

SENDING BODIES

A Bible Study from the FL-GA Advisory Council on Church Worker Recruitment

The Purpose for the Advisory Council for Church Worker Recruitment and Student Aid is assisting Florida-Georgia congregations in “SENDING” sons and daughters into church work.

- a. Choosing
- b. Praying over
- c. Equipping
- d. Supporting and
- e. Encouraging

Introduction

Think of a time you sent someone on a mission. Why did you choose that person? What purpose did you send him or her to achieve? What did you give the person to allow them to achieve the purpose for which he or she was sent? What was the result? Success? Trouble?

Now, think about the same questions reflecting on a time when you were sent on a mission. Who sent you? Why *you*? With what purpose were you sent to achieve? What did the sender give you to enable you to achieve the purpose? How did it felt to be sent? Was the mission difficult? Challenging? Did you succeed?

Sending is a prominent theme in both testaments of the Bible. God is revealed to us in Scripture to be a God who sends. The major players in the history of salvation, Moses (Exodus 3), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1), John the Baptist (Mark 1), and our Lord Jesus (Matthew 10:40, John 3:17, Galatians 4:4) were all sent by God.

The key players in the history of the early church are called apostles. The word *apostle* refers to one who is sent. In John 20:21, the resurrected Jesus says to his disciples, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This sending activity continues after Jesus ascends into heaven as God sends the promised Holy Spirit (John 14:26, Acts 1:4) to give his presence, power and purpose to the apostles whom he as appointed.

In the book of Acts we see the same sending activity being carried out through Christ’s body, the Spirit-filled church. And in the apostolic letters the inspired writers make provision for the continuation of the mission of the church after apostolic age, which mission includes sending workers into the world with the same requisite equipment to achieve the divine purpose for which they are sent.

The title of this study, “Sending Bodies”, is a study of selected New Testament congregations. It has been prepared in order to help congregations today revisit what it means to be on the sending end of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

BECOMING A SENDING BODY: WORSHIP AND MISSION IN THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

“In the church at Antioch...”

Before Jesus ascends into heaven, he describes the mission of the church this way: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) The geography of Jesus’ mission moves like a ripple effect on the water. Situated just north of Samaria, Syrian Antioch is on the inner edge of the widest circle, reaching to “the ends of the earth.” Read Acts 6:1-7, Acts 8:1-3, and Acts 11:19-21. How did the Christian message reach Antioch? Significance?

“...there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.”

In the early church, prophets and teachers functioned in a way similar to pastors today, teaching God's word and applying it to the specific situations in a congregation's life. How did there come to be prophets and teachers in Antioch? Though we don't know all of the historical details, what does Paul say about the ultimate source and purpose of prophets and teachers and other workers in the church in Ephesians 4:7:13?

It is worth noting that in all likelihood none of the prophets and teachers named here originally came from Antioch.

Simeon called Niger. Simeon was a popular Jewish name. The word Niger, Latin for black, was perhaps a descriptive nickname of someone of dark completion.

Lucius of Cyrene. Lucius is a Latin name. Lucius was likely one of the leading Christians who, we are told in Acts 11:20, came to Antioch from Cyrene, the capital of what is modern-day Libya.

Manaen. Luke tells us that he grew up with Herod Antipas, the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and tried Jesus before his subsequent crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. Perhaps he was the one who provided the inside information on Herod that we have given to us in the gospels.

Unlike the three above, we are given more details about how Barnabas and Saul came to Antioch.

Barnabas. Read Acts 11:22-24. How does Barnabas get to Antioch? What does Barnabas do while he is there? What is the result?

Saul. Read Acts 11:25-26. How does Saul get to Antioch? What do you think made Barnabas think of Saul? See Acts 10:19-30. What does he do while he is there? What were the results?

In addition to the prophets and teachers mentioned in Acts 13:1, Luke also tells us that at one point prophets had come from Jerusalem to Antioch. Presumably they like Barnabas were sent there from the church in Jerusalem. What did they do while they were there? What effect did their presence have on the church in Antioch?

In light of Ephesians 4:7-13, reflect on the people that have been sent by the crucified, risen and ascended Christ to your congregation. How did they come to you? How has Christ worked through them to “fill your corner of the universe” with Christ (cf. Eph. 4:10)? In what specific ways have they equipped you for works of service? Edified you? Increased your knowledge? Fostered unity? Allowed you to mature in your faith? Take a moment to give thanks for these gifts of God.

Acts 13:2-3

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.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Antioch is the church through which God will send Barnabas and Saul, later Paul, on their missionary journeys to the ends of the earth. Paul will travel some 18,000 miles, throughout Asia Minor and

Europe, having been set apart, ordained and sent by the church in Antioch. Acts 13:1-3 is the story of a beginning. For that reason, it is important.

How is the church involved? How is the Holy Spirit involved? Identify their respective roles. Notice how they work together.

What is the relationship between worship and sending?

“While they were worshipping the Lord...”

For the church in Antioch, the mission upon which Barnabas and Saul were set apart and sent began in worship (not in a committee meeting!)

The connection between worship and sending is not accidental but necessary. Worship that does not lead to evangelistic mission betrays a misunderstanding of God’s idea of worship. In the Bible we observe a reciprocal relationship between the two, such that the goal of worship is evangelism, and the goal of evangelism is worship.

To see the Biblical understanding of the connection between worship and evangelism is as easy as analyzing the familiar sentence, “Praise the Lord.” The book of Psalms teaches us to say “Hallelujah” in our worship. See Psalms 148-150. This word and its English translation appear in many of our hymns. Which come to mind? To whom are we speaking when we utter this sentence? Grammatically speaking, what kind of sentence is it? What does it tell us about the connection between worship and evangelism? How is the same logic at work in Isaiah 6:1-8? What about the connection between worship and mission in Matthew 28:16-20? How is the same logic informing the well known hymn in praise of Christ Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11?

Think about your own worship life. It has been said that Christian worship always wants a larger choir. Is this reflected in your worship services? In your own heart at worship?

“...and fasting...”

Share your experiences with fasting. What is difficult about it? How have you found it to be helpful? If you’ve never fasted, what keeps you away from it?

Fasting was a spiritual discipline practiced in the life of the early church. Often it was connected with prayer, specifically in situations where it was necessary to discern God’s will with regard to important personnel decisions (cf. Luke 6:12, Acts 13:3, Acts 14:23).

Fasting can help us to focus on God’s will. In our prayer life we have a tendency to jump to the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Fasting can be a way to keep us focused on the first three, which are prior in importance to the fourth. How does our Lord invite us in the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer to participate in sending workers into the world?

In our affluent culture, fasting is also an artificial way for us to understand a level of human neediness and dependence foreign to our everyday experience. What role might empathy with the suffering playing in teaching us to be sending congregations? See Acts 11:28-29.

“...the Holy Spirit said...”

We conceptualize the activity of prayer in terms of us talking and God listening. For the church in Antioch, God shows himself to be the one who not only listens to but also answers prayer. How does Jesus teach his disciples to pray in Matthew 9:35-38? How is Matthew 10:1 an answer to that prayer? Significance?

It is not clear how the Holy Spirit spoke to the church in Antioch, but assuming that God works consistently, it is likely that the Spirit spoke through one or more of the prophets named in Acts 13:1.

IN CONCLUSION: Reflecting on what we have studied about the church at Antioch, identify how those first century Christians engaged in “sending” activities, and what your congregation can be doing today.

Activity	The Church in Antioch	Your congregation
Choosing		
Praying over		
Equipping		
Supporting		
Encouraging		