

When you have to make a tough decision, how do you decide what is the right thing to do? When you have to make a choice between two different things, how do you decide what to do? When you are getting pulled in two different directions, how do you decide which way to go? There are times when we have trouble deciding what the right thing to do is. What's true for us, was also true for the early Christians.

If you think about it, the lives of the first Christians was turned upside down. First Corinthians tells us that Jesus appeared to 500 of his followers sometime between Easter and the Ascension, when He returned to heaven. The book of Acts tells us that 3,000 people were baptized into the Christian faith on Pentecost. That means that there were about 3,500 believers right after Pentecost. Even though most of these people had probably been raised in the Jewish faith, Christianity was brand new to them. Jesus had challenged the man made rules and rituals of His day.

How would these new Christians know what to do? What would their new life in Christ look like. The book of Acts gives us a glimpse into the early church that helps us see how they lived. We can learn some basic principles for living from how they lived. The three key things we want to look at today are these:

1. Have a common purpose
2. Be part of a shared community
3. Work together for the common good

These principles can guide how we live in the church, in our families, and as we reach out into the community around us.

The early Christians had a common purpose. Acts 2:42 tells us, **“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”** The new Christians joined together to praise God. The new Christians joined together to grow in their faith. The new Christians worked together to bring others to faith in Jesus. And it worked. Acts 2:47 reads, **“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”**

Jesus told the first Christians what to do just before He returned to heaven when he told them, **“Go and make disciples of all nations.”** (Matthew 28:19) He also gave them this promise, **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8) The words of Jesus are still true today. When Christians lose track of the Lord's command to reach out to others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the church is not doing its job, the church plateaus or declines. The church has to reach out to those who don't know Christ or it is not doing the right thing. When a family is divided, it struggles. When a company doesn't have a clear vision,

it falters. When a team isn't working for the same goal, it fails. To do the right thing, have the right common purpose.

The second thing we learn from the early Christians is that they had a shared community. Acts 2:46 tells us, **“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”** The members of the early church spent time together. They got to know each other, supported each other, encouraged each other. One of the dangers many people who call themselves Christians face today is that they intellectualize their faith. They confess their faith in Jesus Christ, but are not connected with a church, a Bible study group, a Christian fellowship. They are not part of the body of Christ.

You can't be a solo Christian. It just doesn't work. Just as the coals in a charcoal fire need each other to keep burning, we need each other to keep the fire of our faith burning as well. You can only go solo for so long before your faith runs low. I can use my laptop computer for a little while without plugging it in. But if I don't plug it in, if I don't recharge the battery, it will die. If we don't plug into the community of faith, if we don't recharge our faith batteries, then our faith can grow weak and die.

One of the real advantages that we have when we get together with other Christians is that they can help us make the right decisions. They can help us see distinguish between right and wrong. They can help us determine between doing a good thing and doing the right thing. More mature Christians can mentor Christians who are new in the faith. When the world around us is telling us to compromise, to look out for ourselves first; the Christian faith tells us that we cannot compromise with the world, that we need to love others and not just ourselves. If all you do it walk in and out of the doors of the church on Sundays and don't connect with fellow Christians, you are missing out on the community of faith that can help you make the right decisions.

The third thing we learn from the early Christian is that they worked together for the common good. Acts tells us that they shared everything in common; describing what the early Christians did to help and support each other. This passage is descriptive. It doesn't tell us what we need to do today or must do today. But it does set up a key principle for us to follow. We need to work together for the common good. It is not what is best for me, but what is best for everyone. Our families would all fall apart if everyone was only looking out for their own best interest. Our church would fall apart for the same reason. But God brings us together, gives us unique gifts and abilities for the good of all. 1 Corinthians 12:7 tells us, **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

Life works better, we make the right decisions when we are looking out for the common good and not just for ourselves. Philippians 2:3-4 tells us, **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or**

vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

When you are trying to decide what is the right thing to do, remember these three things:

1. God has given us a common purpose to glorify Him by sharing His love with others.
2. We learn how to make the right decisions when we are part of the right community, when we let fellow Christians help us understand God’s will.
3. The right decisions follow the right priorities, which means God has first place in our lives, followed by our families and our fellow Christians.

This is exactly what Jesus did. God the Father gave Jesus a purpose, to rescue us from sin and death. Jesus lived as part of a community of disciples and called people to be part of his body the church. Jesus put others first when He gave up His life on the cross for us. When it comes to make the right decision, let the Lord be your guide. You may be amazed by what may happen. God did amazing things in the lives of the early Christians. He can do amazing things in our lives, as well. Amen.