

In *Actions Speak Louder Than Words...* author Herb Miller writes:

Two Kentucky farmers who owned racing stables had developed a keen rivalry. One spring each of them entered a horse in a local steeplechase. Thinking that a professional rider might help him outdo his friend, one of the farmers engaged a crack jockey. The two horses were neck and neck with a large lead over the rest of the pack at the last fence, but suddenly both fell, unseating their riders.

The professional jockey remounted quickly and rode on to win the race. Returning triumphantly to the paddock, the jockey found the farmer who had hired him fuming with rage.

"*What's the matter?*" the jockey asked. "*I won, didn't I?*"

"*Oh, yea,*" roared the farmer. "*You won all right, but you crossed the finish line on the wrong horse.*"

In his hurry to remount after the fall, the jockey had jumped on his competitor's horse.

What we may think is success... through all the hustle and bustle... can actually turn out to be failure. ... Our greatest fear should not be of failure... but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter. ... That is why whenever we come to a passage like the one we have before us today... in our study through Acts... we need to perk-up and take notice... and evaluate how we are doing as a ministry.

I have titled today's message: "What Makes Good Ministry Great."

Right now the elders of our church are in prayer... as we seek who God is calling into various leadership roles for our church. Not only do we need leaders who understand what makes good ministry great... but we need the entire church on prayerful watch with us... as we go into the new year.

Many of you are new to our church... and... as you consider... perhaps... a greater involvement with us... it would be good for you to know what proper ministry aim is. ... Today's scripture verses present us with several examples of effective ministry... and they would make an excellent checklist... for evaluating our own ministry.

The last verse of Acts chapter 12 (where we left off one week ago)... revealed to us: "*When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*" ... After having the joy of delivering a special offering from the church at Antioch to the Jerusalem church... Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch... taking along with them... John Mark. (By the way... Colossians 4:10 tells us that John mark was Barnabas' younger cousin.)

These great men and their young friend did not know it... but the greatest chapter in the church's history was about to open. ... The church at Antioch would receive its orders and go on the march — and face the difficulties that effective ministry always brings.

No matter what your level of involvement in Christian activity or ministry... you will be subject to difficulties and trials. ... Friends will sometimes forsake you. ... Families will fail you. ... Heartache will be a regular part of your life. ... In fact... dedication to Christ often brings us face to face with more problems than if we lived for ourselves. ... The Apostle Paul calls it "Spiritual Warfare."

But here is the reason why I risk sounding so pessimistic. ... How we view the war... makes a vast difference in our conduct... and even our longevity.

The opening verse of our passage next week... will present this by way of a contrast between Paul and Barnabas – and Barnabas' younger cousin... who will become the first missionary casualty.

Our chapter this morning... brings us to a turning point in the book of Acts. It is what Winston Churchill would have called one of the “*hinges of history.*” ... It marks the beginning of the third phase of our Lord's great commission. ... In the opening chapter of Acts... just before Jesus ascended into the heavens... He said to His disciples... “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...*” (Acts 1:8) ... Then he outlined geographically how that witness should proceed... beginning in Jerusalem... then in Judea and Samaria... and finally to the most remote parts of the earth... (Like La Pine Oregon.) ... In Chapter 13 we meet the beginning of the last phase... the going unto the uttermost parts of the earth. ... It is also the beginning of the apostleship of Paul. ... Up to this time... though he was called to be an apostle when he was first converted on the Damascus road... Paul has never acted as an apostle. ... Now... some eleven or twelve years after his conversion... he begins to fulfill the ministry to which he was called as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

As we get ready to investigate one of the great “hinges of history”... Acts chapter 13 will also expose what I believe **MUST BE** at the very heart of all ministry... including our own – The Mission of God to the World.

By reviewing the history of the Church... it becomes clear that Christianity has never been more consistent with Jesus... and more evidently en route to its own future... than in the launching of the world mission.'

Henry Martyn died... when he was only 31 years of age... in 1812. He had served as a missionary to India and Persia... He spent only six years in missionary service but accomplished more in six years than most who have spent 40 years. ... Henry Martyn once said, "The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become."

Somehow the church at Jerusalem (which had been the hub of all Christian activity) did not catch on to this. ... We have observed them already in Acts showing resistance to missionary outreach. ... We have observed a few of the Apostles being led by the Holy Spirit into such ministry... but then they had to answer to the church members back in Jerusalem for it. And when we get to chapter 15 of Acts... we will see Paul have a major showdown with them over it.

So here in Chapter 13... we see that God has raised up a new center of ministry. ... From this point on... Antioch in Syria would become the new center... and the Apostle Paul will be the new leader. The Gospel was on the move! ... And we are going to be looking at the ministry that God raised up for His effective service. ... We are first of all introduced to the Antioch congregation gathered for worship... and in particular to its leadership team.

Acts 13:1

OK... Let's stop right there... This church was amazingly heterogeneous. It included Barnabas. We have already met him a few times in Acts. He was a wealthy Cyprian... a man born and reared on the island of Cyprus. Then

there was Simeon who was called Niger. The name "Niger" means black, referring to the complexion of his skin. ... The name is also a Roman name... which shows that he moved about in Roman society. ... Several commentators suggest he was the Simon of Cyrene... mentioned in Mark 15:21... who you may remember carried the cross for Jesus at His crucifixion. There seems to be a lot of good evidence for this... but we don't know for sure. ... We also have another Gentile who was named Lucius. He was also... most likely a black man... because he was from Cyrene (which was North Africa.) Also in this church was Manaen... possibly a slave of Herod's father... who had grown up as a foster brother to Herod Antipas (the Herod who put Jesus on trial and who killed John the Baptist.) ... And then... of course... there was Rabbi Saul.

This was the church staff at Antioch — a racially integrated group of go-getters who Luke identifies as "prophets and teachers." ... Antioch was certainly where the action was — teachers teaching... and prophets prophesying. ... The perfect profile for effective ministry was exhibited there at Antioch. ... They were in microcosm what the church would become in the world. This was no accident, but rather a deliberate work of God!

'So the first large city church that we know anything about... had a five-person pastoral team from three continents. This is the climax of Pentecost.

The point is this: these men... with their diversity of backgrounds and social standings... show just how much the church at Antioch reached out to everyone throughout the community. ... It reached out to... and was inclusive of all classes of people... all needs... all nationalities and races. No one was excluded... everyone was invited to Christ and welcomed into

the fellowship and ministry of the church. ... The church at Antioch was a ministering church... a great outreach church... just the kind of church God needed to launch and support the first missionaries to the world.

But note a significant fact... a fact that stands as a warning to every ministry: God had to choose some church other than the Jerusalem church to launch the world-wide mission. ... The Jerusalem church was too narrow and traditional to do the job. ... Too many of its members wanted to retain sameness (to only have people who were just like them) as members. As we have seen... and will see again in Acts chapter 15... they were too prejudiced and held too many feelings against the rest of the world... They refused to freely and wholeheartedly commit themselves to world missions and evangelism. ... They refused to repent of their *exclusiveness and their traditional... formal approach to God*. ... God had to bypass the Jerusalem church and raise up another church to become the center of His mission upon earth.

What makes a good ministry great... is that it does not focus on sameness. ... It doesn't demand that its members (and especially its leadership) all come from the same background... social status... same personalities... or way of thinking through the issues. ... We cannot decide who comes into leadership on the basis of – “Well... he doesn't process thought the same way the rest of us do...” ... “She wasn't raised the same way we all were...” “They are not a white... Anglo-Saxon... Republican... Oregon Duck fan... who comes from around here... (like Jesus and us!)” ... As long as each are intent on discovering Christ's will... and walk close with the Lord – sameness in all other matters is of no concern.

So the first observation for what makes a good ministry great is... Diversity Among the Ranks ... (In its members and leaders.) ... But let me say once again that there **HAS TO BE** sameness of focusing in... on what Christ wants for His ministry. There should be no diversity from our common desire to discover Christ's will and to walk in it.

Acts 13:2

Now... I do not know how he spoke. ... It may have been through a prophetic utterance of one of these prophets as they were gathered together worshipping and ministering.... Or it may well have been that he spoke as He speaks to many today... in what is sometimes referred to as "insistent unanimity." ... That is when a deep conviction is shared by everyone in the group... that the Spirit of God desires a certain thing. A stirring of the heart begins. ... This is the way God has led us many times here at Living Water. ... The Elders have felt a deep... persistent sense that God's Spirit was moving in a special way. One of us mentions it at an elder meeting... and then another affirms "Yeah... I am sensing that too... Soon... everyone shared it. ... Whenever we have had this sense of unanimity we have taken it as the leading of the Holy Spirit... and subsequent events have invariably proved it to be true. ... It is how Colombia Grace Foundation was launched. ... It is how we knew it was time to begin the effort to obtain a Pastor of Student Ministries (even though we had no idea where the finances would come from.) ... But this is often the way God works.

Here in our passage... He spoke to men who were already at work doing what they knew. ... Teachers were teaching... prophets were prophesying... and they were actively worshipping the Lord. ... (LISTEN...) You can

steer a ship or a car if it is moving... but it is very difficult to steer it when it is sitting still. ... God loves to see people at work at what they know to do... and then he will give them further direction.

They were busy serving the Lord in Antioch when God called them. ... God does not call the lazy... the slothful... the loafers. ... God calls those who are busy doing what they can. ... Serve faithfully where you are if you want to know what God wants from you.

This church had positioned themselves to hear God. That is certainly another element of what makes a good ministry great. Be positioned to hear from God. That means do the things you know God wants you to be doing. (You know what those things are. Every true believer does.) Use your spiritual gifts in serving others... be active in worship... and perhaps engage in private fasting.

"Fasting" is always a mark of deep spiritual concern, indicating that a person is willing to set aside the normal demands of life in order to concentrate for a time on what God wants. It appears that the entire Antioch church was joined in this pursuit. They were "worshiping the Lord," and during that time the call of the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Their fasting shows they were earnest in the Lord's work. They were dedicated servants. ... God calls the dedicated... not the saint who lacks enthusiasm for God's work and is unfaithful spiritually.

What makes a good ministry great is those who are involved position themselves to hear God. ... There are many believers I find today who are looking to God to lead them in some dramatic way. They think they must go away and hole up in a cave somewhere to commune with nature in order for God to speak. Once they get away on a mountain somewhere then he will speak in some dramatic fashion and send them back with a great sense of call. Perhaps some here have been waiting thirty or forty years for that to happen, and it has not happened yet. Very probably it is not going to happen at all because God does not call that way very often. Sometimes he does, but usually his call comes when one is busy exercising his gift where he is, just as here. These men were busy employing their gifts, and, in the midst of their activity, the call of the Spirit came.

When the Holy Spirit spoke... notice what He said: “*Set apart for Me...*” ... The essence of a call is **less** geographical than possessional... It is a call to be completely given up to God. ... At the heart of any call is our becoming entirely available to God. ... The question of Whose we are... is always more critical... than the question of where we are... or end up. ... Availability trumps itinerary in God's ministry.

What makes a good ministry great? 1) Diversity among the ranks. 2) Positioning to hear God. 3) Whose we are is more critical than where we are. ... So Barnabas and Saul's being yielded to God was primary... and the geographical location of their service... was in that sense... secondary... and would follow later.

The service of these two was not immediately specified. ... God does not always tell us everything about our duty when He calls us to serve. He will,

however, inform us when necessary. ... The will of God is like the headlights of an automobile at night. ... It shows enough of the road so we can drive the auto... but it does not show all the road.

Acts 13:3

Allow me to quote J. Vernon McGee here:

They laid their hands on these two missionaries they were sending out. We still do that today to our missionaries. Why? Is it that we are imparting something to them? I'm afraid all that we can impart to someone by laying our hands on them is whatever disease germ we have on our hands. The laying on of hands is a means of identifying, of declaring that we are partners with that one. So the Christians in Antioch are indicating by placing their hands on them that they are in a partnership with Paul and Barnabas in the enterprise of getting out the Word of God. They are sending these men out as their representatives. They will minister at home while Paul and Barnabas go to the regions beyond.

So the entire ministry was showing that they were whole heartedly responding to God's leading. ... Boy! That is another measure for a great ministry. Everyone whole-heartedly responds to God's leading. ... It gives me great delight to say that we have seen this (once again) with Colombia Grace Foundation... and with our current youth ministry. ... I hope we will continue to see much more of it.

What makes a good ministry great is:

- 1) There is diversity among the ranks
- 2) They position themselves to hear God
- 3) Whose we are is more critical than where we are.
- 4) They whole-heartedly respond to God's leading

(Now it is time to pick up the pace a little...)

Acts 13:4-5

There is no reference to the Spirit's specific direction at this point, though it may be implicit in the opening phrase. Cyprus was, of course, Barnabas' home territory. He came from there. He once owned property there... before he sold it to help those who were in need at the church in Jerusalem. The island of Cyprus is a natural destination because Barnabas knows the culture and has relatives there. And where they went next ... was broadly Paul's homeland... just South of it. He would have had some familiarity with Galatia.

It is therefore not impossible that they simply followed the obvious course of going to areas where they would have an immediate familiarity with the cultures and contexts. ... The Holy Spirit does not routinely contradict common sense.

The Spirit may lay on your heart some need, some ministry, some opportunity that is before you... and you feel impressed to do it... and perhaps others will join you in it. ... But you do not know quite how to get started. ... Then... start with what looks like the most natural thing... being confident that God is in you to govern and lead you in your choice... and to bring out of it what He wants.

Paul and Barnabas stepped out... taking the Gospel elsewhere... first by starting in a manner that was most natural to them... And then... as we shall see... they moved out to other territories.

What makes a good ministry great... is that it also finds ways to get the Gospel message out to other lands and other places (both familiar and unfamiliar.)

Acts 13:6-12

#5) for what makes a good ministry great... is... they stand up to the evil that opposes them.

A major battle was inevitable. ... Spiritual warfare is not a fantasy of overimaginative theologians or pastors who stand in a pulpit to warn you... It happens today... just as it happened to Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark. We can expect bare-knuckled... heart-thumping... confrontations. ... The truth is, life is difficult, and sometimes even more so when you choose to follow Christ.

There is a cost to sincere service for Christ. Never share your faith and you will never look like a fool. Never stand for righteousness on a social issue and you will never be rejected. Never walk out of a theater because a movie or play is offensive and you will never be called a prude. Never practice consistent honesty in business and you will not lose the trade of a not-so-honest associate. Never reach out to the needy and you will never be taken advantage of. Never give your heart and it will never be broken. Never go to Cyprus and you will never be subjected to a dizzy, heart-convulsing confrontation with Satan. Seriously follow Christ and you will experience a gamut of sorrows almost completely unknown to the unbeliever. But of course you will also know the joy of adventure with the

Lord of the universe and of spiritual victory as you live a life of allegiance to him.

For Saul and Barnabas, the battle was on.

We certainly should not go looking for a fight. But as we watch our society become more antagonistic against Christianity... we do not need to pretend that we don't have the answers that the world is looking for. We do! And there is no need for us to back down from that. ... No doubt that we are only beginning to see outrageous attempts to silence and contradict our message of hope and salvation. And we will need this same kind of patient boldness that we see in Paul.

Now that leads us to our next observation.

You will notice as they began their ministry it was "Barnabas and Saul." They will not be very far into the first missionary journey until Saul's name is changed to Paul. ... The shift happens with our biographer (Luke... the author of Acts)... right here in verse 9. From now on... Luke refers to Saul... as Paul. And it immediately becomes evident that Paul is now the leader and the chief spokesman. ... The team from here out is called "Paul and Barnabas."

I love the fact that there is absolutely no evidence what-so-ever of even a hint of jealousy on the part of Barnabas. ... he seems perfectly OK with Paul taking the leading role. The selflessness that we have seen of him in Acts chapter 4 (when he sold his property to contribute to the needs of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ)... is consistent with the character of a man who would not have such jealousy.

Here is another measurement for what makes a good ministry great. 6)
There is an openness to God's changes (even if it involves role changes.)

A seventh and final measurement is seen in the God-sized result.

Paul and Barnabas had no idea that they would be able to have a hearing before the governor of the island... the proconsul... the man placed there by the Roman senate and responsible for the control and governance of the whole island. ... But that man... prompted by the Holy Spirit... though he was a pagan Roman... sent for Paul and Barnabas... and asked them to speak to him the words of truth. ... They were diligent in doing what God had asked them to do... and God opened the door. They did not have to kick down any doors. ... You can never anticipate how the Holy Spirit is going to work things out. ... But what makes a good ministry great is that there are God-sized results. ... Things happen that have only one explanation – God!

It is interesting that archeology has confirmed this incident because inscriptions bearing the name of this very man have been found in Cyprus. Furthermore, Sir William Ramsey has uncovered evidence that he was a Christian, and that his whole family became Christians, and were very prominent in Christian circles after this event. Here is one of those cases where archeology has clearly confirmed the report of this accurate historian, Luke.

So Church...! Here is our checklist. This is what our aim ought to be. Here is what we all need to be on the same page with new leaders for the coming year.

1) Are we afraid of those who walk close with the Lord... but perhaps don't have the same experiences as others on the leadership team...?

2) Are we doing the things that position us to hear God...? Are we active enough in our worship... seeking him... and serving others...? Is there more we can do...?

3) Is there still a whole-hearted response to God's leading...? Having sent our missionaries out... has the fervor died out at all...? Are we as enthusiastic about praying for our youth outreach... now that Tyler has come...? ... Are there other ministries God has given us that we need a greater involvement from the whole church...?

5) Do we remain fervent about our support for missions...?

6) Will we persistently present the truth of God's Word against our certain opposition...? Will we oppose any evil that tries to stop us...?

7) Are we open to whatever change that God has for us... even if it calls for us to be humble... or accept things that are not our first choice...?

8) Are we expecting more God-sized events to happen around here...?

Our greatest fear should not be of failure... but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.

Let's make sure we are on the right race horse!