

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

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Text

Acts 12:25 – 13:4

Topic

After twice fasting and much praying the Church at Antioch released Barnabas and Saul to go where the Holy Spirit was sending them

Title

Life Comes at You Fast

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Acts 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

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Acts 13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Introduction

If you are driving the lead car, do you make it easy for someone to follow you?

Whenever I try to follow someone it seems I get left in the dust!

They speed-up to make it through the yellow light; I get stuck at the red. Instead of pulling over, they just keep driving. They must not understand that I am following them because I don't know where I'm going.

When you are among Christians you hear talk about the leading of the Holy Spirit. He leads; we follow.

Does it ever seem to you that the Holy Spirit has accelerated through the yellow light and left you in the dust?

There is no better text to explore the leading of the Holy Spirit than right here in Acts thirteen. Barnabas and Saul find then follow His lead as they embark on a missionary journey. If we see how they were led we will learn how we, too, can be led.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Holy Spirit Wants You to Find His Leading, and #2 The Holy Spirit Wants You to Follow His Leading.

#1 The Holy Spirit Wants You to Find His Leading (12:25 – 13:2a)

Jesus told His disciples they would be His witnesses **in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth** (Acts 1:8). We are at that point in the story where going to **the end of the earth** began. It began in the Church at Antioch. Barnabas and Saul went out on what is called Saul's first missionary journey. Three such journeys are recorded in Acts. This first one ends in chapter fourteen when the missionaries return, report, and rejoice with the Church at Antioch.

It's a monumental moment in history – not just Church history but the history of the world. What we will be focusing on is how the decision was reached. We'll see it was reached thanks to the leading of God the Holy Spirit.

We begin with the last verse of Chapter twelve.

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

The Church at Jerusalem was suffering the effects of a famine. The Church at Antioch sent them aid. Barnabas and Saul were the guys

who delivered the proceeds of the free-will offering taken in Antioch for Jerusalem.

While there they picked-up John, sometimes called John-Mark, as a tag along. He was a young believer, probably converted under the ministry of Peter. He was Barnabas' cousin. He would go on to author the Gospel of Mark.

Before Barnabas and Saul even return to Antioch we can see some things that are necessary in order to find the leading of the Holy Spirit. There are at least two things here in verse twenty-five.

First, Barnabas and Saul were actively involved serving the Lord. They were willing and available to take the offering to Jerusalem. It wasn't as easy as it sounds. Traveling was both difficult and dangerous; just ask the guy the Good Samaritan came across! It was even more dangerous to travel with large sums of money.

I would add that they were serving the Church. Barnabas and Saul were vitally involved in their local fellowship. They were part of the leadership but also submitted to leadership and to one another as a body of believers. They weren't out doing their own thing. They were doing God's thing.

If you want to find the leading of the Holy Spirit in and for your life you must get involved serving the Lord in your local Church. Someone compared it to steering a car. It is much easier to steer a car when it's moving than when it is stationery.

The second thing we'd note is that they **fulfilled *their* ministry**. They followed through and were faithful. I cannot emphasize enough the absolute value of following through. Anyone can start well. It's the finish that is most important.

Faithfulness, in this case, is something beyond following through. It is your attitude while following through. It is the understanding that what you are doing to serve the Lord is for Him and should therefore be done with the utmost preparation and care.

The person who faithfully follows through is in a spiritual position to find the leading of the Holy Spirit for future direction.

Barnabas and Saul returned to the Church at Antioch.

Acts 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

In just a few verses, verse nine to be exact, we're going to read **Saul, who is also called Paul**. Saul was his Hebrew name; Paul his Roman name.

Paul would later write a lot about God's plan for His Church. He would say that it was established by the apostles and prophets on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Then he indicated apostles and prophets would give way to pastor-teachers and evangelists.

There are no apostles today. Not in the New Testament sense of men with immediate authority. For one thing, no one meets the major qualification given by Peter in Acts Chapter one of seeing the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

There are also no prophets in the sense of holding an office in the Church. There are those who have and exercise the gift of prophecy; but they are not speaking with immediate authority for God. All their utterances must be judged by the Word of God.

These **prophets and teachers** in Antioch were its leadership. We already know Barnabas and Saul. **Simeon** was called **Niger** which means black. It is supposed that he therefore was from Africa. We know of **Lucius** only his city, **Cyrene**. **Manaen** was a former rich kid. He had gone to fancy schools with **Herod the tetrarch** – who was Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist.

The next verses show us how this vibrant Church was led. It was led not by these leaders but by the Holy Spirit. Here's how:

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said...

Let's stop right there for a moment. I suggest that this was their job description as leaders. Two things: **they ministered to the Lord**. They **fasted**.

Ministered is an interesting word. It's where we derive our word *liturgy* which means the order of service in a Church. It's also the word used of the work of the Levites in the Tabernacle and Temple of the Old Testament.

They were responsible for the order of service in the Church. Not just Church services but for overseeing that everything was done orderly to the glory of God.

They went about their service with the same kind of commitment and zeal a Levite would have in the Lord's Tabernacle or Temple.

But what is most necessary to notice in this job description is one word. It's the word **to** where it says **they ministered TO the Lord**. We want to say that they ministered **for** the Lord. But the key is that you are not doing your work *for* the Lord. You are doing it **to** Him, to bring Him the glory.

It's the difference between burden and blessing. If I minister *for* the Lord I am then ministering *to* people. I will be burdened when people flake-out or otherwise let me down.

But if I minister *to* the Lord I am ministering *for* the people. At the end of the day I am only interested in pleasing Jesus. If I do and say what He told me to do and say I can be blessed regardless the results.

Maybe it's as easy as realizing that my focus should always be on Jesus. If there is one thing we're learning in Acts it's that these guys did not know what to do or where to go until Jesus showed them. Then they simply followed His lead in obedience.

I would add this: The leaders were interested in meetings where the gifts of the Holy Spirit were exercised. So should we be!

How do you minister to the Lord? In this case they met together for prayer to hear from the Lord during times of voluntary fasting.

It's become popular among evangelical scholars lately to try to show from the New Testament that fasting is nowhere commanded as a spiritual discipline. OK, guys; but the first Church definitely fasted! Paul would later say of himself that he was **in fastings often** (2Corinthians 11:27).

Fasting isn't commanded. It is *commended*. It's one of those romantic aspects of our walk with the Lord. We give up to be with Him – the way we do when we fall in love!

Fasting is a lost spiritual discipline. I freely but sadly admit I am just discovering fasting in my own walk – and not really doing very well with it!

I'd have to say, on the strength of this text, that praying with others during times of voluntary fasting is important to finding the leading of the Holy Spirit. We need to do it more-and-more.

And we need to be in meetings where the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be properly exercised.

Here is what we've learned so far about finding the leading we're seeking:

1. Be actively involved in the life of the local Church.
2. Be serving the Lord and follow through faithfully in our serving.
3. Be ministering to the Lord, not for Him.
4. And, be praying with others while fasting.

Is it any wonder we sometimes have no leading? The Holy Spirit wants you to find His leading!

Once found – **follow it!**

#2 The Holy Spirit Wants You to
Follow His Leading
(13:2b – 4)

We stopped in the middle of verse two because what they were seeking was found:

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Almost certainly the Holy Spirit **said** this through one of the prophets in that group. He received an impression, or a vision, or a dream, or a direct word from the Lord and then revealed it to the group. It's so important to see that this **work** was one that God had **called them** to. The Holy Spirit was sending them. One commentator put it like this: Among those who serve the Lord, there are those who are sent and there are those who just went!

Your own desires are subordinate to the Lord's work. You must be called; you must be sent. Those who just went experience burdens they are not equipped to carry and they run the risk of harming God's dearly loved saints.

Barnabas and Saul found the leading of the Holy Spirit through prophecy. Today we find it first in the Word of God. You see, most of the things in your life that require some direction are already clearly spelled-out. There is plenty of leading, inspired by the Holy Spirit, about how to live every day as a man, a woman, a husband, a wife, a father, a mother, an employer, an employee... You get the idea.

In more personal areas where you need minute leading the Word of God in combination with other factors can lead you. An example of these other factors is given in verse three.

Acts 13:3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

They continued to **fast** and pray even *after* the prophecy. It shows no lack of faith to confirm the leading of the Holy Spirit. God speaks perfectly but we hear Him imperfectly. Continuing to fast and pray for a time gives God opportunity to show us we've really heard Him and not our own will or the will of others.

Something new is mentioned: they **laid hands on them**. By **them** I think we're talking about the whole body of believers at Antioch. Even if it was just the three other guys, they represented the whole body and it was to the whole body Barnabas and Saul would return to and report to.

Laying on of hands is a physical, public gesture to show your agreement. By laying on hands you identify with the other person or people.

This tells us we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in a larger context. We follow it as members of the body of Jesus on the earth.

The Christian life is a subordinate life. I am always subordinate to Jesus. But I also must submit one to another in the Church I attend. The whole body is working together to get somewhere.

Back in verse three the word **sent** is *released*. They released them to do what God wanted them to do. What a beautiful word and concept. Once you have found God's will, in conjunction with the whole Church as a body, you are released within it and among it to minister to the Lord.

Acts 13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

We'll talk about the destinations in our next study. The important thing to note for our discussion today is this: The Holy Spirit was sending them and they actually **went!** **Went** is the word. They obeyed. They followed the Holy Spirit's leading.

I said earlier that there are those who are sent and those who just went. If you are sent, you need to went!

I know it sounds silly but it will help you remember. In this case **went** indicates obedience. It's no use finding God's leading if you do not intend to follow it.

Are you wanting to be led by the Holy Spirit? Of course you are! Then consider the following:

1. Are you in a place where His leading can be found?
2. If found, are you already willing to follow it – no matter what?

If your answer to those questions is, "Yes!" then it should not be hard to understand the leading of the Holy Spirit.