

## Remain Faithful to the Lord

- I think the timing of this message is completely a work of the Holy Spirit. It didn't occur to me at first. But after I decided that I didn't need to preach the same story to you two weeks in a row, and we skipped over the first 18 verses of chapter 11, I began to see a connection. Just this week we rejoiced at the return of Shawn and Sara Curtis, and Charlie, from England. That's where they spent a week looking at the lay of the land, meeting with lots of people, and hearing God's heart for them to one day help plant a church there.
- As I started studying this passage today, it struck me how similar are the circumstances here to what we as a church are doing as we pray about sending the Curtis family to England, for the purpose of establishing a family-integrated church, should He open the doors there. I realize that God does not clearly lay out in Scripture a blueprint for planting churches. There are lots of ways to do it right, I would say. But I believe there are some exciting principles we can see in this passage today. Let's look at the three ways God led His people to establish the church at Antioch. Then we will look at three qualities necessary for a church planter that Barnabas puts on display. Finally, I want us to look at three ways Barnabas began the process of establishing a church that would touch the whole world. If you like alliteration, we could call this a church planting pattern, a church planting person, and a church planting program.
- **Church planting pattern**
- 1- God led through persecution first: after Stephen's stoning, the followers of Christ were scattered everywhere, going where they believed the Lord was leading them, I'm sure. And you could make the argument that this first wave was not necessarily trying to plant churches. The record provided by Luke just says that they were "preaching the Lord Jesus." That's the foundation, the Gospel must be preached! But there wasn't a church gathered, apparently, until the next step.
- 2- God led through appointment next. The church in Jerusalem heard what was going on in Antioch, and they sent Barnabas to establish and to lead a church.
- 3- God also led through recruitment. When Barnabas saw a great many people being added to the Lord, he went to Tarsus to find Saul and recruited him to come and be a church planter, himself! So, there are several doors into church planting, as we see here. We can also agree that not every Christian is called to be a part of a healthy church plant, but every Christian IS called to be a part of a healthy church. Of the "great many people" who were added to the Lord at Antioch, there were two who were called later to leave and start new churches. There may have been others at other times, but clearly the majority stayed where they were and maintained a healthy church. In fact, the church at Antioch became the mission center of the first and second century church, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Simon Kistemaker said, "Jerusalem provided leadership and direction; Antioch had vision and ambition."
- **Church planting person**
- When Jerusalem heard that there was a work of the Holy Spirit going on in Antioch, they took action and sent Barnabas. We are not told why they may have chosen Barnabas, at least not at first. But then Luke says this in verse 24: Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. That's a three-fold cord that is not quickly broken. He was a good man. Only because he was a believer who was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. One of the interesting storylines surrounding the Super Bowl tonight has been the fact that both quarterbacks, Peyton Manning for the Denver Broncos and Russell Wilson for the Seattle Seahawks, are professing Christians. Jim Denison wrote about each one this week. In a video titled "The Making of a Champion," Wilson says, "I was kind of a bad kid," explaining that "I used to beat up kids and bite kids and do stuff all the time." What changed? "I had a dream that my dad passed away. And that Jesus came into the room. He was knocking on my door, saying, 'You need to find out more about

me," Wilson said. "So that Sunday morning I ended up going to church and that's when I got saved." While some athletes get in trouble for comments on Twitter, Wilson posts daily Bible verses on his Twitter feed. During the NFL season, he visits the Seattle Children's Hospital weekly and has visited with soldiers at the local military base. He is National Ambassador of the Charles Ray III Diabetes Association. His explanation: "I realized that God had given me so many talents, and I wanted to give him all the glory." In his book *Manning*, co-authored with his father, Peyton tells the story of his conversion: "My faith has been number one since I was thirteen years old and heard from the pulpit on a Sunday morning in New Orleans a simple question: 'If you died today, are you one hundred percent sure you'd go to heaven?' "It was a big church, and I felt very small, but my heart was pounding. The minister invited those who would like that assurance through Jesus Christ to raise their hands, and I did. Then he invited us to come forward, to take a stand, and my heart really started pounding and from where we sat, it looked like a mile to the front. But I got up and did it, and I committed my life to Christ, and that faith has been most important to me ever since." Peyton says his four priorities, in order, are: faith, family, friends, and football. He testifies, "My faith doesn't make me perfect, it makes me forgiven."

- These men are leaders on a football team but their lives impact many more. Barnabas was the first leader of the church at Antioch, but his life impacted many more as well. But it started with what should be the normal description of a Christian: a good person, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Normal for all but *required* of a Christian leader, as Paul said in 1 Timothy 3 when he describes the character of an elder, a deacon, and even a deacon's wife. May I say something else about faith as it relates to church life and especially church planting? It took faith to leave Jerusalem and go to a place where he may not have known anybody and he certainly didn't know everybody. Barnabas needed the shield of faith to extinguish all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and so do you and I.
- That's the church planting person: a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.
- **Church planting program**
- It's not complicated, this whole church thing. We make it a lot more difficult than it should be. There are three things I see Barnabas doing here that I believed were a recipe for success, inspired by God.
- **He saw the grace of God and was glad.**
- How did God make His grace visible at Antioch? What did Barnabas see that was the grace of God? He saw that persecution had led to preaching, and people were turning from darkness to light. I believe he also saw people in Antioch who were hungry for the Word and overlooked hardship and suffering in order to be in a place to receive it. I will never forget the first night of a pastor's conference in Zimbabwe in 2007. Rob Mancuso and I were greeted by more than 100 pastors, some with their wives, who had traveled for days to get to the conference site. Which happened to be a school that did not have a gathering place for all of us, so we met under a tree. They slept on the concrete floors in the school. They endured the heat and the bugs and the little bit of food that was prepared each day. None of that compared to what they were hungry for. They would have said with Paul, "This momentary weight of affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." (2 Cor. 4:17)
- Barnabas saw this in Antioch, and get this, "he was glad." I am so glad the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to include that. Barnabas was GLAD that he saw the grace of God. Sometimes we are not glad because we do NOT see the grace of God. It's visible, but not to us, because we are too busy looking at the suffering or the trials or the daily stuff of living. But sometimes we SEE the grace of God as it is abundantly made visible to us, but we are not GLAD. Barnabas was glad to see God at work, and I believe that was the first "program" of the church. If people ask you sometime, "What kind of programs do you have over there at Antioch Community Church," say this: "We see the grace of God and we are glad!"

- **He exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.**
- Here's your greatest ministry. To encourage fellow believers to remain faithful to the Lord. John Stott said that Barnabas gave the church an exhortation "both to perseverance and to wholeheartedness." Cindy and I had the privilege to attend a retirement banquet last Saturday night for Pastor Howard Thompson. He finished 42 years at Burlington Assembly and has been in the ministry for 50 years. But over and over we heard from so many people who spoke as part of the program that what they most appreciated about Howard Thompson was his faithfulness. For 42 years he exhorted his flock to remain faithful to the Lord, and did so mainly by remaining faithful to the Lord himself. One of the most touching moments for me, and for Howard and Marilyn also, because I saw them wiping the tears, was when their four children came up and said that all their lives growing up they saw the same man at home as everybody else saw at church. He was faithful to the Lord, and not just when the church people were watching. The banquet was not without its funny moments. We were in the gymnasium at BCA: the school was founded by Howard Thompson, and the gym is the Thompson Gymnasium. After the four children spoke, Michael Brown, the principal at BCA said he will never forget when Todd, Howard's son, got in trouble in the classroom. He was probably 8 years old. The teacher said something about taking him to the principal and Todd shot back, "My daddy OWNS this place." The teacher asked Michael about it later, saying, "What do you think about that?" Michael Brown said, "I think that's about right."
- So, Luke summed up Barnabas' primary message to the church at Antioch as this: remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. This was a recurrent theme in the book of Acts. Acts 13:43, "as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God." And 14:22, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." I would say to you at Antioch today: remain faithful to the Lord. Continue in the grace of God. Continue in the faith. If you are wanting to stop or even turn aside from the faith, go back to the first thing that Barnabas did, and see the grace of God and be glad.
- **He brought another leader in to help with the work.**
- I love the progression we see. Persecution resulted in preaching, and the Lord turned many lives around as "a great number who believed turned to the Lord." The church in Jerusalem got involved and sent Barnabas. Then Barnabas got involved and as he did, "a great many people were added to the Lord." So Barnabas went to find Saul of Tarsus and Saul got involved and for a whole year "they met with the church and taught a great many people." What was the result? A powerful missionary church was being prepared by God.