

## **Lifelong Discipleship Formation**

Acts 2:42–47

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They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

When I was 9 months old, I was baptized. My discipleship journey in the church had begun, a community of faith had promised to care for me and my

parents had promised to raise me. From the cradle to the grave, we travel along the path of life, the disciple's journey.

When I was twelve years old, I was at a summer youth camp and I accepted Jesus into my heart. Now this was not the first time I had done this because at every camp the leader would call on us to accept Jesus into our hearts. I guess I just assumed that Jesus came last year but had to leave for some reason so I needed to start again. While I do not continue to believe that this is how it works, I do believe that it is a good example of what my discipleship journey has been, one of starts and stops and do overs.

When I was sixteen years old, I had just been picked up by my dad from Hello Dolly the musical rehearsal and I broke down in the car crying. I simply could not understand why an all loving God would send my gay friends to hell. Now, what I had been taught about the discipleship journey was that it ended in either heaven or hell. It did not make sense to me. My dad, trying to comfort me, said that God was all loving and that we simply needed to trust in that love. And to me, that solved it. God is bigger than a simple decision for heaven or hell. God is bigger than each of our journeys but also God is with us on our journey. God will not condemn. God is love! I trust that God walks with each and every one of us on the steps of life.

This conversation with my dad helped change the direction of my discipleship journey forever, towards a more open and inclusive God than I had ever imagined before. It opened up the mystery of faith and the hope for a traveling companion to come with me along the way. I started seeing that love, I started seeing God in all my interactions with my friends at school.

When I was twenty, I was on a local mission trip where I began to learn about truly living my faith in the day to day. My discipleship journey took another turn and began to deepen in its understanding. What had previously been a one on one religion, me and God, became instead a communal life filled with living. Faith was not about an intellectual decision or an act of meditation, faith became a lived journey with the God of the universe and a community of faith.

Now I could go on and on about different steps in my discipleship journey but I need to keep some stored away for later sermons. But what I am hoping to show you is that Lifelong Discipleship Formation, our theme for the day, is not a one time event. It is not about believing in the right thing. It is not learning to be holier than thou. It is not about a destination. *Lifelong Discipleship Formation is all about the journey.*

The Book of Acts writes about the earliest formation of the church, what worked and didn't work. What they believed and how they lived. In our passage

today, which I think is familiar to most of you, I want to focus on one Greek word that I had never really noticed before. And I am not sure I would have noticed it if the PCUSA had not paired this passage with this vital mark of Lifelong Discipleship Formation.

*Proskarterōntes*, they devoted themselves... *Proskarterōntes*. This devotion, the devoting of themselves, I believe, is why this passage was paired alongside our theme of Lifelong Discipleship. A devotion that is committed to their faith and to their community. A devotion that would be severely tested in the coming chapters of Acts. A devotion that loved and cared for each individual while working to reach outside their doors and bring more people into the fold of love.

And as I started looking at this word, and doing a little study, I learned that *proskarterōntes* is a present active participle which in Greek means that this is an ongoing or continual action. So it might better be translated that they constantly or continually devoted themselves... This was not a one time action but something that required focus and attention. It required them to make the decision to continue on the path again and again.

And that is our call to action today. No matter where you are on the journey of faith are you able to take that next step forward? What do you need to take that step? Do you need hope? I challenge you to check out our Lent Devotionals for a

day by day study to help you consider your faith and your journey. Do you need a community? I challenge you to join one of our two Lent Bible Studies meetings either today after church or the one meeting on Wednesday afternoon. Join a group and travel with us on this discipleship journey. Do you need prayer? If you feel comfortable ask one of your neighbors after church to pray with you or ask one of the pastors and we would love to spend some time in prayer with you.

And friends, do not be discouraged. This is a *lifelong* process, this discipleship journey. I believe that Lifelong Discipleship Formation, as intimidating as that might sound, is simply about taking the next step forward, whether we are running, walking, or even crawling when we must. And something I know to be true about this community, is that we will be here for you, each and every step of the way, when it is easy and when it is difficult, when we go forward, when we stop, or even when we move backwards. We will be here. God is here for you. So come and join us on this lifelong discipleship journey.