



DEVOTIONAL

Some years ago, an article in the Harvard Business Review called “Market Myopia” talked about how some people didn’t understand what business they were in. For example, the railroad people didn’t understand that they were in the transportation business. Had they realized it, they would have invested in the airplane. The telegraph people thought that they were in the telegraph business. They failed to realize that they were in the communications business. In 1886 or so, they could have bought all of the telephone patents for about \$40,000. But they didn’t know what business they were in.

What is the main business of the church? Some would say that it is to care for its members. The church is here to visit the sick and pray with them, to take care of people at important transitions in life, such as marriage, childbirth, and death. It’s here to provide guidance and comfort for people at important times. No doubt, these are all functions of the church. But I would argue that these functions are not the main business of the church, and if we start acting as if they were, we will miss our main business.

We are always in danger of slipping into a maintenance mentality in the church, where we focus on maintaining our religious club and preserving its sacred traditions, and we forget about the lost. Erwin McManus, a pastor in Los Angeles, said, “We somehow think that the Church is here for us; we forget that we are the Church, and we’re here for the world.”

John Piper, a Minneapolis pastor, says, “The book of Acts is a constant indictment of mere maintenance Christianity. It’s a constant goad and encouragement and stimulation to fan the flame of Advent—‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost’” (www.desiringgod.org, Sermon on Acts 13:1–12, 12/8/91). As Piper elsewhere articulates (e.g., chapter 1 of *Desiring God* [Multnomah Books]), the main goal of evangelism and missions is not just to reach the lost, but to glorify God. The glory of God is the supreme goal of history. He saves sinners “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6, 12). Thus,

The main business of the church is to obey the Holy Spirit in promoting God’s glory among the nations by sending out workers called by God to preach the gospel.¹

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-31-main-business-church-acts-131-3>

OPEN IT

1. At the beginning of Acts 13 we are introduced to some of the leaders of the church in Antioch and are told of their background. Take a moment and share with your group your family's place of origin/nationality. What things if any do you do to celebrate or honor this heritage?

SEE IT

Take 8 minutes to watch this video from The Bible Project that summarizes where we have been in Acts chapters 1–12 and then shares where we are heading in Acts 13–28.

<https://youtu.be/Z-17KxpjL0Q>

READ IT

Acts 13:1–12

EXPLORE IT

2. What church is the focal point in Acts 13?
3. What did the church send Paul and Barnabas to do?
4. Where did they go and what did they do when they got there?
5. Who opposed Paul and Barnabas?
6. What was Paul's response to this opposition?

APPLY IT

THE DREAM TEAM (vs.1–2)

In Acts 13 the scene shifts back to the church in Antioch, where some men who had been scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem had the audacity to speak the gospel to Gentiles (11:19). The hand of the Lord was with them, and many got saved. At the end of chapter 12, Luke reports that Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, where they had taken the gift for those affected by the famine. They brought back John Mark with them. This sets the stage for a major shift in the focus of Acts.

From now on, it is the Acts of the Apostle Paul. It is the story of the missionary thrust of the church in Antioch, resulting in the planting of many churches in the Gentile world. Just as the founding of the church in Antioch was a radical turn, with Jews and Gentiles getting saved and joining together on the basis of the cross, so Acts 13 is another turning point. The gospel goes out into Gentile territory, as the church in Antioch responds to its **rightful business**.²

7. What is the rightful business of the church? What good things can distract the church from fulfilling the purpose God has for it?

Acts 13:1 — Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

A committed group of shepherds watched over development of the Antioch church. This team was spiritually gifted to provide two things needed to help people grow up in relationship to Jesus Christ: prophecy and teaching. The leadership team at Antioch included these men:

- Barnabas — “Son of encouragement,” a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 11: 24).
- Simeon — Nickname: “Niger” (Latin for “dark-skinned” or “black”), probably an African.
- Lucius — A North African from Cyrene (modern Libya).
- Manaen — His name means “comforter,” a man with aristocratic connections.
- Saul — A trained rabbi, former persecutor of Christians, brought to Antioch by Barnabas to help disciple and equip converts (Acts 11: 25–26).

Antioch’s spiritual leadership team was as racially and socially varied as the people they served.³

² *ibid*

³ Girard, Robert C.. *The Book of Acts* (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2878-2893). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

8. What type of health and protection is found when a church is led by a team instead of just one individual?
9. What inherent difficulties must elder teams overcome to be productive and useful to God and the church?
10. Luke describes three activities of these five church leaders in verses 1–3. What are they and what do they tell us about the role and focus of church leadership?

It is significant that the church in Antioch had such a culturally diverse leadership in keeping with the diversity of the population of the city (13:1). Did Luke mention the names and backgrounds of the leaders to highlight this diversity? We cannot make a binding principle out of this one text, but what happened in Antioch was certainly remarkable and may be an example worthy of emulation. I will go so far as to say that fostering leaders from different cultural backgrounds is a goal to work at in all churches that have a diversity in their membership.⁴

11. The church in Antioch had found a way to minister and reach the diverse population that surrounded it. In what ways can the church today follow their great example?

⁴ Fernando, Ajith; Fernando, Ajith. *Acts* (The NIV Application Commentary Book 5) (p. 328). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

- 12. What blessings can a church miss out on when it becomes too homogenous? In what ways can we unknowingly hinder other people groups or cultures from feeling welcome and connected?**

BOLDLY GO WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE BEFORE (vv. 3–4)

The Christians at Antioch surrounded Barnabas and Saul and John Mark, the young man who would go with them, touching them in a show of love and support, sending them on their way. John Mark, the third member of the missionary team, was Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10). John Mark was an eyewitness, unlike Barnabas and Saul, of Jesus' life and death. He was raised in a godly home. His mother's house was a gathering place for Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Later, he authored the first "Life of Christ" ever published — the Gospel of Mark.

The church's sending act was significant for three reasons. First, Christ's ambassadors were sent out not as independents but connected to the sending church. Second, the laying on of hands symbolized the congregation's support. Third, the church's willingness to deny itself the ministry of two of its valued leaders in order to share the good news with strangers demonstrates a spirit of liberality.⁵

- 13. Why is it important for a church to not only send out missionaries but also remain in close relationship with them?**

- 14. How does a robust missions focus strengthen a church? How have you been encouraged in your faith as a result of the work of missionaries?**

⁵ Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2913-2922). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

- 15. In what ways can a church and its people support and minister to the missionaries it sends out? What are some unique needs and concerns that missionaries may have that might be overlooked by other Christians?**

The course of their first mission was quite simple. They set sail from Seleucia, the port city near Antioch, for Salamis, the port city of the island of Cyprus. It was an easy 130-mile voyage. The ancient world regarded Cyprus very much like we regard Hawaii or the Bahamas. William Barclay says it was called *Markaria* or “Happy Isle” because its climate was so perfect and its resources so abundant. For some it was a place in the sun or a “Fantasy Island.” But it was also a needy place, the crossroads of the Mediterranean, and a natural place to go to first because Barnabas was a Cypriot himself. Upon arrival, their method was simple — travel the island from east to west, from Salamis to Paphos, a distance of about ninety miles, preaching the gospel first in the Jewish synagogues but also to the Gentiles.⁶

- 16. This first missionary team traveled past many towns and cities that could have used the gospel and instead were led to the island of Cyprus. How does a church go about determining where to send missionary workers? What things should be considered during this process?**

- 17. Since we are all called to be missionaries, where and to whom has God uniquely called you to serve? What unique opportunities and obstacles do you face as you serve God there?**

⁶ Hughes, R. Kent. *Acts: The Church Afire (Preaching the Word)* (Kindle Locations 3243-3249). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

AN OPEN OPPORTUNITY (vs. 5–7)

Acts 13:7 — Sergius Paulus...summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God.

He was hungry for more than the idolatry of his day and the counsel of his personal prophet, Bar-Jesus (“Son of the Savior”). While Bar-Jesus may have promised to know the way of salvation, Paul’s message was radically different from anything he taught. And Paul’s teaching apparently attracted Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man of high standing. When we engage neighborhoods and nations with the gospel, we should expect that some people will be open to our message. We may find an audience with “the least of these,” those who are poor, uneducated, and marginalized or with “the greatest of these,” those who are powerful, wealthy, and influential. In this case the missionaries found an audience with an influential leader.

Their experience reminds us that you never know to whom the Lord will direct you — who will listen to the gospel. Understand that these apostles were nobodies compared to the Roman proconsul, yet here they find themselves in front of him, speaking the good news to his heart. Paul told the Corinthians that the conversion of the powerful was rare (1 Corinthians 1: 26), but here in Paphos a powerful man found himself attracted to the Word.⁷

18. What types of things does God use to open the hearts of non-believers? Looking back to your own conversion story, how did God open your heart to His love and gospel message?

How can we as believers discern when someone seems open to spiritual things?

OPPOSITION (vv.8–11)

The opponent in this passage is Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas, meaning “sorcerer” (v. 8). Romans placed value on omens and divination. They also thought the Jews had inside information on spiritual matters, a fact helping to establish Bar-Jesus as a popular sage. He, however, was a false prophet in touch with dark powers. He was not a “magician” (v. 6 ESV) who pulls rabbits out of hats but a superstitious occult leader. Bar-Jesus proved to be a false prophet, opposing the Word of God that Paul and Barnabas taught. Bar-Jesus tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith, seeing the missionaries as a threat to his prestige and livelihood (Stott, *Message of Acts*, 219).

The gospel confronts idols. And when collisions happen, heated opposition sometimes ensues.

⁷ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 4138-4147). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

The confrontation between the missionaries and Bar-Jesus was intense (vv. 9–11). Perhaps you think Paul’s resulting curse on the man isn’t very nice. Know that the fate of Sergius Paulus’s soul was at stake in this situation, and Paul — out of deep compassion — wanted him to believe.

Paul is “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Bar-Jesus is filled with “deceit and trickery.” Paul is a child of God. Bar-Jesus, far from representing his name, is a “son of the devil” (cf. John 8:44). Paul is telling everyone about the righteous One who makes sinners righteous. Bar-Jesus is an “enemy of all that is right.” Paul is announcing the way of salvation (cf. Luke 3: 4). Bar-Jesus is “perverting” the way of salvation. Instead of advocating real conversion, Bar-Jesus advocates spiritual perversion. As a consequence, the Lord judges Bar-Jesus. He strikes him blind, perhaps representing his spiritual blindness (John 3:9–20; 9:39). This move was particularly fitting since the man was a proponent of darkness (Isa 5:20). His judgment was a foretaste of what will happen to all who fail to bow the knee to Jesus: they will be thrown into utter darkness (Matt 8:12; 25:30).⁸

19. Paul told the Colossian Christians that our conversation should be full of grace and seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6). How are we to square up Paul’s words in Colossians and his example in Acts 13:9–11?

When, if ever, should we use Paul’s tactics in Acts 13 in our own evangelism?

GOOD TRIUMPHS OVER EVIL (vs.12)

Luke concludes by telling us a great report (v. 12). While the darkness of judgment came on Bar-Jesus, the light of salvation burst on the Gentile ruler Sergius Paulus! As in the early chapters of Acts, a miracle provided an occasion to proclaim the gospel, and this prominent Roman official, who had “no religious background in Judaism, ”(Stott, *Message of Acts*, 320), became a member of the family of God. Let this conversion story encourage you as you seek to make the gospel known to unbelievers. Some people will repent and turn to Christ when a bold witness makes the good news clear to them. God is at work in the world, bringing all sorts of people to faith in Christ through the witness of faithful missionaries! Your Sergius Paulus is waiting!⁹

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

20. How does this story of light defeating darkness encourage you to be bolder and more confident with the gospel this week? What things must change in your life so that you might venture out as God's missionary to a lost and broken world?

Take time as a group to pray for one another to be bold in our witness as Paul and Barnabas were in Acts 13.