

"Discovering God's Next Step"

7/28-29/07

6 p.m.; 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Acts 13:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Babies progress from laying, to pushing, to pulling, to crawling, standing, walking and running.

It's no accident that God uses the same imagery to talk about spiritual birth and spiritual growth of His children.

As we open to Acts 13 today, we're going to see a church that has continued to grow and mature.

A few weeks ago we read about the beginning of the church in Antioch in Acts 11:20. Some Christians from **Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch** and started telling non-Jews about Jesus.

Verse 21 reads, **"The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."**

v. 22: **"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."**

Barnabas taught them and encouraged them; the people of the church continued to tell others about Jesus, and many more people believed.

So, Barnabas, realizing he needed mature Christian help, went and found Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch.

v. 26: **"So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."**

So, we see the church in Antioch growing in maturity and numbers under the ministry of Barnabas and Saul.

Now we come to Acts 13, and we see another mark of maturity, a ministry team that has grown beyond Barnabas and Saul, leading the church.

READ Acts 13:1-3 (**PAGE** 1714)

In v. 2 we see this ministry team gathered together, worshipping, fasting, seeking the Lord.

We're not certain why they're meeting, but what becomes clear is that God is ready for this maturing congregation to take their next step of growth... their next step in fulfilling the command of Jesus to make disciples of all people in the world.

Every church has been given this mission: to influence our friends, our community and our world to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

That means that every Christian church you drive by... regardless of location, ethnicity, or socio-economic status... has been given the exact same mission by the Lord.

There are different ways that churches work that out, different kinds of ministries that fit the church and the area in which they are located.

For instance, one of the more unique ministries we have in this congregation is a **homeless ministry**. And one of the key reasons is because we're downtown and near locations where much of the homeless population gathers.

Many years ago when we started **recovery ministries** to help those struggling with drug and alcohol addictions. At that time was unique for churches. Now, it is fairly common. The need is great!

How does a church find God's direction for working out the Great Commission?

And, how do various ministries under the umbrella of a single congregation determine the ways to go about fulfilling the mission of influencing other people for Christ?

Key Idea: *To discover God's next step for your life and ministry, develop a united, God-focused team.*

I. Develop Unity in Christ (Acts 13:1)

Notice the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural staff/leadership base in this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural city of Antioch:

Barnabas: a Jew from Cyprus (cf. Acts 4:36).

Simeon: a man with a Jewish name, but a Latin nickname, "**Niger**," which indicates the color of his skin and that he was from Roman circles.

Lucius: from Cyrene, N. Africa; modern day Libya (Ababie).

Manaen: raised with Herod (who killed James); an aristocrat; high-society circles in Jerusalem.

Saul: a Jew from a Roman city, Tarsus, who had been a Pharisee.

In spite of their differences in background, ethnicity, and culture, they are one in Christ. Jesus is the reason for their unity.

Something else that contributes to their unity is a shared calling:

II. Discover Others Who Share Your Calling (Acts 13:1)

All 5 of these leaders originally came from places other than Antioch.

But, they all shared in the same leading and calling; God bringing them together to lead this church.

Lucius: from Cyrene, N. Africa, probably one of the early Christian missionaries from Cyrene to Antioch mentioned in Acts 11:20.

Barnabas: sent to Antioch by the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22)

Saul: God called him specifically to reach the Gentiles; brought to Antioch by Barnabas (Acts 11:25-26)

Manaen: from Palestine

Simeon: His nickname leads us to believe he's a native African.

All different, but all drawn together by God, sharing a passion and a calling to spread God's message of salvation and establish those who believe in the church.

They are God's called leadership team for this church, teachers and prophets, sharing a common calling and a common leading from God.

ILLUSTRATION

Our pastoral staff: Modesto, Arizona, Ukiah, Stockton, Manteca, New Zealand, Minnesota, and other locations.

Ethnic leaders for: Cambodian, Laotian, Chinese, Latino.

And I believe God will provide more ethnic leaders as this church and community continue to change.

But, the key point is, all, regardless of differences all share a common calling and leading to help fulfill the Great Commission in this place.

ILLUSTRATION

There are also many leaders within the church who are not pastors but who are just as critical, sharing a common calling for a specific kind of ministry: children, youth, ministering specifically to men or women, the homeless ministry, athletics, worship ministries, prayer, young marrieds, seniors...

... each finding their niche, the leading of God on where to serve to strengthen the church and reach out to others.

AND, there are some who are dreaming right now about reaching a segment of people, a kind of people who we're not reaching very effectively right now.

IF you are one of those who is dreaming, go for it!! And, pull along side others who may share your passion, talk to a pastor so we can help support what your calling is.

Most always, the ministries that succeed are characterized by a unified team that shares in the same passion or calling.

And now, together, they are worshipping the Lord and fasting...very possibly seeking the direction of the Lord for the next step in expanding the Kingdom of God.

III. Be United in Seeking God (Acts 13:2a)

"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting..."

A. Worshipping: *leitourgounton*: literally,
"ministering to the Lord"

(ministering to the Lord includes worship, but is broader than worship)

It is used of the various ways in which Christians serve God, including prayer, worship, financial giving, voluntary service, complete surrender of one's life.

Having been in sessions like this as a pastoral staff, I think the following elements were likely involved in this time with the Lord:

a. Surrendering their lives afresh to Christ:

Romans 12:1 **Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.**

b. Praise/worship:

Hebrews 13:15 **Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess His Name.**

c. Listening to the Lord:

Luke 10:38-42 "As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him.

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said.

40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

41 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things,

42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'"

Did Martha understand rightly that they would need dinner that night? Yes.

But, she was missing what she should have been doing at that moment because she wasn't slowing down to listen to the Lord.

When we don't (feel we can't) slow down to listen to the Lord, we are showing that we are worried and upset (driven) by many things; and we're missing what is best. We're missing the bulls-eye of God's will.

The same thing can happen to churches: as a whole and in different areas of ministry. They can be so busy doing things, good things, that they don't slow down to seek the Lord and listen to Him.

Seeing the combination of **worshipping** and **fasting** gives us a hint that this is a meeting with a special purpose.

Usually when we see individuals or groups of people in the Bible who are fasting, it is for a specific purpose: protection, seeking God's will, confessing sin and seeking forgiveness...

B. Fasting

God reveals His will without fasting, but it is

interesting to notice how often fasting is involved when someone is passionately seeking God's direction.

Fasting is intentionally going without food in order to seek the Lord.

For example, giving up a meal to devote that time to seeking the Lord. Sometimes it will involve one meal, sometimes a series of meals, sometimes days; always for the purpose of seeking the Lord.

(it is not going on a diet!)

Fasting often indicates a passionate seeking after God for a specific reason... "What's our next step, God?" "Evaluate us, God." "We need to know Your will, God."

So, to discover God's will, they were a united, God-focused team, worshipping and fasting.

IV. Be United in Following God's Leading (Acts 13:2b-3)

Acts 13:2-3 "...the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

- The Spirit likely spoke through one of the prophets among them.

- And He sends them as a team of two: Team ministry

"God has spoken, we must do what He has said!"

They were united; they heard the voice of the Spirit, they moved to prayer, and then commissioned them for this Spirit-led ministry.

Laying on of hands: identified the church as a whole with their ministry and acknowledged God's direction for them, entering into agreement with God.

CONCLUSION

Do you sense you're at a point where there's a "next step" in your walk with the Lord?

Maybe a kind of ministry He has put on your heart?

Maybe a step of growth or commitment to draw closer to Him?

Is the ministry you are a part of ready for a "next step"?

Have you ever surrendered your life to the Lord and asked Him to forgive you and lead you in His ways for your life?

"Father in Heaven, thank You for laying out a plan so I can discover and apply Your plan for my life, and the next steps I will continue to take. I give my life as an offering to You, so that I can glorify You however You lead. I Jesus' Name, Amen."