

## MAIN POINT

*We each have a unique role in carrying the gospel to those who are spiritually empty. In a broken world, this is the mission that brings hope and healing.*

## INTRODUCTION

What did you want to be when you grew up, and why?

Do you feel called to your career? If so, how did you sense that calling?

What things are we called to other than careers?

**After his eyes were opened, Paul was gripped by the urgency of spreading the gospel—and his role in that process. He began partnering with like-minded people to engage those distant from God with the life-changing message of Christ crucified and risen. Like Paul, we each have a unique role in carrying the gospel to those who are spiritually empty. In a broken world, this is the mission that brings hope and healing.**

## UNDERSTANDING

### > READ ACTS 13:1-4.

**Acts 13–14 gives us the details of the apostle Paul’s first missionary journey, which began the spread of Christianity around the world. For this first trip, he was accompanied by Barnabas.**

Before they began their journey, Paul and Barnabas were commissioned, or sent out, by their local church. What do we learn about the overall culture of the early church from this passage?

How did they seek to understand God’s purpose for their lives? What are the implications of these verses for us today?

**Out of their service in the church, God called Paul and Barnabas for the mission field. Before acting on that call, the church spent a period of focused, dedicated devotion to God, foregoing food or other needs or comforts in order to hear from God and sense His direction. This meant the leaders were able to be responsive to the Holy Spirit when He moved. In this instance, the Spirit directed the church to set apart Barnabas and Paul (whose name was Saul at this point) for specific service.**

What does it mean to you to know that God sets each of us apart for specific acts of service to Him and His kingdom?

For what specific purpose has God set you apart? For what purposes has He set apart our church?

How would our church function differently if we really believed God has set us aside for His work, like the early church did?

**The word translated “set apart” comes from a verb meaning to “mark off by boundaries.” Paul used the word to describe God’s call on his life (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). In Acts 13:2, the word communicates that the church was to mark off or put a boundary around Barnabas and Paul to serve elsewhere as led by the Holy Spirit. In this case, they would travel as missionaries to new frontiers to share the gospel story.**

When the church is functioning in obedience to its calling, what should be happening in and through it?

**The leaders in the Antioch church had a unified purpose: find out what God wants for us to do and do it, whether that meant staying and serving the local church, or taking the gospel to the world. Our strategy should be the same.**

**> READ ACTS 14:1-7.**

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What opposition did Paul and Barnabas face after being sent out to proclaim Christ? How did the missionaries respond to being opposed (v. 3)? How did the Lord help them?

What opposition have you faced doing mission work today? Share a story about that experience if you have one. How well did you handle it? What did you learn about God through the experience?

**Verse 3 seems to be a sort of parenthetical declaration of the gospel’s power even in the midst of opposition. Although their enemies sought to do Paul and Barnabas harm, God gave the missionaries a long and effective ministry. The Lord demonstrated His power by confirming the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. Paul and Barnabas were driven by their devotion to Christ and the lostness of people. These two factors also motivate us to persevere in missions involvement. Our devotion to the Lord, coupled with a burden for the world’s lost people, will prevent us from giving up when times get tough. The task God has given us is not an easy one. Even though God placed His stamp of approval on the missionaries’ ministry at Iconium, controversy continued to mount.**

**> READ ACTS 14:19-28.**

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**When we live each day as followers of Jesus—going where God sends us and living for Him—we’re being His church, representing Him and sharing His message. This was how Paul and Barnabas lived. As they traveled, the men actively shared the message of Christ, and the result was that people believed the gospel. Not only**

**did people experience salvation, but Paul and Barnabas also ensured the new converts were growing as disciples (v. 22).**

If you're being honest, what would you do if you knew you would face opposition for sharing the good news about Jesus?

What specific attributes of God are helpful to think on during times of opposition?

What evidence do we read in this passage about the missionaries' commitment to their faith? How does their example challenge you as you think about the unique role you have to carry the gospel to those who are spiritually empty?

**By opening "the door of faith to the Gentiles," God ensured that no one would be alienated from the gospel's saving grace. God doesn't close the doors to any people group on our planet. Every human being should have an opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to it. As the church today, we continue to carry out Paul's mission of proclaiming Christ to the world. In a broken world, this is the mission that brings hope and healing.**

## APPLICATION

Seeing Paul and Barnabas's courage, faith, and endurance, how are you challenged to serve the Lord more completely? Which of those three traits do you most struggle with?

If you were to emphasize one central truth about the gospel in your evangelism efforts, what would it be?

Paul knew at the end of his life he would stand before God and give an account of his days. Read Psalm 90:12. How does the truth in this psalm and Paul's example impact how you see your personal responsibility to take the gospel to the world?

What are you doing to grow now so that you will be ready to be used by God when He sets you apart for a specific service? How can our group encourage you in the growth process, and vice versa?

## PRAY

**As you close in prayer, ask God to help you focus (or refocus) your priorities on building the kingdom of God through proclaiming the gospel to others. Pray for hearts that break for the people around us who are spiritually empty.**

## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

**1. Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:**

How have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life and the life of our church this week?

How do you sense God setting you apart for service to Him in the coming months and year?  
What do you need to do to respond obediently to His calling?

**2. The challenge to memorize Acts 13:2-3.**

## COMMENTARY

### ACTS 13:1-4

13:1. While Jerusalem had been the base of the Christian movement, Antioch became the center of activity. The church was led by prophets and teachers. Luke described them by their tasks as opposed to calling them elders or overseers. As prophets (a gift of the Holy Spirit), they boldly proclaimed God's Word, the foundation of the church. Contrary to what we think of as a prophet today, a "fore-teller" of things to come, they were "forth-tellers" of God's truth, edifying and directing the church. As teachers, they recounted Jesus' stories and teachings, laying the groundwork to build the new disciples' faith. These five men brought together a racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity, evident in the Antioch church. They comprised a world fellowship, initiating a world movement.

13:2. They (the Antioch congregation) were ministering to or worshiping God. The English word liturgy comes from the Greek word for ministering. The church's worship followed the familiar format of Jewish synagogues. In addition, the church was fasting. Jewish worship sometimes joined fasting with an earnest and urgent appeal to the Lord. Taken together, ministering to the Lord and fasting indicated a period of focused, dedicated devotion to God, foregoing food or other needs or comforts in order to hear from God and sense His direction. This church was expectant, sensitive to the Spirit's leadership. They were not strategizing or planning; they were seeking God's direction. And God provided. With the community gathered in worship, the Holy Spirit spoke, revealing God's plan and His directives. The Spirit instructed that Barnabas and Saul, two church leaders, be set apart to venture out on an evangelistic mission. Interestingly, these were recognized, gifted leaders, not individuals the church would have determined they could "do without." They were set apart. The work, commonly believed to be the mission to the Gentiles, was their task of communicating the gospel message to those who had not heard, thereby extending the Christian movement's reach. God called them, meaning He confirmed His desire on their hearts.

13:3. Following this worship experience, the church laid hands on Barnabas and Saul. This action conferred blessing and authority on these two men, endorsing their work as they departed to missionary activity. They were commissioned. Placing hands on them did not impart new gifts or credentials. Their gifts had been recognized as church leaders; now those gifts were to be exercised in fulfilling the missionary task. Once done, they were sent off, discharged from their church leadership responsibilities at Antioch to embark on a wider ministry of evangelism and missions.

13:4. Upon leaving Antioch, Barnabas and Paul went to Seleucia, Antioch's port about 15 miles away near the mouth of the Orontes River. From there they sailed to Cyprus. Cyprus, an island of great importance

under Roman control, was a sixty-mile boat trip from Seleucia. Furthermore, Cyprus was the birthplace of Barnabas (see Acts 4:36) and a good place to start their missionary enterprise. Barnabas had relationships and trust established with the people in this region.

#### ACTS 14:1-7,19-28

14:1. Having been run out of Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas regrouped and targeted another important city for evangelization—Iconium. The city was an important trade center and probably the most important city in the area. Paul’s ministry there shows again his interest in reaching major population centers. The approach Paul and Barnabas used at Iconium was the same as at Pisidian Antioch—they went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. Paul never lost his desire to see Israel saved (see Rom. 9:1-4). Even though most of his fellow Jews would reject the gospel again and again, Paul’s normal pattern when entering a new city was to preach in the synagogue. Once again he preached so powerfully that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

14:2. As in Pisidian Antioch, unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against the missionaries. Once again a small number of Jews created trouble for Paul and Barnabas. How did they turn the people against the missionaries? They poisoned their minds. The word translated poisoned means to harm or to embitter. It denotes that which is destructive, injurious, or evil. The Jews used rational arguments designed not merely to have the people run Paul and Barnabas out of town but to have the people harm them.

14:3. Although their enemies sought to do Paul and Barnabas harm, God gave the missionaries a long and effective ministry. They persisted not only in spite of the opposition, but because of it. The Lord demonstrated His power by confirming the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

14:4. Notice Paul and Barnabas are called apostles. Apostle literally means one sent forth. Only here and in 14:14 is this term used to refer to anyone other than the original twelve apostles.

14:5. Eventually the opposition party developed a plot to harm the missionaries. The word translated plot literally means a violent impulse or assault. They intended bodily harm against Paul and Barnabas, desiring to mistreat them and stone them. Mob violence was planned against the Lord’s servants.

14:6-7. Somehow the two apostles discovered the plot against them and fled the city before the plan could be implemented. They journeyed to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe. Some may contend this was not an appropriate response by the missionaries. Sometimes the Lord does call missionaries to martyrdom, but on other occasions He calls them to seek safety and resume their work later.

14:19. At Lystra Paul and Barnabas once again saw an initial positive response to their ministry, this time centering around a man’s miraculous healing (Acts 14:8-18). Unfortunately, as before, their great beginning turned sour. Some Jews from Pisidian Antioch (some 100 miles away) and Iconium followed the apostles to Lystra and won the crowd over, turning the people against the missionaries.

14:20. Some of the converts at Lystra then gathered around Paul, apparently after the mob had disbanded. Apparently Paul was unconscious, but he was not fatally injured. The Lord protected Paul from death, enabling him to continue his missionary activity. Instead of leaving town, Paul got up and went back into the city. Although Lystra was not a safe place for them, Paul and Barnabas remained there overnight. The next day they left for Derbe. Here we see again the missionaries’ faithfulness to continue with their work. Even though Paul had been injured, he and Barnabas continued to press on, preaching the gospel to those who had never heard.

14:21-22. In Derbe, the two men preached Jesus and won a large number of disciples. Unlike before, the missionaries experienced no persecution at Derbe. When they had completed their work, the missionaries then revisited each congregation they had previously established. Returning to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch was dangerous, but the apostles did not want to leave the area without contacting the churches.

They wanted to strengthen and encourage the many new converts to remain true to the faith. Paul and Barnabas had experienced hardship on this first missionary campaign, and they wanted to prepare the Galatian believers for the same. One of Paul's missionary strategies was to plant permanent indigenous churches. He did not evangelize in a superficial, unorganized manner. His goal was to leave a city with an established church with leaders in place so the work would continue long after he was gone.

14:24-25. These verses identify the apostles' final stops on their return trip to Syrian Antioch. They descended from the mountains of Pisidia to the lowlands of Pamphylia, arriving at Perga, where they first had stopped after leaving Cyprus. Acts makes no mention of any preaching ministry during their first visit to Perga, but on the return trip the apostles preached the word there. They were committed to finishing the work they had begun. The two missionaries then traveled to the seaport of Attalia in order to board a ship for their home base at Antioch .

14:26. This first missionary journey probably lasted 2 to 3 years and had covered some 1200-1500 miles in distance. Along the way the two missionaries had seen the Lord work mightily. Many Jews and Gentiles had become believers, and new churches had come into existence. They had encountered some difficulties; but God had shown Himself faithful every step of the way. They had successfully completed the work they had begun. Still, one important task remained—reporting to their sending church. Antioch is where they had been committed to the grace of God. The church would rejoice as the two missionaries shared how God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27).