

The Call to be "Set Apart"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2026

Preacher: Craig Dowling

[0 : 00] Thank you, thank you all. Acts chapter 13. Acts chapter 13. Acts chapter 13.

! I make a habit of saying it every single week, perhaps one more time. If you see those Bibles there and you're in need of one, you'd like to use one, feel free to use those and take those particular ones home, of course. God's Word, God's love story to humanity. And Acts 13 begins by telling us that in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers.

And verse 2 says, while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. And the next two chapters, chapters 13 and 14, detail the incredible missionary journey they were sent out to embark on. In fact, through until chapter 21, we get the four incredible missionary journeys that the first century, brand new missionaries embarked out on after they have been set apart for God's work.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for so many chapters cram-packed with the details of missionary journeys.

This is where we discover how your church ended up multinational, international, worldwide, from so much strategic, well-planned missionary work. So help us learn about it, be inspired by it.

[2 : 59] And as we think about being set apart for the work of your kingdom, may we know what you're saying to us. Lord, I would pray that if you were calling one person here to give up their lives to be set apart for the work of your kingdom, that this day they would know it and respond to it. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

So, committed to the cause. Have you ever thought about that word or that expression, the cause, taking a stand for the cause? What really does it mean? I googled it the other day.

Google described it as a principle aim or movement to which one is committed and which one is prepared to defend or advocate.

I'll give the example. She devoted her whole adult life to the cause of deaf people. And as I read that, I immediately thought of countless, countless of folks, both famous and personal, who have committed their lives to a particular cause.

Across the centuries, countless folk have been committed to a cause which helps, which enables, which does good, and then many.

[5 : 00] Many, many have been committed to a cause that does evil, that causes destruction. And such a cause leads to nothing.

And life is too short to be caught up in empty causes. We Christians, we disciples of Jesus, are in God's kingdom with the purpose of dedicating our lives to God's cause.

But have you really been converted to God's cause? John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Movement, he was famous for saying, we all need be converted to Christ, yes, but we also need to be converted to his cause.

For far too long, British culture encouraged, enabled generations of Christians to discover Jesus and then in selfishness keep it to themselves and do nothing with it.

Christians who are not technically converted to the cause of God. Wester Hills Baptist Church, we must be a bunch of Christians who, alongside our commitment to Jesus, are also committed to his cause.

[6 : 54] And just what exactly is the cause of God? Max Lucado teaches, the cause of God is the unbounded work of God to reach all nations in pursuit of our relationship.

All centered on and brought about by divine providence, redemption, and grace. And of course, nowhere else is all this better summarized than the Great Commission.

For it is the ultimate definition of what God has been and still is out today. Matthew 28.

You know this well. We all do. Jesus says, Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And then he finishes it with, And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. That is the cause of God.

[8 : 35] That is indeed the cause of God. And after we have received our salvation, we then need get committed to doing this.

To doing it. And often we over-technicalize it, don't we? And we make it difficult to do when it's actually very, very, very easy.

So, if that's the cause of God, Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28, well, the next little question must be, well, how do we go about it?

How do we do it? The cause of God. Well, there is the little verse I'm forever banging on about here.

Jesus said, love one another as I have loved you. But, what about the very famous be his salt and light? Let's turn to it. Matthew chapter 5.

[9 : 45] Be his salt and light. verse 13. When Jesus says, you are the salt of the earth.

But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on their foot.

If seasoning has no flavor, it has no value. And if Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, then they are of little value to representing God in the world and therefore of little help to the cause of God.

For if we are too much like the world, then we can't help it. We can't change. We need keep aspiring for righteousness, godliness, the fruits of the Spirit, and flavor our patch of the world with these.

And by doing so, we are participating in the cause of God. verse 14 continues, you are the light of the world.

[11 : 40] A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and place it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Can you hide a city on top of a hill?

No. Its light can be seen for miles. And so, alongside our godly saltiness, our actions and words should be visibly and fully heard.

all of our kind, godly, loving actions should be attracting people in.

And then our loving words should be telling people the good news. And again, when we do this, when we consciously do the salt and light passage, then we are participating in the cause of God.

[12 : 58] And if all Christians all over the globe truly and fully do it in and to the nation they are specifically in, then the entire cause of God as penned in the words of the Great Commission is being done.

If every Christian all over the globe is being salt and light, the salt and light of Jesus in their patch in the Great Commission is being done.

The cause of God is being fulfilled. It is, of course, the core theme of all that is going on across the book of Acts.

It is person after person across the book of Acts coming to faith and then committing to the cause of God, getting active, and here in Acts 13, the cause of God now goes into hot pursuit.

for it is here that the worldwide missionary work now begins. Indeed, the cause of God had been active, changing lives, saving souls across the lands, all stemming from the great persecution that we read about.

[14 : 24] But it is here where Holy Spirit, for the first time, inspires purposely planned, strategically fought through, professionally, business styled, arranged, and fully funded missionary work.

All so that the cause of God can be successful. And to fulfill this new work, God then says, set apart. set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

And after fasting and praying, they laid hands on them and sent them off. Now everyone there that day was called to the work and the cause of God.

we're talking here about John and Peter and those guys. Guys long called to God's service. Guys long committed to God's cause.

But here, Paul and Barnabas are called to be set apart. So why? Just what's going on here?

[15 : 45] let's ponder being set apart, being called by God to the office of missionary, lay preacher, evangelist, pastor, youth pastor, preacher, a bearer of God's good news.

For whatever the specific role is that God calls one to be set apart for, they are all caught up in hold, bear, and tell the good news.

Whether missionary, pastor, worker, pastor, or any other office, the calling is first and foremost to preach and tell this message.

that's in one-on-one conversations. It's up front, small groups, out and about.

It's through actions as well as words. And within that, those set apart as office holders then have a responsibility to look after God's church, to disciple, to lead, to love.

[17 : 12] So, is God calling me to be set apart? it's a question many Christians wrestle with at some point in their life of faith.

Not just in adolescence or early adulthood, but sometimes midlife, or even in approaching the so-called retirement age. Now, the New Testament doesn't draw nice, neat, distinct lines between what we would call full-time ministry and so-called secular work.

Or as the Bible puts it, those being called to be set apart. Or maybe another way to put it, those called to evangelize from within the church and then those called to evangelize in the secular work field or their retirement days.

And so we must remember whatever God by his providence leads us into for our day job or to do with our retirement days, he calls us to do our work as a worker for him and a worker for his church. And that is still full-time ministry. All workers in whatever your job or your day-to-day life is, he charges all workers whatever you do as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord as your reward for your serving the Lord Christ.

[19 : 01] So, the fundamental divide is not between full-time ministry and non-ministry jobs, but the important distinction is about one set apart to hold office.

So, perhaps the better question to ask, or at least where we have some specific text to give us some clarity, is am I called to hold office within God's church?

And as I studied this, I find myself thinking back on God's calling in my life. And I'm thinking, why, why, why did God call me to be set apart for however long or short for service in his church?

Why did God call me to come here to Wester Hills Baptist Church for however long or short that may be?

Why call me to be set apart, to serve as your pastor, to lead our eldership, to lead our deacons, to oversee your discipleship?

[20 : 15] And I've been on a little journey thinking back upon my initial calling, my calling from the Lord 23 years ago, 2003, Faith Mission Easter Convention.

I was so aware, I simply knew with no doubt God was calling me to preach, to pastor, to evangelize. And you know what? It was all I wanted to do. I couldn't think of anything I'd rather do than share Jesus in word and action.

And that's one, one of the necessities for being called by God to be set apart.

God will have a deep burdening want. You will have a desire.

[21 : 15] God will plant it within you. You won't have to be forced. God doesn't twist one's arm into his service, but he instead drenches their heart in a love and a desire for him, a desire for his word, a desire for his people, a desire for his church, a desire for his cause.

If God is calling you to be set apart, that's one of the necessities that God will do. And so as I went about my work those next few years, all I did was tell people about Jesus.

I was nicknamed Rev within my ordinary everyday jobs and security. I was already pastorly caring for people in the workplace.

I was on the streets of Belfast with Bibles at my lunch hour. It just naturally came out of me. And again, another important factor is you won't have to force yourself.

You won't find yourself finally doing it because you're out work or when it's your day off or when you go on a mission trip once a year or only helping your particular church, but you will be doing it firstly on the street you live in.

[22 : 45] You'll want to start there. And you won't just be caught up in this recent influx of retired folk. The Anglican church in particular is terrible for this.

Lots of early retired folk saying oh I'm called to be a minister of my retirement. No calling but it's a good use of my time. No. You will just naturally always be doing it in your day job from day one.

And people will begin to affirm it. Christians yes, other pastors but also non-Christians like in my workplace. Hey, you should do that for a living as they would put it.

And eventually at some point God will present you with a real life opportunity which involves giving up a lot of stuff to purposely be set apart for an office within God's church.

And because of how far the church has got away from the first century. Nine times out of ten the opportunity will need to begin with Bible college formal training so that the one being called to be set apart can properly learn what the early church leaders learned from Jesus.

[24 : 14] We're so far that the set apart ones will need formal Bible college training to get re-equipped with what was back there in the first century.

And so finally you will be willing to devote two, three, four years to fully studying God's word. And although I have held other offices in God's church when it appeared to me that God was placing this opportunity of pastor at Wester Hills Baptist Church before me.

And the desire was there and the affirmations were there but the final piece of the jigsaw had to be just as the church here in Acts heard God said set apart Paul and Barnabas the final piece had to be do the good folk at Wester Hills since God saying set apart and what a journey we had but eventually a year ago this very month you heard God say set apart and I and Georgie later that night could only say well here we are Lord then send us for however long or short they may get behind the vision and go with isn't what you do Lord they may not but until then we go and over to you Lord until we came and in the days following

Gerald and Gerald may not even remember this he says we need to arrange your commissioning ordain you as rev and I sort of said well if you think it's necessary but I'm happy to crack on and this is why this chapter perhaps has a personal touch for Gerald then said no we need to ordain you as reverent because it tells the people you are set apart it tells the people you are set apart for the office of pastor at Western Hills Baptist Church for however long I'm sure that may be but my question still remains why on earth would God call and use me I have nothing to really offer and I grew up in a working class Belfast housing paramilitary controlled estate I have no skills no abilities worthy of his service so what do

I have well I can think of one thing and I give all the credit to the Lord for it but all I seem to have is what King David had a heart after God's own heart and as Paul preaches here he refers to this in verse 22 you have a look of Acts chapter 13 as he's talking about God and God's history with his nation and his people and the things he's done and the things he hasn't done and he talks about King David's time he says he made David their king God testifies concerning him I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart he will do everything I want him to do and it strikes me so much that is all God needs in order to call you in order to call anyone to be set apart all

[28 : 02] God needs in order to call you to be set apart to hold office within his church is that your heart is like King David's you just want him you'll do whatever he wants and let's remember as we have been covering this morning those who serve within their day jobs within their retirement life have as much of an important role in the work of God's church as those set apart and so the big big challenge today is one in whatever you do daily do you work in it truly truly committed to God's cause i.e.

are you being the salt and light of Jesus are you loving as Jesus loved at the last supper and are you purposely focusing on doing your role in the Great Commission in your workplace in your school in your college in your day to day life and two what's your specific role many of you have finders keep it salty work at it study it nurture it and by doing so you will be his salt and his light in all different ways participating in the cause of God and three the other challenge is God calling you to be set apart to go to Bible college to give up two three four years of your life and go and study his word full time that you may come and be set apart for office within his church well only you truly know all the things God has been and is doing with you but if you genuinely desire it then push it explore it if there's people affirming it push it explore it if there's opportunities coming push it explore it let's chat let's come and talk and see what God sent to you the cause of God is to reach the nations with his grace and God himself is doing this

God is a missional God yeah the expression that God is the missionary God is the evangelist God is the pastor who himself is loving all the people who himself is doing all the work all we are doing is joining in with what God is already doing we have a cheek don't we we sometimes talk about what we do here at Westerhills Baptist Church what we came and started what the early we didn't come and start anything God's missional work in Westerhills was here long before this building came he

was loving the people loving the schools loving the area long before any of us came we just came and joined in of what he was already doing missy of day it is God who is the one who is reaching out to love all and he does this through us his church and the early church here in Acts was determined to be part of what God was doing they were truly committed to the cause of God they were committed to finding out what's God doing in those other countries out there let's go and join in with them because he was already across these missionary journeys in those countries loving everyone there they just went and joined in with what he was already doing they gathered together to worship and fast while they were doing this the Holy Spirit spoke to them set apart Barnabas and Saul Barnabas and Paul went and they proclaimed the word of God they were filled with the Holy Spirit and from within these actions the world went bang! as the Christian faith hit every nation every tongue every tribe and from there on in a lot changes an awful lot changes such as up until now the central place had been Jerusalem and Peter had been the top guy but from here on in Antioch would be as much a central headquarters as Jerusalem and Paul now becomes the main guy in the rest of the story and from the early days of Jesus ministry they had largely worked in Palestinian and Galilean countryside with regular visits to Jerusalem but now the church would enter a new period of largely inner city ministry and across the next two chapters read them later a Holy Spirit inspired and strategic professionally arranged fully funded missionary journey embarks across and into six major cities and these major cities are all visited with the good news and from there on in the mission field would never be the same again and as we have said

[33 : 51] God was already in those cities this was just simply his set apart ones now turning up finding out what was going on and joining in with him don't we want to be a church like that no yes yep don't we want to be a church like that let's be a church totally abandoned to God recklessly abandoned to God to his church to his mission to his cause you see the salt and the light lived by the early church is and was so effective that 2,000 years later churches all over the world still want what they had we do don't we they were so salty and so light filled that here's us still wanting what they had 2,000 years ago so let's do it all of you me let's do it first and foremostly make sure your heart is after his let's pray lord we come to you asking you to enable us to be a church like the first century church to enable us to be so missionally minded and focused on what you're doing that we get in there with you lord that we find out what you're doing in all the departments and bits and pieces of this area and from where we live as well from our homes out and beyond lord let us find out what you're doing there and get involved as well that your kingdom may be built that your name may grow father let us be like

Paul and Barnabas let us be like the first century church and lord if you are calling anyone this morning to be set apart then may they hear this today and go home and ponder it and respond to you come and build your kingdom here now in Jesus name amen and so let's very appropriately stand if you're able as we sing build your kingdom here and so very very very simply and as is very very well known church and whatever you do from day to day go forth to fulfill the great commission Jesus came and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit and teaching them everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age in the name of the father honor the son honor the holy spirit amen amen amen amen■ amen!

amen! amen! amen! Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[38 : 59] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.