

# Discussion Questions

In what ways might you be unknowingly treating Jesus as an addition to your life rather than the foundation of everything you do?

How does the church's diversity in Acts 13 challenge our modern tendency toward uniformity, and what practical steps can we take to pursue unity across differences?

When have you experienced spiritual opposition after stepping out in obedience to God, and how did you recognize it as spiritual resistance rather than just human conflict?

What are the specific areas in your life where you might be mixing Jesus with American culture, politics, or other ideologies in ways that weaken rather than strengthen your faith?

How does viewing service in the church as worship rather than just helping out change your perspective on volunteering in areas like nursery, setup, or hospitality?

Why do you think the proconsul was astonished by the teaching about Jesus rather than the miracle itself, and what does that reveal about the power of the gospel message?

In what ways have you experienced exhaustion from trying to hold onto Jesus with one hand while grasping something else for security or significance with the other?

How can we practice calling out deception and lies in our culture while still leaving the door open for reconciliation and unity with those we confront?

What does it mean practically for your church community to be a place that performs the Spirit's actions rather than just programs and activities?

How does Jesus willingly entering darkness on the cross so we could see transform your understanding of what he has done for you personally?

## 5-Day Devotional: The Church God Uses

### Day 1: Unity in Diversity

**Reading:** Ephesians 4:1-6

**Devotional:** The church at Antioch was a beautiful tapestry of differences—African, Jewish, Greek, wealthy, and common—all united in Christ. Uniformity erases distinctions, but unity reconciles them. Jesus is greater than our differences. Today, consider the diversity in your church community. Are there people different from you whom you've avoided? God's eyes roam the earth looking for hearts wholeheartedly devoted to Him, not hearts that look, think, or vote the same. Unity doesn't mean we're all identical; it means Jesus is our common ground. Ask yourself: Am I contributing to unity or uniformity? The Spirit unites across differences, making the church a living testimony that Jesus reconciles what the world divides.

### Day 2: Worship Through Service

**Reading:** Romans 12:1-8

**Devotional:** Worship isn't confined to singing songs on Sunday morning. The early church understood that serving one another was spiritual worship. When you serve in the nursery, host a small group, or clean the church, you're offering your body as a living sacrifice—true worship. Many believers miss this, thinking they're missing out on worship when they serve. The opposite is true. You're worshipping more authentically when you lay down your preferences to meet someone else's needs. Today, ask God to show you one practical way to serve someone in your church family this week. Remember, communion with God leads to more communion with God. As you serve others, you're actually serving Christ and deepening your relationship with Him.

### Day 3: Resisting Spiritual Syncretism

**Reading:** 1 Kings 18:16-24

**Devotional:** Elymas the sorcerer represents a dangerous pattern: the "Jesus plus" principle. Like ancient Israel mixing worship of God with Baal, we're tempted to add Jesus to our politics, culture, social causes, or personal ambitions. But when Jesus is fused with anything for power, He stops being Lord and becomes a pawn. The result isn't wisdom but weakness and darkness. Examine your heart today: What are you adding to Jesus? Where have you made Him an accessory to your real source of hope—whether that's political victory, cultural acceptance, or personal success? Jesus plus nothing equals everything. Anything else leaves you exhausted,

holding too much with both hands. The punishment of choosing deceit is being deceived. Choose Jesus alone, and find the rest you've been seeking.

## **Day 4: Seeing Through the Darkness**

**Reading:** Matthew 27:45-54

**Devotional:** On the cross, darkness fell so thick that Jesus couldn't see His Father. "Why have you forsaken me?" He cried. Jesus willingly entered darkness so we could see. Before Elymas was struck blind, Jesus was blind in the dark. This is the astonishing message that should capture our hearts: the Son of God chose blindness so we could have sight. Many people today don't reject Jesus—they reject the Frankenstein monsters we've created by mixing Him with other things. Our calling is to make crooked paths straight, to present Jesus clearly. When the proconsul witnessed God's judgment, he wasn't astonished by the miracle but by the teaching about Jesus. Is Jesus Himself still astonishing to you, or have you grown familiar with a modified version? Return to the pure gospel today.

## **Day 5: Performing the Spirit's Actions**

**Reading:** Acts 1:4-8; Ephesians 6:10-18

**Devotional:** A church participating in God's mission performs the Spirit's actions. The Spirit sends, and the church carries out that sending. This is the beautiful paradox: God works through His people. But expect opposition. Our struggle isn't against people but against spiritual forces of darkness. When the church moves forward in the Spirit's power, something pushes back. Don't be surprised by resistance; be filled with the Spirit. The early church listened to the Spirit, was sent by the Spirit, and was filled with the Spirit. We must do the same—nothing more, nothing less. Today, ask God to fill you fresh with His Spirit. Ask Him where He's sending you this week. Remember, you're not fighting alone, and the battle isn't ultimately yours. Stand firm, perform the Spirit's actions, and watch God work through your obedience.

# **Small Group Guide: Acts 13:1-12**

## **The Church That God Uses & The Opposition It Faces**

---

### **OPENING PRAYER & ICEBREAKER (10 minutes)**

**Icebreaker Question:** When have you experienced opposition or pushback when trying to do something good? How did you respond?

---

## RECAP THE MESSAGE (5 minutes)

This week we looked at Acts 13:1-12, exploring two main themes:

1. What kind of church does the Spirit use?
2. What kind of opposition does the Spirit face?

Paul's teaching shows us that when the church performs the Spirit's actions, spiritual opposition will arise—often in the form of syncretism (the "Jesus plus" principle).

---

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### 1. Five Characteristics of a Church God Uses:

- **Unified** across differences
- **Worshiping** through service
- **Praying** and listening to God
- **Proclaiming** the gospel
- **Apprenticing** the next generation

### 2. The Nature of Opposition:

- Our struggle is spiritual, not against people
- The enemy's primary tool is syncretism—making us believe Jesus isn't enough
- The "Jesus plus" formula always makes us weaker, not stronger

### 3. The Astonishing Message:

- Jesus plus nothing equals everything
  - Jesus entered darkness so we could see
  - The gospel message itself is what astonishes, not just miracles
- 

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Understanding the Text (15 minutes)

1. **Read Acts 13:1-5.** What strikes you most about the diversity of leadership in the Antioch church? Why do you think Luke emphasizes their differences?

2. **In verses 2-4**, who sends Paul and Barnabas—the church or the Holy Spirit? What does this teach us about how God works through His people?
3. **Read verses 6-12**. What was Elymas (Bar-Jesus) trying to do? Why was his approach so dangerous?

### **Personal Reflection (20 minutes)**

4. **Of the five characteristics of a church God uses** (unified, worshiping, praying, proclaiming, apprenticing), which one resonates most with you personally? Which one challenges you most?
5. **The sermon talked about the "Jesus plus" principle—adding something to Jesus for power or security**. Have you ever caught yourself thinking:
  - Jesus plus the right political outcome?
  - Jesus plus financial security?
  - Jesus plus a certain person's approval?
  - Jesus plus success or accomplishments?

Share (if comfortable) where you've been tempted to add something to Jesus.

6. **The pastor said, "Lies are exhausting."** Have you experienced exhaustion from trying to hold onto Jesus with one hand and something else with the other? What would it look like to let go?

### **Going Deeper (15 minutes)**

7. **Paul confronted Elymas with bold clarity, but the judgment was "for a time"—leaving room for repentance**. How do we balance calling out deception with leaving the door open for redemption? Can you think of biblical examples of this balance?
8. **The sermon emphasized that calling out other believers should produce unity, not division**. How can we discern the difference between:
  - Necessary correction that leads to unity
  - Divisive criticism that tears down the body?
9. **"Most people don't reject Jesus—they reject the Frankenstein monsters they've been given."** What are some common distortions of Jesus you've encountered in our culture? How can we present Jesus more clearly?

---

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION (15 minutes)**

### **This Week's Challenge:**

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

#### **Option 1: Worship Through Service**

- Sign up to serve in one area of church ministry (nursery, setup, hospitality, etc.)
- Remember: you're not missing worship—you're participating in it more fully

### **Option 2: The Prayer Experiment**

- Set aside 15 minutes each day this week to pray and listen
- Journal what you sense God saying to you
- Share with the group next week

### **Option 3: The Subtraction Exercise**

- Identify one "Jesus plus" area in your life
- Spend time this week asking God to help you trust that Jesus is enough
- What would change if you believed Jesus + nothing = everything?

### **Option 4: Apprenticing**

- Reach out to someone younger in the faith to invest in this month
- OR ask someone more mature to mentor you

### **Group Discussion:**

10. Which option are you drawn to and why?
  11. What obstacles might you face in following through? How can this group support you?
- 

## **CLOSING REFLECTION (5 minutes)**

**Read together:** Ephesians 6:12 *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil spiritual forces in the heavens."*

### **Reflect silently for 60 seconds:**

- Where do I need to see Jesus more clearly?
  - What am I adding to Jesus that I need to release?
  - How is God inviting me to participate in His mission?
- 

## **PRAYER TIME (10 minutes)**

**Pray for:**

- Eyes to see Jesus clearly, without additions or distortions
- Strength to resist the "Jesus plus" lies that exhaust us
- Boldness to participate in God's mission as His church
- Unity across our differences as we follow Jesus together
- Specific needs and requests from group members

**Closing Prayer Focus:** Thank Jesus that He entered darkness so we could see, and that He is truly enough.

---

## **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK**

- Read Acts 13:13-52 (Paul's longest sermon in Acts!)
  - Come ready to discuss: What does Paul emphasize when proclaiming the gospel?
- 

## **LEADER NOTES**

### **Sensitive Topics:**

- Some may have experienced spiritual abuse or toxic church leadership—be gentle when discussing church structure
- Political discussions can become heated—keep focus on Jesus, not partisan positions
- Some may struggle with feeling "not enough"—emphasize grace