

NOTES



OPENING PRAYER

Lord, thank You for building Your church out of people who don't naturally belong together. Open our ears to hear You more clearly through one another tonight, and activate us this week to proclaim and demonstrate the good news of Jesus wherever You've placed us. Amen.

OPENING QUESTION_(OPTIONAL)

Who's someone very different from you — in background, personality, or opinion — who ended up making you better? (A coach, coworker, family member, friend, teammate, etc.)

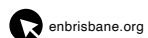


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WORD

Acts 13:1–3

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.

Acts 15:1–12, 36–41

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” 12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

WORD (cont...)

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Acts 13–15 shows the early church growing up—full of strong personalities, real theological stakes, and unresolved tension, rather than the idealized harmony of Acts 2. The diverse leadership team gathered at Antioch (a Levite, an African, a former Herodian insider, and a converted persecutor) models how the Holy Spirit works through difference rather than around it, commissioning Paul and Barnabas for a mission that was always meant to be both spoken and lived out. When sharp conflict arose over circumcision and Gentile inclusion, the church didn't avoid it or let it fester—they brought it to a council, let Scripture settle it, and communicated the outcome clearly, which in turn strengthened the church's confidence to keep preaching and demonstrating the gospel.

The later falling-out between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark shows a messier, more honest side of church life: not every conflict resolves neatly, and Luke records their split without assigning blame or forcing reconciliation. Yet even this rupture became fruitful—two missionary teams emerged where there had been one, doubling the gospel's reach rather than stalling it. Years later, Paul's request for Mark by name shows the break wasn't final, and Mark's own Gospel became a lasting testimony that outlasted the disagreement entirely.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS (cont...)

1. Discernment is corporate, not solo. Antioch heard God's direction as a diverse room united in prayer and fasting — not as individuals waiting alone for a private sign. Takeaway: seek God's direction inside community, especially community that doesn't think exactly like you.

2. Diversity sharpens hearing, it doesn't dilute it. A Levite, an African, a courtier, and a former persecutor prayed in the same room — and that's precisely why they heard clearly. Takeaway: ask who's missing from your "Antioch room."

3. Sending always aims at activation. The Spirit didn't set Paul and Barnabas apart to sit still — He sent them to proclaim Christ and demonstrate His power. Takeaway: ask God what He's setting you apart to do, not just to know.

4. Truth and relationship are not competing priorities. The Jerusalem Council fought hard for right doctrine without abandoning the relationship. Takeaway: you can hold your ground on truth and still stay at the table.

5. Not every conflict resolves — and that's not automatically failure. Paul and Barnabas split, and Luke records it without shame or spin. Takeaway: some relationships call for stewardship of a rupture, not a forced fix.

6. Unresolved doesn't mean unredeemed. Years later, Paul asks for Mark by name. Takeaway: stay open to reconciliation even after a season of distance — God isn't finished with the story.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You that unity was never meant to mean sameness, and that You can be trusted with our unresolved stuff. Sharpen us through the friction You allow, and activate us this week to proclaim Your gospel with our words and demonstrate it with our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think of a time a group you were part of made a great decision together. What made that possible?
2. In Acts 13:1–3, the Antioch leadership team is made up of people who wouldn't naturally be in the same room. What do you think it cost them to stay united, and what did it produce?
3. Paul and Barnabas were sent out to both proclaim the gospel with words and demonstrate it through their lives, their courage, and even their suffering. Where in your own life is it easier to talk about Jesus than to show Him — or the other way around?
4. When the Jerusalem letter was read out, the church "was glad for its encouraging message" and kept moving forward in mission. Has clarity or resolution in your own life ever freed you up to be more active in sharing or living out your faith? What held you back before that?
5. Paul and Barnabas's split in Acts 15:36–39 isn't resolved in the text — yet both men kept proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel afterward, just in different places. What would it look like for you to stay activated in mission even in a season of unresolved relational tension?

Gospel Invitation:

- If you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, tonight is an invitation to do that — not because you've got your relationships figured out, but because He meets us in the middle of the mess, the way He met a persecutor named Saul.
- If you've been keeping score in a broken relationship instead of bringing it to God, consider this an invitation to repentance — releasing bitterness and asking God to lead you toward His resolution, not your own.

Missional Activation:

- Proclaim: This week, tell one person in your life a simple, honest sentence about what Jesus has done for you — not a sermon, just your story.
- Demonstrate: Identify one practical need around you — a neighbour, a coworker, a stranger — and meet it in a tangible way that shows the love of Christ before you ever explain it.