



THE COMMUNITY

Paul's Strategy 2 | STARTING POINTS AND DISCIPLESHIP

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 14

Acts 14 gives us the second half of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Here they continue into Galatia as far as Derbe, and then retrace their steps all the way to Antioch. As in the previous study, there is much to learn from their model.

Take a look at verses 1-7. This chapter begins by saying, "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue." If you look back through chapter 13, you'll see that was their pattern. In Acts 13:5, they went to the synagogue in Salamis, and in 13:14 they taught in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Paul maintains this preference in all of his journeys. Whenever there was a synagogue in a city, he would begin to preach there. If a city didn't have a large enough Jewish population to support a synagogue, he would go to a place of prayer. If there was no place of prayer, he would find another gathering where he could teach.

There are several reasons why a synagogue was an ideal place to begin preaching. There, the people would be aware of the Old Testament promises, and they would have some notion of the coming Messiah. They were accustomed to having visiting rabbis teach, and were obviously open to spiritual things. Despite the constant persecution Paul also found in synagogues, he continued to visit them because they were the best possible place for the gospel to establish a foothold in a new community.

In our culture, there are also "synagogues" or natural places to begin an outreach. One of them is the college campus. A campus has a collection of people who are at critical crossroads in their lives, where they are evaluating decisions and beliefs, and are determining courses for their lives. There is a closed community with a defined identity living in a close geographic region and with strong social connections. Students also have more discretionary time than they ever will again. There is no place on earth like a college campus to have a ministry. Even on a worldwide scale, the campus is phenomenally strategic. An American student could travel to any campus on earth, and there find the future leaders of that nation, English speakers, people with whom they can connect, and people eager to meet them and learn about their culture. Universities are the key to reaching the world for Christ.

Even within college campuses there are "synagogues." Freshmen are perhaps the most strategic of college students. If you want to reach a campus for Christ, Freshmen are

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What's the Big Idea?

In this study, you want to continue to help your group think strategically about ministry. Specifically, this passage shows how Paul was intentional about choosing a starting point for outreach, and how he valued discipleship in addition to evangelism.

What's the Problem?

The enormous task of reaching everyone on the planet with the good news about Jesus' life, death and resurrection cannot be accomplished without giving careful thought to the best ways to proceed.

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the key. Everyone is a Freshman at one point, so if you reach all the Freshmen for four years, you will have reached everyone at the school. They will be there the longest, which means they will have the maximum time to mature and lead. They are often the most open to new relationships and new ideas. They generally live on campus. For these, and other reasons, Freshmen are an incredibly strategic “synagogue” to reach.

Look now at verses 21-27. It would be helpful if you had a map to see this. Perhaps there is a map of Paul's first missionary journey in the back of your Bible. Paul has just left Lystra where he was preaching, and where the people mistook he and Barnabas for Greek gods. After persuading the people that they were just humans like them, some Jews came and stirred up a mob to stone Paul. He was dragged outside the city and left for dead. Miraculously, he survived and continued on his journey.

The last point on their trip was Derbe, where they led a large number of people to Christ. Take a look at a map and see where they now are in relationship to their starting point in Antioch. (Note: They didn't begin in Pisidian Antioch of Galatia, but in Antioch, the large Roman city just inland from the northeast tip of the Mediterranean Sea.) They've almost come full circle, but instead of completing a relatively short over-land journey, they backtrack and revisit most of the cities where they preached.

Their reason for doing this is stated in verse 22. They were “strengthening the disciples, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.” They could have spent additional time on the road going to new, unreached cities. Or, they could have shortened their trip and gone home. Instead of either of these, they returned to strengthen the new churches. There always needs to be a balance between evangelism and discipleship. Both are necessary, neither can survive nor thrive without the other. If we do no evangelism, there will be no one to disciple. If we do no discipleship, there will be no one to do evangelism.

Paul loved his churches. He prayed for them, visited them and (fortunately for us), wrote to them. He was constantly striving for their faith and strength in the gospel. We, too, have an obligation to nurture and develop the people we lead to Christ.

One final word. Some people may take issue with the way this study values strategy, believing it's ungodly. For that reason we suggest you launch the study with a debate about that and air the topic. God can and does override strategy and sometimes call us to do things that appear entirely nonstrategic. But in general it seems He honors wisdom and invites us to think about how to best accomplish the tasks He has given us. So while we should invest the energy to make the best decisions we can, given what we know of our situation, human nature and God's ways of working, none of those things override obedience to God's specific commands, however counter-intuitive they may seem to us.

What's Our Response?

As a group, evaluate how strategic your ministry is.

Seek to reach out to the people who can best help you win the entire campus.

Evaluate the balance between evangelism and discipleship in your ministry. Adjust as needed.

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What Are the Questions?

Acts 14

Launch

Divide your group in half and have them debate this proposition: "Strategic thinking is ungodly. If we were actually empowered by the Spirit we wouldn't have to depend on strategy."

Explore

Read Acts 14.

1. reread Acts 14:1-3. Where did Paul usually begin preaching the gospel when he would enter a new city?

2. Why would Paul begin by preaching there?

3. Where are the places in our culture that are natural starting places for outreach?

4. Where or with whom are the starting points on your campus?

5. What makes them strategic?

6. What about the people that are not in a "strategic" subgroup?

7. read 14:21-27. look at a map in your Bible of Paul's missionary journeys. Where were they in relation to the Antioch where they started?

8. We know from Paul's second journey that there was an overland route to connect those two points. Why do you think they didn't just finish the loop and go home?

9. Which is more important: evangelism or discipleship? What should the balance be?

Apply

10. If you were visiting a city where you had just preached the gospel, what are some of the follow-up topics and issues you would teach? Write down what you would consider to be the 12 most important issues.

11. Who do you know in the ministry who could use some "follow-up"?

12. How would you initiate this relationship and process?

13. Few of us are naturally balanced in evangelism and discipleship but we prefer one over the other. Which are you inclined to neglect in favor of your natural preference? What steps could you take to let your strength aid your weakness??

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Paul would begin in Jewish synagogues.
 2. Take time to develop this advantage of synagogues. There were so many and it's a key concept in this study. People would be aware of Old Testament promises and open to spiritual things. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?" for a partial list.
 3. Allow the group to discuss. College campuses are one example of natural starting places. Be prepared to help people discover all the ridiculous advantages to campus ministry and why it's so strategic. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
 4. Allow the group to discuss. Fresh men are one starting point.
 5. Discuss the topic. Freshmen are there the longest, open to new ideas, and often live on campus. See "What Do I Need to Know" for a list of benefits to reaching Freshmen.
 6. We still want to reach them! Paul preached outside of synagogues all the time. These are merely strategic starting points. We need to figure out ways to get the gospel to everyone.
 7. They are reasonably close, and have almost completed a loop.
 8. According to verse 22, they went back through the cities they visited to strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith.
 9. Allow the group to discuss. Both are necessary.
 10. Give the group time to come up with what they feel are the most important teachings a young believer needs to hear. The "Walk by Faith" lessons in The Compass are a good place to start.
 11. Discuss specific people.
 12. Discuss the topic. Begin by simply getting together for a meal or coffee; look to make a regular time where you can meet, share, pray, and go through a mini-Bible study on a topic.
 13. Allow the group to discuss. On using strengths to aid weaknesses you might suggest that the strong disciplers see equipping someone to share their faith as an essential part of discipleship. It has been said that discipleship without evangelism isn't discipleship at all – it's counseling.
- For those preferring evangelism you might encourage them to see following up new believers as an essential part of evangelism, grounding them in the faith.

Memorize

...We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

Acts 14:15



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