



FASTING FOR CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

Acts 13-14

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Acts chapter 13 and pull out the notes that are there in your Worship Guide. Acts chapter 13. And while you're turning there and getting situated, I want to begin just by sharing with you some good news that Heather and I received on Friday. I had the opportunity to share this at Secret Church, but some of you may not have been there.

We got a call Friday letting us know that all of our paperwork for adoption had gone through. We're waiting for travel dates. We got travel dates on Friday and received word that Lord-willing, around Monday, sometime on Monday November 21 (so that's Monday of Thanksgiving week), we will have the opportunity for the first time to meet our daughter face-to-face. We will be there for a couple of weeks going through a variety of different processes and then head home the beginning of December.

So I share that with you, one: to ask you to pray. I'm scared. I know kind of what to do with two boys. You just throw them around and wrestle with them. But I don't know what to do with a little girl, and so I'm nervous. I've got a couple weeks to figure out what to do. In all seriousness, I share that to express overwhelming gratitude to God—the Father of the fatherless—who has taken us on a round-about journey that we would not have planned ourselves. That led us through Nepal, and now to this news from China. He is—just to see His sovereign hand at work at every step of this process leading us to this little girl. And so we will try... to let you know over the next few weeks. That will obviously change things for me a bit around here. I'll actually be here next week. Bart will be preaching for some reasons we'll talk about later today. And then the next couple of weeks, Jonathan, our Global Disciple-making Pastor will be leading us—kind of postponing what we normally do, kind of global disciple-making emphasis—but Jonathan will be leading us in the Word while I'm in China and then we'll come back.

But along the way, we're going to work to put updates online, blog, and whatever else. Much like did when we went to Kazakhstan, so that you would have the opportunity to pray and walk alongside the journey with us. We'll let you know more about that next Sunday.

Last week, we spent time together thinking about who we are and what we do as the Church at Brook Hills based upon the Word. You've got at the top of your notes one statement that sums up who we are and what we do—what we're about. I want to see if you can say it with me as you fill it in. This is our vision, our mission, our goal in one sentence driven by Psalm 67, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 24:14, Revelation 7:9-10. All over Scripture. This is what we do. See if you can say it with me. "We glorify God by making disciples of all nations."

See, what happened in the first worship gathering it got put on the screen and people just read it. And so you did not...I was going to make sure that didn't happen for you guys—that you had an opportunity to think through. This is the sentence. This is what sums up who we

are; what we do. We glorify God. We exist to exalt the glory of God and we exist to exalt God for His grace. We are a God-centered people. Why? Because we have a God-centered God, who is worthy of all glory. How do we glorify Him? By making disciples. Us growing in the image of Christ as disciples and then leading others to grow in the image of Christ as disciples. Every disciple in this room, a disciple-maker: teaching the Word, serving the world, making disciples in all nations. Everything we do at Brook Hills we do ultimately for the sake of God's glory in all nations. We have been commanded not just to make disciples generally. We have been commanded to make disciples specifically of every nation, every ethnicity, every people group. This is not a suggestion from Christ—this is a summons for us. Make disciples of all the nations until every people group on the planet is reached with the gospel of Christ and He returns to fully and finally redeem His people.

We Glorify God by Making Disciples of All Nations

So we glorify God by making disciples of all nations. I want us to take that statement and unpack how that ultimately and inevitably leads to multiplication of The Church at Brook Hills. So we're going to pause for a second there in your notes and I want us to look at Acts 13 and 14. This is a passage that we've studied and read on a couple different occasions—most recently back in the Spring when we walked through the Book of Acts. So nothing new here necessarily. But I want you to see an overall picture of the early church, especially the church at Antioch, that I think will inform our understanding of what God is doing in The Church at Brook Hills.

As we intentionally make disciples, we will inevitably multiply churches.

So start in Acts chapter 13, verse one and read along with me.

"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. 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.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3).

So this is the church in Antioch, already in Acts known for claiming the gospel not just to Jews, but to Greeks also, here worshiping. So see the tie again between worship and mission—a people enthralled with the glory of God will give their lives proclaiming the gospel of God. So as they're worshiping they send out. The Spirit says, "Send out Paul and Barnabas," the first missionaries from the Church of Antioch. So they're worshiping (a people with blank checks, right?) on the table. We're worshiping the Lord. Our lives belong to Him. You are Lord; we follow. Whatever you want us to do, we do. Wherever you want us to go, we go. You make the calls—not us in all of our lives. It's what the Church does. The Spirit said, "Set apart for me Paul and Barnabas." Willing to send their best, the church at Antioch. Two guys whose presence, whose loss so-to-speak, would undoubtedly be felt. And Paul and Barnabas, willing to leave behind the relationships and the community of faith there at Antioch they had grown to love, cherish and value; willing to leave behind the community they had there. This was no easy thing. But you don't negotiate with the Spirit of God—you follow the Spirit of God.

The Spirit calls and then the church confirms. So notice, the Spirit said, "Set them apart," and the church acknowledged, "Yes." The Spirit is setting them apart. The whole church is involved here. This is not just a Paul and Barnabas thing. This is not individualism. This is

not people saying (like sometimes they say today), "Hey, here's what the Lord is telling me what to do," and then they go off into the world as a renegade. That's not the pattern of the New Testament. It's the church discerning the call of the Holy Spirit on somebody's life. That's why when anybody in our midst senses that the Lord is calling them out, or if we as a church or leaders in the church sense that God is calling someone out, we pray together through that. None of us is intended to be alone in this thing. And as the Spirit sends, the church supports. They lay their hands on them—a picture of identification with them as they go.

And so as they send them off, Paul and Barnabas and John (who we will see join them in a minute), a missionary team going out, compelled by the Spirit of God, equipped with the Word of God, armed with the gospel of God to do...What I want to show you is something very simple. Not easy, but simple. Look at verse four. *"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them"* (Acts 13:4-5).

That's what they went out to do. It's really very simple -- to proclaim the Word of God. And everything else that happened to them that we're about to run through real quickly (all the people they met, all the relationships they established, all the churches that were planted, all the persecutions that they faced) that all came from the overflow of proclaiming the Word of God. That's what we send, that's what the Church sends out people to do. The Church doesn't send out people to meet humanitarian needs, to establish relationships, to build churches. We send people out to proclaim the gospel. And along the way, obviously we meet and love people and we meet and address needs, and we see churches planted and built up. People. But all of that flows from the proclamation of gospel. That's what they were sent out to do. And as soon as they started doing that, they began to experience resistance. So a magician comes to them trying to oppose them. Paul, under that power of the Holy Spirit, temporarily blinds that guy and then leads to proconsul to Christ.

You get down to verse 13. *"Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem"* (Acts 13:13). So now it's just Paul and Barnabas.

"But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it'" (Acts 13:13-15).

You do not have to ask Paul to preach twice. *"So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said..."* (Acts 13:16). And he begins to do what? Proclaim the gospel. He's doing what he's sent out to do: proclaims the gospel. All the way down to verse 42. So he proclaims the gospel. You get to verse 42,

"As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:42-44).

And proclaiming the Word. People are coming, and they begin to face opposition. You get down to verse 48. Even in amidst opposition people come to Christ, even Gentiles. *"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region"* (Acts 13:48-49).

Again, opposition:

"But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:50-52).

Proclaiming the gospel. Making disciples. Facing persecution. All in the joy of the Holy Spirit. You get to chapter 14 and verse one. *"Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way (proclaiming the gospel) that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed"* (Acts 14:1). Now in Iconium they faced persecution again—the threat of stoning. Go down to verse five.

"When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to (guess what?) preach the gospel" (Acts 14:5-7).

They go on to Lystra where a crippled man was healed. The people of Lystra start exalting Paul and Barnabas like they're Greek gods. Paul and Barnabas obviously react against that. And while they're resisting that, meanwhile, some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium catch up to them and this time they do stone them. Verse 19,

"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe" (Acts 14:19-20).

Paul is like the Energizer bunny, you can't keep the brother down. He keeps going, and going, and going. You can't stop this brother from proclaiming the gospel.

"When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, (listen to this) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:21-23).

Did you hear that? Proclaiming the gospel. That's what I mean by simple—not easy. Obviously not easy. But proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and multiplying churches. They would proclaim the gospel, people would come to faith in Christ by God's grace, and those people would begin to gather in churches led by elders and pastors. That's how the gospel is spreading. People proclaiming the gospel, intentional disciple-making, and then from that, inevitably church planting. And this happens in every city where Paul and

Barnabas go. After this is they retrace their steps and they go back. They strengthen these different churches where they'd just gone. All the way back to verse 24,

"Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia (retracing their steps), and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. (Back to their home base) And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples" (Acts 14:24-28).

So they made it back to Antioch, a church that had sent them out, and together they rejoiced in what the Lord was doing! So here it is. Come in here real close. Don't miss this. What we're seeing here is exactly what God is doing here. I want you to put us in the story for a second. A people worshipping, declaring, delighting in the glory of God. Just say we're at Antioch. Making disciples here in Birmingham, just as they were at Antioch. And then from Birmingham (from Antioch), in cities and among nations, glorifying God by making disciples of all nations.

Now the step deeper I want us to take this morning is realizing (and we've talked about this before but I think it's still kind of soaking in) as we intentionally make disciples, we will inevitably multiply churches. This is where we come back to the notes here. As we intentionally make disciples, we will inevitably multiply churches. Disciple-making inevitably leads to church multiplication.

Making disciples through small groups.

Think about it! It makes sense. You think about what we talked about last week. Here, as this faith family, making disciples through small groups. The goal is for every member of this body to be locked arms with a group of brothers and sisters, sharing life together, fighting the fight of faith together. Not just for our own souls, but for the spread of the gospel. Not just for our own families, but for the spread of the gospel to other families. This is God's design—every member making disciples. Every disciple a disciple-maker. This is God's design. Every member empowered for ministry. Every member of this church filled with the Spirit of God, empowered to share the gospel of God to make disciples.

Think about this. Now really put yourself, your life, into this story. Do you realize that the same Spirit who was on Paul and the same Spirit who was on Barnabas is the exact same Spirit who dwells in *you* right now? Christian brother or sister, there are no second-class citizens in this picture. You have the same Spirit of God. Yes, we all have different gifting's from the Spirit, but we have the same Spirit, fullness of the Spirit, given to all of us (Acts 1:8) for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. So accountants, lawyers, teachers, students, stay-at-home-moms, all of us, with the Spirit of God in us, empowered for ministry. Every member empowered for ministry.

Every member equipped for ministry with this Word. That's all they had in Acts 13 and 14. Spirit and Word. That's all they needed. The Spirit and the Word. That's another reason why it's simple. So many things we think of when it comes to church today—all this stuff—when the reality is, all you need to make disciples and multiply the church is the Spirit of God and the Word of God. And the reality is, they didn't even have the full Word yet, the full Canon of Scripture. They didn't have all of Paul's letters here. So we've got an advantage here on the Church at Antioch, an advantage here on Paul and Barnabas.

So you've got every member empowered for ministry, every member equipped for ministry, and every member engaged in ministry. Whether here or around the world, every one of us is intended to be engaged in ministry with God; every disciple a disciple-maker. So here's the deal: what if we really believed that? What if we really did that? If this were really the case among each of us, among all of us, among more and more and more of us. You think about it. More and more and more people, empowered by the Spirit of God, equipped with the Word of God to engage in ministry with God.

Imagine just a small group like that. Think about this. Let's bring it down. Imagine a small group where every member, sharing life with one another, bearing burdens with one another, learning from one another, leaning on one another, sharing life together. But realizing, this is not just for us. We are here not just for community; we are here for the spread of the gospel.

And so how can we help each other share the gospel? Who can we share the gospel with? How can we work together to intentionally share the gospel from our community? How can we share the gospel in our neighborhood, our workplaces and the networks that our families have? How can we, together, on our campus, wherever it might be, how can we share the gospel? And imagine a small group really believing that every single member is empowered by the Spirit of God and equipped with the Word of God to do this: to make disciples and actively proclaiming the Word of God.

You think about it. What I'm about to say I do not want to sound mechanical at all. I know that only the Spirit can draw people to Christ. But based upon the power of this gospel, I've got to believe that if you have a small group of men and women who are all empowered by the Spirit of God and every week are saying, "How can we together share the gospel of God?" And they work all week to share the gospel, then come back together and say, "How's it going? Who do we need to pray for? Hey, this person's close to coming to Christ." Working together. Coming back. It just seems to me that based on the power of this gospel (I don't want this to sound mechanical but you think about it), if a small group is doing that week after week, after week, and every single person in that small group is sharing the gospel. It seems like within a year, two, maybe three, that small groups going to at least double, if not more. Do we believe in the power of this gospel? I know only the Holy Spirit can add, but He will add when this gospel is proclaimed.

If there is a way to double the church every year, or two, or three, not based on having more programs or more events or more money, but based on people actually believing the Word of God, I think we should go with that. Now, the problem is, if we actually believed that and actually did that, we would have a major problem here. Because you look around in our morning worship gatherings, and there's not room for us to double. Clearly. And in case you haven't been around the last five years, we are not planning on building bigger gigantic buildings and palaces here, just to make sure that memo is on the table. Intentionally making disciples will lead to inevitable multiplying of the church. The whole picture is, whether here or around the world, if we're going to give ourselves to making disciples, it will inevitably lead to multiplying churches.

Multiplying churches by sending teams.

So making disciples through small groups, and multiplying churches by sending teams. Knowing all of this, just a couple of years ago around this time in November we said, "We need to train and prepare for this." We began together to envision building into our budget and our focus as a church, sending brothers and sisters from here, led by church planters and pastors trained at Brook Hills. We began a church planting residency to intentionally raise up brothers and their families from within our midst to go with church members

servant at Brook Hills—brothers and sisters who are making disciples here with a view toward making disciples together there. What I want us to do is do a little bit of “end of Acts 14” here and rejoice together in what God has done over the last couple years as we have sent out teams in North America to unreached people groups. And then we’ll bring it back to how that’s led to church multiplication even here in Birmingham.

Paul and Barnabas came back for this kind of celebration. We don’t have all the people that we’ve sent out coming back here. Instead, we have something that they did not have in Acts 14 called Skype and iChat and flip cameras. What we’ve done is we’ve asked those who we’ve sent out to speak a word back to us about how things are going and how we can be praying for them. We have sent out two teams. We’re about to send out a third team to under-reached areas in North America.

The first one: earlier this year, when we were walking through Acts, we sent out Andrew and Kim Arthur and a team alongside them. We prayed for them, identified with them, sent them to Seattle. That’s the picture I want you to remember. When you’re about to see Andrew and Kim on the screen speaking to us, remember they’re in a very real way an extension of us. We are identified with them. Church at Antioch—Paul and Barnabas. Church at Brook Hills—Andrew and Kim and other brothers and sisters who have already moved up to Seattle, or who are still in the process of moving up to Seattle. Let’s hear from the church planting team in Seattle.

[Andrew Arthur on Video] “Hey Brook Hills, this is the Arthur’s here with The Hallows Church plant here in Seattle. Life for us has been moving quite quickly since arriving. When Delaney showed up in Seattle, she could barely pick up her head. Now she’s running around the church plant entertaining and helping everybody out. I want to thank you—take a moment just to thank you—for your prayers and support of our ministry here in Seattle. Thank you so much for giving time and praying and fasting on our behalf. We could not, we will not see fruit apart from people assuming the posture of dependence and praying for us. And thank you for that.”

“And your prayers are being answered. Progress is being made. We’re building relationships with people in the community in a variety of ways. We’ve had multiple opportunities to share the gospel with people who have no knowledge base of the gospel, much less ever believed in it. Being able to breathe gospel clarity in peoples’ lives here in Seattle and then have them actually.... If they don’t believe the gospel, at least they’re not believing the true gospel and not some cultural distortion of the gospel. We’re very grateful for that fruit to be able to speak the gospel into peoples’ lives. We’re trying to do so as faithfully as we can. The church plant’s moving along. We’ve got a series of community groups that are up and running. Right now groups of about eight to 12 people are meeting in different homes in this neighborhood to share life together, to study Scripture together, and to find ways to serve the community together. And our prayer is that by the end of this year we’ll have five of those groups up and running. That’s one way that you can be praying for us as we move into the future. Again, thank you so much. We love you guys and we’re praying for you as well.” [End of video]

Andrew and Kim, and apparently Delaney are enjoying Seattle. We sent them out in the spring. This summer we had an opportunity to send John and Amy Crawford to the Midwest, to Kansas City, where in the words of John Crawford, “the aim was to lovingly and graciously confront, calm, comfortable suburbia with the gospel. They now have settled in to Kansas City so let’s hear from them.

[John and Amy Crawford on Video] "Hi Brook Hills. I'm John Crawford and this is my wife, Amy. It's almost three months ago in which we were commissioned from the Church at Brook Hills to come here to Kansas City to make disciples and ultimately to plant a church. And so, here in the course of these three months I think one truth has been evident in our lives—that if Christ doesn't build this church then we are completely done. It's completely up to Him to complete this task. We do ask you that in the days ahead that you would continue to pray for us."

"And here are just a few ways that you can be praying. First would be that God has blessed us with a great church planting team. In the days ahead continue to pray that we would be faithful witnesses of the gospel. Pray that we would live with gospel intentionality and really seek to be intentional in making disciples in the different spheres of influence and contacts in which God has placed us. The second way would be that our church planting team would truly be the body for each other; that we would humbly serve and care for one another; that we would love each other; that we would take care of one another's needs; and really be used of the Lord to encourage and spur each other on as we seek to make disciples and follow Him."

"And we want you to pray that we would have true favor with the neighbors that we're meeting and the community that we're trying to immerse ourselves in as we frequent stores, as we delve into new friendships. Pray that we would have favor and that God would pave the way and soften hearts to give us many opportunities in the days ahead."

"We love you guys and are so thankful for how you've partnered with us in the gospel; for how you've prayed for us; how you've encouraged us; how you've financially given—sacrificially given toward us to see a church planted here in Kansas City; that disciples would be made not only here, but also to the ends of the earth. We miss you guys and love you all very much." [End of video]

We have a church planting team in the Northwest and the Midwest. In the next month we're about to send out a third team to the Northeast, to New York City with Josh and Traci Stahley leading that. Remember that metro New York is home to over 22 million people, including 500 different people groups who speak 800 different languages. Metro New York includes two million Jews, 800,000 Muslims, 400,000 Hindus. It's the American hub for Russians, Chinese, South Asians, West Africans, Caribbeans, South Americans, and more. So Josh and Traci have a lot of work to do and a team alongside them.

These are the teams that we've sent out or are preparing to send. Then I put some question marks in your notes because the reality is we are a worshipping people. As we worship and as we pray, who knows who in this room the Lord might raise up to go? And where He might send you to join with one of these teams, or to other under-reached areas of North America, or to unreached areas of the world?

At this point I'm going to make a bit of a transition. There are a lot of people who listen to podcast from our worship gatherings on Sunday. And some of the things that I'm about to share are things that don't need to be shared beyond this faith family regarding some security sensitive stuff that our brothers and sisters from here are a part of around the world. For those who are listening on podcast, you're going to get left out on this one. We'll pick back up with you guys in just a second after we finish talking about what God is doing among unreached people groups in some areas of the world that are hostile to the gospel. So pause for that.

Okay, back to the podcast here, but still speaking specifically to our faith family. So Church

at Brook Hills, the reality is the Lord will call many of us, many of us to leave here. There are so many people who have never heard the gospel. Clearly the Lord will call many of us to leave here, but likely not all of us. So what does this mean for those who are in Antioch so-to-speak, for those who are in Birmingham? Does that mean that those who stay in Birmingham are sidelined when it comes to church multiplication? I don't think it is because I believe God desires His church to be multiplied throughout Birmingham as well. And we've seen that over the last couple of years in ways that we didn't even plan for or expect.

By God's grace, this summer we ended up sending out a team of brothers and sisters from our faith family led by Ben Deloach to begin the church at Southeast Lake in Birmingham. We commissioned them, laid our hands on them, sent them out in order to serve and proclaim the gospel, and plant a church in a different part of the city. The church has begun there, meeting in two homes, and is about to expand beyond that. Ben sent us this update from our brothers and sisters right down the street in South East Lake. Watch this with me.

[Ben Deloach on Video] "Brothers and sisters, it's a little strange addressing you this way. Many things that were strange have become normal since we moved to East Lake. Callie and I and our four kids have lived here a little over a year, and we're still learning the neighborhood and how to be neighbors in a community that is very different than what we're used to. God has let us all trust Him and believe His Word more and more as we have walked through times of fear and of frustration. We realize now more than ever just how long a journey this is going to be. As many of you know, we formed the church at South East Lake on July 31, and we're still meeting as two groups that come together on the last Sunday of the month. So far, 14 families have moved from suburban areas to East Lake, and five families have joined us and are trying to move to East Lake. Five other families that were already a part of the community have joined us as well."

"Things are getting a little crowded so we hope, as God leads, to begin a third house church in the early part of next year. We so appreciate your commitment to pray with us, and we still are working through how to remain unified as a church as we multiply. With two house churches, it's challenging. We know that as the church multiplies, those challenges will as well. The foundation of our unity is Christ Himself. We know that can't change, but our unity as friends and neighbors with a common vision and goal is proving a little harder to maintain. So please pray for our unity with one another first. And then for our unity with the community in general."

"Also, please pray that people will hear us as we proclaim the gospel. We know that salvation is God's work in a sinner's heart, but we know from Romans 10 that unless people hear, they will not believe. Only God can open their ears to hear and we trust Him with this. Our prayer is that whatever dividing walls, that might keep people from hearing us, would be removed. Pray that God would give us wisdom in these things, and that regardless of our weaknesses, people will hear the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in Him alone there is forgiveness and peace with God and peace with one another. We hope to see you at East Lake very soon." [End of video]

So church multiplication in Birmingham. This is where I want to encourage you to broaden your thinking about church multiplication. As we intentionally make disciples, we will inevitably multiply churches. Last year, almost a year ago, Bart and I were having a conversation. Most of you know that Bart is our Pastor of Biblical Training, who leads our Institute for Disciple-Making, and preaches often. He's actually been overseeing a lot of this church planting picture, the church planting residency, training up church planters and pastors to send out from here.

Well, Bart and I were talking about a year ago, and he shared with me how in the midst of overseeing church planting, God seemed to be giving him a desire to plant a church—to be a part of being sent out with a team of folks from here. At the same time he was wrestling because he really enjoyed what he was doing here, particularly when it comes to the Institute for Disciple-Making. So we started praying together. We said, “Well, let’s seek the Lord together.” And that’s what we began to do. (Blank check. Lord, what are You doing here?)

And then in the Spring, we’re walking together through the Book of Acts. One Sunday after we had walked through and seen this kind of picture like we’re looking at here, a couple of small groups approached me from the Homewood/Southside area of Birmingham. They approached me and they said, “Pastor, we are leading people to Christ. We are doing ministry among those who don’t know Christ in our neighborhood. It’s a challenge to involve those people who live in our neighborhood and share life with a church that seems pretty distant from them down 280.” And so they asked me, “As we are making disciples in Homewood/Southside, would it be possible for us to gather together there as a church with people who are coming to Christ?”

I smiled, and said, “Let’s get together.” So we did and I invited Bart to meet with us. Together we began praying about the possibility of these small groups beginning to gather together for worship and the possibility of Bart shepherding them. After that point, Bart began meeting with them some. Over the last few months now, they’ve all been meeting together in that area of our city with a view toward gathering together as a church in that part of Birmingham next year, as a church—not a campus, not a “pipe in David Platt on DVD every Sunday.” But as a body of Christ with elders, pastors, who teach the Word in their community, glorifying God by making disciples of all nations from that community.

This is the WIN. This is the WIN! Brothers and sisters in small groups making disciples where they live, and if this is happening, it will only make sense for churches to begin all over the city! If we are making disciples, we will not be able to gather together all in this one building! And it wouldn’t even make sense if we could because the most effective place to make disciples is where we’re living with the people we’re among!

So as we intentionally make disciples, the church will multiply. We spend our resources not on getting more people to this one location, but spend our resources on sending more people from this location, empowered by the Spirit of God, equipped with the Word of God, to make disciples to multiply churches throughout Birmingham and around the world. This is what we’re seeing in the New Testament and we want to be a part of. I want you to hear from Bart and these small groups who have been gathering together. Watch this with me and then I want you to hear personally from Bart and his wife Leslie.

[Bart and Leslie Box/Small group members] “It all kind of culminated when after one of David’s sermons he was talking about being the church outside of the church and what does that look like. Some of the implications led us to go approach him and to actually ask him, ‘What would it be like to plant a church in Homewood?’ They shared how they were making disciples in the context of their community, and felt they could be more effective if there were perhaps a church in that area with the same vision, mission, goals as Brook Hills.”

“We felt like there was this disconnect that we would go on Sundays and then we would come back. But it was difficult to invite people to church or to be involved on Wednesday nights.”

"There are a lot of believers over on this side of town that really want to get together and reach that are for the Lord."

"And there are some really neat neighborhoods that border Homewood that people don't know about: Roseland, Southside, Valley Avenue. I think there's some exciting stuff that could go on there."

"Homewood's a really big melting-pot. You've got a lot of different people groups there because of the medical community downtown and drawing different people from across the world."

"Little did we know that Bart was actually interested in being a pastor of a church again and had been seeking for something like that in his own life."

"I love what I do at Brook Hills, but at the same time, I felt the desire in my heart to either pastor or plant a church. I want to say, immediately, I don't think we're going to be the only Bible-believing, gospel-preaching church in Homewood. But at the same time, I think one of the long-term, most effective means of making disciples wherever you're at, or to the ends of the earth, is through the planting of new churches. It has other benefits. I think it renews existing churches. I think it gives opportunity for, in this particular case with Brook Hills, I think it gives an opportunity to renew practice and vision within that sending church. To be honest, I don't really have any kind of blueprint in terms of some kind of booklet or carefully laid out strategy. I think we just want to find our vision in the pages of the New Testament. So I want to keep it rather simple in those terms and devote ourselves in the same way the early church did to the Word. Devote ourselves to fellowship together: caring for one another, loving for one another, bearing one another's burdens, carrying out those 'one-anothers' in the New Testament."

"I think some of my hopes for this church would be that the world would look at this body of believers and say that they would be in community. They care for one another. And that they would see Christ in us."

"By God's grace, we want to go and preach the gospel to them and see them won to Christ and disciplined into the image of Christ."

So Bart and Leslie Box, friends of Heather and me ever since we moved across the hall from them in Seminary and Leslie brought us some lemonade as we were moving in. The privilege of serving alongside one another here and now potentially the privilege of sending out. So give us a little picture. I've shared a little bit of kind of the background, but fill us in a little more of the background, Bart, and how you've seen God bring this whole thing about.

BART: Yeah, I think it's been...as you kind of shared, a convergence of their lives and mine and Leslie's life. And then particularly when I think about...We've talked a lot about a blank check and just kind of, you know, asking the Lord to lead us and guide us in whatever direction we can be most effectively used for the spread of the gospel. And I really like and love (Leslie and I have talked about this a lot), love what we do here. It's really a privilege to serve here, particularly in the role that I serve in. I get to preach and teach and not answer most of the unpleasant emails that come. They generally land in his inbox and not mine. And so that's been good.

Really and seriously, to walk alongside JD and Chris, and to walk alongside Andrew and John, and now Josh and Ryan—that's just been a real joy and something I've

enjoyed doing. But at the same time, we just want to be open wherever. Whether that was here or somewhere else or starting a church—something along those lines. So we began praying about that and met with that group and even set that aside for a little bit. One day Brian actually approached me on the playground and just said, “Hey, what do you think about going to lunch? Let’s do that.” We then had further conversations from there, and began praying about it. We met over the summer in particular getting to know each other a little bit, and then more intently beginning in the fall. So we’ve met on a weekly basis beginning around August up until now, really simply in terms of Word and prayer and fellowship. And in particular, looking at what the Word says about being a church and loving one another. So that’s kind of where we’re at up until this point.

DAVID: These small groups meeting already in Homewood/Southside with a heart for that area of our city. Give us a picture of why Homewood/Southside? Why is it important for a church like this to be spreading the gospel in that particular area.

BART: Yeah, well one, which you’ve already shared this morning, as we’re making disciples intentionally, it’s inevitably going to lead to the planting of churches. I think there are a lot of other benefits that we don’t often think about when thinking about church planting in terms of renewal from the sending church so even though obviously to a gospel presence of a gospel witness in a particular community—renewing that on and on. But above everything, though, we want to be about gospel proclamation. I think that’s why we want to plant a church in any particular area, because there are lost people—whether they’re over there or here. We work alongside, we play with, we live by lost people every day. And so the most effective way to reach them I think is as a body of believers. And particularly in this case they want to be a body of believers rooted in that community, reaching that particular community, and spreading the gospel in that community. So I think it makes sense to reach lost people through the planting of churches.

DAVID: So where from here? You’ve obviously got these small groups and some brothers and sisters have already been meeting from among us for this purpose. But there might be others who live in that area or would like to know more about this picture. Where are things going from here?

BART: Right, yeah we’ve had about 30, 35-or-so adults and a lot of other kids, little kids. Not other kids. Their kids.

DAVID: That’s great. Just pulling a lot of random kids. That’s good.

BART: We just kind of get them right off the street. (laughter) But we’ve been meeting and Jason Wallace has graciously allowed us to meet in his studio to this point. That’s been ongoing. But there will be an opportunity for others that are interested to, if nothing else, to pray and encourage. And we need both of those: prayer and encouragement. And so we’ll be meeting next week and there’ll be a couple of opportunities for you guys if you’d like to hear more. After the 11:00 and after the 6:00 services, there’ll be opportunities where you can come, hear, and again partner in prayer, partner in going along potentially. If the Lord is leading anybody in that way, then certainly we want to figure out how we can incorporate you in terms of that and in the leadership of the Spirit. And then from there, I don’t know. We’ll see.

DAVID: It’s a good plan.

BART: It is. It's a good plan. No, we want to establish relationships and then look toward the possibility sometime in the beginning of next year. [End of interview]

So I mentioned earlier that Bart is going to be leading us in the Word next week and in those informational meetings. If you just want to find out information or interested in being involved or anything along those lines then...Here's what I want us to see in this picture of Bart and Leslie and these small groups, on one hand (obviously a picture that we want to be praying for from right now for disciple-making in Homewood/Southside and from there to the ends of the earth). So that on one hand.

But then on another hand, I want us to realize that this kind of thing has potential to happen all over this city. It's not just us saying, "Okay, where are the neediest places and the neediest people groups in the world and how can we go there?" We are saying that and we're going to continue to do that. But we're also looking at the people right next door and we're thinking, "How can we best spread the gospel to them?" It's always best, we talked about it, to make disciples in the context of where we live, among the people that we're around. So if we're intentionally making disciples where we live, we will inevitably multiply churches where we live. And that's the point!

That's the whole point! In case it has not yet soaked in, let it soak in! The purpose of your Christianity, the purpose of my Christianity, the purpose of our Christianity is not to sit back, coasting this thing out in a comfortable church with programs and events that are revolved around us. No! The purpose of your Christianity, my Christianity, our Christianity, the purpose of our faith, the very reason we exist, is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ where we live and to the ends of the earth. And out of all of us, every member of this church, on the frontlines, making disciples. As we make disciples we multiply churches and we will not be afraid to send our best out. We will not be afraid to send brothers and sisters in these two small groups and these church planting teams—brothers and sisters that I love and will miss. Brothers and sisters that will miss being here. But we were created and we were saved for something much greater than coasting it out here together.

This gospel is good! We've only got a little bit of time here. So let's go! Every one of us making disciples all over the city. Making disciples all over the world. And as we do, multiplying churches from Birmingham, to under-reached parts of North America, to unreached people groups around the planet. What is most important is not our seating capacity. What is most important is our sending capacity. That's what it means to be a church.

So God, give us grace to move out of a paradigm where the goal is to get as many people as possible into one building where we can have the best programs to revolve around us. God, give us the grace to move to a paradigm where the goal is truly to send out as many people as possible out of this building to spread the gospel to people who need it in our city and around the world.

Worshipping, Praying, and Fasting ...

That's the goal. This is the WIN. And I pray that God will do this in ways that we can't even imagine right now. Prayer is central to that. You may have noticed that in the very beginning of Acts 13:1 and the end of Acts 14:23, these two chapters are book-ended with prayer and worship and fasting. And so this is what I want to do this week: I want to call us

this week to fast and to pray. I want to call...You've got in your notes. So you've got on the front of your worship guide a list of brothers and sisters that have been sent out mid-term and long-term from our faith family to where they're serving. So to pray for each of them by name. To fast and pray. And then on the inside you've got list of prayer requests from church planting teams sent out from here. You can add Homewood/Southside to the end of it. Pray for them, and not just for them but for us. Just freshly as you fast and pray.

Sometimes we've done this on one day. What I want to call you to do is one day this week, any day this week, whatever would be most convenient, to set aside time to fast for the spread of the gospel through the multiplication of the church, through brothers and sisters that we've sent out, and then through us. Freshly put the blank check on the table and say, "Lord, do you want me to be a part of any of these? Do you want me to be a part of something totally new that's not even on here?"

We fast because we love the glory of God.

So why do we do this in fasting? We fast for these reasons: because we love the glory of God, we are worshipers (Acts 13:2). We're worshipers who love the glory of God more than our stomachs long for food, our souls long for God. That's why we set aside food for a day. And I know that for some people with medical reasons, it's not possible to do that. So if that's the case, then find some kind of daily necessity you crave, that you desire, and set it aside.

We're saying as we fast, we have deeper longings that even food itself... Every human being craves food, desires food during the day. But we as the people of God, have a more intense, a deeper craving. More than our stomachs long for food, our souls long for God. We fast because we love the glory of God.

We fast because we need the Spirit of God.

We fast because we need the Spirit of God. Everything in Acts 13, 14, everything that we're talking about in our faith family here revolves around the leadership and the empowering of God's Spirit. More than we need physical provision, we need spiritual power. What we're talking about this morning, we can do none of it on our own. We need His power from on high more than we need strength for our bodies.

We fast because we want to accomplish the mission of God.

We fast because we want to accomplish the mission of God. You look at Matthew 9:14-15. You see where Jesus talks about fasting. And He said there that His disciples would fast once He left. One of the reasons we fast is to express our hunger for Christ to come back. Christ, Who has said to us, "Make disciples of all the nations." Christ, Who said to us, "This gospel will be proclaimed to all nations and then the end will come." Christ, Who is going to receive praise from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation, is going to come back and receive praise from all those people groups.

So we fast. We get hungry during the day. We think, "I'd like some food." I say, "No. More than I desire food to satiate that hunger..." Instead we pray and we say, "More than we want our hunger to cease, we want His kingdom to come." More than we want our hunger to cease we want His kingdom to come. And that's what this table represents. That's what this meal represents. The Lord's Supper is us saying, "We've been saved by the gospel of Christ and we want to make the glory of Christ known to the ends of the earth so that our King returns and receives the praise He is due." Making disciples, multiplying churches here and to the ends of the earth, in ways that are simple, based on the proclamation of the Word of God and the power of the Spirit of God.

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