

# Devoted to the Narrow Path

In the 2015/16 Premier League season, there was a story that shocked the world. The previous season, Leicester City had narrowly avoided relegation; they had a woeful season and all of the experts were predicting them to go down in the new season.

What happened next, no one could have predicted - Leicester went on to win the league in style - beating many of the top teams and demonstrating a team spirit and grit that propelled them to the top. It was an impossible situation; there were too many obstacles, too many other teams that could win it, but somehow they won.

Around 2000 years earlier, there was another similar story. Something happened despite all of the odds.

On the day of Pentecost, we see the Spirit of God being poured out on 120 believers as they gathered together to pray and the church was born. 3000 people came to faith that day.

But as we read on through the book of Acts, we see that the church was greatly persecuted and this continued for the first 300 years of church history until Emperor Constantine came to faith and legalised Christianity.

The Jewish leaders wanted to stop this new movement because they believed that Jesus was wrong and a blasphemer

The Romans wanted to stop it because they viewed the Christians as a threat to civic order and their values.

Yet despite the odds, the church continued to grow in the face of great persecution.

We read in Acts 2:47 that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

How amazing is that?

These early followers of Jesus were a movement that could not be stopped.

One of the Jewish leaders, Gamaliel, even said that “If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

I want to read to us a passage that is a window into the life of the early church.

How did they grow? How did they maintain their faith despite the circumstances?

What was life like for them? What shaped them in this early time?

Read Acts 2:42-47

## 1. Devotion in a world of distraction

The first thing I want to talk about today is what we see right at the beginning of this passage:

“They **Devoted** themselves...”

The early church were a DEVOTED people.

We live in a world that is fast paced, full of things all around that are desperately vying for our attention.

News articles, notifications, likes, comments, tweets. You name it.

There is even a phenomenon that many of us may have experienced called a phantom buzz - where we feel a buzz in our pocket even if there was nothing on our phones.

We live in a distracted world, full of connection through social media and technology but lacking in true genuine connection.

How many times have you had this conversation?

"How are you?"

"I'm good, i'm just busy."

Busyness has become part of our culture, it's deeply ingrained in our minds that somehow, busyness means importance.

John Mark Comer said in his book "The ruthless elimination of hurry" -

["In this world, we are distracted from distraction by distraction"](#)

Or in other words, we don't realise how distracted and busy we are because we are so distracted.

Jon Norman said, ["Distraction is one of the enemy's favourite tools, because if he can't destroy you, he'll simply distract you."](#)

Because of this, devotion can be hard. But what did the early church devote themselves to?

Administration?

Putting on events?

Filling their diaries?

No...

Many of these things are necessary, but devotion means to have things in the right order.

**"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."**

- a. Apostles teaching - the word of God, it is our daily bread, it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

People often come to me saying they are struggling to know God. The Bible is the written revelation of the living God. If you want to know God, know the bible. Devote yourself to knowing the word. Write it on your heart, allow it to flow out of you.

**Talk about discipleship pathway - it is written etc**

- b. Fellowship - "it is not good for man to live alone"  
Share about how friendship has helped my faith journey.

**Connect culture - com grps, activity groups, serving.**

- c. Breaking of bread - keeping the cross front and center.  
"I resolved to know nothing while i was with you excpet Christ and him crucified"

"The cross is the crux of Christianity"

- d. Prayer - talking and listening to God.

To do life as a christian without prayer is to drive a car without fuel in it, we must devote ourselves to prayer.

Find space for prayer in the day to day. If you have to set an alarm, do that. If you have to wake up earlier, then do that. Prayer helps us to know God, to hear his voice and his direction for our lives, to still our souls in the chaotic world the we live in.

Let's become people of prayer.

The things i mentioned before are all important AND necessary but it's what we allow to shape us that matters - the early church had the same problem:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Let us be a people that, like the early church become Devoted in a world of distraction.

**Talk about prayer teaching series**

## 2. Unity in a world of division

As we once again peer through this window into the early church, we see another element to this growing movement:

They had unity in a world of division

Read verses 44-46

They were together and had a unity.

When we look through a different window - the one looking at our culture today, we see a very different story.

- In politics - we see polarisation and slander and distrust. People arguing on social media.
- In the World Cup, we've seen the media stirring up disunity within the England squad after their quarter-final win.
- Racial injustice
- A lack of trust for authority

We live in a world of division.

The early church also faced these struggles within their culture

- Jews and Samaritans
- Men and women - testifying in court
- Paying taxes to Rome
- Pharisees and Saducees
- Polytheism
- Civil war in the roman empire
- Romans and Jews
- Class divides

One of the things that made the early church stand out was their unity.

Yes, they disagreed, yes they argued and fell out. Even the Apostle Paul had to part ways with Barnabas after a disagreement.

But the thing that united them was their common love for Jesus and their passion to spread the word, often by first meeting a physical need first.

I want to say to you this morning that what, or should I say WHO unites us, is far greater than what divides us.

There was a wonderful unity and diversity within the church.

**SHOW MADDIES BLANKET**

Maybe some of you need to reconcile with someone that's hurt you. You've been holding a grudge for too long.

It's been said that harbouring unforgiveness towards someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Let us be people that forgive, that let go of past hurts and lay them down at the foot of the cross. Let us stitch ourselves together, diverse yet united.

We also see from the early church that their unity sparked a radical generosity within them.

**"They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need"**

Generosity can be such a powerful thing; it can greatly bless people, and it can also bless us as we give of our time and money and skills. To be generous loosens the grip of money on your life and allows you to live with freedom and a deep trust in God.

Earlier this year we had our Young Adults retreat and a number of you gave generously to sponsor people to go, where they can encounter Jesus and devote themselves to him.

Others here are generous with your time - there is an amazing volunteering culture within this church and I want to honour each and every volunteer here because it allows us to do what we do here.

**"God is drawn to the heart of sacrifice"** - Jon Norman

### **Mention rich towards God series**

## 3. Walking the narrow road

As we come towards a close this morning, I to finish with the words of Jesus:

**"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)**

How did the church grow despite the great persecution they faced? The devoted themselves to the narrow road. Jesus tells us to enter through the gate, but he also says there is a road that we must follow, the path of devotion in a world of distraction, of unity in a world of division and of generosity in a world of greed.

The earliest followers of Jesus were called followers of the way. We are all on a journey, some further than others but let us do all we can to walk this road together, united by our love for Jesus and our love for one another.

We must be intentional about this, it doesn't happen by accident. If we do nothing, it's been said that churches go up and in.

Upwards in age  
Inwards in focus

We want to be people and churches that go down and out. Passing on the baton to those younger and being outward in our focus, being missional not just as a church, but as individuals.

Paul did this, he had Timothy, who he taught and disciplined. **Who's your Timothy?**

Is there a neighbour who doesn't know Jesus who you could invite for dinner?

The early church grew because God made it grow, but the people partnered with God in his mission which became a catalyst for the purposes of God in their generation.

## INVITE BAND

Jesus didn't come to seek and save the found, he came to seek and save the lost.

Look around, look at the empty seats around you. Around a year ago we went to 2 services to make space for people. Who could fill the seat next to you?

Maybe a family member  
A friend  
A colleague  
The homeless person you often see  
The single mum living next door  
The muslim family in your community

Maybe there are some of you here today that feel a bit lost, that aren't sure about this.

Jesus came for you. He told a story of a man who had 100 sheep and one went missing, the shepherd went and left the 99 for the 1. You and I are that one. The story concludes like this:

"Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep' I tell you that in the same way there will be more

rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.”

Jesus longs to have you back with the flock. Maybe you want to make that choice today, to come and follow Jesus, to allow him to lead your life like a good shepherd. If that is you, and you want to decide today to follow Jesus, I’m gonna pray this prayer for you now and repeat it in your heart.

Pray for salvation

For those of us who know Jesus already, let us make a choice this morning to walk the narrow road of devotion together as we follow him who went before us.

Lets sing together

## Community Group Questions

1. What do you think are the biggest distractions Christians face today?
2. Josh mentioned that "devotion is having things in the right order." What things can easily take first place in our lives instead of Jesus?
3. What's one practical change you could make this week to create more space for God?
4. "What, or should I say Who unites us, is far greater than what divides" How does remembering Jesus help us disagree well.
5. The early church's unity led to generosity. How have you experienced someone else's generosity making a difference in your life?
6. What makes it difficult to stay on the narrow road in today's culture?
7. The question was asked, **"Who's your Timothy?"**
  - Is there someone you're intentionally encouraging or discipling?
  - If not, who could that be?
8. Finish with a time of prayer in response