

Time of Grace Ministry
Roots and Fruit: Get a Group
Acts 2:42
September 8, 2019

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We can go on tangents and we can have fun - I'm not saying not that - but we have to actually commit our minds to hold on and get in the habit of wrestling with the Bible and not just sharing our own thoughts and opinions. And I really want you to be committed with that in your group because I think group is the perfect place to learn about Jesus.

You know, I got to watch a four minute YouTube video the other day. You know what I learned? Pineapple doesn't just pop out of the ground. It's a process. According to the video I watched from Dole - you know, the kings of pineapple growing - it takes about 13 to 16 months from start to finish, from the first planting of the seed and the root, until the fresh pineapple, the good fruit that so many of us love and enjoy.

I want to tell you that today not just to persuade you in the gospel of fresh pineapple but I'm thinking about your character and your faith and your relationship with God today. If you've started following Jesus for any amount of time, you know that this great strong faith isn't just something you pray for and like there it is. It's a process. And it's a patient process but it's a predictable one. Like, if you plant the right seeds and have the right roots, God will bring back some incredible fruit.

There's this great passage in the New Testament in Galatians 5 where the apostle Paul says the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance or patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And I want you to look at that passage for just a second and think about what your life is like when you have lots of that fruit and what life is like when you don't. Like if your church or your family or your relationship or your school or your workplace has tons of that compared to when it has none of that. And you start to realize why this fruit is so good.

But here's the thing about that fruit: It's fruit. And the apostle Paul picked that word intentionally. He didn't say the "miracle of the spirit," like you would pray and there it would be in the morning. He didn't say "the result of prayer," like you would say "in Jesus' name," and you open your eyes and there it would be. He said "the fruit." Because just like a pineapple needs some time to grow, the Holy Spirit needs some time to work in your heart until he produces an abundance of this kind of fruit. And that's why if you come here to our church or you listen to my teaching for more than one or two weeks, you'll hear us talk all the time not just about good fruit but about good roots. Some of you are going to recognize this picture. We often talk about the five roots that produce that incredible fruit; what we call "gather, group, grow, give, and go." Nod your head if you've heard me talk about that before. Yeah, lots of you. By gather, we mean we gather together in church week after week. By group, we mean we do

life together with other Christians. By grow, we mean we're trying to get into the Bible every day at home. By give, we're giving generously like Jesus, our time and our talents. And by go, we mean we're on a mission to tell people who don't have roots so they can enjoy the fruits of the spirit, too.

When we talk about gather and group and grow and give and go, we are not saying that if you don't give generously or you don't read the Bible on a Tuesday night or sign up for a group that your faith will die and you won't end up with God in heaven. We are saying, though, that you will miss out on some of the best things that God wants to give - more fruit, more love, more joy, and more peace. And so, if your heart is anything like mine and you want more joy and you want your marriage to have more love and you want to have more peace and trust in your heavenly Father, then there's a simple answer. Plant roots. And so for the next few weeks, I want to talk to you not just about what the roots are but why they are so good; why they are worth your time and energy, effort, and planning. Because it might not happen today or tomorrow - like a good pineapple, it might take a year, maybe a little more - but in time, God will keep his promise and your roots will produce incredible fruit.

So today, let me start with that second one, the group root. Now, group might be an official life group like we offer at our church or it might just be those small group of Christians that you do life together with and carry out the "one another" passages of the Bible. And if I'm going to be upfront with what the whole purpose of my message is today, it would be the first fill in the blank in your bulletin; that if you want fruit, then God's encouragement to you is get a group. Get connected to people who love Jesus, who love you, and fruit will come.

There are so many passages in the Bible that I could turn to to make that point but today I just want to focus on a single passage - one verse, that's all we're going to cover - Acts 2:42. That passage is actually so famous in the Scriptures that there's some churches I've heard of in the United States that are named "242 Church," because they want their entire culture of their church to be based on that single passage. So maybe I can take you back about 2,000 years to when that passage was written. If you know much of the story of the New Testament, Jesus comes as the Son of God, he dies on the cross for our sins, he rises from the dead, he stays and preaches and proves that he's risen from the dead for about 40 days and then he returns up to heaven and I want to take you to about a week after Jesus returned to heaven; 10 days after his ascension. A day when one of his friends, the apostle Peter, preached this powerful message and the Holy Spirit went wild. He changed 3,000 people's hearts on a single day. He added 3,000 members to the holy Christian church. They were baptized, they became followers of Jesus, and they looked at each other and they said, "Well, now what?" And Acts 2:42 says exactly what the "what" was.

Here's what I want to cover for you today. I want to show you four keys to a good group. We're going to find out they devoted themselves to four specific things. By devoted, we mean they committed themselves to it. They said "no" to about 1,000 things so they could say "yes" to these four things. They got into the habit and they protected these habits so they could hang on until God produced the right amount of fruit. So that's what we're going to cover today; four keys to a good group and let's see how the passage begins.

It says in Acts 2:42, "They," the early Christians, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." That's the first devotion the early church had; to the apostles' teaching. The apostles, if you're kind of new to the Bible, were the 12 people that Jesus handpicked to be like his inner circle. And they're teaching - we don't have to guess what it was - because the first 41 verses of Acts 2 will tell us. When the apostle Peter stood up and he taught and essentially what he taught was Jesus - who Jesus was, what Jesus did, the cross of Jesus, the empty tomb of Jesus. He taught people to repent, to turn away from their sins, and to turn to Jesus for redemption and real life. If we're going to fill in the blank, essentially, they were devoted to the Bible and the Jesus who was the center of it.

And the best groups of Christians do the same thing. They devote themselves, they are committed too, they get in the habit of holding to the Bible. Which might sound like way too obvious to like scribble a note and star and underline it but can I tell you it's not quite that simple? I've been officially involved in like small groups or life groups where, you know, 10 to 12 Christians get together in a room and try to do life together. I've been doing that for about 10 years and do you know what I've learned about most of you? That in general, most of you like to squirrel! You chase tangents all the time and I do it, too. In the course of a conversation there's so many thoughts that pop into our head and if we are like not devoted or committed to the actual topic, the actual Scripture, we will talk about everything except the Bible and the Jesus who's at the center of it. And you might think I'm exaggerating but sometimes I try to count like the tangents based off of the tangent, which is based off of this tangent and then that one. I've gotten to double digit level tangents in conversations and you wonder how did we get here? But that's how the human brain works, right? The conversation starts, "Hey, what'd you think about the message?" And the first person says, "Well, I don't know, I like that part about Jesus' being like the shepherd or like he's sowing seed." And the second person says, "Oh yeah! That kind of reminds me; I grew up on a farm." And the third person says, "Hey, my cousin's actually a farmer. His name is Rob." Next person says, "Oh, I have a friend named Rob. He loves bacon." And the next person says, "Speaking of bacon, I love Kevin Bacon." And then someone pulls out their phone, they start the Footloose soundtrack, and I've kind of exaggerated but not by much. I mean, we chase squirrels and tangents and I mean, a whole hour can go by and we miss like the message and the Jesus at the center of it. And so, the best groups have to be devoted. We can go on tangents and we can have fun - I'm not saying not that - but we have to actually commit our minds to hold on and get in the habit of wrestling with the Bible and not just sharing our own thoughts and opinions.

And I really want you to be committed with that in your group because I think group is the perfect place to learn about Jesus. I mean, I love church, I love what's happening right now, but here's the dynamic of church - and if you have a question about something that I say, you know, this isn't really the environment to raise your hand and interrupt me. And I love it when people read the Bible and they grow at home but I don't know about you, but often when I read the Bible, there's stuff that confuses me and I don't get. But group is the place - think of this - if God puts 10 Christians in a room, how many years of Christian experience has he gathered together? And if we come into a group and we're devoted to the apostles' teaching, if we're humble enough to just say, "You know, guys? I have no clue what that means." "Like not just that word or that sentence but this whole section, I have no clue what it means, can you help?" And if we are

devoted to the apostles' teaching, we will teach each other, encourage each other, and grow together in incredible faith.

And do you know why especially I want you to be committed to that? Because some of you are scared of group. I was trying to count - there's a conversation I think I've had five times - I counted five times in the last six months with brothers and sisters in our church. And the conversation was essentially this: "Pastor, I could never tell the church about that." And there's some struggle, there's some embarrassing part of the past and there's just this like fear of being real with other Christians. But think about this for a second - if a group is devoted to the apostles' teaching and the apostles' teaching was essentially that Jesus has forgiven everything, then a group would be the safest place to share anything. And group is where you can get a glimpse of the face of God who, when you confess to him, does not shrivel up his nose in disgust but gushes with love and grace and mercy. And so, I don't just want you to join a group. I want that group to be committed to the Bible because the Jesus who's at the center of the Bible is the best thing in all of creation.

So that's the first thing, which brings us to the second thing. What else was the early church devoted to? Well, let's go back to Acts 2:42. It says they, "Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship." So I came up with this all by myself: They were also devoted to fellowship. Fellowship is just a fancy Bible word that means mutual concern. Like, if you thought the first part meant group is just about some in depth, intellectual Bible study, no, no, no, it's just as much of about people as it is about passages. It's about people who have an actual love and concern that they would give up their own wealth, their own time, their own energy to show love to actual people that God loves. And if that sounds awesome, it is. What makes groups so good are the people, the encouragement, the faith, the knowledge, the prayers, the forgiveness. But can I be real with you, too? The hardest thing about group is the people! Because people are really, really great on paper but in practice, they're people. And so fellowship, actual group, becomes this battleground for love. The fruit of the spirit is patience and it's self-control and it's kindness and it's gentleness and you will never know if you actually have that if you just come to church. I mean, I could be the most annoying person on planet earth and you could shake my hand and find a seat on the other side of church and we're fine. But if you have to be with me week after week in the same room - alright, now let's talk about love and commitment and patience and kindness and self-control.

In fact, I think that's why the Bible is as long as it is. I put a little bookmark here where the book of Acts 2 is in my Bible. Do you know why there are so many pages that finish out the New Testament? Why there's Romans and Corinthians and another Corinthians and Galatians and Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians? It's because the early Christian church was filled with people. People weren't always perfect. Sometimes they believed weird things. Sometimes they had really bad behavior and the apostle Paul had to write to them to encourage them because their churches were just like your group; they had people.

But when we actually love people - as the passage says, when we are "devoted" to people - when I'm not just going to sign up and show up when it's convenient and nice and easy for me but I believe that God has put me and put you in that room to learn to love people and to really grasp

the heart of God. Even though that throughout the week I'm kind of like that person that's hard to love, and yet, God is so devoted and so committed to me. When you can find a group of people who actually care about each other's faith, that's a good group. And so, that's my encouragement to you. If you take that step and you sign up for a group and God brings all kinds of people like you, or very different than you, see that as your mission. A chance to grow, to bring joy, to give love, to produce fruit.

Two down; two to go. We continue in Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship to the breaking of bread." Blank number three: They were devoted to breaking bread. Now for about 2,000 years, Christians have debated what that phrase means. In the Bible, sometimes breaking bread means just sharing a meal together. And other times, breaking bread refers to what we call the Lord's Supper or to communion because Jesus broke the bread and he gave it to his disciples. And if there's time, I would talk about both those things and how powerful they are for a group. But for the sake of time, let me just cover the former; the power when you and I are devoted and committed to sharing meals together.

I think about that because I just read a study that was published by the U.S. Loneliness Index. They did this massive study of Americans and they tried to find out who are the loneliest people in America and do you know what they found? That even lonelier than people in their seventies, many of whom have buried their spouse, their parents, some of their best friends, the loneliest group of Americans were between the ages of 18 and 22, which is interesting to me. If you're 18 to 22, what some people call Generation Z, you grew up as a digital native. Like, you can't remember a time when the internet didn't exist. You grew up with devices and smartphones and tablets. You have been - you are connected every day and perhaps to more people than your great grandparents would have shaken hands with in their entire lives. So how is it possible that you can be that connected, have that many likes, that many comments, and still feel lonelier than your grandparents?

And I'm sure the answer to that question is pretty complicated and nuanced but I wonder if part of it is this, the average 18 to 22 year old doesn't break bread. They say that family dinners, that people actually look each other in the eye over a table and good food, is decreasing precipitously and our mental health is going with it. But what happens when we share a meal? When our communication is not carefully crafted and highlighted and deleted and rephrased but we communicate with each other through what we say and through the expression on our face? What happens when we go out to dinner and we all put our phones face down and I can tell when you're quiet and frustrated. Or when you can sense that I'm confused or have a question. When we can read each other and dig in and communication is not shallow because face to face it's hard not to go deep. What happens when we're committed to breaking bread is that we grow. There's often kindness and goodness and faithfulness and love. There's the joy of the gospel and the peace of Jesus that's shared when we can share a meal.

And so that's why I want to encourage you with a group. You know, sometimes you can just go, it's just good that you can make it to group and you've got to run out the door and that's okay. But if at all possible, can I encourage you to do this one thing? Stay for food. Sometimes it's not in the living room during the official group time; it's in the kitchen. Where that big group of 12

will break off into conversations of two and three and one another-ing happens. Where real questions and digging deeper and real encouragement and the real grace of Jesus and real prayers and real forgiveness is given because we can do life together. The secret sauce of the early church is that they didn't just show up one day a week. They were devoted to teaching fellowship and to the breaking of bread.

Which brings us to our final point. Acts 2:42 ends like this: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." That was their final devotion; they were devoted to prayer because the devil fears people who persist in prayer. The devil knows that those who keep knocking, the door will be opened. And those who keep seeking will find what they're looking for. And those who keep reaching out to Jesus will find him in the arms of faith. The early church devoted themselves to praying for each other and when we do, good things happen.

And I've seen it in group. I've been to plenty of Bible studies and I love every kind of prayer; thank God for that. But sometimes, prayer is shallow and it's generic and our minds wander because it's nothing that we care about. But in group, when we know each other and we can pray, when you know that this is my temptation and I know that this is your struggle and I can pray for you by name and by situation, God does really good things. When our group starts like a prayer thread, when on week one we get everyone's cell numbers and we start to pray for each other - not just week after week but day after day - when I can put a prayer request and say, "Hey, this Friday I'm going to face this and I know it's going to be tempting, would you pray for me?" Man, God does really, really good stuff. When we pray not just about safe travels and grandma's cancer but we pray about holiness and forgiveness, to escape shame and guilt. When we pray the gospel over each other that we would believe everything that Jesus did, incredible things happen. When we don't see prayer just as a starter pistol to group or the official technicality that ends a church service but a privilege and a power source, great things happen. And so we devote ourselves to prayer. We commit ourselves to it. The past might stink but we are not going to give up in the future because your Father in heaven loves to answer prayers in Jesus' name.

And that's what they did and it changed the world. And you could threaten Christians, you could persecute them, you could throw them to the lions. You could exclude them and mock them socially but they were devoted to these things and it changed the world. And I hope it changes you, too. If you'd read the last few verses of Acts 2, you'd find out the fruit that came from that group root. Let me show you one last passage today in Acts 2:46. It says, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." There was gladness. Happiness. There was joy and there was peace. There was really good fruit because they planted really good roots.

And I pray that you do the same thing. Maybe you've never had a group root before; you've come to church and you've done that but you've never had people that actually knew you and loved you. And maybe today, you're going to take that step. Maybe for some of you who've been part of a group before, you're going to take it a level deeper. You're going to be devoted to people and to prayer and to sharing Jesus with one another. I don't know what your step is but I

pray that you take it because I know in time you won't regret it. A good pineapple takes 13 to 16 months to get good and your group root might take just as long but I guarantee you that if you commit yourself, it will be just as good.

And I hope you think about your faith that way. I know there's so many things to keep us busy in the moment but I'm not thinking about the in the moment you. I'm thinking about the six months from now you. I'm thinking about the two years from now you. I'm thinking about a decade from now you. I'm thinking about your children and grandchildren connected to you. And I want you, and I want them, to enjoy good fruit. So plant a root, plant a seed, pray for it to grow. You want more love, more peace, more joy, more fruit? Then I know your next step: Get a group.

Let's pray.

Dear God, I thank you for community. I thank you for the people that you have put in our lives who know the gospel and who shared it with us. Thank you, God, for every mom, every dad, every best friend, every roommate, every pastor, every teacher, every brother, every sister who shared Jesus with us; who is so committed to the gospel that we just could not live without joy and peace; that we could escape shame and guilt. And I pray, God, for all of us today. There's so many good things that we could do this week. There are things that aren't sinful and aren't wrong but some of those good things will rob us of the best thing. And so, I pray that you would give us the kind of wisdom to think long-term. That we would not just think about this day but we would think about the next season of our spiritual life.

And God, give us that commitment that whether it's the best experience or middle of the road that we would know that you do great things when people gather around your word in your name. I thank you, God, for the history of our church. Coming here for the past few years, it's been amazing to walk into a group of people who are committed to doing life together. And I pray that we can take that baton faithfully and we could run even faster in the season to come. God, just in the past few weeks, you have drawn hundreds of people - more than we have ever had before - to take that step. And I pray today, tonight, will be the first step for dozens more and you would bless them because of the step they take.

Thank you, God, for our church, thank you for this fellowship, and thank you so much for Jesus. Thank you for his devotion and commitment to saving us. We ask it all in his beautiful name and all God's people who love having good roots, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."



TIME OF GRACE®

Roots and Fruit: Get a Group

Study Notes

Summary

Even pastors know that 60 minutes on Sundays have their limits. Some fruit only comes through personal, vulnerable, doing-life-together community. The early church knew that, and their Group root produced the fruit of love and generosity and kindness. When we personally know and are personally known in a spiritual community, we find our spiritual and physical needs being met.

- **Galatians 5:22,23:** ²² The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

“If a large portion of the root system is destroyed, a corresponding portion of the leaves and branches will die.”—Thomas Perry

- Want _____? Get a _____!
- **Acts 2:42:** They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- 4 keys to a good group:
 1. Devoted to the _____.
Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.
 2. Devoted to _____.
Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship.
 3. Devoted to _____.
Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread.
 4. Devoted to _____.
Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- **Acts 2:46:** They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

Points to Ponder

1. Read the apostle Peter's teaching in Acts 2:14-41. Name at least three of Peter's main points. How do those points affect the way that we do Group today?
2. **Agree/Disagree:** Passion for the 5 Roots is only possible when you think of your future and not just your present.
3. Evaluate the current strength of your Group root. What small step could you take to strengthen that root so that your future might include more spiritual fruit?

Homework for Next Week

Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and Psalm 92.

*"[Life] Groups are like retirement savings. If people wait until they need it, they won't have it when they need it."
—Andy Stanley*