

Guided and United: Wisdom from the Early Church

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[0 : 0 0] Imagine being part of a small group that goes out and changes their world against all odds.

They're able to make a difference in their entire world. No, it's not the storyline of a blockbuster movie. And it's not part of a gripping novel.

Well, it's the story of what the early church, through the disciples of Jesus Christ, did in their own world. They went out sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

And as historians tell us, they turned their current world upside down. They faced persecution. They faced ridicule.

They faced untold challenges. And when they were beaten, some lost their lives. They came back together and they prayed for more boldness. So they go out and share the gospel all over again.

[1 : 0 5] But yet their steadfastness, their faith, and their spirit-filled lives led to the birth of a movement that is still going on today.

And will be until Jesus Christ returns. That was the power, the faith, and the unity of the early church.

And it's a movement that has continued for over two millennia. Today, as we delve into Acts chapter 1, verses 15 through 26, we're going to be making it through the end of chapter 1 this morning, by God's grace.

Unless Jesus chooses to return and bring us home before then. I was talking to Brother Larry this morning, and I said, you know what? It'd be just fine with me if Jesus comes back.

You know, then I don't have to pay the power bill this month. I don't have to. I don't have to. You know what I mean? And so we're looking forward to the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 1 0] But I trust this morning that we will uncover some of the guiding principles that allow the early church to make the difference that they made, the kingdom impact that they made during their time.

And so that we, as New Testament believers in the 21st century, can see similar results, can see similar changes taking place as the Holy Spirit empowers us, and so that we, too, can shake the foundations of our world, shake the foundations of this current generation, so they can come to know Jesus Christ and experience the freedom that only comes through Jesus Christ and leave a lasting legacy for Christ, if He chooses to wait many years before He comes back.

And in the book of Acts, what we see is we see the birth and the growth of the early church. We see a group of believers who literally turned their world upside down for Christ.

What was their secret? What was their secret? Power that they got from the Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus said, Stay, stay here, because I've got to leave to go back to the Father, but I'm going to send you the Holy Spirit, and when He comes upon you, you shall receive what?

Power to be my witnesses, Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. That's the mission that He left for the body of Christ, is to make disciples, share the gospel, make disciples, baptize them and teaching them everything that Jesus taught us and that we need to know.

[3 : 57] So as we unpack these verses, we're going to apply the principles of the early church, I trust, into our lives, relying on the Word of God, relying on prayer, and relying upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let's take a look this morning in the book of Acts, beginning with verse number 15. Verse 17.

Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity. Matthew says it a little differently, but the field was purchased with the money that had been given to Judas.

And falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his entrails gushed out. That's not a very pretty sight. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem, so that field is called in their own language, akaldama, that is, field of blood.

For it is written in the book of Psalms, let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it, and let another take his office. Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us, and here in verse 21, Peter gives the requirements for the apostles that would be representing the 12 tribes of Israel on the day of Pentecost.

[5 : 47] So therefore, of these men who have accompanied us, all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. So it was a man that needed to have accompanied Jesus and his disciples when Jesus was on the earth.

Beginning from the baptism of John to that day when he was taken up from us, who also needed to witness the resurrection, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

Remember, they were going to be witnessing this on the day of Pentecost to the Jews who crucified Jesus. Verse 23, And they proposed to Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justice, and Matthias.

And they prayed and said, You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. So let's take a look at verses 15 and 16 to begin with.

[6 : 58] So in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples. Now Peter has been criticized for taking charge.

You know, well, Peter, you shouldn't have done that. You know, there were ten other of you guys who should have made that decision. So Peter sometimes was criticized for taking the leadership role, taking charge, and telling the men what they needed to do.

But I believe he was doing the will of God because Jesus made it clear that Peter was to be the leader of the apostles. That Peter was to be the leader of the disciples.

We see that in Matthew 16, 19. We see that in Luke chapter 22, verses 31 to 32. John 21, verses 15 to 17.

And in every single list of the apostles, whose name is first every single time? Peter. Peter's name is first in all of the list of the apostles.

[8 : 03] Peter was what we would call a first among equals. Jesus had left Peter as the leader of these men. Jesus was their leader.

He left another leader who was to take responsibility for leading this group, and that was Peter. And he would have been, I believe, what would have been called a first among equals.

He was there, and the others recognized his leadership as well. No one balked. They said, okay, let's do it. So, how did Peter approach the situation?

Well, first of all, what did he do in verse 20 and 21? Or verse 20, rather. What did he do? You'll see it in your Bibles.

It's actually written a little differently. He quoted Scripture. So, before doing this, Peter said, we need to rest upon the Word of God.

[9 : 04] Before we make a decision, we need to look to the Bible. And the Bible that they had was the Old Testament. There are a lot of people today that said, you know what, the Old Testament, that's outdated.

Jesus came. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. So, all we really need is the New Testament. Now, I'll probably botch up this quote, but there's a quote by St. Augustine, and he said, in the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed.

In the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. And so, in the Old Testament, we still have the same thread, the same scarlet thread of redemption all the way through the Old Testament.

Matter of fact, it started back in the Garden of Eden. An animal had to die, shed its blood to clothe Adam and Eve. We call that the first, well, the Proto-Evangelium, that was the first time that God really showed what needed to be done to take care of sin.

And all the way through, it's God's story of redemption, ultimately through the Messiah. And in the New Testament, God reveals it to his people. And so, they looked to the Old Testament and they looked to Scripture specifically Psalm 69, 25 and Psalm 109, verse 8.

[10 : 29] And in verse 16, men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before in David or by David concerning Judas.

So, Peter looks at the Old Testament and he said, David said this and I believe it had a dual fulfillment but ultimately he was also speaking about Judas.

that needed to be replaced who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. So, we look at this quote very quickly. For it is written in the book of Psalms, let his dwelling place be desolate and let no one live in it and let another take his office.

Now, if we are to make a difference in today's world, we need to rely on the Word of God. The Word of God is unchanging. The Word of God is living.

The Word of God is powerful and the Word of God is sufficient for us to know today for our faith and our practice. So, where do we learn what to do?

[11 : 38] It's in God's Word. Where do we learn the will of God? It's in God's Word. You know, how do we know how we're to do things? It's in the Word of God. So, if we are to make a difference, we're to rely on the Word of God and we should always be diving deep.

Excuse me. We should always be diving deep into the Word of God. We need to be studying God's Word. We need to be learning God's Word and don't just wait on the pastor or whoever's preaching or teaching to learn God's Word.

Spend time in God's Word in your quiet time in your time with Him during the week. Open His Word and ask the Holy Spirit, Lord, teach me, show me what you want me to know, what you want me to learn, how you want me to live, what you want me to do.

Open His Word and allow Him to speak to you and then you speak back to Him in relation to what He told you through His Word. And as we study the Word of God, we recognize the inspiration of Scripture and we also recognize the relevance of the Word of God to our lives.

Because it's living, God's Word is just as relevant today as it was when the men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote it nearly 2,000 years ago and even many years before that, those who wrote the Old Testament.

[13 : 03] So to grow in our relationship with God, we need to study, we need to apply the Word of God to our lives and it's through reading, it's through studying and reflecting and understanding the historical and the cultural context, we can gain a deeper appreciation and the valuable lessons that are found in God's Word.

And that's exactly what Peter did. He said, we look at the Old Testament and we're told by David that Judas needs to be replaced.

replaced. And then, we need to embrace the entirety of the Bible, Old and New, so we can shape our understanding of the character of God and the will of God, God's plan of redemption and also His plan for our lives.

And as we engage both Old and New Testaments, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of God, the history of the nation of Israel.

And not only that, but as we're going through on Sunday mornings in Sunday school, God's plan for the future in the book of the Revelation because we've got the end of the book and we know what happens.

[14 : 19] So, this, I believe, this holistic approach, the entire Old and New Testament allows us to gain a grasp of the depth of God's love, the depth of God's mercy, and also God's grace as He has revealed it all throughout human history.

And then, we need to seek the mind of God. Understand what God wants us to do, how He wants us to carry out His plan, how we are to live. And many of you, I've heard your testimonies when you said, you know, in our family, when we needed a decision to make, we gathered the family together and what did you do?

You prayed. What does that teach your children? Reliance upon God. The power of prayer. And nothing that we do really makes an eternal difference unless God's involved and His Holy Spirit is empowering us.

So, we seek the mind of God, we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal His truth to us. So, we should rely on His Holy Spirit to guide our understanding, reveal His truth to us, and then as we do this, we can grow in our knowledge of God and we can be better equipped to live out our faith in a way that honors and pleases Him because it doesn't matter what we want to do.

I can hear at least one amen. It doesn't matter what we like to do. It doesn't matter what we think we ought to do.

[16 : 00] To quote Henry Blackaby, he said, you should never ask what for, you should never ask are you for this or are you not for this?

Should we do this or should we not do this? He said, rather you say, have you prayed about it? And what has Jesus told you He wants you to do with His church?

Amen? I love that. Don't ask what do you want to do? Don't ask what you think we should do. We should ask, have you prayed about it? And what did Jesus tell you we need to do for His church?

Because really it doesn't matter what we want. He is God. Jesus is our chief shepherd. He's given us His Holy Spirit to be our teacher, to be our guide, to be our comforter, and He is there to lead us and guide us and direct us.

you have so many stories. I have so many stories of I needed a decision to make. I needed to make a decision. I said, God, you're going to have to give me what to say. You're going to have to let me know what I need to do.

[17 : 10] And sometimes it was profoundly obvious. Sometimes it was at night when I wake up and God just kind of laid a thought on my mind and I said, okay, that's the way.

God will do that for us. The second thing, not only diving deep into the Word of God, gaining the will of God and the intention of God from His Word, from His Holy Spirit, then we need to pray for God's guidance in all.

How many decisions? All of our decisions. Now, you know, I don't, I say all. You know, I don't think, you know, I remember back when I was in college, in Bible college.

Now, this was way before I had ever met Catherine. The guys, we would ask a girl out for a date. Some of you who have been to Bible college know what I'm talking about.

And her response was, well, I'll pray about it. That was, that was code for saying, I don't want to go out with you, I want to let you down real easily. So, but, but, you know, I mean, I don't think you have to pray for what you're going to eat for dinner tonight.

[18 : 22] You know, I don't necessarily, unless you just really are stuck and you need to. but I think pretty much any decision that we make that is going to have, that's going to make a difference in someone else's life, I think we need to make it a matter of prayer.

The apostles did it. Jesus even did it. Verse 21, therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when he was taken up from us, he says, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

and they proposed to Joseph called Barsabbas who was surnamed Justice and Matthias. Before choosing the next apostle, they sought guidance.

Now, I'm giving you my opinion this morning on this, what I'm going to say next. I think it's got biblical support, but there are some who said they shouldn't have chosen they shouldn't have cast lots, they shouldn't have chosen Matthias because Paul became, later became, an apostle.

Now, as I'm saying, this is my personal opinion, this is my understanding of this. Jesus left Peter as the leader.

[19 : 51] I believe Peter was acting with the right purpose and as we see here, God didn't tell them they did anything wrong.

They cast a lot. The lot fell upon Matthias. The way I see it, Pentecost was coming and there were 12 tribes of Israel and the apostles were going to be representing the 12 tribes of Israel and they were going to be witnessing of Jesus, his resurrection.

So I believe this was the right timing and I believe God chose Matthias. Again, I'm not telling you this is the only right thing.

You may disagree with me. But these apostles all had the ministry to the Jews. Whose ministry was Paul to?

Gentiles and Paul didn't meet the qualifications that were given here. Paul didn't walk with the disciples. Paul didn't accompany the disciples on earth.

[21 : 04] Paul didn't witness the resurrection of Jesus. He didn't witness the bodily resurrected Jesus. Now we believe that later when Paul talks about his time in Arabia where he spent time most likely with Jesus being taught by Jesus.

There again. So I back off of that. That's my explanation. It may be wrong and so I'm big enough to admit that but that's just that's my personal take on it.

But the important thing is the important thing is what did they do in verse 25? They prayed about it. They prayed about it.

When we have a decision when you have a family decision to make when you have a financial decision to make when you have a health decision to make I know we have one person here that's going to be going to the doctor Wednesday surgeon Wednesday and will have to be making a health decision.

We need to be praying about these decisions. So what does this tell us? They prayed before they acted. I think we need to approach decision making by humbly submitting to God's will seeking his guidance through prayer.

[22 : 23] I believe we need to be willing to obey God and trust that he will reveal his will to us as we earnestly seek him.

We see that in John chapter 7 and verse number 17 that as we seek God's will as we earnestly want to do his will and then cultivate a consistent prayer life.

Cultivate pray pray earnestly pray fervently pray pray consistently about things that come up during the day. Sometimes we breathe just a really quick prayer.

Sometimes it's get on our knees get on our face and just really really pray whatever that means at the moment we bathe things in prayer and we we do that so God can align our hearts with his will his purpose and we might experience his power in our lives so cultivating a life of prayer I believe is vital for aligning our hearts with the will of God.

See prayer is not just a one way conversation. Prayer is not just bringing our laundry list to God it's letting God speak to us through his word talking back to him about what he's told us and saying okay God you've shown me this I'm going to obey I'm going to obey you God you've convicted me about this you've shown me in your word that this is wrong it shouldn't be a part of my life and God by the power of your Holy Spirit give me the grace to obey you give me the grace to put this sin aside so it's it's a two way conversation it's an ongoing dialogue with our creator through which we can express our gratitude we can express present our needs to him seek his guidance so when we do this regularly what we do is we create space for God to speak into our lives for God to show us and reveal his will to us and he transforms our thoughts as he aligns our minds and our wills with his will and so what this does also it opens up channels for God's power through his

[24 : 41] Holy Spirit to work through us so that we can live out our faith boldly and effectively so the early church looked to God's word they prayed about their decision and then they were looking to the leadership to continue what God had started so the next thing that we see is we need to embrace our roles embrace our responsibilities within the church and in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples there were about 120 it says so he says let me see here so he says therefore these who have accompanied us all this time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us he gives the requirements beginning with

John one must be a witness of the resurrection they proposed Joseph or called Barsabbas and Matthias they prayed and said you oh Lord know the hearts of all show which of these two you have chosen to take part in this ministry they cast their lots lot fell on Matthias that's the last time by the way in the New Testament where it says they they casted lots whatever that that meant for them to make these decisions and then Matthias was numbered among the eleven apostles now while we no longer have the office of apostle God has left the church with leadership and in order for the local church to function as God intended it to we need to first of all recognize and respect the leadership that God has placed in the church and also supporting and cooperating with them as they seek to carry out

God's mission so as we've already mentioned Jesus made it pretty clear that Peter was to be their leader was to be the apostles leader he was to be the first among equals the first thing we see that Jesus left the local church the pastor as the under shepherd under Jesus Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd he's left the local pastor the shepherd the under shepherd and just like Peter is the first among equals the teaching elder the pastor is the leader shepherding the local church under Jesus Paul appointed Timothy if you remember ultimately to become the pastor of Ephesus and what did Paul tell Timothy to do to appoint elders in all of the churches he told him to reprove rebuke exhort he gave him that responsibility as the lead as the teaching elder within the church now we should all we should still have accountability because we're all mutually accountable to one another but just like in the family the husband and a wife are accountable to one another but God holds one person ultimately accountable for what's done and so at the end of the day

God holds the leader God holds the shepherd accountable for what happens and I believe with every fiber of my being and I believe this is born out and taught in the truth the scripture of the New Testament and the early church that God will hold me as the pastor ultimately accountable for what's done here at faith and I'll have to answer for it and if God's will is not done he's going to hold me ultimately accountable just like you men I'm going to stop here for a minute and pick on you guys if you are the leader in your home if God has called you to lead your home don't let your children lead the home we are living in a culture today where children are literally leading homes well mom dad I don't want to do that and I hate to be trivial but I say who cares what you want you're the child

I'm the parent you know this this lately this this well you know what we don't want to stifle their creativity we don't want to stifle them we want to let them have decisions you know they can have some decisions but there are consequences that go along with it and there are some things when they say why your answer only needs to be because I said so now you may disagree with me but I believe I have the authority of scripture behind this now having said that as they get older as they become teenagers what's God implanting in their hearts and their minds because you don't want 40 year olds still living at home God God is implanted within teenagers God is implanted within young people the desire to become independent now forgive me for using this word but sometimes teenagers are stupid sometimes we don't know what we didn't

[30 : 51] I didn't always know what was best for me so we can allow them to make some decisions that won't ruin the rest of their life but we can let them make some decisions as they get older and then like if they choose not to study for that big final exam and they flunk the course what do you say oh yeah I hate to say I told you so but no you know you just you had a decision to make you made the wrong decision and you just live with the consequences so I'll stop meddling for a moment get back get back to preaching so that being said dads become the leaders of your home now God has put the husband and the wife together to be mutually accountable there's nothing wrong with saying honey what do you think we should do but at the end of the day man you make that final decision because God placed you as the leader of your family now there was however a plurality of elders within the local church what Paul told Timothy to do was he said appoint elders in each of the cities they provided mutual accountability the elders provided shared accountability with one another elder but in the new testament it was typically one elder and it was the one who was supported to preach and teach that we see that in first

Timothy 5 17 and 18 who was looked at as the leader among the elders elders just like Peter was the leader among the apostles and just like James was the leader of the elders in the Jerusalem church we see that in Acts chapter 15 verses 2 to 21 Acts chapter 21 verse number 18 Galatians chapter 2 verse 9 James is always the one that was mentioned as the leader who was the voice and who basically led the other elders also the pastor's role is to equip the saints to equip the members to do the work of the ministry the church is not a one man show I'll say that again the church is not a one man show God didn't call me to be an autocrat God didn't leave me to tell you what to do every step of the way because

God gave you the Holy Spirit just like he gave me and so God has given you spiritual gifts and you know if you've got the gift of mercy I don't have the gift of mercy I know that may come as a shock to some of you but if God's given you the gift of mercy and you see someone or you see a ministry that needs to be done in terms of showing mercy to people you know you shouldn't have to ask for permission God gave you the Holy Spirit and so my job and I will admit I have failed at this job and starting now we are going to be equipping everyone the saints equipping the saints for the ministry ministry but I'll say more about that in a minute the pastor's role is to equip the elder's role is to equip the saints the members to do the work of the ministry and then deacons were chosen by the early church to take care of the physical needs the more physical needs of the members of the body the deacons were in effect given the benevolence ministry the office of deacon focuses more on the physical needs of the church so in summary as we look at the structure now one thing I will say about the early church what the bible teaches about the early church it is more descriptive than prescriptive it simply says this is the way the early church operated and in summary in the early church elders led deacons served but that doesn't mean deacons don't have any don't lead as well elders lead by leading by teaching by praying by counseling and deacons may leave others in service that was the way the early church accomplished it that's the way the early church did it but still there's a basic distinction between those responsible for spiritual and ministry leadership of the church and those responsible for service and then here's another thing we need to understand the importance of every member's role within the body

I don't see anything in scripture that there were any that there should be any inactive observers within the body of Christ service now your service may not be the same as another person's service someone next to you might have the gift of leadership teaching administration you may have the gift of service and that service might be not necessarily wanting to be in the limelight you're the one that's always there to help to serve to support you are a you are if you have the gift of service I will tell you this you are a godsend we need you but each member's role within the body of

Christ I believe is to serve to utilize the spiritual gift that God has given you empowered by the Holy Spirit for service so I think the Bible makes it very clear every member should be serving it may look different your service might be there are some serving in the nursery this morning while we're here it doesn't mean that's the only thing you do there are some who serve cutting the grass there are some who serve cleaning the church and you may feel you know what I can't do much else but I can do that then what are you doing you're serving every member serving it's like every brick in this building serves a purpose there is no one less important brick in this building no matter how menial no matter how small the task it is that you're doing and then lastly what we need to do is is we need to be and I lost my place for a moment we need to be relying very quickly we'll close on the power of the

[38:10] Holy Spirit we need to be relying on the power of the Holy Spirit so embrace the reality that we like the early church we can turn our world upside down we have the gospel we have the most powerful message and truth as we as I mentioned I believe it was in last Sunday evening we have the only gift that we can present to the entire world that is the perfect gift for every single person the gospel Jesus Christ died in our place he was buried to prove that he died in our place he rose again to prove that God was satisfied with the penalty that he paid and we have the perfect gift it's Jesus Christ that we can present to the entire world then it's up to the

Holy Spirit to draw that person to open up their eyes so they can see because we know that Satan has kept their eyes blinded and then pursue a spirit filled life by seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance his power in your daily walk and then trust in the Holy Spirit to enable you to enable you in your calling to be faithful to the mission that God has called us to in our world for the glory of Jesus Christ so this morning as we apply the principles from Acts chapter 1 verses 15 through 26 let's dive deep into the word of God pray for his guidance embrace our roles within the local church and rely upon the power of God's Holy Spirit may we live our lives in full and complete alignment with the will of God trusting in his

Holy Spirit's power to enable us to fulfill our calling and impact this generation what did Cody Hughes say last week and I believe it is so true that we are literally only one generation away from Christian faith extinction and we know that's not going to happen because God will build his church the gates of hell the gates of Hades will not prevail against it but unless we're teaching it to our children unless we're teaching it to our grandchildren unless we are presenting the truth of God to a lost and a hurting world a lost and dying world they won't know who Jesus is and have people in Lake Charles and surrounding area who don't know who Jesus is I mean literally don't even know who he was Jesus who and so we have that responsibility to spread the word of

God and to make disciples it starts at home starts within the local body where we mutually exhort one another encourage one another we learn from one another in order that we might go out and make disciples just like Jesus as he gave us that mission let's pray my precious heavenly father I thank you for your word the truth that is in your word that that teaches us how to be right with you that teaches us how to rely upon you and your Holy spirit for the decisions that we make today father that as we look to your word for your truth and guidance and as we embrace the roles that that you've given us I pray Lord God that we would rely on your Holy Spirit's power in everything that we do as we carry out your mission thank you

Lord we pray this in Jesus name we we we go