

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads

Week 12: The God Who Opens Doors of Faith • Acts 14:21–28

Over the last three months, our study in Acts has taken us on a behind-the-scenes tour of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. We've watched these men travel hundreds of miles, spreading the gospel from city to city with a boldness that was met with both faith and violent opposition—including multiple attempts to take their lives.

Finally, having reached the end of this long, life-threatening journey, we watch these two do something totally unexpected:

"After everything that had happened to them, they turned around and went right back to the same cities where they were attacked and mistreated—Paul even stoned. They could have easily kept going east—the direction they were already heading—which would have taken them to Paul's hometown of Tarsus, and then on to their home church in Antioch."

So...why didn't they?

- What is your reaction to Paul and Barnabas' decision to return to the cities where they'd been violently opposed and attacked?
- Do you see this same tenacity in the church today? In your own faith? Explain your answer.

Pastor Blaine answered our why question this way:

"Paul and Barnabas stayed on mission. They didn't focus on the personal insults and attacks or how they had been treated unfairly. They focused on the mission they had been assigned."

This explanation points us in the direction of our Big Idea: A healthy church is a mission-minded church.

What does it take to be a mission-minded church?

1. A Mission-Minded Church Grows through Hardship

By focusing on the mission instead of the hardships they faced, Paul and Barnabas modeled for these new disciples Christ's example of enduring trials for the sake of His Gospel mission.

"Paul and Barnabas went back to these new churches to prepare them for the difficulties to come. They urged the disciples to keep their eyes focused on the kingdom of God, knowing that resistance, hardships, and trials help us to grow stronger in the faith."

We see this truth in action today as the underground church in places like China, India, and the Middle East is experiencing explosive growth. In these regions disciples of Jesus Christ are under immense pressure and resistance.

- Explain in your own words the role that hardship and trials face in the strengthening of our personal faith. How about in the strengthening of the church?
- Can you give an example of a trial that caused your faith or church to become stronger?
- What might our church miss out on if we shy away from challenges for fear of resistance or difficulty?

2. A Mission-Minded Church Appoints Godly Elders

Of all the things Paul and Barnabas could have done to strengthen and encourage these new churches, one of their primary actions was to appoint godly elders to shepherd and protect the flock. Verse 23 tells us, “[They] appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”

Why the emphasis on elders? Elsewhere in Scripture, we see God’s purpose and expectations for church eldership:

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Peter 5:1-3

As one of the nine elders of Oak Pointe Church, Pastor Blaine expressed:

“We feel deeply this responsibility from the Lord to strengthen, encourage, lead, and protect you through the gospel. It’s why we preach and teach. It’s why we lead and serve by God’s grace and to the best of our ability. It’s why we urge you and plead with you to believe the gospel and to turn to Christ in repentance and faith. We don’t do it casually. We have a burden from the Lord to see you transformed by the outworking of the gospel in your life.”

- Explain in your own words the value of godly elders in the church.
- Take time now to pray for the elders of Oak Pointe Church. Examples of what you could pray for include spiritual protection, godly wisdom, and endurance.

3. A Mission-Minded Church Gives God All the Glory

After all the work, the travel, and the hardships they experienced, check out the report Paul and Barnabas give when they finally return to their home church in Antioch:

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” Acts 14:26–28

Their mission report was not about what they had done or what they had suffered. It was all about God!

“Paul and Barnabas were willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of Christ, including their reputation, their comfort, and even their lives. They endured hardships, they worked hard to strengthen the church, then they gave all the glory to God. How about you and me—what are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel?”

Just as a healthy church is mission-minded, a healthy Christian is mission-minded. Are you living with a mission mindset?

- Where are you in your personal discipleship journey? How are you personally growing in spiritual maturity? How are you helping others to grow?
- How are you engaged in strengthening the church? Are you a member of a team here at Oak Pointe?
- The Lord opened a door of faith for Paul & Barnabas to take His Word to the Gentiles. What door of faith has the Lord opened for you? In other words, what is your mission field?
- Are you walking through that door of faith? What would it look like for you to step out in obedience toward the mission God’s given you?