



Good mothers prepare us for life - birthing us, feeding us, loving us, training us, encouraging us, correcting us, and sending us out to parent their grandchildren. On this Mother's Day it's appropriate that we consider the similar role that Developing Disciples plays in the furthering of the Gospel.

Acts 11:19 (NET) ¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as **Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch...**

That **persecution** began as Saul and other leaders encouraged the stoning of Stephen. Most Jewish followers of Jesus chose to get out of Jerusalem and head for other towns [Acts 8:1-3]. Despite the persecution, this led to the Gospel message being taken to these other places.

Persecution pushes believers to count the cost & reach the lost.

It's clear that one of the reasons God had allowed the persecution was to push the Jewish followers of Jesus out to Gentile areas. But, as we're about see, some of them still didn't get it.



Keeping the Gospel Within Our Own Culture?

Acts 11:19 (NET) ¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as **Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch**, speaking the message to no one but Jews.

The gospel was being shared BY Jews with other Jews, but not with Gentiles.

When is the last time YOU shared Jesus with someone from YOUR OWN (or another) culture?

Maybe we don't share because: 1) we aren't prepared 2) we're scared or 3) we don't care.

Taking the Gospel to Other Cultures

Acts 11:20-21 (NET) ²⁰ But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to **Antioch** and **began to speak to the Greeks too**, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. ²¹ **The hand of the Lord was with them**, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Antioch was the largest and most important of 16 cities named after the Syrian emperor, Antiochus.¹ Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that Antioch had a large, wealthy Jewish population in the 1st century, with beautifully decorated synagogues, making proselytes of many Greeks.² Antioch was the third largest & important city in the Roman Empire, the crossroads of an important trade route.³ This Greek city as a place of education & arts, but it was also full of

¹ John McRay, "Antioch," ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 67.

² Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 753.

³ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 366.

pagan worship and sexual immorality.⁴ **Antioch in Syria** - would play a major role ultimately becoming the cradle of Gentile Christianity.

Some men were faithful to take the message of Jesus to Gentiles. Dr. Luke doesn't even give us any of their names. The focus isn't on the men, but on their mission - **to proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus** to Greeks too. They weren't alone in sharing the good news of Jesus.

The hand of the Lord was with them, and this resulted in **a great number** of people in Antioch turning to follow Jesus!

Developing Disciples is much more than just a task God has given us. As WE develop disciples, **the hand of the Lord is with us too** ("I will be with you always - Matt. 28:19-20)! As we have seen throughout the writing called ACTS, God is with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit sets up Divine Appointments. (e.g. Philip & the Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8:26-40)
- The Spirit empowers us to share the Gospel. (Acts 4:8, 31)
- The Spirit convicts hearts of their sin & need for a Savior. (e.g. Cornelius, his family, & friends - Acts 10:30-44)

Barnabas' Long Trip to Antioch

Acts 11:22 (NET)²² A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Barnabas was a great choice as he was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36-37). Barnabas traveled almost 300 miles to Antioch⁵. Why travel so far? Once again, the Jewish followers of Jesus wanted confirmation about what God was doing...AMONG the Gentiles!

Barnabas was going to POUR INTO these young believers. As we are about to see, this was no quick trip. Barnabas was gonna stick around for a while, because knew something about DEVELOPING DISCIPLES that we need to learn...

BIG TRUTH: You'll find purpose when you pour into people

Worth the Trip

Acts 11:23-24 (NET)²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, **he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts**,²⁴ because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and **a significant number of people were brought to the Lord**.

Antioch contained many distractions that competed for the attention of the people. Barnabas wisely began to help the young believers count the cost, because following Jesus wouldn't be easy. They must **remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts**. Barnabas was also making time to impact those who had not yet followed Jesus, and God used this good & Godly man to see and **a significant number of people were brought to the Lord**.

Then our story takes an incredible turn. Remember Saul, one of the reasons why many of the Jews had run to Antioch in the first place? Saul was confronted by the risen Jesus in a vision where Saul was blinded, and after 3 days of fasting and prayer, Saul turned from his sin and trusted Jesus. The one he had previously hunted followers of Jesus...CHANGED TEAMS! God

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 312.

⁵ James F. Strange, "Antioch," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 75.

greatly used him to impact many people, but the apostles thought it wise to ship him to Tarsus to protect him from those wanting to kill him. At this point, several years had passed since Saul's radical conversion (Acts 9:30).

As the number of Gentile & Jewish believers keeps growing in Antioch, Barnabas needs some help DEVELOPING DISCIPLES. He can't do it by himself.

Look Who Came to Town!

Acts 11:25-26 (NET) ²⁵ Then Barnabas departed from Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So **for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church** and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called **Christians**.

Fact # 1 Barnabas & Saul spent a year in Antioch DEVELOPING DISCIPLES.

What would YOU need to do to go spend a year hundreds of miles from your friends - in order to be a part of DEVELOPING DISCIPLES?

You'll find purpose when you pour into people

Francis Chan "Teaching people to obey what Jesus commanded is a never-ending process that requires us to intertwine our lives with the Christians around us. If you are not connected with other Christians, serving and being served, challenging and being challenged, then you are not living as He desires, and the church is not functioning as He intended."⁶

Fact # 2 This is where **disciples** of Jesus were first called **Christians**. This wasn't the term followers of Jesus originally used of themselves (it is used only 3 times in the NT: here, Acts 26:28, & 1 Pet. 4:16). Followers of Jesus called themselves disciples, believers, brethren, saints, those of the Way. "Christians" was originally a term simply meant to point to the one they followed, the one called "the Christ". Oh that those who are called "Christians" would resemble & point others to HIM!

Evidence of Effective Discipleship

Acts 11:27-30 (NET) ²⁷ At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.)²⁹ So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

The church of Jerusalem in Judea had invested in Antioch by sending Barnabas for a year. Now Antioch wants to help those who have helped them.

⁶ Francis Chan Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples, 54, 55

4 Self Examination Questions

- What demonstrates I am a disciple of Jesus? (serving, growing, obedient)
- Who am I sharing Jesus with?
- Who is developing ME as a disciple of Jesus?
- Who am I developing as a disciple? (Need someone? See Connection Card)

CONNECTION CARD: Under Prayer Needs, Comments, Questions - write "HELP ME GROW."

*** Please place your CONNECTION CARDS in the buckets when leaving.**

You'll find purpose when you pour into people

Please call us if we can answer any questions or help you in any way.

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