

Lesson 17: Acts 11:19-30 The Healthy Christian Community Planted at Antioch

Introduction

We have in the book of Acts a valuable window into the kind of Christian community born from the witness of the disciples who walked with Jesus and from the fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Reading this story in Acts, one of the questions I think we ought to be asking is, “What makes a healthy Christian community?” What marks or attributes did Luke choose to highlight for us? We ought to ask both for the health of our own Christian community, and also out of a desire to see the Church spread in healthy way. We want to plant healthy Christian communities.

Luke gave us this kind of window in Acts 2:42-47. We saw in that very first expression of Christian community believers eating together, praising God together, giving out of their own wealth to care for fellow believers in need. We saw a community committed to the Apostle’s teaching, to fellowship, to the celebration of the Lord’s supper, and to prayer.

We get another opportunity to consider a healthy Christian fellowship here in Acts 11:19-30. How was the church in Antioch established? What attributes do we see in this story that could make a difference in our own communities?

Before we look for those attributes in the text let’s first consider the place of this story in the history of Gospel expansion. The planting of the church in Antioch is a unique moment. It is the first record of a Gentile fellowship in Gentile territory.

The Gospel Bridges Cultures at Antioch

As hard as the thought was for Peter to enter into a Gentile home, other Jewish believers had already broken the Jew/Gentile barrier. Propelled out of Jerusalem by the persecution following Stephen’s trial and execution, Philip crossed a major cultural barrier when he shared the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. Others took the Gospel North to Gentiles in Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria. Like sparks blown on the wind, they lit a fire among Gentiles that would eventually spread throughout the entire Roman Empire.

In our last two pairs of stories about Peter’s ministry in Judea, we saw the Gospel move away from social isolationism as just another Jewish sect. We see in those stories how the Gospel leaps the cultural boundaries set in place by Old Covenant law. This is now the New Covenant. The healthy spread of the Church does not require new believers to enter into a socially isolated culture completely set off from the communities where new fellowships are planted. This is not the same system with the spread of Judaism and people having to become Proselytes and leave Gentile culture to enter into Jewish culture. It’s not required by the Gospel. It’s not required but it does still often happen. It is the practice of the Church. Missionaries quite naturally take their own culture with them wherever they go and sometimes fail to even consider that a healthy Christian fellowship in another culture should look quite different than what they are used to from a healthy Christian fellowship in their own culture. We can’t really separate our Christianity from culture. But we can operate on the principle that the Gospel is not bound by a particular culture and is free to take on new expressions when established in new places. This is a significant difference that God made in the transition from Old Covenant requirements to New Covenant requirements, and it’s going to cause us to have to think about what principles or what attributes make a Christian community, a healthy Christian community. If it’s not these cultural markers, then what is it? What makes a healthy Christian fellowship?

We saw the move from social isolationism in the last pair of stories as God led Peter across the threshold of a Gentile home. In our next two pairs of stories, this move away from Jewish isolationism will be verified and we will see a move away from central administrative control. The

leaders of the church in Jerusalem did not commission missionaries to plant a church in Antioch. And we are not going to see the church in Jerusalem attempt to establish control over the church in Antioch, at least not in this story. The story of the struggle for prestige among bishops of Jerusalem, and Antioch, and Alexandria, and Rome, that's later in Church history. That does not seem to have any apparent connection with the way church leadership is expressed in the book of Acts. Here in the book of Acts the Gospel is freed from social isolationism as a Jewish sect and freed from the administrative control of Jerusalem.

Antioch at the time of Paul

The name, Antioch, might not impress us as a major urban center, but in the first century it was immediately recognizable by anyone living in or around the Roman Empire. The province known as Syria, it was much older than Rome, it was under Persian control when Alexander the Great conquered all of the Biblical lands from Macedonia all the way to India. After his death in 323 BC, the huge area of conquest was divided into roughly four parts, consisting of Macedonia (his homeland), Asia Minor (where Paul is going to do a lot of missionary journeys), Egypt, and the largest portion, which was under the Seleucids, stretching from Syria through Mesopotamia and Iran all the way to India. In 300 BC, Seleucid I founded Antioch on his eastern border and named it after his father. The city flourished.

So, by the time of Acts, Antioch had been around for three centuries as a major city in a wealthy territory, controlling the trade route from Mesopotamia and India in the East to Rome in the West. All that wealth is going to flow through Antioch. Here is a bit of description from Timothy George's Galatians commentary. I'll just read the whole quote that he writes.

"During the New Testament period Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire [only behind Rome and Alexandria] and boasted a population of more than half a million. Its political importance derived from the fact that it served as the capital city of the Roman province of Syria. A series of Roman emperors beginning with Julius Caesar lavished attention and resources upon this "Rome of the East," furnishing it with theaters, aqueducts, public baths, a great basilica, and a famous colonnaded main street adorned with a marble pavement and vaulted stone roofs.

The Jewish community formed a significant segment of the city's population, numbering some sixty-five thousand during the New Testament era. The Jews at Antioch were generally tolerated by the Roman overlords but were occasionally harassed and persecuted there as in other large cities throughout the empire. [Not long before the arrival of the gospel], the emperor Caligula (A.D. 37–41) had instigated a virulent attack against the Jews of Antioch. During this crisis many Jews were killed and their synagogues burned. The same kind of harassment was being carried out in Palestine as well and may account for the overly zealous attitude of many Jewish Christians there concerning issues of circumcision, food laws, and adherence to worship in the temple.

[...] Jerusalem was the epicenter for a kind of Jewish Christianity that was decisively shaped by the presence of the temple, strong Pharisaic and Zealot influences, and a Torah-centered interpretation of Christianity. Antioch, on the other hand, was far to the north of Jerusalem; it stood at the geographical and political crossroads of East and West, a veritable melting pot of diverse civilizations and cultures.¹

That sets up a context for this community of believers that is going to be established in this major urban city and that is going to, from there, reach out into the Roman world. I'll read both of our Antioch stories together. They only take up 12 verses. Acts 11:19-30,

¹ George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, pp. 170–172). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Another Look at a Healthy Christian Community (Acts 11:19–30)

¹⁹ So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and *began* speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. ²³ Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord; ²⁴ for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

²⁷ Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius. ²⁹ And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰ And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

A Gospel Community Planted in a Gentile Culture

The reference to Jewish believers spreading the Gospel up through Phoenicia, which would include cities like Tyre and Sidon, and then on to Cyprus and Antioch may describe the only example of Jewish believers taking the Gospel message beyond Judea. But I doubt that. We've noted more than once that Luke provides for us only a part of the story. Luke is describing the spread of the early Church, but not comprehensively. He has other goals. One major goal is a defense of Paul. And in that defense Luke is defining and defending the Gospel message preached by Paul. This is the true Gospel message and is completely in line with the preaching of Peter.

With these goals in mind, Luke does not go into the missionary actions of the other Apostles. Luke also does not cover the whole spread of the Gospel after Pentecost. We do not know about any Jews who may have returned home after Pentecost before the persecution. After the persecution he writes in Acts 8:4, "those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." Well, how many, and about where? Where did they go preaching the Word? He only gives us, at that point, one example - example of Phillip. Here again he refers to those scattered and mentions one route out of Judea up the Phoenician coastal plain then west to the island of Cyprus and east to Antioch. I think we should assume that these are not the only destinations of the Jews who left Jerusalem after Pentecost. Jews took their new faith in Jesus back to the other regions named in Acts 2, places like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Libya, Pontus, Rome, and Arabia.

One big question in the New Testament is, how do we have such a developed church in Rome for Paul to write to? Paul had never been there. Yet, he writes that their "faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8). And Paul mentions several house churches in Rome in the closing greeting of chapter 16 of the letter. How did these churches come to be? The best guess is that some of the Jews from Rome at Pentecost mentioned in Acts 2:10 came to faith in Christ and returned to Rome before or after the persecution. They witnessed to the fellow Jews and to God-fearers in the synagogue and the church grew from there. We get that kind of occurrence here in Luke 11. Jewish believers definitely went to Antioch. Where else did they go? Luke does not say. He leaves us free to wonder.

Luke does tell us that these believers moving up the coast towards Antioch preached the Gospel only to Jews. It reminds me in Church history of the ministry performed by Anglicans in the 1700's, you know, the British Empire was spread around the world. But, for example, when the young John Wesley sailed north to America as an Anglican minister, he had no thought of proclaiming the Gospel to native North Americans. His ministry was for the British citizens living in North America. He may have traveled a long way from home, and he was serving an important function, but he was not a missionary. At least not in the more technical sense I am using in this series on the book of Acts. In that sense, a missionary is someone who proclaims the Gospel and builds up the Church cross-culturally. Geographic distance does not define missions work. Cultural distance defines missions work. Whether you're crossing culture in your same neighborhood, or whether you're crossing culture halfway across the world, it's that crossing of the culture to share the Gospel, to build up the Church, that's what makes it mission work.

In the 1700's, Anglican clergy throughout the world generally taught and preached and provided service for their own people. They were scattered but they weren't doing missions work. They accepted natives who came to them culturally; who became anglicized but they didn't significantly reach out into those cultures. The great Protestant mission movement that would take the Gospel across culture, around the world is just beginning to bear fruits in Wesley's days through the Moravians and would not truly be born until the turn of the 19th century through pioneers like William Carey. So we see that this temptation to do ministry to our own that was happening as these believers in Acts 11 went up the coast and preached just to Jews, this is something that will carry through Church history.

The vision to take the Gospel to every people group has waxed and waned through Christian history. Here in Acts 11, I think we see both the natural inclination to stick to our own people group, and also the latent drive of the Gospel to cross over cultural barriers. It is often not easy for us to proclaim the Gospel in our own culture, much less in other cultures. The Jews going up the coast had a natural connection with fellow Jews wherever they went. Not only did they share culture and ethnicity, they shared a Biblical world view. Like Peter and Stephen, they could begin their conversation with Abraham and they could bridge over to Jesus from David or the prophets. They share that with fellow Jews. They believed in one God, they revered the Holy Scriptures, they expected a Messiah. It would seem much easier to preach the Gospel to fellow Jews. After all, the Messiah was for them. And that might have been another reason the message initially went to the Jews. Many of these believers would still struggle with the same ideas of cleanliness and commitment to Old Covenant law that Peter struggled with before God made the implications of the Gospel for Gentiles clear to him. It's not clear yet to all these that had gone out.

Nevertheless, the Gospel must be proclaimed to all nations. That is the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. That is the desire of God. That is the heart of the Holy Spirit. And some of these Jewish believers caught onto that vision and began sharing the Gospel with Gentiles in Antioch. Maybe it started, as we will see often with Paul, in the Jewish synagogues of Antioch with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. The assumption might be that to start with Jews makes more sense. But as we see in the mission field today, the strongly religious people might have the closest worldview to the Gospel, but that worldview sometimes acts like a vaccination. We think it's going to be easier to reach them, but they've been vaccinated. They have received an imitation of the real thing that makes them resistant to catching true faith when it comes. Later in Acts, we are going to see this regular pattern with Paul where Jews initial respond positively only to become very resistant, while Gentiles who come from a more distant worldview seem better equipped to understand and accept the Gospel message. It seems not unlikely that something similar happened in Antioch. And as

Gentiles began to accept the Gospel message, by God's grace, the Jewish believers who had brought the message embraced the Gentiles as brothers and sisters in Christ and did not withhold from them the Gospel. According to Luke, "the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."

The fellowship of believers in Antioch becomes the most important center for Gospel mission to Gentiles in the first generation of Christianity. Paul's three missionary journeys will be launched from Antioch. And the church at Antioch will stand with Paul in the struggle to keep the Gospel free from Old Covenant requirements. The church in Antioch appears strong in theology, and practice, and vision to spread the Gospel. What kind of foundation produced this healthy Christian movement? From the human perspective, we can identify several attributes that contribute to the spiritual health of the church in Antioch. None of those attributes is as important as the phrase we just quoted, "the hand of the Lord was with them." Christians can do all the right things, with the right heart, covered in prayer and still see very little response if God does not bring about a spiritual awakening in the hearts of men and women. We abide in Jesus. Jesus produces the fruit. In this case God's hand was with them. God had a plan for Antioch that involved a large number of Gentiles turning to the Lord.

Eight Principles of Healthy Community Displayed in Antioch

Recognizing that God is the primary and essential worker in the growth of the Antioch community, what did the people involved in the story do right? God calls us to engage with heart and mind and strength, to go about the work of the Gospel in wisdom. What wisdom can we take away from this report of the planting of the church in Antioch? I see several possible factors to consider.

First, I see the freedom of the original team of believers to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and plant a Christian community. We don't know their makeup, the makeup of this original team. They could have been young, and inexperienced, and just excited, and they were unexpectedly cast out of Jerusalem, they were making their way back home, and sharing the love of Jesus wherever they go. Or they may have had more experienced leadership. This may have been more of a plan. When they got cast out, maybe they met, and they determined to go as missionaries. Back in Acts 6, of the seven men full of the Spirit and of wisdom chosen by believers in Jerusalem to ensure fair distribution of charity to the Greek-speaking widows, one was a Gentile from Antioch, named Nicolas. Now Luke identified him specifically as a proselyte from Antioch. It is tempting to imagine that Nicolas led this group of Jewish believers to this ministry among fellow Gentiles. And he's a Gentile, he's a proselyte. So, he led them to the Gentiles in his own city of Antioch. But we can't know that.

We can't know the makeup of this band of believers. And even not knowing who they are, we can see in them a sense of freedom to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus and start this new church fellowship. We do not see them commissioned by elders in Jerusalem. We do not see them asking for permission to witness. They do not write back to Jerusalem with a request for instructions or help for leadership.

And they are also not concerned that their congregation is made up of Gentiles. I am using the term, Gentiles, though the term Luke uses is, Hellenists, which might be translated as, Greeks, in your version. It is the same word used back in 6:1 describing the Hellenistic or Greek-speaking widows. It does not mean people who are actually Greek. It is a cultural designation. Art and philosophy had risen to a high level in Greece and was spread from Macedonia to India by Alexander the Great. The Romans adopted a lot of the culture of the Greeks. A list of Roman gods is basically a renaming of the Greek gods. The Romans have adopted this Greek culture. The word, Hellenist, in the Roman Empire is something like the word, Western, today. People fell on different points of the Hellenistic continuum. It kind of depends on your perspective, where you're coming from. For example, a Korean kid in Seoul who listens to hip-hop and wears a baseball cap might be called "Western" by his parents. But he wouldn't be called "Western" by somebody from Europe. A Korean kid who grew up

in California and speaks only broken Korean would certainly appear western to relatives back in Korea. But he may have habits and values that make him appear Korean to his non-Korean friends in California.

The Hellenists or Greek speakers mentioned in Acts 6 are all Jews, with the exception of Nicolas. Those Greek speakers who opposed Stephen – but being a Greek speaker doesn't then guarantee what your culture is going to look like; sometimes it's the people who grow up outside of the country who want to hold even more strongly to the values of the country. So, then you have two different kinds of Greek-speaking Jews. – Those Greek speakers who opposed Stephen appear more fiercely Jewish than Judean Jews. But those who joined Stephen were already a step closer to the Gentile culture than Jews like Peter and John. So, they were potentially more open. Those who came to Antioch were third-culture kids who grew up as Jews but not in Judea. They grew up in Cyrene and in Cyprus. They spoke fluent Greek. Even though there is a cultural gap for them to cross in sharing the Gospel with Gentiles in Antioch, there is also similarity. They are not as far removed culturally as the Celts to the West or Indians to the East. That would be a much bigger cultural step. It's significant for Jews to go to Gentiles but at least these are Hellenized Jews going to Hellenistic Gentiles. They share something in common, having all grown up in the Roman Empire with a common language and a Greek-influenced culture. These Hellenistic Jews, they seem to lean into this side of their own identity as they witness to Gentile Hellenists in Antioch. They do not try to make them into Jews. They freely share what was freely given to them. The Gospel goes forth freely.

Second, I see the wisdom of the church in Jerusalem taking some responsibility for the health of the movement in Antioch and not just assuming this new church plant was fine on its own. Though there does not seem to be any attempt at administrative control over the church in Antioch, the Apostles are responsible for the spread of the Apostolic message, which is the New Covenant teaching they had received from Jesus. That is their commission. And it is wise to send a representative to evaluate this work that is being reported to them. You know, what is the theological foundation of this new community up in Antioch? It's wise to send somebody to see.

Third, not only were they wise to take the initiative to send someone to assess the movement, but they were wise in choosing a leader who would not take over the work, but would enhance the work. Luke describes Barnabas as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." We were first introduced to Barnabas as a man who sold one of his own fields to care for people in need. This man has character. He is generous. We were also told that his nickname was, "Son of Encouragement." And we got to see that nickname in action when he took it on himself to meet Paul and introduce him to the Apostles when everybody was still scared of Paul. We were also told that he was from the island of Cyprus: one of the places founding members of the Antioch community are from. From the standpoint of faith, of character, of personality, and culture Barnabas seems an excellent choice if the intent is to partner with and encourage a work already begun. He is not the man you send if you want to take over the work.

Fourth, I see the importance of exhortation and teaching. The Church started with the proclamation of the Gospel. And that's the foundation. It's this simple message of faith. Growth takes both perseverance in that message of faith and ongoing grounding in Biblical truth. Knowing the need for perseverance, Barnabas exhorted "them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord." And he was certainly able to teach, to help continue to ground them in the truth of God's Word.

My fifth point has to do with Barnabas going to get Saul. Though I am not sure exactly what principle we should emphasize here. It's really tempting to read into it a lot. God has raised up truly exceptional men and women over the course of salvation history. Paul is one of those people. The great majority of healthy Christian fellowships through history are not led by superstars. In fact, a

number of unhealthy Christian movements have been planted by truly exceptional believers whose extreme gifts rubbed off in an unhealthy way on the churches or movements they lead. The point here is not that the spiritual health of our church demands we call a pastor as exceptional as Paul. I'm sure that's not the point.

Barnabas was well equipped to provide the teaching that the Antioch fellowship needed. His decision to go get Paul may have been more of a blessing for Paul in the long run than for Antioch. Paul has been out of the picture for about 8 years now. Part of me wants to imagine that he has been working on a small scale in Tarsus during this whole time, just kind of quietly off to the side, when Barnabas goes and rescues him out of obscurity. That's a picture I imagine. But there is some indication that Paul may have been quite busy spreading the Gospel during these eight years. After the council in Jerusalem in chapter 15, Paul and Silas are going to take a letter from that council to the Gentiles in the churches in Cilicia. That will be another one of those moments when we get there that we have to pause and say, "Wait a minute, Luke; what churches in Cilicia? You have not told us about anybody going to witness in Cilicia." And then we will look up on our Bible map and find out that Paul's hometown of Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. And Paul was there for about 8 years. And maybe Paul had already done a missionary journey around his home province without anybody telling us about it.

So, we don't know if Paul was quietly serving in his hometown fellowship or out and about planting churches in Cilicia. Whatever the case, Barnabas thought Paul would be a good match for Antioch and Antioch would be a good match for Paul. And he was right. I'll draw my fifth and sixth observations from this move by Barnabas.

Fifth, as a leader, Barnabas is making space for other people to participate in the work of the Church. And sixth, Barnabas seeks to fill that space by matching the need with giftedness. Stepping back from teaching, which may not have been his top gift, but he could have done it, Barnabas creates the need. And then he goes to get someone he knows to be an excellent teacher. He may even be aware of the need Paul has to use his giftedness in this way. It's not just good for Antioch. It's good for Paul. Barnabas here chooses to lead as a coach instead of a player. He steps back, creating a space for ministry. And then he finds someone who would be great in that specific role and recruits that person to fill that role.

Seventh, the disciples are here first called Christians and I believe that says something about their own sense of self-identity. There are two words here to consider. They are disciples. And they are called Christians. Members of a healthy Christian movement see themselves as disciples. They see themselves as learners, and not just book learners. They are learning truth. They are learning about The Book. They are learning a new way to see the world. At the same time, they are learning obedience and practice. They are learning to pray, and to give, and to care, and to witness. And who are these men and women disciples of? That's the part I love. They are not disciples of Barnabas or disciples of Paul. They are not first here called, Lutherans, after Luther, or, Calvinists, after Calvin. They are disciples of Christ to the degree that they take on that name. They are Christians. They are those who follow, who walk with, who walk in the footsteps of Christ.

It seems significant that this designation would be given to a Gentile church. The Jewish believers had begun to refer to their movement as, "the Way." We've seen that already in Acts, and Paul will use that term at the end of Acts. It is not a bad term. Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. It's a Christ-centered term. The term, Christian, might not work so well in the Jewish context. All the Jews were looking for the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. When Jewish believers did get called by reference to Jesus, they weren't called, "Christians." They were called, "Nazarenes." "You follow that guy from Nazareth." But now out of the Jewish context, when the people of Antioch wanted a way to

refer to the people who were following this new faith, they called them by a name that must have constantly been on the lips of the believers. And it's not really a name; it's a title. Those outside the movement kept hearing about Christ. "These are the ones who will not stop trying to convince you that a Jew named Jesus is King in heaven. He is, apparently, an Anointed One. He is the Christ. They don't stop talking about him, so we call them Christians." That's the mark of a healthy movement, when you ask those outside the movement, "What are they going on about? What's their favorite topic of conversation?" You know, and it's not predestination, it's not baptism, and it's not their favorite college basketball team, or their favorite European football team. What are they going on about? And those outside answer, "I don't know. Something about Jesus, who they call, the Christ." You have identified yourself so much with Jesus that this is how people outside the movement identify you. That's pretty awesome!

I'll make one last observation. We have two stories here about Antioch. The first story is about the planting of the Church. The second is about their response to a coming famine in Jerusalem. My eighth observation comes from that second story. A healthy Christian church embraces both their responsibility to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and gives out of their own resources to care for people in need. It's a both/and. The focus of Acts is on the primary mission of the Church, which is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, lives are changed, bringing believers into a new orientation that seeks, first, to love God and, second, to love people. Loving people involves caring for their material needs. We saw that at the birth of the Church in Jerusalem, when believers shared property to care for other believers. We saw it with the distribution of funds to the widows. We saw it in Joppa where Tabitha was known for her care of the poor. And we see it here again in Antioch, when this Gentile church learns that there is a coming famine in Judea. They are not commanded to give. Nobody is requiring anything from them. They are simply made aware of the need. And they respond. They determine in their own hearts to contribute. And they send Paul and Barnabas with the relief funds as a gift of love to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

God's hand was at work in establishing this church. And the leaders he provided for them, the initial leaders, and the leaders in Jerusalem, and then Barnabas, they made some wise decisions that would promote her growth and maturity. And they are wise decisions that we can see. Instead of trying to reduplicate our own culture, this text gives us principles that we can try and reduplicate in any culture. From this healthy Christian community of Jew and Gentile, God is going to launch a missionary movement that will plant similar communities of faith all over the Roman Empire. And that's a vision for us, as well. A desire for health and maturity in our own communities so that we can also participate in planting healthy Christian communities all over the world.

Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 11:19-30. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. What positive principles stand out to you when you consider how the gospel came to Antioch, before Barnabas arrived?
3. How do you understand Barnabas' responsibility? Why did the apostles send him? What was he supposed to do? Did he have an administrative function? How was he received?
4. What positive principles stand out to you when you consider Barnabas and Paul's ministries in Antioch?
5. What positive principle stands out to you when you consider the believers' response to the prophecy of famine in Judea?
6. Look over the eight principles of a healthy church suggested above. Do any of these stand out to you?
7. Considering the principles you have come up with and the principles suggested above, what is one that you believe your community does especially well?
8. What is one that you believe your community could work to improve?