

## **A Generous Church**

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**The Power of Generosity Sermon Series**

**September 27, 2020**

**Acts 2:42-47**

Acts 2:42-47 says the early Church grew. They were “devoted.” Adjectives that are synonyms of devoted are: *“enthusiastic, dedicated, fervent, zealous, loyal, faithful, committed, caring, loving, affectionate, aligned, kind, and attentive.”* Verbs that are synonyms of devoted include: *“gave, offered, lavished, heaped, and conferred.”* Generosity was part of the early Church’s daily routine. Acts 2:46 begins: *“And day by day...”* The early Church learned to practice new behaviors and attitudes that became habits that refashioned their hearts.

We change daily. We grow or shrink every time we think, say, or do something (or refrain). Some behaviors are fun and easy. Some actions are costly. God does not call believers to a life of ease. Too much comfort leads to apathy, boredom, confusion, and being stuck. These early believers were not narcissists. Lost in worship, fellowship, growing in the Word, and serving, they learned to forget about themselves and their hardships. They shifted into the kingdom of God. They were people of joy. They had purpose and meaning. They helped others in need. They were devoted to the mission of Helping Others Follow Jesus.

APPLICATION: The early Church had “glad and generous hearts.” A church is only as generous as its members. Financial freedom is a powerful tool that can help us become more generous. That, in turn, will help us *“add to our number day by*

*day those who are being saved.”* Asbury is starting some “Financial Peace University” classes with options of in-person or virtual attendance. Classes begin on October 4, 11, and 13. For more information visit: [asburytulsa.org](http://asburytulsa.org).

### Acts 2:42-47

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

(I'll use the whiteboard here)

This is what we aspire to.

- 1.) The Word (The Apostles' “*Didache*” – teaching/doctrine/believing)
- 2.) The Fellowship (“*koinonia* – sharing”) Not individualistic/solo.
- 3.) The Table
- 4.) The Mission (“*diakonia* – becoming servants”)

The result: *glad & generous hearts; praising God; favor with all the people* (the church grew)

*“A text without a context is a pretext.”* Our text is from Acts 2:42-47. Let’s see the context. The 1<sup>st</sup> half of Acts deals with Jerusalem, Peter, and a Jewish background.

1 – Ascension

2 – Pentecost

2- Birth of the Church

*“We’ve had a baby.”* There is great excitement. Something unprecedented happened. It is brand new. The text we are about to read reflects the enthusiasm, excitement, joy, unity, and growth of the church. It is a celebration. It’s like the birth of a baby. Or like a honeymoon. The Book of Acts has many “babies.” These celebrations happen as people take the gospel to the world. However, when you bring a baby home from the hospital, you’ll have sleepless nights. The baby will cry and demand attention in many ways.

4 – External threat

5 – Internal problem (Ananias/Saphira)

5 – Apostles arrested

7 – 1<sup>st</sup> martyr (Stephen)

9 – Persecution (Saul)

10 – Gentiles (Cornelius)

12 – James is killed; Peter imprisoned

The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Acts goes beyond Jerusalem. Paul becomes the main character, + Gentiles are the focus.

We saw last week in 2 Corinthians that the Jerusalem Church was in trouble, (persecution or famine).

Yet, God is at work. There are miraculous/wonderful things that happen. There are also problems of every type. The church and people suffer.

*And they **devoted** themselves to....* Affection. Attention. Commitment. Concentration. Dedication. Enthusiasm. Faithfulness. Loyalty. A sense of purpose.

*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:66-70*

One of the mountains in the Alps that is popular with climbers has a rest house about halfway up. For amateurs, it's a good day's climb from the base to the top. If they start early in the morning, they get to the rest house about lunchtime. The owner of the rest house has noticed over the years an interesting phenomenon happens on a regular basis. When the climbers get into the house and they feel the warmth of the fire and smell the good food cooking, several always yield to temptation. They say to their companions, "I think I'll just wait here while you go on to the top. I'll join you when you come back down." The rest of the group put on their gear and trek to the top. A glaze of satisfaction comes over those left behind as they sit by the fire or play the piano and sing mountain-climbing songs. There is a spirit of happiness around the fireside; they are having a good time in the cozy little lodge. But around 3:30, it starts to get quiet. They begin taking turns at the window, looking at the top of the mountain. They're silent as they realize they are not going to achieve what they set out to accomplish. They settled for coziness over

commitment. The temporary comfort of the shelter caused them to lose sight of their purpose. Great achievement always requires great sacrifice.

It is easy to be devoted to something when it's comfortable, delightful, fun and everything goes our way. It is NOT so easy when things are hard and challenging. Christians have a mixture of good things and hard things. We are trying to learn devotion.

The danger for Christians in America now is not persecution. It is the loss of devotion.

One of our challenges now is that when we lose our fellowship, we've lost accountability. We really must pedal to make our faith work. Erosion happens slowly, almost imperceptibly. I'm concerned that the fire is going out.

What are you asking me to do? *"Will you be loyal to Jesus Christ...as expressed through Asbury. Will you uphold it by your prayers, presence, gifts, service & Witness.*

The expansion of any movement is always in direct proportion to its ability to mobilize its total membership to live out its message. The Lord needs your engagement. We want to be a generous church. We will be sending a commitment card for you in the next couple of weeks.