

Church 2.0

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

(Acts 1:8 ESV)

1	<p><u>The Good in Missions Reports</u> July 16th, 2023 Acts 14:24-28 Rev. Steve Paul</p>
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Today, we return to our journey through the book of Acts where we left off some weeks ago. Open God’s Word to Acts chapter 14. You’ll find it on p 923 in the church Bible at your knees.

In the opening paragraph of chapter 13 (the previous chapter), we watched Paul and Barnabas **LAUNCH** into the first missionary journey. Here, in the closing paragraph of chap 14, we watch them **LAND** back home.

At launch, we watched them as they were **SET APART** and **SENT OFF** by their home church in Antioch of Syria. See that? On the lower right of the map?

3	<p><i>[Projectionist: Show MAP SLIDE HERE ...]</i> leave up until cue to take down please</p>
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We tracked as they got on a boat, sailed to the island of Cyprus and (follow the numbered arrows) preached the good news of Jesus across the island from east to west. They then sailed north to Perga in Pamphylia (current day Turkey). Then they preached their way into the mountains, from city to city in a clockwise curve. Many in those urban centres welcomed their message about Jesus. But many rejected it, kicking up violence. When the missionaries came to the crest of their circuit at Derbe, they did a remarkable thing. Instead of taking the short way home, they spun around and retraced their steps, back through the same cities (which took remarkable courage! Remember? Paul was pelted with rocks and left for dead outside of Lystra.) Nevertheless, they worked their way back **consolidating the work God had done** in each one.

Chapter 14, verse 22 describes the consolidation phase of the work. They *strengthened the souls* of those who said ‘yes’ to Jesus. They *encouraged them to continue in their faith*. They *warned them to expect many tribulations* as they follow King Jesus. And (v 23) they *appointed elders* to lead in every new church, *committing them to the Lord* in whom they had believed.

Bible commentators estimate that this missions trip (this evangelism, church planting and consolidation project) took somewhere between 1 and 2 years. Paul and Barnabas hoofed it for about 800 kms through island and mountain terrain, and sailed about 1100 kms by sea.¹ My guess is they’re spent. Depleted. Their fuel gauges are pegging on empty. And it’s plausible, Paul could still be recovering from his pummelling at Lystra.

So, in the closing paragraph of chapter 14, we get to watch these two finish the last leg of their trip and **LAND** ... back to the place and the people that **LAUNCHED** them.

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Upon arrival, they do what seems mundane—maybe even dull. What’s that? Well listen.

Beginning in v 24, hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹ Constable, p. 307.

5	<p>²⁴Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸And they remained no little time with the disciples. (Acts 14:24-28, ESV)</p>
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This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The missionaries LAND. And what do they do? They gather the church and give a report. Why?

7	<p>Why is it good for a church to hear missions reports?</p>
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Well, isn't that what's *always* done? Don't we *always* pray for missionaries or teams as they head out (like we did for the Kingsview team on their way to the Dominican Republic, like we did for Dr. Craig and Dr. Ben when they left for South Africa)? And don't we *always* get a report from them when they get back? Cathy and I spent the better part of the '90's as missionaries, and every time we came home, we *always* did this.

Yes, but why?

Of course, a church wants to hear ... needs to hear from its missionaries. It's good for missionaries to *inform* and *inspire* the people who stand with them in their work. But is there a greater GOOD, a higher PURPOSE for such a report than to *educate* or *motivate*?

I find it curious that Paul the Apostle, who held apostolic authority OVER God’s churches, would consider it important enough to report to them. There must be something inherently valuable and necessary in it. What might that be? This passage will show us.

First, a missions report ... like this one from Paul and Barnabas to their home church ... is meant

9	1. To remind us of God’s Grand Plan.
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We (God’s Church) need help to remember how we fit in the Eternal Scheme of Things.

Remember how all this got launched? Flip back a page to Acts 13:2 ...

11	While they were <u>worshiping</u> the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for <u>me</u> Barnabas and Saul for the work to which <u>I</u> have called them.” (Acts 13:2, ESV)
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In the middle of a worship gathering, made earnest by fasting, God’s Holy Spirit handpicks two of their best leaders for Himself ... see that? “for me” ... for a work project God defines ... see that? “for the work to which I have called them.” The church obeys and

13	³ ... after fasting and praying <u>they</u> laid their hands on them and <u>sent</u> them off. (Acts 13:3, ESV)
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Or as 14:26 says looking back on that launch, “They commended them to the grace of God.”

Did you notice? There are *two players* in this LAUNCH process—both intimately linked.

Who chooses the workers and defines the work? *God does, **through His church.***

Who does the sending to do God's work of planting and consolidating churches? *God does, through His church.*

Do you get the sense that **the church is GOD'S TOOL of CHOICE?**

"I will build my church ...!" seems to be God's primary MO in God's Grand Plan!

We can get a fuller sweep of God's Grand Plan reflected in places like Psalm 2. From that vantage point, from the vantage point of eternity past, we can see that God's Grand Plan has always been to penetrate and win back His rebellious world by installing His chosen King, by appointing His anointed Ruler in Zion, God's holy hill. That handpicked, God-appointed King is identified in Psalm 2 (and in Hebrews 1) as God's Son, to whom God decreed,

15	Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. (Psalm 2:8, ESV)
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God the Father's Eternal Plan has always been to retake His rebellious world by entrusting His Son to redeem it and rule it as His possession.

So God began to unfurl His Grand Plan through a **SERIES of SENDINGS**.

17	⁴ ... when the fullness of time had come, God <u>sent</u> forth his Son , born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5, ESV)
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And the Son God **sent** began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 4:17) "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." (Matt 6:33) He demonstrated by His words and His deeds that He is God's righteous King, whose death and resurrection would deliver us from the domain of darkness and transfer us into the kingdom of ... the Son God loves (Col 1:13), as planned from eternity past!

That Son ... whom God sent ... handpicked followers and said to them,

19	<p>“As the Father has <u>sent</u> me, even so I am <u>sending</u> you.” (John 20:21, ESV)</p> <p>“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <u>Go</u> therefore and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matthew 28:18-19, ESV)</p>
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By what warrant is such a thing done? Who do missionaries think they are, going to far-flung places of the planet and disrupting them with claims that the Bible is true and that Jesus is their greatest need? Who do WE think we are to send them? By God’s decree, by God’s Grand Plan from eternity past:

“Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”

But there’s more to these **SENDINGS** that propel God’s Grand Plan. The Father **SENT** His Son to redeem and rule. They both **SENT** the Spirit to empower ... His followers **SENT** to all nations.

SENDERS and **SENT** are essential to God’s Grand Plan, as the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 10:

21	<p>“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are <u>sent</u>? (Romans 10:13-15, ESV)</p>
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The Triune God is a sending God. He has always propelled His Grand Plan by sending.

It shouldn’t surprise us that Paul and Barnabas, **SENT** by God through God’s church in Antioch, would take the time to gather those who sent them and give a report ... give a kind of accounting ... and demonstrate by the recounting –

This is God's Eternal Plan.

You're a significant part of it, church.

You are His tool of choice.

You are KEY in His Grand Plan.

So, when the Kingsview team sat here at the round table some months ago and reported to us about their trip to the DR, and when Craig and Ben sent us video clips from South Africa (or give us a more extensive report this fall), it's for way more than to inform or to inspire.

It's to remind us: **There is no loftier purpose in the universe, and you Cornerstone are vital part of it.**

A missions report (secondly) is meant:

23	2. To refresh our faith with God's mighty acts.
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We (God's Church) need help to rehearse what God has done, and so boost our YES-responses to who God is.

The day Paul and Barnabas trudged back into Antioch, they'd disembarked off the ship and hiked 24 kms up the Orontes River valley from the coast. (It's about the distance from here to Coldwater, a 4 and half hour hike, uphill.) Imagine the chatter that burst through the church when they got there!

"Mathilda? Did you hear? They're back! My lands, have you seen those boys? Scarecrows, the two of them. And Paul? Oh my! Pummelled, don't you know. With rocks, don't you know! Wonder he can walk at all!"

The heroics Paul and Barnabas had endured on the trip were enough to draw a curious crowd. Paul would tell the Philippian church to hold workers in high regard who risk their lives, who come close to death for the work of Christ.

Though Paul bore on his body the marks of Jesus, their report didn't focus there. See v 27?

They gathered and

25	they declared ALL that <u>God</u> had done with them , and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27, ESV)
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That was their focus! Of far greater import than any personal cost, Paul and Barnabas thought it vital to report on **ALL ... ALL God had done**. "Look ... look at what the Lord has done!"

There was so much to tell, so much to rehearse, they had to come back for more. There were probably multiple episodes to this report, because the verb "declared" in the Greek is continuous. They *kept on declaring* what God had done in Cyprus, in Antioch of Pisidia, in Lystra ... and back.

Can you hear Paul? "Yes, Lystra seemed like a write-off at first. Their violence slammed the door hard! But when we returned, there was a young man. **God has been long at work** through his mom and grandma—faithful women. Bible loving women. Young Timothy has become my son in the faith. Look what God has done! Pray for that promising intern."

But an even greater marvel was for the church to hear story after story, account after account about how God had opened FOR THE GENTILES the door into the kingdom of righteousness. **God had opened a door!** Non-Jewish people didn't have to squeeze in through Jewish law or through rigorous Jewish customs, but through the simple door of faith in Jesus—by trusting, believing, receiving the King of Righteousness who died and rose again for us.

Look what God has done! God is doing what He's always promised He'd do for His Son:

Ask of me and I will make *the nations* your inheritance, *the ends of the earth* your possession.

Cornerstone, it's vital to our faith that we rehearse what God has done. To hear missionary stories of how God is at work in the DR, in South Africa, or even in parts as foreign as

Newfoundland ... refreshes our faith and restokes our YES-reflexes to God for larger worship and greater obedience.

Psalm 78 begins with a commitment: "We will open our mouths to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD." That's what we need to be doing. But the psalm quickly decays into a long, disappointing dirge that laments, "Look at ALL God did, and rather than marvel, God's people forgot! They forgot." When what God has done goes dim for us, it isn't just "OOPS, slipped my mind"—it's faithlessness. It's a ramp turning away from God. It's the seed bed of rebellion.

Oh God, give us eager ears to receive reports of YOUR mighty acts!

Like I said earlier, Cathy and I spent the better part of the 1990's on mission in Chad, Africa.

We lived in the capital of N'Djamena and helped serve missionary partners in 8 mission agencies to function in the remote places God had put them.

The gospel had penetrated the country for 70 years, and since the 1970's there had been relative calm—in contrast to the constant upheavals next door in Sudan and Nigeria.

But to the north lay Libya and its ruthless dictator Moammar Qaddafi. Qaddafi had political designs on the whole continent. So he decided to flash his oil money and foot the bill to bring every Muslim African head of state to Chad for a massive Muslim prayer meeting. It was to be so big, no indoor venue in Chad could contain it.

From one day to the next, every vestige of Chadian control vaporized. It was as if the Chadian president had handed the keys of his country to Qaddafi. Every street corner bristled with Libyan commandos. Helicopter gunships thundered overhead, covering Qaddafi's motorcades and flexing as all the heads of state arrived.

It was a fearful time for the church and for missionaries. The US embassy counselled expats to hunker down and let it blow over. But would it?

I remember gathering our young boys and singing Steve Green's version of Psalm 56:

*When I am afraid I will trust in you, I will trust in you, I will trust in you.
 When I am afraid I will trust in you, in God whose word I praise.
 In God I trust I will not be afraid ... what can mortal man do to me?*

It was April—the peak of dry season—and rains wouldn’t come for another month or more. But our national church leaders put out the call: “PRAY! Pray to the true and living God, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that it will rain on Qaddafi’s parade. Pray that in dry season, his outdoor prayer meeting will be rained out.”

The day came. And it wasn’t gunships that thundered overhead. It poured!

I can still see our guys ... age 8 and 3 ... drenched. Dancing. GOD HAD DONE IT! God had answered their prayers. The smell of the wet earth—a pungent reminder of God’s Grand Plan: Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

When we hear a missionary (or a VBS leader) rehearse what **God has done**, it reminds us of His Grand Plan. It refreshes our faith for higher worship and greater obedience.

A missions report (thirdly) is meant

27	3. To strengthen our missional relationships.
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We (God’s Church) need to stoke friendships that help us all make progress on our God-given mission together.

I love the way v28 closes the paragraph.

29	²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples. (Acts 14: 24 -28, ESV)
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The report is done. Their talking is finished ... but their influence isn't. They remained. They lingered. Ongoing RELATIONSHIP was as important as the REPORT. They stuck around and hung out. The Greek word there paints a picture of rubbing hard together ... of sticking around to influence even more.

There's no question these two men had spent themselves empty and needed some refreshing fellowship. They needed a good hammock in the shade and a cold Cokes. But the "no little time" they spent hanging out was purposeful. They invested hours and days and weeks ... with the DISCIPLES. See that? Even as they recharged their batteries, they kept on mission ... making, shaping, multiplying disciples.

One of the biggest influences that made Cathy choose to spend her life for Jesus was just this. After a guest preacher or missionary spoke in their church, her mom and dad had a habit of inviting them home. The friendships forged over food might have accomplish more than any report to shape my wife's longing to live her life on God's MISSION.

It makes me thankful for the trouble and effort our church leaders are going to, not only to send missions teams out, but to bring mission partners here ... like Pastor Shedrach. Won't it be good to have him here in person! We need to see him. We will benefit to hear him in person. We need to then linger with him ... feel his heart for South Africa. How good would it be to invite Pastor Shedrach and Dr Craig over for burgers! Let their heart infect your heart—your kids' hearts—for far-flung nations on God's planet.

There's inherent value in mission reports, and in lingering together after those reports, because these reports, these relationships

- 1. Remind us of our part in God's Grand Plan**
- 2. Refresh our faith with God's mighty acts**
- 3. Reinvigorate our relationships to stay on our God-given mission together.**