



Sermon Growth Guide

January 9, 2022

Missing Pieces - Devoted



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Acts 2:42-47

Key Verse: Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Big Idea: God’s people are devoted.

Foundations

Even in more stable times, things fall apart. To paraphrase a central tenet of the second law of thermodynamics, all things move toward disorder. This is a material fact. Outside of an outside help, our world moves toward chaos, not Kingdom Shalom.

Does this ring true in your own life? Are there healthy rhythms you have held in the past that are absent from your current day-to-day living? Do you sense that anything is missing from your life?

Today we begin a new series, **Missing Pieces**. We acknowledge that plenty around us has come undone, over the past two years especially.

But God. God is Creator, not created. God is not bound by the second law of thermodynamics! God is a God of peace. God is a God of restoration, of renewal. In God, all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

In Christ, what is missing can be found! What is lacking can be filled up. The Missing Pieces of our lives become sites of Resurrection when we give ourselves into the restorative hands of God.

Blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to the One who holds all things together, to the One who fills in what is missing with Himself and His Kingdom and His people.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Acts 2:42-47. What stands out to you?

What does it mean to be devoted to something?

What four things are the disciples devoted to in verse 42?

Applying God’s Word

God’s people are devoted to His Word, one another, communion and prayer.

Host an honest conversation about that which you are functionally devoted to. In the Spirit and in His attitude of love, help one another talk openly about how your life is prioritized. Is your life prioritized toward the Kingdom of God or toward the pleasures of this world? What is your next step in being fully devoted to God and His kingdom?

Witnessing God’s Word

If we are indeed “foreigners and exiles” to the culture in which we live (1 Peter 2:11), we should stick out quickly as we live the Kingdom life. Hold a discussion on how well you “stick out” for Christ in your context. How can you even more live out the Kingdom ethic of devoted love to display Christ to those around you?

Devoted. What is devotion? It means being committed to something, given over. Devotion comes in many forms. Many of you, yesterday, were sitting in front of the TV watching the Broncos. They moved it to Saturday, and you changed your schedule. You got out your Manning jersey or your Von Miller jersey, put it on, turned on the game, and sat there thinking maybe, just maybe, we would beat the Chiefs. That is a form of devotion. It proves that devotion is not always rational. That's OK. I mean, I know some Cleveland Browns fans. It could be worse. Chicago Bears. What does it mean to be devoted?

We are going to talk about **Missing Pieces**. (Speaking of the Broncos...) No. I mean really. In life. Are there missing pieces out there? Things you are lacking, gaps to be filled. Gaps where it feels like there was something there a few years ago, before COVID, before 2020, before that loss, or trauma, or fire, or illness, or job change ... it was just there. Now it's not. I think we have a lot of missing pieces. We are missing community. We are missing a sense of purpose and mission. We are losing optimism and missing the hope that things are going to get better. Some of us, we are missing God. Here's the thing, God intends to fill those gaps. The missing pieces in your life feel like vacancies because they are meant to be occupied. Like Blaise Pascal famously said 400 years ago, there is a God-shaped hole in every heart. The point of this series is to show how God intends to fill those holes, to plug those gaps. We try to fill these holes with everything we can find, desperately grasping at every little thing that promises relief, but "this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself" (Blaise Pascal). It's a big need requiring a big solution. God doesn't intend for you to run through life grasping at things to cast into the gap. God intends to fill it Himself, and God intends to use the church.

The book of Acts tells the story of the church coming together for the first time. Our passage today says it started with devotion. Not to the Broncos.

A different kind of devotion. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). One thing you may be missing is devotion. Do you have something in your life worthy of true devotion? When I think of devotion, I think of parents who never gave up on their missing child and finally found them. I think of a pet owner patiently cleaning up after their dear, old dog. What are some images of devotion? I think of some of you with your long marriages. Young couples recite vows with giggles, "in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and health." At 50 years of marriage those words mean a lot more. You remember the plenty. You remember the want. You held together in joy and in sorrow. You have seen the sickness and you give thanks for the health, with real gratitude. "As long as we both shall live." "Until death do us part." Devotion. Surely the Lord wants it in our lives. Surely the Spirit of God does impart such gifts to the believing. I think when you don't have anything to be devoted to, that's a gap. The church, the mission of Jesus, the Body of Christ, it is worthy of this sort of devotion.

What did they devote themselves to? "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Here we have a ready test for the church we are involved with, whether right here, or should you move to a new city or settle somewhere else after college. How do you find a church worthy of devotion? Here is a fourfold marker. First, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). The Apostle's Teaching. What's that? That's the Scriptures. The apostle's teachings were the sayings and stories of Jesus which were in the process of coming together to form the New Testament, held in same regard as the Word of God found in the Old Testament. As one example, there are others, here the church is described in Ephesians as "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians

2:20). Apostles and prophets on equal footing. They devoted themselves to the Word of God.

Our First Pres Way values speak to the authority of Holy Scripture, the Word of God. “Hold Fast: Stay founded on Scripture and centered on Christ, who holds you steady.” With the Westminster Confession, we proclaim and believe the Holy Scripture to be “the word of God written ... given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.” First Pres is a Bible church, I hope you know. The Bible doesn’t belong to us; we belong to the Bible. We do not dispense the Word of God; the Word of God dispenses with us as it pleases. Everything we do, we do under the Word of God. From who we ordain, to the babies we baptize, all the way over to the coffee we put out on Sundays, we have a scriptural basis for everything we do, in the full counsel of God’s Word, or we wouldn’t do it. This is the Word of God written. If you want to know what God has to say, read these pages. And no, you can’t make Scripture say whatever you want. The words run across the page just like any others, and the range of meaning is limited and defined. They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ Teaching, the Word.

Second, they devoted themselves to fellowship. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This is a much-celebrated word in the Greek New Testament, “koinonia.” It’s more than fellowship. It’s communion, “in-common-ness.” It is mutual belonging. I belong not to myself. I actually belong to my church, I am a member of a body, a part, an appendage of a larger organism. When any part of it hurts, I hurt. When I hurt, the whole body hurts. If any part of it is in jeopardy, I am in jeopardy. If I am in jeopardy, the whole body responds. One to another. Can you feel that? It’s more than Broncos fans. It’s more than a school or society or fellowship. It’s more like family. But it takes devotion. This is a missing piece. People are hungry to be in meaningful community, to be in relationships that matter, to be known and to know, and to be tied together by something more than passing affections.

People are painfully, chronically, lonely. But, and here’s the rub, people don’t necessarily want to do what it takes to be in a community like the church. It takes devotion.

Let me ask you this, does church win in your life? In your home and family and calendar, does church win? I mean, ever? Soccer comes up, skiing comes up, golf comes up, let’s drop church. Church is the easiest thing to drop. If you want that missing piece filled in, it might take more commitment. They devoted themselves to fellowship. Being together. Now, we have gotten used to being online. I know that. And you at home, you already watched my opening video for online worship, but just to say it again, if you are at home because in your best risk-assessment it is still wise to stay away from crowds, God bless you, we are with you, you will not be left behind. But a lot of us have just gotten used to not going to church. That’s the truth. I was reading an article where a pastor said the most surprising moments in their year came at parties or events bumping into to church members who said, “We haven’t been coming to church because of COVID.” They said, at a party! Pick your priorities. People want genuine community, but that takes a sacrifice of self, a commitment and a devotion. Here is community worthy of devotion.

Does your church devote itself to the Word, and to the fellowship? Third, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Yes, this is coming to table together. Eating together. Even feasting together, as the Scriptures command over and over again. There is intimacy in breaking bread together. But it refers to more than that. This is a reference to the Lord’s Table, holy communion, the sacraments the church began to learn and practice. In following weeks we will talk about just what we believe about communion and baptism, the two sacraments of the church. Here’s a quick-hit just to get you started thinking. “At-home communion” is an oxymoron. Yes, in dire straits, in persecutions and imprisonments, in medical emergencies

and global pandemics, these things are stretched and accommodations are made, but communion is something the church does together.

Fourth, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Prayer. The disciples of Jesus Christ learned a lot about prayer. It moved from something you have others say on your behalf in temples, “say a prayer for me,” to something to recite, an incantation, “say your prayers.” But finally under Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, the church began to learn that prayer is connection and communion with God. Kids have to grow through that same pattern. Pray for me. I say my prayers. I pray. If you have a relationship with God, you talk to Him. In Jesus Christ, we can connect with God. In the church, this is all we do in worship and common prayer and song and music, celebrating the presence of the Lord. In private, the Lord wants you to know that you can enter His presence at any moment through personal, individual, spontaneous prayer. Just open the conversation. God is already listening.

Four signs of a church worthy of devotion: Word, Fellowship, Sacrament, Prayer. In a body like that there is constant wonder and amazement as God shows up again and again, “Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Please don’t read that the apostles were magicians. These are the works of God done through ordinary men and women, works of the living Christ who said “apart from me you can do nothing.” Attached to Him, wonders of God emerge. A body like that shares life together. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:44-45). That’s not communism, a coercive government redistribution of wealth, or socialism, denying individuals the right of property; that’s supernatural community. More like family. I can’t hold too much while I see you with too little. It’s my joy to share in all things. A body like that loves being together, even

when there are powerful forces to keep them apart. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46). That’s big church and Life Group. That’s gathering at the temple and circling up at home. A body like that worships big and loud, and they have the presence and communion with God to celebrate! “Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Note, the church doesn’t add to its number, but the Lord adds to the church, because healthy things grow and God entrusts more and more lonely and lost to be gathered up in the joy of being at home, in the body, in the church of Jesus Christ.

They devoted themselves to that. Devotion, a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action. A body like that, it is worthy of giving yourself to. But sometimes we can’t. When you read along in your Bible you will see that word devotion come up in another context as well. It is how the Bible talks about sacrifice. A sacrificial dove is devoted to the Lord. An ox was devoted to God, meaning it was slaughtered. A lamb was given, devoted. Whole life. Body and blood. We can’t match the devotion necessary to fill the missing piece in our lives. We long for community, but who could give their whole life? Jesus did. Jesus died in a devotion we could not match to win a community we could not win. Do you feel the missing piece? Christ has won it for you. For you, for us, He was devoted.