

## Preparing for Growth

---

Freddy Fritz / General

Turning the World Upside Down / Church Growth; Obedience; Prayer; Scripture; Leadership / Acts 1:12–26

Acts 1:12-26 shows us how the apostles prepared for the growth of the church.

---

## Introduction

Imagine for a moment that Jesus suddenly appeared in person at the next Session meeting.

Stunned by his sudden appearance, one of the elders finally manages to blurt out, “Lord, why are you here? What’s going on?”

Jesus replies, “As you know, I am building my church. And I am building my church all around the world, even here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. I want you to prepare for the coming growth that is about to take place here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.”

And with those words, Jesus disappears.

Just as stunned by his disappearance as they are by his appearance, the elders look at each other. Finally, one of them asks, “How do we prepare for the growth of the church?”

We find some—but not all—of the answers to that question in today’s text.

Just before his ascension, Jesus gave his apostles their mandate: they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (1:8).

However, rather than sending them out immediately to preach, Jesus told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He knew that they needed the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission.

While the apostles were waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord was preparing them for the coming growth of his church.

## Scripture

Let's read [Acts 1:12-26](#):

**<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.**

**<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, <sup>16</sup> "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." <sup>18</sup> (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. <sup>19</sup> And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup> "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,**

**" 'May his camp become desolate,  
and let there be no one to dwell in it';**

**and**

**" 'Let another take his office.'**

**<sup>21</sup> So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." <sup>23</sup> And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and**

**Matthias.** <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

## Lesson

[Acts 1:12-26](#) shows us how the apostles prepared for the growth of the church.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. By Practicing Obedience (1:12)
2. By Joining Together in Devoted Prayer (1:13-14)
3. By Studying the Scriptures (1:15-20)
4. By Choosing Godly Leaders (1:21-26)

### I. By Practicing Obedience (1:12)

First, the apostles prepared for the growth of the church by practicing obedience.

During the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension, Jesus gave his apostles this command in [Acts 1:4](#): “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”

In obedience to Jesus’ command, **“they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away”** (1:12), which is about three-quarters of a mile.

The Lord’s command to go to Jerusalem and wait might have seemed strange to the apostles.

After all, they were fired up with enthusiasm and energy. Jesus was alive. They were utterly convinced about the reality of his resurrection. They now understood the message of the gospel. Furthermore, Jesus had commanded them to take his message to the world.

So, why wait?

The apostles had to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit because Jesus had made it clear that the Holy Spirit would not be sent until he returned to his Father (see [John 16:7](#)).

The Lord knew that they needed the Holy Spirit to empower them to proclaim the gospel.

And so they had to go to Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And that is exactly what the apostles did.

They were completely obedient to the Lord. Although they might not have understood all the reasons at that point, they nevertheless were obedient to the Lord.

Many times we do not know what lies ahead of us, but the Lord calls us to complete obedience anyway.

When I was in the South African Air Force, I was an Air Traffic Controller. One time a pilot was caught in bad weather and needed to come down to land. He could not see the ground because of the clouds, and all he had were his instruments and my guidance. By a combination of radio and radar, I was able to guide that pilot safely down through the clouds onto the runway.

But he had to trust me for that safe landing. The pilot could not see what was ahead (or below!), but he had to obey my instructions completely to land safely.

In the same way, the Lord calls us to complete obedience even though we sometimes do not know what lies ahead.

The apostles had come to the place in their lives where they knew that the Lord was to be fully trusted *and* obeyed.

They had come to the place where they no longer balked at what he commanded, but did what he said.

One reason for the explosive growth of the church was the apostles' obedience.

Because we, like the apostles, belong to the Lord, we must commit ourselves to practicing obedience to our Lord.

## II. By Joining Together in Devoted Prayer (1:13-14)

Second, the apostles prepared for the growth of the church by joining together in devoted prayer.

In obedience to Jesus' command, the apostles went to Jerusalem. **“And when they had entered [Jerusalem], they went up to the upper room, where they were staying”** (1:13a).

Luke then tells us how they spent the next ten days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost: **“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer”** (1:14a).

Luke noted the eleven apostles were present (1:13b), except for Judas Iscariot.

In addition, the apostles were joined by others. The group included **“the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers”** (1:14b). Jesus' brothers evidently came to believe in him after his resurrection.

By the time Peter stood up to give his speech, the group in the room numbered about 120 persons (1:15).

Some houses commonly had large upper rooms, which were used for a variety of purposes. This one must have been part of a large house since it accommodated 120 people.

Its exact location is unknown. It may have been where the Last Supper had been celebrated by our Lord and also where Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

Although the location of the room is unknown, Luke does tell us that their prayer had two characteristics which, Calvin comments, are “proper to true prayer, namely, that they did persist, and that they were all of one mind” (John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* [Galaxie Software, 2002], [Ac 1:12](#)).

Let's note the two characteristics of their prayer.

*First, their prayer was united.* **“All these with one accord** were devoting themselves to prayer.” The expression **“one accord”** (*homothymadon*) in context means that they prayed “with one mind or purpose or impulse.”

There was great unity as all the believers prayed together.

There is something about prayer that unites believers together.

In prayer, believers are not talking to each other, but we are talking to God.

Prayer takes the focus off ourselves and our concerns and puts it on God and his concerns. There is unity in that.

*And second, their prayer was persevering.* “All these with one accord **were devoting themselves** to prayer.” The expression “**devoting themselves**” (*proskartereo*) means “to be busy or persistent” in all activities. Luke uses the verb here to indicate persistence in prayer.

And so we find the group persevering in united prayer.

What were they praying for?

They were praying for the Holy Spirit to come.

The Father had promised to send the Holy Spirit soon. Jesus had commanded the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit and then—and only then—to begin their witness.

And so, the believers were obediently uniting in persevering prayer, asking the Lord to send the Holy Spirit.

Today, we do not need to pray in the same way as they prayed (that is, for God to send the Holy Spirit), because he already has sent the Spirit (at Pentecost).

We do, however, need to pray that God will help us obey his commands and that he will fulfill his promises that are for us.

Here’s the principle: God’s commands and promises do not render prayer superfluous.

God’s commands and promises give us the warrant to pray and the confidence that he will hear and answer.

Sometimes people get confused about this. They say, “If God is going to do something that he has commanded or promised, if it is in his sovereign will for him to accomplish a certain thing, why pray for it? He is going to do it anyway.”

That is a bad misunderstanding of how God works.

God is indeed sovereign. God does what God wills to do. God accomplishes his purposes. The disobedience of man does not frustrate him.

But when God accomplishes his purposes, he does it through means.

If he is going to save someone, he usually does it by leading someone else to go to him or her with the gospel and speak about Jesus Christ.

Similarly, when God sends revival, as he was about to do on the Day of Pentecost, he almost always does it by leading his people to pray.

Prayer is not superfluous.

The apostles knew this. Jesus had taught them. So, they prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit and his blessing when the Spirit came.

Those who have studied the history of revivals in the church point out that they have always been preceded by times of united, persistent prayer by Christians.

Revival historian J. Edwin Orr said that “no great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer—Christians persistently praying for revival.”

The Puritan commentator, Matthew Henry, is reported as saying that when God wants to do something special in the world, he first gets his people to start praying.

It has not always been a large number of people who have prayed, at least at the beginning. Often only a small group gathered at first. But there was always prayer as God’s people came together to ask for his blessing.

In the 1850s, for example, the United States was in a weak spiritual state, as people were preoccupied with concern for material things. In 1857 a quiet forty-six year-old businessman, Jeremiah Lanphier, felt led to start a noon-time weekly prayer meeting in New York City, in which business people could meet for prayer.

Anyone could attend, for a few minutes or the entire hour.

On the first day, Lanphier prayed alone for half an hour. But by the end of the hour, six men had joined him.

Twenty came the next week and forty the week after that.

Soon they decided to meet daily, and the group swelled to over one hundred.

Pastors who came started morning prayer meetings in their own churches.

Soon similar meetings were being held all over the United States.

Within six months, more than ten thousand people were meeting daily in New York City alone.

This was the start of what is now termed “The Third Great Awakening” in North America.

It is estimated that in two years (1857-1859), two million people made professions of faith (out of a population of thirty million).

The prayer that took place in Jerusalem was *united* and *persevering*.

Prayer is foundational to any true ministry and any true growth.

We must commit ourselves to united and persevering prayer if we want to see growth.

To that end, I encourage all our Bible Studies, Adult Bible Fellowships, Sunday school classes, and so on to spend time in united and persevering prayer.

Pray that God will bless the ministry of his word.

Pray that God will bring people to faith in Jesus.

Pray that God will help each one of us to grow as disciples.

Pray that God will grow the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

Pray that God will glorify his name here in our midst.

### III. By Studying the Scriptures (1:15-20)

Third, the apostles prepared for the growth of the church by studying the Scriptures.

When Peter “**stood up among the brothers**” (1:15) and spoke about the need to replace Judas, he quoted Scripture.



He said in [Acts 1:16](#), **“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.”**

Later in his speech, he quoted two passages from the **Book of Psalms**: [Psalm 69:25](#) (**“May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”**) and [Psalm 109:8](#) (**“Let another take his office”**).

It seems clear that Peter, the apostles, and other believers poured over the Old Testament Scriptures in those ten days before Pentecost.

Not only did Peter quote the Old Testament Scripture in the upper room, but he also quoted Scripture on the Day of Pentecost.

How did Peter get the Scriptures into his mind if not from in-depth, meaningful study?

We say that we want God to bless our church, or our family, or us personally.

But if we are serious about wanting God’s blessing, we must learn that the way God blesses is usually through a study of the Bible—as we come to know what God has written, respond to it, believe it, and then proclaim it to other people.

Listen! Spiritual growth *never* takes place apart from the careful, diligent study of God’s word.

Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God’s Word?

R. C. Sproul said it painfully well: “Here then is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”

Are you studying the Bible?

Are you in a group with others where you are studying the Bible?

You expect blessing and growth in your life, but it will never happen without work. You must study the Bible.

#### IV. By Choosing Godly Leaders (1:21-26)

And finally, the apostles prepared for the growth of the church by choosing godly leaders.

The apostles recognized the need for leadership, and they took the necessary steps to supply it.

Specifically, it involved the election of **Matthias** to become an apostle to fill the place of **Judas**.

Since there is no apostolic succession, what the apostles did here was unique.

Nevertheless, there are some principles regarding the selection of leadership which are instructive to us. It's instructive to note some factors which contributed to the discovery of God's will in this matter.

*First, leaders should be chosen in accordance with Scripture.* Peter was guided by the Scriptures that a replacement should be chosen for **Judas** (1:16-21).

The New Testament, which Peter of course did not have, gives us guidelines as to what constitutes the biblical qualifications for leadership ([1 Timothy 3:1-13](#); [Titus 1:6-9](#)).

*Second, leaders should be chosen as a result of prayer.* After two qualified nominations were put forward, the apostles and believers prayed. Surely they remembered that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before choosing his twelve apostles ([Luke 6:12-13](#)).

Commentator Robert Stein points out that “prayer preceded every major decision or crisis in the life of Jesus and the early church” (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992], 192).

Prayer is important before making any decision because it gets us in tune with God so that we are more receptive to his voice.

When the process of selecting leaders is saturated in prayer, the desire to know God's will unconsciously influences the process so that the chances of acting according to that will are greater.

*And finally, leaders should be chosen because their hearts are right with God. The apostles and believers prayed: “**You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen**” (1:24). Only the Lord knows everyone’s heart.*

Christian ministry is essentially spiritual in nature, and external qualifications are useless if a person’s heart is not right with God.

If the apostles, who had been relatively close to these two candidates for two or three years, needed divine guidance regarding the heart of a person, then how much more do we need divine guidance when choosing our leaders?

Nominations, written tests, oral examinations, and interviews do help, but they can also fail to reveal what is in the heart.

We get to know a potential leader’s heart by spending time with him in a close relationship, such as being in a ministry or a Bible study with that potential leader.

As we choose leaders, let us always choose leaders in accordance with the Scriptural qualifications, as a result of prayer, and those whose hearts are right with God.

## Conclusion

Churches grow when their members practice obedience, are joined together in devoted prayer, study the Scriptures, and choose godly leaders.

Did you notice what Luke did not mention regarding church growth?

Luke did not mention a fantastic worship service. He did not mention a great children’s ministry. He did not mention a youth ministry. He did not mention that needs were met.

It is not that these things are unimportant and contribute to the ministry of the church.

What Luke did mention were things that everyone of you—and not the pastor or the elders or the ministry leaders alone—can do.

So let me ask you some questions.

Are you practicing obedience to all that is given to you in God's word?

Are you joining with other members in devoted prayer?

Are you working in your study of the Scriptures?

And are you choosing godly leaders for our church?

Let me exhort you to keep in mind that churches grow when their members practice obedience, are joined together in devoted prayer, study the Scriptures, and choose godly leaders. Amen.