

Church Planting

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Acts is one of the most exciting portions of the New Testament. It is the only divinely-inspired account of church history and is full of epic events. It has been said that the theme of the Book is the Holy Spirit's miraculous work through the church for the evangelization of the world. But actually, I feel that the theme of Acts is even more specific than that. It appears to me that the fundamental theme of Acts is the evangelization of the world through a global work of church planting.

In Matthew, Jesus stated a definitive purpose for human history when He said, "... ***I will build My church***" (Matthew 16:18b). When He made that statement, the building of His church was a future project in which Jesus intended to engage. The church is a spiritual reality that began to exist after Jesus' resurrection and subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Book of Acts lays out how Jesus began to build His church and how He continues that work today. The basis of this conviction is Christ's statement in Acts 1:8: "***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.***" Beginning in Jerusalem and branching out to the end of the earth, the disciples were to be Christ's witnesses. And based on the testimony of Acts, they apparently understood this to mean they were to spread the Gospel message throughout the earth through preaching and church planting.

As the disciples begin fulfilling their Christ-given mission to be His witnesses, a pattern is repeated throughout Acts which is seen in microcosm in Acts 2.

First, Spirit-empowered men preach the Gospel to lost people (verses 1-39).

Second, individuals who hear the Gospel believe and are saved (verses 37-41). Every time these first two steps occur, the

universal church grows. But the testimony of Acts does not end here.

Third, the newly born-again people who believed the Gospel begin gathering in community as a local church (verses 41-47). They submit to the authority and instruction of biblical church leadership. They fellowship, pray, eat, and live life together as the local church. They care for individual needs and share resources (verse 42). Thus the newly-planted local church becomes a microcosm of the universal church. And this is why it is not enough to say that the theme of Acts is the Holy Spirit's miraculous work through the church. The purpose of the Spirit's miracles as recorded in Acts was to inspire faith in the preached Gospel, so that individuals would be born-again, so that they'd begin living life under Jesus' Lordship as part of the local community of believers in their area—the local church (compare Acts 8:4-8 and 9:31).

Fourth, and finally, as new believers are disciplined in the context of a local church, over time new leaders are raised up either to lead the newly-planted local churches (Acts 14:23) or to be sent out to plant more churches, generally as part of an apostolic church-planting band (Acts 20:4-6). This is the story of Acts: Spirit-empowered men planting churches that plant churches. In addition to Jerusalem, Antioch became another hub of discipleship and church planting (Acts 13:1-5). And from Antioch as a home base, the apostle Paul ventured out to plant local churches all over the known world.

The results of God's people taking seriously the New Testament example to plant local churches through preaching the Gospel are significant. The local church becomes the house of discipleship through which Jesus' command to make disciples through baptizing and teaching them His will is fulfilled (Matthew 28:19-20). The universal church, which consists of the various

Gospel-centered local churches that worship the true Christ throughout the world, grows steadily. God's glory fills the earth through the praises of regenerated hearts, minds, and mouths. And lost sinners are saved from experiencing both this life, and then eternity in hell, without God.

The end of the story of Acts is still being crafted through the lives of God's people and today's local churches. Calvary Chapels are

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just one part of the continued church-planting story of Acts. It is a part of Jesus' church-planting, kingdom-growing work that I love. It is a significant work of the Holy Spirit. In 50 years, Calvary Chapel has grown from one small local church to a movement rapidly approaching 2,000 churches worldwide. Will we continue to be a legitimate part of the ongoing church-planting story of Acts? I believe the Spirit is beckoning us, through the pages of Scripture, to remain in the flow of what He's doing and reach the world together through church planting. Whether or not we do is up to us. 🙌

The ReEngage Conference on October 15-18 will train new CC church planters and help established fellowships thrive as church-planting churches. To register, visit www.calvarychurchplanting.org.

Kellen Criswell and his family moved to Ogden, UT, in 2008 to start Refuge Church and work with existing churches in the area. He and his wife have two children.