

The Church at Antioch



Acts 13: 1-5

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As we continue our study through the book of Acts, we are going to be talking about the church in Antioch. I hope as we see some of the characteristics and the life of that church, it helps us understand who God wants us to be as his church here in Hardin.

Scripture

"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 off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them."

I am sure that there have been many times when you had something you wanted to do, or needed to do, but knew you couldn't do it by yourself so you had to wait and to get someone to help you. Without that helping hand, you couldn't do what you wanted to do, but with that helping hand, many times we can do more than we can by ourselves. Have you ever had one of those situations at home where your wife wanted you to get something done while she was gone — you get it done, and then she was amazed that you got everything you got done! When she asked you to do it, she just knew there was no way you could get it all done, but she asked you anyway. Now she comes home, looks at you, and she's surprised that you got it all done. Now, if you are like me, you try to take credit for that, but then after a while, you feel really, really guilty, right? And you say something like this, "Well, the reason I got it done was because Kory came over and helped a couple of hours." Or, "I went and got the grandkids and I had some helping hands." It's just amazing how, with a helping hand, we can get more done than we can do by ourselves.

When we look at the church at Antioch, the Bible is going to make this statement about the church of Antioch: "The hand of the Lord was with them." When the community of Hardin talks about Hardin Baptist Church, I pray they sense that we are not doing what we are doing on our own but we are benefiting from the helping hand of God.

Our primary text is going to be Acts 13: 1-5, but we have to back up to the 11th chapter, verses 19-30. You may think we skipped that passage, but we just knew it didn't come into play until this message. We can't fully understand Acts 13:1-5 until we realize what is going on in Acts 11:19-30. What you are going to discover this morning is that whole message that Kory preached last week from Acts 12, is a parenthesis. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Luke is telling us a story because he can't continue the story he started to tell, so to take up some time, so to speak, he inserted this story. And what a story it was — about the power of praying as a church. Now, I want you to see what Luke did and why he did it.

Go back with me to Acts 11:19: **Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.**

Luke paints the picture of the early church, but here he takes us back to the stoning of Stephen. He reminds us again that when Stephen got stoned a persecution broke out on the church, and the church scattered. Now, when he originally told us about that in Acts 8:4, he told us that when the church got scattered they went to Samaria and proclaimed Jesus. Then Philip goes down south and meets a guy who is travelling in a chariot, and he is reading his Bible. Luke is recording that when the church gets scattered, they go just right outside of Jerusalem to Judea and to Samaria because they are supposed to take the gospel to Samaria. Then they take the gospel down south. Luke wants us to realize that the gospel doesn't just go south and just a little ways north of Jerusalem, it goes as far north as Phoenicia, as far west as Cyprus (an island out in the Mediterranean Sea), and as far north as Antioch — that is 300 miles from Jerusalem. The reason the gospel is going in these directions is because the church gets scattered. And here is what Luke tells...I love this! He says that when the church came into this northern region, they didn't speak to anyone but Jews. Now they are outside of Jewish soil, they are outside of their borders. They are in another country. And because of the Old Testament history of Israel, and because of the two exiles, the Jewish people have been scattered all over the world's population. So when the Jewish church gets into Gentile soils, they find people just like themselves and they are the only ones they tell about Jesus. They don't tell anybody else. Whoa, whoa, whoa! According to Acts 1:8, the church is supposed to start in Jerusalem, go to Judea, go to Samaria, and go to the ends of the earth. We are supposed to tell everyone about Jesus, but here the early church is only talking to people like themselves.

Why would Luke tell us this? Do you think it's possible that the early Jewish church was just like us, the American church, and that really most of us are only comfortable talking to people who are like us? Sometimes we really struggle to meet, talk with, and enter to a conversation with someone who

is not like us. Do you realize that is a hindrance for us doing what we have been called to do? And that is to take the gospel to the nations.

Acts 11, verse 20: **But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.**

Now, you have to remember, we are in Antioch. It's a Gentile city but there is a large Jewish population there. And the Jewish church comes into Antioch but they are only telling the Jews there about Jesus. Then Luke says we have *some* people in the church who are from Cyprus (Barnabas is from Cyprus) and some from Cyrene (the northern tip of Africa), and guess what they do? They tell the Hellenists about Jesus, and they preached to them that Jesus is Lord. They are telling the people who the Jewish won't talk to about Jesus. That phrase, "Hellenist," refers to a Greek speaking person, someone who is emersed in Greek culture. This early church, primarily raised Jewish, are now out in the world and they are intermingling in the Greek culture, and they are not comfortable. That culture does things that the Jewish Christians can't have anything to do with, so they are not talking to anybody — but these other Christians who are from Cyprus and Cyrene are talking to the Hellenists. Now, I don't know if Luke tells us this because they are more comfortable since they were raised in a Greek speaking world, a Greek culture. Are these men from Cyprus and Cyrene just doing what the Jews were doing, talking to those they are comfortable with? Or, is Luke recording that there is a small part of the church that really gets what we are supposed to be doing? And that is not just talking to a few people, but talking to everyone.

Acts 11:21: **And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.**

Now, I want you to watch this. While they are talking, while they are preaching, Luke says, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number of them who believed turned to the Lord." This is awesome! Make sure you have this picture. The church that scattered is scattering the Word and the Lord is blessing the scattered Word! As His Word gets scattered and planted in the souls of people, there is a great harvest of

souls for Jesus. There is a great number that are believing, and a great number of them who are turning to the Lord. So Luke is trying to tell us that there are some who believe but don't turn to the Lord. You do know this, right? Not everyone who says they believe really believes. How do you know who really believes? In believing, they turn to the Lord — and in turning to the Lord, there is a great change in their life.

Acts 11:22–23: The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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...

Just like earlier in Acts when the gospel went down to Samaria and the church in Jerusalem heard about it and sent apostles, now 300 miles away the church heard about this. I mean, you can't do anything without the church knowing about it, agreed? The church in Jerusalem hears about it, but they don't send apostles this time, they send Barnabas. Remember Barnabas? He is that Levite from Cyprus. His name means 'Son of Encouragement,' so no doubt he has that gift of encouragement. So Barnabas is sent by the church, by the apostles — he is going to encourage the church — and when he gets there, Luke tells us he saw the grace of God and was glad.

How do you see the grace of God? We talk about grace of God a lot. We talk about how we are saved by grace through faith. So, how do you see grace? Luke specifically says that Barnabas saw it. Now, I think if we keep this in context, here is what he saw...he saw this group of people who claim to believe in Jesus, and he knew God's grace was really in their life because he saw the changed life they were living. If someone looked at your life, would they see the grace of God? Would someone who really knows you and knew who you used to be, and then knows that you claim to be a believer in Christ, would they so see the transformation in your life? Would they see such a different life that the only thing they can contribute it to is the grace of God? Here is what I want us to see. When we see the church at Antioch, Luke is laboring to get us to see that it is a graced church. Grace is not forgiveness of sin, only. I can't tell you how many times I am told by people, "Ricky, be graceful." What that means is that

somebody has really blown it, and I am supposed to be graceful. I am supposed to be forgiving. Yes, forgiveness is a result of grace, but let me tell you what grace really is. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what He did. Grace is God's enabling power. It is God's enabling ability. When we get grace by God, there is a change in our life because God gives us the ability to live this life called the Christian life, each and every one of us! Because the old person that we were dies, and we become brand new in Christ. Is Hardin a grace church? Do people look at us and see the grace of God?

Acts 11:24: ...for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

Luke is now going to describe Barnabas. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith. We don't know how long Barnabas stays, but we come to understand that while Barnabas was there a great number of people get added to the Lord. I want you to see this...the church at Antioch was not only graced, but it was growing. I really believe with all of my heart that if a church is healthy, it ought to be growing. Unless we are in a church, in a town of a hundred people and all hundred people have come to know the Lord, and the rest of the community lives like 10,000 miles from us, a church today ought to be growing. Why? Because we scatter the seed. Then, God takes that seed and plants it in the hearts of people and He brings about that harvest, and those people who believe are going to be added to the church.

Acts 11:25–26: 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 in Antioch is not only a growing church and a grace church; it is a gathering church. See, here is what happens. The church is gathering and Barnabas is teaching. He looks around and realizes that there are so many people who have been added to the Lord that he can't do this by himself. So do you know what he does? Luke says he goes to Tarsus and he looks for Saul. When he finds Saul, he brings him back to Antioch —

Saul, that guy who wrote so much of the New Testament. — In our study, we haven't heard from him in about ten years. Do you know where he has been? He has been in Tarsus, which is north of Antioch. Barnabas brings Saul to Antioch and, together, they meet with the church and they teach for a whole year.

Luke says they met with the church. The word church means 'a called out assembly.' It is people who are called out of the world to assemble together. We are assembling because of Christ, assembling because of God. We don't assemble because we have an agenda. We assemble because we, as the church, carry out the agenda of the Kingdom of God. And so these people who are being called out are meeting together, they are assembling. Saul and Barnabas are teaching them because they are gathering together, they are getting connected, they are studying together. That is us. We have got to gather. If we are born again Christians, if we are following Christ, we have been called out of this world to assemble, to be the assembly of Christ. Our whole purpose of gathering together is because He has given us an agenda, and it is His agenda that we are supposed to be carrying out. We can't just attend church; we have to be the church. There is a difference in attending and gathering. There's a difference in attending and connecting. There's a difference in attending and serving. Are you gathering to hear God's Word so that you can help us be the church that God wants us to be?

And then, we see in the last part of verse 26 that the church was first called Christians in Antioch. Up until this time, they have been called believers, they have been called saints, they have been called brothers, they have been called the Way, and now they are called Christians. The word, Christ, is not Jesus's name; it is a description of who He is, the Jewish Messiah — a Messiah who was coming not just to make salvation available to Jews, but to make salvation available to the whole world. Now, for the first time people started connecting the dots that this group of people living in Antioch reminded them of that person that they heard about in Israel described as Christ, the Messiah. We don't think a thing about saying we are a Christian, but here in Acts chapter 11, being a Christian meant that you were a follower of Jesus. His beliefs were your

beliefs. His example of life was how you lived your life. Do you think people look at us, here in Hardin, living in the Bible Belt of the United States of America and really believe we are Christians — that we are following Christ? Maybe it would be good if we reread Matthew, Luke, and John and read about this Jesus who said that He "...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." There are a whole lot of times when He just kept his mouth shut. There were a whole lot of times when He didn't get reeled into a debate, because He knew the motive of those who were asking the questions. So instead of telling what He really believed, He just asked a question back to get people to think. You kind of get this idea when you are following Christ that life is not about us. Our life ought to be about God, and the people that ought to be on our mind should not be us, but others. Yes, there were times when Jesus stopped because He was tired and He needed to eat. There were times He slipped away to pray. There were times He was asleep in the midst of storms. But He lived His life submissive to the will of God for Him. That is what the name, Christian, means. How are you doing with that? How are we doing with that as a church?

Acts 11:27–29: Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

We see this church that is graced. We see this church that is growing. We see this church that is gathering. And now we hear. As Luke continues on in Acts chapter 11 that prophets now come down from Jerusalem. Now, we don't know if, being a prophet, they just sense the Spirit lead them from Jerusalem to go down to Antioch, or if the church apostles sent them there. But now we have prophets in the midst of the church at Antioch, and one of those prophets predicts that there is going to be a worldwide famine. Evidently, he talked about how disastrous it was going to be in Judea and so the disciples got together, the church got together, and they decide to send relief...but they don't take money out of the church budget.

Luke says they determine to give to the relief according to each one's ability. So what we are going to see here is that the church at Antioch was a giving church. That they didn't give according to the tithe, they gave according to ability. That changes everything.

Now, let's just think about this for just a moment. Let's just suppose we are all tithers in here. We all get our check and we give God ten percent; we invest in His work through the church. But let's suppose we are getting ready to take up a relief offering for some believers who are living somewhere else. We decide that we are going to give and agree together that we are going to give according to our ability. How big would your offering be? It would be huge. Some of us have been blessed to live in greatest country on the face of the earth with the highest standard of living the world has known. So if we give according to our ability, when it comes to meeting needs of other people it would be life changing for somebody. Where did this come from? This kind of giving isn't rooted in an Old Testament concept of a law that says to bring their tithes to the Lord and then bring a special offering — this is a church that roots their giving after the very giving of God. Isn't that what God did when He gave Jesus? He gave according to His ability. When He gave His Son, it changed our lives.

Acts 11:30: And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

This early church takes up an offering that is going to change the life of the people of Judea. And when they take up this offering, I get blown away about what happens next.

See, we saw in Acts 6 that there was murmuring in the church, we deal with the murmuring, and then we ordained seven deacons so that the Apostles can pray and proclaim the Word. We think those seven deacons are going to start taking care of widows, and that the gospel is going to go to Samaria and Judea and to the other parts of the worlds because the apostles' hands are freed up. But it is not the Apostles who take the gospel outside Jerusalem; they stay in Jerusalem. It is the deacons who take the gospel, and the church takes it as they are scattered! That threw me a curveball. I am like – *God, what are you doing here?* We have chapters

taking up two stories about Stephen and Philip and they are deacons, they are not apostles.

Now, we are back to that story again, about how it is not apostles who are taking the gospel to the known world. It is a church that is scattered who is taking the gospel to the world. And so the church takes up this love offering and they get ready to take it back to Jerusalem to give it to the church so they can take care of the people there, and guess who the church sends...their two teachers. It is three hundred miles! This will take months. Why don't they send a deacon? Why don't they send a business man who is traveling there? The two people who we would believe are the most valuable — Barnabas and Saul — are taking a love offering to Jerusalem! They are not dealing with spiritual things here; they are dealing with physical things.

Here is another curve ball that I am swinging at, and I am hoping I hit it, but this is getting us ready for what is happening in Acts chapter 13. I want to say this to us. Being fleshly, there are some people who we believe just have to be a part of our life and we wouldn't be the same without them. Luke is trying to tell the church that God can take the two main teachers out of the church and have them take a love offering to Jerusalem, and the church will be okay. Do you hear what we are saying here?

Now watch this. Saul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, but Luke can't keep telling us about the story of the Antioch church because the two teachers are gone. So now, he tells us in chapter 25 about Herod killing James, Peter being placed in prison, the church praying, and then that miraculous deliverance. When Luke finished the story in verse 25, he says Barnabas and Saul finished the job they had been sent to do, and they come back to Antioch.

The Shift from Peter to Saul

Now, Barnabas and Saul are back to Antioch and Luke continues the story. Now, I want to tell you what is happening here. Up until this point, the primary church in the book of Acts has been the church at Jerusalem. But we are going to see a shift now, going from a church on Jewish soil to a

church on Gentile soil. We are going to see a shift from Peter, who up until this point has been the primary person, in the church, the spokesman for the church. Luke will now shift to Saul, and it is all taking place in this church in Antioch.

So when chapter 13 opens, Luke tells us, "Now there were in the church in Antioch, prophets and teachers..." and then it names the five people. We know Barnabas and Saul are teachers because they have been teaching for a whole year, but then it mentions three other people. These three other people are probably prophets, they may teach too. He mentions Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, a teacher. Then, he mentions Simeon and he is called Niger. That means that he's called 'dark.' No doubt, he is a dark man, an African man. Then, we have Lucius of Cyrene. Cyrene was that northern town on the coast of Africa, so we have a second African mentioned, possibly. Then, we have got Manaen mentioned, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch. This is not the Herod who just got eaten by worms, but the one who beheaded John the Baptist. Herod's lifelong friend is in the church as a prophet or a teacher. Can you imagine that? That person who opposed Christianity, that person who beheaded John the Baptist, that person who would not listen to the message of God — his best friend, at some point came to know Christ, and now has been scattered to Antioch. So, we have got a Jewish Levite, a Jewish Aristocrat, and two Africans (possibly), and we have Saul.

What do we see here? We see a gifted church. We see a church who recognizes that God has given these men in the church the spiritual gift of prophesy and teaching, and they exercise those gifts. If you remember in Ephesians chapter 4, Paul talked about how God has gifted the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers. Do you remember when Paul wrote to the church of Corinth and said he set first in the church apostles, then prophets, then teachers, then miracles, then healings, then administrations, then encouragement, then various kinds of tongues? So here is what we see. The church at Antioch doesn't have an apostle! They have prophets and teachers. When you look at this gift of leadership, it mirrors the city. They are not all Jews. They didn't all come out of Judaism.

Please hear me church...the church in a community should reflect the community, and that's what Luke is telling us. The early church reflected the community of Antioch, and that is what Hardin should be. In every way that Calloway and Marshall are diverse, we should be diverse in this church because we are unified in Christ Jesus. We don't see people the way the world sees people. We see people the way God sees people.

So you have this gifted church, and I think each member of the church had a spiritual gift from God that God expected and wanted them to use for the benefit of the church. That is the same thing He expects here, for each one of us to recognize that at the moment of spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit of God has given us a spiritual gift. We don't use it for our own glory; we use that gift for the glory of Christ's body so that we can be the visible presence of Christ in this community. You are here because we need you. The church needs the gift you have in order for us to be the body that we are supposed to be, and not just when we meet on Sundays or Wednesdays. As we scatter throughout the community, we are the church of Jesus Christ.

A Worshipping Church

I want you to listen to these closing things that Luke tells us about. Verse 2 says, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."" Now we see that the church at Antioch is not only a grace church, it is not only a growing church, it is not only a gathering church, it is not only a giving church, it is not only a gifted church, it is a worshipping church. Now normally, when we think of worship we think of Sunday morning and gathering together under Matt and the worship team's leadership. We publicly worship God. I think this is included, but I think this includes far more than that. I think that this is speaking about the lifestyle of the church, whether the church was gathered in public assembly or scattered throughout the community, the church was a worshipping church.

I don't know if you all remember this, but several years ago we met on Wednesday night for one purpose, and that purpose was to talk about worship and what kind of church we wanted to be as a worshipping church.

We had an awesome worship time together, and then I got to teach about worship. I shared with you my simple definition of worship: Worship is the releasing of our attitude toward God. I think that is worship. Worship is when I, in the presence of God, release my attitude toward God. That doesn't just happen at 7:50 for me or 9:15 for me or 10:40 for me. I love that I am the pastor of this church and I get to worship three times. This is talking about how I live my life, and how you live your life. Are we a worshiping church? Is your mind on you, and what you like, rather than on God? Are you uncomfortable because it's not the way you want it to be?

I will never forget when Celisa and I visited Rick Warren's Saddle Back Church in California. I was raised in Western Kentucky — and the music was to the tune of Led Zeppelin — yeah, I was in California. That first song, me and God were in a battle. I couldn't worship God because I was hearing Led Zeppelin. I never liked Led Zeppelin...Put me in an environment where it's southern gospel or country music! So I had to struggle, I had to focus. Because of what was happening around me, I wasn't aware of God. So God taught me an important principle. Worship begins when I am aware of who He is or what He has done or is doing in my life. If I am not aware of Him in my life, I will not worship.

Awareness Leads to Appraisal | Appreciation Leads to Worship

The reason some of us don't worship is because we aren't aware of God. We don't like the song, we don't this, we don't that — because our minds aren't on God, our minds are on us. Worship begins when we are aware of God. When you become aware of God, whether it is at home or at church, you have to make an appraisal about God. You have to make an appraisal about how valuable He is in your life. You have to make an appraisal about how valuable what He has done for you in the past, or what He is doing for you right now, is. Once you make that appraisal, you have a choice to either appreciate it or depreciate it. The moment you go down the road to depreciation, you will not worship God. The moment you begin to appreciate what you have appraised about God who you are aware of, inside you (no matter what your personality is), there will be an attitude that will start building up, and you will begin to develop an attitude toward God. In other words, you are aware of who God is, you are aware of what

God has done in your life. You are now appraising him, now appreciating him, and you now have attitude welling up inside you. When that attitude starts welling up inside you and it starts being developed, you have a choice to make — to release it or not release it. The moment you release it, *that* is worship. You don't release it for yourself or anyone else; you release it for God. He is your audience when you are worshipping Him.

Now, I don't know how your worship will look, but here is what my worship looks like. It will probably start with my face. Then it will move out of my face into one of my hands. I can't help it, it just moves my hand, whether I am sitting on the front row, driving my truck, or I am in a tractor, I just can't help it! But then, it moves to my feet. The next thing you know, those hands that want to raise, now want to serve him. Those hands now want to live for Him. That is why some of the oldest English versions translate this word, worshipping, as 'ministering to the Lord.' That's what worship is — we minister to the Lord! The life we live for God flows out of our attitude. It is not confined to what we do on Sunday morning for fifteen minutes; it is how we live our life throughout the rest of the week!

The Early Church Fasted

This church worshipped God...and they fasted. I have to confess to you that I have not been faithful to preach to you what I know is true, and that is that the early church fasted. Jesus's disciples got in trouble for not fasting, but Jesus took up for them. He said, "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." Then He said that the day would come when He would go away, and when He goes they will go back to fasting.

Do you ever fast? If you don't ever fast, we can't say that we are a fasting church. I have to be honest with you, I was raised in a church that taught there are some things about yourself that you don't talk, because if you did you would be bragging, so I don't talk about fasting. I confess that to you, and I am going to change because fasting is an important part of the life of a Christian. It's an important part of the life of the church. Fasting is not about not eating. Fasting is when you get so focused on God and His will, or a word from Him, a desire we want to express to Him — that we want

to be so certain of it that it leads us into a time of fasting — to where we desire the Spirit more than we desire food. What normally happens when you begin to fast and it comes to those times of eating, you choose not to eat, and you remind yourself that you are more hungry for God, and God's things, and God's light, than you are food. During that time when you are just overwhelmed with those cravings, you focus that into intense time of praying to God and being focused on God.

I just want to share one thing, and please forget it after I tell you. I remember a time in the life of this church when we were going to make a decision. The decision was to move from downtown Hardin out to the highway with a worship building. As pastor of this church, I was hearing the voice of those who wanted to move and I was hearing the voice of those who did not want to move. I was torn in my heart, as a pastor, because we were not united as a church. I was so hearing people on this side, and so hearing people on that side, that I could not hear the voice of God. And I remember saying to God, "God, I have to know...because this is big." I want you all to know that I didn't want to come out here...I did not want to be a church on the side of a four-lane highway. I wanted to be the pastor of a church in downtown Hardin — so that if you came to Hardin Baptist Church the only way you knew to come was that somebody had to invite you. In other words, you had to hear about the church; you didn't just see a church on the side of a road and decide to come. There was nothing within me that wanted to come out here. And I have to lead. And I remembered all those stories in the Bible about fasting, so I just said to God one time, "God, I am going to fast." I told God how long I was willing to fast and then I started my fast. And I'll never forget those first days. Every time that hunger pain would hit, I would go to the Lord. I wouldn't let anyone know it. I farmed, I pastored this church, and no one knew I was fasting. You could never tell on my face. So I fasted, I prayed, and I sought God. Now, if you fast long enough, those hunger pangs will go away. They really will, and you won't be hungry anymore. So I got to that stage where I wasn't hungry anymore. And when I wasn't hungry anymore, I didn't know what to do because that hunger was what was driving me to pray. It was what was driving me to stay focused, and then I lost that. Then, my fasting went to another level. My communion with God

went to another level because I really had to stay focused on why I was fasting. And then, I'll never forget this, I was down in the Family Life Center one Wednesday night for meal ministry...and I had been fasting. I walked in, with no hunger pangs at all, and I just had a desire to eat. I said, "I can't eat." I didn't sense an audible voice, but I sensed in my spirit God saying to me, "Why aren't you going to eat tonight." And in my spirit, I said to God, "I am fasting." And God said, "Why are you fasting?" I said, "Because I told you I would." And I heard God say, "I thought you were fasting so that you would know what I wanted the church to do?" I said, "I did." He said, "But don't you know?" And I said, "Yes." And He said, "Then why are you fasting?" Did you catch that? I only tell you that to say that there is a difference in fasting and not eating. Are we a church that fasts?

Set Apart and Sent

There are times when the early church worshipped, but they fast. For most of us, our main meal of the week is on Sunday after church! So this couldn't be talking about a Sunday morning worship service. It's talking about a lifestyle of people who sometimes decided what they were the most hungry for, and it was the things of God. Here is what happened in Acts 13. While they were worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke. I don't know if the Holy Spirit spoke through a prophet and they delivered the word, or if the Holy Spirit spoke in that inner sense that we sometimes sense, from God's Word, but the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Set them apart. Here is a church that is set apart from the world, assembling together. And now, the Holy Spirit said to set these two apart, not from the world, but from the church, because He has called them to a work. And Luke says the church fasted. They fasted. I think they wanted to make sure they were hearing from God so they fasted again, and they started praying. So they gathered Saul and Barnabas together, laid hands on them, and they sent them out.

See, the church is not only a grace church, not only a growing church, not only a gathering church, not only a giving church, not only a gifting church, not only a worshipping church, not only a fasting church, not only a praying church, it is a sending church. I want to make sure you get this.

There is a Greek picture here. When the English says they sent them out, the Greek picture is they loosed them and let them go. I think the church had wrapped their arms around them. God was getting them ready for what He was getting the church ready for, and that was the calling of Barnabas and Saul to go out from the church at Antioch. So when the church laid hands on them and sent them out, what the church was really doing was letting them go, letting them do what God called them to do.

I don't know how they do it around the world, but I know how they do it in America, Brazil, and Nicaragua. We measure the church by numbers and count how many gather. That's good, but I had this thought. Kory has challenged us for the last several years not to say we are dismissed at the end of the service but to say, "We are sent." I wonder if it is possible that some of us are being sent this morning. I wonder if we ought to also be measuring our church, not just by how many gather in this community with us, but how many who gather with us eventually get sent because of a call of God in their lives.

I want to share something really personal. Please don't take this the wrong way. Years ago, there was a lot of talk among the community about this little church in Hardin saying there were more people attending the church in the town than there were people in the town. Everybody got a big kick out of it and thought it was really neat. The whole community rejoiced in that. The whole time people were saying that, Celisa would whisper in my ear, "Ricky, on the day of judgment, Hardin Baptist Church is not going to be known by how many people gathered in a building in Hardin but by all those people who have been sent out of this church to other places."

Please realize that you might be one of the ones God wants to send. If He calls you, we want to pray about it and we want to fast over it, then loose you and let you go. I want to stay conscious in my life, even though I am sixty now, that God may still one day send me. He may still want to send you. Do you know what? The church will still be ok because it is God's church.