

What shall we do?

In Acts 2 we see the critical connection of the mystical and practical in God's church.



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If we are to get the point, we must step outside our organizational expertise, avoid our need to reduce the plan to six progressive steps to reaching the goal, break free of profit margins and fasten our attention on Jesus and the power of God's Spirit. Acts shocks us with the dramatic outpouring of the Spirit and offers a vision of the church as relational, changing lives and replicating God's grace.

If this does not sound like church today, we must ask the Spirit to help us see with new eyes and hear with new ears. Dare we ask what we should do?

The crowd at Pentecost had never imagined such an experience. The contrast between Herod's Temple and the religious leaders with the miraculous languages and signs stunned everyone. Peter's answer to the crowd focused on the good news and its necessary result: "Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Peter firmly connects the Pentecost event to the eternal plan of God "for you, your children and for all who are far away" (v. 39). From a dozen frightened disciples to 120 after the resurrection, the church became about 3,000 people who were baptized that day (v. 41)!

With such dramatic results, it is easy to understand how Christians in our day fasten on the idea that this is a formula for church: thousands gathered in arena-sized buildings, network broadcasts, corporate religious organizations and the promise of a great show!

But Acts and the rest of our New Testament speaks to conflict, persecution

and the negative influence of societal preferences on the early churches.

Acts does not present an organizational plan or business strategy for the church. Acts presents the foundation of God's grace and the characteristics of the "body of Christ" in this world.

First, the church must be devoted to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). We must learn and grow in faith. Many different groups claim to be "the true church" but a study of their beliefs reveal how far they stray from the Bible. The world still hears false prophets and false messiahs. A reading of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation reveals that the same false doctrines appear in every generation, but the stream of God's grace has continued unbroken. Christ followers continue to learn and live by the Word of God, which is perfectly embodied in Jesus.

Second, the church is a community devoted to worship. Acts 2 shows a church devoted to prayer, gathering at the Temple and praying together. No worship plan is described or program structure defined. Worship was claim too much importance in our day. What mattered were relationships, mutual support and the sharing of life. Church is the family of God.

Third, church is when and where we open heart and life to God in wonder and gratitude. "A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles" (2:43). God still performs miracles, when a 12-year-old and 60-year-old make a public profession of faith, when a circle of friends pray for the healing of a cancer patient and when a couple announce God is calling them to be the presence of Christ in Eastern Europe!

Fourth, a church gives generously of its material and human resources to help others. Acts 2:44-45 presents a radical picture of people selling their property and possessions to give the money to those in need. Curious how the story moves so quickly from tongues of fire and rushing wind to amazing generosity!

Formations

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Scripture: Acts 2:37-47

Fifth, church is a celebrating fellowship. Those early believers met daily in the Temple and in their homes, shared food and demonstrated God's goodness for all (2:46-47). This entire text presents the importance of relationships over programs.

Sixth, a church must be winsome, even contagious, in its mindset. This example in Acts shows people of generosity and joy in spite of a world marked by dangerous officials, poverty, injustice and opposition. Yet the Lord added new believers every day (2:47).

If only we could be like those early Christians! But a reading of the entire book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament reveals the early churches suffered from the same weaknesses and challenges the modern world presents. We must not miss the truth that real people and situations offer too many opportunities to depart from faithfulness and fall into the habits of this broken world.

There are still Pharisees who build on legalistic interpretations and harsh judgments. There are those who view an effective church structure from a corporate model. No system is perfect. Your relationship to God is intensely personal and reflected in how you treat others and approach life. We are a people of "the way" (Acts 9:2).

The Christian life is a journey of becoming, a continuing discovery of how to be a Jesus person. Christian faith is a relationship with God, made real in Christ and growing to maturity with the help of the Spirit. Our calling is to be part of a community or family of faith, learning, worshipping, celebrating, giving and embracing our varied gifts.

What must we do? Seek the presence and power of God's Spirit as we share and minister in Jesus' name.

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