

Back to the Future

By

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“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:42-47

It’s inevitable. When a man begins to abide in Christ, and enter into that deep fellowship with Holy Spirit and begins to see this life in Christ manifested into those around him, he begins to look at Church differently. He may even begin to feel like it is a mundane experience or even insignificant. Going into the sanctuary and participating in worship and then hearing a 20 minute sermon may pale by comparison to the richness of what this man has experienced in a Journey group or even in his own abiding time with the Lord. So, what’s the answer? George Barna, famous author and founder of The Barna Group, a research group which specialized in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans, wrote a book in 2005, called “Revolution”, where he asserted that there is a growing number of Christians who are on fire for the Lord and treasure His Word, but do not attend church.

I would say that leaving the Church is NOT THE ANSWER! Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us, *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

I believe in order to find the answer for the Future, we must look Back. A few years ago, I discovered Acts 2:42-47, and I believed it answered a question I had been asking ever since The Journey radically changed my life. The question was, “What is Church supposed to look like?” As I read this account of the early believers in the First Church group, it resonated with the longing of my heart and it confirmed something I had tasted in my fellowship with men in a Journey Group. Below are a few key components of Church which I believe God is trying to urge us back toward:

The Word is Central:

"They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching." The Apostles had spent lots of time with Jesus, Who was always teaching them God's Word and writing God's Word with his life. They knew what we have discovered. God's Word is transformative. God's Word must be taught without reservation. I've sat in services in the past where God's Word was barely mentioned, and I've sat in others where the focus was more on pop culture than on the Word. In the Old Testament, they would gather the people and they would read God's Word aloud for all the people to hear. John 1:1 tells us *"The Word was with God and the Word was God."* The Word is powerful and timeless and It has the ability to cut a man to the heart by Itself, without any fancy stories or flowery speech. We must guide our fellow believers to God's Word and encourage them to feed on it themselves throughout the week.

The Fellowship is Essential:

We read that these early believers met together EVERY DAY. They met at the Temple (Church) and they also met in each other's homes. They met to praise God together and they experienced a joy and friendship. They were so close that they took care of each other like family. It says they would sell their possessions to take care of someone else's need. Amazing! It reminds me of Psalm 133:1: *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"* I've often thought of how many tangible needs exist among our people as we sit together in church and how many people are sitting in the midst who have the ability to meet those needs. It seems to me that the these early believers understood this dynamic, and they did something about it.

The Breaking of Bread:

I have no doubt that element of the Church is talking about the Lord's Supper. Paul, in his teaching about this practice in 1 Corinthians 11:26, says, *"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."* This is a very significant spiritual practice, one of the last teachings of Jesus before He went to the cross. It is easy to see why some church traditions practice this at EVERY gathering. If you have experienced the Lord's supper with a close group of believers, you know how powerful and profound this is. It is a celebration and a remembrance of our Lord, one which needs to be before us regularly. That's what the early believers did. I also believe they shared meals together. I've often heard it said that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Well, just as Jesus gathered His close friends for a meal,

something magical takes place when we take time to sit around a dining room table together.

Prayer:

In today's microwave culture, we underestimate the power of prayer. We are on such tight schedules, with no margin in our lives, so the idea of sitting still before the Lord in prayer is lost on most believers. Paul teaches in *1 Thessalonians 5:17* that we should "*pray continually*", which we should, but there is something extra special when we pray together with other believers. Jesus Himself confirmed this when He said, "*Where two or three gather in My Name, there I am with them.*" *Matthew 18:20*. This is a challenge today, even in our churches, where we try to pack so much into an hour that Prayer becomes a small part of it. We may take 15-20 minutes for Praise music, but we only take 2 or 3 minutes for Prayer. The early believers made Prayer a priority.

Results:

Two amazing things resulted in this Early Church:

#1. Wonders and Miracles were witnessed! When you are a group of believers, living in unity, sharing God's Word, open to the Holy Spirit, remembering and honoring Christ, you will see miracles. You will see hearts changed, marriages healed, spiritual gifts manifested, physical healings, bondage broken, lives transformed.

#2. Daily, people will be saved. This kind of joyful fellowship is contagious. In this lost, hurting, confused world in which we live, people are looking for answers. They are longing for the abundant life that only Christ can give. We, as believers, are to be Christ to those around us. As we live in community and open our homes to others, we will begin to impact those in our sphere of influence.

Conclusion:

When I read Acts 2:42-47 and pondered it in my heart, I realized that I had seen this lived out in my Journey Group. I have seen all these elements of Church working together throughout a 9-month Journey experience. I don't believe the answer for today's Church is to "revolt" as Barna may suggest. I believe we as Influencers should influence our individual churches toward what Christ desires. I believe that as we continue to take men and couples in our churches through The Journey, the Spirit will begin to multiply Himself and His influence throughout our churches. Our churches will become what every pastor desires. We will become The Church that Christ died for and for whom He is coming back.