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Acts 2:42-47 “How to Grow as a Christian”

Intro. I would like to ask you a question. Have you been growing as a Christian? If you were to look at your life today compared to a year ago would you say that you are more Christlike today? Are you growing in love and faith? Are you experiencing more victory over temptation? Or have you become stagnant in your growth? Or have you even become what the Bible calls a backslider? (Prov. 14:14; Isa. 57:17; Jer. 3:6, etc.)

In the physical realm growth takes place from birth until we become adults, and even then most of us continue to grow in size! Have you seen how rapidly some children and youth have grown? Well I believe that God intends that born-again believers should grow spiritually.

After Peter preached on the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were saved and baptized. That was not the culmination of the work of God in their lives. That was only the beginning. Getting saved and receiving eternal life is not all there is to being a Christian. Jesus compared salvation to being born again. The new birth is only the initial salvation experience. Following the new birth there must be growth. Peter said in 2 Peter 3:18, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” It is God’s will that we not only trust in His Son for salvation, but that we also grow in our Christian faith. These Jerusalem church saw to it that these new believers were nurtured in their new faith and grow as Christians. Consequently, the Jerusalem church grew to be a great church.

So this morning I am going to deal with the subject of, “How to grow as a Christian.” My Scripture text this morning is one of the best for dealing with the subject.

Now, there are two sides of Christian growth: we have a part and God has a part. This is expressed well in Phil. 2:12b-13, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (our part), for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (God’s part). This is similar to the physical world. God has so designed the human body that a child will grow healthy as long as they do their part, which includes eating right and exercise. Yet growth is also a miracle of God. Even so, if you will do your part to grow spiritually God will enable you to grow and mature in your Christian faith. So let’s look at the first requirement for spiritual growth:

I. BE STEADFAST TO THE LORD

In v.42 we read, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine....” Two times in these verses the word translated “continued steadfastly” (*proskartereo*) is used. It contains root words which mean “strong unto,” and came to mean steadfast continuance, faithful adherence, to be devoted to something. The present tense reinforces that truth. The same word is used in v.46, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple....” So one characteristic of these believers was that they continued in the Christian faith, and they were dedicated to the spiritual disciplines that were required for Christian growth. They were not the kind that would profess Christ as Savior, be baptized, and then walk out of the church never or rarely to appear again. Instead, they were steadfast. This is largely a matter of making the spiritual disciplines that we will talk about today a priority in your life. If your Christian growth takes back seat to other things, you will not grow.

Also, we see from these verses that we must not allow our feelings to control our lives. There will be times when you will not *feel* like coming to church, or reading your Bible, or praying, or serving God. But you must choose to stick to it, and keep doing these things. Then, you will find that positive feelings will follow. Just keep at it, and these things will become a good habit in your life. So I challenge you to become a steadfast Christian.

Another requirement for spiritual growth is this:

II. BE INSTRUCTED IN GOD'S WORD

The word translated "doctrine" in v.42 simply means "teaching." Considering that Jesus spent so much time teaching both the crowds and His disciples, it is not surprising that teaching had an important place in the early church. After all, the foundation to Christian growth is acquiring a good understanding of the Word of God. Peter said, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). One evidence of true conversion is the desire of the individual to be instructed in the Word of God. It is as natural for a true Christian to want to learn the Word of God as it is for a baby to want milk. So if you profess to accept Christ as Savior, see that you are often found where the Word of God is taught and preached.

The early church had some great preachers and teachers, didn't they? They had the apostles themselves as their teachers. They had learned from the Master Himself for 3 years. They were also anointed by the Holy Spirit. But we are not really at much of a disadvantage. We have the teaching of the apostles in the Bible. We have the same Holy Spirit. We have gifted teachers in our own church.

Have you thought about what was the content of their teaching? The "apostles' doctrine" must have included the high points of Jesus' life and work; study of the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus; explanations of the nature of salvation; and His ethical teaching, such as is found in the Sermon on the Mount. After all, the commandments of Jesus must have been given special prominence according to our Lord's own Great Commission (Mt. 28:20), especially the commandment to love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17).

Let me tell you why Bible study is so important. Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...." We all need instruction in the Word of God to properly transform the way we think, because our thoughts will determine our actions and our attitudes. You will never be a strong Christian unless you are devoted to the apostles' teaching. You may produce plenty of emotional Christianity, and perhaps a lot of busy work without Bible doctrine, but you will not grow strong without learning the doctrines of the Christian faith. There are few spiritual disciplines as important as learning the Word of God, for this is foundational to just about everything else.

Are you devoted to the teachings of the Word of God? Do you attend Sunday School or some other weekly Bible study? Do you come to any of our other Bible teaching opportunities, including Sunday and Wednesday evenings? Are you devoted enough to read your Bible on a daily basis?

There is another requirement of spiritual growth, and that is to:

III. ENGAGE IN FELLOWSHIP

This Jerusalem church must have been taught the importance of fellowship. The word translated “fellowship” in v.42 is *koinonia*,¹ which also means, “association, close relationship; joint participation, sharing.” A newborn baby needs close association with loving parents to develop properly. Even so as a Christian you need to maintain a close, loving relationship with God’s people. You need the support of other believers. You cannot stand alone. We need each other’s love, and we need to bear one another’s burdens. If the only fellowship you have is with the unbelievers of this world, you will not grow. Paul said, “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor. 15:33). Young people, stick close to your Christian friends. Stay in fellowship with your church youth group.

Now what do you think of when you hear the words “Christian fellowship”? We may think primarily of eating together. That is one form of Christian fellowship, but there is certainly more to it than that. So note from our text the different aspects of Christian fellowship that we should engage in:

A. Fellowship Also in Homes – In v.46 we see that they met together in the temple. But it also says in that verse that they were “breaking bread from house to house.” We need to have fellowship in other places besides the church building, in small groups. Fellowship in fun activities is good. We should have fellowship meals at homes and in other places. In fact, the phrase “breaking of bread” in v.42 is found in just one other place in the New Testament, and that is Luke 24:35, where it refers back to the time when Jesus shared a meal with the Emmaus disciples. I think it’s great when Sunday School classes meet at someone’s home or at a restaurant for fellowship.

Let me tell you why you should experience Christian fellowship in homes. Notice in the last of v.42 that as they were “breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...” They experience gladness and joy, and so will you. Furthermore, there fellowship was characterized by “simplicity of heart.” This means that there is no pretense and performance in the way they behaved. Informal fellowship takes away pretense and helps people to be themselves. This in turn opens the door to deep sharing. I also suspect that much of the evangelism was taking place in these home groups. The last of v.47 says, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The home is also a suitable place for evangelism because non-Christians who feel uneasy about entering a church may feel more at home in a friend’s house.

Do you ever invite Christian friends over for fellowship in your home? When someone invites you over, do you reciprocate? Hospitality is listed as one of the Christian virtues (Rom. 12:13).

This is one reason our Home Group Team is working and planning to establish home groups in our church. You will hear more about this in the coming weeks.

Notice other ways that we are to fellowship:

B. Fellowship with Unity of Purpose – We read in v.44, “Now all who believed were together...” Literally, it is “upon the same,” a phrase used several times in the New Testament for gathering together, or coming together. But in those cases it denotes a gathering with a unified purpose (Mt. 22:34; Acts 3:1). All believers were together in those early days. There was no sectarianism, no strife, no denominationalism. Note in that verse that foundational for such unity is

¹ This is the only time it appears in Luke's writings.

a common faith in Christ and salvation experience. I can go anywhere in the world, but if I meet up with a true believer, I have almost instant fellowship with that person.

Now fellowship *in the Lord* is closer to what the Bible means by true Christian fellowship. It is fine to eat with a fellow believer. It is fine to go places with other believers. There's nothing wrong with getting together and talking about our sports teams. But the deepest fellowship takes place when you are united in a desire to pray together, talk about the Lord, and minister to one another in the name of Jesus.

C. Fellowship in Christian Service – In Phil. 1:5 Paul thanked the Philippian believers, “for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” They labored with Paul in sharing the gospel, and once he departed from them, they continued to support the gospel through their missionary offerings. They say that 20% of the church members do 80% of the work in the typical church. But that is not good fellowship in the gospel. That is not joint participation in the work of the Lord. Experience the fellowship of working side by side with God's people doing God's work.

When Todd shared his testimony recently, he mentioned the fact that when his grass cutting team finishes their assignment, they stay a while and fellowship together. Serving with other believers is a great source of fellowship. So when you are asked to serve, look upon it as a fellowship opportunity!

D. Fellowship of Possessions – In vv.44b-45 we read that they “had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” This togetherness prompted the result stated, namely, that they “had all things in common.” Note that the word “common” (*koinos*) has the same root as the word translated “fellowship” (*koinonia*).

Now what we read about here was partly due to a unique situation. On the Day of Pentecost people were present from many nations, and many of the new believers from those nations decided to remain in Jerusalem. They had not brought sufficient funds to supply their needs over an extended time. So the early church had such a deep fellowship that they even shared their possessions with one another. The sharing of possession among believers did not continue to such a great extent for very long. But the fundamental principle should continue today. The well-being of others should take precedence over selfish concerns.

I want to share a few thoughts about this fellowship of possessions. First, it was voluntary, not imposed by commandment. Later in chapter 5, v.4 Peter recognized Ananias' right to do as he chose with his property. The Bible affirms property rights. Then, the last of v.45 says that they gave “as anyone had need.” We are never commanded to share to fulfill people's *wants*, but we to share to meet our brother's *needs*. This was a loving work of meeting needs as they developed. I say this because all of the verbs in vv.44 & 45 are in the imperfect tense, which describes ongoing action in the past. Finally, I believe their fellowship of possessions was sacrificial. Many sold much of what they owned, keeping very little.

Our church had a recent example of making sacrifices to help one of our members. Little Christian Pontious desperately needed a liver transplant. The people of our church contributed over \$14,000 toward his medical expenses to make this possible. Today he is in our nursery and doing well!

How about you today? Have you experienced this kind of fellowship? Rom. 12:13 says that we are to be “distributing to the needs of the saints...” If someone in our church had a significant need, how much would you be willing to sacrifice in order to help them out? Our attitude should

be, “If you need a meal, come to my house. If you need a roof over your head, come to my house. If you need a ride somewhere, call on me.” That kind of sharing and that kind of selflessness ought to continue to describe believers.

Another way we grow in our faith is this:

IV. PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP

In the last of v.42 we see that they also devoted themselves to the “breaking of bread.” There is little doubt that the observance of the Lord’s Supper is at least included in what the phrase means.² After all, “breaking of bread” has a definite article. The Lord’s Supper was one form of worship, remembering Jesus and what He did for us. It was probably associated with the common meal, as v.46 seems to indicate, as well as I Cor. 11:20-34.

The fact that the early church engaged in worship is also seen in vv.46-47, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple...” they were “praising God” So I want you to know that worship is another important aspect of Christian growth. The Bible says in Heb. 10:25 that we are not to be “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another....” You cannot grow as a Christian apart from Christian worship.

Now as we think about worship, I want to share with you a few thoughts about worship from our text. Notice:

A. The Places of Worship – It is clear in v.46 that they worshipped both publicly in the temple and privately in homes. First, they worshiped publicly. By frequenting “the temple” and mingling with other worshipers, the believers made it plain that they were not seeking a break with the religion of the Jews. They saw themselves as a fulfillment of Judaism. So they continued to worship in the temple in those early months of the Christian church. Judaism had several sects with their special emphases, and all were free to use the Temple. There were covered colonnade porches surrounding the temple courts, and various groups would meet there for prayer, teaching, and so forth. No doubt Christians would welcome guests to come and hear what they had to say. If the Christians had withdrawn from the Temple, the task of reaching their Jewish brethren with the Gospel would have been rendered difficult, if not impossible.

Of course, we are not to make direct application. We are not to worship in an Old Testament style temple, as Jesus Himself indicated in John 4:21-24. For us, the application is that we should worship publicly. Our worship is indeed public. Often our church sign invites the public to worship with us. We are to welcome visitors.

Of course, v.46 also indicates that they met in homes to worship through prayer, singing, and taking communion. They not only met in large groups, but also in smaller groups in private homes. With 12 apostles, I can imagine that the church met in at least 12 of the larger homes of Jerusalem for small group fellowship and worship.

B. The Frequency of Worship - Note in v.46 that they worshiped daily. They devoted themselves to consistent, public worship. Acts 19:9 says that the apostle Paul was “reasoning daily

² The phrase used probably became a kind of shorthand way of speaking of the Lord’s Supper. Acts 20:7 says, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ... spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:16, “... The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” Also, the other three features mentioned in v.42—teaching, fellowship, and prayer—are spiritual activities, which suggests that this fourth one—the breaking of bread—is also a spiritual activity (i.e., the Lord’s Supper).

in the school of Tyrannus.” We have enough trouble getting people to worship one service/week, but the early church met daily. Now just because the Bible *describes* a pattern of behavior, that does not mean that it is *prescribing* such behavior. Meeting on the first day of the week for worship became normative in the early church (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Yet there is something special about worshiping the Lord several days in a row, at least periodically. Our children experience that at Vacation Bible School. Our youth experience the value of daily worship at youth camp. Soon we hope to schedule a revival sometime this year. Such multi-day meetings make people more open to a work of God in their lives.

How often do you participate in public worship? When you are excited about Jesus Christ, you will probably want to gather for worship, fellowship, and Bible study more than just once a week.

Finally, another important means of spiritual growth is to:

V. PARTICIPATE IN PRAYERS

We see this in the last of v.42, where it says they, “continued steadfastly ... in prayers.” The first church was a praying church. The reference to “prayers” probably refers to seasons of prayer in which believers alone participated, whether in homes or in one of the areas of the temple (1:24; 4:24; 12:12). However, the definite article in the original language, “the prayers”, may give support to a reference to one of the regular times of prayer for Jews in the temple, as we see in 3:1. But these prayers were in Jesus’ name.

We should see from their example that you can’t grow as a Christian without prayer. You need daily fellowship with God in prayer. If you are going to develop a relationship with someone, you need to spend time with them. Through prayer we experience fellowship with God. So give God your attention through prayer on a regular basis. You need to express your dependence up God in prayer.

Are you a praying Christian? You not only need private prayer, but you also need to engage in public prayer meetings. Do you participate in the opportunities for prayer that we provide? We pray in our S.S. classes. We have prayer meeting on Wednesday night. In my opinion the best time of prayer we have each week is at our Friday morning prayer service. We have a group of men that are truly devoted to that prayer meeting. It is so important that you pray with other believers. If and when we start on groups prayer will certainly be included in what we do. Christians will grow, and the church will grow only through prayer. God works through the prayers of His people.

Conclusion: Would you examine your life in light of the spiritual disciplines that I have talked about today? Are you doing all five? Do you need to recommit your life to one or more of these spiritual disciplines? Remember, God will do His part to enable you to grow as a Christian, but you must do your part as well.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 119-124 only; Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 1977); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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