

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the book of Acts 11:19. I sure like this book. I like the challenge God sets before us, the vision of a church that God is moving at. It is certainly our prayer to have that kind of church in our culture today, that God would work through lives that were surrendered to Him.

We ended last week with the leadership and the brethren in Jerusalem hearing and marveling at the grace of God that was poured out upon all men, including the Gentiles, because Peter and his team had been sent by the Lord to the Caesarea area to the house of Cornelius; and we went over that story very carefully. If you weren't with us, you can go back in the archives and look at it. But, needless to say, Peter realized that this was going to be quite a shock. And we've been talking about prejudice and how God breaks down, by His Son, every prejudice that can hold you and that people have them, but the Lord needs to break them down. And certainly there was a prejudice from the Jews to the Gentiles in Jesus' day. It took a lot longer to get hold of the church in Jerusalem to be free than it did guys like Peter or Barnabas or even Saul, for that matter. And their exclamation (in verse 18 of chapter 11), as Peter was called on the carpet when he got back (by these guys), was they were filled with wonder. It says there that "they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life,' " and they were just filled with wonder. But it was a huge step for the church, forward. You can put dates and times on, but we're ten years into the church, at least, now. And even so, in those ten years, we find that this is a work that needed to continue to go on. So, God used Peter amazingly so. He got to see firsthand what God wanted to do. He showed up at a house where it was filled with hungry hearts and no understanding in the Bible at all. Peter didn't preach the Old Testament; he preached sin and the need to be forgiven and Jesus being God. And by the time he gets called on the carpet, he answers every question. He was real sure about what the Lord was doing. And so, from that time on, there would be this openness, I think, to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Tonight, beginning in verse 19 and heading down to verse 30 (so the end of the chapter), there's an interesting report that the Lord gives us as we get these first thirty years of the early church. And that is, while this is going on - while Peter is in Joppa, while he gets this vision, while Cornelius is over here in Caesarea, a

Gentile soldier gets a vision, and God brings them together and salvation happens - while all that is going on, we hear from the Lord (because it's important for the next story) that God the Holy Spirit was doing a work in an entirely different part of the country; a part of the country that was predominantly filled with Gentiles, a place in Syria, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem; a place that, several years earlier, there were those who had been in Jerusalem from those areas. Stephen had been martyred, everyone ran for their life, the church scattered - the Diaspora as it is called, the dispersion of the church - and these guys went that far and began to speak not just to the Jews but to the Hellenists and to those who really had a lot of Greek persuasion, if you will, in their lives. So, it's interesting because there's this official bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles. It amazes everybody. It required a meeting and Peter being grilled, if you will, and six witnesses. But then, when you turn the page, you go from the open doors in Caesarea and the saints in Jerusalem enjoying it and then this entirely different work in the Lord in a place called Antioch in Syria, where eventually the ministry of Saul and Barnabas would begin and from which they would go out into the world mission-wise, historically, to reach the whole world with the gospel. Antioch would become Jerusalem, if you will, for the missions church. So, by the time we get to the middle of chapter 12 or so next time, Peter will disappear from the scene almost entirely, and our full attention will be turned to the planting of churches and the reaching of the world and the defining by action as to what kind of church that the Lord would want us to be.

So we're going to start in verse 19 (after Peter finished his testimony in verse 18) when we read this, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." So, back in chapter 8, when the church is scattered (Stephen is killed, and the church, which was told by the Lord to start here in Jerusalem, but you go to the ends of the earth, they hadn't moved), persecution moved the feet. It got them moving, if you will. The persecution drove people out of Judea, out of Samaria. They were sharing the love of the Lord. But there were lots of saints in Jerusalem who went a whole lot further than that. They traveled to Phoenicia (is today Lebanon, which is to the north of Israel, where Beirut is). Cyprus is the island off the coast of Syria. It is the home of Barnabas. We'll get there in a couple of chapters. And Antioch was the capital of

Syria at the time; like I said, three hundred miles north. This is a long way to go. This church that had operated within fifty miles of itself, in ten years now, makes this huge leap, really; six times as far as they've ever gone, as far as fruit is concerned. But this is the first report we get from the Lord after the gospel had been brought to the Gentiles.

As usual, and maybe I haven't pointed it out to you enough, Luke supplies little to no names when it comes to the work of God. In fact, most of what you see in passing - "Oh, and many people get saved," and, "the numbers are multiplying" - there's never a name attached to it. It isn't like, "and Saul" and then "multiplied." No. It's just "and the church." And I think that's interesting that God's intention for you and me, even tonight, is that we, together, would reach the world with the news of His Son. It isn't the superstars. It isn't the guy with the name. Oh, God uses people, and that's fair enough. But more often than not in the book of Acts it is the humble, kind of average believer who is just available to the Lord that God uses, who puts himself in a place that he can be usable. And so here's a report almost of an attached couple of verses where Luke says, "Hey, back in chapter 8 when everybody was running for their lives, some people went this far, some people went that far, and then there're guys that went a whole lot further. And the folks that left out of Jerusalem, running, some of them only preached to the Jews because maybe they were Jerusalem residents, they were just gettin' out of Dodge. But there were other folks who lived out there, who were used to Gentile living conditions, if you will, or Greek practices, who went a whole lot further - guys specifically from Cyprus and Cyrene, which is in northern Africa." In fact, in chapter 13, there is a list of names of folks who became the elders in this Antioch church, and one of the names you'll read there was a fellow named Lucius, and it says he was from Cyrene; he was a North African. So there were people that were from very different cultures.

But unlike that orchestrated leading of God's Spirit to lead Peter to Cornelius' house, there were some guys that were going out and beginning to preach without any assurance from anyone they were doing the right thing or direction that that's what they were supposed to be doing. They were just so excited in what God had done in their lives, they couldn't shut up. And, if you will, they didn't know about the "rules." They weren't necessarily the Jews from Jerusalem, who had those staunch kind of fences around them. But this is just an open door, and they began, if you will, to walk through it. In fact, we read in verse 20 that they went out, and they began to speak and to preach Jesus. They began to speak about Him and

preach Him to others - to the Hellenists, those that lived there that said and told them that Jesus was the Lord.

The term "Hellenist" is a common word that usually refers to, at least in their case, Jews who grew up in Greek cultures. In other words, you can be a Jew from anywhere, but the Jews in Jerusalem were Jewish in their practices. They were staunch. In fact, if you go to Israel today, the Jews in Jerusalem are the most staunch, the most rules.....they'll drive you crazy with the rules. They just practice outward religion. But the further away from Jerusalem that a Jew gets, at least in the 1st century (if not now), the less Jewish you looked, the more you looked like everyone else. You looked more Gentile than Jew. So you're a Hellenist in the sense that you practice Greek cultures, and it has invaded your religious outlook. It doesn't mean you change your idea about God, but you're not under the bondage of all of those rules. I think I told you when my Dad got saved (a very strong Catholic), he struggled with rules for a long time. I was a kid that went to Catholic school through 12th grade, but I was a kid so I'd thumb my nose at everything because that's what kids do. I didn't take it seriously. I wentwhatever Dad wanted. But I wasn't attached like he was attached. When I got saved, I was able to walk away from everything that wasn't in the Bible, real easy. I had a harder time walking away from my drugs than my theology. But my father was locked in. It took him a long time. So that's kind of how that Hellenist thing works. The further away from Jerusalem you get, the more open you are, the less structured you are in your religious convictions, if you will. And so you find people that were open, and you really couldn't distinguish Hellenists from Gentiles in many ways because they tended to just kind of fade into the culture. So here's a report. While this is going on so dynamically at Cornelius' house, there're guys, three hundred miles away, doing the same thing without this open door, without this prompting, without this stirring, if you will, or at least not the way that we saw it. They looked less Jewish. And to the legalists in Jerusalem, they didn't look Jewish nearly enough.

So, the Hellenists had been around since the church was born. You might remember Acts 6. The first organizational step in the early church was widows who didn't feel like they were getting a fair shake along with the other Jewish widows, and it says they were Hellenist widows. "Nobody's bringing us the right food. We're always on last, and sometimes they're out of food. And they're not helping us with the bread." And so the apostles got hit up, and they went, "Well, we can't stop. We're prayin' and teachin'. That's what our job is. We can't just go

delivering food. Get some guys that'll take their food to them, and pick some Hellenists." And they picked seven Hellenists. In fact, of those seven Hellenists that they chose in particular, there was one guy in chapter 6:5 - his name was Nicolas, and he was from Antioch. So this guy was actually from this area. It would have been a daring, I would say to you, move (considering the legalist kinds of opinions of Jerusalem about salvation) that somehow they would begin to share with these Hellenists, "Hey, Jesus loves you, and you need to get saved." But God blessed it. And so these men were on the forefront, if you will. They began to reach out to the world in a context that was largely Gentile, and it went hand-in-hand with Peter's revelation in Caesarea. But this was spontaneous, organic almost it's just an awesome work of God in the hearts of the people. We don't know whether the news about Peter's experience and the lessons that were taught to the Jerusalem counsel had traveled far enough north to approve this action. But we presume that it didn't hit because when the news finally did get to them, they immediately sent Barnabas to go check it out. "Well, what's goin' on over there because we haven't gone up there to do anything?" And they sent him to check it out and confirm that what they were learning through Peter and through Cornelius, what they had learned with Philip in Samaria (that God was reaching out to everyone) was still happening all around the country.

So, we read in verse 22, "Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." Now, just as God had done with Philip and the Samaritans (and by the way, those were half-breeds - half Jewish, half mixed in with everything else because that's how the Assyrians assimilated people; they moved you if they conquered you into places where you didn't like the food, you couldn't speak the language, and you just had a different religion; and you have kids and they have kids, and pretty soon everything's lost and that was their plan). Just like the Lord had sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch who was a convert to Judaism, a full-on Gentile, so that an entirely different nation could hear, even as God sent Peter to Cornelius' house (that recent experience), here God makes His will crystal clear as well, three hundred miles away. And news eventually gets back, "Hey, there're all kinds of people" (verse 21, there) "getting saved." The people were beginning to believe, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and they began to turn to the Lord. And all of these reports were rolling in to the apostles' offices, if you will, that God was blessing, people were getting saved. Where? In Syria in Antioch.

Now, just because we're reading through the book of Acts, let me warn you about Antioch. There were sixteen different Antiochs in the ancient world in this area. So whenever you read the Bible and it says "Antioch in Syria," then you'll know it's that one. In chapter 13:14, it'll say there was an "Antioch in Pisidia," which is just kind of another region. And a couple weeks from now, when we start Paul's missionary journeys, we're going to bring you maps of every one of those that you can stick in your Bible, and we're going to use them as we go through so you'll get to see how far it is and how long it took and where they went. So by the time we're done, you'll go, "I get it." You'll get the whole map thing. You'll get to see what Paul did. You'll figure out that Paul went this way the first time, and he went, "That was boring. Let's go this way the second time and then that way the third time." So we'll get it all to see what God wants to do. But there were lots of them.

But this Antioch in Syria was by far the largest city in the area. In fact, it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, next to Rome and Alexandria, as the Empire goes. A half a million people lived in this Antioch. It was fifteen miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. It was on a river called the Orontes River. It happens to still be there. It was the gateway to the East. Saul could not have picked or headed for, as he will find out, a larger, more influential place in that area than this city of Antioch. It was an ultra-modern city. It was the only one in the entire Roman Empire that lit their streets at night. They were advanced in just so many ways, but they had this religious corruptness that rivaled, if you will, Corinth. It was about as bad and as perverse as it could be. They had the god Daphne that they worshipped. Daphne was seduced by the god Apollo in Greek mythology, according to that, and so he turned her into a laurel bush. I mean, you know, mythology's nuts anyway. But anyway, in response, they built their temples of worship in amongst the trees and the groves, and people and priests and priestesses, temple prostitutes, gathered in these woods to supposedly worship by reenacting her seduction, if you will. It was a gross place. But it was an extremely large place.

So, in this mess, God now plants a group of believers who are not intimidated by the culture, who are not overwhelmed with the filth. They are just sharing Jesus. They didn't have much to go on. They certainly wouldn't have been taught much. Even staying in Jerusalem, they would have had a limited amount of understanding, but they knew they had to get saved. They knew who Jesus was. And they just began to share what they knew with the people around them, and God's Word on their lips and God's Spirit upon their lives - people began to change. Because all of

the sinfulness and the flesh weren't satisfying anyone, and so God was beginning to move and respond. The best and most effective evangelism in the Bible is lifestyle evangelism anyway. Right? We like filling stadiums and seeing tens of thousands of people go forward. And that's exciting, but more often than not, 97% of those people are going back home without any kind of change at all because there's just a lot of emotion that drives them as well. But if you watch somebody, and you see their life and how it's changed, and you get to ask them questions, and you get to set your life next to theirs, then there's a reason to listen and to believe and follow your counsel. And that's what's going on here. These people are just living the life of believers, and it isn't necessarily evangelism done in the church, it's evangelism done by the church. Right? It is the church being out there amongst the people. I don't know if these guys realize that, in the midst of what God was doing, He was planting a church that would be the church for the next generation that would reach the world. I doubt they understood that or was that part of their mission statement. I think they were just gathering together. But I would say this to you - don't ever think that because the days are ugly in which you live (and they're darker than ever) that there isn't a way that you can make a difference. There is. It seems to me the darker things get, the better the light looks. Right? So if we continue to walk with the Lord.... That's certainly the truth in Antioch because the perversions of idolatry found the people turning to the love of Almighty God, and it was happening pretty much unled and overseen, not planned or developed; just a bunch of Christians running from persecution three hundred miles away and finding themselves in this town - some of them displaced from northern Africa, some of them never getting all the way home, some of them going north instead of south. But God began to use them.

When news of that (verse 22) got back to Jerusalem (there was a revival amongst the Hellenists; and, like I said, Hellenists are more Gentile than Jew the further away you get), they decided that they would send Barnabas, our good friend, three hundred miles away to go find out what was going on. I mean, Barnabas is a guy that is perfectly suited for the task. We've met him a couple of times. Right? He was in the church early. He was a tolerant guy. His name was given to him by others. He was an encourager, an exhorter. You put him in any situation, he thrives. And he was from Cyprus, which really just was off the coast. If you got in a boat and just kind of sailed, you could go to Cyprus rather quickly. We were in Cyprus on the "Footsteps of Paul" tour. It's a beautiful area. But that's where Barnabas came from. So he was flexible, he's a fearless guy. He's the only guy, really, that went to meet with Saul before a couple of the apostles were willing to

meet with him. But he kind of risked his life that this guy wasn't lying when Saul first got saved. He's a selfless guy. He had a property in Jerusalem he sold and gave money to the church and to the needy in the church. It prompted Ananias and Sapphira to do the same thing for their own glory, and that got them in trouble. But not Barnabas. So he's been around a long time. He seems to be suited for the task. He's an encourager in any situation, and he's an OG - he's an Original man of God. (Laughing) So, here he comes, and he has good reputation, and he has a love for God in his heart, and he's open, and he's three hundred miles away from anybody that he knows. And he begins to look at what God is doing, and it excites him. Right? It touches his heart. He can't believe it. So, the good news eventually traveled down the coast, down to Jerusalem, and they sent him north and around the horn there (in today what is Turkey), and he went to find out what the Lord was doing there.

We are told in verse 23, "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad," (he did what he was called to do) "and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." So, he saw God's grace at work. What does that mean? Well, lives were being changed. Faith was being instilled. There was joy in the hearts of these people. He's not a critical guy. Barnabas is not going to go solve problems; he's just going to love everyone. He's going to put out the fire with smiles. And he's not nitpicking, he's not fault-finding; he's just happy to see what was going on. God is moving. And that in the midst of the quasi-Jews, semi-Gentiles, nobody really picks a place to stand. They're all kind of, "Well, I'm sorta this, and I'm sorta that." He was fine with that. "Let's just see what the Lord will do." And he begins to encourage, which is what he does best. He encourages them to talk to them about their need to stay focused upon the Lord, and he encourages them specifically about the purpose in their heart. Right? The word "purpose" here is the word for goal or goal-setting, if you will. He literally said, "Make it a point for yourself to continue, to stick to, to stay with, to abide, to remain in the Lord. Do it in your heart." And I think that's interesting. Let your heart set your goals. Your mind changes a lot. Your heart usually doesn't change near so much. If you had a girlfriend (I'll talk to the guys) who you liked, who decided to leave you, your mind may accept it long before your heart does. Because your heart goes, "Yeah, I'm still in," but your head, "She doesn't like me." Your head gets it; your heart doesn't get it. The flesh is kind of that way. Sin will appeal to your flesh, to your body, even to your mind. But your heart wants nothing to do with it because that's been converted. Right? And so his purpose in encouraging these folks, as the fruit continues to come out of the church, was he

just wanted people to have nothing to do with their old life and to commit themselves in heart to doing things God's way. Purpose in your heart. Make that your commitment. Have some personal responsibility. Joshua said to the people in Joshua 22:5, "Take heed to God's good law, and love the LORD, and walk in His ways, and keep His commandments, and take hold upon Him, and serve Him with all of your heart and all of your soul." Just be in a relationship with God. Jesus said, "You can't serve two masters; you'll love one and hate the other, cleave to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). You've got to be purposed. And so, in his encouraging words, that was Barnabas' message. Be purposeful. Set your goals, and then it'll affect everything that you do. And I would say that you understand that. Right? Goals are established and pursued. If you want to lose weight, you gotta stay out of Ben & Jerry's, and you gotta stay out of 31 Flavors. You can't go to the donut store in the morning. It smells so good. Maybe I'll just have one. I might be speaking about myself. (Laughing) And then, if you're in college and you really want to graduate, you gotta take the classes, you gotta do well, you gotta plan ahead. If you have a purpose, then you can make a plan. But so often, we don't bring that to our relationship with God. We don't do things that our purpose is to keep our hearts connected. So we don't read our Bibles very much because that would help. Or we don't have prayer times, but that would help. We don't have any discipline. We're not in church very often. We're not in fellowship. We're not accountable to anyone. And yet here's Barnabas, "Just purpose in your heart. Make this your goal." And I'll tell you what - if your goal is staying close to Jesus, you're going to make good decisions; you'll do them on your own. No one will have to tell you nothin'. But if that's not your purpose, you'll find a hundred reasons why you shouldn't be here, why your Bible doesn't have to be opened till Sunday. You can find yourself becoming weaker rather than stronger. So, it's good advice from Barnabas. I think we could use a couple of Barnabases in the church to always run around and make sure that we do well together. Because to neglect the purpose of your heart is to neglect your spiritual well-being. And that goes pretty easy. I've been trying to lose weight for 61 days now. I'm down 21 pounds. That's right. Thank you. (Congregation is clapping) Bring it in, bring it in. Thank you so much. But I have to lose 60. So that blows, really, when you think about it. (Laughing) And now, for the last ten days, I'm Nothin'. I ain't got nothin'. I got nothin'. But I'm purposed in my heart I'm gonna stick with it. And if not, you can call me on it, and you'll be able to tell. (Laughing) Thank you for grace before you start. Purpose in your heart to do well with the Lord, and you'll do better. Now I'm singin' to the choir. You guys are in church tonight, and there're a lot of reasons you could not be here. And there're a lot of folks that are not here that should be, and

I can't begin to tell you how often I would tell them if I see them. But purpose in your heart. Be wise. I always tell people, spiritually, just be selfish. Take care of you first. Get as close to Jesus as you can. Stay there.

Verse 24, it says this of Barnabas, "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." Now, this is interesting because here, added to Barnabas' life and character, Luke adds a description of his lifestyle, I think, to say to us it is always more effective when you practice what you're preaching. Right? It's hard to sell if you're not buyin'. It's hard to say to someone, "Rogaine works," and you're bald. (Laughing) Or, "These wrinkles will take it away - get this face cream," and you're all haggard. It doesn't work. It's hard to sell what you don't do yourself. But I think that that's why the Lord adds, and we've gotten insights into Barnabas a few times - I think he went to encourage, he wanted people to walk with Jesus, and He said, "Now, he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit." He did what he asked others to do. People will follow you if you're actually practicing. We hate folks that put on false fronts, don't we? We don't like that kind of mask wearing. We don't like when people aren't real. We'd almost rather them be real and offensive than just not real at all. But here's a real guy, and because he's a real guy saying real things that he himself practices, look at the fruit at the end of the verse. "Many people were added." People just came to the Lord in waves. And the reason is because he was walking with the Lord himself. He was grounded. And because he was grounded, everyone else loved to be a part of it. So, he shows up in town, he sees the grace of God, he couldn't be happier with what he sees. He gets himself involved, he's a real guy, he loves the Lord. He's on people just sayin', "Man, make up your mind you're going to walk with Jesus. Don't let anybody turn you away." And people just came right and left, and the church began to grow.

And as it grew, verse 25 tells us, "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul." Here's the thing with Barnabas, and he's such a good guy: Barnabas realized his calling was to encourage, not to be the teacher. He didn't feel he had a gift for it. He certainly didn't feel a calling for it. He's a very selfless guy because he could have said, "This is my church, and I've grown it! This is my space, and I'll hang on to it!" But he doesn't do that. He loves the church more than he loves himself. And he seeks the Lord, and apparently God put Saul on his mind. Years earlier, in Jerusalem, when Saul had come there (in chapter 9) to visit, he had shared how the Lord had said he was going to be an apostle to the Gentiles, how that the Lord was going to use him to teach the Gentiles. He came only for fifteen

days, you remember (in Galatians 1:18-19) he only hung around for fifteen days, only saw two of the apostles and Barnabas; that's all he saw. So, Barnabas had a relationship with Saul that few others had. It had been seven or eight, nine, years since Saul had disappeared, if you will, went back home. And so now this church is growing, and he remembered Saul's calling, and he thought, "Well, this would be a good time for him to step up, man, because we're overflowin'. We don't know what to do. These people need someone that can teach them the Bible like I cannot." And so he realizes what gifts he has and which gifts he doesn't, and he heads off - only from Antioch - a hundred miles to Tarsus. Not that far. And he went to start looking around for Saul. The word "seek" is a word that means to search high and low. So, apparently, he didn't just find him. He went and asked people, "Where is he?" Saul was not a well-known guy, if you will. He was out of the limelight. In chapter 1:21-22 of Galatians, he wrote, "Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches." So, people didn't know him. But they did say of him, "There was one who persecuted the faith. He tried to destroy it. And now he's glorifying God." So he had a reputation, but really nobody knew him, and he was kind of off the grid. So, the word "seek" here (verse 25) would say that he was hunting for him, to seek for him; didn't find him just initially, he wasn't standing out.

"And when he had found him," verse 26, "he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." So you remember Saul's story, right? He gets saved, spends three years in the Arabian desert (which isn't very far from Damascus), spends at least seven more years (and maybe even as many as ten - just depends whose numbering system you use, and they're not so clear in the Bible; but those are in the ballpark) - so let's say ten years he's been saved, he's been working smaller venues. Ministry preparation has taken a long time for him. But Saul began to know what God had done for him before he ever went out to tell people what they should do for Him. And that's indeed how Paul writes all of his letters. If you go through all of the epistles in your Bible, they follow almost the same rule as you find with, say, Ephesians. There're three chapters of "this is what God has done for you." Nothing is asked of you for three chapters. "God has done this, God has done that, isn't God good? He's done this, and what about that, and you should add this to your list." And then you get to chapter 4:1, and you read the words, "Therefore. Because of all of this, now here's what I want you to do for Him." Same thing in the book of Hebrews. Ten and a half chapters, "Here's what God has done for you." Nothin' else. "Therefore, don't

forsake the assembling of yourselves together. You just have to walk by faith. Present your body a living sacrifice." And then off it goes into what you should do in response to what God has done for you. Almost all of his epistles follow that same formula.

So, Saul has been out learning what God has done for him. He hasn't been ministering much; he's been taking a lot in. We were talking today at our meeting about we try to get people in ministry here to church a couple times a week. Sometimes that's impossible - work, children - but that's our goal. And the goal is simple. It is easy to begin to substitute your serving the Lord for your relationship with the Lord. And you'll say, "Well, how close are you to the Lord?" And they'll go, "Well, I'm an usher." "Well, great. But how close are you to the Lord?" "I'm a worship leader." "Well, that's great. But what are you doing in your relationship with the Lord?" You don't want to be Martha - in the kitchen, always cookin'. You want to be Mary - sitting at Jesus' feet, first. Right? And Jesus said (Luke 10:42), "That's the best part. She's chosen the best part, Martha. I'm not going to take that from her." And from that position of fellowship, then you can minister. But ministry is always overflow. It's not substitution. So we want to encourage people to that end - to be in fellowship. But first to take in. You can't give out what you haven't taken in. You can yap. You can fill your mind with information. But if it's not comin' from your heart, then God can't use it anyway. So, whatever Paul or Saul was doing, he was being filled up, and he was about ready. Because you don't just write the book of Romans or the book of Hebrews - these theological, great books - without having spent some time sittin' at Jesus' feet. He'd been prepared, and now he's called. And I don't know how much argument it took from Barnabas to go, "Come on, dude. Church is growing, and we need a teacher, and you're the closest guy - a hundred miles away. And I heard you tell me seven years ago you were called to do this. Well, maybe it's time you get on this." I don't know if Saul just went, "Yes!!!" Or if he went, "No, I don't know." But whatever, he came, and he came along. Right? And we find Saul and Barnabas back in this Antioch church for a whole year (verse 26), "and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And so it was for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." So, they were preaching, they spoke and preached (in verse 20), they exhorted (in verse 23), they taught (in verse 26). The church needs all of that. We need preaching the gospel. We need teaching the Word of God. Some churches, all they do is preach. I went to a church when I first got saved. All they did was preach. I went forward every week. "Yes! I still want to be

saved." We all did. We were kids. We didn't know. "Let's all go. Come on." Our whole row would go. The pastor would go, "I'm pretty good!" No. It's the same ten kids. We're here every week. (Laughing) But if he felt good, we felt good. And then.....but you've got to get taught. Once you get saved, then you've got to learn something. Then there're places that.....you need both. You need the preaching and the teaching of God's Word. And that was happening here. But, look, the primary need of Christians is to be well-taught. Right? Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." So, God wanted them to learn. So did Barnabas. And God brought Saul, and he began to teach.

I don't know what would have happened to Saul if there wasn't a guy like Barnabas around. I don't know where he'd have turned out. I like Barnabas. If you want a calling, be a Barnabas. Walk around and encourage everybody to walk with the Lord. That's a pretty cool job. Don't walk around criticizing. We've got plenty of those. Find someone who you like to encourage in their walk with the Lord.

So, Saul came, and God began to use him and Barnabas in this church. I think, and you can think it through a little bit, that some of the people in the Antioch church maybe had gotten saved there because they had run from (or they were saved in Jerusalem and are back here) the persecution that Saul had brought in Jerusalem years earlier. He literally could have walked into guys who he tore their house up or took someone to jail, made their life miserable - in the same church. We don't know. But certainly they came from that revival that came with the birth of the church.

The word "Christian" is a hybrid word in Greek, and it's kind of got a Latin suffix to it. It literally translates, by syllable, party of Christ. That's the way it is written. Like Herodians, if you will - party of Herod. It appears to have been coined first as a derogatory term. It was termed by the enemies of God's people. It was not a compliment. It is only found twice in the New Testament, and apparently that term "Christian" didn't stick. Today, unfortunately, it has lost most of its meaning. You talk to any American, they're a Christian. Even the Muslim guy, he's a Christian now. So, many people say they are, and they're not. Right? You don't really know, until you get to know them, whether they are really of the party of Christ or not, are they Christ followers or not. I guess we should be accused of it. That would be good. The old question that I always liked when I was a kid....if you're arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? That's always a good question. But these saints would have said, "Yes. Yes."

Verse 27, "And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch." (Three hundred miles) "Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." These two guys went. You can add verse 25 of chapter 12 there, where we read, "And then they came back from delivering the goods to Jerusalem." So, in between there we have a whole chapter of Peter's last stand, if you will. But in verse 25 of the next chapter, we read of Saul and Barnabas coming back from Jerusalem, having delivered the monies and the help that they delivered. And when they came back, they also brought John Mark, a nephew to Barnabas, with them from Jerusalem from his mom's house, and they would then take him on this journey.

Over time, Jerusalem became far more open to the work of God in going out to minister to the Gentiles. There were many gifts of prophecy in the early church. You find them operating. There were a lot of people that traveled from church to church saying they were prophets. It was a big problem in the early church. There was a book written about 100 A.D. called the Didache, and the Didache was written mostly by church elders to warn other churches about being discerning. "If there's a prophet that comes into your town but he wants you to feed him for more than a week, he's a false prophet. Just tell him to move along. He's there tryin' to cover himself under the 'God's using me.' If he wants to stay at your house more than three days, just tell him to get lost." There's a whole book. You can buy it, actually. It's still around. In any case, there was some potential abuse of these guys, traveling. However, there were also prophets that God used in the church. The cool thing about the gifts of the Spirit - they are best used in local bodies where you're responsible for what you say and do, and then you can discern whether you're hearing the Lord or not. So, it's an important place to practice.

But this guy, Agabus, is an interesting guy. His name means locust. He shows up a couple of times in the Bible - here, he shows up again in chapter 21 warning Paul about what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. So he hung around a lot of years. But to his credit, everything he said was verified. It happened, and so we determine he was a right prophet. We are told here that the famine that he predicted was coming came during the reign of Claudius Caesar. Claudius Caesar reigned from 41-56 A.D. The worst part of the famine (you can look that up, historically) happened late 46 into 47 A.D., according to Josephus. Thousands of

people starved, and it was worse in Judea, three hundred miles to the south. So, here's a prophecy from the Lord. And notice that the purpose of prophecy was not just to satisfy somebody's curiosity, but it was intended to encourage action. There's a verse in 1 Corinthians 14:3 which says, "He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men." So this was a message from the Lord to this young church - Gentile, at least in root, in many ways - and they were told that there was a need coming, that there was a famine coming. They believed the prophet, and so, verse 29, "the disciples, each according to their ability, determined to send relief to their brethren who dwelt" (in the Jerusalem area) "in Judea," which they then did. Now that's an interesting picture, if you will. I love the heart of this missionary church because they're kind of being missional already. Right? They are sending help to the big church at Jerusalem. This is the first time we read of one church sending money to another church in the New Testament because this is just getting started.

It is worth noting, and I want to point this out to you just from experience, that the flow of money is not how you might suspect - from the big church, with the resources and the history, to the small church which needs the help. It is the opposite. It is the small church that is just getting started trying to send help to the big established church who was poor. I bring that up.....we were in Brazil helping start a church twenty years ago, and I was with a guy who was in a missionary organization, and we rented a car, and we picked him up at the airport. And he said, "Can I have the car? I have to run around and do some errands." I said, "Yeah, you can use it. Just pick us up in the morning." And then he was gone for two days with my car. And then he brought it back and said, "Oh, dude, last night I got a ticket." I said, "Well, that's crazy," and he said, "But, you know, you're just goin' home, so it don't matter." And I said, "No. That matters." And then I said, "Are we obligated to help you?" and he goes, "It's in the Bible. Big churches always help little churches." So I went and looked it up and came across this and thought, "Well, he's wrong. It's just the other way around." At least in the Bible, more often than not it runs the other direction. So, we had an interesting conversation, and I think we stopped supporting that guy when I got home. I wasn't sure.

But I love the heart of these people, and I think that we, as a church, have a really good heart for giving. We've been able to send every year at Christmas, at Thanksgiving. We have a really generous bunch of people, I think, that care about others, and I see that as God's work in you. That's such a blessing to see. But I

love the picture of guys three hundred miles away that may have never been to Jerusalem goin', "Yeah, I'll just give you what I can." And I want to point out to you, in verse 29, it's important - the words "according to your ability." I know these guys on TV just say, "Just give and believe, and God'll....." That's crazy. Don't give what you don't have. Don't spend what you don't have. "Build it and they'll come" is not biblical. If they come, then you can build it - as God gives you ability. So, most of these were Gentile-leaning believers. They reached out beyond their cultural and religious boundaries. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It's not in the gospels. It's in the book of Acts (20:35) that He said that. But they believed it, and whether they gave large or small, that didn't matter. They wanted to be helpful. So they gave according to their ability. Saul and Barnabas took these offerings to Jerusalem. They delivered them to the elders, notice, in verse 30. And I think that's an important issue of church oversight. We don't have a congregational-ruled church. We don't see it in the Bible. We don't vote. We don't see it in the Bible. We have an elder-run church. I think that's biblical. Men who are responsible, making decisions for the well-being of the church. And so we have elders here, we have board members here, that we're responsible to, and they're responsible to us. So, they were good stewards. They delivered it to the people in charge in Jerusalem. What they did with it, I don't know if they were ever able even to measure. They'd just go, "Here's for the help," and God blessed them.

So, the church at Antioch is established. God is moving. Barnabas is there teaching, so is Saul. They are ministering to others and reaching out to the poor in Jerusalem. We are only going to now get a story about Peter's imprisonment, his release from jail, the prayer meeting at John Mark's mom's house, Peter escaping (for a better word), the death of Herod (who we're not going to miss), and then Barnabas and Saul coming back at the end of chapter 12. Which brings us, then, to chapter 13 and the beginning of these three long missionary journeys that will take us just about to the end of Acts, certainly for the next seven, eight, ten chapters before we get Paul in prison and all. So, good outline in your head. I want you to be able to see it, the thirty years or so that God has given to us.

So, look, here's what you can take away. Sharing your faith is vital. Just look at what happened in Antioch. I know you might feel like, "Gosh, I can never relate to these people. They don't even" Just tell them what Jesus has done for you. I'm always amazed at how God can use you to minister to people. We were at an event a couple of weeks ago, and all we were doing was just talkin' to a guy about

the Lord - a friend that we knew, and somebody behind us tapped us on the shoulder and said, "Are you a pastor? I've got some Bible questions." It was just in the public eye. I think if you're open, God can use you to do a lot of stuff; if you're willing. If you're too busy, and you're on your way out, and, "I gotta go," then it's hard for the Lord to use you. "I'd like to use you," and you're gone. But if you're available, and you're open like these guys, then God can use you. And you can share, without prejudice, wherever you go - without hesitancy. Jesus said the laborers were in short supply, not the fruit (Matthew 9:37, Luke 10:2). And if you don't think you're a teacher, I'm sure you can be an encourager. You can just come and encourage me. I'll take that! Just come tell me what a great guy I am. I'll feel good every week! You can all take turns.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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