

Traction Gains Momentum Week 12: Greater Impact

We are going through the book of Acts. If you are just jumping in right now, don't worry; each sermon can stand on its own. It covers the rapid growth of this Jesus movement after Jesus is raised from the dead and ascends into heaven. I encourage you to read through it like a novel and follow each week's chapter.

What connects them is this theme, Traction Gains Momentum. What started in Jerusalem and where this fledgling movement gains some traction, reveals many amazing things as well as a consistent message about Jesus as savior who was dead and now is alive.

We come to chapter 13, the movement is heading west out of what is now Palestine.

Now there were in the church at **Antioch** prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² 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." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the **proconsul**, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called **Paul** (Same guy as listed above, Saul), filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:1-12 ESV

There are some subtle things that these early disciples did that we see has already paid dividends. There was a great impact on one very significant person, **Sergius Paulus**. It says that he was the proconsul. In the Roman Empire, rule was kept with a heavy hand by their great army. But in some

places that were more civilized and had no history of problems, the **Roman Senate** would place a representative there to rule as they decided. In other words, this was the most powerful man on the **Island of Cyprus**.

But when we get to the end of the chapter, there is much more that happens. **It all began in the gathering of some people in Antioch, who are trying to decide how God wants them to keep the movement active. They were definitely making an impact on the Island of Cyprus!**

You may have heard from someone young **trying to decide what direction** to take in school or some sort of training or even in the military say, **"I want to make a difference"** or **"I want to have an impact on the world."** There's some **youthful idealism** in that, but I think it goes deeper than that. I think everyone wants to make a difference or make an impact. **That people will know I was here because of something that I've done that has had lasting good.**

Whatever we are doing in our life, if we see that it is making a difference then our **satisfaction goes up. When we see that our efforts and our presence has made an impact, it feel like it's worth it.** Whatever it took to prepare or whatever you had to push through it was worth it if you could see that your life made an impact.

Is that you today? Or maybe **life has kicked you** around a bit or you endured some **self-inflicted wounds** and you've given up on that. Maybe you're **too young.** I'll think about that later. Or, you're **too old** and you believe your time is up. Let someone else have the impact. Or maybe you think that you're **not gifted enough, smart enough, rich enough, or good looking enough.** **Can I ask you to lean into this story for just a few minutes and see how some regular people who were following Jesus were a part of a huge impact?**

This group of first generation Christ followers was no different. They had experienced that Jesus was dead and is now alive. They have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. These things have changed their lives. They have been transformed. Many of them had been on the outside of what God was doing, never really measuring up. Now they too can be transformed into someone who is forgiven and has been invited to be a part of what God is doing in the world.

They are not sitting on their hands, happy with receiving this Good News. They want to keep the movement moving. They want to have a greater impact in the world and the people around them. But they did some things first before sending Barnabas and Saul Antioch. They were...

Preparing to have a greater impact.

It's easy to read right over what happened at the beginning of this chapter but that's where this whole thing gets started, gets its power from.

Here's the picture. The church in Antioch, which was one of the more significant churches in this early part of the movement's growth, is **gathered together for worship and prayer**. In the midst of this gathering the writer, Luke, lists a **few key leaders**. He calls them prophets and teachers. We don't exactly know what they would have been doing in that meeting. **Maybe they ate together**, took **The Lord's supper**, read **scripture**, gave **praises** to God for his faithfulness, and **shared stories about Jesus**, his teaching, and how he loved people. They were probably **gathered in someone's house**.

It says that they were worshipping. But there was something different in what they did then that we sometimes experience on any given Sunday in an American church. We sing songs that we hope all ages will be able to tolerate. We will ask questions like, "Did I like the music today, or did it make me feel good? Did the message meet my needs so that I can be encouraged as I try to live in this crazy world? Were the people friendly and nice? Did I feel like I belonged?"

In other words, we approach that hour as consumers. The church and, in particular, this gathering (remember when we used to gather) was what the church produced as religious goods and services that, when consumed, will give me a happy life and allow me to get into heaven.

When I read those first couple of verses I get a sense of something that is way different.

The beginning of having a greater impact is viewing our gatherings differently. **Our worship must be our service.**

Look at the beginning of verse 2. **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting... v. 2a**

I always wondered why we called it a worship service as a kid. It seemed like I was being served. A lot of people were sitting and listening while a few did all the work. Yes, we sang, but that was it. Didn't seem like I was serving, more like learning.

In the original Greek language that word we translate as "**worshipping**" literally means "**ministering to the Lord**" or **serving the lord**. In other words this was work, not something to give me a good feeling. **They didn't view it as something that would be done for them.** They didn't come to a

worship service to be serviced, but to serve. What they were doing in that room was for God, not for them. **Now, in the process of worshipping,** praising, praying to god, and for God might they leave filled, motivated, empowered, to go do what God had put them on this earth to do? That would be a "yes".

Their worship must have been desperate. Did they need God in order to feel good about their situation and have purpose in their lives? No, they were desperate for God to show up and work through them, do something miraculous, because what they've got ahead of them is a complete disaster unless he shows up.

Their worship was about doing what Jesus commissioned them to do.

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
Matthew 29:18-20 NLT

This is too big for them. Remember where this all started. Jesus was dead and the original gang who followed him around Palestine **were huddled behind a locked door,** hoping to avoid the same fate as Jesus. They felt alone, confused, scared, and yet it's this bunch that, after seeing Jesus alive and hearing this word, came out of that room and **saw the church grow into the thousands in Jerusalem.**

If that isn't enough, Jesus makes the path even clearer to this greater impact. **⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**
Acts 1:8 NLT

All of this is what they are gathering together for; worship, prayer, receiving instruction in the scriptures, sharing stories of what Jesus said and did. It was so that **when they went out to make disciples and to baptize and to teach these new disciples to obey Jesus they would have that power from the Holy Spirit.** It was so they could be a part of it spreading across the world. **That's why they met, in order to serve God and serve people by bringing them the transforming saving power of Jesus.**

To have a greater impact, we must gather and "worship" with that kind of attitude.

The next thing we see in this gathering that prepared them for a greater impact...**Prayer + fasting directs our service.**

In the midst of a group of people gathered to serve God, they prayed and fasted **for the purpose of getting direction from God** about how to move forward.

Lets keep going in verse 2. **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."**

They are praying and seeking direction from God out of a desire to serve and obey him and **to this, they add fasting**. They probably went without **eating and even without drinking** for however long it took.

Commentator Ajith Fernnado puts it this way, Fasting gives evidence of "an atmosphere of urgent desire" pg. 374

This is where prayer and fasting helps **direct them to the "who"**. Who is God raising up for leadership and teaching. In this case it is **Barnabas and Saul**.

"Prayer here is viewed as a service we do for God (13:2). To this is added fasting, which was also associated with the start of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:2). Ralph Earle Writes that fasting 'emphasizes a state of uninterrupted concentration which made it possible to ascertain the will of the Lord. That is the main purpose and value of fasting.'" 376-7

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Acts 13:3-4

Fasting has a way of enhancing your ability to hear God's voice and see his direction. It did for these people and it can for you.

Maybe you have done it during this time of year for Lent. There are **two foundational truths** that help prayer and fasting make sense:

#1. God is always speaking and always working...He doesn't go on vacations, retreats, or go off somewhere to get his head straight.

#2. We tend to be hard of hearing, over-stimulated, and in love with noise and living at a hectic pace, therefore we miss what God is saying.

We blame God for not speaking to us or not doing anything when really it's on us. His is a still small voice. You have to lean in, but once you lean it, wow what we can hear.

It was about a year ago I was sitting in **Grand Traverse Pie Company**. There's a fireplace with two leather stuffed chairs in front of it. I like to sit there; drink lots of unsweetened iced tea and read, study, write, and pray. I was fasting and had asked people to fast with me for wisdom in discerning God's direction for us as a congregation. I was passionate about hearing God's voice **about how we could become a church of disciples who make disciples to the 3rd and 4th generation**. I had finished an **11-month cohort** studying, learning, unlearning, and discerning with some other leaders. I had done the work, **made the commitment**, been in the word, and I sensed that the next week was key. I was looking for **clarity, a breakthrough**. And I opened up a book and a paper fell out of it. On that paper, I had written the answer to the question that I was stuck on. That paper wasn't supposed to be there and **I'm not hyping this story**. It fell out and as I read it, I knew. **God had me write that months ago**, not know why and even what it meant for this very moment. **The right word at the right time in the right context and it was because God's people were praying and fasting with me and because of that**, a man with difficulty hearing heard in crystal clarity.

Releasing what we'd like to keep.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Laying on hands...**"was an act of blessing in which the church associated itself with them and commended them to the grace of God."**

We want to be a **river church, not a lake church**. We want to be a **sending church, not a hoarding and warehousing church**. We want to be an **airport terminal, not a hotel**. That is, when we are able to actually travel again.

Our core values, which are what we want the culture to be like, all start with R. Real, Ready to change, Relational and Release.

We want to release our people; in many cases, our most capable people. Today there are **future church planters and Christian entrepreneurs listening right now**.

We want to release our people to serve in ways that **don't directly benefit us**.

- Cultivate.
- Young Lives.

- Adoption option.
- Forgotten Man Ministry.
- Warner Camp.

They released two of their best leaders when they would have really needed them.

The message the church received was to release their best for missionary service (13:2). This is typical of churches that have a missionary vision, churches whose main aim is more than survival or maintenance. Missions are so important to them that they willingly take steps that may seem harmful to the church in order for the missionary program to thrive. They have a corporate 'others orientation.'" 377

So, in order to have a greater impact, they viewed their worship gatherings as service, they prayed and fasted so that they could get direction from God, and then they **sent away their best leaders**; but, there's more. There was a...**Focus on the person of peace.**

What do I mean by person of peace? Listen to what Jesus said when he sent the 72 out in pairs to teach about the Kingdom of God and to heal people.

⁵ "Whenever you enter someone's home, first say, 'May God's peace be on this house.' ⁶ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. ⁷ Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay. Luke 10:5-7

The person of peace is the one who is open to a relationship with you and is open to the peace that you bring in Christ.

Let's take one step back. **How has this person come to the place where they are open to you and open to Jesus?** Simple. The Holy Spirit has been already drawing him or her. No one comes to Jesus without first being drawn by Jesus. (Verse from DFP) **No one has interest in the Bible, God, Jesus, spiritual things, unless he or she is being drawn.** What did Jesus say in the gospel of John over and over? **"I am looking for the ones that the Father is giving me."**

Now look before I pull up this next scripture, **tell me who is the person of peace** in the section we just read?

⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. Acts 13:7

You cannot impact anyone who isn't moving toward you.

Who is moving toward me, and who is moving toward Jesus?

They went to the Jews first, but if they didn't want to hear then they moved on. Shook the dust off of their feet. They weren't going to **spend a bunch of time and energy yelling** at the Jews who were trying to run them out of town.

So what happens? The man who God had prepared, who was moving toward Paul, Barnabas, and most importantly, Jesus, the person of peace becomes a disciple of Jesus. How? Well it started by believers gathering together as a way of serving God. They earnestly sought God's direction through prayer and fasting. They asked and then positioned themselves to hear. They passionately wanted to see this Jesus movement spread and to do what they had been commissioned to do. They were willing to send their best two leaders when they really could have used them there in Antioch. And after all of that, Serious Paulus saw the miracle of God literally shutting down the opposing voice.

This Jesus movement continues to spread west as Paul and his companions sail northwest from Paphos in Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia. Not sure if they preached there or not, but most of what happens next is in Antioch of Pisidia.

Paul takes the prominent role. From this point on it goes from Barnabas and Paul to Paul and Barnabas. **John Mark leaves.** This will become a bone of contention between Paul and Barnabas.

Next is a long sermon that Paul preaches in the Synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. This is a different Antioch from the one this powerful prayer meeting took place. **I guess Antioch was like Springfield, there's a bunch of them.**

Paul goes through the **story of Israel** in the OT showing how God has been working and preparing for what would be the climax of all his activity, the coming of Jesus.

Here's what happens next after this sermon.⁴² **As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.** ⁴³ **And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.** ⁴⁴ **The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.** ⁴⁵ **But when the Jews^[d] saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.** ⁴⁶ **And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since**

you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was **spreading throughout the whole region.** ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:42-52

This is where we see the greater impact. In one town, we see a key leader begin to follow Jesus. And in another, we see a **whole town come out** to hear Paul and Barnabas. And finally, **"the word of God spread throughout the whole region"** that previously had no knowledge of Jesus. But if we are to have truth in advertising, we must be honest about this next point. **Greater impact always creates resistance.**

Steps of Obedience

1. Confess that I've made worship about me in order to have a greater impact.
2. I need to release _____ in my life in order to have a greater impact.
3. These are the names of people who might be my person's of peace.

Final challenge. This week, fast in some way. Use it as a time to listen to where God wants you to go and what he wants you to do. Do that on behalf of Eagle Ridge Church of God. There is a very significant ministry opportunity that is very much at the idea stage, but if God is in it, I'm asking doors to be open and clarity for me.

Maybe this sounds like a completely crazy idea. What have you got to lose? Test God and see if you, with urgency, ask him for direction and power to do this thing that he wants you to do, but you can't.

[The Haystack Meeting of 1806 pg 380 Research more about it](#)