

Series: You Are Sent Vol. 3 – “Planning to Go, willing to stay”

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Text: Acts 14

VBS PRAYER

Hey big heads up to you TODAY is our first day of Vacation Bible School. We are all about partnering with families to raise the next generation of disciples and this is a really big week for that. I know of SO many who can trace a major moment in their faith journey to a week of vacation bible school at a local church. This will be one of the biggest evangelistic weeks of the year for Mercy Church. Like Christmas and Easter are great. And we hype those. BUT, VBS is far more effective in evangelism because we have the chance to teach children the gospel in a fun, creative high energy way for an entire week. And as we enter into the book of Acts, into the story of God advancing the gospel through the local church, I think this is a fitting moment to pray for God’s blessing over this coming week.

So I want to bring up Abby Carpenter. Abby is the director of our kid’s ministry here at Mercy. Abby has worked like crazy, alongside many of you, to prepare for the children God will bring this week. So here’s what I want to do. As Abby comes up here, I want to ask you if you will be serving in VBS with us this week...I want to ask you to stand up right there at your seat. CHEER

PRAY

Intro

Today we begin our summer sermon series. We will be in the new testament in the book of Acts. We will be picking up in Acts 14. I say picking up because this is not our first time in the book of acts as a church. We actually began our journey in the book of Acts on August 28 of 2019. And we divided the book of Acts into 3 volumes because we wanted to preach through all of it and wanted to spread it out over some time because it is so important to who we are as a church. We did volume 1 in 2019, volume 2 in 2020, and we will finish with volume 3 of the acts anthology here in 2021. And our over-arching message of the entire book is simply “You Are Sent.” Which, if you’ve been around mercy, you’ve heard us say a few times. Like at the end of every service. We speak it over you. Because we believe God’s redeeming love FOR you comes with a redeeming purpose for your life. It’s good news we celebrate in here each week and its good news we walk out of here WITH each week. We don’t just meet up with God here, no God goes WITH each of us as we leave. And he sends us out with a purpose. And then we get back in here the next week and celebrate what the Lord has been up to the previous week. It’s the most incredible thing to me that God would not ONLY save me, but would let me be a part of his saving work in the lives of others. And in this last volume in our Acts series we are going to lean into that purpose a little bit.

The theme of this last volume in the you are sent series is “Planning to go, willing to stay.” Let me explain. Man I grew up in church and about once a year we’d have missions Sunday. And a missionary would come in and they’d have some slides on a slide show with pictures of a faraway land and they’d tell

stories of what God is doing there. Then they'd say something like...maybe God is calling you to go. And our church might do a mission trip once a year and the pastor would say "maybe God is calling you to go." But I never really planned to go. Maybe. But how would I really know if God was calling me to go? A couple of times I prayed about it but how could I really KNOW IF God was calling me to go? So opportunity after opportunity just went by me and I kind of developed a view of the go-ers as the elite navy seals of Christianity.

Then in college I read the book of Acts. And something hit me like a ton of bricks. The accounts of this church were of people who went. By and large they didn't wonder if they were called to go. They were planning to GO. Maybe "going" just meant to their neighbors or friends or even their own family members. Maybe it meant going to the sick person down the street. Maybe it meant going to a whole new country they'd never even seen before. They weren't just willing to go; they were planning to go. They were so sure that God had not forgotten them. That God had an awesome purpose for them, that they were planning for it. Planning to go. And I realize I'd been asking the wrong question about my life.

Wrong Question: Is God calling me to go?

PAUSE before revealing

Right Question: *Where* is God calling me to go?

That's an important, and I think clarifying, change of mind. God has given me a purpose bigger than myself. I'm not supposed to wait to put my yes on the table to God's plan for

my life. Instead I'm to put my yes on the table and let God put it on the map.

And what I believe God wants for mercy church is to be a people who aren't just willing to go if God calls. But who are planning to Go because we believe God HAS called us. Has invited us off the sidelines and into his mission to take announce his redeeming love to the whole world.

So the theme of Acts volume 3 is **Planning to go, willing to stay**. I'm planning to go. Go where he calls me. And maybe he's calling me to stay here in charlotte. But if that is true...staying is seeing my current situation as the bench where God has left me, and maybe he will put me in the game one day. No, if I'm staying it's because I'm being SENT BY God right here! The workplace & the neighborhood he's already placed me in. So either way I'm planning to go because when you embrace God's redeeming love and see God's redeeming calling on your life, staying isn't waiting, staying is going. Let's dive into Acts 14. As we get into it I believe this idea will start to get clearer and clearer.

Chapters 13 & 14 take us through the apostle Paul's first missionary journey. He has 3 of them that the back half of Acts will document for us and through his first one I want to show you what "planning to Go" looks like. Here in chapter 14 We are going to follow them to 3 different cities and as we do, you will see I want to show you 4 characteristics of a church where everyone is a go-er. And then I want to show you where the joy of going comes from.

1) In Iconium they entered the Jewish synagogue, as usual, and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

They – this is the apostle Paul and his buddy Barnabas. We are picking up in Iconium, but chapter 13 documents a few stops since they set sail from Jerusalem. And the reason they are going is because of what God called them to at the beginning of Chapter 13.

2 As 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 they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off. -- Acts 13:2-3

I hope you see what I believe to be a model for how the Lord calls. The church together is worshipping in unity, fasting regularly. Praying together. And out of that healthy unity, the Lord sends out. That’s why we strive so hard for unity here, for prayer here, and why we try to be open-handed with our people and resources. We want the Lord to use us to accomplish his mission! Well towards the end of chapter 13 Paul & Barnabas are not well received in Antioch. So they kick the dust off their feet and move on to Iconium. To the next town. And as they do, the church they planted in Antioch stays with joy. And the believers there get to work.

So here Paul & Barnabas are now in Iconium. It was a common practice to go into the Jewish synagogue. To speak in the power of God...that’s the way they spoke. In the power of God. Something you will see in Acts. The gospel is the POWER

of God to save (Romans 1.16). And the Power of the Holy Spirit was upon them (Acts 2). That’s why they are speaking in “a great way.”

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

When people start believing...some are not going to be happy. And they will try to poison the minds of new believers. “ARE YOU IN A CULT!?” “THEY HAVE BRAINWASHED YOU.” “They don’t care about you. They are using you.” “They are bigoted. They are misogynist. They hate women, hate the queer community. You need to run away from them.” These are the words of people who are threatened by someone’s conversion to Christianity. Not everyone is going to believe. Some are though. And those that are will be in the hot seat for converting. Maybe its converting away from a certain faith. Or maybe its converting away from the secular faith. So the unbelievers try to convince the new believers they are wrong.

3 So they stayed there a long time and spoke boldly for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders.

Make sure you see the main character – The Lord. They spoke boldly. But the LORD testified to the message of his grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders. This is really important – SIGNS AND WONDERS – are done by the Lord to testify to the gospel. There’s even a warning about using this power for other means in Acts 8. Simon tries to BUY this power from the apostles because he’s enamored with it. It’s even more powerful than the sorcery he used to practice. And

he gets rebuked bigtime by the apostles. Because signs and wonders are for ONE PURPOSE – to testify to the gospel.

4 But the people of the city were divided, some siding with the Jews and others with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat and stone them, 6 they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding countryside. 7 There they continued preaching the gospel.

There is a very common pattern to the new testament church. They preach, some believe, their lives get threatened, they either continue & are killed or they move on to the next town and preach again. Sometimes they get slowed down. But they are never silenced. And the more you try and silence them, the further the gospel spreads. That's what happens when you attempt to smash God's church. It just shatters into more pieces and scatters to more areas who then spread the good news wherever they go! I'll never forget learning the story of how the gospel spread in Cuba in the 20th century. The communist regime rounded up the leading pastors on the island and put them all in the same prison to snuff out the movement. Many in the prison came to faith. So, they took a different strategy and sent each pastor to a different prison across the island.... The faith multiplied! You try to smash God's church, it will scatter.

Planning-to-go: Sharing the gospel...expectantly.

Wherever these two guys went, they preached the gospel. That's the one thing they did virtually everywhere they went.

They planned to preach. They found people of peace, they found spiritual and cultural centers of thought and they contextualized the gospel thoughtfully. But at the end of the day, they did all of this because they planned to share the gospel. The gospel is the announcement of God's redeeming love for you. That though you are a sinner God still loves you and offers you forgiveness from your sin. Christ died to pay for your sin and in Christ you are free! In Christ you are not your past sins. In Christ you are a child of God! In Christ you have the promise of heaven!

This is awesome news. And these guys were set apart, honored to be able to go and share this with people who hadn't heard it. God has called every disciple to this honor. Matthew 28. Therefore, go and make disciples. We are not all preachers. But we all can talk about Jesus with others. **What if we got up in the morning planning to talk with people about Jesus today?** Because that's our purpose. What if there was a joy waiting for you that you are missing out on because you aren't planning for it? Maybe you've been waiting or wondering if God is ever going to call you...and today I want to get that question answered loud and clear. He has called you! It's not if God calls you, but where he's calling you to go share the gospel. And let's EXPECT God to change a life today! When they shared, people believed! The more they shared, the more believed! I don't think you believe God can use you. And I'm like...he SAVED YOU didn't he? If you don't think you can do it...that's the whole problem. You can't. GOD can.

8 In Lystra a man was sitting who was without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth. 9 He listened as Paul spoke. After looking directly at him and seeing

that he had faith to be healed, 10 Paul said in a loud voice, “Stand up on your feet!” And he jumped up and began to walk around.¹

The man had faith to be healed. He didn't necessarily desire salvation from his sins yet. That is usually what happens. The lame man in Luke 5, the lame man in Acts 3 – they wanted physical healing. Which is what ALL people want. How can Jesus help me with real problems in my life? And the power to HEAL gives evidence of the greater power – the power to save. That's what Jesus gets at in Luke 5 when he heals the paralyzed man. This guy is laying on a mat and his buddies lower him through a roof to get him to Jesus to be healed. Jesus looks at him and says...your sins are forgiven. The religious leaders are offended. YOU CAN'T Forgive sins only God can do that. So he says “which is easier to forgive sins or heal the sick? But so that you may know I have the power to forgive...here I will heal him.” NOW that power is passed on to his church. And Paul sees this man has faith. The Lord grants Paul that sight. And that power. So he says get up.

The purpose in BOTH is that physical healing is a demonstration of God's power to perform spiritual, eternal healing. To heal you from your sin. To forgive you of your sin and reconcile you to God.

¹ Similar to Peter in Acts 3.1-10 and even Aneas in 9.32-35. & similar to Jesus in Luke 5.18-26

11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought bulls and wreaths to the gates because he intended, with the crowds, to offer sacrifice.

Before you think whoa these people are crazy...check yourself. These people are responding the only way they know how! They see power & they think...the gods we know of have come down in human form. Even Zeus the chief God is here. ‘there is always a tendency to confuse the power that heals with the healer himself, and here the healer acts immediately to set the record straight’.²

14 The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting, 15 “People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own way, 17 although he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” 18

² Peterson, D. G. (2009). [*The Acts of the Apostles*](#) (p. 407). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.

Now this is such a great missionary text to me. Paul and Barnabas make sure, real fast, to divert praise AWAY from themselves. We are people just like you! We are proclaiming good news to you! Don't praise us and miss God! They want these people to praise...just to praise God. And then they go immediately into showing how God has been pursuing them all along. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN GOD! God gave you rain; God gave you harvest. God gave you joy. Every time you had a full meal and leaned back at the table around your family and thought wow, this is great. This is the life. ---that moment right there where your heart feels full – that is NOT your doing. You didn't create that. Zeus didn't create it. The UNIVERSE didn't do that. The Living God gave you that moment. And Paul says...it wasn't me. I get ZERO credit here.

Planning-to-go: decreasing so he increases

God does not share his glory. That's why these guys are so quick to divert credit to God. And it would be SO EASY to take credit. But they refuse. Because they know God is about God's glory. And if they make this ministry about themselves...oh man they are in trouble. God's not going to be in that. And who knows what direction they could take people down.

John the Baptist said the same thing

28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of

mine is complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease." -
- John 3:28-30

What John is saying – Best Man shouldn't be flirting with the BRIDE! Shouldn't be trying to get her attention. Bride shouldn't even see him. Best Man's job is to make Groom look good.

Listen to me there should be no such thing as Christian fame. We are SO PRONE to worship SOMETHING though that even we Christians create paths to fame. I think it's good to have heroes in the faith. A hero in the faith is something different though than fame. But I see too many who have sought the limelight for themselves and use God as a means to get it. Who are trying to author their own story and make God one of their endorsements. Please do not try to use God for your own glory. That is not what God is sending you for. He's sending you, in the words of count Zinzendorf to Preach Christ, Die, and be forgotten. It may be that your pursuit of your own glory, your own legacy, is the thing that's keeping you from the joy of the "sent" life.

Ok what happens next? Pretty similar story line. Here come those angry unbelieving Jews. They followed him from Iconium where he just was. That's a 100-mile trek. You gotta be mad to follow a guy 100 miles to beat him up.

19 Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.

This time the Jews got him. In Iconium they TRIED to stone him. In Lystra, they did stone him. To the point they dragged him out of the city and thought he was dead.

Planning-to-go: Expecting to suffer & sacrifice

Let me be clear – I do believe God is going to call some of you to take the gospel to a part of the world where Christ is not known. And where preaching the gospel may bring hostile physical attack. And you may die. The possibility that if we, over time, remain steadfastly a planning-to-go church – I may get a call that Darren & Jennifer or Dominique & Nicole have been killed in Somalia. I may get a call that Brandon is hiding in a bunker in Iran and we don't know if he will make it out. I get that the Lord may use my words here today to create a chain of events that leads to that call. And the only thing that keeps my mouth open is that scripture says how beautiful are those feet. Calls them honored to be able to suffer like their messiah. And it says live is CHRIST and to die is GAIN. And it is ONLY security in Christ and the promise of heaven that makes such a life make any sense.

Most will be called to locations, maybe even staying here in Charlotte, where you will not be hunted. But you will suffer and sacrifice. We must plan for it. We must expect it. Are you ready for rejection when you share the gospel? Middle & High School students: Are you ready to be the only kid on the team who doesn't play on Sundays because he chooses Jesus over sports? What about the employee or employer who is ostracized for practicing a faith, for preaching a gospel, that directly contradicts the worldview of the day? You will suffer,

³ He references this one in 2 Cor. 11:25; 2 Tim. 3:11; and possibly Gal. 6:17.

you will sacrifice. Jesus didn't say if they reject you, he said WHEN.

22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you, and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man. 23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note — your reward is great in heaven, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets. -- Luke 6:22-23

Let me show you what Love looks like in the face of that. Jesus said later in Luke 6 that love looked like turning the other cheek. Evidently Paul knew that teaching of Jesus. because look at what he did next:

20 After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

The church came to his aid. And then he got back up and went into the town. Oh man. In the words of Sean carter – Go on and brush your shoulders off. When you get so beat up they think you are dead. And then you get up off the dirt and walk back into town. This was a big moment for Paul. ³ When they stoned him – he loved them enough to go back. Oh what love.

Planning-to-go: Loving people who don't love Jesus...yet

Only one saturated like a full sponge with the love of God is able to get his brains beat & then go back in. Here's the thing – he loved who God loved. God loves people that don't love him yet. And ya'll I'm going to go ahead and tell you that is hard. the only way to do that...is to remember 1 Corinthians 6.11 – such were some of you. Such were some of you.

Ummm one thing we Christians tend to forget is that we didn't always know Christ. And that we did NOTHING to make ourselves worthy of the salvation we received. God in his kindness SENT somebody to tell us. And we who didn't love Jesus.... were loved by Jesus and were loved by that person who told us about Jesus. Man...God is really good like that. he loves the very people who reject him. And he keeps sending his people to them to announce his love. And it may be that you suffer and get rejected by the very people you are sent to. Will you still love them when they reject you? Right there is when you will be closest to your savior.

See God has placed you NOW among people who need the gospel. But you will only go to them with the gospel if you love them like Jesus loves them. If you see their separation from Christ's redeeming love as the greatest need they have. It's not a question of IF God is sending you. He already has. But Christian...you can't share that great hope of the gospel because it's just your Christian duty or out of fear you will be a failure if you don't. That's not how the gospel works. No if you feel any bit of that...go back to Jesus!

Everything I just shared about a planning-to-go life...Jesus did every one of them. For you. He was sent from heaven to come to earth FOR you and I. And he came proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. To give sight to the blind and set captives free. He planned to give God the father all the credit. He who would be exalted...he humbled himself to the fathers will. He made his purpose in life to do his father's business. He planned to suffer and die SO THAT we could LIVE! He planned to hang on the cross and as he died still speak words of love

over his killers! FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO!

See the only way a church turns into a movement for the gospel is when we get our hearts so filled with God's love for us that we can't bear the thought of others missing it. THAT is God's heart for our neighbors and for the nations. And you will only exhibit that kind of self-sacrificing love when you make your home in Christ's love for you. Church what I'm saying is that we won't plan to go anywhere until Jesus becomes more worthy to us than he ever has been before. But once we see him as worthy...we will no longer wonder if we are called. We will start looking for where.

My personal story – Planning to Go, willing to stay.

What about you?