

"The Lifestyle of the New Community"

3/10-11/07

6 p.m.; 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Acts 2:42-47

OPEN to Acts 2:42-47 (**PAGE** 1694)**INTRODUCTION**

I was reading this week about Carl Lewis, the great sprinter and long-jumper, who qualified for 5 U.S. Olympic teams.

Before his fifth Olympics, knowing it would be his last, Lewis started a new training program. For the first time in his career, he lifted weights and focused on strength and distance running.

"I've done a series of weightlifting drills, running stadium steps, jumping up and down on boxes, (and) distance running..."

He also worked with a medicine ball, did special exercises that build explosive power (plyometrics), and yoga.

He also paid close attention to his diet. As a strict vegetarian, Lewis reduced his body fat from 6% to 3%.

He worked with an allergist to clear up the congestion and sicknesses that plagued him for three years.

You see the single-mindedness? The commitment to a training lifestyle?

The Apostle Paul spoke about the Olympic games, and compared them to the lifestyle of a Christian:

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 **"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.**

26 **Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.**

27 **No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."**

In Acts 2, we see that the apostles instituted a spiritual training program to insure that the 3,000 new believers would grow strong in their new-found faith.

It's a series of spiritual disciplines, the very ones that Jesus taught the 12, that are at the heart of beginning well, and finishing well.

And it is still the lifestyle that the Lord intends for every one of His children to live.

READ Acts 2:42-47

To Grow in Your Relationship With Jesus...

I. Be Determined

Acts 2:42 **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."**

v. 42: **"They"** were the 3,000 who received Christ in v. 41

A. Focused, Continuous Devotion

v. 42: **"devoted themselves"** lit. **"continually devoted themselves"**

They were committed to a lifestyle of better knowing Jesus and His will for their lives.

The same work is translated a little differently in other places in Acts, but carries the same idea of continual devotion:

Acts 2:46: **"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts."**

Acts 1:14: **"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."**

Acts 6:4: **"...and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."**

You see this is talking about a steadfast and single-minded faithfulness to a certain course of action. (EBC)

They were not casual or careless or haphazard about their lifestyle in Christ.

They were **devoted !!**

Where did this devotion come from???

Let's back up a little bit in the story...

The apostles followed Jesus' command given in Matthew 28:18-19: "**... make disciples of all nations** (on Pentecost they took the step of telling the crowd about Jesus and their need for Him),

"... baptizing them..." (they did this, v. 41),

"... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

This is what the apostles are now doing. They are teaching these new Christians about Jesus, what He taught, and the need to obey Jesus, since He is Lord and King over their lives.

It is very important to understand that we are seeing a lifestyle that is based upon obedience to Jesus.

And we must grasp that this is all about relationship, not about jumping through religious hoops or some form of legalism...

... that is, "*the church says you have to do all these things. A Christian isn't saved by good works! Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus and I have a relationship with Jesus, and I will decide what I want to do.*"

There is some truth in that statement. But, someone who talks like that can also be in the grip of deception, or so self-willed they aren't following Jesus at all.

Following Jesus requires obeying Jesus. It is pursuing a growing relationship with Him, through the church. The church was His idea, not people's idea.

For instance, some of you have your children involved on a sports team of some kind. Is practice optional? Can you skip practices because you'd rather be doing something else, and expect to stay on the team... or get playing time?

No. It is understood that if you are a part of the team, you come to practice. You train with the rest of the team. You bond with the team and work together to improve your game.

And no one goes around saying, "*That coach is so legalistic! He expects the team to practice!*"

It's not called legalism, it's commitment.

No one who joins Rotary later says, "*What do you mean you're going to fine me for missing a meeting? That's legalistic! Who do you think you are?*" No one does that.

Why? Because when you join Rotary, the expectations are clear and you agree before becoming a part of the organization. You miss a meeting, you pay. It's not called legalism, it's called commitment.

And, so, as we look at what the apostles communicate to these new believers, we see that they...

are teaching them to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

It's teaching them how to love God with all of their hearts and all of their souls and all of their minds and all of their strength.

It's teaching them how to develop a deep relationship with Jesus, and with other believers. Jesus told us to love one another in the same way He loves us. We can't do that without being involved in one another's lives.

So, that is what we're seeing happen. That is the context.

And, on top of this, these people have been waiting for hundreds of years for the prophecy about the coming Messiah to be fulfilled... and now it has!!

To Grow in Your Relationship With Jesus...

II. Be Connected (v. 42)

Acts 2:42 **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."**

A. The Apostles' teaching: the word of God

The apostles' teaching was the teaching of the Word of God and how it applied to their lives.

In v. 46 we see that they gathered every morning in the temple courts to hear the apostles teaching. (*they didn't have their own personal copy of the Scriptures*)

Then, later in the day, they would gather in homes in their neighborhoods, they would discuss the apostles' teaching, grasp it, and wrestle with what it meant to apply it to their lives.

They were living the way Jesus had taught the 12

Hear, wrestle to understand it, then apply it; hear, understand, apply.

And still, today, small groups are a place where real men and women have a safe place hear the word of God, wrestle with understanding it, and then applying it to their lives.

Personal training in the Word:

1. Hearing (worship services, Sunday A.M. Electives, small groups, tapes/CD's, church website, podcasts)

2. Reading (Bible)
3. Memorizing (a friend recently told me how he has been memorizing Scripture as a part of his men's group... I never could memorize... then I found a method... it has been so great! So helpful to have Scripture in my mind to fight temptation and to put my mind on God's word)
4. Studying (group / personal)
5. Meditating upon (mental chewing... not fast food! Pondering, thinking, asking God about it)

Joshua 1:8 **"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."**

So, we see the importance of the Word of God in the spiritual training program for Christians.

B. The fellowship

The word "**fellowship**" in the NT is a word that expresses what we have in common in Christ, or what we share in together.

It is a "family bond."

You see, what they had in common, what they shared in together was their new life in Jesus Christ.

They were devoted to being together as God's people.

We gather together to meet with Jesus and one another,

And as we meet with Jesus in His word and prayer and worship, He fills us afresh with His life,

And then, we minister to one another, (spiritual gifts, service)

And to people who are lost from Christ.

ILLUSTRATION

Last month, I spent a Sunday afternoon at a Super Bowl party. There were about 25 people there who were from this church, and a few others. Because we were all believers, there were some things that were likely unique about this gathering: what we drank... the words we used when the enemy team scored a touchdown... the jokes we told.

So, there was a sharing in common of a lifestyle.

But, when the game was over, a greater form of fellowship took place as some of us shared with one another about the real stuff of our lives. There was sharing of burdens, concerns, great things that were happening, genuine encouragement. It was clear that we were pursuing Jesus and we were truly interested in encouraging and helping one another. And, honestly, as much as we all enjoyed the Super Bowl, the post-game sharing was precious, special.

Since we have Jesus living in us, He binds us together...

we want what is best for one another,
 so we help,
 we encourage,
 we teach,
 we give,
 we bless,
 we pray,

we want everyone with whom we share the life of Jesus,
 to excel in their relationship with God, and with the
 people in their lives.

C. The breaking of bread: the Lord's Supper

Jesus said, **"Do this in memory of Me."** And they did.

A reminder of the death of Jesus for our sins; our forgiveness through His sacrifice, and that without Him we can do nothing.

D. Prayer

Praying together as a congregation, in smaller groupings, as individuals.

Prayer is a sweet reminder that without Him we can't do anything of eternal value.

We need God to be closely involved in

Not so much a time to share prayer requests, but to pray for those requests. If we are praying aright as a group, each one is entering into the prayer of the one praying, sharing their burden, joining in their words.

Four elements of this training program: The Word of God, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, Prayer. Each one important, each one indispensable.

Every training program has results

To Grow in Your Relationship With Jesus...

III. Praise God as He Moves Among Us (v. 43-47)

A. v. 43a: **Awe**: Jesus makes His presence known

B. v. 43b: Miraculous signs

Power follows unity.

C. Selfless Giving

When you're living together like this, loving and caring and encouraging, you are willing to give of your resources.

D. Glad and sincere hearts

E. Praising God

F. Enjoying the favor of all the people

G. The Lord adds to their number daily those whom He saves.

CONCLUSION

Are you growing in your relationship with Jesus?

Is there one or more areas that we talked about today that you need to become devoted to?

God's word?

Fellowship?

Prayer?

The Lord's Supper?

"Father God, I need to draw closer to You. I want to know You better and better. Please help me to take steps toward You and to be devoted to meeting with You in Your word, in prayer, in the Lord's Supper, and through fellowship with other devoted believers. Thank You for Your gracious help and strength! In Jesus' Name, Amen."