

Devoted Disciples

Acts 2:42-43

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Transition from “Me Church”

God worked wonders in our services this past weekend as seven people indicated they repented and received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior! Another woman sent me a note later to say she was saved some time ago but raised her hand because she *“felt it alright to finally let people know that I am saved!”*

On Thursday afternoon I received an email from Edgewood member Molly Shattuck. Molly is married to Scott and they have two children, Brady and Nora. This email was also sent to Sheila Kuriscak, our incredible Children’s Director.

Yesterday morning, Brady (age 6) asked Scott on the way to school if he was a Christian...they had a pretty brief conversation about it, but Brady indicated that he wanted to ask Jesus in his heart before bed. Fast-forward to bedtime...Brady got to his room and (totally unprompted) happily announced that it was time to ask Jesus in his heart!

Scott and I were able to sit down with Brady last night and talk about the “ABC’s” of becoming a Christian and Brady prayed to ask Jesus in his heart. What an amazing experience as a parent! During our conversation, I was blown away at the understanding our six year old had of the Gospel. I want to THANK YOU both for valuing and pouring in to the kids at Edgewood. I am totally convinced that Edgewood played a huge role in Brady’s coming to Christ...and I know Edgewood will play a huge role going forward as Brady grows in his relationship with the Lord.

I put Brady’s name on the wall in the sanctuary...and by the saving grace of God, our prayers for Brady’s salvation have been answered! I can’t thank you [Sheila] enough for your Christ-like leadership. All glory to HIM!

BTW, the main impetus for our *Grow Time* expansion and renovation project is to grow our future so we can reach, teach and equip more children and students with the life-changing message of the gospel!

While it's thrilling when people put their faith in Christ, it's only the beginning because we're also to equip believers to follow Christ. Jesus told us in Matthew 28:19-20 we're not to just make converts, but to ***“make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”***

Last weekend in the “Sermon that Launched the Church” we saw that Peter started with a *hook* and then went to the *Book*. This caused his listeners to take a *look* within and then many *took* the free gift of salvation and were baptized. After repenting of sin and receiving the Savior, we read this in Acts 2:41: ***“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”***

Last week we looked at a large section of Scripture and today we'll slow our pace down and unpack just two verses. Open your Bibles to Acts 2:42-43: ***“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the 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.”***

Here's what I'm hoping we learn today: *The depth of our devotion will determine our awe and our impact.*

Deepening our Devotion

Verse 42 is linked to verse 41 with the word ***“and.”*** ***“They”*** refers to the new believers who ***“devoted themselves...”*** The word ***“devoted”*** has a rich meaning. It refers to ***“staying close, cleaving faithfully and continuing steadfastly.”*** This is in the imperfect tense, meaning it was ongoing, occurring over and over. The New American Standard captures it well: ***“they were continually devoting themselves.”*** One commentator says they ***“attended constantly upon.”*** The idea is to ***“to be steadfastly attentive unto.”***

Here's how the idea of ***“devoted themselves”*** is further developed in other passages.

Acts 1:14: ***“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...”***

Acts 11:23: “When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.”

Hebrews 10:39 helps us see the definition of devotion by showing us what it is not: *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”*

This idea is further developed in Luke 9:51 where we read of Jesus’ determination to head to the cross, *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* The KJV reads, *“He steadfastly set His face.”* Just as there was no stopping Jesus from what He came to accomplish, there was no stopping these followers who were resolutely steadfast in their devotion.

Brothers and sisters, let’s be done with casual Christianity and half-hearted holiness. God longs for us to be completely committed. Notice this is an act of the will because it says they devoted *“themselves.”* It didn’t happen automatically and no one could do it for them. These Christ-followers decided to become sold-out, to give their all to the one who gave His all for them. *They knew the depth of their devotion would determine their awe and their impact.*

4 Facets of a Faithful Church

These first followers were devoted to four disciplines. We could call these the four facets of a faithful church or in our context, the “Quads” of a Biblical Community.

1. Preaching. The first thing these believers committed themselves to was *“the apostle’s teaching.”* The teaching of the apostles first and foremost involved the gospel and the fulfillment of Old Testament passages, similar to what Peter preached earlier in this chapter, when he referenced the Book of Joel and two specific Psalms. The word for teaching refers to *“doctrine”* and is used of the act of teaching and the content itself. In order to grow in grace, these new believers needed to know God’s Word.

We are committed to the primacy of biblical preaching not the promulgation of the prosperity gospel, gimmicky techniques, or motivational pep talks. Acts 6:7 says, *“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”*

During the month of October, my mind always goes to the reformers who held to *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone. Along with them we declare Scripture as our highest and final authority, not tradition or our politically correct culture or our feelings or our political party or the church or the Pope or the Supreme Court. The Bible and *the Bible alone* is the basis of our faith. Psalm 19:7-8: ***“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.”***

Tim Keller puts it like this: *“Contemporary people examine the Bible, looking for things they can’t accept. Christians allow the Bible to examine them, looking for things God can’t accept.”*

A healthy church must have devoted disciples committed to sound doctrine. Again and again, Paul exhorts two younger pastors, Timothy and Titus, to preach the truth of the Scriptures. Listen to 2 Timothy 4:1-4: ***“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”***

We get the Bible into our head by *getting into it*. The Word resides in our heart when we *let it get into us*. The Bible is demonstrated through our hands when we *live it out* obediently. Chuck Swindoll says it like this: *“It’s not how quickly you get through the Bible but how quickly the Bible gets through to you.”*

Because *the depth of our devotion will determine our awe and our impact*, let’s continually devote ourselves to hearing and heeding the preaching of God’s Word.

2. Partnering. The second facet these first followers devoted themselves to was ***“the fellowship.”*** The Greek word *koinonia* refers to a *“common shared partnership.”* This partnership involves participation and is more than just Christians having casual conversations about the news, the weather or about sports (unless it’s the Packers). At its core it’s being committed to the common cause of

gospel proclamation. We see this in Philippians 1:15: ***“Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”***

Note this is ***“the”*** fellowship, meaning it was a specific group of people they were partners with. Drop down to verse 44: ***“And all who believed were together and had all things in common.”*** We read in Acts 5:12: ***“And they were all together in Solomon’s portico.”*** It’s so important to gather together with God’s people – it’s our first purpose as a church.

How many of you know the song, *“Blessed Be the Tie that Binds”*? Here’s the first verse: *“Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”* Let’s be honest. It’s not always easy to be with other believers, is it? For many of us these lyrics are more true to life: *“To dwell above with saints we love, oh, that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, well, that’s another story.”*

On Thursday I posted this on Facebook and added this question: *“What are some things you have learned that have helped you bear with believers who are not easy to be with?”* Over twenty people responded. Here are some of their suggestions.

- *Ask for forgiveness for ill thoughts. And then smile.*
- *They are in need of the good news of Jesus just as much as I am so I seek to speak the gospel into their lives and bear with them as Jesus transforms both of us.*
- *I am broken, they are broken and Jesus can fix us both.*
- *Jokingly identify them as “EGR” – extra grace required. And as much as they are difficult...how many times have I come across that way to others...let alone to Jesus.*
- *If [Christ] can love and forgive me, isn’t that the least I can do? I’m flawed and broken too.*
- *I find it best to learn to listen first, and then discern where the other person is coming from before speaking.*
- *Be a listener. You don’t always know what they are going through.*
- *Often my impatience with others is really a subtle expression of idolatry. For, if I expect them to have perfect knowledge of what is right which in turn leads to right choices all of the time, then have I not ascribed unto them perfections which belong to God alone? And in doing so, I have made an idol out of them.*

- *Everyone has a story: what are they dealing with in life that may affect their behavior/attitude/disposition? How can I identify with them? What do we have in common? Give grace for what irritates/annoys you (remember that you'll need that from others for your own faults). How can you brighten their day, show you care, or help them feel included? Did they walk away feeling positive about the interaction with you?*

Here's what I came away with after reading these responses: there are a lot of deeply devoted disciples at Edgewood!

Incidentally, the word "**saints**" (referring to set-apart believers) is in the plural 67 times in the New Testament. It's used in the singular only once and even then it refers to a plurality – "**greet every saint**" (Philippians 4:21).

Related to this, there are 59 "**one another**" commands in the New Testament (love one another, serve one another, bear with one another, etc.). One-third of these have to do with unity. Brothers and sisters, the only way to obey these "one-another" statements is to be in community with one another. One pastor said it like this: "*We cannot be devoted to the Head, who is Christ, and at the same time cut ourselves off from the body, His church.*"

Beth and I attended Celebrate Recovery a week ago. CR is a Christ-centered sanctification process that equips those struggling with hurts, habits and hang-ups. One of the most moving parts of the night is when everyone forms a circle right here in this room and holds hands while singing the song, "*Sanctuary.*" Here's the first line: "*Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. And with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary, oh for you.*" It's a beautiful picture of how we need the help of Christ and of each other to live pure and holy lives.

I love asking people at Edgewood how they know each other. This past Saturday I saw two newer families talking after the service. It looked like they were good friends. When I asked how they knew each other they said they met at Edgewood just a couple months ago. I smiled as they walked slowly out to the parking lot, continuing their conversation. Another long-time EBC couple gathered with God's people last Saturday night and again on Sunday morning. When I teased her about coming back for seconds, she smiled and said, "*We're headed to Florida soon and will miss everyone. We thought if we came Saturday and Sunday we'd get to say goodbye to as many as we could.*"

Are you continuously devoted to *the* fellowship here? Maybe it's time for you to become a member. 1 Peter 2:17 challenges us to ***“love the brotherhood.”***

Hebrews 10:25 provides a warning: ***“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”***

Tertullian recounts when the Roman government became suspicious of the early church, they sent spies into their services. The spies came back and reported that Christians were very unusual – they did not have idols but instead worshipped One by the name of Jesus, who was absent. The spies added, *“How those Christians love each other; how they have fellowship (koinonia) one with the other!”*

The depth of our devotion will determine our awe and our impact. We devote ourselves to preaching and to partnering.

3. Partaking. The third facet of a faithful church is partaking through ***“the breaking of bread.”*** This phrase has a dual meaning. First, it often referred to the simple act of eating a meal together. We see this in Acts 27:35-36: ***“And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.”*** Not only did Paul partake of this meal, he shared it with others on the ship.

I appreciate this insight from another pastor: *“The partaking of a meal was perhaps the most intimate form of fellowship one could have with fellow believers. In the ancient near eastern world, when a guest was invited to a meal with his host, it was incumbent on the host to provide protection for this guest.”* This helps explain Psalm 23:5: ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*** To have a meal with a brother or sister is to say you are at peace with them.

This reminds me of the young boy who was messing around at the dinner table. After being warned several times, his parents finally told him he had to eat by himself at a tiny table in the corner. When he sat down his dad reminded him to pray before he ate. So he closed his eyes and prayed, *“Bless this food that I eat in the presence of my enemies.”*

The second use of this phrase is rooted in the words given by Jesus when He celebrated the memorial meal with His followers in Luke 22:19: ***“And he took***

*bread, and when he had given thanks, he **broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’**”*

Communion reminds us of our common union in Christ. We do it because Christ commanded it, because it reinforces the truth of the gospel and it preserves unity in the church. The church at Corinth was filled with conflict and division, so Paul writes these words in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: ***“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”***

In the early church it was common for believers to eat an ordinary meal together and follow it up with communion. Commentators are divided on what this passage is referring to but I lean toward it being a simple shared meal. I get this from Acts 2:46: ***“...breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”***

We’ve been learning in our BLESS strategy that there is power in sharing a meal or a cup of coffee with someone who doesn’t know Christ yet.

- Begin with prayer**
- Listen attentively**
- Eat together**
- Serve by meeting a practical need**
- Share the gospel**

Has it be awhile since you’ve opened your home and shared a meal with someone? Maybe you could connect with someone after the service and make plans to get together this week. When we move to our new Sunday schedule in four weeks, we will have more time between services and Growth Groups so we can connect with each other.

The depth of our devotion will determine our awe and our impact. Let’s devote ourselves to preaching, to partnering, and to partaking.

4. Praying. The final facet is a devotion to ***“the prayers.”*** This literally reads, ***“They were continually devoting themselves to the prayers”*** and refers to set times of corporate prayer, along with various types of prayer. In the early days, believers persisted in the observance of stipulated times of Jewish prayer at the temple. One

example is found in Acts 3:1: ***“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”*** Prayer took place privately and publicly, in homes and at the temple.

Most of us don't need more preaching on prayer, we need more ways to practice prayer. Here are some practical ways to incorporate prayer into your life.

- Pray every day before reading the Bible, pray while you're reading and pray when you're finished.
- Pray while you're driving (Beth prays for me when I'm driving).
- Pray for your neighbors every time you come back to your neighborhood or dorm room.
- Go on prayer walks. BTW, two Augie students were saved last weekend. I think this is related to the prayer walk the EBC pastoral team did on the Augie campus last month. We're going to have an opportunity to do prayer walks in our facility the week before our first services in the renovated worship center – more details to follow.
- Pray before and during sermons (but don't hold your breath for five-minute messages).
- When at a restaurant, offer to pray for your waiter or waitress.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer and use it as outline for prayer.
- Use the CHAT acrostic as a way to pray – confess, honor, ask and thank.

I've been meditating on Acts 4:31 and long for this to be a regular occurrence here at Edgewood: ***“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”***

The depth of our devotion will determine our awe and our impact. Let's devote ourselves to preaching, to partnering, to partaking and to praying.

Awakening our Awe

When we continuously devote ourselves to these four facets of faithfulness, God will awaken our awe of Him. This was not accidental but came about because of their intentional devotion. When we do what God wants, we get to see Him do what He wants, which leads us to worship!

Look at verse 43: ***“And awe came upon every soul...”*** The word ***“awe”*** refers to ***“reverential fear, respect and honor.”*** The tense of this phrase helps us see it was not a one-time event because awe ***“kept on coming.”*** Observe this sense of awe was not limited to a few but came upon ***“every soul.”***

We see an awakening of awe throughout the Book of Acts.

Acts 3:10: “And they were filled with wonder and amazement...”

Acts 3:11: “...All the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them...”

Acts 5:11: “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”

Acts 19:17: “And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.”

Awe was a common reaction to the worth and work of Jesus in the gospels as well. Listen carefully to Luke 5:26: ***“And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’”***

This makes me wonder, where’s the sense of awe and astonishment in my life today? The search for an answer led me to reread a portion of Paul David Tripp’s book, *“Awe”* this week.

*“Where you look for awe will shape the direction of your life. It just makes sense that your source of awe will control you, your decisions, and the course your story takes. If you live in awe of material things, for example, you will spend lots of money acquiring a pile of material stuff; to afford your ever-increasing pile, you will have to work a lot. You will also tend to attach your identity and inner sense of peace to material possessions, spending way too much time collecting and maintaining them. If material things are your awe source, you will neglect other things of value and won’t ever be fully satisfied, because these material things just don’t have the capacity to satisfy your awe-longing heart... *Misplaced awe keeps us perennially dissatisfied. Perhaps in ways that you have never come close to considering, your dissatisfaction is an awe problem.*”*

As I thought about how God is awakening a sense of awe at Edgewood, my mind went back to an article I referenced several years ago called, [“Is Your Church a Cruise Ship or Aircraft Carrier?”](#) Here are a few excerpts.

People who attend “cruise ship churches,” much like cruise ship passengers, often come to be entertained and catered to by the staff. Very little is expected of these church attendees. In fact, they tend to rate the quality of their experience – the music, the sermon and the way it made them feel – much like cruise ship passengers rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their trip.

Cruise ship churches tend to be internally focused on the needs of their regularly attending members. The main goal in these churches, as on a cruise ship, is to keep the “customer” happy and the complaints to a minimum. Leaders in a cruise ship church focus on the existing members rather than pursuing those far from God or encouraging others to do so. Very little of a church’s calendar, training or communication is spent on activities to reach the lost or help those in need outside the church.

There are, however, churches that are more like aircraft carriers. These churches are designed to empower all members to find their God-given purpose in life, to equip them and to send them on missions into the world to reach and serve those who don’t know Jesus, much like the crew of an aircraft carrier is all about launching military planes and equipping them well to carry out successful missions.

Did you know an aircraft carrier is the same size as many cruise ships, housing thousands of people? But what distinguishes an aircraft carrier ship isn’t its size; it’s the efficiency on the flight deck. The crew of an aircraft carrier can launch a plane every 25 seconds—all in a fraction of the space of a typical landing strip. The mission pervades every aspect of the ship. From the pilot to the person who restocks the ship’s vending machines, everyone on a carrier knows his or her particular role and how it supports the mission—to equip, prepare, launch and receive aircraft back from their crucial assignments.

An “aircraft carrier church” has a clear mission that stems from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Everyone in the church knows why their church exists and plays a role in the mission.

I am so glad Edgewood is an “aircraft carrier church!” Instead of meandering, you are living on mission! Instead of just living for pleasure you are focused on your

God-given purpose. Instead of just cruising through life, you are committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as you commit to gather, grow, give and go with the gospel.

EBC is not a “me” church. We are a “we” church dedicated to “He” alone!

It was D.L. Moody who said, “*The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God’s help, I aim to be that man.*” Do you want to be that man? Do you want to be that woman? Will you be that young adult or that boy or girl?

Brothers and sisters, let’s be continuously devoted to *preaching, partnering, partaking* and *praying*. When we are, God will awaken within us a sense of holy awe.

We’re going to end by focusing on the awe of God as we sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy.”