

# The Secrets of the Early Church's Success - Part 1

by G.W. North

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*The early church's success was due to its fearlessness, prayer, and unity, which were empowered by the Holy Spirit.*

**Duration:** 45:30

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:14, Acts 2:4, Acts 4:23-31, Acts 6:4, Acts 12:5, Acts 16:25-26

**Topics:** "Early Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Acts chapter 4 and emphasizes the importance of believers gathering together in their own company. He encourages listeners to find a community of people who share the same truth and beliefs. The speaker also highlights the need for basic foundational principles in the church, rather than being flippant or focused on trivial matters. He references Acts 1:8, where Jesus promises the power of the Holy Spirit to empower believers to be witnesses for Him. The speaker emphasizes the importance of living out the Gospel and being filled with the Spirit, rather than constantly seeking new anointings or experiences.

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## Transcript

Amen. I want you to turn with me please to the Acts of the Apostles. You will know that the book could as well be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, or if you like, the further Acts of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Or it could even be called the Acts of the Church. And it's about this I chiefly want to speak. I'm very glad we sang that hymn.

I didn't choose it or ask Norman to choose it, but it points to that which I want to say. The secret of the early church, its success. For no one will doubt that the early church was a great successful church.

Is that right? You will have read it as history, the Acts of the Apostles, and it quite accords with secular history, or the historians that wrote quite heathen people. They said the same kinds of things. They never said it in the same way, but the facts are there for us all to read.

And how wonderful that great and glorious church was. And I suppose you will agree with me as you look round. You will say the church is not so successful today.

I don't know whether you would. You can look, say, at the success of Islam, and see that it is successful. You could even see the success of devil worship, which is increasing, aided by television and radio, and all kinds of things like that.

And I suppose, too, that we are all agreed that this world has not become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, as we read about in the book of the Revelation, with assurance that it shall be in the end. But as we look at the state of affairs today, and I invite you, not just taking the worldwide view, but have a look at your own church, whether you call it fellowship or whatever you want, that is, where you go and worship, and ask yourself whether that is a successful church. By success, I do not mean that you are managing to hold your own against the advancing tide of evil.

I hope you don't have to say you are decreasing or going down before it. And by success, I do not mean that you are a wealthy, lovely, middle-aged church. You never have any financial difficulties at all.

I don't mean that. I don't. I mean, whether looking into this book, which is the only book to which we can look, would you say that your church, and your church being part of the church universal, is a successful church? I suppose, too, if I asked you that and you gave an answer, I might say to you, well, what do you mean when you say successful? What do you count as success? I have already touched upon one angle of it, that you are still managing to find a little niche somewhere where a few of you, and I suppose I can use the word few in context of the millions upon millions in the world, gather together and you have a good time and you go home and that's that.

And so on and so on. I don't mean that. That is not successful.

That is keeping your nose above water, which means that the greater part of you is underneath the water. Now, I want then this morning to take this book in hand, and by the way, you have discovered, of course, that a good Bible is nothing, not the thing to bring with you when you come to a place like this when the degree is somewhere about 90 and your sticky hands make smears all over the page and the new Bible is turned into an old one in one conference. But I do trust, whether you have a new book or an old book, that you will follow this morning through this great account.

For it is given as history, but more than that, it is given as a source of instruction and inspiration that you and I might see the way God works and have courage to get rid out of your meetings or out of your thinking, basically, the things that you will see are not in the New Testament. That is as basic things. I know that all sorts of things must change.

I mean, it never talks about cars in the New Testament, for instance. That's not the sort of thing I'm meaning. Let's be flippant in our thinking.

Let's be basic. The things that must be, or else you cannot count yourself to be a true church of Jesus Christ. If I look at this lovely chapter 4, for instance, we'll read there.

Some weeks ago my interest was caught up afresh in this great glorious truth. The beginning of the chapter is concerning the fact that people were put into prison and they spent the night in prison for the gospel's sake and they come out and they go back to what is called their company. They did it under threat about their future.

And I want to mention, first of all, then, beloved, having commenced here, that they were an absolutely fearless people, completely fearless, when the governing power said, you must not. Now, I don't know

whether you're a people that as soon as some governing person says so and so, you find ways to fall in line with it. On the assumption that the powers that be are ordained of God.

That is right. The powers, but not the persons who use them. The power can be abused, in which case it is wrong.

For instance, to ban the preaching of the gospel in a country or in a town or whatever it is, those people were never raised up of God to do that. They've been raised up of Satan. They must be ignored.

In other words, this will sort you out basically whether you are afraid of man or whether your fear is of God, which is the greater fear. You will know that in every department of your life. Whatsoever power, for instance, take the power that a husband must have over his wife, and that a wife has to do what her husband says, so she does, up to a point.

She does not have to obey her husband if her husband is talking contrary to the scriptures of truth, what they say in general, not take an isolated verse and make it a threat hanging over everybody else, everything else. You ought to keep that clear. The essential thing is not to obey your husband in lieu of God, but to obey God first.

I give my wife perfect freedom to do that. Obey God first and foremost. Get your ideas balanced before you attempt to do it.

Talk to a godly man and a godly woman before you start launching out. And know the way of truth. I've just touched on that because these are vital points.

These things operate in every sphere. And I want to say to you men, if you seek to dominate your wife in spiritual things, you are a usurper and you must understand that you are as calm as you hide, though you can speak in tongues and interpret and prophesy and go preaching or give a word as it is and be called a leader. You must know that in the things of the Spirit of God there is no marriage.

In the things of the Spirit of God there is no male or female. Keep that very, very clear. But may I make a plea? Please ladies, don't go and say, Mr. North says so and so and so and go and smash up the relationship.

That's not what I'm saying. Take the tape and let your husband listen to it before you operate it. Will you do that? Well, that would be good, wouldn't it? You'd really be honest then.

And he'll know I'm his friend. Well, here then is the great truth. In this fourth chapter I'm ever so glad that Norman said, Would you like an hour and a half, brother? And then he's given me leave to take longer because he started me before eleven o'clock.

He's very kind to me. And it says this. Being let go, verse 23, these people that had challenged the authorities, being let go, notice that, they'd been prisoners, they hadn't just had a threat, being let go, they went to their own company.

Oh, have you got an own company? They say, yeah, well, a place where I go to work. Oh, no, no, no. Well, yes.

But your own company are people who inherit and inhabit the same truth that you do. Do you understand that? That's your own company. It is the company of God.

Keep this very clear. It's nothing to do with, well, we go to such and such a fellowship, or church, or anything like that. You've got to know your own company.

And this will be decided for you upon this issue, whether you are in God's company. In other words, to use the scriptural phrase, whether you are in fellowship with God. Now, that will decide it.

It's nothing to do with denomination. You have nothing to do with denomination, so far as that is concerned. Denominations are all denominated by men.

You, whether you call them godly men or not, that's the fact. You and I have to know that we belong to a company. Let me tell you what I mean.

In the days of old, I was still alive then, I used to be in a northern, northeastern city in England. And we used to have a midweek prayer meeting. We used to fast and pray every Wednesday and spend it before God.

And gradually, as God began to really bless, we found other people came in. We knew they didn't belong. We had a Church of England vicar come in.

We had people from, oh, I forgot the denominational names now, and they used to come in and they spent the day with us. And when you asked them why they said, we come here because you pray, what a commentary on the places where they went. And some of the places would have said they were people baptized in the Holy Ghost, full of the Holy Spirit.

You're as empty as a dry old barrel if you don't know how to live in prayer with God. And if your church doesn't pray, it isn't a church. And I don't mean has a weekly prayer meeting.

They're at only a meeting convened. When people pray, they're not satisfied with a meeting. Give them a day a week, that's pretty good, one in seven.

What a tremendous thing it is to understand. But this is the plain teaching of the New Testament, although it doesn't say that in one day in seven you should have a day of prayer. But it does teach by implication, by all the greatness of truth that is revealed here.

These people prayed. Let me tell you this. The church was born in a prayer meeting on the tenth day of coming together for prayer.

That is, from the fortieth day after the Lord's resurrection to the fiftieth. And they got there. And the church was born in that atmosphere.

If you think you can be born in any other, you are deceived. It wasn't born in an atmosphere of ministry, preaching. Keep that very clear.

It was born in an atmosphere of prayer. Not only just the atmosphere, but in the actuality of it. In the bringing of the being into line with God, into somehow a grasping of the fact that this is life itself.

They couldn't, as it were, breathe or continue to live unless this was basic in their life. Do you teach that in your fellowship, you men? Do you teach that? For sure enough, fellowships or churches are the result of the ministry that's going on in them, providing it goes on long enough. I don't mean after a week.

And here, then, is the whole glorious truth. Maybe if we had continued together after this conference and gone into the brethren's time, I would have been speaking, but I'd only been speaking to preachers and leaders and elders then. And I know some women are more fit to be elders than men.

Yes, Cambridge, did you hear that from the back? I didn't ask him to. And what a tremendous thing it is for us to understand. And of course, the preaching must follow example, not precede it, for it to have any power at all.

Now, this is the glorious truth. They went back to their own company. Now, if I go on to a quarter to one, will you be upset with me? Good, all right.

I promise you not to preach to you again this conference. This is what it says. They went to their own company.

And you can see it's their own company. You can see it will all unfold as we go through. This is the proof of it.

And reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. I'm going to read it wrong, so keep your eye on your book. And when they heard that, they said, Oh, God, how can we carry on like this? We'll have to go and see about the other and the other and this and this.

Oh, God. Now, listen. Talk about weak knees.

You know why they're weak, don't you? You don't get down on them enough. That's why they're weak. When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, Oh, Lord, have mercy upon us.

Please prevent all these awful things going on. Dear John, dear Peter. And this new convert actually threw him into prison.

Oh, Lord, stop it. Prevent it, Lord. Perhaps you've got to revise your approach to prayer.

Why you say you're going to pray, they said. And this is the thing. Oh, let me read the prayer through first.

Because I should comment on every word. Here we go. It says, They lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, Lord, our God.

That was the end of it. That was the beginning and the end of it, in their estimation. Or, if we leave out the word art, because it's not in the original, of course you'll have already devised, divine, if that be the word that I'm reading from the old version.

It says, Lord, thou God which hast made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is, who by the mouth of thy servant David hath said, Why didst the heathen rage? And the people imagined vain things. So you've got to know the why. The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.

Or of a truce against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together. Anticlimax. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Yeah. Just let's keep on, shall we? And now, Lord, behold their threatenings. And grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word by stretching forth thine hand to heal.

And that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. Oh, you shouldn't have said that because that sign and wonder was done on the temple steps. That's why you were thrown into prison.

Do the very thing, Lord, for which I got cast into prison. That's what they're talking about. Let me repeat it.

A prison cell was home to many of them. How about it? How about it? When you can't even start to get married today unless you've got your house fully furnished, wonderful carpets on the floor, gone into terrible debts, must have a dishwasher, a clothes washer, a clothes dryer, television in every room, perhaps. I don't know what you must have and you're in debt for the rest of your life.

And you're moaned and you're groaned and when the government asks you to pay your poll tax, you say, oh, I can't do that. I'm not defending the poll tax. But let me say, and I'll be saying it a bit later, a bit later, I've been out to places like Zimbabwe and Mozambique and this man has and you've got missionaries sitting all around you.

I guess it was me. I couldn't help thinking about it. I saw these little kids walk out of the bush.

They've got nothing, not a stitch of clothing on them, and no mother, and no father, and no brother, and no sister, and no home, and no where, and no body, and no thing. And you grumble about paying poll tax. You, and you say you're a spiritual Christian.

I don't believe you. The fullness of the Spirit will have persuaded you otherwise. The same Spirit that I have, He taught me this.

He won't teach you anything different from you. Oh, well, we're all individuals. No, you're not.

Not in this. Well, you are. I'm always contradicting myself, aren't I? But there it is.

That's the great thing that you ought to understand. If I said stand up and be absolutely, completely honest as on that great and dreadful day when you stand before that throne, stand up, every one of you that's grumbled about the poll tax. I'm not asking you to.

But if I did, would you stand ashamed before this company? And how will you stand in that day? What a tremendous thing it is for us to understand what this life is all about, from whom it came. God help us. Let me continue to read.

When they had prayed, verse 31, the place was shaken where they were assembled together. You'd almost think the very walls and roof and furniture sort of understood what they were saying. These people who were absolutely unified with the Spirit of God.

That's right. The tremble. The place was shaken where they were assembled together.

I love that word, together. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And they spake the word of God with boldness.

Amen. This is that second outpouring of the Spirit. You will recall the other day I made this remark, that most of, I didn't put it this way, but it's true, most of that which resulted came about in the accident was not

through constant outpourings of the Spirit.

It was through the flowing of the Spirit. It was because, to use the Ephesian term, 518 if you want the reference, they knew what it was that Paul was speaking about. He was talking about his own experience.

Be being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's right. And that's why the rivers flowed out in fullness.

Because he was being filled with the Holy Spirit morning, noon and night. Not with fresh infillings, but as now an habitual state of life. A constant, ongoing thing.

Thank God in those days, though we thank God for it in these days, there was no place called Rohrer, and there was no firm called Atwoods to build tents. Nothing. They were one great company of people.

They didn't come together for special conferences. Fancy being able to get from Liverpool down to here in five hours. It might have taken them five days.

Here was the tremendous and glorious thing that God has to say to us, beloved. This, then, is that second outpouring to which the Lord referred. And He never moved from it.

He said in Acts 1.8 that you shall receive the power. I'm coming right out of the Greek now. You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you.

Amen. And you shall be witnesses to me. Witnesses to Jesus, isn't that true? Everywhere He went, the living water flowed out of Him.

He didn't say, my, I must go and get another anointing. I must go and get filled with the Spirit again. Normalcy is Jesus.

He's the standard of normalcy. Okay. Everywhere He went, the waters flowed out of Him.

The living water. Come to me, He said, you can drink the living water or flow out of your bowels. You do that and that's precisely what you find.

The four points about pouring had special significance. Jerusalem. Judea.

This is the Judean outpouring. In the eighth chapter you get the Samaritan outpouring. And in the tenth chapter you get the Gentiles outpouring for the Gentiles.

And no more does it happen. Oh, people received the Holy Ghost. Precisely.

They'd be as dead as stones if they didn't. But that's not this great baptism in the Spirit that God is talking about. When you read in Acts 1 verse 8. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

And listen. The result of that was this. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

I'm in verse 31. And they spake the word of God with boldness. And a multitude of them that believed were of one heart.

Now listen, beloved. That is the second great thing. If you like, it can be first.

The outpouring of the Spirit is first. But on the human level. The first great thing is that if you say.

And I'm listening for it and looking for it too. When I come to meet you, know you, come to your church or whatever I do. Immediately you become one heart.

You cannot be baptized in the Holy Ghost and not be of one heart. That is not possible. I know modern preachers that wangle around it to justify some queer thing that they're doing.

The disunification of the church. You get one heart. Whether you speak in tongues or not is immaterial at that moment.

The great thing is this. One heart. One soul.

And neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own. Everything he got from that moment was from God. Have you ever come to that position? Where you should say, Lord, everything I have is from thee.

It's not mine. Does God do such new things? Is this the new thing that he does? It is exactly. And modern preachers will not preach that.

Probably because they don't understand it or know it in themselves. You get one heart and it's Christ's. You get one soul and it's the soul of Jesus.

Amen. And from that moment, everything else as being of the old man and life and background is done away, though you may still retain the piano if you had one before. But it's from God.

You understand that? And that should purge your piano. You say, well, fancy saying a piano needs to have all means of playing of it. What's the use of a piano if it can't be played? Everything that is inanimate and amoral partakes of the nature and soul of the person that plays it, owns it, or uses it.

Everything, your money, your wife, your husband, your children, your mother, your chairs. You say, the man's going off his head. No, I'm not.

This great, vast completeness of this work. Have you ever been baptized or have you just had a touch that has left 75% of you in the soul realm untouched? Have you ever been brought into it? Listen to Father. Jesus taught.

Remember, I've said this. Read your New Testament. Read those gospels and find out about Jesus.

Jesus taught this. Here it is. Son, all that I have is thine.

That's Father in the parable. All that I have is thine. The stupid young fellow that said, divide unto me the portion of goods that fall to me.

And Father would have said, but all I have is thine, son. See your thinking? My gift, you say. My ability.

My ministry. My church. My this and my the other.

You've never died yet. God arranged a neat little death for you. He called the cross.

Very compact, I'm sure you will agree. It wasn't a holocaust. One cross.

One grave. One Savior. One burial.

And such a burial that you stayed dead for all eternity. One resurrection. One life.

One preaching. One gospel. I saw I could go on.

Here then is the proof. They had all things common and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And that's the only way you can do it.

You can go out. You can have your bills and posters printed. You can wear badges, fishes or whatever you want to wear.

You can do all that, but that doesn't mean that much. It only indicates to the people that see them that you belong to a certain set. That's all that indicates.

Jesus bore the cross all his life. Never once did he have it hanging on a golden chain. You have to see these things, beloved.

They are all hallmarks of a lower thing. Indications of a lesser position. You don't see them.

Neither can you till your vision is cleared. And this is by grace of God. The Lord wants us to see this, beloved.

You'll all hate me after this morning. And you won't book to come next year, but I'm going to try and come. Here is the great thing for us to understand, beloved.

Spare nothing. Spare nothing. And nobody.

Did you know the great man, Charles Grandison Finney, who brought wonderful revival to America. Do you know what he said? He used to advise in his lectures on religious revival, get a big stick, beat around every bush. Don't let anything remain.

Don't let anybody hide behind anything. Well, I haven't got a big enough stick, perhaps. But I know there are a lot of bushes that people are hiding behind.

Great power. Let me say this, though some of you have heard me say this before. It's worth repeating.

You've heard me say the name of Jesus before. On the day of Pentecost, according to Acts chapter 1, they received power from on high. Now see what's happened.

Great power. An increase. Would you say that's going on in your church, man? Look at me, you leader.

Would you say that? Then it's your fault, son. You're the leader, aren't you? You are the infeder, aren't you? With great power. You say, but all this, he that, she that.

Oh, you know our troubles. Yeah. You'd like to spend the night in prison first and learn the ways of God, would you? You don't know.

There are no minds hardly in the world that are in line with Scripture. We're 20th century believers, aren't we? And we believe what we like. God wants us to see the truth.

Great grace was upon them all and so I could go on in this great thing. But what I want us to notice particularly is this great thing. Their prayer being let go, verse 23, they went to their old camp and reported

all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

You can read it in the first part of the chapter. You can read what they said. We won't stop on them now.

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice. Not voices. Will you notice this? I want to tell you, beloved, that listen.

Are you listening? A church has a voice. You may have 200 people and say, we've got 200 voices. No, you haven't.

Not to God. The church has a voice. Your church, your fellowship, has a voice.

You shall not do as we do here this day to cause your voice to be heard in heaven. And he was talking to how many people? Find it in the Scripture and see. Just one voice.

Your fellowship has one voice. You will begin to see then, beloved, that the great secret, first, after the outpouring of the Spirit in the act of the apostles, and you may trace it everywhere through, is oneness. It can't be any other.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. If you've got anything else but oneness, you've got sin in your church. Church, yes.

And if you haven't got oneness with your other fellow brother elders, they're sin. It's either in you and your lot or them and their lot. Get it settled.

Everything divisive that slants you off in another direction is sin, though you may glamorize it and have wonderful ideas about what you're going to do, what you're not going to do. It's oneness. Let me say it again.

Any group, church, fellowship, whatever you want, company, we'll take this word, it's scriptural. It is. Wherever it is to be a true church, it must be one.

One. Every other company is false. Oh, like some man who stands up and says, we have a great breadth of people in our communion.

I won't say his name. I'm very glad he's going. Here is the whole, I don't mean from this conference, so don't look round.

We allow all kinds of opinions. So you can have a guy that denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Oh, we'll have him.

We'll drink wine with him. We'll have him lecturing to our students. We'll do all this kind of thing.

Oh, will you? Then know that the true church is as far as the east is from the west away from you. And God wants us to see this, beloved. And I speak especially to the elders and the leaders.

You are the ones that must set the example. And no excuse. It's very difficult because of him and because of her.

Do you know that, brother? Do you understand what's been going on? Yeah, I understand what's been going on. I didn't get white hair when I was ten years old. With no experience.

And it wasn't the wife that gave me white hair, so don't misunderstand. The whole glorious trouble, nor my daughters, either, I want to say. Very glad about that.

The Lord wants us to see the truth. They lifted up their voice to God.

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