

The First Christians - Acts 11:19-30

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[0 : 00] If you are a guest with us today, we have been walking through the book of Acts. And we're looking at the work of spirit-empowered witnesses, and that task is unfinished.

We find ourselves today in Acts chapter 11. If you have a copy of God's word, you're welcome to turn there. Acts chapter 11, we'll be looking at verse 19 in a moment.

Before we do that, though, we need to be careful, I've said this before, but we need to be careful not to see every narrative as prescriptive, that is, every story to be prescribing, which we should be doing in the church today.

That said, narratives provide us facets for the church, where we can learn. In the book of Acts, making disciples, they were multiplying, they were sending missionaries, they were planting churches, and they did all of this apart from multimillion-dollar facilities in innovative technology. They had the word of God, they had the spirit of God, and the people of God, and that was sufficient for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the world.

[1 : 15] And so, I do, though, find five exhortations in our text today that we'll be looking at, but before we look at those, let's consider the word of God as we read together Acts chapter 11, 19 through verse 30.

Now, those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except for the Jews.

But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists, also preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord.

It was steadfast purpose. For he was a good man, full of the spirit and of faith, and the great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

[2 : 29] For a whole year, they met with the church and taught and a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Now, in those days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, a name was Agabus.

He stood and foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world, and this took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone, according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. The five exhortations that I want us to look at today, I want to begin with one.

Let us raise up ordinary people in the church who do extraordinary things for the glory of God. Josh, can I have your help real quick?

I'm sorry. It says in verse 19, and those who are scattered because of the persecution rose over Stephen.

[3 : 48] If you look back with me in Acts chapter 8, you find how this all came to be. In Acts chapter 7, 54 through 60, you have the stoning of Stephen.

But in Acts chapter 8, you see that Saul approved his execution, that is Stephen, and there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were scattered throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

And so you see this stoning of Stephen as the event that makes people flee for their lives and disperse throughout the region.

And so we see in verse 19 that this group is now found themselves at Antioch as part of those who were fleeing the persecution that happened in Jerusalem over the stoning of Stephen.

That is the event that caused people to go and they ended up, some of them, at Antioch. These were not the apostles.

[4 : 53] We don't read about Peter. We don't read James. We don't read John being sent off. No, we don't want to see Philip, the great evangelist. We see unnamed men and women, unnamed Jews, with no official directive or direction, no official training, no seminary training, no official church planting experience, no denomination behind them.

It was just persecuted believers, men and women, who were under duress, fleeing hardship, who started the greatest church, perhaps in history, of Christianity, the church at Antioch.

These were ordinary disciples who were making disciples. This is so contrary to our thinking. We think in ourselves, we think plant churches, and to grow or grow a church, we need a gifted communicator.

We need superb musicians and we need a smoking facility. And then we need to start programs at every age and every stage of life and then gather on Sunday and just watch the spirit work.

That's what you need. Not so with the church at Antioch. You just needed the people of God, the spirit of God, and the work of God.

[6 : 23] We don't need professionals, places and programs. We need people sharing the gospel, ordinary people, equipping and discipling other ordinary people.

God, forgive us if our evangelistic strategy is to invite people to sit, hear one person from the pulpit, hear a few more on the worship team.

If that's our evangelistic strategy, we have missed the point. Our evangelistic strategy is equipping ordinary people to be gospel witnesses to those around them.

That's all of us. Let us be careful not to exalt the unique giftings of some leaders and extreme gifts and talents while ignoring the massive army of everyday people who have the spirit of God witnessing and discipling others around them.

That said, it is why the 9 o'clock discipleship hour is to give us the tools that we may need to share Christ effectively and have sound doctrine about that which we share.

[7 : 45] If you have not yet come at 9 o'clock and found a class, a discipleship group to go in, you can either just talk to myself or Pastor Jay.

I recently got my haircut, thank you. You just don't look at this good rolling out of bed. A lot of work goes into this.

Thank you for seeing the humor in that. But I love, I join you in this evangelistic effort.

I ask for this person to cut my hair every time. I wait for her to become available. This last time sitting in her chair, I asked about her church experience.

And I learned something that I had not heard her say before. She said, my grandfather always hounds me to go back to church. I haven't been since I was a little girl.

[8 : 53] And she has two children now, a single mom of two boys. So I asked her that my wife and I would love to have her in our home and share a meal together and get to know her.

And she said, let me consider that. So the next time I go in and have my haircut, I'm going to advance that conversation. But this is how the church grows.

Just ordinary people proclaiming the gospel, developing relationships, having relationships to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I know this lady's eternity.

Unless someone shares the gospel with her. Why not be me? Why not it be you? Each of us in our circles of influence, in our marketplace, in our neighborhood, God has set you in that place to share the gospel.

You have coworkers because God has placed you there. You have a neighbor because God has placed you there. You know the bank teller, the barber, the nail salon person, the friend.

[10 : 01] God has given you those people to proclaim the gospel. And we're just a bunch of ordinary people.

We come to exhortation number two. And that is this, let us embrace suffering as a God ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

Let us embrace suffering as a God ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. If you read with me, verses 19 and 20.

And now they were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking to no one except for the Jews.

But there were some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists and preached to the Lord Jesus. The church at Antioch got its beginning through the means of persecution.

[10:59] One of the greatest churches of all time got its start because of persecution. Persecution began with the stoning of Stephen. The church would still be in Jerusalem at the end of chapter eight but we're not for Stephen being stoned.

Martyrdom in the church led to the multiplication in the church. It's difficult for us to embrace this, but this was God's design.

God doesn't just allow suffering. He ordained suffering among his people for his purposes. God doesn't just work.

The gospel doesn't just expand in spite of suffering, but because of suffering. And it is the pattern of the gospel that we see this. We see that we are saved from our sins through the suffering Savior. God sent his son to suffer and die for sin. He was killed, he was crucified, he was raised from the dead. And we are saved from our sin because he took our place on the cross as the suffering servant.

[12:04] And when we place our faith in Christ and the work on the cross, we are saved. And how does this good news of suffering servant spread? The good news of the suffering Savior spreads through the lives of suffering servants.

Listen to the apostle Paul in Philippians chapter four verse 29. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but suffer for his sake.

Come, can you imagine this evangelistic appeal? Come receive this wonderful gift of coming to Christ. It's called suffering.

We don't suffer this way, same way Christ did. We suffer, Christ suffered to accomplish salvation. We suffer to spread salvation. Christ suffered for the propitiation of sin.

Our suffering is for the propagation of the gospel. And Jesus sends out his disciples and this is what he told his disciples.

[13:13] Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. Being sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

This is not comforting good news if you're a disciple of Christ. All men will hate you because of me. He also said.

Do we get this? That the danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.

If we are serious about the spread of the gospel to the unreached, the most unreached, the darkest, most difficult places in this world, there will be suffering.

I don't want to build this church on programs that keep us comfortable. I want us to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

[14:12] It will be costly as we plant churches and send missionaries. As you witness here and spoke hand in your circles of influence in an effort to make disciples among all nations, it will be costly.

It will be costly for you. It will be costly for your spouse, your children. And many are dying and many more will die for the cause of Christ.

Perhaps some even in this room. May we not be surprised when this were to occur. But even this is God's design.

God has ordained suffering to show us that Jesus is better than health. Jesus is better than wealth. Jesus is better than comfort and possessions of this world.

Years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Jordan. I was there to meet up with some pastors and to find potentially a ministry partnership.

[15:17] And as I sat in this room, it was painfully obvious I don't belong in this room. I wasn't worthy to be sitting in the room with these men and women.

There were ministry leaders all around from the Middle East. There was Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan. There was a pastor from the Gaza Strip, Egypt, Libya, and the sorts. You get the idea. I couldn't get to them in some of their countries, but we could all manage to get to Jordan together.

And I found myself in this room and all of them had been beaten. Some of them had a death order out on their life. All of them had been disowned by their Muslim families.

All of them had been jailed at some point. Some of them had their spouses and children killed in front of them. And they were encouraging each other in the Word of God.

[16:20] They were praying together. One person, I'll never forget the image of this woman. She was probably 80 or 90 pounds.

She just looked like a skeleton with skin. And I later found out about her. She had so much joy. She would pray.

I could not understand her because of a language barrier, but she was a delightful person. I wish I got to know her more. And someone told me the story of her.

I said, tell me about her. And the story was this, that her family found out that she had come to Christ.

And in order to kill her, they slipped her some acid in her tea. So when she drank, it burned her esophagus in her stomach. And she could barely get nutrients from food anymore.

[17:15] So she was constantly losing weight. And I... And they were rejoicing that they had the privilege to suffer for Christ's sake.

And that's what these people were fleeing from here in this text. And they were proclaiming Christ as they went. And it was out of this persecution and the suffering that the church at Antioch was born.

Amazing. Thirdly, we get to our third point. And that is our third exhortation. Let us remind ourselves of the expanding nature of our mission being intentional to proclaim the gospel.

Let us remind ourselves of the expanding nature of our mission, being intentional to spread the gospel. You see that we're to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the world.

We see in verse 20, there were some who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, coming to the Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists. Also preaching Jesus Christ. That is, they weren't Hebrew-speaking or they were Hellenists.

[18:39] They were Greek, or maybe Arabic. They were... They were Hellenists. They were Greek-speaking people. They weren't from... They weren't like them.

They were Greek-speaking. Here in Antioch, these unnamed believers scattered by the stoning of Stephen.

Persecution rose. They proclaimed the gospel among the lost. These believers set their face toward the lost. That seems basic to us, but it is endangered from being forgotten.

Let me illustrate even in my own life. Having come to Christ at the age of 19, my circle of friends has become increasingly, increasingly, increasingly believers in Christ.

That's okay. I'm not diminishing that. That's one of the purposes of the churches, to have encouragement among one another. But my circle of influence among the lost has diminished.

[19:37] I have to work hard at reminding myself. One of my jobs as a believer in Christ is to be his witnesses. Is to be his witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world.

That my job isn't to have a holy huddle of only believers in Christ. And the longer we are believers in Christ, the easier that is to happen.

And we must remind ourselves of those without Christ to be witnesses. And we see they went and they didn't just holy huddle unto themselves as Hebrews.

They went also to the Hellenists, the Greek speaking. And we must remind ourselves of the expanding nature of our mission, being intentional to proclaim the gospel.

I want to challenge us all. There's nothing wrong also with inviting non-believers to church.

[20:38] But there's also a beauty in your circles of influence, sharing Christ, discipling them, and welcoming them into the church at that point as well.

We all have responsibility to those without Christ. Who is it that is in your circle of influence who doesn't know the Lord, where you are proclaiming the gospel, simply testifying where you are with a co-worker, a neighbor, a vendor, whoever it may be.

Fourthly, let us be committed to dynamic discipleship. Look with me in verse 22. The report came to the ears of the church of Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Their faith was growing. And their disciples were being added to their number. And there were some facets to this dynamic discipleship that we see in the text.

The first one, first component, would be accountability. They send Barnabas accountability. Previously, if you remember, Peter and John were sent to Samaria because the Council of Jerusalem didn't quite know had they received the Holy Spirit yet.

[22 : 02] Were they truly, genuinely saved? And so they sent Peter and John to the Samaria and indeed they had were saved. And now the Church of Jerusalem is sending Barnabas to Antioch.

This is basically an effort in quality control. Antioch was started by ordinary people living in an extraordinary manner. Without apostles, without anyone who had seen the risen Lord, do they have sound doctrine?

Who is leading them? Who is shepherding this group of people? Who is an elder? Is there an elder qualified person doing this? Are they keeping the ordinances? Are they baptizing people?

Have they truly received the Holy Spirit? I'm sure these would be questions of the people in Jerusalem and so to figure that out. Barnabas, go.

Why Barnabas? If you remember, he himself is from Cyprus. He is Greek speaking himself.

[23 : 01] You can see these individuals were from Cyprus in verse 20. So he shares a common location with, there's some affinity because he's from one of their places that they were persecuted from and went.

He has probably even had friends on Cyprus that are now living in Antioch. Second, why Barnabas? Because he's generous. This guy sold a piece of land on Cyprus.

Remember, he laid it at the apostles' feet in Acts chapter 4. He was a proven reconciler and encourager. Remember, Barnabas is the one who found Saul.

This is the guy that was a persecutor of the church. He heard his testimony and was convinced this man knows the Lord. He spent three years in Arabia. He brings him to the other apostles in Jerusalem and says, we need to accept this guy.

They do and then Saul begins to preach in Jerusalem. He gets in such hot water though to save his life, they send him off to Tarsus. Saul's been in Tarsus for eight years now.

[24 : 11] But Barnabas is this reconciler and encourager. So why send Barnabas? Because he's the guy that just does this. If there needs to be some reconciliation between this group in Antioch and the church of Jerusalem, Barnabas is your guy. That's just who he is.

He is a proven reconciler and encourager. And he speaks Greek and he can relate to the Gentiles there well and that he speaks Greek.

Barnabas is the perfect choice. Second, how is it that they're committed to dynamic discipleship?

You see encouragement in verse 23. And when he, that is Barnabas, saw the grace of God, he was glad.

And he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. If you remember Barnabas isn't his given name. It's his nickname and it just means son of encouragement.

[25 : 16] Barnabas wouldn't quench the fire of the Spirit of God, what he was doing in Antioch. He wouldn't take them, the songs that they sing in Jerusalem or wear the kind of clothes that good Jews do back in Jerusalem.

Or they wouldn't follow the same baptism policy that was written up by the church at Jerusalem.

Barnabas would, all he saw was the grace of God, the favor of the Lord was on these people.

And he was glad. But he exhorted them also to remain faithful to the Lord and to his steadfast purpose.

These people were turning from the world and applying a whole new ethic in their lives. They were sharing Christ with their neighbors. They were obeying all that they knew to be true and Barnabas rejoiced.

He was glad. He exhorted them. And then how is it that they received Barnabas?

[26 : 17] How is it that they received his exhortation? How did he get away with this? Well, verse 24 tells us, for he was a good man, Barnabas. He was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

That's who Barnabas was. This is an evidence of a man walking in the Spirit. Goodness. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, goodness.

This is a man, this is evidence of a man walking in the Spirit. He was good. And he encouraged other saints. And don't think this lightly.

Saints need it, need encouragement back then as much as they do today. We need to encourage one another. I was, in 2013, my wife contested I was in a low period of time in life.

And someone, I believe the Lord sent someone my direction to encourage me. And I had never felt that kind of encouragement before. And I'm grateful for those who come alongside each other to encourage.

[27 : 31] I pray that we all would do that well. And it's a part of this dynamic discipleship that was occurring in Antioch. And it's the result, what is the result of Barnabas's encouragement and this discipleship that is going?

And it says in the bottom of verse 24, and a great many people were added to the Lord. A great many people were added to the Lord. Thirdly, there's another component of dynamic discipleship. And that is biblical instruction. If we read verse 25, so Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch for a whole year they met with the church. And they taught many great things, great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Third component is biblical instruction.

Barnabas goes and finds his friend Saul. That guy who he had presented to the apostles at Jerusalem, the man who they had heard in Jerusalem teach powerfully, such so powerfully that he became a wanted man, and they had to send him off to Tarsus for his own sake.

[28 : 51] And Saul has been in Tarsus now for eight years approximately. And Barnabas considers the church at Antioch, and he says, this church needs an incredible teacher.

I can only go so far, but I know a guy who can take this church further. His name is Saul. Let me go fetch him.

And he does so. And I love Barnabas's honest evaluation of himself. He knows his own limits. The church at Antioch needed a dynamic teacher on God's grace and how Jesus is the fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. Let's not forget Saul is the Pharisee of Pharisee.

He spent three years with Jesus out in Arabia. This man understands the Lord.

[29 : 53] And Barnabas knew that is what the church needed. And I love Barnabas's humility. Think about the temptation. Antioch is the third largest church, or third largest city, rather, in the Roman Empire.

Apart from Rome and Alexandria and Egypt, then you get Antioch. It's the third largest city in the Roman Empire. This is the happen in place. It would be easy for a guy like Barnabas or anyone who's given to the flesh to say, you know what?

I get to pastor this church, third largest Roman Empire. I'm the man. Not Barnabas. I need to go get some help.

Let me go get Saul. He could have appointed himself as the pastor of the church, but the church needed Jesus.

And it's not about a personality. No church is about a personality. It's about the work of God and the using of many. The church needed someone's superior in teaching gifts, and the teaching is critical component of a disciple making ministry.

[31 : 06] Listening to music alone will not mature a believer, nor will attending church services while I do encourage you to attend. Christians need to learn how to apply the scriptures, and they need individuals to teach well God's word.

And this is what causes growth and maturity. It's one of the reasons we encourage again the nine o'clock discipleship hour. I am grateful for the many teachers here at 4th.

Those who teach adults, both men and women, those who teach our youth, and those who teach our children. I am grateful for those who handle the word of God well and carefully.

And what's the result of this combined ministry between Barnabas and Saul? And in Antioch, the disciple, bottom of 26, the disciples were first called Christian.

What was the result? That those in Antioch called these Christ followers little Christs. Notice, this wasn't a name they gave themselves.

[32 : 20] Today we say, well, I am a Christian. This wasn't a name they assigned themselves. This was a name that was assigned to them by those citizens in Antioch who said, those guys, they're like little Christs, they're Christians.

The result of this dynamic discipleship is they emulated the Lord Jesus Christ. Such that the world identified them as such.

They were the first ones to be so identified with Christ that they received this moniker.

They knew that Jesus was worth more than casual association with Christ. They knew that it was more than casual church attendance. They knew that Jesus was worthy of total abandonment of

their lives.

So let us in our efforts to evangelize, not minimize the claims of the gospel on our lives of both men and women, let us not call people to make a decision for Christ, but call people to come and die and die to themselves.

[33 : 32] Let us remind ourselves that to follow Jesus is costly. Let us remind ourselves that it is worth it. In Matthew we read this and speaking to his disciples, Jesus told his disciples, if anyone should come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life would lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. And what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his own soul?

Or what shall a man give and return for his soul? This is a man whose name is Jean Baptiste and his wife Olivia.

I had the opportunity when I was in Rwanda to meet him and his wife. And imagine this, he's a young man around 18 years old and the genocide in 94 breaks out.

And he has to flee so Rwanda is here just north of Burundi. And in order to flee he goes over into the Republic of Congo.

[34 : 41] He is newly married, he's 18 years old, he takes his wife and, or 800,000 people were killed in 90 days. And in order to not add another life to that he takes his wife and he flees.

He crosses the border into Congo and it's jungle out there, it's a forest jungle. And he lives out there, he has two children, the first one dies, the second one survives.

And he lives out there for years and those who are perpetrating the genocide were pushed out by the UN forces. And so all around the forest and the jungle where he is has an enemy all around him.

And he's praying to the Lord, Lord I want to serve you, I want to know you and help protect me and my wife and they're just eating what they can find out in the jungle. In fact, Jambotis would say, I'm so thankful for the jungle, for it provides bountifully.

Not necessarily what you want to eat, but what you can eat. That's what would be his testimony of this time. It takes him about four or five years and he finally makes it down to Zambia.

[35 : 51] He crosses the border and he walks down to Zambia north of the Zimbabwe border. And there he finds a seminary run by the Southern Baptists. And he asks, can I get a job? I'll do anything.

And he becomes their security and he becomes a custodian. And there he, for providing that labor, he is able to get formal theological education.

And so he learns, he gets a masters of divinity equivalent from a Southern Baptist seminary in the middle of Africa where he doesn't have paperwork. He can't prove he fled for his life.

He doesn't have any paperwork to prove that he's from Rwanda. He's a refugee. He's trying to get back to his own country. And about 10 years later, after the genocide, he finally finds a way to return to his own country.

And he is now planting churches near the Burundi border and training pastors and planting more churches and discipling others.

[37 : 03] And here is his question. Here is his question. He concludes his church service and he asks, hey, as you're dismissed, would you share with each other how your disciple is doing?

How they dismiss. Not how is your week? How are you doing? You're supposed to just say, it's incumbent if you're a part of that church to be discipling someone and that's because the question you're going to get asked.

Tell me about your disciple. Oh, how different that thinking is.

But perhaps it ought to be our shared thinking. Does this eliminate the spectator mentality?

Everyone here is a disciple of Christ and is a disciple maker.

There is no hiding from the mission of God upon any of us. Jesus has laid claim on our lives and he is worth living for and dying for. We are little Christs.

[38 : 08] In Antioch, the church members were first called Christians and they resembled Christ. Lastly, a fifth exhortation has let us possess a generosity toward the household of faith.

Because it says in verse 27, now in those days the prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, verse 28, and one of them named Agabus stood up who foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine all over the world.

And this took place in the days of Claudius. Claudius is the emperor of Rome at the time. And there's a guy who came from Jerusalem who said, who's a prophet who rightly declared, hey, there's going to be a global famine.

And if you learn history in AD 45, there was a great flood of the Nile River that wiped out a lot of the bread basket of the Roman Empire, wiped out the crops.

And so there was a huge shortage of grain. And so indeed there would be a famine. Now, I don't know about you, but this would have been my response. Somebody tells me there's going to be a world famine.

[39 : 22] This would have been my fleshly response. Here was what it would have been. Wendy, turn off all the lights. I'm turning off all the breakers in the house. If you want water to drink, just suck on your spit.

Because we're going to turn down our cost of living down to nothing. And we're going to eke by because there's a famine coming and we need to store up what we can and not spend any money. And in my flesh, I would have said, because we've got to survive this thing. And I would have hunkered down, and that's what would have been my fleshly response. And it's true again. For those who know Amigo, yeah, I can see it.

It's not too far off. But look at this church. Instead of a selfish response, verse 29, and so the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. There are thoughts about this famine. There wasn't a self-concern. The effect of this was that the people were more concerned.

[40 : 35] The effects of the famine are coming. Everyone knows it. And yet they're being generous toward others when even the bad news is coming and you know what's happening.

They are selfless. They are generous. These believers were more concerned with preparing aid for others than they were with hoarding their personal supplies and preparing for hardship that was to come.

They put others above themselves. What a great reminder that we do not, we must not only be generous when we are financially stable and secure, but we also must continue to be generous in times of difficulty that are ahead, even for ourselves.

This was a generous church. And we can find these five exhortations in this text. And then they send the text reads, Saul and Barnabas, to give the church and the elders in Jerusalem the money. And by the way, this is the first mention of elders in the book of Acts is found in verse 30. Church, let us raise up ordinary people in the church who do extraordinary things for the glory of God.

[41 : 59] Let us embrace suffering as God ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Let us remind ourselves of the expanding nature of our mission, being intentional to proclaim the gospel.

Let us be committed to dynamic discipleship, not just we as a church are discipling, but us as individuals assuming responsibility for others and discipling others.

And then let us possess a generosity toward the household of faith. Let's be that church. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the opportunity today to look at your word, to gaze at the beauty of who you are.

Lord, I'm challenged by this church at Antioch, who sought to know you and proclaim you everywhere they went. Thank you for their example today.

In Jesus, we want to know you more. And it's in your name, Jesus. We pray these things. Amen.