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Introduction

This dissertation arises out of my own interest and engagement in Church Planting that has led me to reflect on my own practice more biblically and theologically. In the process my desire is to learn from the failings I have observed, the stories of other church planters that also had to reflect on Church Planting practice. My journey to proposing this thesis topic became clearer with the studying of different modules in Practical Theology; Context of Mission, Growing Healthy Churches, Starting Healthy Churches and Theories and Strategies of Evangelism. Having studied different modules in Church Planting, I developed an aspiration to explore how the Book of Acts might inform Church Planting today because the Acts narrative describes the development of new churches as a key component in the mission of the early church movement. Acts is a text that is used widely in Church Planting circles and many books have used it to explore aspects of biblical Church Planting. Some scholars, church planters and authors regard Acts narrative as an outstanding description or account of the growth of the early church movement because it presents a framework of how the mission of God and the proclamation of the Gospel spread from the Jerusalem to Rome.

[1]Michael Green states that " it is the only account that we have, and therefore we are driven to its pages if we want to know anything about those thirty critical years" the period between AD33 and 64 when the Christian faith erupted.[2]In doing so, some helpful ideas might be attained by church planters or even denominations that can be useful in reaching non-Christians of today. The most important point to take into consideration when using the Acts narrative is that we cannot take everything that was done then and

apply it today as a blue print in Church Planting. The fact that Paul preached in cities, synagogues, market places, gathered people and planted churches, moved to the most recipient people and moved on from those that rejected the Gospel, elected elders leaving them responsible, wrote letters to churches, and circumcised Timothy, does not mean this same pattern will work today (Acts 13-14; 18: 6-7).[3]Arie Zwiep in one of his essays emphasised that Paul did not provide a blue print on how churches should be planted; neither did Luke provide the handbook of planting churches in the Acts narrative. Nonetheless, the story being told is about the church development though spreading the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.[4]Therefore it is my contention that though there is no blueprint in the Acts narrative for " how" we plant churches today, there are important principles that can inform Church Planting today.

Methodology

As a theological reflection on my practice I will use a literary approach method to get sources that will help me to develop the argument for Church Planting which will mainly come from the study of the Scriptures with the aid of the resource commentaries. My focus on the Book of Acts of the Apostles was guided by the interest shown by authors who find the book of Acts helpful such as; David Hesselgrave, Ed Stetzer, David Shenk, Roland Allen, Charles Brock, Michael Green, Irvin Stutzman and many Acts of Apostles' commentaries. It is not my aim to feature the whole narrative or delve into detail but I am going to focus on the framework of the narrative i. e. the movement from Jerusalem to Rome and focus on the place and role that Church Planting plays within this narrative. Thus this dissertation will give an

overview of the Acts narrative from Church Planting lenses with the view of discovering Church Planting principles and how they can influence Church Planting today. I will demonstrate my research by critically determining whether or not the Acts narrative is a legitimate source for Church Planting today, and address questions of why and how, looking at the insights and limitations the Acts narrative might give us for understanding the practice of Church Planting today. In this thesis I will outline some pertinent principle oriented features of Church Planting noted in Acts; contextualisation, teamwork, leadership, teaching and mentoring, prayer and fasting, struggles and hardships and above all the importance and work of the Holy Spirit which is commented on throughout this thesis and therefore not grouped in a separate section. All of the work of mission and Church Planting is the work of the Spirit! I will note that in the Acts narrative Church Planting is ONE of a number of ways in which the commission of Acts 1 v 8 is fulfilled. Church Planting is one way in which the Gospel spreads to the ends of the earth but it is not the only way.

The Missional narrative of Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8 NRSV)After his resurrection, these are the last words spoken by Jesus to the Apostles before he ascended to heaven.[5]This was a follow on from Jesus words to the disciples when he appeared to them whilst in Jerusalem after his resurrection as recorded by Luke at the end of his first volume; Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in ... (my name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these

things. I am sending upon you what my father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from above (Luke 24: 47-49). These two passages serve as bookends to Luke's narrative, one closing His Gospel and the other opening the next chapter of his story. They are intentionally linked to show the continuation of the Lucan story of Jesus. They both embrace the promise and coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, the description of them as witnesses and last but not least the corresponding of the mission expansion to all the nations and to the ends of the earth. David Williams states that " the statements of this verse should be understood as the cause and effect." [6] By this he means that the words spoken by the Old Testament's prophets about the coming of the Messiah were to be effective through what Jesus was commissioning the disciples to do after he ascended to heaven. [7] For example, the sermon preached by Paul in Antioch in Pisidia was about the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah (Acts 13: 15-17, 22-27, 32-37). The promised Holy Spirit was going to cause the commission to be take place and be effective. Howard Snyder claims that the Lucan narratives draw attention to two of the great commissions by which Jesus makes the Church the instrument " agent" of God on earth by which he makes himself known. [8] That means God's plan on earth is for him to be known. David Peterson agrees by declaring that " the Acts 1: 8 reiterates God's plan to bless the nation through the witness of the Apostles in a geographical outreach from Jerusalem." [9] That is what the Acts narrative is claiming, the fulfilment of God's mission on earth, proclaiming the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. This is the critical part of the story being told by Luke. Williams in his commentary, concludes that " Luke was interested in only one strand <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

of the church's history, namely, how it took the road from Jerusalem to Rome and how, at the same time, it passed from mission to the Jews to preaching God's message to the Gentiles." [10] God's saving plan to the ends of the earth is the big story and ultimate goal of His mission. The basic foundational aspect and centre of God's plan to save all people is Jesus Christ the bridge to the new covenant who came to fulfil the Old Testament scripture.

[11] Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien state that; Jesus is the Messiah and Lord who has fulfilled the purposes of God through his coming, and especially in His death and resurrection. He has announced to us the good news of God's rule, and on the basis of His death he has brought the forgiveness of sins and salvation to needy men and women. [12] Therefore, Jesus sends his witnesses to continue God's mission as He commissions them to go to the entire world integrating the Gentiles to the Jewish old covenant into His new covenant plan. By Peter preaching to the Gentiles in Cornelius house after the vision convinces that God was including Gentiles in His salvation mission (Acts 10: 36- 43). [13] Peter highlighted to the Gentiles that Jesus the Lord was not for the Jews only but that the peace He brings is for the whole world. Peter brings in the Old Testament his conclusion, which included everyone by stating that " all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10: 43 NRSV). Ben Witherington claims that the central figure of the Acts narrative is Jesus Christ, His ascending to heaven, His word and His Spirit that he employs to advance His purpose through human agents in the world. [14] It is through Jesus that the way is opened for all believers to grasp the commission for the perpetuation of this mission. Marshall states that the plan of the 1: 8 Acts narrative is a " threefold pattern", which outlines the <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

story beginning firstly from witnessing in Jerusalem (2: 1-5, 42), followed secondly by the witnessing in Judaea and Samaria (6: 1-11, 18) and thirdly witnessing to the ends of the earth which included the Asia Manor (11: 19 - 14: 28), followed by " Paul's missionary campaign in Macedonia and Achaia" (15: 36 18: 17), " missionary campaign in Asia Manor" (18: 18-20: 38) and the arrest and imprisonment of Paul (21: 1-28: 31)."[15]F. F Bruce in his commentary to the Book of Acts describes " the ends of the earth" as Rome stating that " the geographical terms provide a sort " Index of Contents" ... from Jerusalem ...tracing the progress of the Gospel outside the frontiers of the Holy Land until at last it reaches Rome."[16]He follows the ideas and stories of the Old Testament.[17]Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien describe that geographically the ends of the earth signifies the whole world and ethnically, the Gentile world.[18]Likewise David Peterson acknowledges the authenticity of God's plan as the Gospel went first to the Jews in order for them to " turn Jesus as their Messiah" to be able to take the good news about this Jesus to the Gentiles. Therefore, he asserts that Acts narrative unfolds this divine plan as outlined below with: Salvation of Israel from Egypt and the establishment of the nation in Canaan(Acts 7: 2-38); 13: 17-21). Peter and Paul focus on particular significance of David in the unfolding plan of God ... pointing to Jesus and the Gospel events (Acts 2: 25-31, 34-35; 4: 25-26; 13: 22-23, 32-37). But the revelation of God's eschatological will and purpose comes broadly through Moses (Acts 3: 22-23, 7: 37) and the prophets ((Acts: 2: 16-21; 3: 18-21, 24; 8: 32-35; 13: 40-41, 47; 15: 15-18; 26: 22-23; 28: 25-27.[19]This fulfilment began at Pentecost when the promised was achieved by the work of the Holy Spirit who come upon the disciples whilst they were praying, they were reminded of what was spoken <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

before that they should be Jesus' witnesses and that they should proclaim the repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations from Jerusalem when the promised Holy Spirit has been sent to them.[20]Therefore, the prominence was about making God known through the spreading of the Gospel.[21]When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit they drew the attention of Jews from Jerusalem and from other nations who came and witnessed the disciples speaking in their languages and listening to Peter's preaching the good news. (Acts 2: 1-5; 42). " Peter's Pentecost preaching and subsequent speeches made it clear how the story of Jesus and of the church in Jerusalem is to be understood within the framework of the divine plan (Acts 2-7)."[22]It was meant for many nations not only the Jews in Jerusalem. This appears to be the fulfilment of the prediction of Jesus which is based on the promises of the father in Acts 1: 4-5. As people became Christians and miracles were happening many were added to their numbers and they started to fellowship together sharing possessions, gathering to pray together was the beginning of the church. Graham Beynon calls this the brand new community of people of God.[23]This was through the work of the Holy Spirit that the disciples were patiently waiting as promised for the mission to start. They could not begin before the power was given to them by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the great work was inaugurated after the event on Pentecost. David Hesselgrave attributed that the Holy Spirit transformed the disciples on Pentecost into witnesses of the Gospel consequently the mission work began as the disciples went out preaching the word.[24]Preaching the good news was the principal activity in the disciples' missionary assignment.[25]They took this as an important task in their lives. The word of God started to be spread to other parts starting from <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

Jerusalem as the narrative commanded. Gerhard Krodel gives maps the Acts narrative journey in four sections in which the word of God was spread to other parts from firstly Jerusalem the starting point when the church was established by twelve disciples (Acts 1: 1-6: 7). Secondly, extemporaneous development to Judea, Samaria and Gentile areas, the expansion of the ministry adding the seven and others who scattered to other areas due to the persecution in Jerusalem (Acts 6: 1-8, 12: 24). Thirdly the Gospel continuing to expand under Paul's leadership to the ends of the earth; Asia Minor and Europe, Antioch in Syria, and also in Ephesus (Acts 12: 25-19: 20). Fourthly, the epilogue; Paul whilst arrested through persecution continues to preach the Gospel in Rome and because of his perseverance the word continued to spread by the believers who received Christ when they encountered with Paul (Acts 19: 21-28: 31).[26] Therefore all of this demonstrates that the framework of the Acts narrative clearly outlines the mission of the church to take the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and the story of Acts tells that narrative. Whatever we look at in terms of mission in the Book of Acts we must do so within the overall framework that Luke has constructed. This is what I have chosen to do with Church Planting.

Church Planting within the Acts narrative

Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder are influenced that the Acts narrative portrays the story which has been consciously told through the schematised description of the development of churches.[27] This story has a lot to inform on Church Planting as from the beginning of the Early Church and the apostolic ministry of Paul and his journey with other disciples

planting churches. The developing of new communities of faith or Church Planting can be a direct and unavoidable consequence of the fulfilled mission of God through the believer's involvement in witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel.[28]It is unmistakably clear that the Acts narrative and the fulfilment of the mission of God leads to the establishment of new communities of faith. Therefore, the founding of churches is one of the natural consequences of the mission from Jerusalem to Rome. Michael Green states that " it is undeniable that the Early Christians thought that founding churches was part of their commission." [29]Ed Stetzer, Aubury Malphurs, David Hesselgave, J D Payne, Joel Comiskey, Shenk and Stutzman agree in a claim that the planting of churches was the biggest task of the early church as the disciples understood the commission led by the Holy Spirit as demonstrated in Acts. [30]Darrell Boch emphasises this point by stating that; This commission describes the church's key assignment of what to do until the Lord returns. The priority of the Church until Jesus returns, a mission of which the community must never lose sight, is to witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth. The Church exists, in major part to extend the apostolic witness to Jesus everywhere.[31]Therefore, planting churches is also a task for the Christians of today. Martin Robinson and Christine Stuart backing this claim states the fact that the Acts narrative included the Gentiles in the mission of God means planting churches is God's plan and legitimate, it is not an option for Christians today.[32]To demonstrate that the forming of new communities is rooted in the Acts narrative as one expression and evidence of the spreading of the Gospel, Acts 13-21 describe the missionary work that led to the churches planted by Paul and his co-workers. In the book of Acts, Luke intentionally portrays Paul as a church planter." [33]Paul describes his <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

own mission within the mission of God with reference to the Old Testament^[34]by declaring boldly; " for so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ' I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13: 47).^[35]Therefore, to Paul, his mission was from God and he took it seriously. The Gentile mission was a fulfilment of the scriptures, the promises of God to bless all nations.^[36]As a result of Paul's missionary endeavours to fulfil his calling new churches were established in Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Colossae, and Rome.^[37]Therefore the establishment of churches as a way to fulfil God's calling to share the Gospel today is in itself a principle recorded in the book of Acts. Building the community of faith is fundamental and central part of God's purposes as He works through human beings in partnership with Him. Whenever people respond positively to the preached Gospel about Jesus Christ, they enter the Christian community. This is how the missional task is achieved. David Bosch acknowledges that the disciples were the first to respond to this mission of God through their faith by witnessing about Jesus resulting in forming churches.^[38]Church Planting is therefore one significant way in which the Commission of Acts 1 v 8 is clearly realised. Shenk and Stutzman states that " the Kingdom of God becomes visible in any community wherever a cluster of people gather in Jesus' name", and expanded by taking the message to other communities through Church Planting. Therefore, planting communities of the kingdom is one way in which the Gospel is preached.^[39]Ultimately there is need to plant churches to be able to practice all this and nurture people in their Spiritual and faith growth. This is how the Kingdom of God is built. The theological and biblical foundation for planting churches rooted in the mission of God (mission <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

dei) and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.[40]The planting of churches is based on " God's inspired revelation to mankind" to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.[41]This Biblical Church Planting is evangelism that results in new churches. Tim Chester in the book " Multiplying Churches" edited by Stephen Timmis observed in Paul's work that, mission signified planting churches and that in the Acts narrative wherever the Gospel was preached local churches were established."[42]Stuart Murray writes, The practice of Church Planting may encourage the conclusion that reproduction is as fundamental feature of the church as it is of biological organisms. A healthy church does not just develop internally and expand in size and social impact, but naturally expresses its life in new forms and structures.[43]Hence, the Acts narrative informs the legitimacy of planting churches, is there anything that we can learn from this framework? Paul and the other Apostles did plant churches as a result of their obedience to the commissioning of Jesus Christ to reach everyone from Jerusalem to Rome. Today, it is our commission, how can we go about it for this remains God ultimate plan for His people. I believe there are other important principles that can be helpful in today's church planting movements as informed by the Acts narrative.

Important principles from the Acts narrative

There are several authors who agree that the Acts narrative provides useful principles that the church today can adopt and guidance or learn from, not meaning that they can be used as blue print.[44]David Shenk and Ervin Stutzman write extensively in their book " Creating Communities of the Kingdom" about the importance of Acts for Church Planting. They see the book of Acts as a Church Planting manual drawing a number of principles

that can be useful today such as Holy Spirit, leadership and training, vision, prayer, cultural differences, challenges and obstacles, and teams.[45]These authors and practitioners in church planting therefore draw upon the Acts material in framing helpful principles for the church planting, even if not everyone agrees it offers a blueprint to copy. For Paul the process of Church Planting or multiplication was on-going, that is why he believed in principles such as team work, identifying, training and empowering new leaders.

Hesselgrave organised a cycle in the book of Acts on Paul's work as follows: commissioning of missionaries (13: 1-4; 15: 39-40), contacting listeners (13: 14-16; 14: 1; 16: 13-15), proclaiming of Gospel (13: 17; 16: 31), converting of listeners (13: 48; 16: 14, 15), congregating converts (13: 43), faith confirmed (14: 21, 22; 15: 41), leadership set apart (14: 23), believers commended (14: 23; 16: 40), maintaining relationships (15: 36; 18: 23), and sending churches convened (14: 26, 27; 15: 1-4).[46]This showed that Paul believed that he was commissioned to fulfil all the ten steps. Therefore, out of these steps and the whole of the Acts narrative, are principles that can indeed inform and shape Church Planting today. This can be useful in today's Church Planting, however not to be followed as outline but assistance.

Murray states in his book " Church Planting: Laying Foundations" that though the Book of Acts has been perceived as a handbook or manual for church planting it is not basically only about planting churches but it has interesting things to learn from the Early church, the inclusion of the Gentiles, community leadership, discipline of the church, pastoral issues, therefore the Book of Acts should not be only regarded as the Church planting manual but also provides resources useful for considering the ethical, missiological, theological principles in the development of the church. He added that there <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

are principles that can be helpful for the church today giving emphasis that though useful nothing has to be used as blue print but guidance.[47]He noted that " the fact that Paul planted churches in the first Century does not require us to adopt his strategy or copy his methodology, any more that we should feel obliged to circumcise members of our Church Planting teams simply because Paul did this on one occasion!"[48]Therefore, the Acts narrative can be a useful source with principles that can be helpful today but we cannot copy as it is because what is written there was not for this context and this time and age. Things have changed, what they had then is not the same as what we have, however important principles that took place then can be a guidance in Church Planting practice today. Some of the helpful and important principles are explained below.

Importance of contextualisation

According to David Hesselgrave, the Acts narrative does not only take into consideration the geographical area (Jerusalem to Rome) but also the cultural aspects.[49]This means that the Gospel when preached should be able to reach people of different cultures and different nations and understood without any barriers or wrong interpretations. The fact that the Gospel was to reach the Jews as well as the Gentiles, the works of Peter and Paul cannot be overlooked they are crucial when talking about contextualisation.[50]Graeme Goldsworthy explains the term " contextualisation" as " the taking of unchanged Gospel into an oft-changing culture by restating the meaning of the Gospel in a way that is comprehensible to those who are hearing the Gospel."[51]David Hesselgrave agrees by stating that: " the words in Acts 1: 8, ... witnesses in Jerusalem,

Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth take on cultural as well as geographical significance." [52] This directs to the idea that the message was to be taken to people of different cultures, languages, communities and belief. Therefore, for the message to be understood and received by all nations there was need for contextualisation. This was demonstrated by the power of the Holy Spirit when Peter preached the first sermon; it was understood by all the recipients from different cultures and languages (Acts 2: 14-15). David Shenk and Ervin Stutzman claim that is how God showed his intention for the Gospel to reach all people. [53] Therefore they both insist that the message should be contextualized for the message to be heard by the community it is being preached to so that the truth of God's word can be understood by the people who haven't heard it. Doug Priest asserts that the essential notion of " contextualization" is to address the community in their context of culture and language so much that the message portrayed to them could be clear. [54] That means cultural and language barriers need to be broken down so that everyone hears the Good News. Cultural or ethnic differences disconnect people and create problems in communication.

Therefore it is paramount important for the Church Planting team to consider contextualisation. Bevans and Schroder states that;" the churches missionary manure only emerges as the community engages with particular context, under the direction of the Holy Spirit; the Jewish identity of the community is transformed into the church as the community recognised the Spirit among the Samaritans, in the Ethiopian eunuch, in the Cornelius and his household, and in the community of Antioch. [55] Paul used different strategies in his missionary work. In his evangelism, understanding and

relating to different contexts was important to him in sharing the Gospel with
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different people. As intended "to the ends of the earth", included all nations. [56]This included people of different backgrounds, culture, languages, and beliefs. Therefore, he communicated the message differently to be effective to different context. Paul went out of his way and took Timothy and circumcised him to be able to reach the circumcised audience, knowing they were not going to accept them according to their culture (Acts 16: 1-5). As they were diversity, Paul contextualized the ministry for the benefit of the Jews so they could receive it. Other Brief examples of Paul's different approaches in diverse contexts included while he was in Athens' synagogue and the market-place (17: 17), in Corinth with Jews and Greeks in the synagogue (18: 4) and in Ephesus, in the synagogue the first three months and a rented lecture hall for two years (19: 8-10).[57]In more detail; Paul started evangelism by preaching in the synagogues to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia and got an invitation to come again (Acts 13: 13-48). The invitation could be because the audience understood what he was saying to them and were eager to hear more. He addressed them from where they were starting from the Old Testament on a tour through Hebrew history to validate the authentic of Jesus as the promised Messiah who fulfils the ancient prophecies (Acts 13: 16-41). He quoted the Old Testament five times preaching to them because that what they would understand.[58]However, in Iconium when he preached in the synagogue not many were convinced by the message but by miracles and wonders performed through God's manifestation (Acts 14: 1-4). Furthermore, while Paul was in Lystra, nothing has been said of him being in synagogues preaching but he did heal a sick man and managed to preach the Gospel to the multitudes who came to witness this miraculous act (Acts 14: 8-18). He explained to them that they were just human beings not

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to be thanked but the one who had performed the miracle was not human, but God who is not part of creation but creator the one who deserved to be worshipped. By this they were opening the eyes of the people to see that what they were worshipping was not the real God and they understood and got saved. Using the Old Testament in this context was not going to be helpful because the audience had no clue about it but what they knew and worshipped were idols, ultimately Paul used what they knew to bring what they did not know for better understanding. Contextualisation was also an important feature of Paul's ministry in Athens when he addressed a pagan audience in Acts 17. Paul understood the audience he was preaching to that they were pagan worshippers and did not want to offend them in order to draw their attention to the God he was bringing to them rather than the unknown god they were worshipping.[59]With his knowledge of their religion as he was addressing the philosophers, the council and inquisitive citizens of Athens, he took into consideration his speech to suit his audience (v22). [60]He used the language of the philosophers by quoting " in him we live and move and have our being, for we are indeed his off spring" (Acts 17: 28). This language can also be found from the Greek poets, playwrights and philosophers as claimed by Patrick Darrin.[61]He brought to them what they had experienced before and quoted one of the philosophers they knew, Epimenides, who had helped them during the time of severe plague in Athens, seeing him as a god.[62]Paul knew their history. As a result his approach drew their attention. Paul took every opportunity he would grasp to spread the good news (Acts 17: 18-23). Barrett commented that the audience thought Paul was going to talk to them about a new foreign god, therefore they wanted to know more, and hence the message was about the <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

resurrected Christ.[63]But such language would not work somewhere else. Paul turns the circumstance from a complicated message resulting in demands of explanation into an opportunity to proclaim the gospel in the very epicentre of Greek thought and culture. He used a persuasive speech. Unlike his synagogue sermon to Jews in Pisidian Antioch (13: 16-43) rooted in the Greek Bible quotations Paul used a more Hellenised style, appropriate to the occasion and the Athenians hearers.[64]All these approaches substantiate that Paul was gifted as a missionary communicator, who could translate the gospel to everyone with both firmness and flexibility. Besides the Athenians, he met people from different cultures with different beliefs, hence he managed to bridge the gap and convinced them to want to know about the Jesus he was preaching as he recognised they were Spiritually hungry. He used the wisdom from God to be able to engage well with them starting from where they were as the point of connecting them to the truth about Jesus, the resurrection and the true Spirit. The same approach was not used to others nations he preached to because they were not all like the Athenians who did not have an understanding of Christ, or the Scriptures. Consequently, Paul's did not use the same approach with his preaching in Thessalonica (17: 1-3), where the audience knew the bible story and accepts the authority of Scripture. Alternatively Paul went to the synagogue to proclaim the Gospel on the Sabbaths and he went in the square at the exit of the market during the Week to preach the Gospel to those passing by the market (Acts 17: 1-14). This explains the importance of contextualisation the gospel. In Antioch Paul and Barnabas went to preach to the scattered Greek speaking Jews who migrated from Jerusalem due to the death of Stephen (8: 1, 4), Greek speaking Gentiles (Acts 11: 20).[65]As mentioned above, there <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

were Jews who were forced to leave Jerusalem during the time Stephen was killed because of preaching the Gospel, they went and lived in Antioch and spread the Gospel to the people of different cultures, language to them. When Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch they extended the message to the Gentiles. There were a mixture of cultures there, Jews, Hellenistic, Gentiles but the message was made suitable to the understood by all. James Dunn states that it was in Antioch that the believers started to be called Christians when both Jews and Gentiles formed one church and this provided " the model for the new and most distinctive identity of the Jesus sect." [66] As Paul's mission was to plant a contextual church and more accurately to share the Gospel in contextually appropriate ways depending on God's power for growth to be able to evangelise itself. This enables to cut down on any barriers on evangelising the gospel in terms of culture differences. Michael Sills and Christopher Wright support this confirming that Paul's ministry was contextualized. [67] Paul understood the people and culture he was working in and adapted his approach of sharing the Gospel (not the content) to differing contexts in differing ways. The message should be communicated in a way that people will understand. Therefore, contextualisation will be a tool to help bridge the gap and begin a conversation. When reaching people who are ethnically different there are some sociologically, culturally and economically barriers that need to be taken into consideration. As explained above the early church crossed over cultural barriers as the Jewish believers in Antioch of Syria spoke to Greeks about the Gospel, (Acts 11: 20), contrary to their custom of speaking to Jews only (Acts 11: 19) and also Paul in Pisidian Antioch reached the Gentiles after the Jews rejected to listen (Acts 13: 46). [68] McGavran, claims <https://assignbuster.com/book-of-acts-might-inform-church-planting-today-theology-religion-essay/>

contextualisation is the way forward to church growth insisting that if any mission church wants to grow, not only does it have to translate the Scripture into the language of the locality where the mission is placed, but it also has to express the revelation of the Scripture relative to its own structure of mind by means of contextualisation which is in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures.[69]Therefore as church planting in the Acts narrative has been developed through the preaching of the God news and at times by quoting of the scriptures, it is important that in this process, contextualization is taken into consideration for the authenticity of scriptures. I believe all this wisdom and knowledge Paul and other Apostles had were obtained through prayer and fasting for God to be with them and guide them. Therefore prayer and fasting is another important principle in church planting as explained below.

Importance of prayer and fasting

The book of Acts chapter 1 and 2 informs the starting of the early church in Jerusalem which was birthed in prayer (1: 12-14) as the disciples met praying and fasting together in one place attentively waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit (2: 1-4). In their gatherings they were educating their members and in the process they created groups for them to be able to fellowship, pray, breaking bread and eating together, building relationships and providing them with reciprocal support in those groups. The early church were united and devoted in prayer (1: 14). For example, " it was in prayer they drew lots over Matthias (1: 24), they were at prayer when the day of Pentecost dawned and the Spirit fell (2: 1). Therefore, prayer was a top priority to them.[70]Prayer is the foundation before considering planting

churches followed by a careful planning.[71]It should be part of everything to be done in Church Planting. Prayer plays a big role on how to and who to release to serve in any church plant. In simple words church planning needs the guidance from God, which can be obtained through prayer. In Paul's Church Planting ministry he valued prayer and fasting (Acts 14: 23). Regardless of the ethnically, culturally, economically, and sociologically diversity in the early church, unity was displayed in daily praying, worshipping and regular fasting enabled by the Holy Spirit. Ken Hemphill asserts that they had 'one mind' or 'one thing in common' centred on Jesus Christ.[72]It is also important for the church to pray for the team. For example the church prayed for Paul and Barnabas when God set them apart for His work. (Acts 13: 1-3).[73]This teaches the church of today how to create a greater sense of community. Therefore there is importance of teaching the congregation, worshipping together as a family of God and evangelising the Gospel to the outsiders. It is good to help people to understand the need for fasting and praying and daily worship.

Importance of teamwork

Teamwork is essential in planting churches as demonstrated in the Acts narrative as the disciples started to share their possessions, empathising and practicing justice within the community together (Acts 2: 45; 4: 32).

Therefore, this highlights that they are some things we can learn about team work, however we cannot take everything and apply in today's teams. In the Acts narrative, there was a ministry of compassion, mercy and justice in the early church (2: 42-46).[74]As a church united in all things, they preached to each other the pure truth, praised together and shared joy through the Spirit

of God. One of their focus as a church was to evangelise resulting in effective conversions as many converts were added to their numbers as they were being saved daily (Acts 2: 47, 5: 14). There was a ministry of fellowship, " they devoted themselves to the fellowship," there was a ministry of worship as " they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2: 42). All this was done in one accord as a team. Church Planting in the book of Acts was done by more than one person. Team work was beneficial; one person could not do it all. Daniel Sinclair states that " working in teams is an essential part of the apostolic task." [75] The objective of a Church Planting team is to unify efforts when starting churches in new areas. [76] Taking a look at biblical characters, Paul the Apostle worked in and with small teams. In the Acts narrative we have seen that a huge number of individuals were associated with the apostle at some point during his time in ministry. As Paul was starting new churches in new areas he engaged one or more people to go with him. Some of the people were participants in his preaching, teaching, in his writing and some were his companions on his journeys. For example, Barnabas, John Mark and others joined in his first missionary journey (Acts 13). Paul's second missionary journey was joined by Judas, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 15-16). As Paul was going to Macedonia he was accompanied by Luke and Tychicus (Acts 20: 4-6) and got involved in the teaching and preaching and other things besides just accompanying him (Acts 13: 46; 15: 32, 35). The building of the team was not just from anyone who liked, there were qualities that spotted the apostleship lifestyle. Michael Green noted some of them as dedication, enthusiasm, joy, faith, endurance, holiness, Spiritual power, courage, generosity and transformation.

[77] Examples of the above mentioned characters are; Peter and John
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persisted in preaching regardless of orders to stop (4: 18). When the apostles were freed from prison, they obeyed angel's instruction and preached in the temple (5: 20). Chapters 24-26 when Paul in prison he was dedicated into trying to reach the judges with the good news of Jesus. About the teamwork we can have further questions to explore. We might want to ask, Paul used teams of two or more people what size of the team should be employed in today's Church Planting and what determines the size? The size of the team matters.[78]The team should not be too large or too small for the vision as according to Daniel Sinclair it is not about having a large team in order to have all gifts within the team if they are not all going to serve the purpose, though they are important it is about having a manageable team that is strong itself to pull up the work.[79]The leader should consider how big their team should be in view of specific functions to be fulfilled for growth as this help with the recruitment of the team members. One thing to consider is the funding available to cater for this task, there should be a budget in place.[80]This will determine what size of team will be required. Stuart Murray states that the size of the teams, small or large have advantages and disadvantages' however they are important factors to consider whatever the size might be; kind of people, what basis, and above all the commitment to the vision, values and length of assignment.[81]In the Acts narrative, church planting was done by more than one person but different sizes of teams. Therefore, whatever the size and strength of the team, it is clear that pioneering on one's own is neither a good idea nor a Biblical norm. In addition to teamwork, leaders leading these teams, prayer, and fasting, teaching and discipline of new converts, team members, potential leaders and mentoring of the leaders is important.

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