

The Model Church

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church family. Open your Bibles with me to the book of Acts chapter 11, where in just a moment I'll be reading a passage of scripture that will be the foundation for this morning's message.

And I'll invite you to keep your Bibles open in the book of Acts as we continue to consult the text throughout the message. Well, thank you for the honor of being invited to preach at your church this morning.

I met your pastor a few months ago at the Tennessee Baptist Convention and then had an opportunity to share lunch with him recently as well to talk about the ministry of your church and the impact that you're making not only here in Lewisburg, but really around the world through Southern Baptist.

And so thank you for what you are doing as a church in your community and what you're doing through all of us working together all around the world. Now this morning, I want to begin with a simple and I hope helpful statement.

Church ministry is hard, but it is not complicated. Church ministry is hard, but it is not complicated.

[1 : 35] Church ministry is still one of the strongest churches in that region even today. I started that church based on the model of what I'm going to teach you this morning. And so this is, and then as a result of starting that church and continuing my study, I ultimately wrote a book called *The Case for Antioch*, in which I make the case that the church at Antioch is the most significant church in the New Testament.

So from early preaching to staking really my life and ministry on the model by moving to the Northwest and launching a new church, then writing about it and teaching about it for these years, I've become even more convinced than ever that church ministry is hard, but it is not complicated as long as we follow basic models, simple models, clear models laid out for us in churches like Antioch in the New Testament.

So let's take a look at this church and then apply it to your church this morning as we talk about how to be effective or impactful churches today. We pick the story up in chapter 11, beginning at verse 19.

Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them. Men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 07] The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch.

When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And large numbers of people were added to the Lord. Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul. When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers.

The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world.

This took place during the reign of Claudius. Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea.

[4 : 06] They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul. Now turn a page or two over to chapter 13 for the continuation of the story.

Verse 1. Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Menaion, a close friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

Well, we begin back in Acts chapter 11 by laying out some simple understanding of this model of Antioch and what it says about your church today. And the first principle is this.

Impactful churches are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Did you notice the three references to the Holy Spirit in this text? It says, first of all, that Barnabas, this pastoral leader who came from Jerusalem to give guidance to Antioch, it says of him in verse 24 that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 16] And then if you drop down to verse 28, it says this guest preacher, Agabus, showed up. And how did he preach? It says he preached by the Spirit. And then if you look over in chapter 13 at verse 2, it says, As the church was worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said.

There are three distinct references to the Holy Spirit in this text. The first one is to the pastoral leader, Barnabas. The second one is to the guest preacher, Agabus.

But the third one is to the church itself, meaning all of you. Well, this pattern still holds today. You have a pastor. You want him to be full of the Holy Spirit.

You've invited a guest preacher today, and you're hoping that I'm preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. And you're thinking, yep, that's what we expect of you, man. But the last part of the text says about all of you.

It says the church was worshiping the Lord like you've been doing this morning. And it says the Holy Spirit spoke to them, the church, and directed them to take some specific action we're going to talk about later in this message.

[6 : 19] The Holy Spirit was clearly at work in this church. My friends, this is the first and most important principle to learn this morning, and that is impactful churches, churches that make an image.

Our generation. It's more than that.

This is spiritual work we're doing. It ought to be marked by things we can't explain, things we can't understand, things we can't take credit for, and frankly, things we can't empower to get done.

The church is supposed to be marked by supernatural things occurring that are beyond anything we can ask for or, excuse me, anything we can explain, anything that we can reason about, anything that we can justify or somehow make of our own efforts.

That's what church is supposed to be like. Now, you might think, well, I don't really know. I think church is supposed to be about really important people doing really powerful things and really smart people come up with really good ideas and really competent leaders getting really well educated and doing what they know to do.

[7 : 29] Well, that's just simply not true. Notice what happened in this text. I want to show you a little phrase that has come to mean so much to me over the years, and that's in verse 20. This church in Antioch was started by some preachers who came to town into a city where there were no Christians and started sharing the gospel, not just among the Jewish community as had been done up until this point, but sharing it with the Gentiles, sharing it with everyone.

But notice who was doing it. Verse 20. But there were some of them. There were some of them. Isn't that striking to you?

That these most important church planters, perhaps in the history of the world, who went into a city where there were no Christians and for the first time ever shared the gospel, not just with the Jewish community as had been done in the past, but now shared the gospel with everyone, meaning all the Gentile world was now reading the gospel through these preachers.

These very consequential, significant church planters didn't even get their names in the story. Why is that significant? Because it says to you this morning that what really was happening here was some ordinary people, not even name-worthy, were being used by God to do something supernatural, miraculous, marvelous, unbelievable.

You pick your word. They were doing it because the Holy Spirit was at work through them. Now, when I preach like this in other places, one of the saddest things that happens to me is oftentimes

afterwards someone will come up to me and say, well, it's unusual to hear a Baptist preacher talking about the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 19] Well, if that's true, God help us. Why is it unusual? Why is it unusual for a Baptist preacher to talk about the Holy Spirit?

Why is it unusual for a Baptist preacher to talk about the Holy Spirit? Shouldn't that be normal conversation among us? Thinking about the Holy Spirit at work in our church and asking God to move by the power of the Spirit through us and with us and accomplishing what He can only do by His means in our work.

So how does this happen? Well, there have been whole books written about this and I don't have a whole book length of time this morning. So let me just give you two suggestions. First of all, ask the Holy Spirit to work through your church.

It's as simple as that. Pray simple prayers in deacons meetings, in Sunday school classes, in leadership group meetings, in staff meetings.

Pray when your church comes together in a worship service like this and ask very simply a prayer like this. Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit to work through our church.

[10 : 27] Do through us by the Holy Spirit what only He can do. Accomplish through us what only He can accomplish and move in us in ways that we cannot explain, can't take credit for, and cannot produce by the work of our two hands.

Move through us, we ask, Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for it. Ask for it. And expect it and depend on it. And then second, attempt things that can only be accomplished if God works by His Holy Spirit through you.

Now I'm going to talk about that a little more as we go on through the sermon, but churches that are only doing what they know they can accomplish in their own strength will never experience God at work through them.

It's when you say, God, move through us, and then your leaders say, let's rise up and do this. Let's rise up and attempt this. Let's rise up and ask for this.

And all of you say, well, that seems impossible. That, my friends, is the moment when God is going to come to work in your church. So two things I challenge you to do this morning about the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 31] One, ask for the Holy Spirit to be at work in your church repeatedly and frequently and with humility, especially among your leaders asking for that to occur. And then second, attempt things that can only be accomplished if the Holy Spirit is at work through you in those moments to get them done.

Impactful churches are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Second, impactful churches share the gospel with lost people. Now, notice what happened in this text.

These preachers arrived in Antioch where there were no Christians and started sharing the gospel. And it says they proclaimed the good news about the Lord Jesus. In verse 21, the Lord's hand was with them and large numbers believed and turned to the Lord.

Then Barnabas shows up, verse 24, continues this ministry of sharing the gospel with unbelievers. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord. And then verse 26, as people were coming to faith in Jesus, they established the teaching ministry.

And notice what it said. They met with the church and taught large numbers. And then we see in the chapter 13 that they sent out these first two missionaries to go around the Mediterranean world, planting churches, sharing the gospel in new cities that had not yet heard it before.

[12 : 44] They were sharing the gospel with unbelievers. First, when the preachers came to their city, then when their pastor led them into their city, then as they reached more people, they continued to share the gospel and reach more and more people in their city.

And then they sent out people to go to other places and share the gospel with unbelievers.

Impactful churches share the gospel with unbelievers.

Now listen to this. It's going to be hard to hear. Impactful churches do more than talk about sharing the gospel with other people, with unbelievers. They actually go out and do it.

Do you know there's a difference? I don't hardly know of a Baptist church that doesn't talk about the importance of getting the gospel into their community. But unfortunately, there are a number of them who think talking about getting it done is the same thing as getting it done.

They're not the same thing. Impactful churches actually share the gospel in their communities. And I'll give you, again, two ways that I'd like to challenge you to do that.

[13:50] First of all, I want to challenge you to design ministries that reach into your community with the gospel. You're thinking about Mother's Day Out. That was put on the screen this morning. You're investigating, is this a possibility?

And is God leading you to do this? You're doing that not because you want to do something that's comfortable for more church members, but you'd prefer it to be something that serves your community and gives you the opportunity to build relationships, make connections, and get the gospel into families who've not yet experienced it.

So I encourage you, whether you do this or not, that's not the point. I encourage you strongly as a church to be constantly thinking of, what can we do that extends our ministry to people who've not yet heard the gospel for the specific purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

But I want to also challenge you to go beyond that. And that is I want to challenge you, both as a church and as individuals, to find more aggressive ways to go into your community with the gospel. If a church had not done that, I would not likely be standing here this morning. I was born in Georgia.

[15:02] My mother, on my third birthday, took me and abandoned my biological father, who was a violent alcoholic, beat her regularly. And we fled for her life and mine across four states and hid out in Texas for two years.

My mother ultimately got divorced from that man, remarried a happy drunk, and I grew up in alcoholic chaos. Never went to a church as a family, not ever one time.

Have no recollection of anything about God or the gospel ever being mentioned in our home in a positive way. But when I was 13, I went to the fair, walked off the midway into the exhibit building, and there was a church, Elmcrest Baptist Church Public Opinion Poll.

Well, I had actually been to that church's Sunday school a couple of times that previous summer, just as a, you know, just as going in with a friend, that kind of thing.

And I thought, what are they doing here? Walked over to the booth, and the youth pastor recognized me and said, hey, haven't you been to our Sunday school?

[16:14] Yes, I have been. I said, what are you doing at the fair? He said, well, we're sharing some information and doing a survey, and would you like to be a part? I said, well, I'm 13.

I'm pretty proud of my opinion on everything, so yeah, I'll give you a survey. I mean, that kind of, I didn't say it out loud, but you know I thought it. I took the survey, which led into some questions like, do you know for certain that you have eternal life and will go to heaven when you die?

And I said, no, I don't. They said, well, would you like to take a few minutes and find out how? And I said, yes, I would. Brothers and sisters, standing there at that fair booth, this gentleman shared the gospel with me, and I prayed and committed my life to Jesus Christ.

I am a Christian today because the church went to the fair with the gospel, intentionally and directly, to connect with people and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I came to faith in Christ that day, and I'd love to tell you my whole story, but that day, that man who led me to faith in Christ helped me to become a part of that church.

[17:25] The church mentored me and guided me for the next 10 years. I went from convert to associate pastor from age 13 to age 23. They launched me into ministry, and that man who led me to faith in Jesus 25 years later led my mother to faith in Christ 25 years after he led me to the Lord.

And then, just two years ago, when I was elected president of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, that man who led me to faith in Jesus came to Nashville and led the dedicatory prayer of my inauguration as the president in my current role.

I'm talking about a church that is committed to getting the gospel into community and not for a minute, but for a lifetime, this church has been doing that, and this leader that I'm describing to you has been doing that with his people.

Brothers and sisters, impactful churches don't talk about, we ought to be sharing the gospel with somebody. Somebody ought to be sharing the gospel with somebody. Somebody ought to be taking the gospel to unbelievers. Impactful churches say, we're going to do it.

We're going to structure our ministries to do it, and we're going to individually go out and do it. We're going to find ways to connect with unbelievers and get the gospel to them. That's what impactful churches do.

[18 : 40] Well, number three, churches that make an impact teach people how to live for Jesus. Look what happened in this text.

It's quite the story. The gospel arrived in Antioch. People started coming to faith in large numbers. Barnabas arrives in Antioch, starts giving some direction to the church and realizes we have a serious, serious issue.

We have large numbers of new believers who don't know anything about what it means to be a Christian. Now, this is almost impossible for you to get your mind around, but I want you to try right now with me just for a minute.

Imagine going to a town where there were no Christians, where no one had ever seen a Bible. No one had ever been to Bible school.

No one had ever been to youth camp. No one had ever heard a Christian radio station. No one knew anything. You tracking with me now? It's hard to get your mind around that, but get it around it.

[19 : 43] It's hard. That's what happened in Antioch. They knew nothing. And Antioch was not some insignificant little town. Historians and archaeologists believe there were about 800,000 people living in the Antioch region when this happened.

Lots of people come into Christ in the context of a very large and secular community. And Barnabas says, we have to teach them what it means to follow Jesus.

And then he does one of the most unusual things. He leaves town. That's what it says. Verse 25. Then he went to Tarsus. Now I did the map work for you.

Tarsus is 90 miles away. It's a one-way walk. No cell phone. He let out thinking, last I heard, this guy named Saul, we know him as Paul, is in Tarsus.

I'd like to have been in that meeting when that happened. Barnabas goes to Tarsus, gets Saul, brings him back. He's not yet Paul, by the way. He's not been launched into public ministry.

[20 : 55] You know his backstory. Barnabas. Well, everyone, been up to Tarsus, been gone a couple of weeks back now.

This is my friend Saul. Some people call him Paul. He's going to be your teaching pastor. He's going to help me. Now don't get nervous.

I know what you've heard. Yes, he was killing Christians just a few years ago, but he's changed. I promise you, he's changed. Okay? Can you imagine what that meeting must have been like? But look what it says.

When he found him, he brought him to Antioch, and for a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. They taught the church.

And notice that in the next verse it says they were disciples that were then called Christians. And down verse 29, they were called disciples. disciples. We call it discipleship in our world today.

[21 : 56] It's a teaching people how to follow Jesus. Now I was in this, as I said, I studied this text so long and planted a church based on it and wrote a book about it.

But after studying this text for about 10 years, I was sitting in my office one day at the seminary, and I was reading it again and thinking about it again. And I read this phrase, and taught large numbers. And for the first time I asked the question, taught what? Taught what? Now this became very important to me because at this point in my life I was a seminary president and curriculum design and all the things that go along with that had become very important to me and I saw the genius of the faculty and how they put together not just a class but how they put together a curriculum and how it was based on learning outcomes and teaching objectives and all of this flowed together to produce the outcomes we wanted in the lives of students.

Taught what? And now I knew for the first time how to figure that out. You see, in this text these are brand new Christians who have no reference to God or the gospel.

people, they become Christians and now they're being taught and the amazing thing is what happens next? You see, these next two stories are a result of what they were taught and reveal to us what must have been in the curriculum.

[23 : 33] So it says in the next story that they gathered for worship. Why did they do that? Because they were taught. You say, well, everybody knows you come to church if you're a Christian. No, you don't. If you've never been a Christian, you've never gone to church, you've never even seen one, you don't know that.

But once they came to Christ, they were taught you've got to come for church. So they did. And it says that they listened to a preacher. And then it says they responded to the preacher and obeyed God based on what they believed the preacher was saying to them.

That's what the next verses say. And then it says this is one of my favorite parts. It says they gave an offering. It says in verse 29 each according to his ability. You say, well, of course that's how Christians do it.

Now, you don't know this, Jeff? This is how Christians give. We give proportionately. We believe in something called the tithe. And so we give a percentage of what we have.

That way the poor give a little and the rich give a lot. But we give a percentage and we all know that, right? Shake your head. You know that, right? They didn't know that back then. Somebody had to what?

[24 : 31] Teach them. But they're doing it because somebody taught them how to do it. And then that could go on. If you get over to chapter 13, this is amazing. What were they doing over there? It says in chapter 13, once again, they gathered for worship and then it says they were worshiping the Lord and fasting.

Now, it's not a trick question. You ought to be getting it by now. How did they know how to fast? They were taught and they were worshiping the Lord and fasting and then they prayed and then it says they laid hands on them.

Where did that come from? How did they know to do that? They were. You get the idea. I want you to see the progression here. The Holy Spirit is at work and He produces a church that goes out and tells unbelievers about Jesus.

And then what do you do with those people when they come to faith in Jesus? You teach them how to live for Jesus Christ. You teach them it's important to come to church. It's important to listen to preaching.

It's important to obey God when He speaks to you. It's important to give away some of your money every week. It's important to fast and to pray and occasionally lay hands on people and send them out to do ministry.

[25 : 37] That's what we do. Now I'm not saying that's all they taught but I'm saying there's no reason any of these Christians should have known how to do any of that unless someone taught them how.

That's why what we're about to do in a few minutes is so important. Look Sunday school is not some routine that we do because we want to have something else to happen on Sunday morning at church.

Sunday school Bible study one-on-one discipleship meetings this is where we teach people how to live for Jesus Christ and it's so vitally important that we do that well because it's the next step if you will in being that impactful church I'm describing to you.

We in the power of the Holy Spirit share the gospel with unbelievers and then those who believe we teach them what it means to live for Jesus Christ and then there's one last thing and that's at the end of chapter 13 and that is impactful churches give themselves away.

Notice what happened in first of all the end of chapter 11 right after the telling us the church was founded among unbelievers and was growing through discipleship what did they do?

[26 : 53] they took up an offering and it's quite the offering it was sent back to Jerusalem to help them with famine relief you say well that's nice no no you're missing the point here remember what Jerusalem had done they had had the gospel for almost a decade by this time when it leaked out into the Gentile world in Antioch they sent down Barnabas not as an encourager but as an inquisitor an investigator to check out this movement there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the fact that these Gentiles were coming to faith in Jesus you can find Acts chapter 15 for example an entire chapter of the Bible devoted to solving this conflict so the church of Jerusalem that had the gospel that wasn't very pleased when it got to Antioch that had a lot of suspicion about what was happening down there who sent Barnabas to check it out then sent Agabus down to have a service and ask for an offering and the amazing thing is they gave it they gave it can you imagine a church in your city attacking you on social media putting out negative things about you in the public life picketing you or talking about you in ways that were harmful and destructive and then a fire happened at their building what would you say well good riddance no no if you're the

Antioch church you'd say let's get up an offering help them out while they're hurting they gave away their money and then they gave away their people that's chapter 13 they're worshiping the Lord and

fasting the Bible says and the Holy Spirit said sit out Barnabas and Saul send them out for the work I have for them to do and there's no time to tell you the whole story but you know some of it Barnabas and Paul then left Antioch and made three long trips around the Mediterranean world over the next several years preaching the gospel and starting churches in all kinds of cities all around that part of the world that gave their people away well I wish I could tell you all these stories but when I moved to Oregon in 1989 to plant a church I didn't have very much money I had one other family that was helping me plant the church and then two more that helped when we got there and we were just barely we were we were just we started with nearly nothing we we just had these three or four families and a big dream is really all we had but I had the Antioch model and so I said to my church this when we start this church from the very very beginning we're going to give ourselves away so we had the first meetings of our church in somebody's living room in July of 1989 1989 and we took up an offering in that month that we met together and in August of 1989 our church gave its first missions gifts through the cooperative program of the Southern Baptist Convention in August of 1989 now listen to me we didn't have our first public service until October of 1989 two months before we opened for public worship we were already giving to missions why because we wanted it in our DNA we're a giving church not a taking church we wanted it in our DNA that a great church gives itself away and we didn't give away a big a lot of money but we gave away a percentage of what we had and we started doing it in August two months before we opened and we kept it up every single month after that for these decades why because an impactful church is a giving church that gives its money away and beyond that an impactful church gives its people away we started the church in August of 1989 and I told the church we will not finish this first year without first our going on our first mission trip well that following summer we took our first mission trip a group of us went from our church in Portland Oregon to Lewiston Idaho to help plant the Tammany View Baptist Church where Tim Palmer was the pastor I would like to tell you it was the greatest mission trip in the history of American Christianity it probably wasn't it was a small group of us four or five adults and half a dozen teenagers and we went over to Lewiston and we we shared the gospel we did backyard Bible clubs we helped with some outreach events and we did our best to help this church get started over there in that community but more importantly we laid down the pattern we give ourselves away we give our money away and we give our people away we go somewhere and help other people that's what we do let me fast forward to that out of that church that I planted in Oregon two years ago simultaneously I became the president of the executive committee the Southern Baptist

Convention responsible for distribution of all mission offerings given by Southern Baptist accounting for them and sending them to the work that you sent them to accomplish and the pastor who followed me at the church who's now stepped aside toward retirement he was elected the chairman of the International Mission Board Board of Trustees a church in Portland Oregon 30 years after it was founded produced two leaders for Southern Baptist partly because from the very beginning and even before the beginning the church said we're going to give away our money and we're going to give away our people and for 30 years they've been giving away money and people in ways I can't even have time to describe to you and God has used that church in remarkable ways to make a difference all over the world so church family First Baptist Lewisburg church ministry is hard but it is not complicated it's real simple ask for the Holy

[33 : 05] Spirit to be at work in your church go out and share the gospel with unbelievers teach those who believe how to follow Jesus and give your money and your people away and watch God replenish your supply that's what it's like to be an impactful church in Antioch and my friends that's what it's like to be an impactful church in Lewisburg Tennessee do these things and watch God work through you well I'd like to lead us to pray this morning and in time of response your pastor will be here to receive you to help you and then to lead us into the Lord's Supper but as we respond this morning I want you to respond by if you're a member of this church maybe a simple prayer that says Lord make me more open to the work of the Holy Spirit Lord help me to share the gospel with an unbeliever Lord give me strength and support as we teach new people how to follow you and Lord give me a spirit of generosity so that we'll be at the forefront of giving away our people and our money and watching you replenish our supply Heavenly Father I thank you so much for working in our service this morning and I thank you for this church and the long impact it's made in this community and around the world and now Father I pray that what I've said today will be motivational and that this church will rise up in ways it has never experienced before and make an impact here in

this community and around the world Lord I pray that you speak to the church now and motivate them to be prayerful and respond to what you're saying to them about how this church can expand and grow and develop its ministries by following this simple pattern of Antioch and we receive it from you now and thank you for it in Jesus name Amen

Pastor