

Get Out of His Way! (#2)

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Acts of Paul ἰΡτῖλῃActs ἰλ

Road Trip!

There is a thrill of possibility when you start a road tripᾰNew destinationsᾰNew adventuresᾰExciting gas station snacksᾰ

My family has always been excited to take road trips togetherᾰWhether driving to Arizona or Kentucky or Florida or Nebraskaᾰwe've always enjoyed our time together on the roadᾰBut our travels are almost always laser-focusedᾰwe have a destination in mindᾰhand we're gonna fly down the interstate without dawdlingᾰ

Our journeys are described more by the ᾰwhereᾰthan the ᾰwhatᾰᾰWe don't often hit the tourist spots on the wayᾰWe don't meander down country roadsᾰ unless an accident up ahead forces us to detourᾰWe just want to get to our goal at the end of the road ᾰlike Grandma ᾰ Grandpa's houseᾰor Disney Worldᾰwith a minimum number of bathroom breaksᾰ

Yet not everyone travels like usᾰIn factᾰmany people do just the oppositeᾰTheir journeys are described more by the ᾰwhatᾰthan the ᾰwhereᾰᾰThey could care less about a destinationᾰInsteadᾰthey want to experience things along the wayᾰAn uncertain itinerary gives a sense of freedom and that thrill of possibilityᾰIt is a mentality described well in ᾰThe Old Walking Songᾰby J.R.R. Tolkienᾰ

The Road goes ever on and onᾰDown from the door where it beganᾰ

Now far ahead the Road has goneᾰAnd I must followᾰif I canᾰ

Pursuing it with eager feetᾰUntil it joins some larger wayᾰ

Where many paths and errands meetᾰAnd whither thenᾰI cannot sayᾰ

ᾰThe Old Walking Songᾰby J.R.R. Tolkien ᾰThe Fellowship of the Ringᾰ

As we continue our sermon series looking at the book of Acts and specifically focusing on the apostle Paul, we find travelers who adopt this second approach to travel. They are focused on the *what* instead of the *where*. They are less concerned about making it to a destination and more concerned about making an impact on the way. Their travel isn't recreational; it is intentional and spiritual.

Turn if you will to the 11th chapter of Acts as we begin looking at Paul's First Missionary Journey. Like last week, we're going to explore the passage and then hopefully we will find a takeaway or two on the road.

Previously, in Acts...

In last week's sermon, we explored [Acts 9](#) where Saul is transformed by his encounter on the road to Damascus. He changes direction, turning from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of Christ. Jesus chooses Saul to be his chosen instrument to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Saul sees the light, is baptized, and immediately begins telling people about Jesus.

The focus last week was on his conversion, so we didn't talk in depth about where Saul went afterwards. Based on the information we have in Acts, as well as additional information Saul shares in his NT letters, we know that he spent some time in Damascus, travelled southeast to Arabia, returned to Damascus, traveled to Jerusalem, and then returned via Caesarea to his hometown of Tarsus.

Reading Acts, we have a tendency to shrink those events into a short span of time. But rather than taking weeks or months, the events take **years to unfold**.

And that makes sense. Saul needed to grow and be transformed by Jesus. He needed more information, and he needed to readjust his understanding of Biblical texts and God Himself in light of the cross of Christ. Like all of us, he was a work in progress. There was a moment of **justification** (*where we accept the gift of salvation and God applies Jesus' righteousness to us - He can see us "just as if" we had never sinned*) but that moment was followed by the long, slow process of **sanctification** (*where we grow in obedience and holiness and*

knowledge - learning to live out holiness in light of our salvation) Saul is in the process of being sanctified as Acts continues

After heading back to Tarsus Saul disappears from the text of Acts for a little while until chapter 11. In that chapter we read about Barnabas, the son of encouragement. You may remember from an earlier sermon as he is sent by the Jerusalem church to the city of Antioch to investigate a church that has formed there. They want to know if it's a healthy legitimate Jesus honoring church.

Acts 11:19-26 ESV

When he came and saw the grace of God he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

The church is growing. And Barnabas wants to see it continue thriving. He makes the effort to track down some extra church staff. Locating this man he remembered from a few years back who he thought would be perfect for the situation.

So as we begin chapter 13 Saul is now ministering at this church in Antioch. He has years of experience under his belt, growing in his knowledge about and love for Jesus. He is a faithful, proven Christian leader in the church. He is now equipped to carry out the assignment he received in chapter 11.

The Send-Off (13:1-3)

Chapter 13 begins with an important call and send-off.

Acts 13:1-3 ESV

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. 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. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them out.

A Christ-Led Church

The church at Antioch was a pretty cool place.

A few years ago I was listening to a conference session featuring Jo Saxton (from *RightNow Media*) and she spent some time talking about this church and what we see here. You might only see a list of names including one you have to be VERY careful to pronounce, but consider what they represent.

ж **Barnabas** - Jew from the island of Cyprus who was closely connected to the original Jerusalem church.

ж **Simeon** - called Niger (a Latin word meaning black/dark) likely due to his skin color.

ж **Lucius** - A Jew from the city of Cyrene in North Africa who probably helped plant this church. See [Acts 13:1](#).

ж **Manaen** - A guy who had been brought up with Herod (upper class) maybe educated in Rome.

ж **Saul** - A Jew and former Pharisee from Tarsus, a former enemy turned ally.

There is amazing diversity here: different economic statuses, different racial and cultural backgrounds, different religious paths that brought them here. Yet at Antioch they are united as brothers and are known by one name: Christian. This church is where the term originated because they lived so much like Christ. See [Acts 11:26](#).

A Spirit-Led Leadership

These five men are leaders in the church, and in this snapshot in time, they provide a great example of what leadership in the church should look like.

What are they doing? Worshiping the Lord and fasting in prayer.

Sometimes we get so focused on what happens with the Holy Spirit WHILE they are doing this that we miss their posture of worship before it occurs

Don't you want your leaders to be doing the same? I mean these guys aren't doing it because it's a special occasion. They don't have *any clue* that a word from the Holy Spirit is imminent. They are just putting themselves in a position to be guided by God.

Worship & Fasting

- ж **Worship** helps you to prioritize rightly. You honor and praise the Lord making more of him and less of you
 - ж Worship is demonstrated in passages like [Psalm 135](#): “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”
 - ж Worship is personal and corporate. Let us exalt his name together.
 - ж This is part of the reason it is so important to be HERE with other Christians. So we can exalt his name together.
- ж **Fasting** helps you remember what matters most. You forego something good like food or intimacy for a time in a meal a day a week relying on God and God alone for your needs.
 - ж It's not for show. In fact, Jesus instructed us to keep it private. [Matthew 6](#): “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
 - ж The fast trains you to trust God. It's not the only way, but it is effective and helpful.
 - ж This practice often gets neglected, but maybe it's time to give it a try.

Quick poll ⁵ How many ever tried fasting for spiritual reasons? Not surgery. No guilt trip. Let's just keep it real. ☺

Challenge: **Skip lunch one day** this week and take the time to pray for your family, your church, your community, or about a big decision, etc. And then every time you feel a hunger pang, pray some more. OK? OK.

The Holy Spirit takes advantage of this spiritual posture and gives them a message: “Set aside Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The call on Saul’s life is now ready to be activated. But the leaders don’t take the message for granted. They hear the Spirit and then what do they do? Look at verse 14. They fast and pray again.

Why? Maybe it is to confirm that they are hearing this message correctly. Maybe it is for further guidance on the where and how of the upcoming journey. Maybe it is to help strengthen and prepare these two men for their task.

But these leaders were intent on seeking God.

Exhortation for Our Church

To my fellow leaders in *this* church, I ask you to be these kind of men, and help me be that way, too. Don’t get bogged down by details. Don’t get sidetracked by finances or buildings or meetings or programs or drama. Instead, seek God. Seek God.

And to those who aren’t leaders yet, become these kind of men and women. Seek God, regardless of title. Prepare yourself for a time when you might be called to step up and teach or lead or serve. That goes even for those who are too young to be leaders. You’ll grow up one day, and the church will always need godly leaders who seek Him and try to hear His voice above the culture.

This group at Antioch was ready. They heard the Holy Spirit. They continued to listen, and then they acted boldly. Sending out two of their top leaders to go bless other areas. That’s hard. But they were willing, and they showed support by laying hands on Saul and Barnabas, and then they sent them out.

And it all started because they were in a position to listen to God.

The Journey (13:4ff)

Now you may have noticed that we're halfway through a sermon and we've just now gotten Saul and Barnabas out the door. This is the trouble with an overview series. If you spend the amount of time you'd like, it takes a long time. But in the interest of moving on, we must summarize some parts. It kills me to be so brief, but here is what happens next in [Acts 13:4ff](#).

Itinerary

What happens in [Acts 13](#)?

They travel. Check out the map.

(Apologies. It's not as detailed as my famous whiteboard maps, but it does the job! LOL)

The travelers, which include Saul, Barnabas, and Barnabas's cousin John Mark, sail to the island of Cyprus, where Barnabas is from. They then travel from east to west, hitting the major cities of **Salamis**, a major commercial center, and **Paphos**, a major political center and important harbor. This is all described in [Acts 13:4-13](#).

Afterwards, they sail northwest to Asia Minor. They arrive in the city of **Perga**, where John Mark leaves the party, and then travel to **Pisidian Antioch**, a major political center. This is described in [Acts 13:13-14](#).

Pattern

Their missionary journey will continue in chapter 14, so we will save the next stops for another sermon. But I do want you to notice Paul's pattern.

1. He goes to a **major city**, which provides him with lots of opportunities.

2. He visits the **Jewish synagogue**, where he can find people who have a background with God, the Bible, and who look forward to the arrival of the Messiah.

лч He preaches **Jesus** ĩdeath and resurrection and its implicationĳ first to the Jews then later to the Gentilesч

ач Exĳ See Paulĳ long sermon here in [Acts йлжжжй](#)ч I encourage you to read it on your own laterч Itĳ greatæ

мч Those who accept form a **church**ч

нч Paul **moves on** leaving the church to grow and evangelize in his absenceч

Youĳll see this pattern again and again during his missionary journeysĳ because it allows him to cover more ground effectivelyч Yet as he preachesĳ there is an issue that comes up regularlyч Lukeĳ the author of this bookĳ introduces this recurring issue as Paul preaches through Cyprus in [Acts йлжжйк](#)ч

The Opposition (13:6-12)

Acts йлжжйк ESV

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphosĳ they came upon a certain magicianĳ a Jewish false prophet named Barĳjesusч He was with the proconsulĳ Sergius Paulusĳ a man of intelligenceĳ who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of Godч But Elymas the magician ĩfor that is the meaning of his nameĳ opposed themĳ seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faithч But Saulĳ who was also called Paulĳ filled with the Holy Spiritĳ looked intently at him and saidĳ Ду you son of the devilĳ you enemy of all righteousnessĳ full of all deceit and villainyĳ will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lordĳ And nowĳ beholdĳ the hand of the Lord is upon youĳ and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a timeч И immediately mist and darkness fell upon himĳ and he went about seeking people to lead him by the handч Then the proconsul believedĳ when he saw what had occurredĳ for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lordч

The People

OKч First letĳs make sure you got the story and the characters straightĳ because it can get confusing with some overlapping termsч

йч **Sergius Paulus**⁵ the Roman Proconsul ilike a governoronly more powerfulч
He is a Gentile and a smart guyч

кч **Saul** іа~~ч~~ч~~ч~~**Paul**⁵ the Christian evangelistчWe've used his Jewish nameh
but here we get his Roman name Жthe one that we find more ogen in the New
Testamentч

лч **Barnabas**⁵ Paul'с со~~ж~~ч~~ж~~ evangelisththe Дson of encouragementЖ

мч **Bar**Jesus іа~~ч~~ч~~ч~~**Elymas**⁵ the Jewish false prophetжmagicianчHis name
means Дson of Jesusчbut not the Jesus SaulчPaul is proclaimingчJust the
commonhnormal name ДJesusжJoshuaжYeshuaжчhis is how it gets translated
in Englishæ

The Problem

Sergius Paulus wants Paul and Barnabas to share the word of GodчAs the man in
chargehe may have heard some reports about it and he wanted the
information directlyч

HoweverhSergius Paulus has a Jewish connectionжthis magician he knows as
ElymasчAccording to one commentaryж

The Expositor's Bible CommentaryhVolume жJohn and Acts іActs йлжТийль

While sorcery and magic were оз icially banned in Judaismhthere were still
Jews who practiced ithboth under the guise of Jewish orthodoxy and as
renegades ісчLuke ййжl Acts йсжлТийоыч

й'm less concerned about Elymas' practices and more concerned about his
actions here as they relate to sharing the gospelчWhat does he doæ Elymas
stands in the way of the gospelæ Elymasă opposed themhseeking to turn the
proconsul away from the faithж

This is a **microcosm** of what Paul encounters on his missionary journeysчPaul
brings the message to interested and curious Gentileshand Jewish opponents
throw up every kind of roadblock imaginable to stop himчHe faces political

opposition and even physical violence. But Paul doesn't back down. His determination to follow Jesus keeps Paul preaching no matter what.

And so it is here in Paphos.

The Rebuke

Paul's response to Elymas is swift and strong.

"You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"

Instead of a son of Jesus, Elymas is called a son of the devil.

The details of Paul's rebuke fit the Biblical picture of Satan. Jesus while rebuking some of his opponents shared a snapshot of Satan's character.

John 8:44 ESV

You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Elymas mirrors some of those same qualities of Satan as he opposes the gospel message. He is following in Satan's footsteps: a son of the devil.

- He is an enemy of God: of righteousness.
- He is a liar: deceit.
- He is evil: villainy.
- He twists things out of shape: crooked.

Because of his alliance, Elymas finds himself in the crosshairs of the Holy Spirit and Paul. He is blinded temporarily as a punishment, very much like Paul himself was blinded on the road to Damascus. And like Paul, we can hope that the experience gave Elymas time to repent and understand the truth about Jesus. Sergius Paulus believed, so maybe Elymas would figure it out later.

But the intensity of God's response to Elymas is worth discussing here

The Takeaway

What is so bad about what Elymas did? Think about it. He was *personally* opposed to the message of Jesus. He rejected it for himself. And that's bad for him.

Gospel Roadblocks

But God is especially offended when you move from personal disbelief to *relational* roadblocks – when your actions block *OTHERS* from responding to the gospel.

OPTIONAL

When we lived in Louisville, one of the doctors that Deb worked for liked to have spiritual debates with her. During eye surgery, he'd pass the suture. What do you think of the virgin birth? It turns out that this doctor, when he was younger, was interested in becoming a Lutheran minister. He studied the Bible a lot and eventually studied under another minister-professor. This man taught and convinced Deb's doctor that the Bible was just full of myths. He turned an excited young man away from Jesus and onto a more humanistic worldview.

Who do you think would get a stronger rebuke from God? The doctor or his so-called teacher?

Throughout the Bible, we see some of God's strongest reactions when someone gets in the way. When someone tries to impose their disbelief on others.

When Jesus confronted the **scribes and Pharisees**, [Matthew 23:13-15](#) says, “But **woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you **shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces**. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

ж When **Peter** opposes Jesus' predicted path to the cross [Mark 8:31](#) "But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "**Get behind me, Satan!** For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

ж When the **priests** failed to take their role seriously as leaders of God's people [Malachi 2:7-9](#) "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But **you have turned aside** from the way. You have caused **many to stumble** by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, and so I make you **despised and abased** before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction."

Why is this so offensive? It's because your one-star review of God stops people from pursuing the five-star Almighty Lord of Creation. It's because you are blocking access to belief. It's because you are stopping salvation.

If I put a barricade in front of a fire exit, I'm in big trouble. If I park and block access to your driveway, I'm in trouble. If I illegally freeze your bank account, I'm in trouble. Anytime you prevent people from accessing what they need, it's a big deal. If you want to ruin your *own* life, go ahead. It's sad, but it's your life. But don't stop innocent people from the option to make that decision for themselves.

Elymas did, and his rebuke should provide a serious warning for us.

Exhortation for Our Church

Active vs Passive Prevention

Don't get in the way of the gospel.

Most of you would never dream of actively preventing someone from approaching Jesus. You wouldn't bar the door or drag someone away from the baptistry.

But we need to be more aware of our *passive* prevention. The choices we make that push people away. Can I give you some examples? Some choices that are a modern-day Bar Jesus.

ж What about **competitive sports**? The soccer and softball games that pull you away from worship on Sunday mornings. *passively assert* to our kids and grandkids that sports are more important than Jesus. I know that you want to have your kids involved and you can't control the tournament schedules. I get it. I'm a Taekwondo dad and the schedule is challenging. I'm not condemning your involvement but I'm asking, how do you actively make up for what you miss? Do you worship intentionally together at another time? Do you watch online? *legit WATCH* Not just background TV but singing together, grabbing some juice and crackers and having communion together. Do you make sure you're having frequent conversations with the kids about their faith and helping them develop a love for Jesus?

The danger of getting between your kids and Jesus is there. Are you compensating for what you miss?

ж What about **grumbling**? The comments you make about others in the church. *passively assert* to those listening that they are better or outside the walls of the church instead of inside. At least out there they don't have to pretend to be nice, right? I'm not condemning legitimate constructive criticism, but ask yourself, Are you making an effort to speak well of people to build up instead of tearing down? The tongue is a restless evil. According to [James 3:10](#), James goes on to say, [James 3:10](#) "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so."

The danger of your grumbling getting in the way of others' finding Jesus is there. Are you choosing your words wisely?

ж What about **economic bias**? We all take social cues from little things like cars and shoes and watches and we drift toward those who reflect our level or the level we wish we were. The people you *passively ignore* are automatically

excluded from the benefits of the gospel. We usually apply the following words to missions but in Romans we read these words [Romans 10:14-15](#) “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”” It applies to our interactions with cashiers and bankers and beggars on the corner in Lawrence.

The danger of hiding Jesus to those less fortunate than you is real. Are you willing to treat everyone equally?

Be alert. Be aware. Make sure your words and actions clear a path for the gospel. Let your righteousness go before Him and prepare a way for his steps. [Psalm 119:141](#)

The Connection

Do you see the connection between the two takeaways in this passage?

On the surface we have a story about Paul and his first missionary road trip about which I hope you learned and gained appreciation but in the middle of it we are reminded:

- **Prayer and fasting** paved the way for the Spirit's plans to advance. The leaders of Antioch intentionally stepped aside to allow God to move.
- **Opposition** to the Spirit's plan was swiftly condemned and judged. Elymas was forcefully pushed aside to allow God to move.

The bottom line seems to be a simple truth: **Get out of God's way.** Remove yourself from the equation and watch what God can do.

At the very least, don't do things to block others from the gospel. But more positively, take steps that will align your will with His. Pray for wisdom and understanding. Actively seek Him in your normal routines.

When Paul and Barnabas did that when they stepped back and gave the Holy Spirit control God moved in mighty ways even miraculous ways What will he do here and now if we clear the path for Him

Let's get out of His way and find out

Sermon Notes

Previously in Acts ([Acts 11:23-26](#))

The Kingdom of God is at hand

A Christ-centered Kingdom

A Spirit-centered Kingdom

Worship & Fasting ([Psalm 34:1-3](#); [Matthew 6:17-18](#))

The Kingdom of God is at hand

Itinerary

Pattern

The Kingdom of God is at hand

The People

The Problem

The Rebuke ([John 8:44](#))

The Takeaway

Gospel Roadblocks ([Matt 23:13-15](#); [Mark 8:33](#); [Mal 2:7-9](#))

Active vs _____ Prevention ([Jam 3:8-10](#); [Rom 10:14-15](#))

Sermon Discussion Questions

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God