

12 Things the Early Church Didn't Need to Change the World for Jesus

The book of Acts grants us a snapshot as to the power and effectiveness of the first-century church that transformed the world. I believe we are still called to extrapolate principles from the early church in order to fulfill our mission. One of the things that most of us take for granted is the dependence upon modern methodologies and assumptions we deem absolutely necessary today to have a successful church.

However, sometimes what we deem necessary may prove to be a stumbling block in our quest for exponential, explosive church growth.

The following are 12 things the early church didn't need to change the world:

1. A Large Central Building

With the focus today on building large church edifices to hold sizable crowds, we forget that the early church exploded when they were decentralized and met in homes and catacombs. Of course the reason for this was because Christianity was illegal and they could not build public buildings. Having smaller meeting places gave them a greater sense of community and compelled more people to lead to hold the city church together. It was truly one city church with many congregations and locations.

2. A Complete Bible

The powerful church depicted in the book of Acts did not yet have all the gospels, epistles and the book of Revelation. Furthermore, since there was no printing press, nobody walked

around with a Bible! Can you imagine a church today without access to a completed Bible? (In many places today where believers are persecuted, many are without a Bible!)

In the early church, only a few had scrolls of the Old Testament and some apostolic letters that circulated among believers to be read in corporate gatherings. Yet, they turned the world upside down! Why? Because they were living epistles who depended upon oral learning and acted upon the limited revelation they had.

3. Professional Clergy

Often the first-century church only had a handful of full-time ministers. Most of the ministry was done by elders, deacons and believers who supported themselves with a vocation. Of course, the primary apostolic leaders itinerated and devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4).

4. A Denomination

The early church was an organic movement of voluntary associations of believers. The skeletal frame was a simple hierarchical structure that included five cluster ministry gifts (Eph. 4:11) with a team of elders and deacons (1Tim. 3). Their focus was to equip the church to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). As the church evolved, church government became more sophisticated, and the office of bishop eventually expanded to have a diocesan and metropolitan influence.

However, they were not an institutionalized, top-down, hierarchical organization with complicated canon law, protocols and traditions like present-day denominations. They would be more akin to what we would term today as “independent, network Christianity” that is presently exploding and expanding the global church.

5. An Accommodating Culture

The early church emerged as a small, counter-culture movement with opposition from both the Jewish nation and its polytheistic Roman/Greco culture. Its odds of survival were very slim (perhaps in Vegas it would be 100-1 odds). In spite of this, they not only survived but thrived because they depended upon the all-sufficient Christ as their daily bread. Many believers today fight for freedom of religion because they do not want to be inconvenienced when living out their faith.

6. A Bible School

The thought of sending promising leaders away to a university or Bible college was unheard of in the first century. The model for nurturing and equipping their leaders of the future was to mentor them in the context of their faith community. This is still the most effective way to develop strong leadership.

7. A Worship Team

The early church utilized the psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, orally passed down Scripture and sang *a cappella* in their small gatherings (Eph. 5:19). Can you imagine a church trying to grow today without the use of visual effects, lights and a skilled worship team? Often these accoutrements cause believers to focus more on a visceral experience than worshipping Jesus.

8. Social Media and Technology

The apostle Paul planted churches in 31 major cities and networked all the leaders together through the use of hand-delivered letters and personal visits. His work turned the world upside down without the use of planes, trains, automobiles and social media.

There is truly no substitute for personal touch when it comes to birthing a movement.

9. A Sunday School or Youth Group

In the early church there was no separating the families. The children, youth and parents all worshipped and learned the word together. Of course, some were taken aside for private instruction (2 Tim. 2:2), but the concept of Sunday Schools and youth groups was unheard of. Yet, they still kept their families in the faith and perpetuated the gospel for generations.

10. Professional Therapy and Counseling

In the early church—people received Scripture-based admonition (Heb. 3:12,13), prayer and at times deliverance from Satanic oppression—but there was no psychological counseling and therapy (or drugs). Yet, they rejoiced always—even when their material goods were confiscated and they were persecuted (Phil. 4:4; -34).

11. Political Affiliation

Nowadays, most Christians are affiliated to some extent with a political party and even depend upon it to buttress their faith and values. The early church only promoted and affiliated in public with Christ's kingdom. They believed that affiliating with a heathen government like Rome compromised their allegiance to the reign of God.

12. A Financial War-Chest

Many church plants and congregations today struggle to survive due to a lack of finances (many church plants even close due to this). The early church did not have much money (Acts 3:6) but subsisted on radical love, which included the sharing of their material possessions and financial support (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32; 2 Cor. 8-9). This interdependence created synergy, which released great power to spread the gospel (Acts 4:32, 33).

Finally, although the methodologies we utilize today can be useful, we should never allow them to replace proven biblical principles the early church used to turn the world upside down (Acts 17: 6).