

Becoming a Sending Church

Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Acts 13:1-4 / June 14, 2026

Introduction:

This morning, we are considering part of what it means to be a people passionately pursuing sharing the glory of God in Christ. There are two ways we share God's glory in Christ. First, by using Spiritual Gifts like teaching, service, giving, mercy, healing and prophecy to build the church up in love. Second, by spreading the gospel to all peoples. The second way is our focus today, particularly how we long to build a culture where everyone is engaged in gospel proclamation and people are sent out on mission. To encourage us toward this, we'll revisit Acts 13:1-4 to see what moved the church in Antioch to become a sending church, seeking to commit ourselves to similar things and explore practical thoughts on how each of us can and should participate in God's mission. Let's start with what led the church in Antioch to become a sending church. First, we see,

A Sincere Devotion to the Lord

Consider how Luke highlights the spiritual rhythms of this church. Look at verses 2-3. Luke says, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting," in verse 2, and "after fasting and praying," in verse 3. The term for "worshipping" refers to a religious public service and, upon the completion of this mission Barnabas and Saul "gathered the church together" in Acts 14:27 to declare what God had done. This points to the whole church participating in these activities. Note how fasting is mentioned twice in conjunction with worship and prayer. Fasting has become trendy for health reasons, but biblical fasting, used in times of repentance, when seeking revelation for guidance, or when desiring closer communion with God, always involves concentrated spiritual concern. John Stott comments, "seldom if ever is fasting an end in itself. It is a negative action (abstention from food and other distractions) for the sake of a positive one (worshipping or praying)." (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 217). Coupling fasting with worship and prayer highlights the deep devotion of this church. Should this not be the defining mark of our church? We gather to be refreshed by God's Word, delight in His presence together, and filled with the Spirit for the days ahead. Family, let me ask you. Does a sincere devotion to the Lord mark our culture? We will only go far on mission after going deep in devotion because marveling at the power, grace and worth of God is what drives us to make His name great in this world. John Piper rightly says, "Missions exists because worship doesn't." The ultimate motivation for missions is a desire to see God worshipped by all peoples. For us to become a sending church, we need to first be enthralled with the glory of God in Christ, going ever deeper in a sincere devotion to Him. The second thing we see is,

An Abiding Trust in the Spirit

Consider how Luke highlights the Spirit's work in this church. Look at verse 1, "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." Why does Luke single out the prophets and teachers at Antioch? I'm persuaded Luke is emphasizing the Spirit's activity through the Spiritual Gifts of prophecy and teaching, more than recognizing church leaders. Certainly, there is some recognized role as prophets and teachers, but these roles didn't always function as official leadership positions. I'm persuaded Scripture shows two kinds of prophets and teachers in the church. Foundational laying prophets and shepherd/elder teachers, who served as leaders. And people who regularly exercise the gifts of prophecy and teaching. Consider prophets first. Ephesians 2:20 speaks of prophets who lay the foundation of the church, while 1 Corinthians 14 speaks of prophets who exercise the gift of prophecy. We understand a distinction between the two because, in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, Paul says, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet... he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." Note how the submission to Paul's authority. People who regularly exercise prophecy are distinct from foundational laying Prophets because their gift functions differently.

1 Corinthians 14:1 and 3 say, “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” Everyone is commanded to earnestly desire to prophesy, because prophecy speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. This may involve personal guidance, as we see in Acts. Prophecy, in this function, is for personal edification, not laying foundational truths for all believers everywhere, which is why the interpretation and application should be weighed. Does this mean the function of prophets changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament? Not exactly. I’m persuaded this is consistent with the Old Testament because of what we see in Numbers 12. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron, who were prophets, spoke directly against Moses, justifying their actions by pointing to how God spoke through them as well. But look at what God says in Numbers 12:6-8, “And he [God] said, ‘Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’” God makes a distinction between them and Moses by how He speaks to each. I see this pattern continuing through Scripture, making distinction between foundational laying prophets, whom God spoke to clearly, and other prophets whom God spoke to in visions and dreams. The Spiritual Gift of giving encouragement, consolation, and guidance through a prophetic revelation still exists today, but the role of Prophets laying foundational truth for the church has ceased. Therefore, we should not despise prophecy and trust the Spirit may still speak through this gift, while weighing all prophetic words against the authority of Scripture. I encourage you to continue studying on your own and, we can talk more if you want to dig in deeper to this. Consider the similarity with teachers. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul describes elders, church leaders, who labor in preaching and teaching to guide the church. Yet, Scripture also shows those outside of church leadership teaching. Now, why am I sharing this? Because I believe Luke is highlighting the Spirit’s activity through Spiritual Gifts to prepare for verses 2-4 and encourage a deep trust in the Spirit. Look at verses 2-4 again, “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 off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” Note how Luke emphasizes the Spirit sending them on mission. Interestingly, we’re not told how the Spirit spoke. Did He speak through a prophetic word, or teaching on the great commission? Or, perhaps, He simply gave the whole community a united sense of this call. The point isn’t to ascertain how the Spirit spoke but to show their trust that the Spirit was speaking. The language used in the Spirit’s call is a command to immediately obey. Their fasting and praying reveals they took this seriously. And laying hands on them speaks of affirming the Spirit’s call. Note one more thing, how the Spirit worked with the church to send Barnabas and Saul out. Understanding these dual roles protects us from claiming personal guidance by the Spirit void of church interaction, and pragmatic church decision making void of the Spirit’s guidance. So, what led the church in Antioch to become a sending church? A sincere devotion to the Lord and an abiding trust in the Spirit. If we desire to passionately pursue sharing the glory of God in Christ by sending people on mission, these should be defining marks of our church. We will only go as far on mission as we have gone deep in devotion and trust. To conclude, let’s consider on how each of us can and should participate in God’s mission. First,

1) Understand Our Place in God’s Mission

We all have a place in God’s mission. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Verse 12 then says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that...they may see your good deeds and glorify God” Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” The purpose of our redemption is for us to show God’s glory to the world.

Our conduct is a testimony to God's glory and an avenue for gospel witness. The way we spend our time and resources speaks to God's excellencies. Everything in life can open a door for gospel witness. In global missions, everyone also has a part to play whether they go or not. There's a well-known story from the life of William Carey, a famous missionary to India. Before he went on mission, he and his friends were meeting for prayer, when he said to them, "I will go down into the pit, if you will hold the rope." Those words remind those who don't go of the importance of supporting those who do. We all have a place in God's mission. Second,

2) Prayerfully Consider Opportunities for Global Missions

Have you specifically asked God if He is calling you to go? I would wager many are afraid to approach that conversation with God. The thought of leaving family, comforts, and familiar ways of life is unnerving. But could the Spirit speak through that prayer? The church in Antioch may have been fasting for specific guidance on participating in God's mission. Would you dare to do the same? As you do this, don't limit yourself to one model of engagement. There are short-term options, long-term options, traditional missionary work, and unconventional work. Consider Priscilla and Aquila. They traveled with Paul to Ephesus, set up shop and used their vocation for kingdom impact. I know of a missions organization who mobilizes professionals to use their vocation in creative access nations where it is hard or impossible to have a traditional missionary presence, promoting career growth and providing vocational coaching, while teaching believers to consider their vocation as mission rather than merely a visa strategy. Did you know you could use your vocation for kingdom purposes in hard-to-reach places while strengthening your career goals? Do you see your vocation as part of God's mission here? Prayerfully consider all opportunities for global missions. Third,

3) Follow the Leading of the Spirit

The Spirit's leading is all over our passage. How do we become more in tune with His leading? Two moments in my life increased my faith that the Spirit still speaks in powerful ways today. First is our family's call to Abu Dhabi. Nine years ago, I was working full-time in finance while church planting in Fresno, when I began to desire to do more in ministry. I assumed that meant finding a pastoral role in the U.S., but God had other plans. I was walking alongside a close friend considering a move to Dubai to counsel women, when I saw a pastoral job in Abu Dhabi. After discovering it was close to Dubai, I asked Holly about it and she said she wasn't leaving California. Months later, our friend returned from visiting Dubai and met with our elders to share about the ministry. She handed us a map of the UAE and in the middle was the church logo for that job posting. During the whole conversation, the Spirit pressed me to ask Holly about the job again. So, I asked her to pray about inquiring. To my surprise, she agreed to inquire and, after a series of God orchestrated events, we went and returned from a candidating trip. Yet, we were unsure of God's calling when home and I lost my finance job the day after landing. We spent 3 months wrestling with the decision until Holly looked at me on a date and said, "You need to lead our family in this decision." So, I decided to ask God for a clear yes when I woke up the next day or I would know He wasn't calling us to go. In the morning, I told Holly, "I didn't get a clear yes, so I don't think we should go." To which my Spirit-filled, discerning wife responded, "I don't like that reasoning, you need to pray more." So, I decided to sit on the no decision for the day and was completely restless, struggling to sleep that night. The next morning, I came to Matthew 19:29 in my personal study, which says, "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life." The Spirit revealed my reason for not saying yes was because I wasn't trusting God's promise to provide for my family if we left our house and family for His sake. We said yes and it was one of the best decisions of our lives. The second story is more simple but just as powerful. After a worship gathering in Abu Dhabi, someone visiting their family walked up to a couple they had not met before and said, "I believe God wants me to tell you to go. I don't know what that means but weigh it before the Lord." I discovered that couple had been praying about moving to another part of the world as missionaries.

This stranger's trust that the Spirit was speaking, and simple obedience, helped this couple trust the Lord was calling them to go. That may be challenging for some in this room to believe, but I am persuaded the Spirit speaks both through God's Word, like He did for me, and the gift of prophecy, like He did for that couple. The question is, will we listen for and follow the Spirit's leading?

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of reflection and response, let me give one final encouragement,

4) Participate in God's Mission However You Can

Look for ways to participate in God's mission. Whether it's open doors for gospel conversations in your daily life or participating in global missions in some form. Will you sacrifice to go on short term trips, like the planned trip next year with Chain of Love trip? Or use retirement like the Kehoe's to go on mission? In two weeks, we'll hear Tyler Hamilton share God's calling for a 1-year assignment in Japan post-graduation. Would you consider something like that? Maybe you want to connect with the organization I mentioned to use your vocation to reach the unreached. There are some many options in the world of global missions, spanning from weeks, to months, to years. Will you sincerely pray about going? If you aren't called to go, will you support those who do? Here is the deal, we're either called to go or support, there is no third option. Are you holding the rope for someone who is going? Whether through finances, prayer, or encouragement. Family, the question isn't whether you will participate in God's mission, it is how will you participate? Go deep in your devotion and trust of the Spirit to speak to live your life to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Let's pray as we prepare to respond.