

A Community That is Fulfilling a Mission

The early church community...

... worked to fulfill the **mission** of Jesus.

... often gathered to **celebrate** how God was opening doors to the Gospel message.

"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. ²³Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." Acts 14:21-27 (NIV)

... was presented with opportunities to lead and mature through **difficulties**.

... received wisdom through their **submission** to one another.

"With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. ²⁴We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell. ³⁰The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message." Acts: 15:23-31 (NIV)

... sought the **strategy** of the **Spirit** of Jesus.

"As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. ⁶Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Acts 16:4-10 (NIV)

Paul...

... was emptied of his own **strategy**.

... received the **desires** of his heart in unexpected ways as a gift from the Lord. (see 2 Cor. 2:12-15)

Small Group Questions

1. Take some time on your own or as a group to read chapters 14, 15, and 16 of Acts, then answer the questions below:
 - A. What is happening in the story – get a grasp of the places, the movement, the decisions and the people involved.
 - B. What pieces of the story surprise you and why?
 - C. What is the role of the church in the story? What is the role of God in the story?
2. The early church often gathered to encourage one another and celebrate what God is doing. They also often faced obstacles/challenges.
 - A. How are you and/or your community doing on the encouragement side? Take some time to share what the Lord is doing or has recently done in your life or community that is worthy of celebration.
 - B. What obstacles or challenges are you and/or your community facing? Take some time to share and add how you believe the obstacle/challenge could be used to mature you.
3. Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-15. Years after the journey that took him to Corinth, Paul reflects on his following of the Lord's strategy, and we discover that the dream he described in Acts was actually used to fulfill his heart's desire and bring him peace. How does this provide an example of an obstacle/challenge that was able to mature Paul?
4. We discussed being emptied of our own strategy and receiving the strategy of Jesus. What do you think about the idea of Jesus having a strategy for you and for his church?
 - A. How should this shape the church community?
 - B. How should this shape your personal life and calling?