

The Discovery of Meaning (Acts 2:42-47)

Sometimes in life we feel like we are just spinning our wheels

- Endless cycle of work and responsibilities, schedules and upkeep (taxes; old jeep—smog check)
- Or, retirement age and the same routine to keep ourselves busy and occupied
- If we stop to think, we may begin to wonder, “What is this all about? What am I doing this for?” (**meaning?**)
- **When we search for meaning, we realize that we have deep longings that are not always met in busyness**
- **Truth** (noise); **connection** (superficial); **forgiveness** (shame or bitterness); **greater authority** (autonomy)
 - Common to all humanity
- We realize as life hums along that we need reorientation around meaning

What has happened in the context of the story we are following is that a large group of people has decided to follow Jesus

- Now, they are learning what that looks like together
 - As the Church (the collection of God's people)
 - They are reorienting themselves around what is meaningful (scratches those common itches)

They devoted themselves to (1) the apostles' teaching and to (2) fellowship, to (3) the breaking of bread and to (4) prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Notice, these practices of the early church are scratching those human itches that are the need for meaning

1. **The apostles' teaching** = the search for truth
2. **Fellowship** = the desire for connection
3. **The breaking of bread** = the joy of forgiveness
4. **Prayer** = the longing for a greater authority

Notice, the text says they “**devoted themselves**” to these things

- NASB = “**continually devoted**” (because the Greek present tense = an ongoing action)
- I.e. They were developing new **rhythms, disciplines, and values**
 - That cultivated meaning in light of what they now knew (about Jesus)
 - **This is what a church (and person) full of the Holy Spirit does**
 - Notice they did this together, in both **large** and **small** gatherings (**see verse 46**)
 - (we are working on home groups—but don't wait for us) (this was not administrated)

This reorienting around practices that provide meaning is actually a reorienting around Jesus (Christocentric)

- This is the Church's model for ministry (and the Christian's model for practice)
- **The Apostle's Teaching**
 - Would have been from Holy Scripture and about Jesus
 - Took cue from Jesus on road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:27**, NASB) (back to list)
 - Wasn't clever cultural commentary; political partisan positioning; philosophical musing and meanderings—It was the Word of God!
 - Scratches the deep itch of **the search for truth**
 - Reorients our hearts, minds and lives around Jesus
 - **Apostle's Teaching** became the New Testament
 - So, we **continually devote** ourselves to the Bible... (large and small gatherings and individually)
 - The Spirit of God leads the people of God to the Word of God
- **Fellowship**
 - The **desire for connection** (created that way)
 - Reoriented around Jesus
 - **1 John 3:14**, NIV (back to list)
 - Salvation causes us to love another (around Jesus)
 - The church as body... Union with the head means union with the members
 - Koinōnia = to have in common; to share in; to participate (over-connected shallow world)

- **The Breaking of Bread**
 - The Lord's Supper
 - Keeping the Person and Work of Jesus central (Esp. the Cross)
 - Jesus' last request before the Cross (1 **Corinthians 11:23-26**, NIV) (back to list)
 - Celebrating the joy of forgiveness (scratches that itch (freedom or bitterness))
 - Every week at Reality
- **Prayer**
 - We've already seen in Acts that they were **continually devoted** to prayer (and will see)
 - Dependence upon and connection to God (longing for a greater authority) (**Luke 18:1**, NASB)
 - Every week at Reality (Cf. Easter week)
 - Reorienting around Jesus means leaning on and into Him in **prayer** (together and individually)

These were the things they were **devoted to (**devoted** = clinging faithfully) (What being **full of Spirit** looks like)**

What we see next is the three things that happened as a result of this radical reorienting around Jesus

Verse 43

- **Signs and wonders**
- They were experiencing the **power** and **presence** of God at work in their midst (we need more of that)

Verse 44-45

- **Generosity**
 - **Koinōnikos** = **generosity** (Fellowship is not only what we share in, but what we share out as well)
 - Fulfillment of Jesus prayer in **John 17:20-23**, NLT
 - This was **organic** not organized. Caused by **love** not law or a political system. Compassion not compulsion.
 - The love they experienced in Jesus from God caused them to love one another with **generosity**
- The **great generosity** they experienced though the Cross caused them to be **very generous** w/ each other

These are disturbing verses. Do they mean that every Church and every Christian is supposed to do this?

- At different times in church history some have thought so and done so
- But, we do not see Jesus, or the apostles, or the Old or New Testament, forbidding the owning of possessions
 - In verse **46b** we read that they **broke bread together in their homes** (many still owned)
 - Those who did sell their things did so **voluntarily**
 - The tense of both verbs in **verse 45** (**sold** and **gave**) is imperfect, which in Greek grammar means that the **selling** and **giving** were occasional and in response to particular needs (not once for all)¹
 - In **Acts 5** the great sin of Ananias and Sapphira was deceit... not that they kept some of their possessions for themselves (rather, that they pretended not to so as to appear to be something they were not)
- But, even though this **selling** and **giving** of property was and is voluntary, we all need to **heed the challenge of the text and the call to generosity**
- The principle is giving "**to anyone that has need**"
 - So, the needs of those in the church were met (Reality does benevolence—but what can you do?)
 - **I John 3:16-18**, NLT
 - Not a political system, but rather a response to the love of God (**reorientation around meaning**)
- What can you point to as a reflection of God's generosity toward you and so yours toward others?
 - How do you/we confront **the root of all sorts of evil**?
 - We must not evade the challenge of these verses
 - Anyone in our body that is in need and not being provided for is a rebuke to us
 - **In the new community of Jesus it is the responsibility/joy of Spirit-filled believers to meet the needs of those who are in hard places**

¹ John Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, and the World : The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1990), 84.

We end here—we saw that signs and wonders and generosity were results of being reoriented around Jesus

- The final result is sharing the wonderful new about Jesus with others (evangelism)

Verse 47

- The whole picture is not complete without **verse 47**
- They were not just **gathering** together, they were **scattering** in mission (centripetal and centrifugal)
- The other components (**verse 42**) tell us about the interior life of the church
 - But not its compassionate outreach to the world
 - The church was not so occupied with Bible studies, worshipping and fellowship that it forgot its missionary calling (**witnessing**) (**upon power**)
- The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit that created a missionary church (Cf. Jesus and sent-ness)
“The Book of Acts is governed by one dominating, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit... Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is a missionary church.” –Harry Boer²
- **They were an evangelizing church**
 - Shared the good news about Jesus from a place of **praise** and **favor**
 - It was ongoing (**daily**) (please Lord!)
 - But, take joy, **the Lord accomplished** it (**The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved**)
 - But, no doubt, He did it through them
 - The outflow of their devotion (word, fellowship, communion, prayer) was ministry
 - **Romans 10:13-15**, NLT
 - God give us beautiful feet! Send us out in praise and favor!

Let's practice what we preach (at least about prayer)—let's pray for these things:

- A radical reorientation around Jesus
- More of Jesus' power and presence in our midst
- An explosion of Christ-like generosity
- A joyful boldness with the Good News about Jesus

² Stott, 86.