

Next Steps

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[0 : 0 0] Now we're going to turn to Acts chapter 1, Acts 1, and we'll read from verse 15 down to verse 26.

Acts 15, Acts chapter 1, verse 15 to 26. In those days Peter stood up among the brothers, the company of persons who in all about 120, and said, 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.

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. 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.

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. 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.

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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.

[1 : 4 1] And they put forward two, Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also called Justice, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen, to take the place in his ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

And they cast lots for them, and a lot fell in Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. May God grant his blessing for that reading from his holy word.

We see very much, I pray in the context of these next months for you, principles in God's word regarding the next steps for any congregation in the choosing of a minister.

There are five principles, I pray, that we take from this passage. In some ways you might not think it's the most obvious and direct passage for a minister to preach his final sermon to a congregation, but I pray that as you see the principles that this passage brings out, you'll see there are great teachings from God's word regarding the responsibilities of any congregation in the choosing of a new pastor, a new minister.

Five principles that I believe I've seen in this passage. You see the principles on the screen there, the principle of waiting, waiting on the Lord, waiting on the Lord's timing.

[3 : 1 3] Not waiting in any idle or passive sense, but truly waiting upon the Lord's word, the Lord's direction. And in that waiting on the Lord, that the Lord's people exercise that unity in the Lord.

I'll stress that more as we go through these five principles. How important it is that the Lord's people remain united in heart, united in purpose, and united in the Lord in these times that God has given to you in this context.

And of course, if you're waiting on the Lord, you're praying in the Lord, you're praying to the Lord. You're to be that praying people who call upon the Lord's name, seeking his guidance, seeking his direction.

And of course, underneath, underpinning, you're waiting on the Lord, you're praying to the Lord, your unity, that one with another, is the centrality of God's word. You do what you do according to the word of God.

That's the basis for every decision that you make in life, of course, and every decision that a congregation has to make in its next steps in choosing a minister.

[4 : 27] Because, as we know from our church history, we know from God's word, God gives the congregation the responsibility of choosing, of course, under God's guidance, the decision of the church to choose their next pastor.

And of course, you know, as a congregation, you've a lot to do in these next weeks, these next months, there's so many important works to carry on with and to continue with. After all, Jesus has commanded his people to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

There's that mission call, even as we rent there at the start of the service. And, of course, part of that mission call is that a church has a settled ministry.

And the choosing of a new minister is so important. It's such a solemn responsibility. Because you are to do what God has given you to do under God's commanding and God's leading.

And it's not any kind of half-hearted decision to be made. It's not to be anything that's, you know, considered, I think I mentioned this morning, a casual manner. You are given the responsibility to choose a man who's going to preach the word of God.

[5 : 45] Somebody who's going to teach the word of God. Somebody who's going to pastor the flock, the flock that the Lord has composed, even in a congregation. You're going to choose somebody who's going to lead you, lead the people, in ways of righteousness.

And that's no casual thing to do. And if the New Testament certainly, and we'll come back to this later, if the New Testament certainly gives guiding principles as to who it is, or the kind of person it is who's going to have the, as it were, the qualifications to be the pastor, to be a pastor, then there are also at the same time responsibilities that a congregation's given.

responsibilities that are so important to bear in mind and to exercise even from the word of God, the guiding word that God has given to you.

And, yes, there are all, of course, there are various details in the processes involved in the choosing of a new minister. There's the choosing of a name or the person who's going to be given that call.

there's the responsibility of calling somebody from one particular life situation to another. And, this evening then in my own, in many ways, certainly from this pool pit, no doubt I'll see more next week, but certainly my own parting words to you, certainly from this pool pit, is really to bring before you these guiding principles that God's word gives and what you're to be doing in these next, three next months certainly, in the choosing a man from amongst God's servants, one servant amongst many servants, choosing someone who will truly serve the Lord even here in this congregation.

[7 : 41] And, that's why we read Acts chapter 1, because in that chapter we read the choosing of this man Matthias, this man Matthias who was to replace Judas Iscariot to replace him as an apostle.

Now, yes, there are many significant differences in this passage compared to, I pray, what's happening in this congregation and every other congregation that knows and honours the Lord Jesus.

I mean, what we read here in Acts chapter 1 in choosing an apostle, well, the days of apostles, of course, are over. You're not choosing an apostle as such. I trust you're not replacing a Judas Iscariot.

But there are significant principles, significant aspects to what we read here in the passage with what you're going to be doing, what you should be focusing on in your next steps as a congregation.

And that's why we come to these five principles. The first principle of waiting, waiting on the Lord, Lord, and the church's responsibility to wait on the Lord.

[8 : 52] It's interesting, the word church actually isn't found in Acts until, well, much later in fact, in Acts chapter 9. But what we read there, certainly as we started reading from verse 15, certainly what we're reading there is of a church in existence, a church in Jerusalem.

And what we read there, what we read in it from verse 15, is this church in existence before the Holy Spirit comes in the church. So there's 120 people already there in Jerusalem.

And the church, of course, amongst that fairly large number, fairly large, there are 11 remaining disciples. They're the leaders of the church. And as we're told also, there are women in the church, there are Jesus' brothers, there are others as well, amongst that 120.

And one of the sermon series that we looked at in our midweek meetings was very much the theme of the book of Acts, the expansion of the church.

That's what the book of Acts, the Acts of the apostles, the Acts that were done in the name of the Lord Jesus, sending out these apostles, even the apostle Paul, in spreading the good news, the church growing, the church growing beyond, as it were, the confines of these 120 people there in Jerusalem.

[10 : 14] But before the church actually, if you like, expands beyond Jerusalem, before the Holy Spirit comes in the church at Pentecost, what do we find?

We find there's a time of waiting. But Jesus commanded the church before he ascended into heaven, we read in Acts 1-4, because Jesus tells his disciples to wait, to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to wait for that gift that the Father had promised.

And then when we start picking up Luke's account here, even some of the verses earlier, that's what the church is doing, it's waiting. In fact, in God's providence, they were waiting, from what we read there in verse 15, a week before the Holy Spirit comes in the church, before the gift of the Spirit is poured out on believers.

But in their waiting, waiting for this promised Spirit, they're not idle, they're not just sitting back and doing nothing, they're active, there's an action in waiting, they're together, they're together, they're persistent in prayer, they're searching the scriptures, they're choosing a replacement to Judas Iscariot.

And in your work, God has given you to do to seek a new minister. Essentially, you have to wait on the Lord, and wait expectantly, wait responsibly, wait actively.

[11 : 50] Waiting isn't a waste of time. You know, so often people can think, oh, if you're waiting on something, you're just doing nothing. Absolutely not. It's not a waste of time. Because God gives you these periods of waiting.

the more to lean on him, the more to trust in him, the more to deepen your faith in him, to learn that it's in his timing, and for his sake and for his glory, that God gives you these times.

Because your times are in the hands of the eternal God. And don't see the time that God gives you, this time of waiting, as somehow a hindrance to the work that God will continue to give this congregation.

But wait, wait on the Lord. Because if God has a purpose for this congregation living tonight, fully believe he has, in his own time, he'll send that blessing upon you.

So, this time of waiting is part of God's perfect plan for you. Seek his will. Come before him, wait on him. And this is we were saying on Wednesday evening, remember, even in these times of waiting, that all things, even this time of waiting, all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

[13 : 18] So, waiting. But then, in that waiting, I plead with you, be united. Because that's what we read there in the passage.

we read there, in fact, even earlier in the chapter, because early in the chapter, we read that the eleven remaining disciples were in one room.

Possibly a really large room, after all, there are eleven of them there, plus others in the room as well. There's eleven disciples, there's the women who are mentioned later in verse fourteen.

As we said, it's probably Jesus' brothers as well, James, Joseph, Judas, Simon, but this is a group that are together. They're together. Who are together?

Well, the disciples, they're together. And, you know, they've got one mind. In fact, we read in verse fourteen earlier, all those with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers.

[14 : 24] They're with one accord, one mind. Yes, they'd run away from Jesus when Jesus was in trial and when Jesus was crucified. But now they're together again.

They're still together, and they're united. They've been through these post-resurrection, or they've lived through these post-resurrection days, all the trauma of Jesus having died, and they're thinking that that's it, but then Jesus rises from the dead.

They've been with Jesus these forty days after his resurrection, together with Jesus. They've seen his ascension, and now they're back in Jerusalem. They're together in Jerusalem, and Jesus commanded them to be there, to wait on the Holy Spirit.

The whole point of this is that they are together. They're of one mind, one accord, and that was so crucial for the church in these early days of the church's existence, because the church was waiting, waiting for that empowerment from above.

So it had to be united. It had to be one mind, and in their waiting, being prepared to receive the Holy Spirit, and to go out sowing the seed.

[15 : 43] And you know, that's a lesson for you and your waiting on the Lord, waiting for his guidance, waiting for his direction, waiting for God to lead you further and beyond even this moment.

Be united. Be of one mind, be of one accord, even in this time of waiting on the Lord. Have that unity of heart that desires first and foremost to see the kingdom of God advance even in this town and even in this area.

Be united in your desire, in your true heart's desire to see the cause of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus take root in this place.

Have that desire for yourselves to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. You know, have that heart's desire and united together, that you'll be together, work together, love one another, united in the Lord.

Unity has to be so crucial in all the decisions that are to be made regarding the choosing of a man to be the minister here in this congregation.

[16 : 55] And I don't need to say it because so many of you know it, but I'll say it anyway, vacancies can be difficult times. They're testing times. And, you know, I'm sure you've known in times past, not here but elsewhere, where so often, disunity can raise its ugly head.

And so, pray that God will remove any even vestige of disunity in these crucial months ahead. Strive for that unity of heart and purpose.

Seek the Lord's will together for his glory, for the good of, yes, this congregation, but above all for the glory of God's name.

So when you're waiting, be united. And in your waiting, in your unity, be a praying people. Be a praying people as we read, or we read, in fact, in verse 14, all those with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, to prayer.

One accord, devoting themselves to prayer. In other words, they were persistent in calling upon God for God's leading, for God's guiding. They were fervent in prayer.

[18 : 10] prayer. As it were, they were being busy in the business of prayer. Yes, they're still waiting in the Holy Spirit, but in their waiting, they've been active, and they've been active in prayer.

They've been told the Holy Spirit's coming, but they're still being, they're not being passive, they're being active. That's what somebody's written here, God's promises do not render prayer unnecessary.

Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit, but they're still praying in the light of that promise. And you've been commanded, commanded to pray, to be earnest in your prayer for the life of this congregation.

And you know all too well, as I know all too well, so often the Spirit is willing, our spirits, our hearts are willing, but the flesh is weak, and especially in the discipline of prayer.

But the people in that church there in Jerusalem, they were devoting themselves to prayer, and nothing has changed in 2,000 years. It's still a priority for the Lord's people, for you to come before the Lord, and as Jesus said, ask, and it will be given to you.

[19 : 29] Seek, and you'll find not, and the door will be opened unto you. Come before the one who hears prayer, answers prayer. Wherever you pray, whether it's in your room in the house, somewhere particularly where you've called upon God for many years, whether it's in the building itself, or from online, where even in our midweek meetings, that have been so blessed, even over these past months, and are coming together, and the blessing that God has given in these times of prayer, God is calling his people to pray, and to pray, and to pray, that God would move mightily, even in the work that he's giving this congregation to do.

Because if you're not praying even in the context of what God has given in his providence for this congregation, ideally serious about the work, about the work of the gospel, be as those believers there in Jerusalem, and be devoted to prayer.

Wait on the Lord, and in your waiting, be prayerfully waiting. Wait and call upon God, that God will answer the prayers of his people in bringing a unity of purpose, a unity of mind for the choosing of a new minister here in Livingston Free Church.

Waiting, unity, prayer. But then, fourthly, the reading of God's word, or it may be better to say the centrality of God's word in the church.

Because that's really why we read from, certainly from verse 15 to verse 20. And you see how crucial the word of God was in directing the church at that very critical time in the life of the early church.

[21 : 18] Because, of course, as we read there, the church in Jerusalem, in some ways, we might say it's got a problem. Okay, there are 120 people in that church, the early church. There are actually others in Galilee as well.

There are leaders in that church. I mean, if you read in verse 13, Peter's name's mentioned there in the list of disciples. His name's mentioned again, verse 15.

So, no doubt, Peter is that leader in the church. But there are only 11 disciples. And you say, well, okay, there's 11 disciples. Why do they need a 12 disciple?

It seems that things are happening as they should be. But you see, the word of God was supreme. The word of God was absolutely central in that context. Because everything the church had to do then, as has to do now, is based in scripture.

Scriptural principles prevailed. And one of these principles was in waiting. As we said, waiting on the Lord. the church there, then, was about to be endowed with the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 28] The church is to be the new Israel of God, the new people of God. The Israel of the Old Testament, remember, divided into 12 tribes.

So, for there to be that continuity, there's going to have to be 12 apostles to represent the new Israel of God. So, the Israel of God has to be seen to be continuous.

The early church, a continuity of the Old Testament church. And, you know, the disciples are being given this new awareness of what's happening.

They know that Jesus is the Messiah. But after Jesus' death and resurrection, things are becoming clearer to these disciples, especially in these Old Testament prophecies.

especially in relation to the Lord Jesus as Messiah. Remember in Luke 24, Luke who also wrote the book of Acts, Luke tells us that Jesus is with these others on Emmaus Road.

[23 : 34] And Jesus opened up the scriptures to them. The risen Lord Jesus opens up the scriptures. And, likewise, when Jesus is with these 11 disciples before his ascension, we're told in Luke 24, then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

So, you know, what's happening here is that the disciples and, of course, the church has given this new grasp of Jesus, the risen living Lord Jesus.

And Peter is steeped in scripture. And between the time of Jesus' resurrection and the time of Pentecost, you can see from the passage that Peter is so absorbed in God's word.

And he's quoting from the book of Psalms. And he's got this grasp, this new grasping of God's word. And he's connecting what he's reading in the Old Testament, our Old Testament, with what's happening there and then.

And he's read in Psalm 69. And he's read Psalm 69 and now in light of Judas' betrayal. Judas Iscariot, he deserted Jesus.

[24 : 42] He betrayed Jesus. And he's going to, he's faced the wrath of God. And his place is to be deserted on earth. In other words, he's to be removed, his life taken away.

But then Peter's also read Psalm 109. And he reads there in light of that passage, he's interpreting that passage faithfully, that someone else has to take Judas Iscariot's place.

Someone else has got to take to be the 12th apostle. He points this, bring out all this in terms of principle. Peter knows his Bible.

Peter's turned to the Word of God to guide him and to guide the church. Particularly when a church has a particular issue, a particular problem, Peter turns to God's Word. And Peter found the answer to that problem that was existing in Jerusalem.

He found the answer and he found that answer in God's Word, the Bible. 12th disciple had to be chosen. And that's an important principle for you in your current situation.

[25 : 52] Of course, a context for every aspect of your life. But you know, when you're coming to that point of choosing a new minister, a new pastor, God's Word is still that lamp to your feet and that light for your eyes.

God's word of God itself is central to every preaching ministry that honors and glorifies the Lord Jesus. And, you know, attend to God's Word with diligence.

Receive God's Word with faith and act upon what you're reading and being told how, well, it's the only rule to direct you, how you're to glorify God's Word. Seek guidance from God's Word.

As you're seeking, and to be seeking a man to be your minister, use Scripture to guide you. We mentioned earlier about how Scripture talks about the qualifications for ministry.

And, you know, you read in passages such as 1 Timothy chapter 3, these guidelines, the man who's to be above reproach, the husband of one wife, the one who's sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, he must be and so on, and well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace and to the snare of the devil.

[27 : 19] Now, this is Scripture, this is God's Word, this isn't just made up by some committee in the church, this is God's Word. And be grounded in Scripture as that basis for your choosing, your new pastor, because that Word has to have absolute priority in the process that leads to the call of a man.

God's Word had priority in the early church there, it has to have priority in this 21st century church. And, you know, Peter cites Scripture to justify why the churches moved to replace Judas Iscariot and decisions were made on that basis.

What do we find in the decision of the church as we read there in verse 21 to 26? There were set procedures, qualifications for leadership were addressed, two men's names were given, prayer was offered.

Then this, what you might think was rather strange, the casting of lots and then the choosing of one individual Matthias. But remember we're looking at principles here.

Somebody's going to replace Judas Iscariot, not anyone. The qualification is crucial. We're told in verse 21 and 22, it had to be someone who'd been with these 11 disciples the whole time that the Lord Jesus exercised his public ministry.

[28 : 53] And this person who was going to be chosen at the same time had to be a witness to the risen Lord Jesus. And so he has to have been a witness to Jesus' ministry and a witness to the risen Lord Jesus.

And that was somebody who'd seen the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, someone who could testify who was a witness to the Lord Jesus and his ministry and a witness to the risen Lord Jesus.

Someone who had the credentials of being an apostle, to be sent with the word, having seen the very word of God.

Eyewitnesses, people who would carry a credibility, authority, and people who would trust their word, and bring the principle to present time.

Those who are leaders in the church and those who are to be leaders in the church, well, there are credentials, there are qualifications that God's word gives. You have to have seen Jesus.

[30 : 06] Yes, seen him. Seen him with your eyes of faith. Now, as we said earlier, there are no longer designated apostles in the church, the apostolic age is gone, but still there are those who are witnesses who have witnessed the Lord Jesus in their life, who have seen him by faith.

That's why we have to say with great, great sadness that where there are those in leadership in church who have not seen the Lord Jesus by faith, who can't testify to the risen Lord Jesus and a saviour and Lord, then that is deception of the greatest kind.

But we give thanks to God our Lord in the blessing that God gives to a church that honours and glorifies his name, that God will give to his church those who are suitably qualified to lead.

But as we read in the passage, there still was this problem, not just that there had to be somebody to replace Judas Iscariot, but there are two who were deemed to be qualified, who were going to be the new apostle.

What does the church do? As we mentioned earlier, the centrality of prayer. So it prays. It prays. As we read there in verse 24, and they prayed and said, you Lord, you know the hearts of all.

[31 : 39] We were looking in the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus who knows this church. Well, there's the church there saying to Jesus, you know, you know.

But in their coming before God in prayer, yes, they're getting their priorities sorted correctly. Prayer being offered from the heart to the one who knows every heart.

But then we read in verse 26, and they cast lots for them. So they've offered prayer, and then something happens, lots.

I suppose it would be like dice today. And whatever happens with these lots, the decision is given to Matthias.

And you might say, that's a strange thing to do. They've been so spiritual and they're waiting on the Lord and be united in the prayer. But then this casting of lots, I just mean to say, somehow you're going to have to cast lots to see who's going to be your next minister.

[32 : 45] Well, context, principles, context, so important. You go to the Old Testament, and so often the times that we read off to discern God's will, lots were cast.

In the book of Joshua, for example, to see which tribes would be allocated to the particular areas in the promised land, land of Cain, and lots were cast. And other passages as well.

But the precedent in the Old Testament was that, well, God made his will known through that particular procedure. But this is the only time we read of this in the New Testament.

It did happen, but remember when it happened. It happens a week before the Holy Spirit comes in the church. And when the Holy Spirit came in the church, the Spirit came to give leadership and guidance and power.

And of course it's in today's context, the church of today, it's through the Spirit's guidance that you discern truth. So pray for the Spirit's leading, and is leading you to the man of his choice.

[33 : 56] But then back to the passage. the disciple Matthias he's chosen. But remember these are exceptional circumstances before the Holy Spirit comes in the church.

And when the Holy Spirit does come on the church, the church will be ready to move on in the Spirit's power. So you don't need to resort to anything external in choosing a new minister.

But seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We've been looking the last number of weeks and we meeting on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. One of his works is of course to guide the church, to honour and glorify God.

He's called the Spirit of Truth. And he reveals truth to the church. He reveals the truth of the Lord Jesus. So what have we seen then in these early days of the New Testament church?

We've seen that there were days of preparation. There were days of waiting. There were days of prayer. There were days when priorities were established. The priority of unity. The priority of being rooted in God's Word.

[35 : 07] And bring these principles to bear even in this congregation. Unity. Prayer. Bible-based practice as you wait on the Lord.

As you wait in order to make your decisions for the glory of God's name. God's word.

As you come to make your decisions for the Lord. These are months that God has given you for such a time as this. And so as I close, as I close my words to you, I pray God's blessing on each and every one of you.

I pray God's blessing on this congregation. I pray that God will give the increase and that you'll know that it's not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.

Amen. And let us pray. O Lord, our God, you who have led your people thus far, continue to lead them. May your people know that you must increase and you give the increase.

[36 : 31] And we pray, Lord, that your hand will be upon your people here as they wait upon you, as they seek to honour and glorify your name for the furtherance of your kingdom here.

So, Lord, bless your people. Encourage them by your word that they all will grow in grace and in the knowledge, the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

We pray, Lord, these things in Jesus' name. Amen.