



The early church. Most of us long for the electricity and excitement that must have pervaded the atmosphere as the early believers were shaped into a New Community by God's Spirit under the watchful eye of the Apostles. In case we become overly nostalgic, however, Luke, along with the rest of the New Testament authors, lets us know it was messy—every bit as messy as church as we experience it, if not more so.

But in spite of the mess, God was clearly active in the lives of those first believers as they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

God is always sovereign in how he works in and through his people, but as the writer of Chronicles observed nearly a thousand years before the church was born, "...the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9)."

Perhaps the best way to recover the electricity and excitement of the early church is to recover the devotion of the early church (and to get over the idea that electricity and excitement are the hallmarks of our devotion to Christ).

Acts 2:36-47 describes how the first believers received the gospel and allowed it to shape their lives.

RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL (vv. 36-41)

1. How does Peter summarize the gospel in these verses?
2. How does he call on his hearers to respond to the gospel?
3. What does it mean to “repent?”
4. Why should repentance always be at the heart of our response to the gospel?
5. What two gifts do we receive when we come to Christ?
6. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our ongoing response to the gospel?

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL (v. 42)

Luke gives us the essentials of living in light of the gospel in a memorable sentence, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship; to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” It is almost as if Luke were saying, “get these right and everything else will fall into place.”

1. Luke captures the importance of a dynamic relationship with God with the phrase, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching... and prayer.” What are the different ways we can devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching? Why are these essential if we are going to experience ongoing gospel transformation? What role should prayer play?
2. Luke captures the importance of dynamic relationships with other believers in the phrase, “they devoted themselves ...to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread (table fellowship)” How do we demonstrate a genuine devotion to “the fellowship?” What role does breaking bread (or table fellowship) play? Why are these essential if we are going to experience ongoing gospel transformation?
3. The word “devote” can also be translated “persevere in.” It is almost as if Luke is looking back at the early days of the church through the lens of a later time when the new wore off and commitment did not come quite as easy. How do we “persevere” in the gospel when the initial excitement of knowing Christ gives way to the daily grind of following Him in the ordinary events of everyday life?

THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL (vv. 43-47)

Verses 43-47 describes some of the initial experiences of the believers in Jerusalem as they continued to live in light of the gospel.

1. Verse 43 describes the miracles done by the Apostles. Why do you think it is important for Luke to remind us that the miracles, for the most part, were performed by the Apostles? What happens when we have an unhealthy fixation on miracles? What happens when we discount the miraculous altogether? How would you describe a healthy attitude toward the miraculous?
2. Verses 44 and 45 describes the unselfish lifestyle believers experienced within the community of faith. Many biblical scholars note that an unselfish lifestyle is one of the leading indicators that the gospel has taken root in our lives. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. How would you describe our overall attitude toward possessions? What might an unselfish lifestyle look like in our context?
3. Verses 46 and 47 describes the impact the first Christians had on the city at large. How would you describe the link between “enjoying the favor of all the people” and “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved?” Why is it important for us to remember it was “the Lord [who] added to their number?”

APPLICATION

1. As you study this passage what are some of the things that you would like to see happen in our fellowship as a result of our response to the gospel?
2. What are some of the things you would like to see happen in your life as a result of your response to the gospel?
3. What do you think is the best step you can take toward helping our fellowship become everything God intends it to be?