

Series - Unhindered

#1 Characteristics of an Unhindered Church

Acts 1-28

Introduction: Acts 1:1-2 says the Book of Acts is the story of *"all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen."*

It's the story of His disciples being *"witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*[Acts 1:8]

We've seen God use people like Peter and John, Stephen and Philip to perform miracles, healing in the name of Jesus. He used these men to make disciples and start churches and point people to the good news of Jesus!

As you know the book of Acts opens with the command of the Lord Jesus to be witnesses to the end of the earth. The book of Acts closes with the apostle Paul, in the city of Rome, living in his own hired house, his own place of lodging proclaiming the Gospel.

Many people who have taught the book of Acts have pointed out that the book ends in a rather unusual way. The last four words in the Kings James says—'*no man forbidding him.*' Those words translate into one word in the original language. It is actually an adverb... "***Unhinderedly, or Unhindered.***"

There is the question as to why the Holy Spirit led Dr. Luke to end the book that way. Some have suggested that it is a word of **consummation**. Luke started off to demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was to be preached in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. So, when Paul came to the city of Rome, that mandate was accomplished.

Others have suggested that it is a word of **conquest**. It is a shout of triumph. It is a victor's cry. Unhindered--God's church just keeps on keeping on. Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. Paul was bound in a prison, but the Word of God was not bound. UNHINDERED.

That evil emperor, Nero, was on the throne of the empire, but God was still on His throne UNHINDERED. So, it is a word of conquest.

It is also a word of **continuation**. This word indicates to us that the book of Acts is intended to go on. Not in terms of revelation. Every word, every sentence that the Holy Spirit intended Dr. Luke to write in this book is contained here. So, it is not an unfinished book in terms of scriptural disclosure. But in terms of what begins in the book of Acts, the ministry of the church is to continue unhindered.

Some have said that what we find in the book of Acts is a picture of an unhindered church. You and I are living in the 21st century. We are living in the last days.

STORY: Kind of like the old farmer went to bed one night. He and his wife, Nellie, had a big grandfather clock. It chimed the hour. One night his clock went haywire. Instead of 12 chimes, it chimed 23 times. He said, "Quick, Nellie, get up! It's later than it's ever been before."

It is later than it has ever been before and what a day for you and me to be a part of the church unhindered.

I chose this word "unhindered" to be our vision theme for this year several months ago when I ran across a book of the same title. For the next several weeks I want to unpack what it looks like for us, as individuals, and our church to live in the fullness of Christ unhindered.

Today I want to take a journey through the book of Acts and show you what I see as **FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN UNHINDERED CHURCH.**

Most churches get their mission statement, core values, and characteristics from Acts 2:42-47, which says, ***"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."***

SATIRE: - "ACTS 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' new bestsellers and to small group meetings, to the eating of Krispy Kreme donuts and drinking Starbuck's coffee in the church foyer and to contemplative spirituality. And everyone kept feeling the bass from the praise and worship rock band; and many video clips and light shows were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together at three different locations and had casual attire in common; and they began selling their stocks and bonds, and were giving the proceeds to the building campaign, as the church might have need. And day by day continuing with one vision in the new multi-million-dollar sanctuary, and sending church mailers from house to house, they were having celebration dinners together with gladness and self-esteem in the heart, praising God, and finding favor with all the people's felt needs. And the Lord (along with Peter, the original inventor of revival) was adding to their number day by day those who were finding purpose."

I want to show you the five things I see that made the early church and any church UNHINDERED. The first one is that an unhindered church is—

I. A PRAYING Church.

Go back to Acts 1 and I want to point something out to you. A church is nurtured in prayer. A church is born in prayer. A church ministers in the spirit and atmosphere of prayer. After Jesus ascended back to heaven, we are told that the apostles gathered in an upper room.

In the 14th verse it says, "***They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.***" (NIV)

This early church prayed constantly.

They were in a 10-day prayer meeting. The day of Pentecost was going to come. So, for ten days they prayed. Then in Acts 2:1 it says, "***When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.***" (NIV)

1. A church moves ***forward*** in prayer.

A church is no more effective than its prayer life. We are told in Chapter 2, "***they were all together in one place.***" They weren't always in one accord, yet they are praying. Praying has a way of getting people together in a spirit of unity.

I can imagine that as that prayer meeting progressed, maybe Martha went over to her sister Mary and said, "...". And they got in one accord.

And I can imagine that John the apostle goes over to Peter and says, "...". They got in one accord. That's what prayer does. Prayer gets people together. Prayer unites a congregation. There's nothing more powerful than when God's people begin to pray together. It is number one on the agenda. They prayed constantly. We need to be constantly in prayer.

2. A church gets **courageous** through prayer.

In Acts 4:29 the disciples had been threatened and so now they go to God in prayer and say in verse 29, "**Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.**" (NIV)

They made a definite, specific request. They asked that the Lord give them boldness to speak the Word. In verse 31 it says, "**After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**" (NIV)

They prayed and asked for boldness, and they got a definite answer.

3. A church finds **freedom** through prayer.

In Acts 12, we have the account of Simon Peter who is in prison. James has already been killed and they are planning to kill Peter, but verse 5 says, "**So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.**" (NIV)

The KJV says, prayer was made without ceasing. That statement "**without ceasing**" literally means "stretched out." It's the same word that was used of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed.

Luke 22:44 says that Jesus prayed in agony and with earnestness. That's what the word "stretched out" means. When Jesus prayed, He prayed with such earnestness and such agony that the Bible says His sweat became like great drops of blood.

James 5:16 says, "**The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.**" (NIV) So, a church must be a praying church. There is victory in prayer.

The early church prayed for Peter without ceasing and the Bible says that an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, took the shackles off him, and it says when Peter went over to the prayer meeting the people saw him and **were astonished**.

Isn't that just like us? We pray. We ask God for victory and then when God gives it, we are all astonished. Why should we be astonished? **Specific prayer can expect specific answers**. I want to call upon you as a church to pray constantly that God will move and work and do supernatural things amid our fellowship in the winning of lost people to Christ. An unhindered church is a praying church.

Secondly, an unhindered church is...

II. A POWERFUL Church.

We know the Holy Spirit was the source of power. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "**But 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.**" Power comes from the Holy Spirit.

Let me tell you about the Holy Spirit for a moment. Jesus said in John 16:7 — "**But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**" (NIV)

The Greek word is Parakletos! It is an incredibly rich word in the Greek language — there isn't one English word that can capture all its meanings!

- The word Parakletos was used in the legal arena to describe a defense attorney, or a character witness in a trial!
- The word Parakletos was used to describe a specialist in any field who could come in and supply the missing knowledge or insight needed to solve a perplexing problem!
- The word Parakletos was an encourager who knew the right thing to say or do when a person was suffering or discouraged!

Note that a Parakletos wasn't something — a Parakletos was **someone**. Just so you know, when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, He used the personal pronouns "he and him!"

2 Corinthians 13:14, where Paul writes: ***"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."*** (NIV)

A. The Holy Spirit wants to help us — get right! (Salvation)

John 16:8 — ***"When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..."***

B. The Holy Spirit wants to help us — grow right! (Sanctification)

Healthy ***babies*** grow. Healthy ***believers*** grow — being born again or born from above speaks of a beginning not an end!

Physical and spiritual growth is a process — and the Holy Spirit is the power (or the enabler) of that process!

C. The Holy Spirit wants to help us — go right! (Service)

Acts 1:8 — ***"But 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."*** (NIV)

The Greek word translated '***Power***' is 'dunimous' — where we get our English word 'dynamic' and 'dynamite.' The real meaning of the word is more than explosiveness — it was a word that literally meant — ability! The most basic meaning is — The ability to do whatever needs to be done!

Commentator Lloyd Olgivie puts it like this, "The power of Pentecost is for people. What happened at Pentecost is for the paralysis of the world. The Holy Spirit, Christ in the present tense, is for the healing of people in the present age."

Act 2:1-6 says, ***"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

5Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. (NIV)

Some translate that as "the crowds came running."

1. An unhindered church has a ***Drawing power.***

There's something about a church like this that people are drawn to it. The crowds came running! We encourage you to invite people to church. There are literally thousands of people who need Christ. Everywhere you go you can find people who need the Lord. A church that moves in the power of the Holy Spirit is an unhindered church that has drawing power.

It's wonderful to have programs. It's wonderful to have advertisements. It's wonderful to have a great campus. But the thing that draws people more than anything else is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

2. An unhindered church has ***Convicting power.***

After the spirit is poured out in chapter two Simon Peter preaches and verse 37 says, "***When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'***" (NIV)

They were cut to the heart. That's just a Bible way of saying that they fell under Holy Spirit conviction. There was a convicting power about it. We hear a great deal of talk today about how to make churches sinner-friendly. I think we need to do everything we can to let people know they are welcome.

There is certainly to be a love and fellowship that makes people feel comfortable. But if lost people can come into the church and feel comfortable in their sins, then something is wrong. There is a convicting power about a church where Jesus is and where the Holy Spirit of God is at work.

The word "convict" literally means, "to convince of sin." When lost people come into the fellowship of a church where Jesus is and where the Spirit of God is at work and where the Bible is preached, they cannot feel comfortable in their sins.

You and I need to pray that when lost people walk into this building, that the power of God would be so real that conviction will begin to generate in their hearts and they will cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

Drawing power. Convicting power.

3. An unhindered church has ***Witnessing*** power.

Acts 1:8 says, "***...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.***"

These folks witnessed everywhere. They witnessed on the job. They witnessed on journeys. Everywhere they went they were involved in telling the story of Jesus.

So many of you are involved in the Great Commission through mission's giving and personal witnessing. I hope you know that we cannot witness in our own strength, but we can witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus in Matthew 10:20, "***for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you...***" (NIV)

By nature, I'm a shy person, but all that changed when I was filled with the Holy Spirit. When God called me to preach, I was the most surprised person in the world, so it's not been easy for me. Yet, I have had the Holy Spirit to help me. You just pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you and you'll be surprised how much of a witness you can be.

4. An unhindered church has ***Healing & Miraculous*** power.

In Samaria, Macedonia, Asia, and all other places where the kingdom expanded, the Spirit moved through healings and other miracles. Paul gained the attention of Sergius Paulus by the blinding of the sorcerer. Peter saw the region of Joppa open from because of the resurrection of Tabitha, days after Pentecost Peter and John saw the crippled healed. Philip performed wonders in Samaria beyond the ability of the famous Elymas. In each instance, the Holy Spirit was proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and that these men were not just speaking empty words.

An unhindered church is a praying church. An unhindered church is a powerful church. Here's the third characteristic. An unhindered church is...

III. A PURE Church.

I didn't say that the early church was a perfect church nor that any church can be a perfect church. Occasionally people say we need to get back to being a New Testament church like the early believers. And I say, which New Testament church are they talking about? Do we want to be like Corinth? It was the most carnal church in all the New Testament. What about the churches mentioned in Revelation, they all had some issues that Jesus said they needed to take care of.

The early church wasn't a perfect church. The early church was made up of folks just like you and me. Churches have problems because people have problems.

The church is not a trophy case for the display of perfect saints.

The church is not a hiding place to keep saints from being witnesses in the world.

The church is a school for the learning of growing saints.

The church is a hospital for the healing of hurting saints.

That's what a church is all about. The early church wasn't a perfect church, but it was a pure church.

Look at chapter 5 and let me tell you about a church too dangerous to join. ***“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.***

3Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

5When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

(NIV)

You couldn't lie in the New Testament church and get by with it. There was a purity about it. My point is that this early church had power because it was pure.

Just so you know, purity didn't scare people away. A few verses later it says, **"Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."** (vs.14, NIV)

There was purity in the fellowship. You and I ought to live as close to Jesus as we know how to live. We ought to be more of what Jesus Christ intends us to be today than we were yesterday. Not that we are sinless, not that we are perfect, but our hearts ought to be right before God.

Sometimes people get frustrated and upset with the impurities in the church, they go out and start another church.

STORY: I heard about a dear old lady up in the mountains. One of her 12 children fell into a tar bucket and got tar all himself. She was trying her best to get all that tar off him. She said, "I think it would be easier to have another one than to try to get this one clean."

There are some folks who feel that way. Just go out and start another church. But you get that one started and before long it'll need to get cleaned up, too. This matter of purity before the Lord is something that is a daily matter.

It is easy for us as Christians to get things in our hearts that ought not be there. And it will eventually hinder the movement of the Holy Spirit of God and keep us from being that unhindered church.

An unhindered church is a praying church, it's a powerful church, it's a pure church.

The fourth characteristic of an unhindered church, is it's...

IV. A PERSECUTED Church.

Don't ever think that the devil is going to let a church that's on fire for Jesus Christ go without persecution. This early church was confronted by persecution. Look at the 4th chapter, verse 29. ***"Now, Lord, consider their threats..."***

Here was a church that was under threat. Here was a church that encountered persecution and opposition. Don't ever expect this old world to love the church. This world does not love the things of God. This world does not love a church that tries to get people saved and get people right with the Lord. This world doesn't love that kind of church.

This world is not going to be happy when we get on fire for Jesus? You can count on persecution. I have told you before that a Christian is like a tea bag.

We're not worth much until we've been through some hot water.

It is the pressed flower that yields the fragrant aroma.

It is the crushed fruit that gives the sweet juice.

It is the pressured and heated coal that produces the gorgeous diamond.

There is a progression of persecution in Acts 1-8. First the apostles are warned, then they are arrested and beaten, then Stephen is tried before the Sanhedrin, and lynched. Now the whole church of Jerusalem is being suppressed. Saul is the ringleader of this persecution.

Acts 11:19-21 says, ***"19Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. 20Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also,***

telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (NIV)

When persecution comes, it will not conquer the church. Jesus said they will persecute me, they'll persecute you, and Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, "***In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***" (NIV) When anyone tries to stop the church with the fire of persecution. You just set the church on greater fire. It happened in the early church and beyond until today.

Lastly, an unhindered church is—

V. A PRAISING Church.

When you come to the end of Acts 2, verse 47 says, "***...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***"

An unhindered church is a praising church. Don't let personal preferences cause you to miss out on praise.

There's something contagious about praise. There's something contagious about a congregation of people who have a great spirit of praise. We enter the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. But the Bible says we are to enter His presence with thanksgiving. In this early church there was a great spirit of praise.

STORY: I heard about an old boy who in the testimony time of the Wednesday night prayer meeting was always praising the Lord. He was a little tongue-tied and couldn't talk just exactly right. But every Wednesday night he would get up and say, "Praise the Lord. Every day it's getting gooder and gooder and tweeter and tweeter." That was his testimony.

The dear old man went to the doctor and the doctor diagnosed him with diabetes. They all wondered what he would say now. Next Wednesday night he got up and said, "Well praise the Lord. I knew every day with Jesus it was getting gooder and gooder and tweeter and tweeter, but I didn't know I'd done turned to sugar."

I don't know about you but every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. Every day with Jesus, I love Him more and more. Jesus saves and keeps me and he's the One I'm living for. Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.

1. Praise God after GOOD things happen.

In Acts, chapter 3 we are told about the lame man who was at the gate beautiful near the temple. He is healed and it says, ***"He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."*** (VS. 8-10; NIV)

When people come to know Christ, there's great praise. The Bible says there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. The Bible says there is joy in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents. They get happy in heaven.

You and I ought to get happy when people get saved. I enjoyed watching the baptism. One boy that was baptized tonight came up with a shout. He was rejoicing. I like that. Thank you, Lord, he's happy about getting saved. Some of you folks need to get happy again about being saved.

2. Praise God after BAD things happen.

In Acts 16 we have the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi where they preached Jesus, cast a demon out of a fortune-teller, and it stirred up the city against them. It says, ***"The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.***

25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” **32**Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **33**At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. **34**The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.”

3. Praise God AT ALL TIMES.

Psalms 34:1, “***I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises.***” (NLT)

1 Thessalonians 5:18, “***Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*** (NIV)

Hebrews 13:15, “***Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.***” (ESV)

You can't stop a praising church. It will be Unhindered!

CONCLUSION:

We see the early church was unhindered through prayer, Holy Spirit power, purity, persecution, and praise and the last two verses of Acts tell us; ***30*Now Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him, ***31*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.****

The book ends and you are thinking... what happened to Paul? What about Nero? You're left hanging. Why? For one, this is just where Luke finished.

Secondly... HE BOOK IS NOT ABOUT PAUL. IT'S NOT ABOUT PETER. It's about the work of God's Spirit in spreading the Gospel through the church.

That story continues today. Now we take up that mantle. We proclaim the Kingdom of God; we teach about the Lord Jesus... and we should do it with all boldness in the power of the Holy Spirit... **knowing that even if WE get hindered... the gospel will not be.**