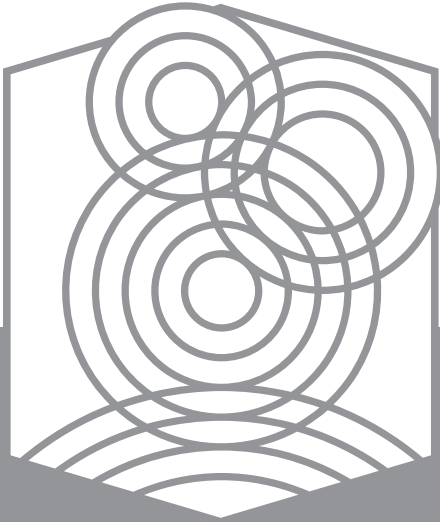


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A 6-SESSION STUDY
FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND
THE SCRIPTURES



PARTICIPATING IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First Principles of Community Purpose

BY JEFF REED

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These materials are designed to integrate with BILD-International resources, which are designed to help churches train leaders.

All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is from the New American Standard Bible.

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PARTICIPATING IN THE MISSION — WORLDWIDE 1

In the first book of this series, *Becoming a Disciple*, we saw that Christ has a mission—making disciples of all nations. In the second book, *Belonging to a Family of Families*, we saw that Christ has an overall plan for His mission—the forming of His disciples into communities of believers, local churches. Local churches are at the center of Christ’s plan. In this book, we will examine Christ’s strategy for making disciples of all nations and how we can fully participate in it. We will now begin by studying a key section in Acts that contains the heart of this strategy—Acts 13:1-14:28. In this section, we will see the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles and the formation of local churches around the new believers. It is designed to give us a pattern for carrying out Christ’s mission today. Once this is understood, we will have a lifelong framework for carrying out our own personal commitments to Christ’s purpose.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: ACTS 13:1-14:28

Think Through the Questions:

1. Who sent out Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey?
2. Where did they proclaim the gospel? How did they proclaim it?
3. What did they do with the new converts?
4. Are there things that they consistently did everywhere they went?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage:

Write a paragraph, outline, annotate, or chart your conclusions— whatever best communicates for you. Be sure to comment on any activities that were repeated from place to place.

Core teaching of Acts 13:1-14:28



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on Acts 13:1-14:28:

Acts is a history of the Early Church. It was written in narrative form by Luke, who was Paul's associate and part of his missionary team. In order to carefully apply it to our lives today, it is important to understand why Luke wrote it. Acts is actually the second of Luke's two-volume history. The first volume is Luke, one of the four gospels, which is a history of the life and works of Christ. Luke explains his purpose for writing his two-volume history in Luke 1:1-4. He wrote to Theophilus to carefully instruct him in

the faith. The word for *teach* in Luke 1:4 is the Greek word *katecheo*, which is where we get the word *catechism*. He did not write his two-volume history merely to give us a few insights into what happened in the Early Church, but to instruct us in the faith that was delivered by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. As Roland Allen, who was an English missionary, has said, Acts instructs us in “the way of Christ and the Apostles.” Together with the letters of the Apostles to the churches, especially Paul’s letters, we have a complete picture of the “exact truth.” This “exact truth” is carefully woven into the actions of the Apostles, since it shows us how they understood and carried out the teaching. This instructs us, or “catechizes,” us concerning how to carry out the Great Commission in all generations. It was designed to carefully document the powerful unfolding of God’s plan, which set in motion a worldwide expansion of the gospel through the multiplication of local churches.

Acts 13:1-14:28 describes Paul’s first missionary journey. The description provides a fairly consistent picture of Paul’s strategy, which he followed throughout his ministry. The first question we need to ask is, What were the core elements of his mission strategy? The second question is, Do we need to follow these core elements as we carry out the Great Commission today? First, let’s address the issue of whether Paul had a core strategy, and what it was.

A careful examination of Paul’s first missionary journey shows at least three core elements to his strategy. First, he proclaimed the gospel everywhere he went. He went to strategic cities along his journey, always going to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Although he was sent to take the gospel to the Gentiles, he went to Jewish synagogues first, out of respect for God’s chosen people. Then he proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles. He used many different environments to proclaim the gospel, yet his core message was always the same (See *Becoming a Disciple*, session one). Second, he gathered together those who believed and quickly instructed them in the “first principles” of the faith, thus establishing a new church. Third, he then appointed elders in every church. Acts 14:21-23 is an excellent summary of this process. This pattern—evangelizing strategic cities, establishing new churches, and appointing leaders over the new churches—was consistent throughout Paul’s entire ministry. Many refer to this pattern as the “Pauline cycle.” In his book *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, David Hesselgrave makes a detailed study of Paul’s strategy. In fact, he builds the entire outline of his book around this cycle, going into great detail to document Paul’s mission pattern from Acts and Paul’s letters to the churches. Though Hesselgrave comes up with many additional elements of Paul’s strategy, these three core elements can easily be seen from this first missionary journey.

The second question is of great importance for our instruction today. Do we need to follow Paul’s pattern—the “Pauline cycle”—in our mission strategy today? Yes we do. This can be seen from at least three vantage points. First, Acts is not just a history lesson. Acts was written to instruct us—a catechism—in “the way of Christ and the Apostles.” Second, Acts is a carrying out of all that Christ commanded the Apostles (Matthew

28:19–20; Luke 24:44–48; Acts 1:1), showing us how the original believers understood their instructions. Third, Paul was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8–10) and to bring to light Christ’s plan for His churches. He commanded those on his team to establish all of the churches according to this plan (1 Timothy 3:14–16; Titus 1:5). Preaching the gospel and then establishing churches was Christ’s design for building His church. Paul then commanded the men he trained to train other men as well (2 Timothy 2:2). The Great Commission is, in essence, a worldwide multiplication of churches. Proclaiming the gospel where it is not known, establishing churches around the new believers, and then entrusting those churches to leaders, trained and appointed—are the essential elements of the mission of churches in every culture, in every generation!

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The quote below is from David Hesselgrave’s *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*, a detailed study of the Pauline cycle in Acts.

“There can be little doubt that insofar as we have in the New Testament an example of sound strategy for planting growing churches, we have it in the strategy of Paul. After giving us a brief record of the role of Peter and others taking the gospel beyond the bounds of the Jewish community, Luke devotes the lion’s share of his attention to the ministry of Paul and his coworkers. Much of the rest of the New Testament is made up of Paul’s correspondence with churches and their leaders. . . .

“It is clear from the New Testament Scriptures that Paul’s *message* is normative. To the Galatians—troubled as they were by the Judaizers—he could say, ‘But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed’ (Gal.1:8). To the Corinthians—plagued as they were with church difficulties—he could write, ‘For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you’ (1 Corinthians 11:23a).

“It is also clear from the New Testament that, in a secondary sense, Paul the *man* was a normative example of what a Christian should be and do. To the Corinthians, who desperately needed an example of what a Christian should be, he could make a remarkable statement, ‘Be imitators of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:1a). But Paul was not perfect. He knew it. And therefore he added those all-important words ‘just as I also am of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 11:1b). So Paul’s example is normative because it reflects the perfect pattern—that of Jesus Christ Himself.

“Then what about Paul’s missionary *method*? As we have said, there seems to be little to indicate that the Holy Spirit expects us to slavishly follow every Pauline procedure in our evangelistic outreach. On the other hand, there is explicit teaching in the Epistles which directs us to carry on the same activities in a similar way—namely, to go where people are, preach the gospel, gain converts, gather them into churches, instruct them in the faith, choose leaders, and commend believers to the grace of God.”¹

Today we often replace this New Testament mission with Christian mission agencies and relief organizations. Over 70 years ago, Roland Allen wrote a brilliant trilogy contrasting today's modern mission efforts with that of the New Testament model. In his second volume, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, he writes (bear with the old English style) regarding the significance of the New Testament model for missions.

“For mission work we have two organizations; one which is ancient and one which is modern; one simple, the other very cumbrous: the simple necessary organization is the organization of the Church, the cumbrous modern organization is the organization of missionary societies.

“The Church was first established and organized with a world-wide mission for a world-wide work. It was a living organism composed of living souls deriving their life from Christ, who was its Head. It was an organism which grew by its own spontaneous activity, the expression of that life which it had in union with Christ, the Saviour. Its organization was the organization fitted for such an organism; it was the organization of a missionary body. Consequently there was no special organization for missions in the Early Church; the church organization sufficed. It was simple and complete. There was abundant room in it for the expression of the spontaneous individual activity of its members; for every member was potentially a missionary; and the Church, as an organized body, expected that activity and knew how to act when its members did their duty. With the activity of its members, it grew simply by multiplying its bishops.”²

Similar thoughts have been expressed by David Niringiye, an evangelical leader in Uganda, in an article in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, one of the two or three major missions journals.

“I am constantly intrigued and challenged whenever I look at the logic and strategy of the young missionary church in the book of Acts, as it sought to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:19). Considering that the early church did not enjoy the numerical strength we have, nor the technological advances we take for granted, one cannot but wonder how this small band of disciples made such a tremendous impact on their world. What was their secret? What can we learn from their strategy?...

“I turned to the Bible with many questions. Who qualifies to be a missionary? What is the mission field and where is it? What role does a ‘young’ church like ours in Uganda have in accomplishing the missionary task of the universal church?

“Naturally, I focused on the book of Acts. The more I read, the more I was struck by the variance that exists between our strategies today and those of the early church.”³

Record any insights from the brief commentary and quotes:



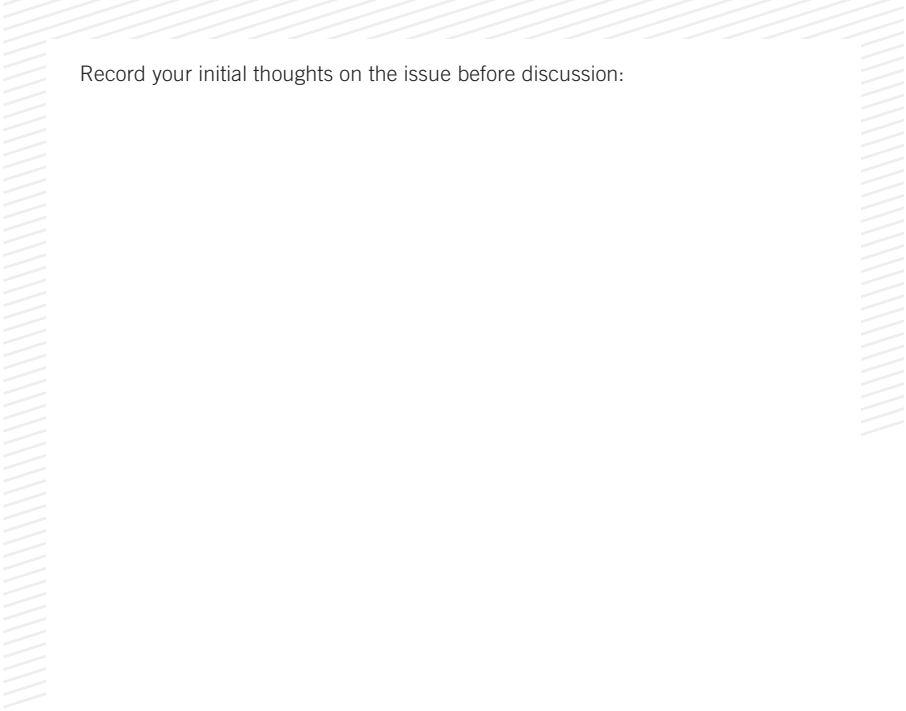
Think Through the Issues

Paul evangelized strategic cities, established churches, and then trained leaders and entrusted the churches to them. The pattern was simple. Today we have large Christian mission agencies and all kinds of relief, development, and aid organizations. The church is not fully involved in the same way that the New Testament church was in Paul's day, as modeled by the Antioch church. Discuss how you can see a church, and you as an individual, fully participating in the worldwide multiplication of churches today.

ISSUE: The core elements of Paul's mission strategy

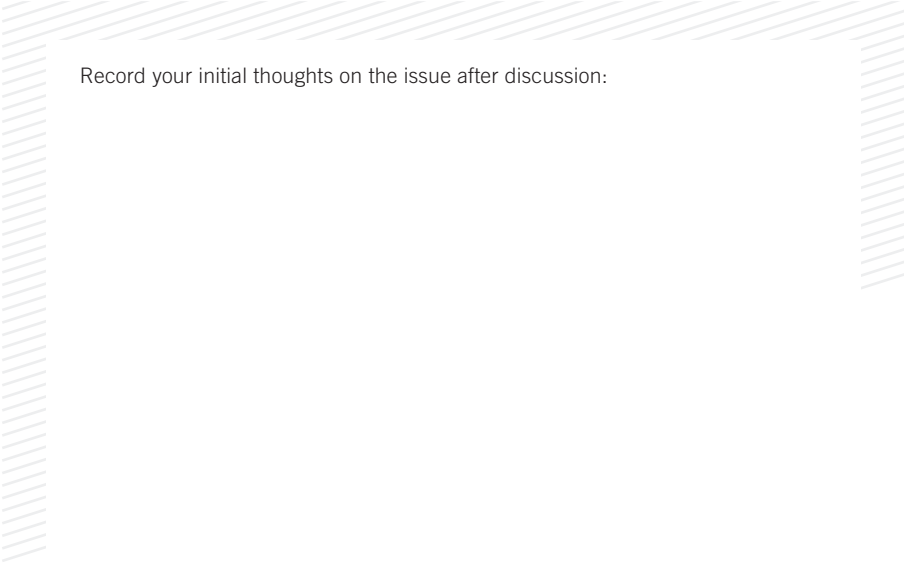
Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. Is there a need to follow Paul's strategy today? Do we need to think in terms of sending people from our churches to areas that are in need of the gospel and in need of churches?
2. If we are going to follow the core elements of Paul's strategy today, what might it look like at a local church level?
3. How could we follow Paul's model today in our modern culture?
4. What are the kinds of ways you can envision directly participating in the mission of a worldwide multiplication of churches?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.



Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion:



Apply the Principles

It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

Design an Application for Your Life.

Complete the assigned project and record any additional applications.

There are two aspects to the assigned project. First, write down what you consider to be the basic strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission today. Then, record your initial thoughts about how you might fully participate in this worldwide mission, both now and in the future.