

# Taking Ground for the Kingdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] Faith has had a witness in our community for over 40 years, and the question we may be asking ourselves is, is Lake Charles better off because of our witness and our positive impact?

Are we taking ground for the kingdom of God? Now, when a church takes ground for the kingdom of God, it means that Jesus is going to be evident in the lives, the homes, the businesses, the work, the atmosphere of our community and the area in which we are serving.

They are going to be better off because we are light. We are salt. We are a preservative. And as well, we are a flavoring.

We can help people understand how they could desire Jesus and that it is good for what Jesus is going to be providing in their life and that we can show them the truth of why all of that is true.

Now, when we talk about taking ground for the kingdom of God, we're not talking about taking land or taking money. We mean that we're winning people to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 32 ] That's what we mean by taking ground for the kingdom. Satan is doing everything he can every day to take ground back from God.

And it is up to us as we are obeying God to be living for, sharing the gospel, and living out our lives so that we are building for the kingdom.

Our text this morning is in Acts chapter number 11, and we are looking at verses 19 through verse number 26. And this section shows how the early Christians, despite facing tough times, spread the message of Jesus far and wide.

Now, let's set the scene. The early church was under pressure. The early followers of Jesus Christ were persecuted, which in and of itself sounds scary.

But instead of being silenced, that pressure, that persecution caused the gospel to be spread far and wide.

[ 2 : 48 ] They took the gospel of Jesus Christ to new places. They took the gospel of Jesus Christ to foreign places, and they didn't just stay comfortable with their own kind.

And these Jewish believers began taking the gospel as they scattered about across the known world of their day, began sharing the gospel with Gentiles as well, crossing cultural boundaries.

And guess what? People started coming to Jesus Christ in big, big numbers. As we go through the book of Acts, you know, it's been called by different names, the Acts of the Apostles.

Some have said it really should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. But we also see the Acts of the followers of Jesus Christ as they went out intentionally, and they brought Jesus with them as they did.

So we ask ourselves the question, why does all of this matter to us? Why would reading and studying the book of Acts be so important?

[ 4 : 02 ] And what does it mean to us? Well, it's kind of like looking at a family album and seeing what your great, great, great grandparents did and how it should inspire us, especially if they live lives that made a difference.

And the early church's mission is our mission as well. They took ground for the kingdom, and now it's our turn to do the same. So we're part of this amazing story.

And this morning, we're going to explore how the early church, under pressure, went out and scattered the seeds of the gospel everywhere they went.

How we can keep this story going is one of the things that we're going to look at, and how we can make a difference just like they did. So let's get ready to learn from the example of the early church as they were under pressure, as they scattered, as they went about into the known world.

Let's look at Acts 11, beginning with verse number 19. Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose, this is going all the way back to previous chapters, that arose over Stephen,

over the death of Stephen, over Stephen's message, they were beginning to be persecuted, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but Jews only. [ 5 : 33 ] Verse number 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.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church of Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

When he came and he had seen the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all with purpose of heart that they should continue with the Lord.

For, or because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great many people, were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus.

We know who's from Tarsus. He went in search of Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year, they assembled with a church and taught a great many people.

[ 6 : 35 ] And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Father, this morning, I ask that your Holy Spirit would speak to us, speak through me, the message from your Word today, what we can glean, what we can learn, and what we can apply to our very own lives today, and how you use the example of these early believers, this early church, and this church planted in Antioch.

And Lord, how we too can begin and can continue taking ground for your kingdom. We thank you, Father. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

What we see in the beginning, verses 19 through 21, we see that the church in action is sharing the gospel.

They were scattered after the persecution, and they were preaching the Word as they went. The scattering of the believers turned a challenge into opportunities.

Now, back in the early church days, following Jesus wasn't a walk in the park. It was not popular. It was not something that you would put on your resume if you wanted to get a job.

[ 7 : 55 ] It was rather difficult. It was difficult to get a job. It was difficult to keep a job if you talked about Jesus while you were doing so. And so they faced persecution.

Now, persecution is really just a fancy word to mean that the believers, these early Christians, were treated badly because of Jesus, because they were vocal for their faith.

And this persecution was intense, so intense that they became refugees. They scattered. They went to Cyprus. They went to Syria, all the way to Antioch of Syria.

But here's the twist. The scattering wasn't a defeat. What was meant to silence, what was meant to stamp out the fire, literally fanned the flames of the gospel, and it spread even further.

Wherever these believers went, they brought with them the account of Jesus, who Jesus was, what He had done in their lives, that He rose again the third day.

[ 9 : 10 ] And what was meant to stamp out the flame actually spread the fire further, and it blew up, if you will. And people came to know Jesus in huge numbers.

Now, where did they end up going? It says in verse 19, they traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

So those that had gone that far, they were restricting the message. They were rubbing shoulders, if you will, with other Jews who were in those provinces.

But there were others, he says in verse 20, but some of them, some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch, now this was Antioch of Syria, there were about, I think, 13 different Antiochs in the ancient world of that day.

There was Antioch of Pisidia, among others, but this was Antioch of Syria. Antioch of Syria had a population of over half a million people.

[ 10 : 21 ] It's a very, very large city, a metropolitan city. Antioch of Syria was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was a very, very impressive city.

It was said that the main street of Antioch of Syria was over four miles long. Can you imagine? Because many of those cities during those days were fairly compact.

They went up instead of out, but an over four mile long main street. And it was said that Antioch of Syria was the only city in the ancient world that had its streets lit at night.

I mean, they were, they had a ride. They were modern. So here you are in Antioch, and you are the only place in the known world that has become so modernized that you can walk anywhere you

want down Main Street, and it was lit.

It was also a fairly wicked city, and probably what we could compare Antioch of Syria to today would be like our modern day New York City.

[ 11 : 36 ] So that would be like, here we are, and we are persecuted, and we scatter about, and we end up in New York City.

And here we are, followers of Jesus, in this very wicked, this very, this culture that was known for people from all over the known world that were there.

And not only was an effective church planted there in Antioch, that church planted in Antioch became the very church that sent out the Apostle Paul to reach the Gentile world for Jesus Christ. So these believers who scattered started sharing Jesus out in the marketplace, wherever they went, possibly their neighbors, they were talking about who Jesus was.

Now this word for preached in verse 20 is not the, or in verse 19, is not the word that we typically would think of of a formal sermon.

[ 12 : 52 ] They weren't preaching three points and a poem. it's laleo, the Greek word for, the simple, common Greek word for speak. So they were talking about Jesus everywhere they went.

It was like someone who's obsessed with something. It could be a sport, it could be, it could be stamps, it could be technology, it could be anything.

But when a person is obsessed with something, whether good or bad, they talk about it. A lot. I mean, I saw, we had an LSU shirt on the platform today.

And people talk about what they're excited about. Well, a follower of Jesus in this time went about and they talked about who they were excited about.

They talked about Jesus. Others go as far as Antioch Antioch and they begin to evangelize Gentiles.

[ 13 : 55 ] Notice, if you will, in verse 20, in contrast to verse 19, some spoke only to Jews and so those who went as far as Antioch were speaking to Hellenists.

Now, we've seen those two words before back in Acts chapter number 6, but in Acts chapter number 6, Luke was talking about Jews or Hebrew Jews and Hellenist Jews.

Here, the word Hellenist when it's used doesn't always refer to Jews. The word itself was simply Greek or Greeks were referred to as Hellenists.

So, here, what I believe Luke is doing is Luke is contrasting Jews and Gentiles because he's not putting a modifier to Jews, just Jews and then Greek speakers or Greeks.

and so he is saying some spoke, some limited their message to Jews, but others, they even began talking about Jesus to the Gentiles.

[ 15 : 17 ] They were intentionally sharing Jesus where they went. Kenneth Gangle notes that this aggressive evangelism by anonymous preachers throws our heavily programmed modern church into stark and feeble contrast.

Never mind that God led them to one of the most wicked cities of the Roman world, they had a message to deliver, the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He goes on to say, notice, they didn't preach a coming Messiah that appropriately related to Jewish groups. So what they did was they changed the portion of the message that they spoke.

They weren't talking about Messiah because these people in Antioch didn't know anything about Messiahs, but they were talking to them about a man who spoke truth, who was killed, and who rose again the third day, and they saw with their very own eyes.

So they were speaking in such a way that would relate with these Gentiles. And so in verse 21, what we began to see, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

[ 16 : 44 ] God blessed these sincere Christians who were willing to share the gospel so that a great number of people came to Christ. bunches and bunches and bunches of people.

This new church plant in Antioch exploded with growth as they aggressively took the gospel to these Gentiles, and they did all of this in face of opposition.

Excuse me. Now, obviously, we don't face the same kind of opposition that these people did. They weren't put in jail for their, we aren't put in jail for our faith.

At least, not yet. They weren't losing, we aren't losing our jobs. Some might, but we, by and large, are not losing our jobs because of our faith, because we talk about Jesus.

So we're not challenged in the same way. We don't face the same kind of opposition, but I think the opposition that we face today is that of apathy.

[ 17 : 51 ] apathy. It's that of apathy. Not our apathy, but the apathy of our community. You see, just a few decades ago, people went to church because it was what was expected of them.

People went to church, for the most part, because it was culturally expedient. You went to church so your neighbors didn't think bad of you.

You know, you didn't want to be caught cutting your grass at 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock on Sunday morning because your neighbors are going to say, look at those lousy people. Look at those bad people.

They ought to be in church. Now, the people who were saying that may not have even been saved. They just knew that good people go to church. Well, the thing is, in just a few decades, what has happened is, by and large, people in our community today have full lives.

For the most part, they have good jobs. And they don't even think about Jesus. Hey, life's good. Hey, let's go to the lake today.

[ 19 : 06 ] Let's go do this. Let's go spend some family time together. We have some spending money, so let's go ahead and do it. And so, for the most part, people don't even think about Jesus.

They don't actively oppose us when we talk to someone. They're going, like the guy that told me the other day, you know what, I'm just not into that. I'm just not into that. He wasn't opposed to it. I'm just not into it. But human nature hasn't changed. That's the one thing that never changes.

People still suffer from loneliness.

People still suffer from broken homes, from addictions, and a desire for their lives to count. And so, that's where we can meet them where they are.

How can we face these challenges of apathy, and I don't need church, and I'm good right where I am? I think we can face that with what I call gospel intentionality.

[ 20 : 11 ] Gospel intentionality. This means we can ask ourselves the question, how can I show the love and the gospel of Jesus right where we are?

So, how can we share the love of Jesus and the truth of Jesus right here?

How can we show people how they might desire Jesus, why it would be good for them to desire Jesus, and then we can show them why it's all true?

So, meet them where they are, meet them where they're hurting, and then help them to see, you know, desiring Jesus is a good thing. That's what God created us for, and it's good, and it's true.

So, our challenge is, how can we actively be sharing the gospel everywhere we go? That doesn't mean we're going to go door to door, and knock on doors, and say, hey, hello, I'm so-and-so from Faith Bible Church, and I want to talk to you about Jesus.

[ 21 : 26 ] You might do that, and you might win people to Jesus. I'm not saying it's a wrong thing to do. But how can we take our everyday life?

How can we take Jesus with us everywhere we go, and be prepared to take a conversation, and simply turn it over to things about Jesus?

Just this week, I was in the gym, and I had finished my workout, and I had gone back into the locker room, and I was getting ready to take my jacket out of the locker, and I noticed there was a gentleman that was sitting in the corner, and it looked like he was getting ready to begin his workout.

It looked like he was about my age, and we always say hi, because when I go first early in the morning, you always see the same people.

I've got two or three that I know. One of them works at FedEx. He works there. He works nights, so he comes in first thing in the morning around 7 o'clock, and we're working out together.

[ 22 : 44 ] We usually follow pretty much the same circuit. There's another guy. He's pretty interesting. He's an older gentleman, little squat, and he wears headphones all the time, and you can hear him singing across the gym.

We got to the point now where when we cross each other, we fist bump. This guy, I said, hello, how are you doing? Getting ready to work out.

We had our typical gym conversation in passing. Something inside of me said, you need to strike up a conversation with him.

So I did. We got to talking, and come to find out, his wife passed away a little bit less than two years ago, and he ended up, he worked at one of the plants, and he retired.

The reason being, he figured that his life, he just didn't know how he would go on. We talked about that for a while, gave him some things to do to help with his grief.

[ 23 : 59 ] We talked about his children, we talked about all of these things, and then the conversation turned over to, well, I know someone who can help with that grief.

We started talking about Jesus. I spent 45 minutes with him there in the locker room, and you know the funny thing is, not a single person came into the locker room the entire time we were talking. I think I was a God thing. I don't know where he is, he wasn't opposed to the gospel, completely shared the gospel with him, and left him with that, and hopefully I'll get to see him again. But the thing is, there's always opportunities that you and I have that we could simply turn into, well, let's talk about Jesus.

And it's not unnatural, it's just a very, very natural segue into talking about who Jesus is, what he can do for them, and how it will make a difference in their life.

[ 25 : 11 ] So we can use up every opportunity. Just like in Colossians chapter 4, I think it's, I forget which verse it is, where Paul says that we need to redeem the time or buy up every opportunity that we have to give people an answer about the hope that is within us.

It's like we're scattering seeds of love, we're scattering seeds of hope everywhere that we go. So the church that was active and growing was sharing the gospel.

And we continue on the end of verse number 3, 21, a great number believed and turned to the Lord because the hand of the Lord was with them.

The power of the Lord, God's hand of blessing was upon the early church. church. When we read the gospel of Acts, it's like reading a script of a blockbuster movie.

People were coming to Christ in droves and it wasn't just because the followers of Jesus were super persuasive or they had a great marketing strategy.

[ 26 : 28 ] The first thing we see is they were aggressively sharing the gospel with as many people as possible. people. The church that doesn't intentionally share Jesus in their world becomes like a boat rowing around in circles.

It may seem like they're making progress but they're simply expending energy without reaching a destination, going through the programs, going through the motions, keeping the lights on, and we're getting preached to and we're doing all of this but it's like it could be like a boat rowing around in circles.

There's not a destination, there's not a plan to be taking on ground for the kingdom. We have to do the necessary work that Jesus commanded us to do.

Matthew, end of Matthew, the Great Commission, Acts 1, verse 8, He gave them a mission. He gave us a mission.

So we have to do the necessary work that God commanded us to do but there's more. Second, the church grew because of something bigger, divine intervention.

[ 27 : 52 ] It grew because they did the work but God did what the church couldn't do and that is the Holy Spirit working in the hearts, working in the minds of those who heard.

See, God was at work in a mighty way. His power was like the wind in their sails. So they put the sails up, they did the work, but the wind of the Holy Spirit as He was working in the hearts and the minds of those people that they were speaking to was propelling the church forward.

And every new believer was a sign that God's hand was with them. He wasn't just watching from the sidelines. He was actively involved working through ordinary people to do some pretty extraordinary things.

You know, we talked, Larry mentioned Moses, Old Testament. Moses started off, had a whole lot going for him, but it took 40 years in the wilderness, it took 40 years for God to deconstruct Moses in order so that God could use him.

He stripped away all that arrogance. He stripped away the pride of his personal history as being part of Pharaoh's family so that God could really use him, Moses being used by God to deliver his people.

[ 29 : 15 ] So this divine power was the secret sauce to the early church explosive growth. They did the work. They aggressively, intentionally shared the gospel everywhere they went.

But God's divine power took it even further, and the wind of the Holy Spirit is what propelled the church forward. Now, let's hit the pause button for just a moment and think about this in our own lives.

See, we often try to do things in our own strength, do we not? We try to fix things, we try to make things work, whether it's trying to solve a problem, make a tough decision, or even grow a church or a faith community.

But here's the game changer. Trusting in God's power to accomplish it, not just our own efforts. It's like switching from rowing a boat as hard as we can to putting up a sail and letting God's Holy Spirit prepare us forward.

When we lean on His power, we find that we can do so much more when His Holy Spirit is empowering us. And just like sailing, sailing takes work.

[ 30 : 31 ] I've heard some who sail as a hobby, and you've got to know a lot, but you've got to do a lot. You have to constantly be changing the sail.

sail. But they're not going to go anywhere until the wind begins to blow. And as the wind is blowing, depending upon where they need to be, they need to be adjusting that sail.

While the wind is still blowing, but they need to do the changes that are necessary to get them to the destination where they need. The early church didn't stop proclaiming Jesus. But the church grew because of what the Holy Spirit was accomplishing in their midst.

It's not about how strong, it's not about how capable we are, it's not about how smart we are, and it's not about if you've memorized the Romans Road or not. It's about just simply us being obedient, every opportunity, whether it's handing out a true life card at the grocery store, or talking to someone at the gym, or talking to a neighbor, or talking to someone at work, and it may only be a minute or two, but every seed we plant is something God's Holy Spirit can use.

So don't stop talking about Jesus. Continue, keep on talking about Jesus. So that's a reason to be encouraged, and that's what we're facing today.

[ 32 : 05 ] And then verses 22 and 23, very, very, very quickly, then the news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. They sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch, and when he came, he had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

What we see in Antioch, Barnabas is a model of encouragement and a model of faith. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he didn't come to put on the brakes.

Instead, he came like a breath of fresh air, and he was living up to his name, which literally means son of encouragement. He saw the grace of God at work in Antioch, and he was glad because of what God was doing.

He didn't doubt the church and what they were doing. He encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with purpose. they should continue with the Lord, verse 23.

He encouraged them to remain true to the Lord, and then he cheered them on. Then we get to verse 24 to 26. The early church was extending the kingdom's reach in what they did.

[ 33 : 23 ] And these verses, verses 24 through 26, we come across a dynamic duo. We've seen some dynamic duos in the movies and in the comic strips, but here we truly have a dynamic duo, Barnabas and Saul, whose name would later become Paul.

Barnabas and Saul did so much. They parted company for a while, then came back together. But what we see here is a collaborative ministry working together for the gospel.

Barnabas, verse 25, departed for Tarsus to look for Saul. When he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.

See, when they teamed up, it wasn't just a random partnership. It was like a divine setup for something epic. They both brought something different to the table. Barnabas was that people person, that encourager.

Saul was the one who was on a mission. Saul was the one who, that type A personality, and he wanted to see results. And he wanted to go everywhere the gospel had not been shared before.

[ 34 : 40 ] And Barnabas is there and he's saying, but let's encourage people at the same time. So these two men, it was a, what we could call a symbiotic relationship.

They accomplished more together than either one could have accomplished alone. So they partnered together in the ministry. They had different backgrounds, they had different skills, they had different personalities, but they had one common goal, and that was spreading the gospel of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And I believe this dynamic duo shows us the power of working together in ministry, our partnership in ministry. It's like playing on a sports team where everyone has a position to play.

If it's football, not everyone's a quarterback, not everyone is a tight end, not everyone is a receiver. You know, you need the big guys, they're on the line as well. You need the little guys that can run. So we all have a part to play, a position to play, unique skills, unique gifts, unique talents, but everyone is playing on the same team for one thing, for the win.

[ 35 : 50 ] And everything they do is for that one goal. So when we collaborate with others in the church, when we collaborate with others in our community, we can accomplish so much more than just by going solo.

It's about combining our strengths. It's about learning from one another, all the while keeping our focus on the bigger picture, the mission of sharing Jesus with the world.

So they had a mission, sharing the gospel. But that's not the only thing that they did. Notice back in verse 26, And so it was, for a whole year, they assembled with the church and taught a great many people, and it goes on being first place they were called Christians.

So let's zoom in on an important part, I believe, of Saul and Barnabas' mission. He was making disciples. They took out a whole year just to teach, to train, to mentor, to disciple these people.

It wasn't enough just that they got saved. They had to grow in Christ so the church in Antioch could flourish, become healthy, and grow so that they can begin to become disciple makers themselves.

[ 37 : 23 ] You see, it wasn't just telling people about Jesus. It was about helping them grow in their faith. So they spent time teaching. They spent time mentoring and building up new believers.

The important thing about church planting, the important thing about rejuvenating a church, in order for it to grow strong, in order for it to grow healthy, we need to be discipling others.

Now, discipleship is walking alongside others and helping them in their walk with Jesus. It's about walking alongside others, helping them to understand God's Word, the truth of God's Word, helping them to know how to pray, helping them to live out their everyday life in faith and accomplish much for God.

Discipleship is not simply pouring information into someone's head and expecting information to transform them into fully functioning disciples of Jesus Christ.

A disciple was never made on knowledge. We have a couple of teenagers that are in driver's ed. They have just finished their classroom work.

[ 38 : 50 ] Now, could they be considered drivers? Probably not. It's like every, it could be music, it could be playing a sport, it could be just about any other walk of life.

I don't care how much information you pour into someone's head, it will not make them proficient at playing the piano or the violin. Learn all the music theory you want, it does not make you a musician.

Learn how to drive, learn all the laws of the state, learn how to do all of the book work. But God forbid, don't put them out on the road by themselves, right?

Why? Because you've got to learn by doing, you've got to learn by experience. And there's going to be an adult in the, a licensed adult in the car with you, right?

Of course, yeah, don't shrug your shoulders, I know there will. Why? Because they want to see you do it. And if you make a mistake, what are they going to do?

[ 39 : 57 ] They're going to teach you what? How to do it right. Don't do that again. Don't make that mistake again. And if you make that mistake again, guess what? You fail and you've got to go back through it, right?

Well, hopefully they'll give you a few more chances than that. The point being is, you don't make a driver by giving them the information to pass a driver's test. You don't make a musician by teaching them music theory.

You make them practice hour upon hour upon hour on that piano or that guitar or that violin. And it's the same with disciples of Jesus Christ.

I heard it put just this week in a message that we as Americans don't fully comprehend the concept of biblical discipleship.

We tend to, or at least we have tended to think about discipleship as you teach someone, you put them in a classroom.

[ 40 : 58 ] Matter of fact, for many, many years people would go on Sunday evenings to discipleship training and thinking that pouring knowledge in their head would automatically turn them into a

disciple.

Or just getting preached to. Oh, preach to people and they learn the need of God's Word and they're going to be a disciple. We need to know knowledge.

But he brought out that the concept, the biblical concept of discipleship could probably be better translated translated into English as apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship. An apprentice goes to work with someone who knows what they're doing, who has the skills, and who is a master of something. And they learn the knowledge, but they also use their hands and they're put to work.

They become an apprentice. And they have to be an apprentice alongside this person who is teaching them, who is training them, until one day they can do it on their own.

[ 42 : 03 ] And that's biblical discipleship. We need to learn and use the model of Jesus. He picked out some guys. They walked around with Him.

They ate lunch with Him. They ate dinner with Him. They went all over with Him. He spent a little more time with two or three of them. But then He would keep sending them out after they had spent time with Him.

And they came back and, you know what? They said, well, you know what? We failed at this. And Jesus said, well, let me give you the reason why you failed. Okay, now go back out. So it was a learning. It was a training experience.

The disciples were apprentices to Jesus. So one of the things that we are going to be doing, I trust, is figuring out a plan, a pathway to make disciples.

Part of it's going to be learning. Learning God's Word. What does God's Word teach about this? Learning Bible stories like Moses and learning about His life. But then say, hey, you know, come.

[ 43 : 07 ] We're going to go spend some time doing something. We're going to spend some time together. Now while you're maybe around the barbecue grill, hey, what are some things this week that you're having some difficulty with?

Well, you know, man, I snapped it, my wife, a couple of times this week. We really got into a big argument. Okay, well, let's see.

What does the Bible say about resolving conflict? So that's a discipling. That's an apprenticeship process. So how can we take someone, pair us together, and after they've learned enough, hopefully, to get them started, all right, now let's go do something together.

Let's do life together, following Jesus' model. I think that's going to be crucial for becoming healthier, developing a vibrant and a growing church.

And then lastly, as we close, the last part of verse 26. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Now there's a significance to being called a Christian.

[ 44 : 18 ] In Antioch, something new happened. The followers of Jesus first called Christians. That was a big deal. It was more than just a label. For some, they might have started calling them that in a derogatory fashion.

Another way to translate it could be little Christ. But they were recognized as people who were trying to imitate Jesus.

People who were trying to imitate Jesus. Christians. It was like wearing a jersey with Team Jesus on the back. You know, they were playing for Jesus.

And everybody, everywhere they went, they talked so much about Jesus. Oh, well, you're on that, you're one of them Jesus people. You're one of them Christians.

So that's how we got our name. Being called a Christian was more than just being little imitators of Jesus. I think it signified a total life change.

[ 45 : 18 ] An entire change of their life. They didn't just believe in Jesus. They lived like Him. They talked like Him. They loved like Him. Jesus became their whole identity.

And today, for us, I think a Christian should be the same thing. And, you know, some will lament that people have left the church in the past 20 years in droves.

The reality is, yes, there are some who are de-churched because they became disillusioned or they moved and just got out of church. But for many, they weren't true followers of Jesus to begin with. Culturally, they went to church because it was the thing to do. And I think what has happened is those who are still involved, those who are still serving, those who are still here are the ones who really mean, being a follower of Jesus means something to you.

You know, you've heard the saying, you know, it separates the men from the boys. Well, I think it separates those who really are passionate about serving, following Jesus. And what it's done is, it's allowing us to go back into those who used to be in church or their family used to be in church and they're not opposed to Jesus.

[ 46 : 40 ] It comes back to showing them how they could desire Jesus, how their lives could be changed, and why it's true.

So we can embrace our identity in Jesus. What does that mean? It's like being an ambassador. An ambassador for a foreign country lives in that, ambassador for a country lives in a foreign country and we represent our country in that foreign country.

We represent Jesus in our world. This isn't just for pastors. This isn't just for missionaries. This isn't just for Sunday school teachers. It's for all of us, whether we're hanging out with friends, whether we're at the park, whether we are at the gym, whether it's at work.

The people who are around us should catch a glimpse of Jesus. And not just because we wear a cross or because we have a Jesus t-shirt, but it's because our lives are different.

And we're so excited. We're so passionate that people wonder, why are you different? Then we talk about Jesus and that's why we are different. It means our words, our actions should reflect Jesus Christ.

[ 47 : 57 ] It's a big responsibility, but it's also an awesome privilege. God chose us to work together with Him to build for His kingdom. So what's our role in taking ground for God's kingdom?

So what have we learned from this section as we wind this down? We've seen how the early believers turned their challenges into opportunities, spreading the gospel when things were tough. We witnessed the amazing power of God working in the church, bringing people to faith in droves. And we also learned from Barnabas and Saul the importance of working together, the importance of partnering with others and discipling others in growing the church.

So I believe this passage is like a playbook from the early church that we can take and we can follow. Take Jesus with us wherever we go. People come to know the Lord, make them apprentices, mentor them so that they too can go and mentor someone else and take on an apprentice of their own and teach them how to follow Jesus, become a fully functioning follower of Jesus Christ.

So how do we apply these principles today? Commit to sharing God's Word. Commit to sharing the gospel with intentionality. Redeeming the time. Buy up every opportunity to talk about Jesus.

[ 49 : 26 ] And then number two, reliance on God's power to bring out the effects. Do all that we can do. Do all that we can do effectively, but then trust God to do what only God can do.

See, we can only take it so far. We can only do what we're called to do. But then God will do what only He can do, and that is change hearts and save a soul.

And then number three, participate in discipleship. Participate in the growth. It doesn't mean we have to pack our bags and move across the world, although God's Holy Spirit may prompt you to do that.

It means getting involved right where we are. Inside these four walls. Outside these four walls. In our community, in our jobs, school.

It's about being a part of what God's doing, whether that be volunteering, mentoring others, or just being a consistent, encouraging gospel presence in the sphere in which God has placed you.

[ 50 : 30 ] So let's be a part of growing God's family, adding new brothers and sisters in Christ every chance we get. Let's pray. Father, we come to you this morning thanking you for this playbook this playbook from the book of Acts that we can see how the early church faced opposition, but that opposition turned into opportunities to spread the gospel everywhere they went.

So Father, I pray that you'd help us to be consistent, talk about Jesus with intentionality, but rely on your Holy Spirit to do what we could never do.

Not getting in arguments with people, not trying to prove, but rather just simply sharing your word and letting your Holy Spirit do the work in the hearts.

We thank you, Father, and may we work together with you and be taking ground for your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.