

■ THIS IS US

Week Three | August 27, 2017 | Paul's Role in Starting New Churches

PREPARATION

■ MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone with God's Word reading through Acts 13–14, Acts 15:35–18:22, and Acts 18:23–21:17. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

■ THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which of those questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your group in the best way.

■ DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those that are present.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

Expanding God's kingdom means starting, establishing, and developing new churches.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Paul's missionary journeys teach us how to be biblically committed to kingdom growth through church planting. If we do not maintain this commitment, we will not be faithful to God's design for gospel expansion throughout the world.

■ MEDITATE

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." (Acts 16:5)

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

- 🕒: *When you think of “growing the kingdom of God,” what comes to mind?*
- 🕒: *What is the apostle Paul famous for? Why?*
- 🕒: *When you receive a missionary report, what kinds of experiences do you expect to hear about?*
- 🕒: *What do you think the commitments of a missionary should be? In your opinion, should a missionary be more committed to sharing the gospel with nonbelievers, or developing the existing church? Why?*

When we think of “expanding God’s kingdom” throughout the world, the typical thoughts that come to mind center around evangelism methods. When we think of “missionary updates” we usually expect to hear about a missionary reaching a few individuals in their community. While none of this is wrong per se, these ideas focus more on spreading the gospel through the lives of individuals. For us to have a balanced view of the way God expands His kingdom on earth, we must focus not just on planting the gospel in the lives of individuals, but on planting gospel-churches that reach whole communities.

This is the approach that the apostle Paul took in his own missionary journeys. While he certainly took time to share the gospel with individuals, he also made sure to join those new believing individuals with one another in the context of a local church. Paul planted the gospel, and then when the gospel bore fruit, he planted churches with the new converts! He preached the good news wherever he went, but as we will see, he also took time to follow up with prior church plants that he started in past ministry seasons. He was both a starter of churches as he shared the gospel with individuals, and a developer of churches once a new group of believers had joined together. And now, thousands of years later, his life as we see in Acts serves as a model for us today here at Oakwood in our church planting efforts.

Q: Explain why new believers need to be connected to a church.

Q: What level of involvement have you had with church plants in the past?

II UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

As we explore Paul's missionary journeys in Acts, we see that they are church-planting journeys. When Paul plants the gospel in a city, people come to faith, and those people need a local body of believers in which to grow. Paul does not leave them on their own to make it in the Christian life as isolated individuals, but pushes them, through his letters, to operate as a unit. To ensure that these new believers not only grow, but also spread the gospel themselves, Paul consistently follows up with these church plants and offers them direction and development. As we read, we will cover an introduction to church planting, and then walk through each of Paul's trips:

1. PAUL'S FIRST CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

2. PAUL'S SECOND CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

3. PAUL'S THIRD CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

CHURCH PLANTING GOD'S WAY

II ACTS 13:1-13

Q: Who initiated the work of church planting? [13:2] Why do you think this is important for us as we start new churches?

Q: When it comes to church planting, what two parties do the "sending out"? [13:3-4]. Explain why you think the Scriptures make starting new churches a joint sending project.

As we learn about church planting through the life of Paul in Acts, the first thing we see is that starting new churches is God's idea. In Acts 13:2, we see that the church in Antioch was simply a normal, faithful, healthy church that worshipped God and practiced spiritual disciplines, one of which was fasting. It was within this context that God laid the vision of church planting upon the congregation. An important principle is seen here: God only initiates the vision of church planting within currently healthy churches, because a church plant usually takes on the health and values of the church which sent it.

Given that we want to reproduce healthy church plants, this principle is important to us here at Oakwood. We constantly seek, through the Lord's help, to be a faithful and healthy church. As we have pursued this over time, God has given us a burden to send church planting teams (some of which we met during our weekend worship service!) into regions where people don't know Jesus, just as He did in Acts.

Second, as seen in Acts 13: 3-4, while the idea of starting new churches is God's idea alone, the actual "sending out" process is a joint-project of the Holy Spirit and the sending church. Here at Oakwood, we believe that God is the one giving divine direction over the growth of His kingdom, and as a sending church, we join Him in spreading the gospel to the world by starting new churches, just as the church in Antioch did with Paul and Barnabas.

Q: *What two things was the sending church doing before God asked them to plant other churches? [13:2] Once the Lord ordered the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul, what two things did this church do before sending them out? [13:3] What does this teach us about church planting?*

Q: *Was Saul sent out alone? [13:2, 5, 13] What difference does this make?*

Third, in Acts 13:2-3, we see that seeking God through prayer and fasting is a vital first step. As mentioned before, this church was pursuing faithfulness before church planting came into the picture. It was "while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting" that God called them to send out missionaries. While they could have assumed they had already been doing enough for their spiritual health, they instead fasted and prayed again, making sure they sent out their church planting team in full alignment with God! From start to finish, the church in Antioch shows us an important principle: supporting our church plants through fervent prayer and fasting is non-negotiable. We want every part of the process to be covered in God's direction.

Fourth, in Acts 13:2, 5, and 13, we see that church planting is not a one-person show. While Paul's missionary journeys have historically been our example of church planting, we must take note that he almost always had a team of people supporting him. In this portion of Acts, we see him partnering with Barnabas, John, and many traveling and planting "companions." The further we go into Acts, we see even more partnerships around Paul, including many individuals, couples, households, and even entire churches. Even the great and famous apostle needed accountability, direction, and help! This shows us a vital principle: no one person can do everything required to start a new church. This is why at Oakwood we are committed to provide our church plants with the support and help they need to thrive.

In sum, at Oakwood we seek to do church planting God's way through the principles laid out for us in Acts. That means that we assume church planting is His idea, we join Him by sending out church plants from our own congregation, we pay attention to the spiritual health of our own church as we do this, and we make sure to provide support for our church planting teams.

PAUL'S FIRST CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

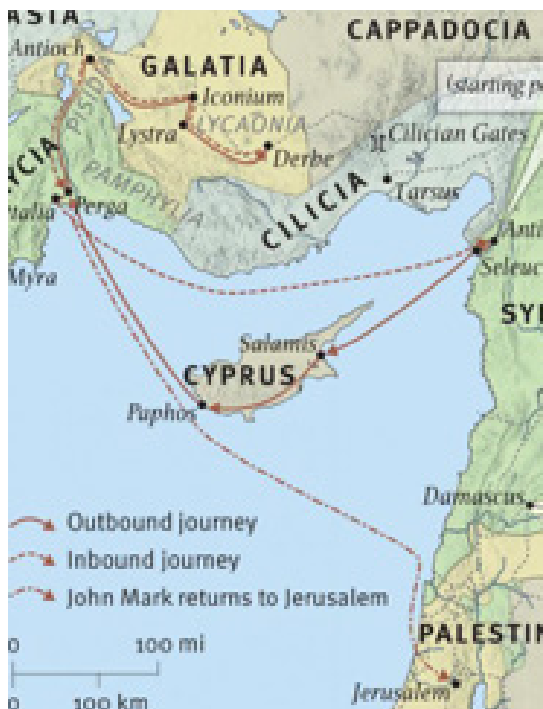
■ ACTS 13–14

🔍: *Point out all the places Paul traveled in this first missionary journey.*

🔍: *Which parts of Paul's experiences in church planting surprise you? Encourage you? Sober you?*

Acts 13–14 give us an account of Paul's first church planting journey, which lasted approximately 1.5 years. He and Barnabas were sent out by the church in Antioch (the first Gentile church as seen in Acts 11, where believers are first called Christians). In this journey, he travels from Antioch to a nearby port town, Seleucia, where he and his companions catch a boat to the island of Cyprus. After arriving at a city of Cyprus called Salamis, he and his team start preaching the gospel. Once they've traveled the entire island, sharing the good news as they go, they come into a sharp confrontation with a local esteemed magician. Due to Paul's unwavering commitment to the Lord and willingness to reject false teaching, the magician's friend (the proconsul) ends up coming to faith (13:6-7), becoming the island's first member of the body of believers in Cypress!

Now that the gospel has a sufficient witness in Cyprus, Paul leaves the island and sets sail for the mainland again, this time in the areas of Lycia and Galatia, where he continues to preach the gospel through sermons (Acts 13)



and start new churches. Once he and his team have finished their journey, they route back to Antioch to give an exciting report that the gospel is spreading and new churches are being planted.

It is during the front-end of Paul's journey that the church in Galatia is born. About a year passes after the church is planted, and likely toward the back-end of his journey, Paul writes them a follow-up letter known now as Galatians. This letter addressed a divisive issue rising up in the new churches of Galatia: whether or not Jewish customs should have a place among Gentile believers. Planting a church means following up often, helping sort out any issues that arise and offering support during times of need. For Paul, there's no such thing as simply planting a church and walking away. Church plants need help and instruction as they grow, making the involvement of their sending church so important.

- ❓ *When Paul reaches a new place, where does he first preach the gospel? [13:5, 13:14, 14:1]*
- ❓ *How do the Jews respond to Paul and Barnabas' message? How about the Gentiles? [13:44-48] How should we expect a city to respond to a new church planting team that faithfully preaches the gospel? [14:4] How can this lead us to pray for Oakwood's church planting teams?*
- ❓ *Regardless of how a city responds to a new church plant, what should the new church continue to do? [14:7]*

In Acts 13–14, Paul's strategy of preaching the gospel is quite clear. His pattern is to preach to the Jews first, because salvation was to come from God's chosen people (John 4:22; Rom. 1:16). This was a natural starting point for Paul since the Jews already had a category and expectation for the Messiah. On top of this, they already believed that the Old Testament was from God, so could use this to reveal that Christ was the Messiah (13:22, 33-35, 41, 47). However, though it was a natural choice to start with the Jews, it was frequently a fruitless one, as they often responded in rage and unbelief (v. 44-48). After Paul went to the Jews, he then turned to the Gentiles, who were often much more open

to the gospel message. We can learn through Paul's experiences that while our church plants should clearly seek the most strategic people to share the gospel with, only the Lord can control how the message is received.

As Paul preaches to both Jews and Gentiles throughout his journeys, we see the varying responses that lost people have toward the gospel. Some believe, some are apathetic, and some are curious and want to know more. Some are so hostile they want to outright kill the messenger. Paul experiences all of these responses. The gospel message divides people—to some it is beautiful and life-giving, and to others it sounds like foolishness and death. When we pray for our church plants, we must anticipate that they will experience a variety of responses and ask God to strengthen their witness and commitment to His message, regardless.

🕒: *What experience from Paul's own commissioning does he now reproduce in the lives of new church leaders? (14:21-22)*

🕒: *List the main principles about church planting you've seen in Acts 13–14.*

A final lesson Paul's first missionary journey teaches us is the importance of a sending church's consistent involvement in the life of its church plants. In fact, Paul doesn't even let a horrific beating keep him from helping the infant churches he started! After he is stoned and left for dead, the disciples in Lystra help him recover, and together, they return to the churches around Galatia and strengthen the new believers there. We see Paul and his companions reproducing the very same model that sent them out: through prayer and fasting, they help these new congregations appoint elders "in every church" (14:23), and encourage them to remain steadfast. Just as these apostles were prayed and fasted over, and then sent out by the leaders in Antioch, so now they pray and fast over new leaders, helping establish the leadership structure in their young churches. The "sending out" model that happened at Antioch and Lystra continues today in the life of Oakwood Church. We, too, purposefully stay involved in the life of our church plants and help establish their steps.

In sum, after reflecting on Paul's first church planting journey, we see two things stand out quite clearly. One, he is committed to preaching the gospel and thus starting new churches, and two, he is committed to following up with those churches through appointing leaders, praying, fasting, and letter writing, which support them in times of theological struggle and need. The main principle for us to draw from Paul's experience is that as we bring the gospel to new places through our church planting teams, we should expect some to reject the gospel and others to repent and believe in Jesus. For the non-believers who do come to faith, new churches are the result. Expecting this, we

should make sure to offer support, help, and direction in their establishment, just as Paul did.

PAUL'S SECOND CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

■ ACTS 15:35–18:22

🔍: *What prompted Paul to embark on a second journey?*

🔍: *What similarities in this journey do you see with the first one? Differences?*

🔍: *Who does Paul meet and bring with him in 16:1-3?*



Acts 15:35–18:22 gives us an account of Paul's second missionary journey, which lasted approximately 2.5 years. After spending a long time in Antioch preaching and teaching, Paul desires to return to all the churches he planted on his first missionary journey to “see how they are” (15:36). We see two things here: one, Paul was already preaching and teaching the gospel in his daily life before embarking on a second missionary journey (or his first for that matter). While many assume that they will start sharing the gospel once they join a church planting team, Acts teaches us that the correct person for the job is one who is already living out evangelism right where they are! Paul didn't take “on”

or “off” seasons when it came to being a gospel witness.

This is the type of heart we pray we would have at Oakwood, as well what we pray for our church plants. Secondly, we learn again that a good sending church should follow up with its plants to “see how they are”, willing to offer whatever help is needed to keep an infant church healthy and thriving. Paul followed up with the churches in some of these regions already by writing letters and appointing elders, but he wanted to ensure one more time that they were doing well.

While Barnabas and John Mark head to the island of Cyprus, Paul travels north with Silas to check on his church plants in the regions of Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia. It was during this time that Paul meets Timothy, his famous disciple and future recipient of the letters of 1 & 2 Timothy. As they visited each church, they shared the big decisions that elders in Jerusalem were making for the church at large, keeping these young churches strengthened, aware,

and in the loop (16:4-5).

Here we learn something important: there was no easy or instant way to update and strengthen these churches like there is today. There were no emails, no texts, and no phone calls. To help them and bring them up to speed, Paul did the hard work necessary to provide them with the encouragement and direction they needed. And this work was not in vain. Due in part to Paul's help in establishing them and keeping them healthy, these churches "increased in numbers daily" (16:5). While we now have many technological advantages, here at Oakwood, we are still willing to do the hard work of traveling back and forth with our plants to keep our congregations connected, updated on one another's progress, and strengthened in the faith—things we witnessed just this Sunday as we heard from our planting teams! As we do this, we trust the Lord to increase the influence of our church plants throughout the world.

- 🗨️: *Do things always go according to our plans with church planting? (16:6-7) How does this truth help us as we make plans for our church planting teams?*
- 🗨️: *Point out the places Paul goes in this second journey. Does he build up prior church plants, start new ones, or both?*

In his second journey, as we've seen so far, Paul and Silas go to check on the prior churches he has started. However, that's not all they do! As he and his team travel into Europe, visiting towns according to the Lord's leading, Paul keeps preaching the gospel and planting new churches in areas along the Egnatian way, in Athens, in Corinth, and in southern Greece. It is also on this second journey that, after spreading the gospel in Thessalonica, Paul writes the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. While one of his goals is clearly to support and follow up with previously planted churches through his visits and his letters, Paul never stops spreading the gospel and starting new churches along the way.

Here at Oakwood, even as we take great care to follow up with our previous church plants, we will always have future church planting goals, just as Paul did. There is still more gospel work to be done, so as we celebrate prior church plants, we also continue to look forward to the future ways God will use our church to create new churches, too.

PAUL'S SECOND CHURCH PLANTING JOURNEY

■ ACTS 18:23–21:17

Q: *What does Paul do yet again in Acts 18:23?*

Q: *List off the places that Paul's third missionary journey takes him.*

Paul's third missionary journey lasted about 5 years, and covered much of the same ground as his second journey. He makes his way to Ephesus (a great port city), passing through Galatia and Phrygia again. After about three years of ministering in Ephesus, he went through Macedonia again, as well as Achaia, "strengthening all the disciples" (18:23). During his three years in Ephesus, he hears about the struggles and sins in his Corinth church plant, and writes 1 Corinthians to give direction and correction. When he leaves Ephesus and ministers next in Macedonia, he writes 2 Corinthians as a follow-up letter to continue helping the Corinthians.

It is during this time that he meets Titus and begins mentoring him, a relationship that will grow to become a famous example of Christian discipleship. We now have the book of Titus as Paul's fatherly letter to the young pastor as he shepherds Paul's church plant in Crete. After leaving Macedonia, he spends a winter in Corinth to visit the church that has been struggling while he was away. It is from Corinth that he writes to the church in Rome, penning the most famous theological epistle in all of Christian history: Romans. Finally, Paul finishes this third journey in Jerusalem, where he ends up facing multiple arrests for preaching the gospel.



It is under his Roman imprisonments that he writes to strengthen his church plants in the letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and 2 Timothy. Even in his final days, he can't help but continue shepherding his beloved churches. Today, we thank God for Paul's constant efforts, for we are all beneficiaries of his tireless work!

In this missionary journey, we see the very same principles woven throughout his other two journeys: Paul is overwhelmingly committed to planting churches and establishing those churches, whether in-person or remotely through letter-writing. It seems no matter where Paul is or who he is presently supporting nearby, he's always writing a letter to support another church from afar! His mind is on the current ministry God has called him to, yes, but it's also on the development of other churches.

Whether present in body or not, Paul's goal is making sure churches thrive. This church planting account in Acts is the reason that we at Oakwood have a high vision and commitment to starting new church plants as well as developing prior church plants. The Scripture shows us just how valuable both these commitments are in order for the kingdom of God to grow, and we are grateful to be a part of His work in the world.

🗨️: *Aquila and Priscilla were influenced by Paul during their time with him in Corinth [see 18:1-3, 18]. How do they use the training they likely received from Paul now that they are in Ephesus [18:24-28]? What is the result?*

🗨️: *What is the ultimate result of following God's direction for church planting? [13:48-49, 14:1, 16:5, 19:20]*

While Acts 18–21 reveals countless principles and examples we could draw out about church planting, one story in particular stands out, that of Aquila and Priscilla. Earlier in Acts, we see that this couple lived and worked with Paul, likely gleaning from his wisdom, knowledge of the Scripture, evangelism, and church planting methods. During Paul's third missionary journey, his influence over them has started to bear much fruit!

As they uproot their lives to go with him from Corinth to Ephesus (something many church planting teams today understand quite well), they put into practice the things they've learned. As they listen to a skilled speaker, Apollos, they realize there are some parts of his message that aren't quite accurate. Just as Paul helped train them in the ways of Scripture and the gospel, now they do the same for Apollos (18:26). After being well trained, Apollos, in turn, goes to Achaia and uses his newfound gospel knowledge to show the Jews "by the Scriptures" that Jesus is the true Messiah (18:27-28)!

This beautifully illustrates the power of multiplication in church planting. As Paul disciples Aquila and Priscilla, they catch the vision for starting new Christian communities and begin to disciple others like Apollos, who go and do the same! From Paul to the couple to Apollos to the disciples in Achaia, in just a few verses, a profound ripple effect has occurred. It's no wonder that Christianity spread like wildfire in ancient times, and continues to today. As we here at Oakwood are changed by the gospel, we strive to pass on what we know to our church plants, who will in turn do the same in their own areas, creating an endless chain of new Christian communities. This is the incredible gospel impact of church planting. What a gift it is to be given such a sacred task!

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- ♀: *As we look at Paul's life, we see that he took time to do two things: share the gospel with unbelievers and develop new believers in their churches. Do you consider yourself better at evangelism with the lost or discipling new believers in their faith? Which do you spend more time doing? How can you reorganize your commitments and your time in order to prioritize both in your life?*
- ♀: *List the church plants that Oakwood has planted up until now. How can you specifically minister to, encourage, or develop one of these plants?*
- ♀: *Write down any regions of the U.S. or the world God has burdened you for. Take some time to pray about this burden, and bring it before your church leaders and pastors. Perhaps God may use you to go with or support a church plant in the future!*
- ♀: *Many times, throughout Paul's story we find him either beaten or imprisoned. Find some resources on the places in the world where church plants are being persecuted, and set aside time each week to pray for them specifically.*

PRAY

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- God, thank you for growing your kingdom through church planting in the life of Paul. Without this, I wouldn't know you.
- God, help me get involved in church planting on some level. Whether giving, sending, praying, encouraging, going to visit, or uprooting my life and relocating with a future church plant, give me clear picture of how you want me to join this mission.
- God, convict me when I view sharing the gospel as a thing only church planting teams do. Give me a passion to do it right where I am, just those in Acts did.

- God, sustain and strengthen the persecuted church. Do not let these precious believers shrink back in fear, but give them great boldness to continue sharing the gospel and planting new churches.

COMMENTARY

Though church planting required intense human effort on the part of the apostle Paul and his various teams, we must not forget that God is the one in control of the results of all our church planting efforts. While this lesson was spent outlining Paul’s methods to start and develop new churches, use this guide below to help remind yourself that God was the one guiding everything we see in Acts.

Chart: God’s Sovereignty in Salvation as Seen in Acts, esv.org

<i>God ordained the cross</i>	<i>God calls, adds, and appoints many to eternal life</i>	<i>God gives faith and repentance; God cleanses and opens hearts</i>
<p>2:23 “Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God”</p> <p>3:18 “what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled”</p> <p>4:27–28 “there were gathered together ... Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand ... had predestined to take place”</p>	<p>2:39 “the promise is to ... everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”</p> <p>2:41 “there were added that day about three thousand souls”</p> <p>2:47 “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”</p> <p>5:14 “believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”</p> <p>11:24 “a great many people were added to the Lord”</p> <p>13:48 “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed”</p>	<p>3:16 “the faith that is through Jesus”</p> <p>5:31 “God exalted him ... to give repentance to Israel”</p> <p>11:18 “to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life”</p> <p>15:8–9 “God ... having cleansed their hearts by faith”</p> <p>16:14 “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”</p> <p>18:27 “those who through grace had believed”</p>

**All exegetical content and commentary for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and The Cradle, the Cross, and The Crown by Andreas Kostenberger.*

