

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## “Moaners and Sneakers” or “Movers and Shakers?” (Part Three)

*Acts 11:19-30*

*19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.*

We are coming back to this text that we left a couple weeks ago to break for some challenges about being thankful. This is an appropriate text as I have entitled this section of Acts as “*Moaners and Sneakers or Movers and Shakers.*” And what we had noticed here in the past couple of chapters of Acts how easy it is to fall into spiritual ruts. It is easy to go to church because that is what you are supposed to do. It is easy to read your Bible and pray regularly, yet without the passion that ought to be ours as we lose the wonder of communicating with our Heavenly Father. Sometimes the Bible reading, the prayer, the fellowship, the involvement with ministry seems to become a burden because no matter how much you have done in the past, there is always more to be done. And, when we fall into spiritual ruts, our inclination or default is to become spiritually grumpy; to whine and complain about things rather than to intentionally pursue greater spiritual fervency. We can quickly become filled with ingratitude rather than purposing to be thankful for what God has done, what God is doing and considering what God is yet to do in our lives.

Thus, our text presents us with a church that is on fire for Jesus. The church at Antioch, Syria. Let me remind you that Antioch was about 15 miles from the Mediterranean coast and about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the cosmopolitan metropolis of Syria and served for a time as the capital of the Roman province in Asia. Rome was so taken with this city that it was assigned the rank of a Roman colony. However, during the first century, if Corinth to the west was the “Las Vegas” of its day, the city of sin; then Antioch, to the east, was like the Atlantic City of its day. It would be in this booming yet grossly sinful city that the church there would become the hub of the missionary outreaches to the Gentiles. It would almost appear that the church in Jerusalem, during the 40’s of the first century, had been so taken in by the spiritual rut we looked at in Acts 10, that the most influential church at the time became the one in Antioch.

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In Acts 11:19-30 we see a church on the cutting edge of God's purposes. There are three characteristics of a church that is on the cutting edge. It is a church that is filled with movers and shakers, eager to see the Gospel spread to all people as opposed to moaners and sneakers, those who do more whining than witnessing, more sneaking around than shaking things up. The three things that are evident in a growing church are the church's fundamentals – what does the church believe about the gospel and salvation (19-21); the church's fruit – what are the ingredients and results of a growing church (22-26); and finally the church's fellowship – what are the common and shared interests of a growing church (27-30). We looked at the church's fundamentals a couple weeks back. Let me refresh your memory so that we can look at the second of the characteristics that is on the cutting edge of God's purposes and then next week we will look at the last of these characteristics.

## I. We see the church's fundamentals (19-21).

We considered the first of these three characteristics a couple weeks back, the church's fundamentals, noting from verse 19-21 two key truths that the church at Antioch understood, first, that God disperses His people where He wants them, often using circumstances like persecution or adversity to do so; and second, He dispenses His people in order to spread the gospel that He might draw lost people to Himself.

We are saved so that we might accomplish the work of Him who saved us! Verse 21 states what happens to a church that believes these fundamentals, "**And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.**" There is both a trusting and a turning. This is how the church at Antioch started. God dispersed His people to the lost and then brought the lost to Himself. This brings us to the second characteristic of the church.

## II. We see the church's fruit (22-26)

*22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

Notice how verse 22, "**The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem...**" We easily miss the point. Most likely the first response of the believers in Jerusalem was shock and awe. There were believers in Antioch? Could this be true? Remember that Antioch was very different from Jerusalem. The people of Antioch had a different culture and lifestyle than those in Jerusalem. It might be likened to the difference between a city in the Bible Belt of the States as opposed to a city like New York or San Francisco. To hear of many coming to Christ and impacting the city of San Francisco might shock us today.

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (behind Rome and Alexandria), with a population of over half a million people. It was a glorious city. The main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. Antioch was the city that never slept and was known for its nightlife. It was the only city in the world at the time that had her streets light up at night). The city was renowned for its central heating, plumbing, and sanitary facilities. And for all its fame, it was also known as a city of sensual

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pleasures, second only to Corinth for its wickedness and decadence. Throughout her streets were dancers, and actors, and chariot races. Just a few miles south of the city was the pleasure garden, a place dedicated to the worship of Daphne where acts of crude prostitution took place all in the name of religion.

I share all of this because it is out of horrid pit of wickedness that God saved some people and established a bulwark of a church. So then, when news reached the church in Jerusalem that such pagans, heathens and sinners were being saved, they determined to send someone to investigate these things. Notice who they sent according to verse 22, “...and they sent off **Barnabas to Antioch.**”

What was it about Barnabas that made him the best candidate for this mission? Let us consider a few reasons. First, remember that Barnabas was from Cyprus, a Greek thinking and acting place, much like Antioch (4:36). It may be that he was acquainted with the men from Cyprus who had evangelized Antioch. Second, he owned property and had lived in Jerusalem for some time, having sold some land near Jerusalem and giving the proceeds to the apostles back in Acts 4:37. The point is, Barnabas was familiar with both worlds and mindsets. Another reason that made Barnabas fit for the task is found in his name, as the name Barnabas, means, and “son of encouragement.” Barnabas was an encourager. He was the perfect liaison and peacemaker between the two churches. You might recall back in Acts 9:27 that it was Barnabas who introduced the newly converted Saul to the skeptics in the church in Jerusalem. He believed Saul was for real when others doubted. Barnabas would be sent to see if the reported fruit of the salvation of the Gentiles was real. What Barnabas would see are the evidences of how God grows a church. For a church to bear fruit it takes three ingredients, each of which are seen in the growth of the Antioch church and each of which out to be in our prayers and our pursuits.

## **A. It takes God’s Provision**

For a church to bear fruit for takes God’s provision. Notice how clearly Luke states this in verse 23, “**Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced...**” If we were to answer the question, “How is it that this church grew” our response is that it was by the provision of God’s grace. What Barnabas saw in Antioch he could attribute only to the *grace* of God.

There is a story of a mother who gained an audience before Napoleon as she sought pardon for her son. After hearing her request, Napoleon reminded the mother that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and that justice demanded death. The mother responded, “But I don’t ask for justice, I plead for mercy.” Thoughtfully, Napoleon replied, “But your son does not deserve mercy.” To which the woman cried, “Sir, it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for.” Upon hearing this the emperor decreed, “Well then, I will have mercy.” And thus he spared the woman’s son.

Beloved, mercy is not getting something we deserve; and grace is getting something we do not deserve. In the mercy of God, sinners do not receive what they deserve. Sinners deserve punishment and death. So, by grace to us, God gave that punishment to His Son on the cross. This is grace and Luke reports that Barnabas saw its *evidence*. Every life converted, changed and committed to Christ and His church is an illustration of grace. We are all here by the very same reason. Our changed lives have nothing to do with what we did, but with what God did. God did for us what we did not deserve and will never deserve, pardon from sin by the death of

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Jesus. And by grace, He gave us what we do not deserve, His Son to die in our place for our sins. It is through His risen Son that we receive new life. This is the first fruit of church that grows, it evidences the grace of God in salvation. A growing church is a church that evidences, testifies and communicates to each other and to the community that they are saved by grace alone.

## B. It takes God's People (22-24)

And while it sounds a bit strange to say it this way, there is more than grace involved. Grace is the first fruit and the first provision by which God grows His church, but notice next from verses 22-24 that it takes God's people to grow a church.

**22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.**

Beloved, God uses people to grow churches. It takes people, sometimes a lot of people to accomplish the mission of God. It takes people like Barnabas and there are at least two lessons we must learn and practice from his life.

**First**, as we noted, Barnabas was an encourager and like him, we must strive to be encouragers. Notice what Luke says is the first thing he did as he arrived at the church. In verse 23 we read, **"...he rejoiced and began to encourage them all..."** What a great way to come to church, rejoicing and encouraging! Barnabas had a ministry of *encouragement*. But what is encouragement? Is it being a cheerleader calling other to make another score? Is it a pat on the back, or telling people all will be okay? The word "encourage" in our text is the translation of a common Greek term *parakaleo* which means "to call to oneself" or "to come along side." It is a rich word and thus is translated by a number of English words including, admonish, beg, teach, encourage, and exhort. The KJV uses this last idea, stating that Barnabas "exhorted them all." Beloved, we must learn to biblically encourage. And what does biblical encouragement look like? Notice the end of verse 23, **"to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."** The KJV says, that the exhortation was for them to 'cleave unto' to the Lord. One of the fruits of a grow church is a people encouraging and engaging in cleaving tightly to the Lord.

We need more of this kind of encouragement. I need it, you need. We need to be reminding new Christians that the Christian life is not easy. Yes it is rewarding and joyful, but it is not easy. We need to remind them and each other to hold tight onto Jesus. We must remind one another not to live by our feelings and to resolve daily to remain true to the Lord. Beloved, the evidence of true salvation is not a date written in the back of your Bible; it is not a prayer card with a life verse on it, it is not having a cool Bible app on your smart phone. The evidence of true salvation is a consistent, persevering life of faith. If Hope is going to be a growing church, this is what we need. Both old and new Christians alike need a ton of something, and that something is *encouragement*. Will you be a "son of encouragement?" Will you go out of your way to come along side other believers and remind them to cleave consistently and persistently to the Lord?

The **second** lesson we learn from the example of Barnabas is how he dealt with criticism. I see some of you looking for any criticism in our text. Where is there any criticism? Remember

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that Antioch is very different from Jerusalem. These believers in the north thought differently than the believers down south in Jerusalem. These in Antioch were saved Gentiles, saved out of pagan backgrounds; being accustomed to eating meat offered to idols. They looked different, acted different, and enjoyed different forms of entertainment. You know what I am talking about. You get around different believing friends or family and they have a completely different outlook on things. How can we have unity with so many differences? Some may say we must simply get rid of all our differences. But this is not biblical unity. We do not have to like same music or wear the same clothing to be biblically unified. All that is required is that we have Jesus Christ as our focus, that we have loving and serving Jesus as Lord in common.

This is what we find in the actions of Barnabas. He encouraged them to do what according to verse 23? He encouraged them to remain true *to the Lord*. It is not about a church, a tradition, a preference, but about the Lord. This is so important to note. We do not find Barnabas arriving at Antioch, looking at the Christians there and saying, “Whoa! Wait! That is not how we do thing in Jerusalem...!” Rather, when he sees these believers, our text says “**he rejoiced...**” He celebrated! And then he encouraged them. To be sure, there were differences, but when Barnabas entered their worship service or fellowship, his focus was on the Lord where it belongs.

And because of this heart of encouragement, Luke gives this insight into Barnabas in verse 24 saying, “**for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith...**” The one who is full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith is able to see what others cannot see. He sees the hand, the providence of God and does not derailed by less important things. What would you be like if you entered a very different church? Imagine that you were sent from the Jerusalem church to go and investigate what was going on in Antioch, where people think and act much differently than you. First, would you have gone and second, would you rejoice and encourage them?

Someone may argue that we do not live in Jerusalem and so such a question is not really valid for us today. True, we are not in the first century Mediterranean Coast but rather in the heartland of the USA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But the question is still valid for you because last time I checked, God still uses people, people of encouragement, people who come along side of others and focuses them on the Lord to build His Church. Beloved, it takes *people* to grow churches.

Let me get pointed here. There are a whole lot of people in Rogers, Bentonville, Bella Vista, Springdale and such that have little or no church background. Our culture is increasingly biblically ignorant, not knowing who Jesus really is. But this I do know. I know that our God is intent on reaching them with the gospel. And I ask you, are you willing? Are you available? Will you reach them? I know the first hang up. “But pastor,” some are pondering, “what will others think of me if I go and talk to or hang around people like that?” We concern ourselves with the potential criticism of reaching others. As we will come to see in Acts 15:1-2, some in the Jerusalem were very critical about what was happening in Antioch. Yet Barnabas was unmoved. Barnabas took risks on behalf of the Christians in Antioch. He went to Antioch and remained there for some time, making it his home.

And so, we learn that to be a biblical encouragers, we must overcome the barrier of criticism. Do not concern yourself so much with what others think but constantly ask yourself, “What does my Lord think?” What a blessing is awaiting us as we focus on encouraging others to remain true to the Lord. Notice how verse 24 ends saying, “**And considerable numbers were**

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**brought to the Lord.”** Barnabas saw the hand of the Lord at work. Oh that each of us would desire to see the same.

I love how Luke phrases this here. Notice that the numbers were **“brought to the Lord.”** Revival is not about growing the roll numbers of church membership but rather is seeing people walk fervently after Jesus! To be sure, as people were brought to the Lord, these were also added to the church. Luke uses the word “added” in reference to the church three times in Acts (1:26, 2:41; 5:14) and in each case it points to church membership, of being tied, connected and glued to the church. Thus, church membership is important. Being an active participant in a local church is imperative. But before any of that happens, a person must be brought to the Lord. A. T. Robertson, in his work *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, writes, “*These people were added to the Lord Jesus before they were added to the church. If that were always true, what a difference it would make in our churches.*” What is required to grow a church? It takes God’s provision of grace and it takes people, but now note that...

### **C. It takes Godly partnership (25-26).**

*25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

Something remarkable is recorded here for us. Luke says that Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. Why? Why did he do this? Remember that many people were being added. Think about that. Why did he recruit Saul? Verse 24 says that many people were added to the church by coming to the Lord. It is a critical time in the life of this Church. It needs leaders to lead, not by leaving town! Yet Barnabas leaves, heading one hundred miles to the west to find Saul. Why did Barnabas leave? I see at least three reasons that become lessons concerning how disciples of Jesus Christ are made. The point to be made is that growing a church takes partnership; partnership between teachers and partnership between disciples.

**First, making disciples of Jesus is Christ is a team effort.** While it is good and important to have a spiritual mentor, as Timothy had his Paul, at the same time men like Paul and Barnabas were team players. They knew something we must also grasp; that any church needs more than any one person can give it. If a leader is insecure, he might try to muddle his way through a ministry. This was not Barnabas. He knew he needed help and sought out the person best suited for the job, Saul who would become Paul. Verse 26 informs us that the entire church prospered because of this action of Barnabas.

Again, let us be reminded that not one of us has all the necessary gifts and talents to disciple a person fully. We must involve the rest of the church or all we will end up with is deficient clones of ourselves. There has only been one person in Scripture who was capable of fully carrying out a one-to-one discipleship program and that was Jesus. We need each other to help us grow one another. Thus, I cannot grow properly if you are not involved in church life. And conversely, you cannot grow aright if you are not active in church life.

And so, realizing he needs help, Barnabas heads off to Tarsus. Luke says that Barnabas had to “look for Saul” which seems to indicate that he was not necessarily easy to find. Let me put this into perspective. We found Saul converted back in Acts 9 and the last we read, he was sent back to Tarsus. Can you imagine how Saul’s family reacted when they heard of his

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conversion to Christ? And from the time of Act 9:30 up to our text, it is believed that somewhere between five to ten years have passed. Saul was being groomed by the Lord for a life of ministry, but up to this point, his life was rather obscure. I would have to believe that while little is recorded of Saul’s activities, he was yet busy telling people about Jesus because Barnabas knows he would be helpful in teaching the people at Antioch about Jesus. Both Barnabas and Saul knew that making disciples was a team effort.

**Second, making disciples is a teaching effort.** People cannot grow in the Lord if they are not taught. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded.” What did Barnabas and Saul did in Antioch? Our text is clear. They **taught considerable numbers**... Now let us link something said in verse 21 with what we just read. First, **“a large number”** believed and turned to the Lord and now in verse 24 we are told that **“considerable numbers”** were taught. It is not enough to have people sign a card, walk an aisle or pray a prayer. Those whom we reach, we must teach! Who are you reaching? Who are you teaching?

**Third, making disciples is a time effort.** Notice what Luke reports there in verse 24 regarding how long they taught. For an **“entire year”**. Beloved, it takes time to grow disciples. Now maybe a year does not seem like a long time. I have been at hope for 17 years and frankly we are not much different in size than 17 years ago. Why were Saul and Barnabas so successful in year that Hope seems to lack after seventeen years? Perhaps we need more encouragers like Barnabas to rise up. I know we do. Perhaps we need better teaching. Maybe, to be sure every teacher of the Word needs to improve himself. But one thing that struck me as I considered this issue of grow in a one year period was the marked difference in the commitment of the people to the teaching and to the process of becoming disciples. Throughout the book of Acts we find that the general practice of these first believers and churchgoers consisted of daily involvement in God’s Word, and that involvement was with a church leader! In Acts 2, the people met daily and went from house to house day by day. When Paul heads over to Macedonia in Acts 16, we are told how he and his team strengthened the believers in the faith and thus how the church grew daily! In Acts 17 we find that the Bereans were examining the Scriptures together daily. In Acts 19, Paul took some of the disciples away from their routines for a period of two years to daily teach them about the Lord.

The point is that what might take a church 10 or 20 years to accomplish in the lives of people today, may have taken much less time. According to some surveys, on average, only 2 of 10 people in the USA attend one or more church service weekly. What would take the early church only a year to cover, would take the average American churchgoer nearly six years to obtain. In other words, if we want to get out of spiritual ruts, if we want to be movers and shakers for the kingdom of God, we need to be taught more often, to be with God’s people more often; to be engaged with one another more often with the intention to learn!

Barnabas was a catalyst for this kind of thinking in the church. We need more people like Barnabas! We need to understand that growing a church requires *partnership*. Sometimes, our partners may outshine us in areas. Certainly this would be true for Barnabas who would slip into second place as the teaching ministry of Saul took hold. Yet, for the good of the church in Antioch, Barnabas recruited Saul. Beloved, being engaged in ministry is great! Yet it is even more beneficial to encourage others to join you in doing ministry.

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D. L. Moody believed that every Christian ought to be given a task soon after conversion. It might begin with simply handing out hymnals or ushering people to their seats, but each convert had to be busy. He said, "It is better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men." Who can you call alongside to join you in ministry; to be a partner in ministry with you?

These are the ways in which a church grows and becomes fruitful. She sees the provision of God's grace, grace that saves and grace that enables to serve God. Such a church sees the importance of people, God's people; of being increasingly engaged in each other's lives. And finally such a church sees the significance of godly partnership; the ministry needs people, people who come along side, people who teach, people who get things done for the glory of God and the benefit of God's church. Will you be such a mover and shaker?

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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