day.
- † **[Slide 7: table]** All three of these relationships are important. The early church knew it would be silly to meet together if they did not have God as their focus.
- If we gathered on Sunday mornings, but did not sing praises, did not pray, did not study God's revelation in the Bible, what would be the point? We would be merely a social club, not a church. We would change the sign to read "Parkesburg Frisbee Golf Team" or "Octorara Hiking Club." There is nothing wrong with those leisure activities, but our focus is on glorifying God.
 - The first believers knew it was vital to have an intimate connection to God, for only then can we experience his sanctifying grace that transforms us into the people he created us to be. So their meetings were more than just social time with good friends, they were worshipful times.
 - At Church of the Open Bible, we want our church services and our small group meetings to be worshipful times. It is important to be together, but we want to pray together, worship together, and study the Bible together. We want our community to experience together the blessings of relationship with God, the blessings of glorifying God as a group.
- † The early church also did not settle for having just a Bible study or liturgy, because they knew it would be silly to meet with God as their focus if they did not allow what God was teaching them to transform the way they lived and related to each other.
- If we studied and sang and prayed, but did not relate to each other, did not put into practice the immense amount of biblical teaching about doing life together, would we really be following Christ and obeying scripture? No. We might be practicing some religion, we might be said to have faith, but we would bear no resemblance to the church or people in God's design.
 - The first believers knew they needed intimate relationships with each other, to experience the "one another" blessings that can only come from Christian fellowship, to receive prayer support, to heal relationally and emotionally, and to participate in the ministry using their spiritual gifts.
 - At Church of the Open Bible, we want our worship service to be as relational as it can be: we come *together* to worship and study; but we also come early to greet, encourage, and pray for one another; we serve one another in various ministries; and we hang around afterward to build relationships and enjoy being with like-minded believers. Church is not 9-10.15, it is 8.45-10.45.
 - We stress the community aspect of the church even more in small groups, where we have opportunities to build friendships, to live out the one-another commands, and to be authentic and honest about our struggles and our attempts to use scripture in life.
- † The early church also was not insular: they were so filled with reverential awe, praise, gratitude, and joy, that they exuberantly shared the truth about God's love and grace with non-believers.
- Such passionate outreach is a necessary result of a healthy church. At Church of the Open Bible, our hope also is that everyone in the church would become so excited about life with Christ and doing life with each other, that we all would be inviting everyone we know. If that does not describe you, then come talk with me or Earl or Mark and let's work through it together.

- † The first church pursued three relationships which are key to true life. Some churches summarize these as the Three Es: exalt, edify, and evangelize; we exalt [praise] God, we edify [build up] each other, and we evangelize [share the good news] with the unchurched. Because true life is relational.

[Slide 8: purpose table] 2. True Life Is Purposeful!

- † True life also is purposeful! I have reorganized our chart: I separated our relationship with God into two parts, worship and spiritual growth; and I separated our relationship with each other into two parts, fellowship and service; now, along with evangelistic outreach, we have the five purposes identified in Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*. Can we learn anything from this way of thinking about the early church?
- † Look at v.42: it says those in the early church were devoting themselves to prayer. We should learn from that, right? Are you praying daily for yourself, begging God not only to make your life easier, but also to transform you into the person he created you to be? Are you praying frequently for this church and for your loved ones and for God to be glorified by your life?
 - Do you feel awe and reverence for God, or is this still all about you? That's the famous summarizing line in the beginning of *Purpose Driven Life*, right? "It's not about you." Life is not about you, neither is church; it's about glorifying God, serving God, worshipping God, living for God. You know from our Genesis study that you were created to live as God's image, reflecting his character, representing him. It's all about him.
 - An attitude of reverence often is necessary to bring about right behavior; we use scripture to change the way we think, because that will change the way we live. But sometimes it can work in reverse: you might develop a greater feeling of reverence for God if you discipline yourself to spend time daily with him, in prayer, worship, Bible study, experiencing his presence.
- † Look again at v.42: The people in the early church were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles. We have what the apostles taught collected for us in this book: the Bible. If we want to be healthy Christian individuals and a healthy church, we need to devote ourselves to discussing, reading, memorizing, studying, and reflecting on scripture. If we do that, it will pay off; if we neglect it, we will never reach our potential, nor stay spiritually healthy.
 - If you were here for the dozen or so sermons on spiritual growth last year, you know that actually everything in this chart contributes to spiritual growth, because it is God who works the miraculous transformation in us, but the means he uses to do so includes all these activities.
 - But Bible study is essential no matter what else we are doing, because God's Spirit interacts with God's Word in God's people to do great things, transformative things, including helping us experience and learn from the other activities in this chart.
 - So if you are not pursuing Bible study and prayer daily, you are not giving yourself a chance to defeat the spiritual forces that are against you, the challenges of life, the pull of the flesh. Bible study and prayer are not sufficient to cure everything that ails you, but they are necessary components for healthy life.
- † Look again at v.42: they were devoting themselves to their fellowship with one another. One thing that strikes me most is how much time they spent together: they were with each other daily!

- Now that doesn't mean each one of them talked with each of the other 3,119 people and growing; but it means that their way of life was communal, they ate together, they shared what they had, they talked about life and encouraged each other. They became close friends with at least a few of the others in the church, and they walked through life together.
- † Related to that is how they served each other. They not only prayed for God to bless others in the church, they worked to make that blessing reality!
- Look at vv.44-45: they shared their possessions with each other and they even sold some things so they could meet each other's needs.
 - This was not communism, because the sharing was voluntary, and the goal was to meet needs, not enforce equal wealth.
 - But their generosity is all the more marvelous for being voluntary. These people were so seized with the miracles of salvation and the Holy Spirit indwelling them, that they stopped thinking in worldly terms, instead seeing material things as a tool for serving Christ and blessing others.
 - We are so much wealthier than they were that the figures are staggering. The computation doesn't even make an impression in our brains. Even the wealthiest among them owned a camel, not a car. If you go on a missions trip to a third world country, you meet believers who have almost nothing materially but are overflowing with joy, peace, love, and generosity. It makes me wonder if our materialism is the reason we don't feel those things.
- † Now look at vv.46-47. What made this church successful at evangelistic outreach? They didn't have to go door to door, they didn't have to hold organized outreach events, they didn't have to buy advertising, do mass mailings, or even worry about how the front of the building looked, since they had no church building.
- Listen: the vibrancy of their faith and the vibrancy of their community made what they had attractive to others, and so God was adding people to their fellowship day by day. They were so excited about God and so passionate for each other, they were so focused on exaltation and edification, on worship, growth, fellowship, and service, that evangelism was easy; people wanted to join that church, they wanted to hear the gospel so they could experience this!
 - LeeAnn and I have been in churches like that. When we first became friends, we found a church together. The pastor was bald and witty; the music was fun and exciting; the people were genuine and friendly. As we got deeper into the church, we found they were intentional about sharing the gospel, about building relationships, about serving together on ministry teams. And we got so excited about what we were experiencing there, experiencing with God and with his people, that we enthusiastically invited everyone – everyone! – we knew.
 - That's what I hope will happen here. It starts with each of us getting right with God, getting our priorities and attitudes right; it involves not only weekly worship but frequent contact with others in the church, loving on each other, meeting needs, gathering for Bible study and fellowship in small groups, serving each other in church ministries. If we want to see God glorified in this church, to see people come to saving faith in this church, we have to make this church more like the first church.
- † The people in the first church organized their lives around these five purposes, these three key relationships. I don't see in the book of Acts that they were distracted by the cares of life, too tired

after work, too busy with other commitments, or too frazzled trying to get one child to soccer practice and the other to a music lesson.

- As someone who has worked in children's and youth ministries, let me tell you that the best thing you can do for your children or grandchildren is to get your life right with God. When they see transformation in your character, when they see the change in your lifestyle, when they see that you passionately believe in not only Christ but in the life he exemplifies for us, that is when they will know Christ is real and want to live in faith. If they instead see you living in the world and not taking God, scripture, or church seriously, then they will not either.
- Don't allow yourself to argue that you are too busy to come together for a couple of hours every Sunday and again for a couple of hours during the week for a small group. Those few hours are one of the best investments you can make, so you can heal and grow into the person God designed you to be.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 9: multiplication map]** When the early church was denied access to the Temple and the synagogues, they quickly became a cooperative set of home-based groups under the coordination of the apostles. God used this persecution to establish a system that could be exported throughout the known world: small groups meeting in houses, tied together by the teaching of the apostles.
 - This is what we want to accomplish here at Church of the Open Bible. We always are seeking to make Sunday morning a better worship experience; we also are establishing a new small group ministry, committed to investing in every person who is eager to be trained and taught, because we believe the blessings described in the New Testament experience are available to us today, if only we would follow God's revelation with trust and obedience, so as to live as God prescribes.
- † Think about your involvement in the church.
 - Come weekly for worship, 8.45-10.45. If you cannot spare two hours per week for God and his people, then there is something really wrong.
 - Try a small group this coming year, and get deeper into God's Word and into doing life together.
 - Decide to whom you should minister – adults, youth, children, a particular subgroup like shut-ins or young adults – and then come talk to me about how we can develop your ministry and skills in that area.
 - And please also find one task way to serve in the church by joining one of our teams for maintenance, cleaning, mowing, shoveling, helping administratively, etc.
 - Join us! Pursue your relationship with God as a daily priority! Pursue relationships with others in this church every week! Get excited about what God is doing among us, and let our love and enthusiasm show outside these walls, such that others want to find out what is going on here!
 - Let's pray . . .