

ACTS: Keys to the Establishment and Expansion of the First-Century Church

COMPETENCY PROJECT-Unit 1

by Steve Hannett

*Developed a basic understanding of biblical keys to the establishment
and expansion of the first-century Church as taught in Acts.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Need to Return to Scriptural Principles

The First Century Church and its success is a fascinating topic study that touches many areas of Christianity. A person's understanding of how to apply the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the Church as revealed in the book of Acts will, in no small degree, frame and define their understanding of the mission and ministry philosophy of the local Church.

Though well-known to many as a collection of stories strung together, the book of Acts is rarely leveraged as a missional storehouse of instruction filled with strategies to accomplish the Great Commission's work. As Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart address when writing about the categorical types of doctrinal statements, there is Christian theology (what Christians believe), Christian Ethics (how Christians ought to behave), and Christian experience or practice (what Christians do).¹

This competency pulls together what we should believe about the Great Commission's work, how we ought to conduct it, and what is experienced or done. I think there's a gap to be bridged between what should be done and what has traditionally been done by the local Church in response to the true nature of Christ's Great Commission.

Perhaps there's no other generation in history that needs to discover afresh the principles the scriptures lays out for the local Church's work at this hour. We need to move from man-made protocol to God-breathed promises and from man-made religion to the authentic release of God's Spirit.

Christianity Was Unstoppable

First-Century Christians had no governmental authority, no military might, and no societal clout. Instead, they were persecuted by the Roman Government, the Jewish religious system, and scorned by countless others. To join the early Church meant they would likely be ostracized, imprisoned, tortured, and even be put to death.

Nevertheless, Christianity was an unstoppable force that could be hindered by nothing and no one. In a short period, the Church went from having approximately 500 believers to filling its known world. They overcame cultural barriers, political barriers, financial barriers, military

¹ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p97

barriers, and many other obstacles in ways that became clear that God was behind its movement. People were saved, God was glorified, and Churches multiplied.

I hope that identifying and clearly understanding these "keys" will help to train, mobilize, and inspire many to carry the baton of the Great Commission in a way that once again establishes and expands the Church like the First Century.

May we be found to be faithful ambassadors of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and stewards of the Great Commission in such a way that our Lord will say,

Matthew 25:23 (NKJV)23His Lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.'

STUDY DESCRIPTION

Developed a basic understanding of biblical keys to the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church as taught in Acts.

This competency asks to identify and explore the "keys" to both the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church. Therefore, we're looking for the essential elements of two things: the planting/strengthening of the Church and the multiplication (expansion) of the Church across both geographical and cultural borders. In this context, we are not speaking about the simple multiplication of buildings, but the expansion of divinely ordered people living according to Christ's principles rather than the world's principles.

A "key" is needed for something to both happen and without which would not happen.

We are primarily considering, "How did the early Church turn the world upside down?" (See Acts 17:6) How did they accomplish the movement of the Gospel message from Jerusalem to Rome, primarily from a Jewish belief system to a Gentile belief system?

Additionally, we are asking how the book of Acts should be used in the twenty-first century. Can it be used to understand the life and mission of the Church today? Can we use it to strategize for ministry? If so, how far can we take it? What guidelines can we follow for things that should be prescriptive or descriptive?

STUDY GOALS

Goal #1-Apply Historical Precedents

To understand the principles behind correctly identifying and applying historical precedents in the book of Acts to the twenty-first century Church.

Goal #2-Keys To Establishment & Expansion

To understand the keys to how the First-Century Church established and expanded the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and from being primarily a Jewish sect to becoming a faith embraced by the Gentile world.

Goal #3-Exploration of Contemporary Application

To explore some of the issues the modern Church needs to grapple with to see a more widely spontaneous expansion of the Gospel today.

Goal #4-Recovery of the Identity & Purpose of the Church

Jesus Christ died for the Church (See Acts 20:28), and He loves Her. He will never leave her nor give up on her despite her waywardness, unfaithfulness, adulterous ways, and lack of faithfulness. She is His Bride forever. Jesus is relentless to come back for a spotless Bride. This writing seeks to recover an understanding of whom the Church is called to be, and what She is called to do. Birds are meant to fly, fish are meant to swim, and the Church is meant to glorify the Father through her Groom, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. By understanding the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the First-Century Church, we're able to make headway in understanding who we are called to be and what we are called to in the Twenty-First Century.

Goal #5-Ministry Philosophy One-Mindedness

To create one-mindedness in the EveryHouse Family of Churches and Ministries concerning the essential keys to establish and expand the first-century Church. Amid a plethora of theories, models, and cultural tensions, it's reasonable and sensible to have a common language and understanding of the most important "keys" or critical success factors to create a one-mindedness within our Apostolic network. This one-mindedness will enable us to work effectively and "run" together to see a spontaneous worldwide expansion of Jesus Christ's Gospel.

Goal #6-Dialogic Framework

I hope that this writing will help create a dialogic framework for other churches, ministries, and Great Commission initiatives to facilitate an effective movement to expand the Gospel.

METHODOLOGY

This writing first identifies the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the local Church in the framework of six sections of the book of Acts presented by Fee & Stuart in their article, "Acts, The Problem of Historical Precedents." It then concludes by expounding some of the most vital keys to establishing and expanding the Church.

DIVIDING THE BOOK OF ACTS

We understand there is a multitude of hermeneutical methods to interpret the book of Acts. For our purpose, we have attempted to adhere to a hermeneutical approach rooted in Biblical Theology, which greatly appreciates the value of interpreting the Bible in light of the meta-narrative of scripture. This means we attempt to understand how the book of Acts should be properly interpreted and how it should be applied in our present day.

Dividing The Book of Acts

The Book of Acts can be divided in many ways. The following are some, as seen in Fee and Stuart's writing, Acts: The Problem of Historical Precedent. ²

Division based on people

1. Peter (Acts 1-12)
2. Paul (Acts 13-28)

Division based on geography

1. Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
2. Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-10)
3. The ends of the earth (Acts 11-28)
4. This geographical expansion is expressed in several ways using significant cities and national boundaries. There are 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 Mediterranean islands mentioned in the book of Acts.

Division by summary statements

1. Acts 1:1-6:7 (in Jerusalem) - Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests was obedient to the faith.

² "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p90-91

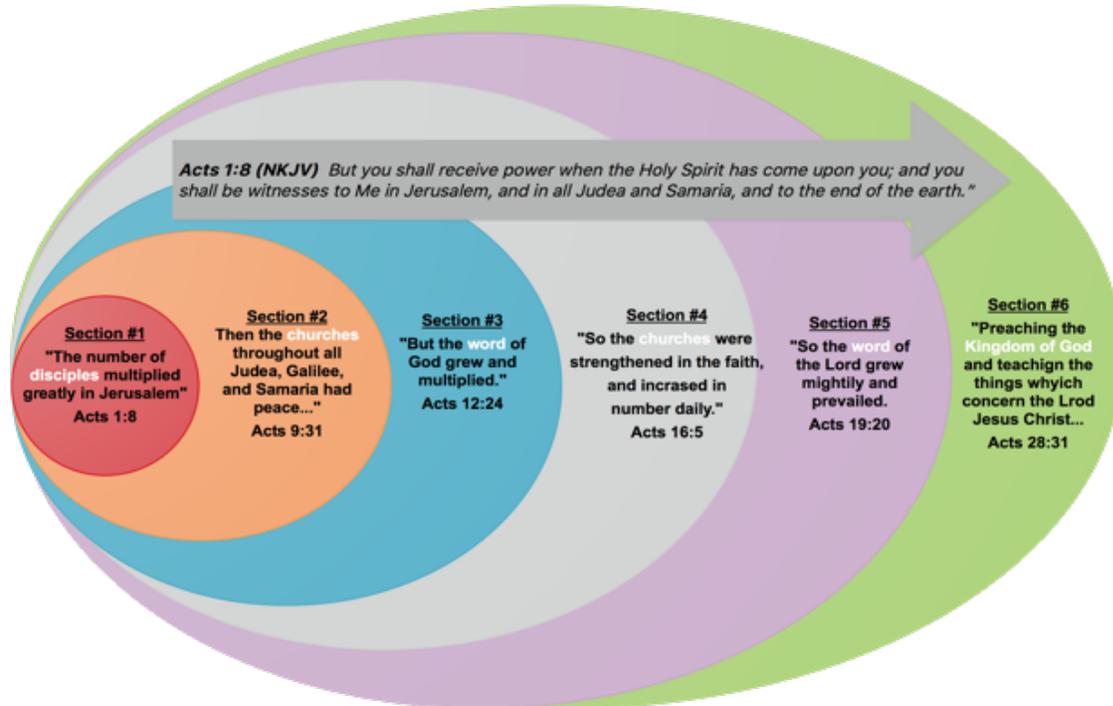
2. Acts 6:8-9:31 (in Palestine) - Act 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.
3. Acts 9:32-12:24 (to Antioch) Acts 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.
4. Acts 12:25-15:5 (to Asia Minor) Act 16:5 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.
5. Acts 16:6-19:20 (to Greece) Acts 19:20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.
6. Acts 19:21-28:31 (to Rome) -The main idea here is that the summary statements represent forward movement from its Jewish setting based in Jerusalem with Peter as its leading figure toward a predominantly Gentile Church, with Paul as the leading figure and with Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, as the goal.

Though I view the above as viable means to divide the book of Acts, I'll be using Fee and Stuart's Summary Statement division because it communicates the movement of the Gospel, which I believe Paul was primarily concerned about in writing the book of Acts.

I graphically express the central idea of movement throughout the book of Acts in the following diagram:

6 DIVISIONS BASED ON MOVEMENT OF THE GOSPEL*

THE GREAT COMMISSION: The movement and expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a movement of the preaching of the Word of God which created disciples which were gathered together into divinely ordered communities called Churches who were entrusted to carry forth the Great Commission. It is from those Churches the Word of God continued to go forth, made disciples and created new Churches. The Great Commission was not only a disciple-making movement, but was indeed a Church planting movement. Making disciples is a necessary and critical component, but it is not sufficient. The testimony of the book of Acts is that the full work was to assemble those new believers into Churches who could carry forth the Great Commission in their own geographies in a sustainable and ever-expanding way.



*As seen in Gorden Fee's writing, "Acts, The Problem of Historical Precedent", p 91.

COMMENTARY ON KEY ISSUES

We Need the "Keys"

When thinking about the "keys" to establishing and expanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is essential to define precisely what is meant. For this work, a "key" will be considered necessary, without which success would not be realized. They refer to the essential elements required for the Church to be established and expanded. The removal of any "key" would be something that would have significantly hindered the progress of the Gospel.

I believe that bearing good fruit is a reliable indicator of the tree being healthy. However, it doesn't mean that the tree is operating with optimal health. Some trees produce thirty, some

sixty, and others one hundred. ³ When seeking the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the local Church, we seek those things that will enable the optimized functioning of the Church.

Also, it's worth mentioning that we are seeking those keys that are biblical. It may be tempting to believe something is a key when, in fact, it may be nothing more than something that is highly valued by a particular group from a specific generation. For example, our American culture purports that "bigger is better". We superimpose this philosophy upon the definition of success for a local Church. It causes people to think that the more people a Church attracts to their Sunday morning service, the more successful and fruitful they must be. Eventually, this translates into a ministry philosophy that espouses that getting many people into a room to be emotionally charged up in a weekend service is more critical than establishing them in the Gospel's teaching.

In contrast, the Bible does not say we need to build a large audience of weekend service attenders. Instead, we are to reach the world and make true disciples who learn, follow, and multiply themselves. Thus, what may look good or "fruitful" may not be at all. Therefore, we seek to find the "keys" that produce quality and quantity, as seen in the first approximately 300 years of Church history.

Gordon Fee's and Douglas Stuart's article, *Acts: The Problem of Historical Precedent*, offers valuable suggestions for identifying what things are normative and what things are not. These suggestions should be applied as litmus tests when identifying the biblical "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church. Some of the most valuable recommendations to me personally are:

1. Seeking to discover the author's intention of what they included and why. ⁴
2. The difference between content that is intentional versus incidental. ⁵
3. Thinking through what scripture explicitly tells us to do versus what is merely narrated or described. ⁶

³ Matthew 13:8

⁴ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p99

⁵ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p99

⁶ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p97

4. Determining the difference between primary and secondary statements.⁷
5. The distinction between normalcy and normativity.⁸
6. The warning of misusing analogy as biblical precedent.⁹
7. The value of precedent to establish principle while not establishing specific actions.¹⁰
8. The value of and possible application of discovering patterns.¹¹

Note: While this writing seeks to identify a relatively broad scope of the "keys" demonstrated by the book of Acts, it does not necessarily represent a comprehensive list.

We Need to Discover That Which Is Normative

This term denotes something that should be a certain way everywhere, every time, with everyone. It's a standard that should never change and be applied in every generation and culture without exception.¹² It is the standard that all things should conform.

Understanding normativity is essential, and it has helped me think more thoroughly through the many conflicts that arise within and among denominational and cultural practices. Though philosophers and intellectuals differ on the specific application and description of normativity, we understand it not to be "a" standard, but rather "the" standard to be followed. It is that which should be done irrespective of culture, geography, and generational era.

As Fee and Stuart thoroughly describe¹³, it is essential to understand what things in the book of Acts are only describing what was historically done versus things meant to be prescriptive for all times and all generations. Discovering normative "keys" or essentials will help every Church build according to primary traditions rather than secondary issues. Confusing primary and secondary statements, along with primary and secondary traditions, will most certainly adversely affect the success of the Great Commission.

Understanding the normative "keys" will establish a practical guide for churches and ministries. It will enable us to discern between what is being "described" versus what is meant to be "prescribed." If something is merely described, we do not need to reproduce it. However,

⁷ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p97

⁸ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p100

⁹ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p101

¹⁰ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p101

¹¹ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p101

¹² "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p101

¹³ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p101

if something is being prescribed, we must ensure it gets carried out in the twenty-first century Church.

Biblical Ministry Philosophy

In his article entitled *A Look Through Three Lenses*, Gene Getz masterfully presents the relationships among people, function, and form and how they work together to form a ministry philosophy. He suggests the need to consider the lenses of Scripture, Culture, and history to arrive at a biblical philosophy.

Seeking to understand the meaning and purpose behind the book of Acts is vital in applying the information contained therein.

In identifying the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the First Century Church, we whole-heartedly agree with Gene Getz that all functions require a form and that we need to identify the difference between absolutes and non-absolutes. We agree functions will not change though the forms in which those functions are carried out will change.

The significant threat to all Christians in every generation is to follow form rather than the function. We must recover our understanding of the function and utilize sound forms to facilitate the function most optimally. We must become married to the purposes of God upon the earth and allow for cultural and generational adaptability. Effective servants of the Great Commission must adapt their methods while preserving the unchanging message of the Gospel.

All who deeply understand the "keys" in the book of Acts well-position themselves to adapt methods without the risk of compromising their ministry effectiveness. Unfortunately, many ministries have attempted to become so relevant to our changing culture they've become irrelevant to God. They have lost their way and need to return from whence they came. They must recover the foundations of our most holy faith if we are to be effective.

The Lord has deeply placed upon my heart a keen awareness that I should not be a product of my era, but that I should be a product of the whole counsel of God in His Word! I desire to learn from many, but I can only emulate what God has revealed in His Word. Modern models often don't fit the scripture, and scripture often doesn't fit into modern models. It is an exciting journey to recover the Way of Christ & His Apostles and discover how to apply them to our current generation!

Concerning Forms

Though all functions necessitate some form, not all functions in the New Testament describe their forms. Getz says, "It is not possible to absolutize something that is not described; that is always incomplete; and that is always changing from one setting to another. This is why form and structures are not absolutes in the Bible." ¹⁴

Concerning Functions and Principles

Getz says, "On the other hand, functions and principles are absolute-if they appear consistently through new Testament history and are not self-delimiting." ¹⁵

These issues are significant in discovering the "keys" of the book of Acts because they help us isolate functions and principles that are absolute while allowing for freedom of form that can be adeptly applied to many cultural contexts. This will enable Church leaders to create a ministry philosophy that is both Biblical in foundation and creative in expression. There is a great need in this hour to deconstruct non-absolute forms, patterns, organizations, traditions, and methods so that we can once again focus upon absolute functions, principles, organizations, truth, and the message. Doing such will cause Ministry philosophies to emerge that are both biblically sound and practically effective. ¹⁶

Establishment

The word "establishment" may cause many to think of the beginning of something. Though the launch of new churches is an inevitable part of the process found in the Great Commission's advancement, it is not the full meaning of how we think or use the term "establishment." More fully, we use the word to describe the process of something becoming rooted or strong. We pull from the Greek meaning of the term "sterizo" in the New Testament, meaning to make strong ¹⁷ when using the English word "establishment." In the context of thinking about the "keys" to the establishment, we are thinking about that which births new churches and matures them.

Expansion

Expansion is more than merely numeric or geographic growth that lasts for a short period. Though numerical growth is apart of expansion, more is needed. For the Gospel of Jesus

- A Look Through Three Lenses from Sharpening the Focus of the church, Gene Getz, 1984 SP Publications Wheaton p38

- A Look Through Three Lenses from Sharpening the Focus of the church, Gene Getz, 1984 SP Publications Wheaton p38

- A Look Through Three Lenses from Sharpening the Focus of the church, Gene Getz, 1984 SP Publications Wheaton

- James Strong, Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

Christ to be considered "expanded," it needs to be more than just preached. It needs to be received. This means new people from new cities and regions need to embrace the message so that it results in life transformation. It must become entrenched in that area as a new way of life. The change must be systemically rooted so that the expansion will impact multiple generations.

History demonstrates those times and places the Gospel message has genuinely expanded and left an impact. Looking at the historical implications of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys is to look at a transformational change that impacted many generations. This is an actual expansion. In contrast, we consider the millions of dollars spent in spreading the Gospel in Europe following the wall's collapse yield nothing more than a spark of theological change with little sustained flame. Everything quickly returned to their old ways of thinking. This, we would not consider actual expansion. When thinking about expansion, we are thinking through the keys that enabled the local Church to celebrate a long-lasting entrenchment of the message and lifestyle of the Gospel.

This expansion isn't merely just about spreading seed but about growing a vineyard that bears fruit. Time is the test of ministry effectiveness. It is the fruit of their legacy that reveals the depth and degree of the expansion.

The Local Church

When thinking about the "local Church," we are including, but not limited to, the following characteristics:

1. A group of people that have received the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, evidenced by authentic repentance.
2. A people group in a city or region not bound nor defined by a physical building but characterized by a lifestyle that follows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
3. A people ordered according to the instruction of the scripture. Thus, we believe that two or more gathered together are apart of the Universal Church but should not be considered the same as a well-ordered community in the matured structure of a divine ecclesia.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Many issues in Christian debate carry little significance. One issue that is of central importance is the Great Commission. It is much assumed that the Great Commission is widely understood because it is widely known. This, however, is not the case. I assert that only some

Great Commission elements are widely known and practiced, while others go largely ignored. Discovering, understanding, and defining the keys to the establishment and expansion helps bring to light some of the less common but essential aspects of the Great Commission. Understanding these "keys" are vital for the following reasons:

1. **Identity**

Understanding the keys will enable the Church to grasp her identity, function, and role in the Great Commission. Understanding the keys and putting them together paints a picture of more than simple first-century church activity. It paints how the early Church understood their mission and the accompanying instructions they were to follow. This helps the twenty-first century Church to do the same.

2. **Missional Integrity**

Understanding the "keys" helps every leader ensure they pursue the success factors for "the work" the Holy Spirit is calling them. Interestingly, Paul had some ministry-related activity before becoming a leader in the Antioch Church. Also, the Church already experienced an expansion up to this time. However, the expansion was primarily because of the persecuted saints' scattering rather than an intentional missions strategy. Nevertheless, we see the Holy Spirit called Paul to the specific work of unfolding to the rest of the world the intentional strategy to establish and expand the Church. It is in discovering the "keys" that we uncover how they accomplished the mission. Additionally, it will help every ministry stay tethered to the Great Commission's primary work and protect them from drifting off into secondary Great Commission-related work.

3. **Strategy**

Understanding the keys will enable local Churches to create biblical strategies to be deployed in any cultural context anywhere in the world. Too often, the Western world thinks according to Western paradigms instead of biblical paradigms. We are stuck in a culture that values "how-to" models rather than principles that mature an understanding of the principles from God's Word.

4. **Theology in Culture**

Understanding the "keys" enables Churches and ministers to effectively relate and minister truth in different demographic and psychographic environments. Churches can focus upon the message rather than the method and regain relevance in people's lives. Focusing upon

the "keys" to establishing and expanding the local Church will enable the Church to establish and expand within the worldwide global village.

5. **Meta-Narrative**

The local Church must again return to understanding her role in fulfilling God's eternal purposes in light of the meta-narrative of scripture. Studying and understanding the keys enables the Church a greater understanding of not just "what" the Church is called to do, but also, and equally importantly, "why" the Church is called to do it.

Ephesians 1:10–11 (NKJV) — 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

6. **Goal Setting**

Understanding the "keys" enables us to set both useful macro and micro goals meaningful and relevant to the mission.

7. **Fruitfulness**

We need to produce fruit that remains. Fruit that is reflective of the Lordship and work of Jesus Christ and the work of Christ's blood that produces an accurate witness of Christ's work to deliver us from the power of darkness and convey us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.¹⁸

8. **Stewards of Time**

We need to be effective in our work to be wise stewards of our time. Time is passing away, and we are running out of time since the day of Christ's second return ever draws nearer. Time is a non-renewable resource of which we need to be skilled stewards. We need more than accurate activity. We need precise and productive activity. Implementing the biblical keys to establish and expand the Kingdom of God results in such activity.

¹⁸ See Colossians 1:13

9. **Productivity**

We need to produce more than just activity. We need to be productive in what we are doing for Christ. Implementing the biblical keys to establish and expand the Kingdom of God optimizes our results in bearing fruit in its due season.

10. **Resource Utilization**

We need the keys to utilize and leverage God's resources properly in the mission. Not focusing on the right things at the right times causes wasted resources. We have to be a lean army and use every ounce of time and effort properly.

11. **Ministry Assessment**

Discovering the keys will reveal strengths and weaknesses in our ministries and cause us to accurately assess how we are going about the Great Commission of Christ. Also, it provides a biblical framework by which leaders can assess their ministries' efficacy and their ministry initiatives and team members.

12. **Measurable Objectives**

Discovering the keys connects training and leadership initiatives with measurable goals and objectives.

13. **Ministry Endurance**

Servants of Jesus need to produce fruit that remains. Fruit that genuinely reflects the Person, work, and will of Jesus Christ. This means that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God will be established where it is preached. It means that the work will produce the proper witness of Christ's work to deliver us from the power of darkness and convey us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. The early Church experienced a spontaneous expansion of the Gospel that successfully endured many trials. Said another way, they built the Church with sustainable growth that weathered storms. We desire to see such an expansion in our ministry today.

14. **Souls Saved**

Understanding and implementing the keys will increase the number of souls saved because it returns the Church to missional living and leadership practices.

15. **Cross-Cultural Success**

The book of Acts demonstrates the forward movement of the Gospel from its Jewish setting based in Jerusalem with Peter as its leading figure toward a predominantly Gentile Church, with Paul as the leading figure and Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, as the goal. Implementing the Keys from Acts will enable us to successfully navigate both cultural and geographical boundaries. ¹⁹

16. **Effective Partnership with the Holy Spirit**

Implementing the keys of the book of Acts will enable us to partner successfully with the Holy Spirit's work. Without question, we will be responding to the Holy Spirit's work rather than asking God to bless humanly engineered design. We must keep in mind that we are not charged with a Great Mission, but we are charged with the Great Co-Mission. The mission is Christ's. We are only invited to participate in it as servant ambassadors.

17. **Faithfulness**

Understanding the instructions is vital concerning whether or not we'll be found faithful to the instructions of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

¹⁹ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids 90

HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD USE THE PRINCIPLES & PATTERNS IN ACTS

Today's Church has an excellent opportunity to rediscover the precious treasure given in the book of Acts. The gift of understanding what took place in the first third of the first century is incomparable. The following are ways the modern Church can use the book of Acts. Though the list is not at all exhaustive, it may prove to be a valuable beginning.

1. **Mission**

The book of Acts can be utilized to understand the mission of the Church and church-based ministries. There are many models, activities, initiatives, and projects the Church of Jesus Christ is involved. The book of Acts enables the Church to discover and understand the Great Commission's core elements and how they should be achieved. Though not every detail of the book can or should be replicated, it nevertheless reveals the critical aspects of the expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how it moved from being primarily a Jewish belief (practice) to a primarily Gentile faith. This movement reveals the Gospel was preached. Believers were established in the context of ordered communities (local churches), and leaders were raised to continue the process of establishment and expansion.

The book of Acts enables the twenty-first Church to see a clear example of how the apostles understood the commandments given by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. We gain this understanding by merely looking at what they built and how they built it. How would someone understand how to interpret architectural blueprints accurately? They would look at the completed building. In the same way, how can we know the mission of the Church? Look at what the first-century apostles built.

This enables us to understand what we are called to do and how we are called to do it.

Though the book of Acts provides repeatable principles and patterns, it should not be used too strictly. Great wisdom is needed to understand which things are being prescribed and which things are merely being described. Once the normative principle and patterns are discerned, there is a great level of freedom of form that can be applied to endless cultural contexts and situations.

Today's Church can apply this understanding to develop ministry plans, or in some cases, re-develop ministry plans that are in alignment with the repeatable and consistent patterns seen in the book of Acts.

Abundant Grace Christian Church and our Church network, EveryHouse, has done a great deal of work among our leadership team to define, design, and apply these observations.

One of the most significant revelations we received was the implication of the centrality of church planting to the work of the Great Commission and what impact this would have on ministry philosophy, leadership training, and many more topics.

2. **Vision**

The book of Acts can be utilized to discover what it practically looks like for the Gospel of Kingdom to be released, established, and expanded. In short, the early believers turned the world upside down ²⁰. They released signs, wonders, and miracles. They created tight-knit church family communities that lived lives distinctly from the rest of the world, and they released the undeniable witness of the resurrected Jesus in the context of their everyday lives. They successfully did theology in culture.

-Abundant Grace and EveryHouse desire to see the spontaneous expansion of the Gospel as the first Century Church experienced. Specifically, we desire to see the advancement of the Gospel caused by everyday people living distinctly different lives and share their faith in the context of relationships rather than by administratively programmed activities centered around an organization.

3. **Map for Biblical Keys**

The book of Acts can be utilized to discover afresh the keys to the establishment and expansion of the Church. It chronicles the history of the establishment and the expansion of the Gospel through various cultures, political landscapes, religious landscapes and progresses with unstoppable fortitude. It stands as a beautiful gift and witness of how the early believers continued the work that Jesus began to both do and teach. ²¹

4. **Biblical Ministry Philosophy**

The book of Acts can develop a ministry philosophy that is both biblical and thus fruitful. If used properly, it enables ministries to become rooted in principles and strategies that cut through cultural influences and enables them to become rooted in normative things that frame biblical approaches to life and ministry. The principle and patterns found in the book of Acts enable a biblical wineskin to be developed and lived out. It can prevent ministries from getting and staying rooted in men's traditions and will free them to live outside the box

²⁰ See Acts 17:6

²¹ See Acts 1:1

of nominalism and approach the Great Commission with a scriptural sense that is both relevant to heaven and the earth. It will create a ministry philosophy that will cause God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. A ministry philosophy that enables the Church to be who she is called to be do what she is called to do, and operate as she is called to operate.

Ministry philosophy is relatively easy to write about. A person can adapt vocabulary, phraseology, and some slang and appear to be rooted in a genuinely biblical philosophy. To live it out, however, is another story. It takes time, wisdom, understanding, and extraordinary commitment over a duration to change a ministry philosophy systemically. It requires renewing the mind and revelation that gets deeply rooted in a church's heart and the ministry's leadership. Abundant Grace and EveryHouse are continually being challenged by the thoughts, ideas, and paradigm-breaking conversations emerging from the study of the book of Acts. As a Church and leadership team, our hearts didn't start far from the principles and patterns emerging from the book of Acts. Yet, we still see remnants of the religion of man that needs to be removed.

5. **Strategic Development**

Churches can use the book of Acts to develop biblically sound ministry strategies to accomplish the Great Commission by establishing and expanding the Church worldwide.

The book of Acts is filled with divine strategies for dealing with diverse cultures, engaging different levels of socio-economic classes, confronting strange and incorrect doctrines, dealing with cultural disputes, local church delegation, ministry planning, team-based ministry, the exhortation of elders, raising and development of modal and sodal ministries and many more.

The Gospel began from its Jerusalem-based, Jerusalem-oriented beginning to becoming a worldwide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon. ²²Without question, the book of Acts enables us to not only learn what the early Church of the first century did but also enables church leaders of the twenty-first century to think through how to apply the principles and patterns revealed in the book of Acts so the Gospel may go from our home towns into the whole world, from Jerusalem to Rome.

²² "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p90

6. **Intercessory Prayer Map**

A significant area of weakness in the twenty-first-century Church is the lack of focused, scripturally-based intercessory prayer. Too many pray with personal or misguided local church objectives and concerns and are often not praying the kind of prayers that heaven is interested in hearing. The prayer is earth-bound because it lacks alignment with heaven's agenda. The book of Acts demonstrates through the book the things the early disciples went after in response to the commands given by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts can truly build a practical guide for prayer teams to pray through toward accomplishing the Great Commission and fruitfulness of the Church.

7. **Training Paradigm**

Steven Covey is famous for teaching on the *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. One of the most famous of these habits is to start with the end in mind. When considering the macro and micro views of the first 30 to 33 years of early church history, we are compelled to see the end we are purposing to accomplish. This, without question, causes top-level leaders to question and contemplate the types of leaders that served the Great Commission in the early Church, and what their training and preparation looked like. Do the training methodologies of our twenty-first-century Church properly prepare leaders for what God is calling them to do?

The Book of Acts can be used to build a framework for building a biblical training paradigm for New Testament type servants that is truly equipped to establish and expand the Church upon the earth.

A whole new breed of servant-leaders needs to be cultivated if we are going to see the types of fruitfulness recorded in the book of Acts.

The training paradigm that emerges from the book of Acts will undoubtedly look very different from the normal methods of raising leaders in the twenty-first-century Church, but it will most certainly produce better results. The call to develop a new breed of servant-leaders upon the earth is at the heart of what the book of Acts would cause leaders to consider afresh. Much is at stake because strong leaders result in strong churches, and strong churches result in the establishment and expansion of God's Church, which results in accomplishing Jesus's Great Commission.

When the twenty-first century Church builds training methodologies aligned with the principles found in the book of Acts, the servants of God will again turn the world upside down.

8. **Decision -Making Grid**

The book of Acts can be used as a decision-making grid for servant-leadership teams. There is great competition for time, money, and other resources. Leadership teams need to prioritize and focus their efforts. The principles and patterns in the book of Acts can be used to assist in evaluating budgeting, resource allocation, and assessing the validity of future ministry initiatives and endeavors.

9. **One-Mindedness Among Local Churches**

The book of Acts can be used as a powerful unifying agent among churches and church networks. A sound hermeneutic of the book of Acts enables normative principles and patterns to emerge while simultaneously celebrating freedom of form within local Church non-normative practice. This presents strategic opportunities to unify on the normative principles while preserving their specific cultural preferences. Though many churches are satisfied with surface-level cooperation that is more social than missional, agreement on the normative principles and patterns can enable deeper cooperation and collaboration in strategic cohorts, church networks, and cross-functional apostolic team development.

10. **Expectation for the Normal Christian Life**

The book of Acts can help establish believers in a truly biblical vision of what the normal Christian life is. The patterns and principles help us understand what authentic conversions look like, what community life looks like, what ministry calling looks like, and what truly missional living looks like.

11. **Strength Facing Persecution**

The book of Acts demonstrates an enormous testimony of resiliency, fortitude, and faith in the face of tremendous persecution. The testimony the early Church released by the Holy Spirit's power is that God fulfills His purpose and promise no matter the difficulty, threat, or level of persecution. The early Church lived with an unflinching commitment to the progress of the Gospel. The testimony they left encourages and strengthens the twenty-first century Church to be faithful no matter the cost persecution may require.

There are convictions that Abundant Grace and EveryHouse hold as a result of our study of the book of Acts. We must be willing to endure being misunderstood and resist the temptation to adopt modern principles and patterns that may seem good but don't fit normative standards. We must work to preserve a truly biblical paradigm and ministry philosophy if we hope to be found faithful by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

12. **Ministry Assessment Tool**

The book of Acts can be used as an assessment tool for churches, church networks, and church planting movements. Churches and ministries can use the book of Acts as a type of assessment map that will enable them to see a "You Are Here" mark related to the principles and patterns found in it. The book of Acts would prove to be a powerful tool to help every church and ministry rise above earth-bound cultural practices, dogmas, and denomination-specific secondary issues and ascend into a strong foundation of principles, patterns, teachings, and biblically normative practices.

Abundant Grace Christian Church and EveryHouse have begun assessing themselves in critical areas and have experienced significant revelation and change that have resulted in rewriting our ministry Constitutions and Bylaws. These new documents better reflect the normative principles and patterns in the book of Acts and have begun to birth a whole new level of fruitfulness.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When I first received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I met Him with great power, having received supernatural healing the same day I was born again. I was deeply impacted by a life-changing encounter that changed the course of my entire life from that day onward.

Growing up Catholic and newly introduced to the Bible, I thought all Christians would have had the same encounter. After all, my encounter was created from nothing less than a clear, simple, and unashamed presentation of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. I simply heard an undefiled presentation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the Lord accompanied His Word with the accompanying signs.

Soon after encountering other Christians, I realized many were attending Churches but weren't necessarily encountering Jesus Christ with signs following. They encountered teaching but weren't experiencing the freedom then Gospel of Jesus Christ provides.

I can now look back at those days with a keener theological sense and safely say that many Churches are rooted in traditions created by man rather than in the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the early Church.

Twenty years later, I am aware more than ever of the great need to understand, teach, and live out the keys found in the Book of Acts. For me, the issue was not theological prowess but life and death. It is the same for many, and I desire to plant and establish Churches that show

forth God's will and witness through Jesus Christ. I believe the study of the "keys" is a critical component of this work.

Additionally, the study of the "keys" in the Book of Acts has created a much fuller wineskin for understanding God's purpose and plan for my own life. Studying the "keys" enables a deeper reflection on how my own MAP (Motivated Ability Pattern) fits the work of the Spirit upon the earth. It enables me to better see my contribution to God's big story and enables greater focus to yield greater fruit for the glory of God.

John 15:8 (NKJV) *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

MINISTRY REFLECTION

When I was first introduced to the Acts Course, I was intrigued to study the "keys." As time passed, I began to learn the keys and teach the course in the context of the local Church I pastor, the network I lead, and others' local Churches and networks. In the process of repeatedly studying the course, I came to realize the real significance of the material.

First, I realized that the "keys" to establishing and expanding the local Church in the first century are rare. People are simply not asking how we should accurately apply to the twenty-first century Church what happened in the first-century Church.

Second, this study has helped me focus better and assess the current work we are doing as a local church and church network. Without understanding the "keys," how could we determine if we're focusing on the right work correctly? I've become significantly impacted by the reality that Jesus is not assessing ministers as good servants simply because they are busy. We must be consumed by the right activity that bears good fruit for His glory. Fig leaves should bear figs, not just leaves. Understanding this returns leaders and their teams to the core fruit-bearing activities the Churches need.

Third, understanding the keys protects us from faulty assumptions made by Western Church, such as what makes a church strong, how to grow a Church, how to disciple people, what true evangelism looks like, how to develop leaders, how to work as a team in ministry, what ministry structures work and many more.

Fourth, during the study and teaching of this course, it became apparent that the study of the "keys" to the establishment and expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was simply another

way of studying how the early Christians understood the instructions of the Great Commission. It's another way of seeing what the normal Christian life should look like and how they turned the world upside down. Thus, to study the "keys" is to study the essentials of the Great Commission itself. It reveals the weakness of the Western Church paradigm and reveals the keys to local church health and success.

KEYS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH MOVING FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME

Section 1: The Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-6:7)

This section records the history of the Church in Jerusalem, its early preaching, its common life, its spread, and initial opposition. Everything is very Jewish at this time. The sermons are Jewish and the opposition is Jewish. This section sets up the history behind the first expansion of the Gospel. ²³

- The continuity of the teaching & work of Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:1-3, Ephesians 2:19-22)
- Obedience to Jesus' instructions/commands given by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:2, 4; 6-8, Matthew 28:18-20)
- The ministry and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4,8; 2:1-4,33)
- Commitment to the biblical manifestations of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:12-14)
- The witness of Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:8, 16, 22; 2:22)
- God-appointed Leadership. (Acts 1:2, 24; 6:2-6)
- Great Commission Focus. (Acts 1:1-28; 2:38, 42-47)
- The centrality of family-based, relational-based communities called the Church. (Acts 2:40-47)
- Preaching the meta-narrative of scripture (Acts 3:1-26)
- Multiplication of disciples resulting in a multiplication of Churches. (Acts 6:1,7; 4:27;6:7)
- Intentionally preaching/teaching of God's Word. (Acts 2:4-11; 4:4;5:42; 6:2)
- Unshakable faith and conviction. (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:3)
- Prayer (Acts 1:14)
- Unity among believers. (Acts 2:1, 46)
- Teaching/pastoring the supernatural. (Acts 2:14-39, 3:12-26)

²³ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p90-91

- Authentic repentance. (Acts 2:37, 3:19)
- Receiving forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)
- Healthy spiritual disciplines (Acts 2:42-47)
- Commitment to the Apostles Doctrine. (Acts 2:42)
- Lifestyle of love. (Acts 2:44-45)
- Supernatural signs & wonders. (Acts 2:5-12, 22, 43; 3:1-11, 5:12-16)
- Prophetic Fulfillment of God's Word. (Acts 2:14-21, 25-47)
- Submission to God's Authority (Acts 4:19-20)
- Faithfulness in the face of adversity. (Acts 4:19-20, 29-30; 5:29)
- The fear of the Lord. (Acts 5:1-11)
- Divine acts of God. (Acts 5:19-20)

Section 2: The Church in Judea and Samaria (Acts 6:8-9:31)

Takes place in Palestine. Paul was behind the persecution that spread the gospel. First geographical expansion carried out by Hellenists to diaspora Jews (Samaritans). Paul's conversion, Stephen's Martyrdom, Philip's ministry in Samaria, movement not controlled by apostles, but approved by them.²⁴

- Faith, power, signs & wonders (Acts 6:8)
- Power and wisdom that flows from the anointing of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:10; 9:20)
- Prayer (Acts 8:15)
- Preaching the prophetic nature of the Word of God in the context of the meta-narrative of scriptures. (Acts 7:1-53)
- Persecution that scattered the believers who faithfully spread the Word of God. (Acts 8:4)
- The Preaching of the Word of God with signs and wonders. (Acts 8:6-8)
- The Exposing of counterfeit, demonic, power (Acts 8:9-13)

²⁴ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

- Apostolic Oversight. (Acts 8:9-13)
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:15; 9:17)
- Divine Leading. (Acts 8:26, 29)
- Skillful preaching from the scriptures. (Acts 8:35)
- Baptism of Repentance in the context of the Great Commission. (Acts 8:36-38)
- True Encounter with God. (Acts 9:1-9)
- Growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus & His Word. (Acts 9:22)
- Commendation of fellow believers. (Acts 9:27)
- Church-Planting. (Acts 9:31)

Section 3: The Church in Antioch (Acts 9:32-12:24)

This section moves to Antioch and provides the description of the first expansion to the Gentiles. It also includes Cornelius' conversation with the first sermon intentionally preached to the Gentiles, and the description of the Church at Antioch where the Gospel was purposely sent forth for expansion.

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- Supernatural healing. (Acts 9:32-35; 10:3-20)
- Divine Visions. (Acts 10:3-20)
- Clear preaching of the Kerygma. (The Proclamation of the Good News Of Jesus Christ) (Acts 10:34-43)
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15, 18)
- Baptism of repentance with water. (Acts 10:47-48)
- Preaching of the Gospel in the context of the meta-narrative of scripture. (Acts 10)
- Prayer of the saints of the Church. (Acts 10:31; 12:5-17)
- The spreading of the Word of God. (Acts 12:24)

* "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

Section 4: The Church in Asia Minor (Acts 12:25-16:5)

This section moves to Asia Minor and describes the first geographical expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world with Paul in leadership. In this stage, the Jews regularly rejected the Gospel because it included the Gentiles and the Jerusalem council met and included Gentile believers and further established the Gospel of Grace. ²⁶

- Mature leaders in a Local Church are available to hear the Holy Spirit's leading in the context of prayer. (Acts 13:1-3)
- The Holy Spirit Called, the Church Commissioned the servants of the Great Commission. (Acts 13:3)
- A Sodality Ministry Team is created and launched by the centrality of the Church. (Acts 13:1-3)
- Supernatural works of the Holy Spirit demonstrating the authority of God to the World. (Acts 13:6-12; 14:3)
- The leaders of the early Church understood the "Work" the Holy Spirit called them to. (Acts 13-14)
- The preaching of the word of God. (Acts 13:15-52)
- Supernatural healing. (Acts 14:8-19)
- Church-planting. (Acts 14:21-23)
- Preaching in many cities. (Acts 14:20-21)
- The establishing and strengthening of Churches. (Acts 14:21-23; 15:36, 41; 16:5)
- Appointed Elders in the churches. (Acts 14:23)
- Prayer (Acts 13:2-3)
- Apostolic Church Network/Strong relationship with the sending Church. (Acts 14:27-28)
- The entrustment of local church leadership. (Acts 14:28)
- Established apostolic/elder authority among the network. (Acts 15:1-31)

²⁶ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

- Enlistment of new, emerging leaders. (Acts 16:1-3)
- Church-planting. (Acts 16:5)

Section 5: The Church in Aegean Area (Acts 16:6–19:20)

This section takes place in Greece and describes the further, ever westward, expansion of the Gospel in the Gentile world and not into Europe. The Jews continuously rejected the Gospel and the Gentiles repeatedly received the Gospel. ²⁷

- Divine leading of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 16:6-12)
- Demonstration of the power of the Name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 16:16-34)
- The preaching of the Word of God into new cities. (Acts 16:16-34)
- The preaching of the Word of God in the Temple and marketplace. (Acts 17:17-18; 19:9)
- Theology in the context of culture. (Acts 17:16-34; especially verse 28)
- Recruiting and training new team members to participate in the work of the Great Commission. (Acts 18:24-26)
- Biblical Theology/ Meta-Narrative. (Acts 17:2, 11; 19:19)
- Baptism of repentance and the Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:1-4)
- Supernatural miracles and healing. (Acts 19:11-19)
- The Word of God grew and prevailed. (Acts 19:20)

Section 6: Summary of the Churches Paul Planted (Acts 19:21-28:31)

This section describes the events that move Paul and the Gospel on to Rome, with a great deal of interest in Paul's trials, in which three times he is declared innocent of any wrongdoing. ²⁸

- Utilization of a team to complete the work for the Great Commission. (Acts 19:22)
- Paul, the Apostolic Worker, spent a long time training Elders (Local Church Leaders). (Acts 20:17-38)

- "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

- "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

- The teaching of the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:26-27)
- The Entrustment/Appointment of Local Church Leadership. (Acts 20:28)
- Apostolic/discipleship modeling/teaching of what new leaders should look like. (Acts 20:34-35)
- Close relationship with Elders/Leadership. (Acts 20:36-38)

Summary Chart of "Keys" Across Six Sections in the Book of Acts

Key	Section 1: Acts 1:1-6:7	Section 2: Acts 6:8-9:31	Section 3: Acts 9:32-12:24	Section 4: Acts 12:25- 16:5	Section 5: Acts 16:6- 19:20	Section 6: Acts 19:21- 28:31
The continuity of Jesus' teaching & work	Acts 1:1-3					
Jesus' Instructions/Commands	Acts 1:2, 4			Acts 13-14		
The Holy Spirit	Acts 1:4, 8 ; 2:1-4,33	Acts 6:10; 8:15; 9:17,20	Acts 10:44-46; 11:15, 18	Acts 13:3, 6- 12; 14:3; 15:1-31	Acts 16:6-12; 19:1-4	
Commitment to the Biblical Manifestations of the Holy Spirit	Acts 2:12-14					
The Witness of Jesus Christ	Acts 1:8, 16, 22; 2:5-12, 22, 43; 3:1- 11;5:12-16	Acts 6:8; 8:9- 13	Acts 9:32- 35;10:3-20	Acts 13:6- 12; 15-52; 14:3	Acts 16:16- 34; 19:11-19	
Leadership	Acts 1:2, 24; 6:2-6	Acts 8:9-13		Acts 13:1-3; 14:23, 28; 16:1-3		Acts 19:22; 20:28
Great Commission Focus	Acts 1:1-28; 2:38, 42-47			Acts 13-14		
The Centrality of the Church	Acts 2:40-47			Acts 13:1-3		
The Meta-Narrative	Acts 3:1-26	Acts 7:1-53		Acts 13:16- 41	Acts 17:2, 11; 19:19	
Planting/Establishing Churches	Acts 6:1,7; 4:27	Acts 9:31	Acts 12:43	Acts 14:21- 23; 15:36, 41; 16:5		
Preaching/Teaching God's Word	Acts 2:4-11; 4:4; 5:42;6:2	Acts 8:4, 6-8; 8:35	Acts 10:34-43; 12:24	Acts 13:15- 52; 14:20-21	Acts 16:16- 34; 17:17-18; 19:9, 20	Acts 20:26- 27
Unshakeable Faith & Conviction	Acts 1:3					
Prayer	Acts 1:4	Acts 8:4	Acts 10:31; 12:5-17	Acts 13:2-3		
Unity	Acts 1:14					
Pastoring the Supernatural	Acts 2:14-39; 3:12-26					
Authentic Repentance	Acts 2:37;3:19	Acts 8:36-38	Acts 10:47-48		Acts 19:1-4	
Receiving Forgiveness	Acts 2:38					
Spiritual Disciplines	Acts 2:42-47					
Apostle's Doctrine	Acts 2:42					

FEATURED KEYS

CONTINUITY OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

Description

Continuity of ministry is all about what God began in Genesis and continues to do today. It's about the unfolding of one grand strategy in the context of the meta-narrative of scripture. It's about seeing the New Testament as a fulfillment of things spoken of in the Old Testament and how they are working together to accomplish God's eternal purposes through Christ. It's about understanding the Church's role in this hour as we have received the baton passed to us from Christ Himself. This is the same theme in Luke 24, Acts 3, Acts 7, and Acts 10; 24:14; 26:22-23; 28:22-23.

Following are some of the reasons why the Continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ is a key to the establishment and expansion of the early Church.

Continuity Found in the Ministry of Jesus Christ

- Jesus accomplished that which was prophesied in the Old Testament. (See Isaiah 53 as one example among a multitude.)
- Jesus was fulfilling all that was written by the Law, prophets, and the writings.

Luke 24:44 (NKJV) — 44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

Luke 24:46 (NKJV) — 46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

Continuity Found in the Ministry of the Church

Whereas Jesus fulfilled the prophetic words of the Old Testament, the Church continues His work in the New Testament. When Jesus Christ walked the earth in bodily form as recorded in the four historical Gospels, the Father's ministry through the Holy Spirit was "Christ-Centric." After the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Father's ministry through the Holy Spirit was "Church-centric." The Church is now the body of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Church carries forward the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Continuity of Ministry is vital because God's work upon the earth is not yet finished, and we must answer the call to continue what the work of the Spirit is upon the earth. The Church's mission should be all about continuing all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Acts 1:1 (NKJV) — 1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Examples of Continuity in the Book of Acts

The Great Commission

In the context of the meta-narrative of scripture, Jesus' Great Commission is truly the call to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant for all the families of the earth to be blessed through Abraham. Thus, the Church is fulfilling this work by making disciples of all nations to be grafted in.
²⁹

The book of Acts records the early Church going, baptizing, and teaching all that Jesus Christ commanded. They were doing God's work to call all nations to Himself so that they may be saved. The Church was, and is, the Body of Christ, continuing the mission to bring salvation to Israel and the whole world.

The Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

The Church continued the multifaceted ministry of Jesus Christ in many ways. The ministry of Jesus Christ was fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, the Church, again being the Body of Christ, continued God's work through the Holy Spirit's empowerment.

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:18), the Church was anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:8, 2:14-21; 2:25-4)

The Work

Though only Jesus Christ was worthy to provide our sacrificial atonement, the work of Christ continued through His hands and feet, the Church. Here are only some examples.

- Jesus did perform healings. The Church performed healings.
- Jesus took care of the needy. The Church was commanded to take care of the poor.

²⁹ See Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:18-20

- Jesus preached the message of the Gospel. The Church preached the message of the Gospel.
- Jesus resisted and overcame darkness. The Church is called to resist evil and overcome darkness. (See Matthew 13)
- Jesus gave commandments that would enable people to follow Him. The Church was to continue to teach people all that Jesus commanded. (See Matthew 28:18-20)
- Jesus built a community of disciples who would live a distinct life. The Church was to multiply divinely ordered communities who would live distinct lives.
- Jesus was called to reveal the Father. (See John 1:14-17, 14:6-11) The Church was called to be witnesses to Him, which enabled the lost to see the Father.

The foundation of understanding what Jesus both did and taught. The disciples were not starting from scratch completely. They had the foundation of Jesus Christ. They had the works and teachings of Jesus Christ. This was the beginning and the foundation and a critical key to the establishment of the Church. They had Christ, who is the chief cornerstone. Though this may seem simple, many churches and denominations are built upon things other than what Jesus Christ both did and taught. The early 1st-century Church had no other model, no other example, no other system for Christianity other than what they had seen and heard from Jesus Christ. It is about the transfer from Christ through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. A foundation was established of the way of Christ and His apostles. (See Acts 1:1, Ephesians 2:19-22)

The Instructions

The amazing reality is that the early Church did not merely receive commands or an example to simply pass on information. They received a mandate to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. (Acts 1-2) The foundation of their understanding was what Jesus both did and taught. The disciples weren't starting from scratch. They had the foundation of Jesus Christ. They had the works and teachings of Jesus Christ. This was the beginning and the foundation and a critical key to the establishment of the Church. They had Christ, Who is the chief cornerstone. Though this may seem fundamental, many churches and denominations are built upon things other than what Jesus Christ both did and taught. The early 1st-century Church had no other model, no other example, no other system for Christianity other than what they had seen and heard from Jesus Christ. It is about the transfer from Christ through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. A foundation was established of the way of Christ and His apostles.

The early Church did not hold memorial services of what Jesus once did and taught. It was filled with life and power! They demonstrated that Jesus was alive and well and working in and through the Church. This is why Jesus not only gave the commandments (instructions) in Acts 1:2 but also waited for them to receive the Holy Spirit so they would be able to accomplish them as they went. The Spirit was always working to develop the Church's understanding of the work she was called to do.

A powerful example of this is in Acts 10 when Peter receives a vision that leads to Cornelius' household becoming saved. The Spirit still needed to bring instruction and understanding to Peter that the work of Jesus through the Gospel was to bring the Gentiles (all people) to salvation. This is the work God had been working on all along from Genesis 12 in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Issues to Think Through

The Church is sent to continue the work of Jesus Christ. This means the Church should be about the Father's business at all times. If the Church does not continue the work of Jesus Christ as in the book of Acts, the establishment and expansion of the Church will not continue. The Kingdom of God will not expand. We can see this happen in communities, cities, and nations. One generation faithfully does the work of Jesus Christ with both the establishment and expansion of the Church, while future generations fail to continue the work, and the establishment and expansion of the Church erode. This very erosion is sadly seen in the places the apostle Paul once worked to establish the Gospel. We must realize that much is at stake during our generation to continue the work of the Gospel so we can once again see the kind of establishment and expansion that took place in the book of Acts.

Personal Reflection

A great struggle is raging within the Church over what aspects of Jesus' ministry are and are not continuing today. A few examples within the theological debate are:

- Whether the time of miracles has passed or if they are the will of God today.
- Whether the gifts of the Holy Spirit have passed or if they are the will of God today.
- Whether the role of the "apostles" ended with the first-century or if they are for today.

These debates would end if we saw the larger picture of the ministry of Christ and His will to do even greater than He did. We are still in the Church age of the book of Acts. We are essentially writing the history of the Church in Acts 29! To see the purpose of miracles, the

anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the calling of the five-fold ministry in the context of the continued work of Jesus should settle the issue that these things should be included in the Church's ministry today.

In fact, how can we say that we have the continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ without having His ministry! He healed, He fed the poor, He cast out demons, He preached, He taught, He operated in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We should not break apart the ministry of Jesus Christ in these functions but should carry forth the baton of His witness upon the earth, knowing that His work continues in His Church today.

Recommendations

1. Leaders need to learn the meta-narrative of scripture so they may come to understand "what" we are called to do and "why" we are called to do it. This will result in many leaders gaining confidence and focus on how they should spend their time and resources.
2. Leaders need to take the call seriously to train servant-leaders to continue the work of Jesus. There is more to do than merely transfer information. We must become the witnesses of Jesus Christ He has called us to be.
3. Leaders need to be willing to lay down forms, traditions, and patterns that hold the Church back from truly continuing the work of Jesus Christ.

CHRIST'S INSTRUCTIONS & COMMANDS

Description

The beginning point of the key to establishing and expanding the Great Commission is simply to understand the Great Commission itself. This may seem overly obvious to some, but the importance of this key must never be estimated. The Great Commission may appear to be well understood, but, in my opinion, it is less understood than most realize. It requires more than a general understanding of the Great Commission being a general call to tell people about Jesus, which is the most basic view of evangelism. It requires every ministry to understand the fullness of the Lord Jesus's instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles in light of the meta-narrative of scripture. In Acts 1:2, it says,

Acts 1:2 (NKJV) — 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

The great question is, "What are these commandments"? What did Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, command, or instruct, the early disciples? The answer is vital and reveals a key to the success of the early Church.

If the early apostles did not understand the commands, they would not have been able to follow them. Though this may appear oversimplified, it is nevertheless critical. Wars are won and lost by how well their armies understood the orders of their superior officers.

Understanding Christ's commands enabled the early Church servants to be fixed and focused upon the plans and purposes of God in the Great Commission.

Though the apostles may not have understood the totality of what the Spirit of God would do from Acts 1 to Acts 28, they understood enough to take the first steps and allowed themselves to be guided by the Spirit as the will of God unfolded for the Church.

Apostolic Clarity

The early disciples understood the Great Commission was not the establishment or expansion of an earthly kingdom but rather Of God's heavenly Kingdom. They were to seek the release, establishment, and expansion of the witness of Jesus Christ upon the earth. They had a clear picture of their assignment.

Today, many seek to build things that are earth-bound rather than heavenly. They have lost sight of what the Spirit is aiming to do in the nations. They focus on the size of congregations rather than the quality of their disciples, they seek God to serve us rather than to serve Him, they prioritize entertainment-oriented services over the serious study of the Word of God, and many seek to make their ministries famous rather than the Name of the Lord Jesus. The early Church leaders were not only clear on their functions but were willing to die for them.

Ministry vs. Missions

There's an enormous difference between operating with the instructions of God with a specific mission in mind versus administering activities in a disunited and fragmented way.

The early leaders lived with mission-mindedness because they followed the instructions of the Lord. The book of Acts, and especially the ministry of the apostle Paul, seem to convey a historical reporting that they were focused on spreading the message of the Gospel, developing new Churches, and raising leaders over those Churches so Jesus would "fill all things." (See Acts 13-14; Ephesians 4:10-11)

The Gospel moved from Jerusalem to Rome with unstoppable momentum. They didn't just meet to have weekend service. They preached with purposed, worshipped with sincerity of heart, and lived for the progress of the spreading of the Gospel.

The Source of the Instructions

The commandments of what to do came from the correct source. They came from through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The source was not a man. It was God. It was imperative for ministers of the Gospel to heed the commandments from Jesus Christ. They were not to embark their way, but they were to follow the specific instructions from Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:2,4; Matthew 28:18-20)

Though sincere Christians believe they are following God's commands, many are sadly following the traditions of the denomination. They are unaware of the original instructions of the Lord. They have come to follow pieces or aspects of the Great Commission but fail to see the sum of the parts.

The Meta-Narrative

The leaders of the early Church were primarily Jewish. This means they had a greater appreciation for the prophetic fulfillment of Christ and how the significance of how they fit the meta-narrative of scripture. This was probably most true for the Apostle Paul as we learn his theological perspectives in his epistles, where he often explains New Testament theology in light of the Old Testament covenant.³⁰

In many ways, the "keys" listed in this writing provide a framework that reveals a complete understanding of the Great Commission in that it describes not only what should be done but some of the critical success factors of how it should be done.

The Passing of the Baton

It was important for the apostles to understand the instructions because of the Luke/Acts transition. In Luke, the incarnate Jesus was the primary worker in the flesh. In Acts, Jesus ascends into heaven and passes the baton onto the apostolic leaders to continue what He began to do and teach. (See Acts 1:1). If these instructions were not understood, the mission of Christ would have faltered and not been accomplished. All that Jesus began would have come to a halt.

Like most, I used to think the Great Commission was simply telling people about Jesus. Now, I've come to understand the instructions, or commandments of God, were much more comprehensive in their scope and that telling the world about Jesus was just the beginning of Je-

* See Pauls' letter to the Galatians and Romans as wonderful examples of this Old Testament/New Testament marriage in light of the Great Commission of Christ.

Jesus's commandments. It is just as vital that we discover and return to these instructions because generations have passed without a clear understanding of the Great Commission, and the Church has lost much ground.

We indeed need the Holy Spirit's power to accomplish the mission, but it is equally valid that we need to look afresh at the instructions of Christ given through the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve received instructions, Noah received instructions, Moses received instructions, Joshua received instruction, David received instructions, Solomon received instructions, apostles received instructions. In the same way, we need to receive the baton and once again run the race in accordance with the instructions of the Spirit of God.

Establishment & Expansion

The early Church established the Church. They did not merely preach about the Gospel or attempt to win new converts. They continued through the fullness of God's will and planted Churches. In addition, "they" established with "expansion" in mind. They were concerned about both geographic and cultural expansion. They were concerned about both the Jew and the Gentile, about both the woman and the slave, and moved the Gospel from city to cities.

Relevant Scriptures

1. Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ commands us to go, make converts (disciples), baptize, and teach people to observe or obey all that Jesus Christ commanded. While this brief text of scripture gives us a robust framework of the Great Commission, it is incomplete in that it does not provide the entirety of information given in the Word of God.

2. The Book of Acts

- As a whole, the book of Acts helps us to understand the greater depth and breadth of the Great Commission. If we were to wonder what image was in a painter's mind, the clearest way to understand it would be to look at the painting he/she painted. If we were to wonder what building the architect had in mind, the clearest way to understand it would be to walk through it. Thus, the clearest way to understand the Great Commission's instructions would be to understand what the Apostle received from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The greatest way to understand that is to look at what they built. The book of Acts thankfully provides a library of information concerning what they did, how they did it, and what it produced. We must look both at the forest and trees within the book of Acts to deeply understand the depth and breadth of the Great Commission.

Issues to Think Through

- We must become delivered from cultural definitions of the Great Commission. The Great Commission has been watered down, stripped down, and reduced to fragmented pieces of isolated activities often divorced from any coherent strategy to disciple the nations.
 - Too many derive their understanding of the Great Commission from the four historical gospels rather than from the whole canon of scripture. To focus upon the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and divorce it from the life and ministry of the Holy Spirit through the apostles is to rob the Great Commission of its fuller meaning of advancing the Kingdom of God through the building of a people in the context of planting Churches and raising leaders to carry the baton.
- Disciples, Local Churches, and Church networks must become founded in an understanding of the Great Commission that is truly biblical and supra-cultural in definition while carried out with cultural sensitivity and intelligence.
- We must be willing to do the necessary work needed to discover the depth and breadth of the Great Commission. It requires more than a cursory read of the book of Acts. It requires serious study of the whole of scripture to truly grasp the meaning, methods, and implications of the Great Commission. The Great Commission is not a simple task to be listed among commandments. It is the grand strategy of God for the Church until His second coming. It encompasses so much more than most realize, and a complete understanding warrants a thorough grasp of the meta-narrative of scripture.

Personal Reflection

Among the many keys in the book of Acts, understanding the importance of the instructions and commands is arguably one of the most critical. We live in an era where the average Christian is greatly confused, disillusioned, and at minimum distracted by the many misrepresentations of what the Christian life should look like.

There are at least four different common types of people:

1. Those who are entirely unaware that the Church is called to be a people on mission.
2. Those who are aware there is a Great Commission but have no idea they should be living a life oriented around it.
3. Those attempting to live missional but are living on the wrong mission in that they are pursuing a distorted, corrupted, and man-made version of Christ's Commission filled with cultural mandates rather than biblical mandates.

4. Those who have understood Christ's instructions for the Great Commission and are living on it.

This key is essentially communicating the importance of the instructions that Jesus Christ gave to the apostles that were meant to continue throughout generations.

Ministry Reflection

The unit has caused me to deeply consider how well we are doing as a ministry compared to the keys in the book of Acts. I'm greatly thankful that God has put us on the right track and that we are further along than ever in understanding the "work" God has been doing.

We have leaders experiencing conviction in the study of the "keys," and I believe the Holy Spirit is developing a sensitivity in us to be teachable in His hands.

Without question, the entirety of this course has been challenging our teams to understand that we have a great deal of progress to make in many areas if we are going to be found faithful to the Great Commission. For example, we have done reasonably well to create a local family who loves one another. They experience authentic Christianity as they meet in homes and are growing in their faith. However, we have not yet experienced the multiplication necessary to see the Kingdom expand to the degree that we should.

Questions To Be Addressed

1. Will our generation in the Western Church embrace the need to study the instructions?
2. Will we in our ministries take the instructions seriously and be willing to pay the price for pursuing the instructions and not culturally popular models?
3. Will we have the courage to stand against other prevailing paradigms that look impressive but are not either normative or, in some cases, even biblical?

GOD-APPOINTED, SPIRIT-LED LEADERSHIP

Description

As John C. Maxwell says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." This phrase holds much wisdom because it's a truth that can be applied to the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church. Nothing would have progressed past the ministry of Christ if the right, God-appointed, Spirit-led leadership was not appointed.

The following observations pertain to the essential characteristics of "Leadership" as a key to the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church.

Chosen/Appointed Leadership

We do not find the concept of volunteering in the Book of Acts how it is practiced throughout Christianity today. In the Book of Acts, God spoke, and servants obeyed, even if it meant going on a dangerous multi-year mission. Today, the Church asks for volunteers and often sends them into mission even when they lack proper training and the demonstration of the character of Christ.

The scriptures instead demonstrate a pattern of sending those God chooses.

- The twelve discipleship were chosen (see Matthew 10:1-4)
- Only eleven disciples were chosen to be sent on the Great Commission instead of twelve. God only sent those who proved themselves to be true followers of the truth.
- God chose Matthias to follow in the apostleship (see Acts 1:24)
- God chose Paul (see Acts 9:15)
- The servants were chosen in Acts 6:1-5 based upon those who had a good reputation, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and demonstrated wisdom.
- Paul and Barnabas were chosen by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the Church leaders in Acts 13:1-2.
- Men were chosen to travel with Paul and Silas back to Antioch (see Acts 15:22)
- The elders were called to oversee the Church (see Acts 20:28)
- Timothy was chosen by the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:1-3)

Functional Versus Positional Leadership

The Church is full of people who pursue position rather than function. In other words, many want to be recognized as being something rather than being passionate about doing something. We like to think we are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers but often fall short of the qualifications of such titles because we have not proven ourselves to do the work.

The Lord desires that we would do the "work" and then be recognized. Positional leadership tends to acknowledge the person as a leader, whereas functional leadership tends to identify the fruit of one's life and ministry.

God is concerned about us being who He has called us to be and doing what He has called us to do. God is the One who makes us fishers of men. (See Matthew 4:19)

The simplicity of the need to be chosen should not cause us to underestimate its importance. The Lord knows who we are and what He along has ordained us to do. We should discover the will of God for our lives and simply respond to it. The book of Acts demonstrates that the early Church took care to respond to God's call. The mission was too significant and the challenges too great to afford to send the wrong people. The right people at the right time had to be about their Father's business.

Jesus chose His twelve, and Paul built a team of called people who assisted him in the work of God upon the earth.

Paul's second letter to Timothy demonstrates that Paul taught Timothy, Timothy taught faithful men, who were also called to teach others. As leaders, we must understand who is faithful, who we should teach, and who we should send into the mission field.

The Holy Spirit called, the Church Commissioned

-The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas the missionaries. Men did not call men.

-Though the Holy Spirit did the calling, the local church leaders were called to do the commissioning, thus the local leaders fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them and then sent them on their way. (See Acts 13:3)

-Paul had a strong relationship with the sending Church. He was not a rogue minister. He was in right relationship with the Antioch Church, from which he was called and commissioned. He reported the great things God had done and kept his sending Church connected in a significant way. He even spent a long time there before he moved on again. (See Acts 14:27-28)

Chosen Servants Were Qualified

-The chosen leaders of the early Church were also chosen to see the resurrected Christ. They knew beyond any questionable doubt that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that He alone was the truth. As testified by Jesus Christ, their faith in the resurrection from the dead was central and critical to the message of the Gospel. They had an unshakable conviction about what they were doing and what they were building. So much so, they were willing to die for it. We see that this is a theme that continues from Luke's Gospel to his second treatise in Acts. (See Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:3)

-They were bold because they truly encountered God authentically and genuinely. (See Acts 4:13, Acts 4:29-31, Acts 5:29, Acts 13:46, Acts 14:2-3, Acts 28:31)

-Servants were called to demonstrate both the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:2)

Appointed Elders in the Churches

Paul created new believers, but he also gathered them together into churches and then appointed elders in the churches to continue to lead and strengthen. The elders did not volunteer but were appointed.

Church Leaders Understood Their Purpose & Assignment

-It was critical that the early disciples understood that the Great Commission was not the establishment or expansion of an earthly kingdom but rather Of God's heavenly Kingdom. They were to seek the release, establishment, and expansion of the witness of Jesus Christ upon the earth. Today, many seek to build things that are earth-bound rather than heavenly. They had a clear picture of their assignment.

Issues To Think About

-We have to consider the difference between what is biblical versus what is cultural. To a large degree, the idea of only sending those the Lord has chosen is anti-cultural in the Western Church. The requirements of who gets sent and when they get sent have significantly been reduced. It appears the Western Church is more concerned about numbers of people rather than the quality of those people.

-We have to put only those the Lord has chosen for His work into the field. I've frequently had to hold people back from putting their hands to the plow of service because they were either not called to the task or were not yet ready to be sent. This can be discouraging to the believer, but it is a test to see how well they will wait upon the Lord.

-Every army, company, and sports team needs to have the right people. Sports teams don't accept volunteers. They would never win championships with this method, and they know it. The Church needs to learn it. We need those whom God has prepared for His work doing what He called them to do in the right place and at the right time.

Personal Reflection

-I have personally learned some compelling lessons about putting the wrong people into positions. I also learned many lessons about putting the right people into ministry too early. Yet still, I've learned lessons about waiting too long to put the right people into ministry.

-It takes great wisdom, understanding, and patience to train those God has called.

- This is why I'm so thankful to have the Antioch School operating within our ministries. It gives us the content, the processes, and mentoring wineskins to ensure we are putting the right people in the right positions at the right time.

Recommendations

- Church leaders need to take a great deal of time to pray, prepare, and send the right kind of leaders into the mission field.
- Church leaders need to create a culture within their ministries that fosters excitement and enthusiasm for being developed and sent at the right time.
- Church leaders need to develop a conviction that they will only send the called and not cave in to the pressures that exist otherwise.

Questions To Be Answered

- What should the process look like in a local church to bring people into their calling?
 - We believe the SIMA process and the other life and ministry development tools are a valuable contribution to helping people and their leaders in their discovery process.
- What will happen if we allow the wrong people to volunteer?
- What is the benefit of waiting for those leaders the Lord Himself chooses?

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Description

Leadership training was a matter of central importance in establishing and expanding the First-Century Church because it ensured the Gospel and its associated ministry would progress with accuracy and fruitfulness. If the first-century Church did not cultivate emerging leaders in new geographies for new generations, the progress of the Gospel would have ceased.

Leadership training was so important because of the simple transfer of information, but rather for the cultivation of the kind of leaders that would continue the witness of Jesus Christ as called for in Acts 1:8. From Jerusalem to Rome, the Church needed strong believers deeply rooted in character, doctrine, and ministry skill. The times were difficult, the environment hostile, and the work was great. They needed servants who demonstrated that the Gospel was not the will of man but was the will of God. That it was not the wisdom of man but that it was the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:5 (NKJV) — 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

First-Century Leadership Training

Leadership training of the first-century Church was distinctly different than that of the 21st-century Church. In short, the Church of the New Testament was focused on developing leaders through real-life mentorship, whereas the modern Church is more focused upon the academic side of classroom training performed outside the context of mentorship.

Leadership training had to properly prepare the servants of the Church for the realities of ministry. If they didn't, the progress of the Gospel would have been hindered.

Paul, the apostle, illustrates the idea of one generation of leaders entrusting the deposit of the Gospel to specially chosen men who would teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJV) — 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The early Church training was multi-generational as it included Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others also. This Paul-Timothy Model of leadership development serves as an excellent description of the paradigm of the first-century Church.

Paul spent a long time training Elders (Local Church Leaders)

Paul functioned as an apostle raising up and training leaders. He spent three years day and night preparing the Elders to guard and protect the deposit, the truth, the faith so that the enemy would not be successful in eroding what God had built. (See Acts 20:17-38)

Paul modeled what other servant-leaders should look like.

Paul lived in a way that others could emulate, but his opponents could not accuse. He worked with his own hands and demonstrated how to live, work, and minister. They had more than a teaching. They had a living example of what they should become and how to lead. (See Acts 20:34-35, 1 Corinthians 11:1)

Training happened in the context of a ministry family and not disassociated members of an academy

This was not an administrative, educational process. It was training in the context of a family. A group of men that spent time studying, praying, and serving for three years. They loved one another so much they fell on Paul's neck with tears because they did not want him to die. This is a strong example of what apostolic authority and influence should look like. It was not power that burdened others, but a fathering love that served others. (See Acts 20:36-38, 2 Timothy 2:1-2)

Paul in the Grace and Knowledge of Jesus and His Word

- Paul grew stronger and stronger. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, but he grew in wisdom and strength and confounded the Jews in Damascus.
- Paul had more than a supernatural experience. He grew in the wisdom of the Word of God because he was now able to "prove" that Jesus is the Christ. He undoubtedly began to understand the true meaning of the Old Testament scriptures in the context of the revelation of Jesus Christ. (See Acts 9:22)

Paul Taught the Whole Counsel of God

How vital it was that Paul taught them the whole counsel of God. He did not preach to their felt needs but preached to their real need. He preached the entire instruction of scripture and was able to declare that he was innocent of the blood of all men. (See Acts 20:26-27)

Paul Recruits and Trains Team Members to Participate in the work

Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla and trained them, and they become part of his team. They even helped to more accurately train Apollos with the fuller teaching of the scripture. This training all happened in the context of organic ministry. (See Acts 18:24-26)

Issues To Think Through

- The modern Church has to grapple with how effective the training of the early Church was compared to today.
- The modern Church has to think about where they got their current training paradigm. Is it from the Word of God or the secular world?

Personal Reflection

The ideas of teaching and training are vital to me. I am passionate about them. How someone is training determines how far they will do and how successful they will become. Gifting and talent are essential, but the training process refines raw material and cultivates it into something new and unique.

The world is starving for real mentors. The Church is starving for real mentors. Throughout my academic life, I was taught to go to school, listen, do my homework, study hard, and then demonstrate my knowledge by taking tests. I worked hard and excelled in this. However, I've come to realize that the test given in the classroom and the test given in real life are two very different evaluative scales. Real-life will give the test that matters because it's the one that emerges out of doing the actual work.

I've become fully persuaded that we need to return to the first century's leadership development models while preserving the benefits and academic standards that have been found beneficial. I'm pursuing my doctorate in Church-Based Theological education because it embodies experiential training with the thoroughness achieved with high academic standards.

Ministry Reflection

As a Pastor and network leader, I have come to value the character, sound doctrine, and ministry skills of a person more than the mere academic knowledge. The great question is whether or not an individual can get the work done and done well. Simply knowing is not enough. They need to understand how to apply that knowledge in an ever-changing world. How to think and think critically through the issues of our day. To reason through the principles of scripture rather than following someone else's rule book.

Recommendations

- All Church and network leaders should study Church-based theological education and make the necessary adjustments needed to experience the power of the paradigm.
- All Church and network leaders should assess their own current leadership training effectiveness.
- All Church and network leaders should think deeply about what changes they need to implement to create a multi-generational leadership development plan.
- All Church and network leaders should think more deeply about who they are called to train and who they will spend a great deal of time with. We need to spend the right amount of time with the right people and deploy them in the right things to see the Gospel once again progress like it once did in North America and beyond.

DELEGATED TEAM-BASED MINISTRY

Description

America, and subsequently the Western Culture, love the "Lone Ranger," "Rambo," and the solo hero that rides off into the sunset. We celebrate individualism and the idea that we can do it all by ourselves. The Church has adopted this flawed view and inserted it into the culture of the Church. We celebrate the famous evangelist, the star preacher, etc.

The biblical record in the book of Acts does the opposite. It establishes prominent figures such as Peter and Paul, but it goes further to describe the important roles key people made as they worked together, as a team, toward fulfilling the work of the Great Commission. What a beautiful picture the Lord has given to us as the Holy Spirit worked through a multitude of

people. One Spirit working through many people for one ultimate purpose. (See Acts 15; 19:22)

A Sodality Ministry Team Created and Launched

In calling Paul and Barnabas out from a local setting into new regions, a new leadership structure was formed that was much more mobile and trans-local. We saw the idea of modality at Antioch, but now the concept of sodality emerges with this new missionary band. It was a ministry team that remained rooted in the local Church but ministered abroad. This "sodality" team was needed because of the "work" the Holy Spirit called them. This was not a scattering of believers because of persecution but was instead an intentional missions initiative of God to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. (See Acts 13:1-3)

The Entrustment/Appointed of Local Church Leadership

Paul did not try to lead everything himself. In addition, he did not try to create a type of centralized government that he micromanaged from afar. He did not try to put a mere administrator in the local Church who would blindly follow another person's instructions. Instead, Paul raised leaders who could lead and carry out the Great Commission. He relied upon them to do the work of a governmental leader in the local Church. (See Acts 14:28; 20:28)

Enlistment of New Emerging Leaders

Paul recruited Timothy, a young man who Paul was able to disciple and groom as a future leader. He was always thinking about adding to his team and used his meeting with Timothy to recruit further next-generation leaders to establish and expand the local Church. (See Acts 16:1-3)

In addition, Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla and trained them, and they become part of his team. They even helped to more accurately train Apollos in the scripture. (See Acts 18:24-26)

Barnabas even helped Paul to be received among those who did not have any personal knowledge of his fruit. (See Acts 9:27)

Strong Relationship with the Sending Church

I believe Paul saw himself as an extension of the local Church at Antioch. He did not consider himself a separate entity operating "para," or next to, the Church. He saw himself as a continuing part of the team the Holy Spirit selected team. (See Acts 14:27-28)

Apostolic/Elder Authority was established

There was an apparent order within the Church. When there was a dispute concerning the need for circumcision to be saved and a dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas with certain men, they knew to go to the leaders of the Jerusalem church about the question. There is a semblance of structure and order and accountability with the Jerusalem church leaders. This "order" revealed a way in which authority was organized, administered, and delegated. (See Acts 15:1-31)

Paul Appointed Elders in the Churches

Paul not only created new believers, but he also gathered them together into churches and then appointed elders in the churches to continue to lead and strengthen. These elders represented his team of leaders he delegated work and authority. Paul did not remain a local elder in those Churches but remained connected enough to shepherd, but was removed enough to rely upon them to complete their assigned duties. (See Acts 14:23)

Delegated Authority Demonstrated Throughout Scripture

From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, God demonstrates that He desires to delegate the work of His glory unto others. In Genesis, God delegated work to Adam and Eve. (See Genesis 1:26-28) In Exodus, He commissioned work to Moses (see Exodus 3). Throughout the Old Testament, God delegates His work to judges, priests, prophets, and kings. God the Father delegates His power and authority to His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus entrusted His work to the apostles who in turn entrusted work to other faithful souls. (See 2 Timothy 2:2)

Everywhere in the New Testament, we see the Holy Spirit filling and working through all types of people who, in turn, were to work together for the work of the ministry.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:" (See Ephesians 4:11-13 KJV)

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (See Acts 20:28 KJV)

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers,

and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:" (See 1 Peter 2:13-15 KJV)

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." (See Acts 2:42-47 KJV)

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." (See Acts 6:1-7 KJV)

Other Scriptures exemplifying this idea of delegated team work are: (Acts 12:13-17; Acts 13:13-14; 11:19-30; 16:4-5; 19:22; Matthew 16:18-19)

Issues To Think Through

This idea of the Church delegating and sending leadership into the Holy Spirit's work was and is critical to the establishment and expansion of the Gospel in the first-century Church. The Gospel would not have traveled as far and wide as it did without this crucial key. The early Church saw the establishment and expansion of the local Church as a core component of the Great Commission, which compelled them to set up these "Gospel centers" that others would have to carry on.

The issue is how we see the Great Commission today. Do we see it as bringing as many people to listen to a preacher, or do we see it as a way of life that needs to fill the nations? Do we

see the work of the five-fold ministry as the work, or do we see it as preparing the people of God for the work? (See Ephesians 4:10-11).

The Church must move from being an event-driven, programmatic enterprise to becoming a movement where the message of the Gospel is embraced, and its prescribed way of life embraced. It must shift from a few "highly anointed" ministers to becoming a unified Body that exemplifies the ways and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Personal/Ministry Reflections

We Recognize the Need for Correct Structure.

EveryHouse and Abundant Grace Church have restructured their leadership roles to be more aligned with the New Testament record. We desire to operate with the correct authority structures to see an ordered acceleration of the spread of the Gospel. We believe having the community correctly ordered is necessary for the people to operate as teams with delegated authority. When a community is well-ordered, the people can function properly according to their callings.

A Difficult Paradigm Shift

It's easy for people to understand the need for "volunteer" teams. They understand how to fulfill a task they've been asked to complete. However, producing teams that flow and move in delegated authority similar to that of the first-century Church often proves difficult. The Western Church culture has made spectators rather than servants, an audience rather than an army, and people who have come to rely more upon the Church's leaders rather than the Lord Jesus Himself.

The necessary shifts are taking place, but at a slower rate than expected. Though some readily accept their calling, many are shy to step out with faith and a mind to work. Some are timid, and others are too preoccupied to prioritize the local Church's work in their lives.

We are continuing to work to move people to both rely upon the Holy Spirit to fulfill their callings and embrace the importance of their roles in the context of their lives and ministries.

Recommendations

1. Every Church leader must be highly intentional about creating a culture that raises people to send.
2. Like the Apostle Paul, we should always be alert for the people the Lord is sending to us.

3. The right ministry structures must be created to send people into the work. Most traditionally organized Churches have very limited roles such as Worship leaders, Deacons, Elders, etc., instead of being creative in designing team fictional roles that people can organically serve.
4. Assessments like the SIMA process should be done for the masses to receive direction and guidance in their respective callings.

CHURCH PLANTING & MULTIPLICATION

Description

I've come to see "Church Planting" as one of the most overlooked "keys" of the Great Commission. How has the Church come to miss such a significant part of the Great Commission? How have we come to a place where ministry activities have become disconnected from the vitality and life-blood of the Local Church?

Truly Church planting is at the very heart of the success of establishing and expanding the local Church and the gospel message.

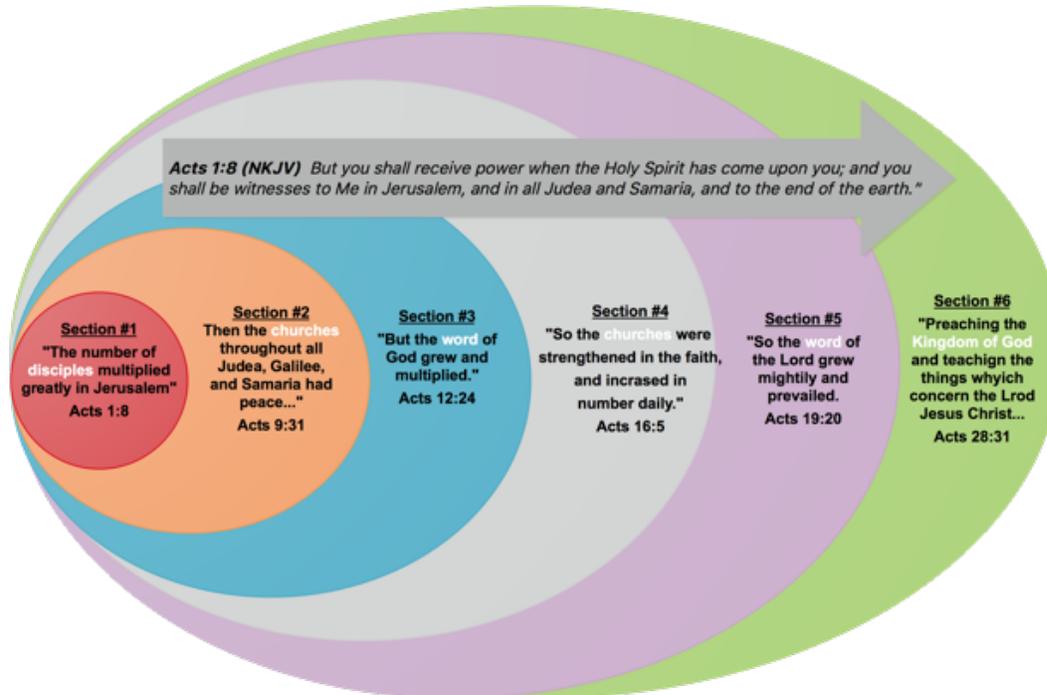
As studied later in the Acts Course, the Pauline Cycle has its foundation in gathering new converts into living communities who would become missional gospel-centers who would bear witness of Jesus in practical and powerful ways in their communities.

Churches planted throughout the geographic expansion of the missional enterprise enabled each culture, language, and people group to find their expression of worship while preserving the normative aspects of the faith.

This graph gives a clear picture of the progression of activity from preaching to church planting from Jerusalem to Rome.

6 DIVISIONS BASED ON MOVEMENT OF THE GOSPEL*

THE GREAT COMMISSION: The movement and expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a movement of the preaching of the Word of God which created disciples which were gathered together into divinely ordered communities called Churches who were entrusted to carry forth the Great Commission. It is from those Churches the Word of God continued to go forth, made disciples and created new Churches. The Great Commission was not only a disciple-making movement, but was indeed a Church planting movement. Making disciples is a necessary and critical component, but it is not sufficient. The testimony of the book of Acts is that the full work was to assemble those new believers into Churches who could carry forth the Great Commission in their own geographies in a sustainable and ever-expanding way.



*As seen in Gordon Fee's writing, "Acts, The Problem of Historical Precedent", p 91.

We see in Acts 13 & 14 that Paul preaching the Gospel to cities, gathered them into communities, revisited them to further establish them in their faith, appointed matured believers as elders, and then reported back to Antioch, his sending Church. This cycle is vital in the establishment and expansion process of the New Testament. If churches, ordered communities, were not established, the Gospel message would have been proclaimed and possibly served as a spark rather than a sustained flame in that part of the world.

Church-Planting (Multiplication)

-The Churches were strengthened in the faith, and they were growing. There was movement. The Churches were involved in the mission. They were spreading the Word, planting churches, raising leaders, and continuing the process of creating new believers. The Churches were not stagnant aquariums. They were thriving rivers bring life to all the region. They were people who spread the Good News of the Gospel and grew. (See Acts 16:5)

The Planting of Churches

- The disciples did not stay as individuals but were gathered together into Churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. In addition, the churches had peace, were edified, walked in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and were multiplied. It is also essential to observe that the Churches were multiplied. (See Acts 9:31)

The Establishing, or Strengthening of Churches

Paul not only preached to new cities, but he also circled back around to the place he first visited, and he strengthened them and exhorted them to continue in the faith. (See Acts 14:21-22; 15:36, 16:5)

Issues To Think Through

Is it possible to fulfill the Great Commission without a focus on planting churches?

I believe the answer is "no." As God commanded mankind to be fruitful and multiply and cover the earth in the context of families, so He is calling for Jesus to fill all things (see Ephesians 4:10) in the planting and establishing of churches.

There is no way to make disciples the way Jesus commanded without doing it in the context of the local Church.

There is also no way to effectively organize the missional enterprise without the wineskin of the Church. Though some try to create organizational structures similar to corporations, only the local Church organized as a familial unit can effectively progress the Gospel.

Personal Reflection

Though I planted Abundant Grace, the local Church I now serve as the apostolic overseer, I did not understand the nature and importance of church-planting. I only was trying to follow the call God placed upon my heart.

It was a great surprise to me to learn how strategic the activity was and how the Lord was leading me deeper into His will.

Ministry Reflection

In the planting and establishing of Abundant Grace, I have come to understand the importance of the Church as being God's Household upon the earth. I've come to understand the context for love, discipleship, correction, and maturity. I no longer teach that the Church is "like" a family. I now teach that the Church is God's family upon the earth.

The role of BILD International and the pursuit of my Doctorate has become the very center of the training and preparation for my calling. It has given me language for what I'm called to do and instrumental for me to understand the biblical strategies to accomplish it.

Not only is what I'm learning in the Acts Course being implemented in significant ways in the context of the local Church, but it is being implemented in our Church Network, EveryHouse. In addition, we have become a Partnered Resources Center Team to help others appreciate the importance of the way of Christ and His apostles.

PREACHING & TEACHING THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

Description

The preaching and teaching of the Gospel's message may appear basic, but the importance of the fundamentals should never be overlooked. The early Church had to bring accurate and consistent teaching to the New Testament world for the Gospel to become established and expand.

The need for accurate and consistent teaching could never be underestimated. The early Church had to bring a new message to a multicultural arena composed of Jews and Gentiles, and it was no easy task.

Nevertheless, the Word of God was preached and prevailed, as seen in Acts 6:7, 9:31, 12:24.

The Meta-Narrative of Scripture

It was important that the early Church didn't preach a disconnected teaching from the meta-narrative of scripture. They preached the meta-the prophetic fulfillment of the meta-narrative in the law, the prophets, and the writings. Powerful examples of this are found in Peter's message in Act 3, Stephen's message in Acts 7, and Paul's message in Acts 13:15-52.

The Apostle's Doctrine

-The deposit of teaching handed down by Christ through the Holy Spirit to the apostles is recorded as the "apostles doctrine." This was considered the authoritative teaching of the Church.

- Luke's second treatise, the book of Acts, demonstrates the continuity of all that Jesus began to do. Jesus handed a body of teaching to the apostles, who passed them onto the early believers. This body of teaching is authoritative and was a required act of obedience on behalf of the early apostles. The Apostles taught the ecclesia to continue in the traditions that were being passed to them. (Acts 2:42, Acts 5:28, Acts 8:6, Acts 11:23, Acts 13:43, Acts 14:22 Acts 15:8-11 Acts 15:14-18, Act 15:24-29, Acts 16:4)

- This body of teaching was essential to lay the foundation for the Church and is an essential element to the establishment and expansion of the 1st Century Church and a key characteristic of the Way of Christ and His apostles. (Acts 1:1, Ephesians 2:19-22)
- The Apostle's doctrine also laid a foundation of understanding what Jesus both did and taught. More than merely a collection of fragmented teachings, the Apostle's doctrine represents the authoritative teaching that flowed from the Father to the Son, through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and then to the nations at large. It was a set of distinct teachings and a distinct way of life that penetrated culture from Jerusalem to Rome.

-The Apostles preached the Gospel every place they went regardless of the political, cultural, and environmental conditions. Although the danger was certainly considered, it was often a catalyst for the spread of the Gospel. (Acts 8:31, Acts 2:22, Acts 3:12-26, Acts 8:35, Acts 9:20, Acts 13:5, Acts 13:42, Acts 14:5, Acts 14:21 and 25, Acts 16:10, Acts 16:31-32, Acts 17:3, Acts 17:13, Acts 17:16-18, Acts 17:22-31, Acts 18:25-26 (Apollos, who was "mighty" in the scriptures, was corrected by Aquila and Priscilla, regarding Jesus.), Acts 19:8, Acts 26:6-7, Acts 28:31)

More Examples of the Word of God faithfully preached:

- Philip preached Christ with signs and wonders that caused the devil's counterfeit power (sorcery) to be exposed and for even the devil's worker, Simon, to come to Christ and to cause those who used to believe in him that he had the power of God, to see a witness of the true power of God which was, and is, found in Jesus Christ. (Acts 8:6-8)
- Acts 8:9-13 Clear Preaching of the Kerygma (The Proclamation of the Good News Of Jesus Christ)
- Peter shared the clear revelation of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:34-43)
- The Word went from being privately known among a few to being publicly proclaimed throughout the land. (Acts 2:4-11)
- Teaching and preaching in the Temple and from House to House (Acts 2:14-39, 4:4, 5:42,6:2)
- Paul faithfully Preached the Gospel Wherever He Went (Acts 17:1-13)
- The apostles taught day and night, in the synagogue, house to house, in the temple, etc. (Acts 5:42, Acts 7:51-53, Acts 20:31, Acts 28:23)

-The Word of God wasn't just preached in Church gatherings. It was preached both to the Jews in the Temple and to the Gentiles in the marketplace. In a sense, Paul fished where the fish were. He brought the truth to the people. It was not a highly scheduled service or outreach but was happening daily in the places people were living. (Acts 17:17-18; 19:9)

-Not only did Paul preach the Gospel where the people physically were, but he also tailored his message to where the people were spiritually. He spoke the truth in the midst of their culture and belief system. He didn't preach it as a separated element but applied it to them. Paul even read some of their poetry because he could quote it and put it into his message to them. (Acts 17:16-34; especially verse 28)

-Though persecution was the cause of people moving into new territories, it was not the actual cause of the faith's expansion. Instead, it was the faithfulness of believers to carry and release the Good News of Jesus Christ wherever they went. Many say that persecution is the key to great revival, but I believe it makes more sense to say that the believers' reaction in the midst of persecution is the key. Some are simply persecuted, and others are persecuted because of their obedience to the faith, which only creates a movement of more faithfulness and more expansion. The responsibility of the preaching of the Word of God was not in the hands of just a select few. All the believers carried it. They knew and worked under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word of God wherever they went. This led to a spontaneous expansion of the Word of God! (Acts 8:4)

The early Church was careful to be faithful to the deposit of the Word and not their thoughts, feelings, etc. I believe they released the apostle's doctrine (see Acts 2:42) because that was what they were taught, and that is what they followed. Acts 8:4

Issues To Think Through

-What is the apostle's doctrine? This is an issue that needs to be understood and defined.

-Will people come to realize the authoritative nature of the apostle's doctrine? There is such sloppy theology being done by so many that it seems everyone has a "new" revelation. This is not what it was meant to be. All Christians should know that the Word of God is preeminent, and its teachings are timeless and supra cultural.

Personal Reflection

-Truth is everything to me. Jesus said in John 8:31 that it is the truth that sets us free. I have a great passion for the truth and the foundations of the faith because I am convinced that only the truth of the Gospel sets people free.

I'm seeing many people living in doubt on many Christian issues because they have come to rely on others' faith rather than the Word of God.

-I pray that I will be found a faithful ambassador to the Word of God in a generation who so desperately needs it.

Ministry Reflection

-There is probably no other time in all history that the Church must take seriously the call to preach the unadulterated Word of God. We are headed for difficult times given the slippery slope both the American society and the local Church has been on. We are in the midst of a time of lawlessness, and the need to return people to the foundations of the faith is great.

-As a Pastor, I am committed to helping people live their lives according to the distinct life-style that flows out of being rooted in the teachings of the apostle's doctrine. I desire people to become separated from the secular culture and their lives to reflect the witness of following and living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Recommendations

Every Church and ministry should make the teaching and establishment in the apostle's doctrine a central part of believers' establishing process. If this does not happen, the very foundation of the establishment and expansion of the Church becomes compromised.

-Every Church should regularly train its members on how to effectively share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people in their own geographic and social spheres of influence.

-Christian leaders need to understand the pressures taking place within and without the Church to properly establish Christians.

Questions To Be Addressed

-Does the Church of the twenty-first Century have a solid handle on what the apostles doctrine is and how it should be taught?

-Has entertainment and emotionalism replaced the Word of God? Are people more excited about attending worship concerts than they are to give themselves to a serious study of the Word of God?

-Are Christians properly equipped and taught how to share the Word of God with others in such a way that others will come to the faith? Do they know the apostle's doctrine so well that it can become a most effective apologetic tool in our generation?

-Does the Church of the twenty-first Century understand the importance of teaching the same foundational truths that the first-century Church focused upon?

-Will individual believers make the sacrifices necessary to do the work needed to become master craftsmen in the Word of God?

HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT

Description

The work of the Holy Spirit is not only a key in the establishment and expansion of the local Church in the book of Acts but is essential to God's work throughout the Bible. Many have stated that the Book of Acts can rightly be called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles" because He is God's working in and through the Church.

The following are only a subset of some of the reasons the Holy Spirit's power, work, and presence were so imperative to the local Church's success.

- Servants needed to be full of the Holy Spirit -(See Acts 1:4, 6:3)
- The wisdom of the Holy Spirit made the servants effective. (See Acts 6:10)
- The Promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, is a key to the establishment and expansion of the 1st Church. Jesus commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem until they had received the promise. They needed to wait for the Promise of the Father. This reveals that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a key to the Great Commission. The fact is that they could not even attempt the work of the mission without the Spirit of God being poured out on them. (Acts 1:8) It was a critical component to the mission that they would be witnesses of Jesus Christ both to the Jews in Jerusalem and to the Gentiles in the ends of the earth. They would not be able to do this without the power given to them when the Holy Spirit came upon them!
- The early Church and the normal Christian experience was to receive the fullness of what was provided for them in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Both the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. (see Acts 1:4, 8, 2:38)

- As Fee and Stuart write, "The recurring motif that nothing can hide their forward movement of the Church empower by the Holy Spirit makes us think that Luke also intended his readers to see this as a model for their existence. ³¹
- The forward movement of the Church was not the plan of man but the Holy Spirit's design. ³²
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- The release of the power, or dunamis, of the Holy Spirit was mandatory for each of the "sent ones" to receive before leaving Jerusalem on mission. It is vital to understand that neither their experience nor training with Jesus was sufficient for them to fully be witnesses of Jesus Christ. It was essential for them to receive the baptism or empowerment of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:8)
- The manifestations of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost did not sit well with all. The fulfillment of the prophet Joel's prophecy was certainly misunderstood by many. They nevertheless stayed committed to the demonstration of the Spirit of God rather than shying away from it. This was critical because the manifestations were not just impressive in and of themselves, but they also pointed to the fulfillment of God's plan and the coming of the Messiah! They were essential to the first expansion of the Gospel. Think of it, what would the history of the first century Church look like without the early believers' commitment to the biblical manifestations of the Holy Spirit? (See Acts 2:12-14, 8:14)
- Divine Leading of the Holy Spirit- Although Paul and his team desired to go to Asia and Bithynia, the Holy Spirit did not allow them. Then they have a vision of the man in Macedonia pleading for them to come and help them. Paul may have had a plan, but he was able to put his plans aside and be led by the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 10:1-6,16:6-12)
- The Baptism of the Holy Spirit- The Holy Spirit filled the people who heard the Word in Cornelius' house and were filled with the Holy Spirit as evidence with the same gift given to the Jews in the day of Pentecost, demonstrating and sealing the reality of God's grace on both Jews and Gentiles. (See Acts 10:44-46; 11:15, 18)

³¹ "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p98

³² "Acts-The Problem of historical Precedent" from How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982 Zondervan, Grand Rapids p91

- Supernatural works of the Holy Spirit Demonstrating the Authority of God to the World- The preaching of the Word of God was backed up by supernatural power of the Word and the Holy Spirit. It created a clear witness that the teaching about Jesus Christ was unlike any other teaching in the land. It was not philosophy but the very power of God. (See Acts 13:6-12; 14:3)
- There was required obedience to the instructions, work, and power (enablement) of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4, 2)

Issues To Think Through

-There's much controversy surrounding the need and work of the Holy Spirit in the Church today creating much division within the body of Christ. The Church needs to reclaim a simple and purified view of the essential work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church and discover the normative work of the same spirit in the establishment and expansion of the twenty-first-century Church today.

Personal Reflections

-I thank God that I encountered the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit the day I received Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Not only did the Holy Spirit enable me to understand the Word of God with such great clarity, but His healing power also flowed through my body, resulting in me being healed of cancer.

-There is a great need for the modern Church to experience the Holy Spirit's power as the early Church did.

Ministry Reflections

-We need to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit like the early Church. Our ministries should be empowered in the same way rather than depending upon man-made machinery and programs.

-We believe the gifts and anointing of the Holy Spirit are vital for the Church to be strong and successfully cover the earth. Ephesians 4:10 tells us that Jesus should fill all things, which is only possible with the Holy Spirit's empowerment.

We live in unprecedented times, and we must have the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. The world has always tried to solve its problems with its strength, and the Church can only meet the economic, political, and social challenges the world is facing. The only way the Church can be the salt and light of the world is to be filled with and used by the Holy Spirit.

THE WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH SIGNS, WONDERS, & MIRACLES

Description

From the beginning to the end of the Bible, God is revealed as a supernatural God. He framed the worlds with His Word (see Hebrews 11:3), He manifests Himself in a burning bush that isn't consumed, He works through dreams and visions, He is born from a virgin, He multiplies loaves and fishes, He heals the sick, and He raises the dead! He is a supernatural God whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts. (See Isaiah 55:8-9) Wherever God is and where He moves, His supernatural power is at work.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that the presence and work of His Holy Spirit in the books of the Acts is going to be essential to the establishment and expansion of the first-century Church. The first three decades of early Church history is full of release and testimony of the miraculous power of God!

It is important to note that an important reason that signs, wonders, and miracles are not necessarily a key all by themselves. In other words, an isolated miracle may not be a key by itself, but the signs, wonders, and miracles connected to the testimony of the Spirit of prophecy (See Revelation 19:10) that serve as a witness to the credibility, viability, and accuracy of God's Word are vital. In other words, the signs, wonders, and miracles done through the ministers of the early Church by the power of the Holy Spirit serve as a powerful witness that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God and the Savior of the world!

After all, is not Jesus' resurrection from the dead not the greatest miracle of miracles that testifies that He cannot be held by death and indeed is the Savior of the world!

The following is a very brief list of some examples of the importance of God's supernatural power that served to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the early Church.

- The supernatural ministry of angels is seen throughout the book. Specifically, the ministry of angels played an active role in the protection and release of the Apostles. (See Acts 5:19, Acts 10:3, Acts 10:22, Acts 10:30, Acts 12:7-10, Acts 12:23, Acts 27:1-2 and 21-24)
- Philip confirmed the power of the Word of God with a demonstration of signs and wonders, which helped to create faith in the Word that Philip preached. (See Acts 8:6-8)
- The early believers served as effective witnesses of Jesus Christ.
 - It was vital that the people received scriptural teaching concerning the supernatural. In other words, they were receiving instruction about what God was doing. Rather than just seeing a "sign", or hearing a supernatural sound, they received instruction about

what the sign was pointing to. Peter went back to the scripture and unveiled the meaning of what was happening in the supernatural. In other words, Peter needed to teach about the sign that was confirming the Word. (See Acts 1:8, 2:14-2:39, 3:12-26, 4:33)

- The supernatural intervention of God. (See Acts 5:19-20)
- Stephen was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)
- Peter and Cornelius both have a vision concerning the will of God and His mission. These visions opened the understanding that Cornelius, a Gentile, should seek the help of a Jew, and of Peter, a Jew, who should seek the home of a Gentile to reveal to him and his household the Good News of Jesus Christ. (See Acts 10:3-20)
- The healing of a cripple man in the city of Lystra created an opportunity to preach the Gospel to a captive audience though it wound up leading to them having to flee because of the persecuting Jews. (See Acts 14:8-19)
- Aeneas, a man who was crippled for eight years, was healed, testifying to the power, authority, and covenantal promise of healing through Jesus Christ's stripes as revealed by the prophet Isaiah. (see Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:17)
- The healing caused the people in Lydda and Sharon to turn to the Lord. (See Acts 9:32-35)
- The raising of Tabitha from the dead caused many to believe in the Lord. (Acts 9:36-42)

God did unusual miracles by Paul's hands, with much healing coming forth from his ministry. This again repeatedly caused people to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They even renounced their practice of witchcraft and magic because of the fear of the Lord that came upon them. (Acts 19:11-19)

- Paul demonstrated the power of the Name of Jesus Christ, and though it caused him to get thrown into prison, it again created an opportunity for people to witness the power of God. In addition, God's supernatural deliverance of Paul and Silas from prison resulted in the jailer and his family getting saved and baptized. (See Acts 16:16-34)
- Tongues, a working of the Holy Spirit after the disciple's baptism in the Holy Spirit, caused people to see a sign of God's promise! He caused them to see that God was real and that His prophecy was accurate. (Acts 2:5-12)

- Here we see that the apostles accomplished signs and wonders creating a link between the ministry of Jesus Christ, who also moved in signs and wonders. It demonstrates and proves that the apostles are working as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This validates the activity of the Church as being filled with and moving in the power of God. (See Acts 2:22, 43; 3:1-7; 5:12-16)
- Peter preaches for displaying how this miracle confirms the Word of God. Again, it is important to understand that the signs and wonders confirm the word as in Mark 16:20. It is the fact that the signs and wonders are tethered to the direct promised of God. By themselves, miracles may create a stir, but not necessarily salvation or faith. It is that they are linked to God's Word proving that it is true! (See Acts 2:22, 3:12, 4:13-14, 16; 5:12)
- Here we see again that the witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was so critical. And that God witnessed the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ through the giving of power to the apostles. (See Acts 4:33-34)
- Miracles & Healing (See Acts 3:1-11)

"By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." Acts 4:30 KJV

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch." Acts 5:12 KJV

"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." Acts 14:3 KJV

"Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Romans 15:19 KJV

"Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." Acts 8:13 KJV

- Everyone is awestruck by the miracles done by the apostles Acts 2:43)
- Peter heals a man lame from birth; the authorities are forced to recognize that a "sign" has been performed Acts 3:2-10; 4:16, 22)
- The apostles perform many signs and wonders, healings and exorcisms; Peter's mere shadow has healing power Acts 5:12-16
- An angel rescues the apostles from prison (See Acts 5:18-20)

- Stephen performs signs and wonders (See Acts 6:8)
- Philip performs signs, healings, and exorcisms in Samaria (See Acts 8:6-7)
- Philip's signs and miracles amaze Simon the Magician (See Acts 8:13)
- The spirit of the Lord snatches Philip from the road to Gaza and places him in Azotus (See Acts 8:39-40)
- Saul's conversion, blindness, and healing at the hands of Ananias (See Acts 9:1-18; 22:6-13; 26:12-18)
- Peter heals Aeneas in Lydda (See Acts 9:33-34)
- Peter raises Tabitha/Dorcas (See Acts 9:36-41)
- An angel rescues Peter from prison (See Acts 12:6-11)
- Paul strikes Bar-Jesus/Elymas blind (See Acts 13:6-11)
- Paul and Barnabas perform signs and wonders in Phrygian Iconium (See Acts 14:3)
- Paul heals a man lame from birth (See Acts 14:8-10)
- Paul and Barnabas recount the signs and wonders performed among non-Jews (See Acts 15:12)
- Paul casts out a spirit of divination (See Acts 16:16-18)
- Paul and Silas are freed from prison by an earthquake (See Acts 16:26)
- God works "extraordinary miracles" through Paul; garments that have merely touched him have healing power (See Acts 19:11-12)
- Paul raises Eutychus after he falls from a third-story window (See Acts 20:9-10)
- Paul survives a viper's bite (See Acts 28:3-6)
- Paul heals the father of Publius and others (See Acts 28:8-9)

Issues To Think Through

-Many Christian denominations and traditions have lost the understanding of the critical nature of signs, wonders, and miracles in the establishment and spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ. They believe the age of miracles has passed when it indeed has not. The same work the Holy Spirit was doing in the early Church is the same work needed to be done in the

modern Church today. Ministry has to look at the scriptures afresh to recapture a pure understanding of God's work upon the earth and His continued use of signs, wonders, and miracles.

-Many ministers and ministries have deployed extremely unbiblical practices surrounding signs, wonders, and miracles. They have irresponsibly chased the supernatural in ways that do not honor God and His Word and have turned many people away from the validity of miracles in the Church today. There needs to be great discernment in this area to separate the biblical from the unbiblical demonstrations of the miraculous.

Personal Reflections

Of course, I am extremely partial to the importance of signs, miracles, and wonders because of my testimony of being healed from cancer. I thank God that He is still in the business of confirming His Word through His miraculous power. Not only am I thankful for receiving a miracle, but I'm also grateful for the salvations and fruit that it has caused for many.

I'm personally very sensitive to the reality that there has been much abuse and unfaithfulness of ministries in this area and understand the cautionary response of many concerning this key. Nevertheless, I'm excited that God has never stopped demonstrating His desire to perform miracles throughout the earth! Truly He desires for the twenty-first Century Church to still release His supernatural grace in the form of signs, wonders, and miracles.

Ministry Reflections

I cannot underscore the importance of knowing that it is not just the sign or wonder that is important, but that it must point to the accuracy and witness of God's Word being true. Ministry has to take seriously that it is the Lord working with them confirming the Word through the accompanying signs.

Mark 16:20 (NKJV) — 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

When we preach and pray with faith, the signs will follow! Christians should not be seeking signs, but rather signs should be following those who believe!

Mark 16:17 (NKJV) — 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;

PRAYER

Description

Any discussion of the keys to the establishment and expansion of the first-Church must include the need for prayer.

The Lord Jesus said that His house would be called a "House of Prayer" by all nations (see Isaiah 56:7), and it is my prayer that we can carry out the Lord's will.

- The disciples prayed and waited for the Lord to fulfill His Word before leaving. They rested and relied upon God's power, not their ability. This was an act of obedience to Jesus' command. (Acts 1:14)
- Disciples realized they could do nothing for the Kingdom of God through their effort. Prayer gave them direction and purpose and allowed them to receive the Holy Spirit and boldly preach the word of God. (Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:42 and 46, Acts 4:24, Acts 4:31-32, Acts 5:12, Acts 14:5))

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Acts 13:2-3 KJV

- Not only did the Apostles pray often, they often prayed together. I believe this agreement in prayer, which led to agreement in mission, or in other words, unity, is key to receiving and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:14, Acts 2:42, Acts 4:24, Acts 10:9, Acts 12:5 and 12, Acts 14:23, Acts 16:16, Acts 21:5)

Issues To Think Through

-The Prayer of the local church was often focused upon the mission of Christ, whereas it seems prayer is often concentrated on individualistic needs.

-Prayer is currently the least attended meetings of local Churches in America, which demonstrates the need to educate and establish believers in this key.

Personal Reflections

-Prayer is something the Lord has been leading my heart to understand more and more. It doesn't often come easy to me as I tend to want to "get to work." Nevertheless, the Lord is teaching me about the need for prayer and how it is central to ministry success. I desire to be a man of great prayer!

Ministry Reflections

-We have greatly increased the amount of prayer in our local church throughout our entire ministry. Our team of intercessors, home group/ House Church meetings, and mentoring relationships are all filled with an increase in prayer.

-We have been growing in corporate prayer more and more as many have not had experience with corporate prayer and only pray quietly themselves. This has been long-term work that is getting better and better. More and more are praying aloud and growing in their boldness.

-It is so vital to have one-mindedness when we pray. We must all have the same passion for the same thing at the same time under the Holy Spirit's direction if we are going to have prayer the avails much.