

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF ACTS

INTRODUCTION:

Moving the red box from the Gospels to the one remaining historical book = Acts.

Title: The Acts of the Resurrected Jesus Christ Performed by His Chosen Apostles Through the Power of the Promised Holy Spirit

Authorship: Hopefully you have not forgotten the background information from our study two weeks ago on the Gospel According to Luke. Because Acts is the second half of his two part historical work.

You can see from the opening Prologue in **1:1-5** that Luke is continuing to write to Theophilus and taking up the account right where he had left off:

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴ And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So the story begins not with a flurry of activity but with a season of **waiting** – waiting for the promised Holy Spirit who would provide the empowerment for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

They had options:

- Could have gone back to their secular professions – fishing, whatever business had supported their family
- Could have prematurely launched their ministry efforts
- Could have stood in place star gazing after they saw Jesus ascend back to heaven

Flash back to the end of Luke's Gospel: **24:44-53**

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from them. ⁵² And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple, praising God.

You cannot underestimate the **dramatic transformation** of the band of disciples that can be attributed to a large part to their new fold understanding of the OT Scriptures. (John MacArthur) Yes, they were impacted by the **reality of the resurrection of their leader**. So where they had been fearful, and confused about His suffering and death, and in hiding, now we see them transformed into a bold witnessing force that is going to impact the world in spreading the good news about Jesus and God's plan of redemption. Certainly their empowerment is going to be dependent on **the coming of the Promised Holy Spirit**. But just as importantly they already have been revitalized by this new understanding of the prophetic presentation of the Messiah throughout the pages of OT scripture. What they had failed to understand during the earthly ministry of Christ, had now been made plain to them and they quickly became experts in those OT passages.

Remember their earlier confusion regarding the declarations of Jesus that He needed to suffer and die in Jerusalem:

Luke 9:43-45 *And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.*

Luke 18:31-34 *And He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³² "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, ³³ and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." ³⁴ And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.*

But then the resurrected Jesus speaks to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus

Luke 24:25-27 *And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

And then as we just saw at the end of **Chap. 24**, Jesus gave the same extended OT lesson to the larger group of disciples. What a transformation this new illumination provided.

As you read thru Acts you will be struck by how often they **quote from the OT** and draw their arguments from their historical Jewish roots. They drew great confidence from their understanding of God's redemptive plan begun way back in **Gen. 3:15** and now being worked out in their own witness to the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

Do you want to be a bolder witness today for Jesus? Study those OT prophecies regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gain a deeper understanding of the unfolding of God's kingdom agenda and redemptive purpose.

Look at some of the Greek words used here – words where you are familiar with their English translation. [power (dynamite), Holy Spirit; witnesses (martyrs)]

Warren Wiersbe: “*Witness*” is a key word in the book of Acts and is used twenty-nine times as either a verb or a noun. A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard (**Acts 4:19-20**). When you are on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions; he only wants to hear what you know. Our English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word translated “*witness*,” and many of God’s people have sealed their witness by laying down their lives.

It’s all about **empowerment for witnessing** as the gospel spreads from its beginnings in Jerusalem, then through Judea and Samaria, and finally to reach all throughout the earth as the story ends in Rome, the capital city of the world empire at that time.

This is a book about church growth – surprising and powerful and transformative church growth.

The **structure of the book** mirrors the structure of the key verse as it tracks the spread of the gospel.

2 Major Threads governing the outline:

- Geographical spread of the gospel – switch from Jerusalem to Antioch as center of operations
- Progression in terms of the central figures – from Peter to Paul

Look at the contrast between the two parts of the Book:

Chaps 1-12

Jerusalem the center
Jewish focus
Peter – central figure
Peter imprisoned

Chaps 13-28

Antioch the center
Gentile focus
Paul – central figure
Paul imprisoned

(1:1-11) Prologue – The Mission and Empowerment of the Church Promise of the Holy Spirit and Ascension of Jesus

Illustration

A sailboat may be beautifully built, but without wind it goes nowhere.
The disciples had truth, training, and commission—
but until the Spirit came, they had no movement.
The Holy Spirit is the wind in the sails of the church.

I. (1:12 – 8:3) The Origin of the Christian Church in Jerusalem – Leadership of Peter

A. (1:12-26) Foundation for the Church —

- Preparation in Prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem – the city that will be the headquarters for the infant church
- Preparation in Replacing Judas with Matthias to complete the 12 Foundational Apostles

B. (2:1-47) Filling of the Church — The Coming of the Holy Spirit in Powerful Proclamation – Emphasis on the Holy Spirit — Peter’s initial sermon showing continuity with OT prophecy

This is the foretaste of what Joel prophesied about – the complete fulfillment will take place in the end times (2:16)

C. (3:1 – 5:42) Fortification of the Church — Apostolic Ministry Focusing on Peter and John

- Healing of the lame man becomes a platform for proclaiming Jesus – miracles are not an end in themselves but serve to point to Christ and glorify Him

- Opposition begins immediately – arrests, threats, intimidation

- Principle: “We must obey God rather than men”

D. (6:1 – 8:3) Fulfillment in the Church of God’s Progressive Plans — Jewish Persecution of the Church Confirms the Nation in Unbelief (Until Times of Gentiles Fulfilled) – Focusing on

Stephen and his martyrdom

Transition: (8:1-3) The Persecution of the Church by Saul – Leads to spread of the church to Judea and Samaria

And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Illustration

The church is like a fire.

Persecution was intended to extinguish it, but instead it acted like wind on flame.

The more opposition came, the brighter the gospel burned.

II. (8:4 – 12:25) The Early Development of the Christian Church in Judea and Samaria – Transition from Peter to Barnabas and Saul

This section shows God breaking barriers:

- Geographic barriers
- Ethnic barriers
- Religious barriers

A. (8:4-40) New Territory for Expansion — Ministry Outreach of Philip the Evangelist

B. (9:1-31) New Leadership for the Church — Conversion and Initial Ministry of Paul = Apostle to Gentiles

C. (9:32 – 11:18) New Mindset of Accepting Gentiles on Equal Footing with Jews – Healing Ministry of Peter With a Changed Perspective Towards Gentiles – Interaction with Cornelius

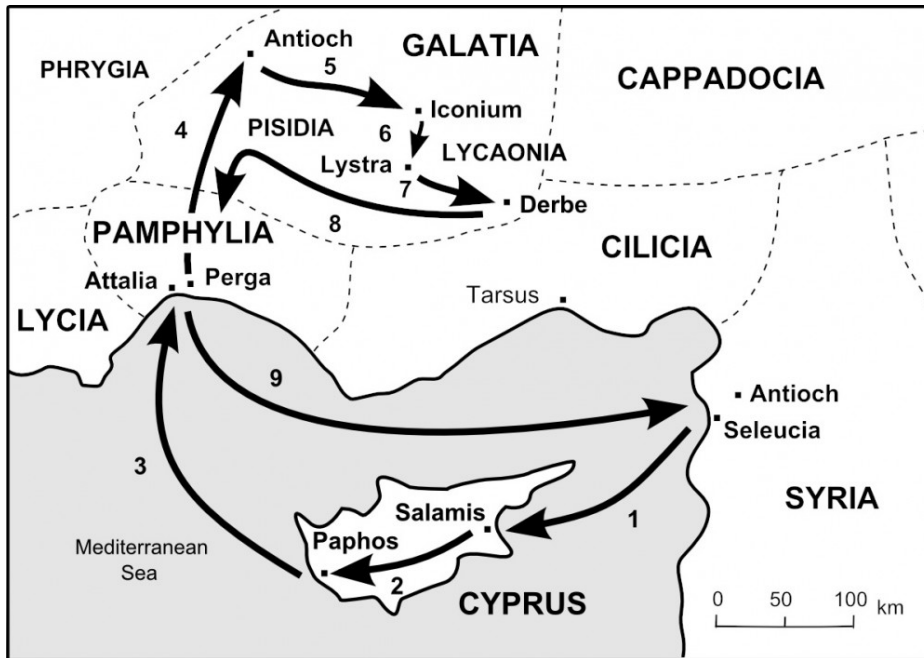
D. (11:19 – 12:25) New Center of Operations — Teaming of Saul and Barnabas to Bring Relief to Persecuted Brethren in Judea from New Headquarters in Antioch

Transition: (12:24-25) Successful Mission and Return of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch

**III. (13:1 – 21:16) The Spread of the Christian Church to the Ends of the Earth –
Missionary Journeys of Paul**

A. (13:1 – 15:35) Paul’s First Missionary Journey and Jerusalem Council (47-48 AD)

[maps taken from [Ralph Wilson](#)]



B. (15:36 – 18:22) Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (50-53 AD)



C. (18:23 – 21:16) Paul's Third Missionary Journey (57 AD)



(22:1 – 28:31) Epilogue

A. (21:1 – 26:32) The Defense of the Church

Paul appears before:

- the Jewish council
- Felix
- Festus
- Agrippa

Again and again, Paul turns trials into testimony. Instead of defending himself only, he proclaims Christ. This is a remarkable section. Chains do not silence him.

Illustration

A courtroom is usually a place of accusation. For Paul, it became a pulpit. The very place meant to stop the gospel became a stage for it.

Application

Sometimes your greatest witness comes in hardship. Hospitals, legal trouble, grief, workplace opposition— all can become pulpits. Acts teaches: Your trial may be your testimony platform.

B. (27:1 – 28:31) Paul's Journey to Rome – The Unstoppable Nature of the Church

Paul survives:

- Storms
- Shipwreck
- Snake Bite
- Imprisonment

Yet he arrives in Rome – the gospel reaches the heart of the empire.

The book ends abruptly – No conclusion to Paul’s trial and imprisonment?

Why? Because the mission of the church is still continuing – You and I have been handed the baton of witnessing by the power of the Holy Spirit – declaring the same gospel message of the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ

4:12 *“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”*

This is an **exclusive message**. This is God’s one and only plan for redemption. This message must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth today.

As you read through the book of Acts, what jumps out at you is the **amazing spread of the gospel**. You have the multiplication of disciples; and then that morphs exponentially to the multiplication of entire churches. Let’s track briefly the starting point and then how the Christian church progresses:

We should expect to find strong opposition to church growth as Satan is active in trying to thwart God’s purposes. So from a natural perspective, church growth will look surprising. But remember that Christ has promised to successfully build His church – even the gates of Hell will not be able to stand against God’s ordained church program (**Matt. 16:18**).

1:15 – We start in Jerusalem with a gathering of the Apostles and initial disciples totaling only **120 people** – hardly a force that you would expect could have a world-wide impact.

2:41 – Response to the powerful preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost --
So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. A healthy start --
Required the miracle of foreign languages so that all of the pilgrims from outlying regions that had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost were able to understand the message in their own language

2:47 – In addition the Lord was daily adding converts as the church pursued their discipleship activities – So the body of believers keeps growing – but all contained in Jerusalem

4:4 – We see initial opposition in the form of imprisonment of Peter and John, but the growing movement cannot be stopped.

*But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the **men** came to be about **five thousand**.*

4:33 – Characterization of their bold preaching – Growth always attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God

And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

5:12-16 – Abundant healing miracles at the hands of the apostles

*And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. ¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, **multitudes of men and women**, were constantly added to their number; ¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. ¹⁶ And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.*

Now there are so many additions to the church that the historian Luke has given up trying to count them. **5:28** – *they filled Jerusalem with their teaching*

Look at Gamaliel's advice – **5:39** -- *if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.*

6:1 – another reference to the disciples increasing in number – created a logistical problem in the distribution of food to the needy widows; required increased organization and administration; huge task for the church leaders of staying on point to indoctrinate these young disciples

6:7 – made inroads into the Jewish priesthood -- *And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

8:7 -- Scattering of the church due to persecution – so we see them preaching now in Samaria -- *For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.* – Connection between physical healing and spiritual healing

8:12 – those responding to the preaching of Philip -- *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.* **Vs. 25** – continued to preach *to many villages of the Samaritans*

9:31 – Summary statement -- *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.* – Unique combination of the attributes of Peace, Fear, and Comfort (or strengthening / encouragement)

9:42 Many believed in Joppa -- *And [Peter's raising up of Tabitha = Dorcas in Greek] became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

Chap. 10 – the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on all the Gentiles associated with Cornelius who had believed the gospel message – Jews forced to conclude that *God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life (11:18)* – Both faith and repentance are only possible by means of the grace of God and according to His sovereign will

11:21 *a large number [of Greeks in Antioch] who believed turned to the Lord --*

11:24 *considerable numbers were brought to the Lord* – once again you had a huge indoctrination project to teach such considerable numbers – Paul ministered there for a year (**11:26**)

Chap. 12 – persecution led by Herod – had James the brother of John put to death with a sword (**12:2**); also imprisoned Peter whom the Lord miraculously freed

12:23-24 -- *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.* ²⁴ *But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.* Quite a contrast between Satan's agenda and God's blessing

13:48-49 – focus of the gospel turning towards the salvation of the Gentiles -- *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been **appointed to eternal life** believed.* ⁴⁹ *And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.* **Sovereignty of God** in salvation magnified

14:1 large number believing in Iconium

16:5 -- *So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.*

17:4 – at Thessalonica -- *And some of [the Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.*

17:12 – at Berea -- *Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.*

19:20 – People renouncing the practice of magic to embrace the gospel -- *So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.*

28: 24 right up until his final ministry while imprisoned in Rome you had the contrasting responses to Paul's same message: *And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*

So we have seen the results of the preaching of the gospel – multitudes being saved; churches being planted and strengthened and then multiplying

How do you explain such success? What was the early church's model for church growth?

Compare that to the methodology of church growth experts today?

What should we be putting into practice in our ministry and what in Acts should we see as transitional and not normative for our day? These are the questions we want to probe in the remainder of our study this morning.

2:42 – Provides an initial summary of 4 key essentials of a healthy church:

1. Indoctrination – A Learning Church

“to the apostles' teaching”

Importance of doctrine and theology – Massive indoctrination program begun at Pentecost with baby believers who had a hunger to hear God’s message

Aspect of submission to teaching God has provided; important to study on our own as well; but we need teaching from gifted leaders

Look at the access we have to the apostles’ teaching; so many opportunities to learn and grow
Not for knowledge sake but for growth and ministry

2. Integration of Fellowship – A Loving Church

“and to fellowship,”

Sharing their new common life in Jesus Christ (**1 John 1:1-4**); Includes the sharing of their material possessions to meet the needs of others

3. Intimacy of Worship (integrated with fellowship) – A Liturgical Church (not high liturgy!) – Communion Service – simplicity of the elements of bread and wine

“to the breaking of bread” Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11

The observance of the **Lord’s Supper** at the close of their agape meal; we gather together to remember the death and resurrection of Christ and look forward to His coming again; Did not just see each other on Sundays ... but during the week as well; spent a lot of time together; not burdensome

4. Intercessory Prayer – a Looking-to-the-Lord Church

“and to prayer.”

Acts 1:14 – a focus right from the start

The Privilege of Prayer

The Expectation of God answering our prayers

Perseverance in prayers – takes a long time for many requests – maintain the fervency

[You could look at **Mark Dever**: [The Nine Marks of a Healthy Church](#)

Mark #1: Expository Preaching

Mark #2: Biblical Theology

Mark #3: The Gospel

Mark #4: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Mark #5: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Mark #6: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

Mark #7: Biblical Church Discipline

Mark #8: A Concern for Discipleship and Growth

Mark #9: Biblical Church Leadership

I have my own 9 Marks:

1) Focus on the Gospel Message – Preach Jesus Christ – His Crucifixion and especially His Resurrection

Read thru the book of Acts and look for every reference to the resurrection of Jesus – that was at the heart of much of their argumentation

Proper understanding of:

- Conversion
- Faith and Repentance
- Process of Evangelism

So many misrepresentations today of the gospel message.

John MacArthur: They had a **transcendent message** – It is the word of truth that gives life – they preached Christ – crucified and risen from the dead and Christ as Lord -- went everywhere without regard for what culture it went to – look at all the cultures represented at Pentecost – same message preached to them all – same call to repent and believe the gospel – because they all had a universal problem = sin and universal need for deliverance and need of the one and only Savior – if the message isn't valid anywhere and everywhere in the world, then it isn't valid anywhere

Our mandate is the same as the apostles and the early church

What is relevant is not the changing trends of culture but the **unchanging Word of God.**

Summary of the message of the gospel:

- **13:39** – Paul – through Him everyone who believes is delivered from bondage *and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*
- **15:11** -- Peter – saved thru grace – the way that people naturally think about salvation is false because men approach salvation from a works orientation *But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.*

2) Preach Expositionally relying on the Authority of God's Word

You find a large number of gospel presentations in Acts of varying length. About 10 full sermons; Other brief statements; as well as some summaries. A lot of Exposition of OT prophetic passages and applications drawn from the OT history of the nation of Israel.

Look at how preachers today like to focus in on the **felt needs** of their congregation and design **topical messages** that are more like the self help books you would find in any bookstore.

- How to deal with anxiety
- How to be successful and productive
- How to live a fulfilling life
- How to improve your marriage
- How to better manage your time

I am not saying that these would not be helpful lessons, but their topical nature makes these messages more **man-centered** than God-centered. To make healthy and strong disciples, you need a consistent diet of expositional messages that edify and provide theological depth.

Your theology needs to dictate your methodology not the other way around.

3) Develop Mature Disciples who will Multiply and Persevere even in the face of Persecution

You might think that persecution would kill a new church movement. Not so. Proved to be an effective strategy for church growth. In fact God was behind the initial persecution of the believers in Jerusalem that drove them out to bring the gospel to Judea and Samaria. **(8:1-4)**

Some church growth advocates think that you should be overly cautious against saying anything that would **offend** your audience. So they even tone down critical doctrines like sin and repentance and judgment. That was not the pattern of the NT apostles. They went so far as to directly charge the Jews with guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus – They did not fear any persecution that might arise. They understood what it meant to take up the cross and follow their Master. They gloried in the preaching of the cross.

2:22-23 -- Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Such preaching made people **uncomfortable** ... but it brought conviction of sin – **vs. 37**

*Now when they heard this, they were **pierced to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"*

The comfort of unbelievers was not the goal of the apostolic preaching.

One of the leading voices of the Seeker Church movement has lamented that his approach was not effective in maturing believers along the path of true discipleship:

Bill Hybels — admission that the model failed to produce disciples

“We made a mistake.”

“Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into... wasn’t helping people that much.”

This is especially striking because it is not a critic speaking.

It is the movement’s own leading architect.

The deeper concern is that the methodology proved effective at **gathering crowds** but less effective at **forming mature believers**.

4) Understand the Nature of the Church Assembly

Here is where we truly must differ with the approach taken by the Seeker Church Movement. They design their services to attract unbelievers – allowing for a pragmatic approach – Asking what works rather than what do we see modeled in the Scriptures. There was nothing the first century church did just to attract large numbers of spectators or to feed a lust for entertainment.

It is a false presupposition to think that unbelievers are not so much rejecting Christ as they are rejecting traditional church culture. Therefore, if we can conduct some surveys and get to know our target audience and design a culture that is acceptable to them, gospel results will follow. What you end up with is a large number of unbelievers in your church assembly.

The apostles maintained a **commitment to a regenerate congregation** – a church is an assembly of true believers and true worshipers – not designed for unbelievers; the called out gathered

people of God who come together to worship and be edified. Your church practices will look different based on your church composition and goals. Yes we want unbelievers to come in and observe and be impacted, but not at the expense of sacrificing the critical functions that edify believers. So NO, don't limit your sermons to 20 minute collections of funny stories. Don't minimize prayer. Don't neglect the practice of communion, etc.

5) Practice Church Discipline when necessary to Protect the Purity of the Church

Look at the Extreme discipline of Ananias and Sapphira; This instilled the fear of the Lord in the congregation. Not exactly a seeker friendly approach.

Matt. 18 – first instruction given by the Lord to the church – you must confront sin; put out unrepentant sinners; **vs. 13** – ideal situation – you don't want unbelievers comfortable in the presence of believers; yet there was respect for the character of the church; **vs. 14** – multitudes were constantly added! Church discipline is actually a strategy for church growth just as we saw with persecution. Some of these things we learn from the scriptural examples are counter-intuitive.

6) Distinguish between Transitional and Normative.

For example: is it required that we meet in houses since that is largely what we see in the book of Acts? Is it wrong to have church buildings?

Or a better example: how do you explain the sign gifts of healing and tongues and instances in Acts where it seems like the gift of the Holy Spirit comes as a secondary act?

[cf. article by [John Piper](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/are-signs-and-wonders-for-today) – <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/are-signs-and-wonders-for-today>]

One view argues that signs and wonders (like healings) were designed by God to help people recognize and believe in the Son of God and then to vindicate the authority of his apostles as they laid the foundation for the church with their inspired teachings and writings. After the apostles died and their writings were gathered in the New Testament, the place of signs and wonders was past, and we should not seek them today.

The other view argues that signs and wonders should be sought and performed today in Jesus' name. The reason we don't see so many is because of how little expectancy there is in the church. But God is at work doing a new thing in our day awakening the church to the reality of these things.

7) Follow the Biblical Model for Church Leadership

You have to first understand the biblical model. Many Christian preachers and institutions don't think there is any biblical model.

Two things make up leadership: **example and instruction**. You teach and you model what you teach. It is critical in the life of a church that those who are in leadership are qualified. It's not about personality, money, business skill – it's all about spiritual qualification and sound doctrine. The church grows under the influence of godly leaders.

Chap. 6 – we are instructing thousands of people; that must be the priority of the apostles; we can't take over this food problem; select seven men to distribute the food – what would you think might be their qualifications? Even this task is qualified in a **spiritual way** – men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom – first deacons –

Result – vs. 7 – church kept growing

Look at how both the missionary teams and the establishment of leaders in the local churches planted by the apostles – both emphasized the plurality of leadership. The church was never intended to be a one-man-focused hierarchical leadership style. The model is servant leadership. And the way to ensure that is the mutual teamwork of a plurality of elders working together under the Head of the Church – the Chief Shepherd – our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Acts gives repeated evidence that leadership in the early church was shared, plural, and team-oriented, rather than centered in one man as the sole authority over a local congregation. This becomes one of the strongest biblical patterns for local church leadership. Here are the clearest examples:

1) The Jerusalem church was led by a **team of apostles**

At the birth of the church, leadership was never vested in one individual.

In **Acts 2–5**, the church in Jerusalem is consistently led by the apostles (plural).

“the apostles’ teaching” (**Acts 2:42**)

“the apostles were performing many signs and wonders” (**Acts 2:43**)

“the apostles gave testimony” (**Acts 4:33**)

Even though figures like Peter often emerge as spokespersons, Luke consistently emphasizes corporate leadership.

This is an important principle: prominent voices may exist without creating a one-man leadership model.

2) **Acts 6** — leadership problems were solved by a **leadership team**

When the church faced the widow-care crisis, the response was collective discernment.

“the twelve summoned the congregation” (**Acts 6:2**)

The apostles function together, then appoint seven qualified men to share ministry responsibility.

This is a major teamwork model:

- shared diagnosis of the problem
- shared decision making
- delegated leadership
- complementary roles
- No single apostle acts alone.
- This passage strongly shows that healthy growth required distributed leadership.

3) **Acts 11:30** — the first explicit mention of elders is plural

This is one of the clearest verses.

“*sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders*” (**Acts 11:30**)

Notice Luke does not say the elder.

The relief offering from Antioch is delivered to elders (plural) in Judea.

This is the first explicit elder reference in Acts, and it is already plural.

4) Sending out of Barnabas and Saul by church at Antioch

5) **Acts 14:23** — **elders appointed in every church**

This is perhaps the strongest text.

“*They had appointed elders for them in every church*” (NASB)

The grammar is important:

church = singular

elders = plural

In each local church, Paul and Barnabas appoint multiple elders.

Different words are used to refer to the same leaders:

- **Elders** – maturity and wisdom
- **Pastors / Shepherds** – teaching, nurturing, edifying
- **Bishops / Overseers** – administrative aspect

This appears to be Paul’s missionary pattern.

It is hard to argue from Acts that Paul established single-pastor churches as the normative structure.

6) **Acts 15** — the Jerusalem Council models shared leadership

This chapter is a major example of teamwork in leadership.

The doctrinal crisis over circumcision is not settled by one leader.

Instead:

“*the apostles and the elders came together*” (**Acts 15:6**)

This is a council of leaders:

apostles

elders

the church body

There is discussion, testimony, scriptural reasoning, and a corporate decision.

Even though James speaks prominently near the end, the final conclusion is **communal**:

“it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (**Acts 15:22**)

This is one of the clearest anti-one-man leadership passages in the New Testament.

7) **Acts 20:17** — the Ephesian church had multiple elders

Paul summons: “*the elders of the church*” (Acts 20:17)

Again:

one church in Ephesus

multiple elders

Then in **verse 28** he addresses them all:

“*the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*”

This shows plurality not only in title but in **shepherding responsibility**.

They collectively pastor the flock.

8) **Acts 21:18** — Jerusalem still led by multiple elders

Later in Acts: “*Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present*”

Again, James may be prominent, but he is not portrayed as a lone ruler.

He functions among a recognized body of elders.

Leadership principles Acts teaches

From these examples, Acts presents several leadership principles:

1. Shared wisdom and responsibility

Plural elders provide broader discernment.

“*in abundance of counselors there is victory*” (**Prov. 11:14**)

2. Mutual Accountability

Shared leadership protects the church from authoritarianism and blind spots.

No one leader is beyond correction.

3. Complementary gifting

Different leaders bring different strengths:

teaching

shepherding

administration

mercy ministry

mission strategy

Acts 6 especially models this. As does the church at Antioch in Acts 13.

4. Leadership multiplication

Church growth in Acts always seems to require more leaders, not more dependence on one leader. Look at how Antioch can send out missionary teams of qualified leaders and yet still have enough leaders to carry on the local ministry. They did not have to go recruit a new Senior Pastor.

Growth and plurality go together.

Important balance

Acts does show leading personalities:

Peter in early chapters

James in Jerusalem

Paul on missionary journeys

But prominence is not the same as hierarchy.

Acts distinguishes between:

lead voices

sole authority

The first is common.

The second is not the normal pattern.

8) Be Missionary Minded with a Great Commission Emphasis

How do you stop from despairing of this great task = to all the world?? It seems like we should just give up – Encouragement – **behind it all is God**

It's God who calls – **2:39** – all whom the Lord our God will Call – those are the ones who will end up calling on the Lord for salvation

11:18 – God is the one who grants repentance to life to the Gentiles

13:48 – God is the one who appoints people to eternal life

14:27 – it is God who opens the door to faith to the Gentiles

Even in particular cases –

- Note how Luke talks about the conversion of Lydia – **16:14** – *the Lord opened Lydia's heart* to respond to Paul's message

9) Rely on Prayer and the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit by the Grace of God

The Spirit empowers:

- preaching
- courage
- guidance
- mission
- miracles

FINAL ILLUSTRATION

Imagine dropping a stone into a still pond.

The impact creates ripples that move outward.

That is Acts.

The resurrection is the stone.

Pentecost is the first ripple.

The church continues the expanding circles.

And the ripples are still moving.