



# Evangelism 101

## Lessons from Paul's Journeys

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When Jesus sent out the twelve on what we often call the limited commission, He gave them several, detailed instructions: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for

*your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. Whoever does not receive you, nor*

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*heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.”* Mt 10:5-14 On the other hand, when he sent them out with what we call

the great commission, He simply said, “Go, make disciples, baptize, teach.” (Mt 28:19-20)

The apostles were more experienced after three years with Jesus and perhaps didn’t need detailed instructions, but how about us? When Steven was stoned, the apostles remained in Jerusalem, but the saints were scattered; “*and they went everywhere preaching the word.*” Acts 8:4 They, like us, don’t seem to have been given explicit instructions about how to “preach the word.” However, we can learn from their and the Apostles’ examples. In this publication issue we’ll consider different aspects of Apostolic examples taken primarily from Paul’s missionary journeys as he successfully spread the good news of the Kingdom throughout Asia Minor and southeastern Europe. (Rom 10:18) As you read through this publication, please note that writers have identified specific actions that we can follow to help us better spread the gospel.

Its worth noting the success of the apostles and early Christians in spreading the gospel . Paul wrote Colossians about 62 AD where he stated, “. . . ***the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.***” Col 1:23 Note the tense of Paul’s proclamation. Secular history corroborates Paul’s assertion so that before the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the gospel had indeed spread throughout the known world. Emulating their example should contribute to our success today.

Paul concluded his third missionary journey in Jerusalem and was almost immediately falsely accused by the Jews and taken into custody by the Roman guard for his own protection (Acts 21:10-14). Thus began Imprisonment which would be his lot for the final chapter of his life. Paul could have easily given up, but his greatest work was perhaps before him. You’ve probably heard the adage, “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade;” and that’s exactly what Paul did.

Instead of cowering in a corner, Paul steeled himself

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for what would become a tortuous journey to Rome. Shortly after he was taken into custody the Lord stood beside him and told him, *“take courage, for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause in Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”* Acts 23:11 He had proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles, he would now defend his faith before their kings and rulers, as well as to soldiers and sailors.

In Caesarea he appeared before Felix the governor, discussing, *“faith in Christ Jesus . . . righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.’”* Acts 24:24-25 Paul didn’t press the case, but allowed the Word an opportunity to germinate in Felix’ heart. As much as Paul and we may want someone to respond to the gospel, we must humbly accept that God will give His increase, in His time.

As he sailed toward Rome Paul encountered a violent storm that ultimately destroyed the ship; yet in the midst of grave danger he encouraged and comforted the crew with these words, *“this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’”* Acts 27:22-24 And so it was that, *“they were all brought safely to land.”* Acts 27:44 There is no substitute for genuine faith. One of our most powerful evangelistic tools is our own childlike trust in God.

When Paul reached Rome, he initially lived under guard in his own rented quarters and openly received visitors. Paul took full advantage of these occasions by preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the

Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). Instead of seeing himself as a victim and losing heart, he saw the glass as more than half full. In Philippians 1:12-14 he states, *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”* *“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”* Rom 8:28b

## Willing & Passionate

Michael Parks

The Lord’s church is part of God’s kingdom, and has a need for workers. Naturally there are many kinds of work that needs doing. 2 Timothy 3:16 intimates that the word of God will leave a man *“thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* The word “work” is an all-inclusive term. It points out a couple of things. First, that scripture is the source of these good works. Second, that scripture will prepare the person to do those works. It would be right then to conclude that I can find approved and necessary work for the Lord, and a training manual of sorts for how to do that work all right within scripture. One won’t need training for years in a seminary to do this work, and scripture alone can be the guide.

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In Luke 10:2 Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. He then also instructs the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest might send out laborers to collect that harvest. Obviously in spiritual terms the Lord is saying that there are many willing souls who would enter the Lord's kingdom, if only there were workers to reach out to them and bring them in, or as it were, collect the harvest. This means that the Lord has assigned the work of bringing others into the kingdom to the duty of man. This is a profound consideration to realize that believers are not added to the kingdom through an irresistible force of God's work, but rather they are brought in by the work of men and women doing the work we see being done in Luke 10. It is the work of bringing the Kingdom to the people. The laborers go to the harvest; they don't wait for it to come in through the front door. In Acts 13:1-4 we see a similar example where disciples are being sent to the harvest. We see in this context that Saul and Barnabas are sent off to the work they were appointed to do. The work is one and the same in both contexts. We see men capable of preaching and teaching the gospel message of Christ being sent to potential converts.

Another interesting commonality between these passages is that in both cases there was fervent or earnest praying. It appears the purpose of the prayers were aimed at not only finding laborers, but finding the right, qualified laborers. Jesus actually commands that earnest prayer be offered in Luke 10:2, so that laborers will be sent. I think this implies we should not assume that people will just accidentally go. "Going" must be in-

tended, prayed for, and provision made. Men and women are not just magically prepared to accomplish this work, but must themselves be taught and nurtured. In 2 Timothy 2:2 we see this principle, where Paul instructs Timothy to teach faithful men the things he has learned, with a view to these men being able to teach yet others.

In both the Luke and Acts context we also learn something about the type of men doing this work. We learn something about their qualifications that make them ready for the work. It starts with an attitude of willingness. In my personal life there are many things that need doing. I may be perfectly capable of doing these things, but I've come to find that if I am not willing, they never seem to be accomplished except through the careful and tenacious management of a honey-do list. In this example you have a worker able, but not willing. It can become common in churches that elders and deacons are reduced to managing a form of honey-do lists across the entirety of workers in the congregation. It is one thing to have a list for the purposes of organizing the work. It is another to be constantly in the position of cajoling others to do the work. We should be willing to do the work that needs doing in collecting the harvest. We are instructed to pray earnestly for the harvesters; and we should have the same willing attitude of the disciples in Luke, and Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. The *"here am I, send me"* attitude should rule our hearts.

Finally, a point about enthusiasm. We have all met the individual, who through lack of enthusiasm, makes the work extremely

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unpleasant. There is an added dynamic here also of giving to the Lord, and others. In 2 Corinthians 8:5, Paul describes how the brethren “*gave of themselves first.*” In the preceding verse (4), Paul describes how they begged him earnestly for the favor of participation. If each of us honestly examines our heart we can think of a time in our Christian walk when we earnestly desired to participate in the work. Hopefully that time is not your past, but rather your present. When brothers and sisters are engaged in the work with an attitude of giving and privilege, they will bring with them a passion for the work. This passion can sustain the individual through the difficulties that are sure to come, and also impact the effectiveness of the work. We as harvesters are bringing the kingdom of God to the harvest itself. If we cannot find excitement and passion in doing so, we have a heart condition that needs careful examination and healing. The harvest is plentiful, and the harvesters are few. Let it be said we are willing and passionate to gather the Lord’s harvest.

## Opposition

Tom Rutledge

Is there anything worse than getting opposition to something you are trying to accomplish? It might come from someone who just really does not like you, or maybe a friend whom you’ve had a falling out with or a family member who has been a discourager, or even worse someone who is a fellow Christian. But it is a fact of life that we will have opposition in some form to things we are trying to achieve in this life. You could

say that opposition is the “silent killer” for some whose hopes and dreams have been dashed just because they did not have the inner strength to overcome the obstacles or opposition.

Maybe it was a personal goal and where there was great opposition to our own objectives and I failed to gather the might to press on to my goal. When it comes to evangelism, it appears that one of the reasons we see less evangelism is fear of being rejected or opposed by - *The Opposition*. We do not like to be rejected and so we allow the opposition to win with our own complacency.

Since the day that Eve took of the forbidden fruit, Satan has worked to oppose God’s plan to save mankind. Opposition is such a normal part of the spiritual realm in which we live, we should not be alarmed when we too are opposed when we try to live a Christian life and spread the Good News. The more we are ready to accept that Christians and the Church live in a hostile spiritual world, where the majority of the world is influenced by Satan and that he is using every means to oppose the salvation of man, the more prepared and effective we can be in spreading the Gospel.

Opposition is like resistance or friction. In the design of a motor vehicle, every aspect of friction must be taken into account from wind friction to the friction inside the mechanics of the engine. It means the engineers must design a power plant that can overcome whatever friction there might be. A true believer, must understand that by the power of God we are able to deal with the opposition to the gospel.

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Because there is such a stigma about opposition to what the Church stands for and what Christians practice, it seems we have become overly sensitive about what people think and the possibility of being rejecting by our efforts to share the gospel with them. The good news is, that even with all this opposition, the Church has flourished and thrived since it came with great power as we read in Acts 2. She has grown from those saved on that first day to where we see that the Gospel is thriving today.

In Matthew 10, when Jesus gathered His apostles to call them into service and teaching the gospel, he tells them later in the chapter, verse 14, that any who oppose them they were to “shake off the dust of their feet” and move on. Jesus knew there would be opposition to the gospel.

Jesus encourages us to embrace opposition in such a way so as to be glad when it happens –

**Matthew 5:11-12**

*“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Hebrews 11:35-38.** The writer of Hebrews describes those who were faithful in the past who embraced opposition to the extreme of living in terrible conditions or laying down their lives . . .

*Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they*

*might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*

You could say that one of the themes of the book of Acts is the opposition the Jews had against the Church and the gospel. Once Paul was converted, after being part of the opposition, he soon learned the ferocious nature of it to himself and others who were trying to evangelize and start new churches. That was evidenced by the events we read about in Acts 14 and 15. Jesus taught His disciples that it was a fact that the “world” as a whole hated Him. In John 15, Jesus said that if we are not of the world, the world will hate us. If they persecuted Jesus, those who follow Him will most likely be persecuted or rejected as well (v.18-27).

The question for us is do we really believe that those who oppose the gospel are going to win? If we believe we are on the winning side of the battle, then why do we not act more like we are on the winning team? Nothing is going to defeat the Church of the gospel of Christ. It was what the dark side of the crucifixion was all about – a great opposition from the Jews to accepting Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Yet they did not win.

Matthew 16:18 Jesus told his disciples that the gates of Hades would not prevail or

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overcome the church. There is no safer place to “dwell” than in the church of God where all the greatest opposition cannot defeat or overcome the Church. It may overcome us, if we allow it, but never the Kingdom of God.

That’s why Paul reaffirmed in Romans 8:31, that *“if God is for us, who is against us?”* There is no opposition that can defeat God which is why he later said in verses 38 and 39 that there was absolutely nothing that separates us from the love of God.

## Tailor the Gospel Message

Kelly Johnson

Paul traveled much of the known world in his missionary journeys. It is interesting that while Jesus hardly traveled outside Israel, Paul traveled around the Mediterranean Sea taking the message of Jesus to many diverse peoples. To be sure, Paul encountered many different cultures, and presented the Gospel to each of them. In order to do that effectively Paul had to tailor the message to the audience. He did not change the Gospel but changed how he presented it to the people.

It was Paul’s custom to first go to the synagogue of the Jews (if available) and teach there. He would use the history of the Jewish people, including the written and oral traditions, to illustrate that Jesus was the expected Messiah. When Paul and Barnabas visited Pisidian Antioch, they followed this custom and went to the synagogue. In Acts 13:13 – 41 we can read about Paul’s presen-

tation and see how he used the history of Israel to make his arguments for Christ Jesus. Because Paul knew that the Jews there would be acquainted with history, he used that as his starting point to teach Jesus

Even as Paul did this and was very successful at gathering a crowd the following Sabbath, the Jews became jealous and were contradicting what Paul said. This led Paul to take the Gospel message to the Gentiles. We see this described in Acts 13:44-52.

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas were preaching and preformed a miracle. The people mistook them for gods and wanted to worship them. Paul, with great difficulty, restrained the people from making sacrifice to Barnabas and himself. Using just a little scripture, Paul made an argument based on God’s provisions through nature. Paul talked about the rains and the fruitful seasons that God provides. These are things that the Greeks would understand much more than the history of Israel (Acts 14:8-18).

Another example of Paul adjusting his message to make it easier for the audience to understand comes from his time in Athens. This is described in Acts chapter 17. While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul was troubled by the many idols that were present in the city. Instead of just giving up on the Athenians because of their idolatry, Paul found a place to have common ground. A place where he could start teaching from and that they would understand.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul said *“Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your*

worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." Note how Paul used something that they were familiar with as a starting point for presenting the Gospel message. If you read on in the chapter you will find that some believed, and others did not. (Acts 17:22-33)

Paul tailored the presentation to the audience. He used a starting point where there was common knowledge or a common belief so that the message presented was not completely foreign to them. He did not change the gospel message, but he did present it in a way that he felt was most likely to impact them. When we bring the gospel to others, we need to use the same care and wisdom that Paul showed.

Paul traveled all around the Mediterranean Sea preaching God's word. He encountered very diverse cultures and customs. Yet he was able to present the Gospel to them in a way that they could understand. I often marvel at how Paul was open to the various cultural differences he must have experienced when he revisited the churches he started. But even with the differences in culture which likely influenced the form of their worship, there was no need to change the Gospel message. The theology remained consistent while the worship services may have been very different on the surface.

In my trips to Australia I experienced differences in the worship services that were quite apparent. The order of services was different. The people dress differently, by a completely different standard. But the Gospel message, while delivered differently

from how we might see here in the States, was the same message. When our preacher, Steven Baxley, travels to the Czech Republic and he takes the same gospel to them as he does to us. But it is very likely that his message is presented differently, in accordance with the audience, their culture and their knowledge of God's word.

As we consider how we can spread the gospel in the areas where we have influence, we must always remember that our audience should impact how we deliver the Gospel message. The content of the message was set by God and it is not ours to change. But the delivery of that message is up to us, and we should adjust our approach based on what we know about our audience. We are still operating on the instructions that Jesus gave to the disciples so many years ago *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Mt 28:19-20 By taking into account our audience, just as Paul did, we can do the best job possible presenting God's word to the saved and the lost.

## **Churches Were Established, Organized, Strengthened**

Aaron Lumpkin

*"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth,"* Paul told the Corinthian

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saints. 1 Cor 3:6 While Paul's point was to address various factions that had developed in the church in Corinth, he spells out an important formula that he used wherever he went to preach the gospel: **teaching + nourishing = growth**. This simple equation is as understandable today as it was to the Corinthians who originally read his words. And while it rings true for an individual's growth, he's talking about the church in Corinth as a whole. Paul goes on to compare them to a building and he and Apollos, who apparently worked with the saints in Corinth after Paul's departure, as builders who were building on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:10ff).

We understand that we are saved individually and will each give our own account to God (2 Cor 5:10). Although saved individually, God considers us collectively to be His covenant people (Jer 31:33). As the apostle Paul travelled and preached the gospel, he clearly understood that part of his work was the establishment of assemblies (churches) of those who believed his message. When he would come to a new city, it was customary for Paul to first preach the gospel in local assemblies (synagogues) of Jews (Acts 17:2). As Jews or Gentiles accepted the truth and turned to follow Jesus, they followed this pattern of assembling together with those of "like precious faith." Whenever we read of the good news being received in a new area, we likewise usually see that these disciples banded together to form local churches, for the logical purpose of supporting each other. Paul spells out his expectations for the Philippian saints on this need for cooperation and unity, saying, *"so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of*

*you that you are standing firm in **one** spirit, with **one** mind striving **together** for the faith of the gospel."* Phil 1:27

A critical part of building up the churches involved organizing each church according to God's plan. We can read of numerous references to elders in the original local church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 16:4; 21:8), and likely to deacons as well (Acts 6). Following this pattern, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each of the new churches they started on their first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). Paul later leaves Titus on the island of Crete to *"set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city,"* clearly emphasizing the necessity of shepherds in a local church. His emotional plea to the bishops of Ephesus in Acts 20 demonstrates just how crucial the role of good shepherding is to the health of a local flock of God's people. Deacons, or those who serve a local group in a formal role, are mentioned much less frequently by Paul, but are also intended to be part of the organizational of a local church. After working with the church in Ephesus for 3 years, Paul leaves Timothy there to keep working with the brethren and gives him instructions on who is qualified to serve as an overseer and who can fill the role of a deacon (1 Tim 3:1-13). Beyond these formally assigned roles, Paul instructed that every disciple had an important part to play in the design of a local body, comparing the individual saint to different parts of a human body (Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:11-16). Paul knew that for a local church to function as God intends, it should be organized as God intends.

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As Paul continued his travels from place to place, he kept the brethren he had previously worked with close to his heart and in his constant prayers (Phil 1:4; 1 Th 2:10). He knew that the faith of these brethren needed to be developed and took a keen interest in ensuring this happened. Of Paul's writings in the New Testament canon, 9 of his 13 attributed epistles are addressed to established groups of saints so that they might be strengthened and continue to grow. He also refers to several other letters he wrote to various groups likely with this same goal in mind. Beyond just writing letters, Paul would often send some of his traveling companions and "fellow workers" to revisit these various churches. Timothy, for example, was sent by Paul to Thessalonica, Ephesus, Troas, Macedonia, and perhaps other locations for the primary purpose of strengthening the saints in those places. Men such as Silas, Titus, Epaphroditus and others were used in a similar fashion to encourage and edify the brethren lest, in Paul's own words, "*our labor would be in vain*" (1 Th 3:5). Finally, whenever possible, Paul would revisit the churches himself (Acts 15:36). In fact, of all the local churches which we read about Paul starting on his three missionary journeys, Scripture records (or at least implies) that he revisited each one except for those on the island of Cyprus, with Barnabas revisiting those instead (Acts 15:39). Paul clearly understood that the goal of evangelism was more than simply convincing the lost of the need to be saved, but also involved encouraging and admonishing those whom he had converted to "*walk in a manner worthy of God.*" 1 Th 2:12

The success of Paul and his partners in bringing many souls to the Lord was not accidental. While the power of the gospel is what saves souls, Paul knew that his efforts could make a difference in not just making disciples, but in keeping disciples. His passionate, methodical, and tireless work to establish, organize, and strengthen these early groups of Christians stand out as an example of the importance of not just helping the lost reach the *point* of salvation, but to further help them to reach the *day* of salvation!

## Flexibility

Drew Caldera

We've all heard the expression 'the best laid plans of mice and men' in reference to the reality of how often, regardless of how carefully one thinks through things, plans change and the results are different than what was anticipated. The military has a version of this expression, 'no plan survives first contact' that appropriately suggests how rarely even a great tactical plan goes off flawlessly. An immediate lesson that needs to be learned by all Christians is that we need to be flexible in our expectations and open to potential changes of course lest we set ourselves up for disappointment. God is in control of all things!

The Bible is full of examples where the plans of men were changed by circumstances and often by the hand of God. As Christians, we can learn some good lessons that will help us to successfully respond to unexpected change. We will consider the topic of

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flexibility in the context of Paul's missionary journeys, and what applications can make to our own Christian walk. The all-knowing God directed a change of course for Paul that will be our primary focus, but we will begin by looking at both a spiritual and physical example of flexibility demonstrated by Jesus prior to his crucifixion.

Just before Christ's ultimate betrayal by Judas and his arrest, Jesus was praying by Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. As the disciples unsuccessfully struggled with staying awake, Jesus prayed to God, fully aware of what was to come; His crucifixion. In Luke 22:42, Jesus prayed *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."* The cup being referred to was the course of things to come that would lead to His painful crucifixion on the cross. Although in anguish over events He knew would take place, Jesus prayed that there might be some other path, or flexibility, in the plan of salvation. Of course, He knew that there would be no change, but the enormity of what He was about to endure must surely have made Jesus wish there was another way. Christ provides a perfect example to us of responding to, in this case a lack of flexibility in God's plan, by praying *"not my will, but yours be done."* In all circumstances we must do our best to acknowledge and pray that the Father's will be done!

Now we will focus on a key example of flexibility in evangelism, from both a physical and spiritual standpoint, found in the Acts account of a twist in Paul's plans during his second missionary journey. Acts 16:6 tells us that Paul and Silas traveled through the re-

gions of Phrygia and Galatia *"having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."* Moreover, in verse seven, *"and when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."* It can be inferred from these passages, that Paul's plan had been modified by God not once, but twice, and Paul responded with a flexible attitude by following the spiritual guidance most assuredly with an inner attitude of 'God's will be done.'

Like any man, even the godly Apostle Paul must have wondered what the bigger plan was, and why he was prevented from preaching in Asia as he had planned. While Paul was in Troas that plan began to unfold when the man of Macedonia appeared to him in a vision *"urging him and saying, 'come over to Macedonia and help us.'"* Acts 16:8-10 Paul accurately deduced that God's will was that the gospel be preached to the Macedonians. Silas and Paul subsequently traveled to Philippi where they spread the good news and converted Lydia, who would be an important supporter of those spreading the gospel. On account of Paul's flexibility and obedience to the Father's will, a tremendous opportunity was made available facilitating the spread of the gospel!

It is the fate of all men to wonder what could have been if different actions were taken in a specific situation. We have no way of knowing what would have happened if Paul and his companions has gone to Asia to preach the word. In the end that doesn't merit concern, because we are able to view the unfolding account of Paul's second and

third missionary journeys in the context that the Father's will was fulfilled and the gospel was spread to those who God, in his infinite wisdom, knew were both most in need of it and would serve to most effectively spread the word.

As Christians, striving to improve ourselves and growing closer to God each day, what can we apply to our lives from these examples of flexibility - Jesus' in the garden and Paul's during his second missionary journey? First, I would suggest that flexibility has two sides, like a penny, in that we may be called to be flexible in staying the course, even though it may incur difficulty, pain or persecution. Or we may need to be flexible and change our path, approach or preferred plans if greater glory can be brought to our Savior and Father. Second, appreciating flexibility may positively counter our inclination toward absolutes. There are many situations we can find ourselves in where being unwavering is a tremendous strength and example, like our absolute conviction in the good news and the positive impact that can have on those around us. However, there are also many examples where being rigid and inflexible could have a negative effect on our responsibility to be lights in a dying world and above all things bringing glory to God and enabling His will to be done. In all things, if we focus on the fruits of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - as Christians we will hopefully be able to be firm or flexible in the right time and place. With Christ's help and faith in the Father, we can rest assured we will not be disappointed!

## Recognize and Seize Opportunities

Ron Gray

As Christians, we have read the Great Commission and feel the need to respond to it. We want to go out and succeed in bringing lost souls to Christ. But where do we look for those lost souls?

Jesus says, "*Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.*" John 4:35 There is the answer to our question; look for the field that is *ready* for harvest. How can we know who is ready to hear the gospel and most importantly who is willing to obey the gospel? Sometimes the soul that is *starving* for the bread of life does not even recognize his own hunger. In the same way we may not readily recognize those who are in need of the gospel. We can be blinded by our prejudices, not being able to see what is right in front of us. "*Look, ... lift up your eyes and see...*"

The Apostle Paul learned to lift up his eyes and see opportunities right before him. On a certain Sabbath day he and his traveling companions went down to a river near Philippi where there was a place of prayer. There they spoke to women who had come together at the river. Paul taught the gospel to those ladies, baptizing Lydia and her household as well. (Acts 16:11-15)

Paul could have passed up that opportunity by considering that he was a stranger in the area and speaking with a group of local women may have seemed socially inappropriate. Also, society may have deemed women to be on a lower station than men, but the

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Lord said that in Christ, *“there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Gal 3:26-28 Paul knew this and penned this passage himself by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In another example of Paul’s willingness to spread the gospel, he was waiting in Athens for his traveling companions. There *“he saw the city was full of idols.”* Paul could have easily assumed that there was *no* fertile ground to be found there and simply waited quietly to travel on to greener pastures, but he chose to “reason” with anyone who would speak with him. He boldly preached *“Jesus and the resurrection”* and was called a “babbling.” However, he did not allow that insult to close his heart to the masses.

Paul learned that *“the Athenians and foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.”* Acts 17:21 Paul had just the “new thing” to tell them and he introduced the gospel right there! He knew this would be an uphill battle since the residents of Athens were not familiar with the God of Creation, but he jumped at the opportunity to speak to any who would listen.

We have no evidence of a church springing up there in the city of Athens after Paul’s valiant effort, and only a few believed in Jesus. But we have no evidence that Paul believed that he had wasted his time there. He had a clear conscience in sowing the seed among the Athenians, which may have sprouted later on in the lives of many who listened to his words.

In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-23), we see the Word represented by the seed. The sower goes forth into his field with a goal of maximum increase for the seed that will be

sown. Even though he knows his field and takes diligent care to sow his seed, he does lose some. With the knowledge that some will not take root and will not produce, he does not hold back in fear; seed left in the package will never sprout!

In wisdom, the sower did not just dump the seed on the ground and hope for the best. He knew what it took to succeed and planned accordingly. He prepared the field, adjusted for resistance from the wind, and very likely prayed for rain and a bountiful harvest.

The Apostle Paul uses a similar example in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. He tells us, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”* *“For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”* This pattern worked then when the church was beginning and it works just as well today! We all work together to plant the seeds of the gospel, lovingly urge growth in the lives of those who obey the Word, and pray for God’s blessing to mature and strengthen all brethren.

We strive to recognize the opportunity to teach our fellow man. But, sometimes our preconceived notions about *who* will listen, obey, and remain on a Godly path keeps us from ever sowing the seed. God did not ask us to sow sparingly or to judge the outcome of our efforts. Even the Lord, when he went about on this earth teaching, met hostility, apathy, and skepticism (read more about this in other articles in this publication).

One man who fights a lonely battle here in Texas is a brother whom we at

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North Beach support financially (and hopefully in our prayers as well). His name is Robert Raif. He teaches prisoners in the Texas correction facilities. These prisoners have been found guilty of a wide array of crimes, and thereby have been crossed off of many Christian's lists of who "deserves" to hear the gospel. Robert tirelessly works within the network of state rules to gain access to these men and to teach them that there is a Savior who died to free them of their sins. These men know that their debts to society will still have to be paid, but their sins can be washed away (just as ours were) by the blood of the Lamb of God. Several of these men anxiously look forward to Bible study and are serious in their commitments to Christ.

We can never be sure of the effect that our teaching may have on our fellow man. Their hearts are varied like the soils in Jesus' parable of the sower. We must live lives of example, humbly and lovingly teach the Word, walk the pathway that leads to Heaven, and *never* give up.

## Paul & Barnabas Sought Out God's People

Gary Mangus

In this article we will attempt to outline the methods that Paul and Barnabas used to seek out and deliver the good news to God's people.

While the church in Antioch was worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to a special work in spreading the gospel. After more fasting and

prayer, the church laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them off with John (called Mark) to assist. Thus began their first missionary journey, led by the Holy Spirit, they first went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4,5b)

From the summary above, four important points can be made:

1. There was a plan, God's plan being delivered through the Holy Spirit.

2. Paul and Barnabas were selected by the Holy Spirit and by laying on of hands by Antioch church.

3. They prayed to God and fasted with the church before setting out.

4. It was a team mission, a group of three at this point: Paul, Barnabas, and Mark.

*"When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the **synagogues of the Jews.**"* Acts 13:5a From this verse we ascertain two points:

1. These were public places.

2. They sought out the Jews first by going into **Jewish synagogues.**

*"Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, and Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem."* Acts 13:13. Note at this point it's just Paul and Barnabas on the mission now.

Why go to the **synagogues** you may ask? Their next stop at Antioch (of Pisidia) Acts 13:14-15 is the **synagogue**, *"and after the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, asking for any word of encouragement."* Clearly discussions from a

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stranger about what was read was welcomed in the worship format. Jesus also spoke in the synagogues in His ministry. From Luke 4:16-30, we see that there was a like reading of some portions of the Scriptures from Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus was free to expound on that text, which He did, revealing that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Following Jesus' example and by the Holy Spirit, Paul used the reading of the passages from the scriptures as a common starting point to discuss their history and how Jesus completed the fulfillment of the prophecies. These Jews begged them to return the next Sabbath. And thus synagogues were the ideal place to initially go to when they arrived at a new city. Here, one could find Jews and Gentiles (proselyte converts to Judaism) and the word would spread from any contact made.

When Paul and Barnabas returned the following Sabbath to the synagogue in Antioch (of Pisidia), almost the whole city was gathered to hear the word of God. But the Jews became jealous of the large crowds, and contradicted what Paul was saying. Paul and Barnabas spoke out against them saying they had made judgment against themselves as being "unworthy of eternal life" and they would now turn to the Gentiles for the Lord had commanded them to be "a light for the Gentiles." When the Gentiles heard this, many believed and were saved. But the Jews stirred up persecution and they shook off the dust from their feet and went on to Iconium. Acts 13:44-51

Paul and Barnabas again went to the Jewish synagogue in Iconium, and spoke such that a great number of both Jews and

Greeks believed. Again persecution was stirred up against them and they took the message to Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country. (Acts 14:1-7) After preaching in Derbe, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, to strengthen the souls of the disciples and to encourage them. They returned and reported all that God had done with them to the church in Antioch. Acts 14:21-27

After their stay in Antioch, Paul wanted to revisit the brethren in the cities. However Barnabas wanted to take Mark and Paul did not. So Barnabas took Mark and sailed away to Cyprus. And Paul chose Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches. Now the church had two seasoned leaders with two teams spreading the gospel! (Acts 15:36-41)

Paul also found believers in public places other than synagogues. For example outside Philippi they went to the riverside, where there was a place of prayer and spoke to the women and Lydia and her household was converted. (Acts 16:13-15) And in Ephesus Paul "spoke in the synagogue for three months and after some became stubborn and spoke evil of the church, Paul withdrew from them and took the disciples with him reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. Paul continued this for two years so that all of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Acts 19:8-10

Paul always kept his zeal and with God's help through the Holy Spirit and companions, the gospel quickly spread wherever Paul went in or out of prison, and through his letters to the churches and fellow work-

ers. Paul described his ministry in Ephesus as marked by teaching “*publicly and from house to house,*” testifying to both Jews and Greeks of “*repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Acts 20:21

You can start your own missionary journey today by following the plan that worked so well for Paul and Barnabas with God’s blessing. First, pray for God to help us define a plan. Then select a public place to start. Select a team of two or three with at least one stronger in bible knowledge, and pray again. Meet with the elders and ask the church to pray for the wisdom, zeal and courage to speak publicly and boldly like Paul. And then go out with the good news, stay the course, and follow up with the new converts!

## **Missionaries Reported On Their Activities**

Steven Baxley

One often over-looked aspect of the spread of the Gospel concerns the reciprocal relationship that evangelists had with the congregations that sent them out to preach the Gospel. It is correctly understood that congregations supported apostles/evangelists financially as they made their way into different areas preaching the Gospel. This can be abundantly demonstrated in the Scriptures. It is sufficient in this regard to note 2 Corinthians 11:8-9: “*I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia sup-*

*plied my need.*”

However, evangelists also understood the need to faithfully report their activities back to the congregations that had sent them out. In Acts 13:1-3, we read of Paul’s being sent off from Antioch to preach the Gospel. This journey took them into Cyprus and Asia Minor, and includes several episodes which demonstrate the reception (or lack thereof) of the Gospel in those areas. Upon their return to Antioch, they reported back to the Christians there: “*And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*” Acts 13:27 Although the reaction of the church there to this news is not recorded, it must have been positive, since verse 28 tells us: “*And they remained no little time with the disciples.*”

It is evident, however, that this reporting wasn’t just limited to the congregation that had actually sent them out (Antioch) based on events recorded in the following chapter in Acts. After their return to Antioch, some men from Judea came to Antioch and were teaching that the Gentile Christians would need to be circumcised in order to be saved. Although Paul and Barnabas disagreed and debated this position with them, it was thought to be prudent to travel to Jerusalem (along with some other brothers) to meet with the apostles and elders there to discuss this question. The church in Antioch sent them as their representatives (Acts 15:2). On their way, they shared with churches in Phoenicia and Samaria the news of the reception of the Gospel among the Gentiles in Cyprus and Asia Minor. When the apostles

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and elders in Jerusalem were gathered to discuss this question, Paul and Barnabas related to them what God had accomplished through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12).

Let's note three lessons: First, evangelists reporting on their labors serves to encourage other saints. This is evident from the reception Paul and Barnabas received upon returning to Antioch. They not only remained with the church, but when men from Judea arrived bringing a false doctrine, the church in Antioch was concerned enough to send a delegation to Jerusalem. The Christians in Antioch were concerned enough about Gentile converts (and particularly the new converts made in Cyprus and Asia Minor) to seek a resolution of that matter.

Second, evangelists reporting on their labors serves to inform other saints about the growth of the Kingdom. The saints in Antioch received word of what had been accomplished on that trip. The saints in Phoenicia and Samaria (who had not had any role in sending them out on their trip) also learned of how the Gospel had spread into new areas and regions. The church in Jerusalem also learned this same information. Christians, a spiritual family, should be interested in learning news about new members of the family. This interest is demonstrated in the actions/reception of Paul and Barnabas as they passed this information along.

Third, evangelists reporting on their labors serves to cement the bonds that exist between themselves and the congregations involved in their support. As an example, consider what Paul wrote the saints in Philippi: *"I thank my God in all my remembrance of*

*you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."* Phil 1:3-7 Paul then tells them that his imprisonment had resulted in even members of the Roman Imperial Guard hearing about Jesus Christ. Although we only see Paul's point of view as the letter's author, it is implied in the warmth of what he writes that his love for them was reciprocated by them.

From a practical standpoint, as Christians, we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to learn of how the Gospel is faring in other places. This is most easily accomplished by reading the regular reports that come in from men who North Beach supports in other places. From time to time, we have opportunity to hear from the men themselves, and to speak with them face-to-face. We should also do what we can to encourage men who are preaching elsewhere, either through emails, cards, or other means. From personal experience, I can attest to the fact that it can be particularly difficult to preach the Gospel in places where the reception is poor and Christians are few. The encouragement of other saints can do wonders for helping these men continue to preach the Gospel without wavering!

# An Active Local Church

Russ Ward

The beauty and simplicity of the kingdom as founded by our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus is clearly seen in the foundation of local congregating Christians. The word we use in our English vernacular for such a local gathering of the Lord's people is "congregation." The Church as a family is seen from a universal and regional perspective in the scriptures and nowhere is there a better example than that of the Church at Antioch.

**Starting a Local Congregation.** Christians were scattered from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen in part due to the persecution that followed from the Jews. Luke tells us that some of those who left were from Cyprus & Cyrene, who upon traveling into Antioch began to preach and teach the Gentiles and a great many believed (Acts 11:19-21). Word reached the Apostles of the growth of the Church at Antioch and Barnabas was sent to them being a man of Faith and of the Holy Spirit to exhort and encourage them (Acts 11:22-24). These few verses provide a magnitude of thought and direction for how a local work is formed and the foundation upon which it is supported and stands. Notice that the foundation is the teachings of the Gospel and the support comes from grounded people of faith, even support that comes as far away as people of faith from other local regions of established Christians effectively working together.

**Evangelizing a Local Community ..** Barnabas departed to Tarsus to secure Saul and bring him into the work at Antioch. Together they assembled with the Church there in Anti-

och, teaching and admonishing the members and evangelizing the community (Acts 11:25-26). It is here that we find believers in the Gospel of Christ were first called "Christians" to which we are still known today. It is a badge we should wear as proudly as they did in their day. It is a name reflective of people who teach Christ, who live like Christ and not of the world, and who want others to have the same hope in Christ.

**Unity of Faith through Benevolence ..** While working together in Antioch a prophet from Jerusalem revealed through the Holy Spirit that a famine would come upon the region of Judea. Upon hearing this prophecy the church at Antioch purposed to provide aid to the brethren there sending it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30, 12:25). Here we see further authority and direction of a local work (congregation) in providing and aiding those of the kingdom who are in need and not only that we should be involved in such a work, but how it should be done; giving simple directions of unity in our collective faith and autonomy in our collective gathering. Luke refers to these actions as their ministry and the described action clearly defines a gift from Antioch to brethren in Judea along with reporting back to the brethren in Antioch.

**Evangelizing Abroad Through a Local Church..** The church had spread, grown, and matured as the Lord expected and the time was ripe for further expansion. The Holy Spirit made known to the brethren in Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul for a work to which the Lord had called them to do (Acts 13:1-2). Notice how Luke records

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their response, *“When they fasted and prayed they laid their hands on them and sent them away.”* There are many things that we could discuss that are found in these few words, but I wish to draw our attention specifically to just a few things. There was a need, there were those who could fulfill that need, there were those who could support those who would be sent, and all was done through Faith, Hope, and Love.

There is such a comfort that can be found in an effective evangelizing congregation. It is reflective of a people that are vibrant and alive, matching that same intensity found within the scriptures. It is a church of hope and a longing for the better things to come, one that seeks not its own but seeks for the betterment of a lost and dying world who knows not God. It is a place of rest, comfort, and strength, showing love and benevolence in the right way and under the correct authority. It is a collective meeting of the cognitive minds not driven by emotion or individual desire rather one of understanding, of direction, of purpose coupled with an uncompromising love of Christ that reflects the will of the Father. It is to be as Paul spoke to Timothy *“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”* 1 Tim 3:14-16

## Acknowledge Limitations & Trust in the Lord

Bud Baxley

“Limitations” is primarily defined as marking out the boundaries of a place or as in setting the limits of what one may say or do in specific circumstances.

“Trust” involves having supreme confidence in someone or something, to commit one’s trust to another.

If we ever needed a lesson in **Limitations and Trust** we have but to look to the example of how the Lord and Paul interacted with one another. In **Acts 9:1-9** we read of Paul’s beginning experiences with the Lord. Jesus tells Paul to *“Arise and go into the city (Damascus), and you will be told what you must do.”* Paul did as the Lord told him. Notice, no questions, no excuses on Paul’s part, just trust. Now if we read on in verses 10-18 we are told the story of Ananias and what the Lord directed him to do regarding Paul. Ananias does seem to remind the Lord of the frightening things he had heard about Paul, but he obeys. Again, another example of one also believing in and having confidence in the “truth” of what the Lord was telling him to do. Ultimately, because Ananias listened to the Lord – Paul was baptized and his previous life was turned upside down. Note also, the Lord told Ananias in (9:16) that He (the Lord) would *“show Paul how many things he (Paul) must suffer for My name’s sake.”* As we follow Paul through his subsequent travels in preaching Christ we see the “truth” of God revealed time and

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again. Paul also had limitations placed on him by the Lord. Note Acts 9:15 , The Lord said to Ananias, *“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”* Paul’s limitations (boundaries) and mission were set. From that point on Paul looked forward not backward. He preached Christ in absolute truth as it was given to him by revelation. Here-in is the great lesson we as God’s children must learn if we hope to be approved of God. We, like Paul must teach, preach, and model our lives according to the infallible word of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We cannot change, omit, nor add anything to it (Rev 22:18-19).

In Acts 17:16 we see the genesis of Paul’s teaching in Athens a city given over completely to the worship of idols. Verse 16 tells us that Paul’s spirit was provoked within him. Paul was roused, stirred up, excited and curious (in a good sense). So much so that he began teaching the Jews in the synagogues including Gentile worshippers and daily in the marketplace with those who were there.

Paul is eventually heard and seen by men associated with the Areopagus and invited to come and speak of this new doctrine. Not one to miss any opportunity to talk about his Lord he accepts their invitation. It seems to me Paul also recognizes his limitations. He does not attack these men in any way because of their idolatry, but instead appeals to their religious nature... Verse 22 *“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.”* We should understand here that Paul does not in any way indicate these men are steeped in idola-

try and thus an abomination to the Lord. Because of their altar to the Unknown God he uses that to introduce them to the God Who made the world and everything in it. Truth, truth, and nothing but the truth does Paul speak. We are told that when he finished speaking about the resurrection of the dead, some men mocked, while other men said *“we will hear you again on this matter.”* Once again, we are given insight into another great lesson for us today. When given the opportunity to speak to others about Christ – stick with the truth of God’s word. Jesus is the Christ! He died for our sins and rose again and is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Follow Paul’s example, don’t begin immediately attacking their faith. Show them the TRUTH of yours. Did Paul win over everyone he preached the Word to...certainly not, and neither will we. Jesus said in Mt 10:14 *“and whoever will not receive you or hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.”* The Lord knows that not everyone will listen and accept the truth. Our job is like that of Paul to preach the word in truth. Jesus said in John 17:17 *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”*

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