



Explosive Impact • The church Sent • Acts 13:1-4 • 10/21/2018

Main Point

As the church in Antioch grew and developed new leaders, God called those leaders out for new endeavors.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you think about your walk with Christ, how have you experienced Him sending you out to new ministry endeavors?

How would you explain what it means to be called of God for ministry? Who do you think that applies to?

In your experience, how have you discerned if God was calling you to something? How big a role did the confirmation of other believers play in your discernment?

Luke chronicled the circumstances surrounding the launch of Paul's first missionary journey. The number of leaders with the ability to teach had increased considerably since Barnabas arrived in Antioch. With everything growing and developing in Antioch, one might think that the leadership should just keep doing what they were doing. To the contrary, in the midst of the healthy development in Antioch, God called out Saul and Barnabas to be sent to fulfill other works to which God had called them.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Acts 13:1.

As the work in Antioch had progressed, so too had the mantle of leadership. At the time when Barnabas was originally dispatched by the leadership in Jerusalem to investigate the salvation phenomenon in Antioch,

Barnabas was the only teacher and disciple-maker of new converts. However, after bringing Saul in from Tarsus to help, Barnabas and Saul continued to multiply the leadership of the congregation as its rapid growth demanded.

Why do you think the growth in the number of teachers/leaders in Antioch was important for the health of the congregation?

What impact do you think it had on the church in Antioch to see new teachers arise from their own ranks? Why do you think so?

| Have a volunteer read Acts 13:2.

The prophets and teachers were leading the congregation accordingly in worship and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them about sending out Saul and Barnabas. It was no small thing that those the Holy Spirit told the congregation to set apart were their most beloved teachers. Notice that the call to send Barnabas and Saul did not come only to Barnabas and Saul. Rather, the believers in the congregation experienced the prompting of the Holy Spirit as well. The congregation experienced the prompting of the Holy Spirit because they were also a part of Saul and Barnabas being sent out.

How do you respond (or have you responded) when God calls someone dear to you to a new work?

Given the deep connection between Barnabas and Saul and the believers in Antioch, what impact do you think God's command to send Barnabas and Saul out had on the congregation's response?

| Have a volunteer read Acts 13:3-4.

Having heard from the Holy Spirit, the congregation continued to fast and pray, then laid hands on their beloved leaders. The dynamic by which the Holy Spirit saw fit to confirm the call was a cooperative experience between the congregation and the men being sent. In light of their commissioning by the church confirming what the Holy Spirit had already spoken into their own hearts, Saul and Barnabas departed from Antioch. What lay just on the other side of obedience would ultimately come to be known as Paul's first missionary journey. Churches were planted, persecution endured, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ went forward into places it would not have otherwise gone. The faithfulness of Saul and Barnabas, as well as the congregation in Antioch, literally changed the world.

Describe a time when God prompted you toward a new challenge in serving Him. How did the confirmation of other believers encourage or inform your decision?

In light of the example for the church in Antioch, why do you think it is important for church members to remain attuned to the moving of the Holy Spirit? Who might need your encouragement to follow the Spirit in faithfulness?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Who has been the most beneficial person to you in understanding your own call to Christian service? What about their insight has been so helpful?

How are you currently fostering biblical community with others that would allow you the credibility to offer encouragement and confirmation to them? What have been the best ways you've found for creating such community?

What gives you the greatest sense of pause or concern when you think about God calling you to go? How can you begin to address those concerns so that you are freed to be faithful to His leading?

Pray

Pray that God would place people in each of the lives in your group that will be able to give Godly counsel regarding calling. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be especially clear for those that are open to hearing from Him for the first time. Pray that those in your group would experience worship to the depth that they are open to the will and leading of God in their life like never before.

Commentary

| Acts 13:1-4

13:1. Luke begins by telling us about the leadership resources of the Antioch congregation. Five men are named, and two spiritual gifts come into focus—prophecy and teaching. We should not be surprised to see Barnabas named first, since he was apparently serving as “senior pastor” in the Antioch congregation.

We know nothing of Simon Niger except that his first name was Jewish and his other name Latin rather than Greek. Since Niger means “dark-complexioned” (or black), some have speculated that he may have come from African descent. Some believe he may have been the Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26) who carried Jesus’ cross and whose sons Alexandria and Rufus were Christians in the church at Rome (Mark 15:21; cf. Rom. 16:13).

Much speculation surrounds Lucius of Cyrene, but the point is that we have no further information than what appears here. Luke tells us that Manaen had been brought up with Herod and uses the word *syntrophos* (indicating a foster brother or intimate friend) referring to Herod Antipas. Saul we know as a regenerated persecutor, now the chief teacher of the Antioch church.

Today we would call these men “missionary candidates.” Is there a distinction in this group between prophets and teachers? Some suggest that the Greek text allows for this, but the more simple reading of the verse seems to indicate in general that all five possessed and used these gifts. It is not impossible, and perhaps even probable, that they all had the opportunity to at least see and hear Jesus in his earthly ministry. Perhaps none of them were believers until after the resurrection, but the Son of God, whose message they would now proclaim, would have been known to them as eyewitnesses.

13:2. Pronouns are crucial throughout these early verses of our chapter. Does the word they refer to the five candidates or to the entire congregation? There is no way to fix that conclusion grammatically, but we certainly understand the Holy Spirit speaks to the entire congregation when he calls for two of the five candidates to be selected for the mission. The word called, transliterated *proskaleo*, clearly indicates a divine call.

Notice the climate in the congregation—worship and fasting. Not frantic activity with programs burning out everybody in the congregation. In an attitude of worship and fasting they understood the Spirit to select missionaries for God’s work. An interesting little word, so common in the Greek language and in English as well, yet in this case designating the missionary effort as a whole. It appears in the same context again in 14:26 at the conclusion of this first journey.

During this process of selection no one in the Antioch church, including the candidates, knew what lay ahead. We read these verses in the light of the entire chapter, and we know exactly where God’s will intends to take them. They offered themselves to the Lord for whatever he wished and wherever he wished to send them. This verse strongly emphasizes call at two points—the Holy Spirit sets the candidates apart and announces that God has called them for a special work.

13:3. The congregation continued fasting. Here Luke introduces praying (though surely they had been doing this all along). They commissioned the chosen two with the laying on of hands and sent them off, an interesting word (*apelysan*) which means “to release them from their duties” at Antioch. What a joyous passage. Willing workers released by a worshiping congregation through a wise procedure. No apostles were present—the sending of the first missionaries was a people project.

In verse 3 we have less problem with the antecedent of they. Clearly by now Luke is talking about the entire congregation (a strong likelihood throughout both verses 2 and 3), for the candidates would hardly lay hands on themselves. This missionary commissioning service demonstrates a planned and orderly congregational

project and shows that, to a large extent, early missions was a lay movement. Luke makes it plain throughout the rest of Acts that Barnabas and Saul always felt themselves under the authority of the congregation at Antioch which had commissioned (not ordained) them for this specific missionary project.

One can hardly overemphasize the significance of lay leaders, congregational involvement, and ministry teams throughout Acts. The church is not, and never has been, buildings, programs, and property. God's church consists of people, and the emphasis always falls on them in Luke's record.

13:4. Seleucia lies north and a bit west of Antioch, a sixteen-mile journey on foot. There the new missionaries boarded a boat and sailed for Cyprus, Barnabas' home island. Though Luke does not tell us, we can safely assume that the Antioch congregation continued to pray for the missionaries and to thank God for selecting them, even though they had lost the two most prominent members of their pastoral staff.

As we leave the Antioch church along with Barnabas and Saul, let's take a quick glance ahead 350 years. After the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, Antioch became the world center of Christianity. By a.d. 400, one hundred thousand Christians lived in that city.

We may also assume that the church provided whatever they needed to at least begin this project. Cyprus was not untouched with the gospel (11:19), and Barnabas certainly had appropriate connection there to get the ministry started. The island was a senatorial, not an imperial, province since it remained under the leadership of a proconsul (v. 7) rather than a governor like Pilate.

Reading Assignment for next week

Acts 15:1-41