

A SENT MESSENGER



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Missionaries are sent to go wherever the Lord calls them (Acts 13:1-3).
2. Missionaries are sent to preach to whomever will listen (Acts 13:13-15,42-46).
3. Missionaries are sent to strengthen the church however they can (Acts 14:21-23).

Background Passage: Acts 13–14

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The early church followed the Lord's leading to proclaim the gospel wherever He sent them, beginning a missionary movement that has not ceased.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus told His disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, reminding us that God's people are "on offense," continuing the mission Jesus began. God's plan is for missionaries to take the powerful and good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness with full confidence that Jesus will build His church.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God sent Jesus to us to provide our salvation, we send, support, and consider being missionaries to serve those who have never heard the gospel.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **How would you define a missionary?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion; often people define a missionary as someone who leaves all they know to go to a faraway land to share the gospel, and that is wonderfully true; the Bible's description of a missionary seems much broader and more inclusive; a missionary is simply someone who is "sent," the early church spread the gospel as they went about their daily lives)

TRANSITION: Missionaries are those who go wherever the Lord calls them. For Paul, that meant he was sent to the Gentiles—non-Jewish people whom God always promised to bring into His kingdom.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). His Spirit first descended upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), and it expanded outward from Jerusalem to the areas just beyond. But now, beginning in chapter 13, the gospel was rolling out from Jerusalem to the entire world. Paul was God's chosen instrument to make this happen. Paul would embark on a series of missionary journeys into all areas of the Roman world, spreading the gospel to the Gentiles just as it had already spread among the Jews.



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POINT 1

MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO GO WHEREVER THE LORD CALLS THEM (ACTS 13:1-3).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 13:1-3** from his or her Bible.

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. **2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” **3** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

INSTRUCT: Talk about **verse 1** and explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 118):

God calls the church to be a diverse group of people who are called to share the good news of Jesus to more diverse people.

- Antioch was an important city in the ancient Roman world. It would take an important city and an important group to pull Luke’s attention away from Jerusalem, where most of Acts took place.
- Note the men listed here: Barnabas (a Christian leader from Jerusalem, known as a great encourager, a ministry partner with Paul [Acts 4:36; 11:22-24]); Simeon (likely a Jew, based on his Jewish name, also called Niger [Latin for “black”], perhaps due to a dark complexion); Lucius (a man from Cyrene who could have been a founder of the church at Antioch [11:20]); Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, who was a ruler during that time, possibly older and wealthy); and Saul.¹
- Saul had come a long way since we last saw him in Acts 9. He was no longer a “baby” Christian. In Acts 13, he was recognized as a teacher in the church at Antioch. Alongside other godly men, Saul took his place, sharing the gospel and teaching the Word of God.
- There is no distinction made between the men as to who were teachers and who were prophets. It may not be very distinguishable, and that’s why Luke chose not to identify each man in their distinct role. Speaking prophetically is teaching, and teaching is prophetic work, so we shouldn’t make too much of the comment found in verse 1.

ASK: (DDG p. 118)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **Reviewing the men mentioned as prophets and teachers, what does this teach us about the church body?** (the importance of diversity in a church; the importance of diversity in the leaders of a church; diversity covers culture and background and socio-economic status and more)

SYRIAN ANTIOCH

Antioch of Syria, or Antioch on the Orontes, is to be distinguished from Pisidian Antioch (in Asia Minor) (mentioned in Acts 13:14). Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1) was a wealthy, port city whose god was Tyche, the god of fortune. Here, many Jews from the Diaspora had settled because of its rich economy. Here also was where believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Luke’s main point is to emphasize that mission is inaugurated by God himself.”³

–I. Howard Marshall (1934–2015)

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 2-3**, explain the following (DDG p. 118):

The Holy Spirit will call those who are already faithfully worshiping and ministering to continue to grow His kingdom.

- During their worship and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders in the church at Antioch. One commentator noted, “The word translated ‘worshiping’ (leitourgeo) literally means ‘ministering.’ In classical Greek it was used for ‘doing public work at one’s own expense.’ In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the first five books of the Bible, this word group was ‘used almost exclusively for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.’”² These leaders were in the midst of serving and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke.
- Though many were listed as prophets and teachers, only Barnabas and Saul were called to be set apart to go. The others still had work to do in the church at Antioch.
- It was probably a hard command for these church leaders. By sending Saul and Barnabas, they would lose two very important leaders. In any church, that is a difficult task, but a necessary one. Missionaries must be sent if the gospel is to spread. God does the saving, but He has ordained that the saving is done through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:14-15). It is likely that Saul and Barnabas did not fully understand the work the Lord called them to.
- In verse 3, the church sent them off after they fasted, prayed, and laid hands on Saul and Barnabas. This is perhaps the very first missionary assignment given by the church. They were not forced out of their homes by some government action. They did not independently decide to go. They were instructed by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the church, being sent out as heralds of the King. It became the model by which thousands of churches have sent out missionaries.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 118)

What can we learn from Saul and Barnabas’s obedience to listen to God’s call? (if we are waiting for God to speak, we must first be worshiping and fasting; we must have ears to hear and be ready to obey; we must listen to the leadership of our church in accordance with the Holy Spirit; we corroborate with other believers to discern God’s voice)

TRANSITION: Saul and Barnabas headed off on their first missionary journey. They took with them the blessing of their church and the power of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to whomever would listen.

POINT 2

MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO PREACH TO WHOMEVER WILL LISTEN (ACTS 13:13-15,42-46).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 13:13-15** from his or her Bible.

13 Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, **14** but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”

HIGHLIGHT: Refer back to **PACK ITEM 4: PROMISE OF ACTS** to wrap up how the disciples were sent and had gone to Judea, Samaria, and now to the ends of the earth as Jesus had commanded. Reflect on Paul’s calling and mission to reach the Gentiles with the gospel and highlight the following as it refers to **verses 13-15** (DDG p. 118):

When God calls you to go and share the gospel, whether the people respond favorably or poorly, it is all in His hands.

- Paul was now the leader of the group of missionaries, as Luke mentions his name first and includes Barnabas as part of “his companions.”
- John, also known as John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), was a companion of the two missionaries (Acts 13:5). Paul considered John’s leaving in verse 13 as a serious failing, so much so that Paul refused to bring him along on another missionary journey (15:36-41). One thing to note is that disagreement did not stop the missionary work but rather multiplied it even more as Barnabas and John Mark eventually went one way and Paul and his companions went another, spreading the gospel even further and faster than they could have done together.
- In this passage, Paul went inland to Pisidian Antioch and, as he always did (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,16-17; 18:4,19; 19:8; 28:17), Paul went first to the synagogue. In this instance, the rulers in the synagogue responded favorably to Paul and his companions and invited them to speak a word of encouragement to the congregation after the reading from the Law and the Prophets that day. Paul did so by sharing the gospel message, probably starting with where they left off in the Scriptures.

ASK: (DDG p. 118)

How is the gospel a word of encouragement to us today? (it is a plan of redemption and salvation; it offers hope and forgiveness for those stricken with guilt and shame; it brings new life, full and complete because of Jesus)



PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

Pisidian Antioch was an important military center of the Romans in the highlands of Asia Minor. Today, it is near modern Yalvaç, Türkiye. To go from Perga to Pisidian Antioch would have been quite a trek, having to cross the Taurus Mountains.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 13:42-46** from his or her Bible.

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. **43** And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. **44** The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. **46** And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 42-46**, explain the following idea (DDG p. 118):

No matter who rejects the gospel, we are called to continue to preach to those who will listen.

- In verse 42, Paul and Barnabas were invited back the next Sabbath to speak in the synagogue. It is likely that Paul continued to walk them through the Old Testament story, highlighting Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture.
- As they left the synagogue, some Jews couldn't get enough. The revelation of Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture fascinated them. They wanted to hear more. Paul and Barnabas did not push them away but drew them in closer, happy to preach to those with hungry hearts.
- The following Sabbath, “the whole city” came to listen. The gospel message definitely draws a crowd.
- But then some of the Jews started their crusade against Paul, trying to contradict Paul out of jealousy (v. 45). Paul and Barnabas explained to them that they had the privilege of hearing the gospel first, being Jews, but since they rejected it, they would now go to the Gentiles.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 118)

Why is it hard to persevere in sharing the gospel when many reject it, and how do we endure? (because it seems like our work is useless or doesn't pay off; because our hearts can get hardened to rejection; because we get weary and tired; to endure we need to pray and rely on God's strength; we do things in pairs or as a team; we simply obey and know that God is at work even when we don't see it)

TRANSITION: Missionaries cannot control who will come to Christ; they must only preach and strengthen the church wherever they are.

POINT 3

MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH HOWEVER THEY CAN (ACTS 14:21-23).



PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Scan this QR code for a map and overview of Paul's travels on his first missionary journey.

SUMMARIZE: The Gentiles rejoiced when they heard Paul say they would preach to them and the gospel spread throughout the region (Acts 13:48-49). Paul and Barnabas then went to Iconium and Lystra and were met with both acceptance and persecution. In Lystra, they healed a lame man, got mistaken for gods, and then Paul was stoned by the Jews but survived. They then went to Derbe, and we arrive at Acts 14:21.

DIG: As we skim over the events of Acts 13–14, however, we notice that there were those who wanted to listen to the gospel message and those who didn't. Some were Jews and some were Gentiles. These Gentiles may have wanted to learn more because they had already seen God's general revelation around them through creation, characteristics of love and mercy, or other things. Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine "General Revelation" in the DDG (p. 119).

Key Doctrine #1: General Revelation: General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His creation (Ps. 19) and through the human conscience (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held accountable for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1–2).

ASK: (DDG p. 119)

Where do you mostly see God's general revelation? (in the stars in the sky; in God's creative work in nature; in the smiles of a baby; in the joys of food; in the love of my spouse; in the goodness in the world)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 14:21-23** from his or her Bible.

21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, **22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. **23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

EXPLAIN: Refer to **PACK ITEM 3: SUFFERING FOR JESUS** to summarize how suffering for Christ's sake is part of the Christian's journey. Using **verses 21-23**, explain the following (DDG p. 119):

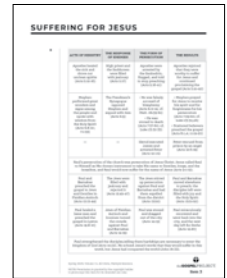
Missions exist to spread the gospel and to strengthen the church, encouraging the body to endure trials.

- In the city of Derbe in the province of Galatia, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and made disciples. To make disciples is to teach, train, and equip believers to follow Jesus.
- Once their work in Derbe was finished, they made a return trip home, stopping in each city where they planted churches, revisiting Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Despite the hostility, they returned to encourage believers in those various cities.
- They wanted to check in on their people. Much opposition in those cities made persevering in the Christian faith extremely difficult. Suffering was a common reality for the early church, and a visit from Paul and his companions would have lifted their spirits immensely.
- Paul's encouragement to the churches was about the necessity of enduring hardships to enter the kingdom of God. These churches needed to know that their suffering was not for nothing. As Paul would write elsewhere, it was a necessary and glorious part of living for Christ (Rom. 5:3-5; 8:17).⁴
- As Paul and Barnabas encouraged the new churches, they also raised up elders. These elders were the pastors charged with overseeing the congregation's spiritual health.
- After appointing elders, they prayed and fasted. Notice that Paul and Barnabas were selected for missionary work after they were first praying and fasting. These disciples earnestly sought the Lord for the right men to lead. By committing them to God, they handed these new churches to the One who loved them and saved them.

ASK: (DDG p. 119)

How can we help believers to persevere in trials? (by serving one another with tangible needs, by encouraging one another and praying for each other; by pointing to Christ and His victory; by being a listening ear)

TRANSITION: Paul and Barnabas then returned home, where they reported to the Jerusalem church how the gospel had spread among the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-29).



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus told His disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, reminding us that God's people are "on offense," continuing the mission Jesus began. God's plan is for missionaries to take the powerful and good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness with full confidence that Jesus will build His church. Because God sent Jesus to us to provide our salvation, we send, support, and consider being missionaries to serve those who have never heard the gospel.

HEAD:

God is the original missionary. His Word has been preached from the foundation of the world. His promises were kept and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Every people group in every part of the world needs to hear this message. It is the world's one hope, and God is calling us to share it. For some of us, that means we must leave our homes and go to the unreached. For others, it means we stay where we are and serve as we can. But we are all missionaries. The only difference is the place.

How does having a missionary mindset change the way you approach your life?

HEART:

Perhaps all this talk about missions causes you to feel some guilt over how you've lived thus far. You can receive the gospel of Christ that frees you from guilt and shame and deploys you into this world with a message of hope and grace. You can stop feeling sorry for yourself that you haven't done as much as you think you should and that perhaps you're just not bold enough, and you can dare to believe that God can use you starting right now.

What prevents you from more ministry?

HANDS:

Perhaps God is calling you to go, or perhaps He is calling you to send others. You can make an impact in world missions today and forever. You can help, resource, pray, and do whatever God has called you to do, trusting Him with the work and the outcome.

What are the next steps you need to take to get more involved in mission work?

PRAY: Father, thank You that You are the original missionary, and that the work You call us to do is the work You started so long ago. Be with us and help us discern what our next steps are. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us remember, then, first of all, that we are required to suffer many tribulations; but let us also remember to add in mitigation that by them we are brought to the kingdom of God."⁵

–J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

POINT 1: MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO GO WHEREVER THE LORD CALLS THEM (ACTS 13:1-3).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“The narrative begins by describing how the church in Antioch was served by a group of prophets and teachers. Five names are listed. First comes Barnabas, who as a Christian leader from Jerusalem may have been regarded as the most important of the group, or perhaps the Christian of longest standing (for the way in which the first converts might become the leaders of the church see 1 Cor. 16:15f.). Secondly, there is Symeon, a man bearing a Jewish name and therefore in all probability a Jew; his other name, Niger, is Latin and means ‘dark-complexioned’; in view of the way in which he is mentioned just before a Cyrenian, it has been thought that he too came from Cyrene and is to be identified with the Simon who carried the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26), but, if so, it is surprising that Luke has spelled the two names differently from each other. Thirdly, there is Lucius from Cyrene, who was presumably one of the founder-members of the church (11:20). It has been conjectured that Lucius should be identified with Luke himself, an identification that was made by at least one early scribe, but it is improbable. Fourthly, we have Manaen, a Jewish name meaning ‘comforter’ who was an associate of Herod Antipas; the term member of the court could refer to a boy of the same age brought up as a companion of a prince or, more generally, to a courtier or friend of a ruler; whatever the precise meaning, it could be that Manaen was Luke’s source of information for material about Herod Antipas which is not found in the other Gospels. Finally, there is Paul, here given his Jewish name of Saul, as has been Luke’s usual practice up to this point (see verse 9 note).”⁶

+ **OPTIONAL DISCUSSION**

Whenever the Bible includes a list of names, it is important to slow down and notice who those people are. It is so easy for us to read over the list quickly to get to the action, but often the action can be misunderstood if we don’t first notice the names.

For example, in the opening of his gospel, Matthew lists Jesus’s ancestors. It includes all the people you would expect—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David—but it also includes some surprises. Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho, a city destroyed by God, who believed the spies Joshua sent to scope out the city. Like Rahab, Ruth was an outsider, a Moabite who came to Israel through her devotion to her mother-in-law and married Boaz. Just those two women show us that the line of Jesus included the outsider, the insider, the sinner, and the saint.

EXTRA

In Acts 13:1, the list of names shows us the kind of people Jesus pulled together in his church in the earliest of days. It was multiracial (Simeon). It was multi-gifted (prophets and teachers). It was diverse socio-economically (Manaen, Herod the ruler's friend). The list is more than just a list. It is a description of the diversity of Jesus's kingdom. Ask the group, "Why do you think diversity is important to God and what is the implication for our churches?"

POINT 2: MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO PREACH TO WHOMEVER WILL LISTEN (ACTS 13:13-15,42-46).

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine a gift so wonderful you can't imagine anyone not receiving it with the utmost joy. It has changed your life, and you want to share it with everyone you know so badly. But when you begin to share it, you notice some surprising reactions. Some receive it as gladly as you did, but others seem to get mad about it. You wonder why they are angry. How could they be? All you are doing is sharing the gift you've been given.

Over time, you realize anger isn't the right word. They are jealous. You can't imagine why at first, but then you realize it's because your gift has replaced them in some way. So they cut you down and treat you poorly.

That's what happened to Paul and Barnabas. The Jews grew jealous of the gospel gift the missionaries brought to town. They felt threatened, and instead of focusing on the gift that they, too, could have, their jealousy caused them to refuse the gift of salvation.

+ OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Ask the group how they would share the gospel with an unbeliever. It may be harder than it seems for many to articulate the basic tenants of the Christian faith. This is not an opportunity to shame anyone for not knowing exactly what to say but a teaching opportunity to help them formulate the words.

One good way to help the group formulate an answer is to use the creation, fall, redemption, and restoration paradigm that we find in the Bible. God created everything good, but Adam and Eve ushered sin into the world, which broke and ruined everything. Ever since, all children are born in sin. The world cries out for redemption. In the fullness of time, Jesus came into the world, being born of a virgin. He lived the perfect life we should have lived and gave Himself as a substitute on the cross to save us from the wrath of God that our sin earned us. On the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead, defeating sin and death, and He will one day return to set everything right.

POINT 3: MISSIONARIES ARE SENT TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH HOWEVER THEY CAN (ACTS 14:21-23).

+ COMMENTARY

“Every human being without exception is subject to many hardships. But the afflictions of the evil are their entrance to hell, while those of the saints work out very well and lead to a happy and joyful end. So their afflictions are aids to salvation because they make them share with Christ. Note that Paul and Barnabas were not content with saying ‘hardships,’ in the plural, but specified ‘many hardships,’ lest anyone succumb after he had suffered one or two, or a few at least. Believers must expect to pass through continual miseries, and then must prepare themselves not just for one kind of persecution but for many kinds. Although God treats some people more gently, he does not pamper any of his people so that they are free of all hardships.”⁷

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

There are a thousand ways to strengthen the church. You can start with your own. Are you serving the Lord faithfully and sacrificially? Perhaps you are sitting back and receiving the ministry of the church, and perhaps that’s exactly what you need right now. If you have served significantly in the recent past, have some life circumstance that prevents you from significant investment, or are a new Christian, receiving the ministry may be the right step for you right now. But if that is not your current position, how can you step up and serve? The church needs you.

Maybe you could serve in the children’s ministry teaching kids the Bible. Maybe you could serve in one of your areas of expertise, like finances, music, or hospitality. Just as in any organization, there are often more needs than resources.

But you could also look beyond the walls of your church. Perhaps there is a way to serve the global cause of Christ. How can you support missionaries? Does your church have any that need help? Do you know someone personally? Maybe all you can do is pray. That’s fine. Are you praying? Maybe you can give. Are you? Maybe you can go. Will you?

Whatever the Lord calls you to, are you being faithful to follow Him? Remember, that is His only call to us—to follow Him. We may feel we don’t have what we need right now to do the work. Relax. He will provide. He’s good at this. He’s a professional. He’s been doing it longer than anyone else. Trust Him.

References

1. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 228.
2. Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 374.
3. I. Howard Marshall, 230.
4. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 413.
5. J. I. Packer, “Introduction,” in *Acts*, ed. Alister McGrath, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), Ac 14:22.
6. I. Howard Marshall, 228–229.
7. J. I. Packer, Ac 14:22.