

## 8 LESSONS CHURCHES CAN LEARN FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

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As narrated in the Book of Acts, the New Testament Church is both a prescriptive and descriptive account that illustrates a pattern for contemporary congregations. The following are 8 essentials the contemporary church must embrace for missional movement.

1. We need corporate seasons for insight and reflection before a movement is properly birthed (Acts 1). Acts 1 shows how 120 disciples of Jesus spent 10 days together in prayer, comparing Scripture and making leadership decisions. This ensured that the foundation of the burgeoning movement would be secure. Their goal was to work towards oneness as it related to the understanding and preaching of the Good News of the Messiah. Without this period of waiting upon God and reflection, the massive spontaneous addition of 3,000 people after Peter's first sermon could have resulted in chaos and destroyed the movement. The contemporary Church must take adequate time every season to wait upon God in prayer and biblical reflection in order to be ready for the Gospel's movement.
2. The growing Church devoted itself to the essentials of the faith (Acts 2:42). Acts 2:42 says that immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' doctrine, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Visitors to Jerusalem that converted, abandoned plans to go back to their homeland so they could sit under the apostles' teaching. This apostolic doctrine shaped their social gatherings, common meals, and corporate prayer. Without this, the activities of the Church would have been based upon subjective experiences and opinions of gatherers. The contemporary Church must also establish believers in the first principles of the faith if they are going to experience a prolific Gospel movement.
3. The ethical standards of holiness must be maintained (Acts 5:1-11). Acts 5:1-12 relay the narrative of the judgment upon Ananias and Saphira. This illustrates how the standard of holiness and the fear of the Lord must be maintained to ensure the health of the Church. If God allowed them to continue lying, manipulating and receiving honor deceptively through giving gifts (which amounts to dirty politics), it would have spread like yeast and eventually would have corrupted the Church. It is not an accident that God began to do extraordinary miracles as soon as this couple was removed from the Church (Acts 5:12-14). The contemporary Church must understand that we limit the capacity for God to move through us whenever we allow unbiblical standards to permeate our Church.
4. Unbiased care and compassion for all (Acts 6:1-7). Almost immediately after the birth of the Jesus movement, ethnic sectarianism and bias reared their ugly head. This took place when the Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked when food was being distributed. Peter had enough wisdom to appoint 7 men of integrity and wisdom who would oversee this ministry, resulting in every widow's needs being met, the Word of God spreading and the number of disciples multiplying. The contemporary Church must understand the principle that there is a strategic challenge to overcome before every great move of God.

5. Faith is not worth believing if it is not worth dying for (Acts 7). The martyrdom of Stephen, as recorded in Acts 7: 54-60, demonstrates an amazing pattern for us to follow in the contemporary church. God cannot bless a Gospel movement if the saints are unwilling to give their lives to advance His kingdom. Even Paul said that he was always given over to death so that the life of Christ might manifest through him (2 Corinthians 4:11). A contemporary church filled with people who only gather to have their felt needs met will never advance the Gospel. Jesus said we would have power after the Spirit comes upon us to be His witnesses. The word witness comes from the word martyr. Hence, a faithful witness overcomes the enemy when he is not willing to shrink from death (Revelations 12:11).
6. The Church must function during persecution (Acts 7:58-8:8). The early Church did not skip a beat but continued to thrive after mass persecution broke out against them. Even though they were forced out of their homes and lost everything, their mind was on spreading the Gospel! Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Word. This resulted in major churches being planted in the cities of Samaria and Antioch and resulted in their chief antagonist, Saul, being converted and becoming the greatest of the apostles. Perhaps Saul would not have respected them enough to join their movement if they had cowered away because of the persecution. The contemporary Church must also persevere amid persecution (similar to the powerful Gospel movement we see today through the persecuted churches in Iran, China and India).
7. The Church must embrace all ethnic peoples (Acts 10:1-48). Although Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples of all the nations, the early Church initially only focused on reaching Jewish people (Matthew 28:19). It took persecution for them to preach to the Samaritans, and it took a vision from Jesus for Peter to preach the Word to Gentiles. Even the apostles had difficulty thinking outside of their ethnic and social comfort zone, which illustrates how difficult it is to overcome ethnic bias. Consequently, the contemporary Church must be open to all people, irrespective of the colour of their skin and cultural background, if they desire to experience a true Gospel movement.
8. Church leaders should give themselves over to fasting and prayer for divine strategy (Acts 13:1-2). Instead of being bogged down with endless church committees and deliberations, the Antioch church elders spent adequate time ministering to the Lord and fasting. Giving God space to move upon them, released a divine strategy that changed the entire world. The contemporary Church must also prioritize seeking the Lord and waiting for the strategic Spirit to illuminate our hearts so we can labour for the things God ordains instead of asking God to bless our agendas.

**Source:** *Written by Joseph Mattera, an internationally-known author, consultant, and theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence culture.*