

**Series: Characteristics of Devout Christians**  
**"A Transformed Life"**  
**Acts 2:44-47**

**Introduction**

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Act 2:41-47 NKJV)

Transforming people one person at a time is at the heart of God's plan for the world. Every time you take a step forward to become a-better-version-of-yourself, that action echoes through your marriage, your family, your church, and even beyond to people in the future. God is in the business of transforming lives. Christ will even make positive changes in your life if you ask him! But you must be willing to cooperate. The Holy Spirit is willing to help you, but, "Are you willing to let Him?" Helping people change is challenging and yet rewarding work. It is a work that Christ has chosen for the Church! A Holy Spirit-empowered church inspires and helps people to become the people God created them to be.

It's no secret; some Christians are more engaged than others. But why is that? Are you familiar with the Pareto Principle? Basically, it says that roughly 80 percent of effects come from 20 percent of causes. In business, the application is that 80 percent of your business comes from 20 percent of your customers. This concept also applies to products. Eighty percent of a company's profits tend to come from 20 percent of its products.

So does the 80/20 principle apply to the Church? Interestingly enough, according to research, the 80/20 principle does not hold for the church. Not even close.

Recent research has discovered that in the church:

- Less than 10 percent of people contribute 80 percent of the volunteer hours and
- Less than 10 percent of the people donate 80 percent of financial contributions.
- This means there is a 90 percent overlap between the two groups.

Roughly 10 percent of church members do almost everything in their church and pay almost entirely for the maintenance and mission of the local church. Everyone else just attends! So, what is the difference between those who are involved and those who are disengaged?

If we could identify what motivates the involved, maybe we could encourage that kind of commitment in others. The truth is: most committed church members don't

even think of themselves as devout Christians or spiritual examples. Nevertheless, only 10% of Christians actually get involved in the mission of the church. Even among the 10 percent, involvement, attitudes, and spiritual habits differ significantly. So needless to say, even among the 90% who only attend church, there are enormous differences. But when you think of what 10 percent of Christians accomplish for the Lord, it's quite phenomenal!

Every single day Christian ministries around the world feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the disadvantaged, care for the sick, visit the prisoners, and teach and train others for ministry. And it is all accomplished by less than 10 percent of the Church's capability! That leaves a lot of room for improvement. If less than 10 percent of Christians are accomplishing more than 90 percent of what we do as a church, imagine what 20 percent could do. Our potential is incredible. We have the power to change the world.

Today is not a time for playing church. The world needs the church now more than at any time in history. In a time of crisis, the church has always risen to the occasion. Believers in every age have risked their lives for the cause of Christ. We cannot quit being the church because of COVID! We cannot stop being the church because of political unrest. People today need God's help. So many are in the grip of fear. The church is a community of faith! We believe God's perfect love casts out all fear! Sadly, many church buildings are empty across the land. But never forget, the church is not a building; the church is the body of Christ. This is not a time to disengage from the community of faith; it is a time to unite and believe and pray and welcome the Great Physician into our lives!

If we could get 1% more people who say they are believers to embrace their faith passionately, we would not only revolutionize our church; we could revolutionize the world! It would result in more volunteer hours, which would allow us to reach our community much more effectively. It would also bring about an increase in giving, which would allow us to invest in even more powerful and vital ministry. Imagine what we could do if each of us would ask God to transform us completely and then let the Holy Spirit actually do that!

What if the number of devout Christians grew by just one percent each year? Of course, not every person in the church is interested in becoming passionately engaged—but what if just ten more people would. Just imagine the incredible outreach, worship, and spiritual development people would occur. The fact is it would only take a 1 percent increase in the number of devout Christians to change the world.

What is it that makes the 10% different from the 90 percent? What do the 10% do, think, and believe that is different from the 90%? Researchers came up with four things the 10% have in common. Four defining characteristics distinguish Devout Christians from average Christians.

If we could work intentionally to help people develop a more vibrant spirituality that includes these four defining characteristics, we would see incredible things happen

not only in their lives but in the life of the Church as well. A lot of believers want to grow in their faith; they just don't know where to start. The four defining characteristics cut through the complexity of Christianity and provide a practical and accessible way for more believers to get involved and grow in their faith. They provide a simple and understandable place to start.

Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, whether you are significantly or barely involved, these four defining characteristics can change your life.

## **The Four Characteristics – an Overview**

It's no secret the things we do repeatedly determine our character and destiny. It is equally true for athletes, business and political leaders, and parents. Life-sustaining spiritual habits are what set the 10% apart from all the rest. There are many ways to live out each of these defining characteristics. They are simple, obvious, and time-proven disciplines. The Four Characteristics of a Devout Christian are:

- PRAYER
- STUDY
- GENEROSITY
- EVANGELIZATION

At first glance, these may not seem like much of a discovery at all. But it's fascinating how devout Christians consistently apply themselves to these disciplines. Over the next few weeks, we will take a look at these four defining characteristics in detail. But today we'll take an introductory look at each of them.

### **I. THE FIRST CHARACTERISTIC - PRAYER**

Devout Christians have a daily commitment to prayer. God is not someone who is a distant force to them. They see God as a personal friend and adviser. They listen for the voice of God. They believe doing God's will is the only path that leads to lasting happiness in this changing world. It's not that the other 90 percent of Christians don't pray! Of course, they do! But the prayer life of most people tends to be more spontaneous and inconsistent.

Devout Christians have a daily commitment to prayer, and they stick to their routine. Prayer is a priority for them. They also tend to have a structured way of praying. Many of them pray at the same time every day. For some, it means beginning the morning with devotions and prayer. For others, it means sitting down in a big, comfortable chair in the corner of their home; or taking a walk to talk with God. But, however they do it, devout Christians tend to abide by a structure. When they arrive at the time and place in their day for prayer, they have a plan.

Devout Christians do not leave their prayer time to chance or mood. They have a habit of prayer, which they cling to with great discipline. It is this daily habit of prayer that serves as the foundation for their spiritual growth.

Devout Christians believe they are talking to God. Different things work for different people. Beginners in prayer struggle because they try it once, and it doesn't work, so they get discouraged and quit. If a person doesn't have someone they can turn to for advice and guidance on how to develop a practical and sustainable prayer life, they will give up.

Prayer is a discipline that is developed through trial and error and often through great struggle over several years. Devout Christians make time to pray, have a place to pray, and maintain a structure to their prayer. Of course, the average Christian does pray, but it tends to happen when the mood strikes them or when some crisis arises. Devout Christians pray this way too, but their spontaneous prayer is deeply rooted in their daily discipline and commitment to a prayer routine. So, if you want to be a dynamic Christian, develop a reliable and regular prayer time.

## **II. THE SECOND CHARACTERISTIC - STUDY**

Devout Christians are continuous learners. They don't know it all! They spend, on average, fifteen minutes a day studying and learning more about their faith. They see themselves as students of Jesus. They try to live by the teachings of Christ. They believe that Jesus doesn't just want followers. He wants disciples.

To be a Christian disciple begins by sitting at the feet of Christ to learn. Devout Christians are disciplined learners. We all sit at the feet of someone to learn. Whose feet do you sit at? For some, it's a talk show host or television program. For others, it is a politician or newscaster. Some sit at the computer and learn from the almighty internet. Others choose their smartphone. Some listen 24/7 to their favorite singers or music groups. It could be an athlete or an artist or a pastor, or a business leader or a peer group. But none of these will ever be a suitable substitute for Jesus.

Devout Christians believe Jesus is alive and is the most outstanding teacher known to humanity. They are keenly interested in learning from Jesus and about Jesus. They believe Christ is more than just a historical figure. They see Jesus as a friend, a coach, a mentor, and a Savior. Devout Christians believe that Jesus teaches them through the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit is really here on earth to guide and help us.

Devout Christians actually read the Bible! They are hungry to learn more about the faith because they are continuous learners. But they are not arrogant about what they know. They have a sense of humility, which is a critical element of this second characteristic. Devout Christians are not afraid of being challenged. They explore what the Bible teaches to understand God's ways. They are eager to discover the truth.

The second characteristic is all about continuous learning. It's part of the daily discipline of exploring the ways of God and the example of Jesus. If you plan to be

a devout Christian, you must add the study of God's Word under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit to your daily routine.

### **THE THIRD CHARACTERISTIC - GENEROSITY**

Devoted Christians are generous. A Devout Christian is filled with a spirit of service and is a wise and generous steward of their time, talent, and treasure. Devout Christians are generous, not just with money and time, but with their love, appreciation, praise, virtue, and encouragement. They believe generosity is at the heart of Christianity and is proof that the teachings of Christ have taken root in their lives.

Every devout Christian believes and will tell you that the spirit of generosity starts with financial giving. They see the love of money and attachment to the things of this world as a primary hindrance to spiritual growth. They will also tell you that generosity is something that everyone struggles with regardless of how much or how little they have. That's why devout Christians adopt a biblical pattern of giving. Financially, devoted Christians give several times more to the church than the average Christian.

Some people are very begrudging givers. But not devout Christians. They have learned the joy of giving from the most generous giver of all! Comprehensive generosity is something that has woven itself into the fabric of their lives. And the spontaneity with which they dispense it is truly inspiring.

They are generous friends, they are generous parents, generous with their colleagues at work, and they are even generous with strangers who cross their path. They are generous with their virtue—generous with patience, kindness, and compassion. Generosity is not a religious requirement for these dynamic Christians; it's a way of life! It's a way of bringing the love of God into the world of others. If you plan to be a devout Christian, you must work on developing a generous heart.

### **THE FOURTH CHARACTERISTIC - EVANGELIZATION**

Devout Christians invite others to meet Jesus and grow spiritually. They are not shy about sharing the love of God with people. Devout Christians want others to experience the joy that flows from a life-changing relationship with God.

Are you an evangelist? Evangelization is at the core of our Christian mission. Do you reach out to others with the good news about Jesus? Most Christians don't resonate with the idea of evangelism! It's an uncomfortable subject for the average Christian. Devout Christians regularly do and say things to share Christ with other people.

They are not embarrassed to invite people to become Christians, even if it is politically incorrect. A devout Christian will read something about God that has particular meaning to them and then give the book or article away for someone else

to read. Devout Christians will also reach out to help or mentor other people to develop a vibrant spiritual life.

They want people to discover the joy of knowing Christ. They instinctively know that reaching out with God's love is an essential part of the Christian life. Sharing their faith is not something they do; it is a part of who they are. Evangelization naturally flows out of them.

In the same way, they are generous with their time and money; they generously share their spirituality. They love to help people find answers to the questions they have about their faith. And they want other people to experience the joy they know comes from having a vibrant relationship with Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

So, what do you think? How are you doing? Just imagine for a moment if everyone in our church did these four things regularly and intentionally. What if each one of us intentionally:

1. Spent five to ten minutes each day in prayerful conversation with God.
2. Read two or three chapters of the Bible or a great Christian book each day.
3. Gave 1 percent more of our income to support the mission of this local church than we did last year.
4. Did one thing each week to share our faith with someone else.

Just think about how our church would be different after just one year? How would it be different ten years from now?

Prayer, Study, Generosity, and Evangelization. It is a simple plan, but even complex problems demand simple solutions. It is the simplicity that makes its adoption and participation doable. What keeps you from becoming a devout Christian? On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself in each of these four areas? After more than three thousand interviews, the top 10% rated themselves at 6.5 on average. Across all four characteristics, the top 10% gave themselves a score of 26 out of 40. Even the top 10% of Christians still have room for improvement.

What matters is what you do next. Incredible possibilities lay ahead for all of us! Wherever you are on your journey through life, you may think that you just don't have time for anything else. But all God asks of you is that you take one small step and commit yourself to a simple routine that leads to a profound and devout Christian life!

When we become convinced, "I can do that!" our lives begin to flood with hope... and hope is an incredible thing. We need believers to be filled again with that hope. It's a hope that causes us to realize that we have something of immeasurable value to offer to the world. When the people of God are full of hope, incredible things begin to happen.