

The Antioch Model: Acts 11:19-30
Inclusive, Intentional, Influential

In many churches these days, the buzz word is “purpose statement”.

Many churches are putting together a statement that reflects what the purpose is of their church.

Here is what just a few have said about themselves:

“Our mission is to follow the Bible’s directive to worship Jesus Christ, to instruct and encourage Christians to become like Christ and to present Jesus to the world as Savior and Lord.”

“We are a dynamic faith community committed to being Christ’s people, reflecting His light, growing God’s kingdom.”

“Ours is to enlist and equip fully devoted followers of Christ.”

“We are a place for restoring and deepening relationships with God and others that result in passionate pursuit of unreached people across the street and around the world.”

All of these statements are good to some degree.

They focus on what has historically been the purpose of the church.

We too, have been spending some time looking at the early church in the book of Acts. Our purpose is to look at what the focus and purpose of it was.

As we look at the church in Antioch today, we want to examine ourselves and ask ourselves some questions about whether or not we are following the Biblical model for the church.

Are our passions similar to that of the church in the Bible? Do we display the same characteristics? Do we share the same emphasis and motivation in our purpose statement?

The church in the city of Antioch is where believers were first called by the name “Christians.”

The hand of the Lord was upon that church and many came to faith and were added to its numbers.

But why was His hand upon that church and why was it growing so well?

There are at least three things that I believe we can learn from them; first let’s read...

Acts 11:19-21, “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**. 20 **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.** 21 **And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.”**

Luke tells us that the scene is changing from what we have been studying in the last couple of chapters.

The story in chapter ten and the first half of eleven is about salvation coming to the Gentiles.

The story takes place in three cities: Caesarea, Joppa, and Jerusalem.

Cornelius lived in Caesarea and Peter was in Joppa at the home of Simon-the-tanner. Peter went to the roof to pray and God answered his prayer but telling Peter to change. He had to change his attitude toward non-Jews.

God then arranges a trip for Peter and sends him to Cornelius’ house in Caesarea. While there, he shared the good news of Jesus Christ and for the first time, Gentiles received salvation.

Peter is then called back to a meeting in Jerusalem to explain his actions. He had broken Jewish custom by entering into a Gentile home and eating with them.

In my last two sermons I challenged you to go to people where they are at and to eat and drink with them as Jesus had.

I followed up that message with a challenge to all of that while maintaining your call to be holy as He is Holy. What does holiness look like? Micah 6 says, that holiness is “doing what is right, loving mercy, and walking humbly before your God.”

Now in Acts 11:19 Luke is presenting a story that is really a result of this kind of living. Going to people where they are and sharing our message of hope.

In verse 19 he is referring to an event that is covered in chapters seven and eight.

In chapter seven, Stephen was stoned and after that, great persecution arose against the believers.

Acts 8:1-3, "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

And so it is in our text today that **verse 19** says,

"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."

Luke is going to tell us a story now about some things that happened in the city of Antioch.

He's referring back to the persecution to tell us why there were believers there in Antioch and the reason is because they had fled to Antioch to evade the persecution in Jerusalem.

This city was located about 200 miles north of Jerusalem.

Because Luke had just told the story about salvation coming to the Gentiles, he pointed out that up till the time of this story, salvation was still only being preached to the Jews in Antioch.

And then we come to **verses 20 and 21** and discover the first of 3 key ingredients to Antioch's favor with the Lord and its growth.

"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. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

Be careful to note the contrast here ("but") between the first group who came speaking only to the Jews and those who spoke to the Hellenists.

While the first group was exclusive, those who were favored by the Lord and saw growth were...

I. INCLUSIVE

I read Acts 8:1-3 a moment ago about the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen; now listen to

Acts 8:4, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."

Clearly that verse applies to the believers in Antioch.

When the believers from Jerusalem came to Antioch, they preached the good news to everyone they came in contact with. Sharing their faith was a priority.

Because of their non-biased openness of talking about Jesus, the Scripture says the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

So what do we learn from the believers in Antioch, we learn that if we make it a priority to share our faith with everyone, no matter who they are, God's hand will be with us and great numbers will believe.

Being Inclusive means that we are welcoming of all – and even more importantly – we appeal to and invite all people to hear the message of salvation.

"God so loved the whole world" – "He is not willing that any should perish." How loving and willing are we that **all** people would hear the message of God's love demonstrated for us in His son's sacrificial death?

It wasn't the Apostles, prophets or church leaders doing the sharing here; they were still in Jerusalem.

It was ordinary Christian people who were telling people about Jesus Christ.

*And when they did, the Lord's hand was with them.
And when they did, great numbers of people believed.*

That's what the first Christians in the church of Antioch did, are we doing that?

Are we lifting up Christ? Are we passionate that others would come to faith in Christ and be included in the kingdom – included in the numbers that cause this church to grow?

Are we telling people the good news about the Lord Jesus?

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Are we making the most of every opportunity to share Christ with those around us?

Do we realize the shortness of our days and the seriousness of the eternity of people?

We've got the same good news that the Christians in Antioch had, don't we?

Are we just making excuses about not knowing enough or not wanting to offend someone?

Are we afraid that we will make ourselves look like fools?

Ephesians isn't asking you to share in a foolish sort of way. In fact, it is calling you to do so wisely!

Colossians 4:5-6 also says, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

We have things backwards: our tendency is to not talk about Jesus unless God really convicts us, but the way it ought to be is that our normal tendency is to talk about Jesus and do so in a way that seasons our message in such a way that it appeals to the hearer. Our normal tendency ought to be like Peter & John's.

Listen to what the Scriptures say after they had been arrested for talking about Jesus in **Acts 4:18-20**.

"And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

When we cannot help talking about our Jesus, the Lord's hand will be with us.

And when we cannot help talking about our Jesus, great number will be brought to the Lord.

So the first thing we see here is that they were inclusive in their outreach to all people; not exclusive!

If this is our purpose statement as a Church, every aspect of what we do should reflect that attitude! Not just as we go to the world out there – but in here.

First, our small groups; they must never become exclusive or closed. They need to be inviting, appealing and inclusive.

Secondly, I believe greeters are an important ministry in the church. I believe we need a strong group of greeters to bring a feel of hospitality to the church. *We are always looking for some outgoing people with a flair for hospitality.*

I believe greeters should make all people feel welcome and appreciated.

I believe greeters need to understand that for newcomers, first impressions are very important.

I believe that greeters are an important ministry in the life of a growing church.

I believe that everyone else in the assembly needs to pick up where the greeters leave off.

We should be hospitable towards everyone and do everything it can to make newcomers and regular attenders feel welcome.

It all starts with me and it all starts with you.

God's hand will always favor those who are open, inviting, welcoming and inclusive of others!

Secondly, we will see that they were not only inclusive, they were... (point to purpose)

II. INTENTIONAL

Acts 11:22-26, "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. 23 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. 24 For he was a **good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith**. And a **great many people** were **added** to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to **seek Saul**. 26 And when he had **found him**, 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**.”*

Now we have **Barnabas** back in the picture again.

We were first introduced to Barnabas (*whose real name was Joseph*) back in **chapter 4**.

Joseph was one of the ones who sold a piece of property and gave the money to the church.

Luke tells us that the apostles gave him the nick-name: Barnabas, which means "*son of encouragement*," because he was such an encourager.

The next time we see Barnabas is in Acts 9 after the conversion of Saul; the same Saul that was there at the stoning of Stephen and then began the great persecution of the church. But Saul got saved on the road to Damascus in Acts 9.

Saul began preaching Christ to the Jews immediately in Damascus, but they became angry with him and conspired to kill him. So Saul fled to Jerusalem.

However, when he got to Jerusalem, the Christians there did not believe that he was really saved and thought he was still trying to entrap them.

But Barnabas showed up, took Saul and brought him to the apostles. Barnabas reached out to Saul and got the others to accept him. The man who had sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the church and became such an encouragement to the believers was now there to encourage Saul.

So when we come to chapter 11, Barnabas has traveled to Antioch and absolutely nothing has changed about him; he is still encouraging others.

It was the believers in Jerusalem who heard about the great numbers being brought to the Lord in Antioch that decided to send Barnabas to encourage them.

Barnabas encouraged them to wholeheartedly and purposely or intentionally continue with the Lord.

The Scripture says Barnabas did this "**for**" he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

The Scripture says that as a result of Barnabas' character and encouraging nature he was committed to the discipleship and growth of the great numbers of those who had turned to the Lord.

*“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to **seek** Saul. 26 And when he had **found him**, 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**.”*

There was an intentional and deliberate plan for discipleship and spiritual growth of believers that was measured in time and results; it was one year long and successfully grew people in to Christ-like ones.

Now let's think about Barnabas characteristic of encouragement for a few minutes...

Webster's New World Dictionary says that encourage means, "*to give courage, hope, or confidence to; embolden*.”

Barnabas certainly did those things.

Barnabas gave hope to those in Jerusalem.

Barnabas gave confidence to and emboldened Saul.

Barnabas gave courage to those in Antioch.

We are called to do those things as well. We need to give others hope, confidence, courage and then embolden them in their faith.

I believe discipleship is a very important ministry in the church. I believe we need a strong group of disciplers to bring growth to the church.

We are currently in the process of reorganizing our discipleship ministry and we are looking for some committed encouragers to help out.

I believe that disciplers are an important ministry in the life of a growing church; an ounce of their encouragement can often be worth a pound of preaching.

But I also believe that everyone is capable of encouraging others in their growth by coming alongside others in the process.

I believe that the church should be nick-named "Barnabas!"

I believe that when the church becomes a place of encouragement, great numbers will be brought to the Lord and with purpose of heart continue with Him!

We can't sit around waiting to see if everyone else is going to start becoming an encourager because it will never happen.

Each one of us has to decide in our own hearts that we are going to become a Barnabas.

And when that happens, I believe great numbers will be brought to the Lord, grow in their faith and become Barnabas' themselves.

Look at what is said of this body next in...

Acts 11:27-30, *"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 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. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

The third thing we see about the church or Antioch is that it was ...

III. INFLUENTIAL

Barnabas the encourager was so named because of his willingness to give to a need.

Acts 4:34-37, *"Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."*

The people Barnabas had encouraged became encouragers. This speaks of the influence he had on them and they had on their world.

And in the first church, they were of the mind that **team work** was important (hands on the globe). They were all equal co-workers on the team.

They got a firsthand glimpse of what unselfish teamwork looked like Barnabas and Saul's modeling.

There was no room for egos, there was too much work to do to quibble over who was greater.

These Christians worked hard to look out for the needs of others and not just for the needs of their growing church. They brought their gift and Barnabas and Saul delivered it.

They worked together as team to further the kingdom of God and consequently, people were helped.

Therefore we see that no one is more important than anyone else in the church.

From these first Christians we learn that there is no room for lone ranger ministries who function simply to further their own cause.

IN CONCLUSION:

[Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World : Evangelism As a Way of Life*. Intervarsity Press, 1999. p 260.]

While doing campus ministry Becky met a student named Bill on a college campus in Portland, Oregon. Bill was brilliant, and always looked like he was pondering something deep.

He had messy hair, and the entire time she knew him, she never saw him wear a pair of shoes. Rain, sleet, or snow, Bill was always barefoot. While he was attending college, he had become a Christian.

At this time, a well-dressed, middle-class church across the street from the campus wanted to develop more of a ministry to the students. They weren't sure how to go about it, but they tried to make them feel welcome. One day Bill decided to worship there.

He walked into this church wearing his blue jeans, T-shirt and of course no shoes. People looked a bit uncomfortable, but no one said anything. So Bill began walking down the aisle looking for a seat. The church was crowded that Sunday, so as he got down to the front pew and realized there were no

*seats, he just squatted on the carpet – perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, but perhaps unnerving for a church congregation. The tension in the air became so thick one could slice it. Suddenly an elderly man began walking down the aisle toward the boy. **Was he going to scold Bill?***

Becky's friends who saw him approaching said they thought, "You can't blame him. He'd never guess Bill is a Christian. And his world is too distant from Bill's to understand. You can't blame him for what he's going to do." As the man kept walking slowly down the aisle, the church became utterly silent. All eyes focused on him. You couldn't hear anyone breathe. When the man reached Bill, with some difficulty he lowered himself and sat down next to him on the carpet. He and Bill worshipped together on the floor that Sunday. There wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Do you realize what we have really learned from the first Christians?

We've seen that an **Inclusive mindset** and passion for Christ brought great numbers. We've seen that **Intentional discipleship** brought growth that transformed people. We've seen that **Influential people** understand teamwork and are not driven by ego but selflessly meet other people's needs and transform them into influencers.

Let's have a church full of Christians like the first Christians!

Let's be Inclusive! Let's be Intentional! And let us together be influential in our community and world!

When we get ourselves out of the way, God will do great things—just as He did for the first Christians!