

Be Devoted: Living A Life That Can Grow

Day 1 of 7 • This day's reading

- Acts of the Apostles 2:42

Devotional

Living a Life That Can Grow

Over the summer, my husband and I traveled from sea to shining sea and back. Boy, did we see lots of farmland along the way. It's amazing how much of our country is dedicated to growing crops. We saw field after field of food being cultivated in every imaginable space. It was a beautiful sight, but one thing I noticed was if the fields were not maintained and kept actively producing crops, they very quickly returned to their previously wild state.

Kingdom living can be very much like these fields.

If we are going to prevent our old worldly ways from creeping back in, it's important to keep our lives in the state of readiness for planting, growing, and harvesting. I have witnessed weeds take over when individuals don't do the things that feed them spiritually. Little by little, they stop following Jesus and wander back to the things they once did before they met Him. I guess for

the sake of our analogy, they became lazy farmers thinking they would harvest a good crop regardless of their input to the process.

So, what does it take to keep our lives weed free?

For the farmer, it is constant maintenance of the land. He must pay attention to what's happening and take measures to retain good growing conditions for the crops in his fields. I am not exactly sure what methods the farmer uses, but when it comes to *life maintenance*, maybe a peek at what the early church did might give us some tools that will keep ours in good shape.

What comes to mind when you think about maintaining a healthy Christian lifestyle?

Day 2 of 7 • This day's reading

- Hebrews 10:24-25

Devotional

They devoted themselves . . .

“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42 NLT

The individuals involved with the early church were devoted.

The word *devoted*—*proskartereo* in the Greek—is actually a phrase meaning *continually devoting themselves*. *Devoted* in the English language means to have a strong love or loyalty for something or someone. The idea then is they were in a constant mode of love and loyalty. They were focused, and fortunately, they were focused on the things that would build them up, keep them accountable, deepen their love for each other, and center their attention on God.

What we must realize is that the things listed in the verse are not simply tools to knock down the “weeds” that pop up in our lives. They are meant to produce a lifestyle that can prevent the weeds from growing in the first place. Devotion is an attitude that results

in action. With our focus on the right things, our actions in the right things will follow.

Are you involved in a church or Christian fellowship?

If not, there are a variety of ways to plug in from the church down the street to church online. Plan to give one a try this week.

Day 3 of 7 • This day's reading

- Hebrews 4:12
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Colossians 3:16

Devotional

Devoted to the Word.

The people involved in the early church were hungry to grow in their knowledge of God. They committed their attention to the teaching of the apostles. With much of the written Word unavailable to the common population in the early church, people had to rely on the apostles to guide them. They gathered often to hear the Word taught.

Today, we are rich in resources . . .

from our weekly teaching at church services to Bible study discussion groups to personal time in the Word. There is a great amount of good quality materials to engage in to grow our knowledge of God and His Word available to us in print and online. Many of us have several volumes of the Bible on our bookshelves at home. Not only that, we have immediate access with our Smartphones. All we need to do is reserve some time out of our day to participate. The more we participate the more we learn—

The more we learn, the more we want to know, and the cycle continues.

Please do not let the words, "I'm too busy," roll off your lips. One thing that I have found is any time spent with God and His word is returned many times over throughout the day. I'm not sure why that is but it's true. Perhaps our focus in the right places frees up time we would spend in the wrong places. Test it and see. I think you will find I am right.

Day 4 of 7 • This day's reading

- Matthew 18:20
- Genesis 2:18

Devotional

Devoted to Community

You have probably heard the phrase, “Iron sharpens iron.” This is the idea behind continually meeting together with other followers of Christ. Engaging other Christians has a variety of positive effects that can keep our lives in working order. We can find we are not alone on our journey. We know what it is to need a Savior and receive forgiveness. We can keep each other in check when faith seems to waver. We can bolster up or be bolstered when weakness creeps in. We can celebrate successes and grieve losses together, and together we can encourage, strengthen, grow, and find hope—We can love and be loved.

When we neglect this very important aspect of the Christian life, things start to unravel. Without constant input of godly living, worldliness doesn't appear so bad. The problem is worldliness creates a very slippery slope and with one misstep one can find themselves falling. With no one to reach out to, disaster is sure to be the result.

There is a verse found in Genesis that says, “The LORD God also said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make for him a suitable helper.” (Genesis 2:18) We know this is when God made woman for man, but at the same time He was crafting Adam’s beautiful bride, He was also building a community. Even in the perfect setting of the Garden with its personal interaction with God, it was not good for man to be alone. The answer was to bring others alongside to do life with.

Day 5 of 7 • This day's reading

- Galatians 6:10
- Galatians 6:2
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Devotional

Devoted to Friendship

Studies show that families that eat together, stay together. I think, perhaps, the early church knew that long before studies began. Eating together creates an atmosphere for a more intimate expression of community. This is where the close interactions occur, and deeper relationships are forged. Family meals provide a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. They bind the participants together in a way most other activities cannot accomplish. It is team building at its best, enhanced with the pleasure of eating.

What are the benefits of this kind of relationship?

These will be the people who bring soup to you on days when you cannot get out of bed to cook for yourself. They will encourage you when things get tough. They will grieve with you in your sorrows and celebrate with you in your successes. They will draw you back when your life goes off the rails and remind you God is

still there. They will be your biggest cheerleaders, teaming up with you in a life that can sometimes be a challenge.

Think about the people you know.

Which are the ones you know best? I would wager it will be the ones you have taken time to share a meal with. If we look to the Bible for inspiration, we see that Jesus spent a great deal of time eating and drinking with others. Sharing meals played a vital part of His ministry. Why? Perhaps for the same reasons its good to eat together today—to enter into each other’s lives at a more personal level.

Day 6 of 7 • This day's reading

- Colossians 4:2
- Romans 12:12
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Devotional

Devoted to Prayer

Dedication to prayer is spoken about more than a few times in the Bible. Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Romans 12:12 tells us to “be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer,” and First Thessalonians 5:17 states, “Pray continually . . . for this is God’s will for you.”

Why is continuous prayer so important?

It keeps us focused on God and His ways. But there is more. I like to think of prayer as an activity that goes *deep* and as well as *wide*. Let me explain. When we pray we gain a greater *depth* of knowledge about God and ourselves. We ask. He reveals. His answers are sometimes beyond our understanding but bring good all the same. We grow. We ask. He reveals . . . As we repeat the process, we learn more about the heart of God, and it changes us.

That's where the *wide* part of prayer comes in.

Our changed selves can reach out to the world around us. Through prayer, we invest in our community. We bring people who are unable or unwilling to the feet of Jesus to be changed like we were. We ask for provision, cry out for mercy, and give thanks and praise. We love the world by engaging God on their behalf. And again, we grow. We repeat the process, and the world changes because they learn more about the heart of God through our actions.

Don't know how to pray? The acronym A.C.T.S. can help you. Start with **Adoration**: Praising God for who He is. **Confession**: Tell Him where you've gone wrong. **Thanksgiving**: Be thankful and tell Him so. **Supplication**: A fancy word for telling God what you need. Don't be afraid. God is never surprised and knows you better than you know yourself. Jump in and give it a try. Can't do all four. Start with Adoration and see how it goes.

Day 7 of 7 • This day's reading

- Acts of the Apostles 2:43-47

Devotional

The Harvest of Devotion

The whole point to planting a field is to reap a harvest, and the early church was doing just that. Along with being devoted to the Word, community, friendship, and prayer, some pretty cool things were happening. Acts 2:43 goes on to say “everyone was in awe at the many wonders and signs” that were taking place. They enjoyed life with the like-minded people who also loved the Lord around them. And together, they served others in need. But even better than that, something else extraordinary was happening. People around them were taking notice and wanted to be part of it. In fact, verse 47 says, “the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.” How is that for a testimony for living a devoted life?

Have your old ways taken over any ground in your new life?

I would suggest a little maintenance may be in order. Start doing the things that will create a healthy environment, one ready for growth. Get into the Word by pulling out your Bible, engage in a Christian community on a regular basis, make friends with others who follow Jesus, and engage the God who has the power to

make things happen through prayer. You will grow through your experience with each of these things. Others are sure to take notice and will want in on the hope you have found.

Live a life continually devoted in love and loyalty to God and to one another.

“Love God your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” ~Jesus, Mark 10:27