

Table of Contents

1. A Church That Spreads	5
Acts 13:1-3	
2. A Church That Sends	12
Acts 13:1-48	
3. A Church That Sees	19
Acts 14:1-20	
4. A Church That Submits	25
Acts 15:1-21	
5. A Church That Sings	32
Acts 16:6-34	
6. A Church That Studies	38
Acts 17:1-15	
7. A Church That Is Single-Minded	44
Acts 17:16 – 18:17	
8. A Church That Is See-Through	51
Acts 19:1-41	
9. A Church That Shepherds	58
Acts 20:1-38	
10. A Church That Shares	65
Acts 21:1 – 22:21	
11. A Church That Stands	71
Acts 22:30 – 24:27	
12. A Church That Sets An Example	77
Acts 25:1 – 26:32	
13. A Church That Spans The Globe	83
Acts 27:1 – 28:31	

Introduction

Evangelism. Now there's a word that has gone out of style. Overbearing sales techniques, one-approach-fits-all methods of sharing the good news have turned a lot of people off. In an adult classroom setting a friend summed up our lack of evangelism as succinctly as I've ever heard. "There are only two reasons we don't evangelize today. Either we don't really believe that people are lost without Jesus Christ or we don't care."

New Testament Christians obviously believed that the world was lost without Christ and they cared enough to endure any hardships to see that the message was delivered to all who would listen. We love to make great claims concerning our brand of "New Testament Christianity." We follow the patterns laid down in the book of Acts. Do we?

A Church That Spreads examines Acts 13 - 28 and challenges us to follow the pattern. Missionary journeys, new church plantings, and sharing Christ with a neighbor were just a part of life in the first century and the church grew. Re-ignite your passion for the lost and your willingness to be a part of a growing church movement. Make your congregation *A Church That Spreads*.

About the Author

Active in ministry for twenty years, Bill Rasco has filled the roles of pulpit minister, youth minister, and education minister. Bill currently serves as the Pulpit Minister for the Spring Creek Church of Christ in Tomball, Texas. He also serves as Speech coordinator and sits on the Board of Directors for North Texas Leadership Training for Christ. Bill is the director of Camp Kichaca, a "first experiences" camp for 3rd through 5th graders. Bill, his wife Robin, and their son currently live in northwest Houston.

Bill Rasco is also the co-author of three books with Casandra Martin.

Tell Me the Story: Heroes of Faith

Tell Me the Story: Meeting Jesus

Tell Me the Story: Armor of God



Lesson 1

A Church That Spreads

Acts 13:1-3

Key Verse:

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" (Acts 13:2).

WARM UP



The world held its breath. On July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 mission landed on the moon. Over 450 million people around the world listened to the telecast of this historic event.¹ What they heard forever changed the way that man thinks about limits. Placing his foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong uttered a sentence that still rings in the world's collective memory. "That's one small step for (a) man; one giant leap for mankind."² With these few words, the boundaries of humankind were forever changed.

Imagine sitting in your living room, listening to the radio. The impact of the message has stunning implications. Stories from Jules Verne no longer seem so fictional. Bedtime rhymes and stories take

1 Alan L. Heil. *Voice of America: A History*. 2003, ISBN 0-231-12674-3 cited at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Armstrong#cite_note-52. Accessed on April 12, 2010

2 <http://www.snopes.com/quotes/onesmall.asp>. Accessed March 19, 2010

on a new reality. Suddenly a vision of far flung outposts and new horizons becomes possible. If a man can walk on the moon, what else is possible?

Now imagine that the church has received a message that has the power to change the boundaries of humanity. In truth, we don't have to imagine. We just have to remember. God has already instilled a vision in His people of a church that shines. A people who surrender their lives to being transformed. A people committed to looking like Jesus. He calls us to a transformation that leaves an imprint on the world.

God wants His church to be a church that spreads. A church that touches the world around us with the love and grace of a risen Savior. A church that ignites a fire in the hearts of those who live around us. Jesus touched lives and pointed the people around Him to kingdom living. He calls us to do the same. The church is meant to live so differently from the world that people see the power of God working in our lives.

Acts 13-28 is a picture of a church that spreads. In the space of only a few decades, the church that began on Pentecost spreads throughout the entire world. The power of God's love and light push back boundaries created by nations, walls built by prejudice and pride, and lines drawn by stubborn hearts and wills. Much like Neil Armstrong, we are riveted to the story of how the Apostle Paul takes the cross of Jesus to places that no one had imagined it going.

The missionary journeys of Paul dominate the last half of the book of Acts. These journeys are God's lessons on how the church spreads. Within each journey, there are the blueprints of characteristics that teach us how to leave an impression in the world. In these journeys we will watch Paul share healing with the hurting. We will hear him speak about the power of the cross to change lives. We will see him

go places and interact with people who no one had ever dreamed would hear the call of God. Paul lives with no boundaries. A church that spreads lives with no boundaries. The grocery store clerk needs Jesus. The crossing guard and the teacher at your child's school need Jesus. The guy who cut you off in traffic this morning, the neighbor who never smiles, the greeter at Wal-Mart. They all need Jesus. How will we leave an impression? How will we show them the love, grace, and call of God? How will we be a church that spreads?

WORK OUT



Becoming a Church that Spreads

The launch vehicle for a church that spreads is diagrammed in Acts 13:1-3. Here we see the basic model for how God empowers His people to leave an impression on the world. A church that spreads is shaped by God, makes room for God, and joins in the movement of God.

Shaped by God - Acts 13:1

The church of the first century is a picture of a family saturated with the presence of God. As people come into contact with the message of salvation, they surrender their lives to walking with Jesus. Congregations begin to form in Judea and Samaria. The church in Antioch becomes a place where God's presence is distinctly felt. Luke tells us that prophets and teachers are among those who worship at the Antioch church.

The word *prophet* brings to mind a messenger. He is someone who proclaims God's will among God's people. The word *teacher*

paints a different picture. A teacher is one who helps us understand what we hear and learn. The church in Antioch was a place being shaped by God. As God's message goes out among His people, they are learning what to do with that message. The Word of God shapes His people. It transforms them to be something different than they were before. It doesn't matter how long someone has walked in a relationship with God. God's Word still shapes us. It shapes our hearts to grieve and rejoice with the things that move the heart of God. God's Word shapes our responses – how we feel about sin, how we react to righteousness, and how we treat others. God's Word shapes our mission, teaching us how to live from day to day as a people who point to Jesus. Our joys are shaped by the reality of God's love. Our hope is shaped by the promise of God's mercy. Our actions are shaped by the power of God's grace.

Today the Word of the Lord speaks to us from the Bible. God's perfect revelation to man is meant to bring more than information into our heads; it is designed to lead us to the transformation of our nature and character. The church of today is still being shaped by God as we give ourselves to the Word of God.

Room for God – Acts 13:2

A church that spreads deliberately makes room for God in their lives. The church in Antioch shows us how to make room for God. The Antioch church was a place of worship. In worship, we pour ourselves out at the feet of God. It is a place where we give God praise and adoration. Worship is a time of sacrifice, a time to deliberately set the things of the world aside in order to be with God. Worship is one way in which we make room for God. In Antioch, the church participated in fasting. Fasting is a great picture of being empty. In the process of putting aside food, we create an empty place in our physical bodies.

We deny the physical need that represents the physical hold that the world too often has on us. Denying the call of the world opens up room for God in our lives. Fasting and prayer go hand in hand. Prayer is a spiritual connection to God. It is a place where we talk to God about filling our lives with His will, His desire, and His power. Prayer is a place where God moves to provide for our needs and transform our hearts. Prayer invites God to fill our lives with His presence. As the church in Antioch come to worship, they pour their lives out. As they fast, they empty themselves of worldly desire. They deliberately make room for God. As they pray, they invite God to fill their lives and direct their steps.

Like Antioch, the church of today must be deliberate about making room for God. If we want to be a church that spreads, we must be a church that moves within the will of God. God creates opportunities for lives to be touched. God empowers His people to make an impression on others through His love and grace.

Deliberately making room for God in our lives means making the most of the opportunities we have to meet Jesus. Worship, Bible study, prayer, fasting, fellowship, and service are just some of the ways that create space in our lives for God. In these moments we empty ourselves and invite God to fill us with His purpose. The church that spreads deliberately makes room for God to transform them to look like Jesus.

Embracing the Movement of God – Acts 13:3

As the church in Antioch is shaped by God, they gather to worship, fast, and pray. They make room in their lives for God. When the Holy Spirit fills their hearts and chooses Saul and Barnabas, the church must decide how to respond. The decision to be a church that spreads is a decision to embrace the movement of God.

You and I face the same decision today. God is moving in our world. Becoming a church that spreads means honoring the way in which He is touching hearts and lives. Having been shaped by His Word and living with lives open to Him in worship allows us eyes to see and experience the movement of God around us. The question becomes – will we join Him? God calls His people into the world. There we are to stand as witnesses to His grace, lights that shine for Him, and proclaimers of His peace. Sometimes it feels safer to stay within the walls of our church buildings. But the power of the cross cannot be contained. As you and I are transformed, the Holy Spirit speaks loudly to the world about what God can do in the lives of men. A relationship with Jesus brings peace, joy, forgiveness, and hope. Our transformation becomes a letter written to those who need a Savior. The church of today is sent into the world to share the transforming power of a relationship with Jesus. As we live out a life changed by God, we invite others to experience that same transformation.

COOL DOWN



Leaving an Impression

As Neil Armstrong stepped out of the Apollo 11 Lunar Module, he made the first footprints ever to exist on the moon. These impressions will last “for a million years.”¹

Everyday, you and I walk in the world. Everyday you and I leave an impression on the people around us. What is that impression? Is the world seeing how God transforms lives? Are we walking in the world

¹ http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/k-4/home/F_Apollo_11.html. Accessed March 19, 2010

as vessels full of the presence of God? Have we embraced the movement of God by sharing His invitation to walk with Jesus in all that say and do?

God calls His church to leave an indelible mark on the heart of the world in which we live. A church that spreads commits itself to being shaped by God. His Word permeates our thinking, choices, actions, and interactions with others, influencing the way we walk in our world. Worship comes to define the spaces of our hearts and the place where we meet God. Opening our eyes to His movement in the world calls us out of our comfort zones, opening doors for lives to be changed by the power of the cross. Christians walk through the world leaving the footprints of Jesus behind. For a church that spreads, these impressions will last through eternity.

Discussion Questions

1. Name five ways in which the Word of God shapes our lives.
2. Why is it necessary to approach Bible study with an eye toward transformation, not just gathering information?
3. How does worship help you make room for God?
4. How are you making room for God in your life every day? How does Colossians 3:1-17 help you to make a plan for being clothed in Christ?
5. How do we learn to open our eyes and hearts to the movement of God around us?
6. What opportunities to spread the example of Jesus do you see in the people around you? How can we embrace the movement of God in these places?