

The Church of Antioch in Acts 11

by David Platt

David Platt's sermon highlights the vital role of ordinary believers in making disciples and spreading the gospel, even through suffering, as exemplified by the church at Antioch.

Duration: 54:25

Scripture: Acts 11:19

Topics: "Church Planting", "Disciple Making"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of intentionally making disciples and multiplying churches for the glory of God. It highlights the need for desperate dependence on the Holy Spirit, fasting, and prayer in ministry. The exhortations focus on raising up ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the kingdom, embracing suffering as part of the Great Commission, penetrating lostness through faithful proclamation, and leaving a legacy of disciple makers, church planters, and pastors across North America.

Transcript

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Acts chapter 11. And while you're turning there, I know these brothers well enough to know that they desire absolutely no credit. At the same time, I do think it would be appropriate for us to express our thanks to God for Aaron Coe, Kevin Ezell, and the brothers and sisters of the North American Mission Board who are serving us in the ways that they have over the last couple of days as a picture of the way they're serving churches all across this convention.

So will you join me in giving God a hand for them? How do you bring a conference like the last 24 hours, two days, to a close? I know that your minds are full, your hearts are full. And so I want to dive right in to what I hope will be a helpful encouragement, exhortation to us as we prepare to leave this place after the last 24 hours. When I was in Cuba a couple of years ago, my life and perspective on pastoral ministry and church planning was turned upside down.

Cuba is such an interesting country. From the outside looking in, you can hardly see the church. You don't see nice buildings.

You don't see elaborate programs. You don't see attractive productions. You only see the church in Cuba when you get to know the people of Cuba.

When you get to know the people, you find small pockets of brothers and sisters who are spreading the gospel like wildfire. They stay under the radar in this communist setting. One Cuban believer told me, in communism there is a ceiling above our heads, and the goal in life is to keep your head below the ceiling.

As long as you keep it below the ceiling, you're fine. If you raise your head above the ceiling, it gets chopped off. Not necessarily literally, but that's kind of the philosophy.

So he said, this is the way we do church. We keep it small. We keep it simple.

We stay low, quiet under the ceiling, and quietly, exponentially, they are planting churches all across that island. We went to one small, impoverished Cuban house church. This one church had planted 60 other churches.

We go to one of the 60 churches that they had planted, and this church had planted 25 other churches. And so that's what I mean by exponential. And so I remember talking with the pastor of this one church that had planted 60 churches, another church's older brother.

This guy's crazy. The communist council in his area brought him before them for questioning. And so he's brought into questioning, facing threats from this communist council, and he brings a rock with him, this huge rock with him, into questioning.

He puts it on the table in front of the council. They say, what's the rock for? He says, I want you to know from the beginning that if you try to stop me from speaking about Christ, this rock is going to do it for me. They thought he was crazy, and they let him go.

Just gives you a little flavor of this brother. And so he's planted from this one church, 60 other churches, from those churches, 25 multiples of other churches, church planting like a wildfire. I said, how do you do it? I got my notes.

I'm ready to write down. I'm ready to learn. I said, how do you multiply churches like that? He looked back at me and he said, here's what we do.

I've got my pen ready. And he said, we make disciples. I said, I'm going to write that down.

Make disciples. That's good. I came back thinking, we've come up with all kinds of methods for multiplying the church in our culture.

We give money. We start campuses. We use DVDs to show pastors, satellites.

And I'm not saying in any way that any of that is wrong. But I can't help but to wonder. What if we didn't have the capability to reproduce DVDs and pour hundreds of thousands of dollars into multiple campuses? What if we didn't have the technology that we do have? And we should be wise to use.

But if we didn't have those things, what if we had what many of our brothers and sisters around the world have? What if all we had was the spirit of God and the word of God in the people of God? This would be sufficient to see the gospel spread like wildfire across North America. Do we really believe that? Or have we become so dependent on our money and our technology and our creativity and our ingenuity that we have missed the essence of how the church is multiplied through the making of disciples. People of God.

Spirit of God. Word of God. Making disciples of Jesus Christ.

So, I would have conversations with those brothers and sisters in Cuba. And they would look at me and they'd say, Well, obviously you know that a church is not healthy if it's not reproducing. And I would nod my head.

And then it would sink down. Because I knew that the church I was pastoring at that point a couple of years ago was not reproducing. Yes, giving money.

Yes, praying. But not intentionally reproducing. And so, I and some of our pastors came back and said, We have got to change.

And by God's grace, He has done a work in our church, in my own heart, to see churches planted from our church and our city and in under-reached areas in North America and unreached people groups around the world. And so, I want to encourage us tonight. And what I want to do is I want to bring us to Acts chapter 11.

To the church at Antioch. This church that was the base for making disciples and multiplying churches all throughout the Roman world. And I know we have to be careful whenever we come to the book of Acts not to be overly prescriptive in our interpretation.

Not to think that everything we see is prescribing exactly the way things should be done today. At the same time, we have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in the first century. And so, I want us to glean from them.

And let the brothers and sisters in Antioch encourage the brothers and sisters in North America tonight. As we prepare to send one another out into a continent where there's around 260 million lost people on a road that leads to an eternal hell. And we have the gospel of salvation from sin forever.

So, how do we make this gospel known throughout North America? How do we stab in the heart of this continent? The United States and Canada. In a way that transforms communities and cities. And I want us to hear 10 exhortations from the church at Antioch.

Don't be scared when I say 10 exhortations knowing that it is late at night. We're going to go quickly, I hope, helpfully through these. But don't be frightened by 10.

Based on two particular passages. First, this introduction to the church at Antioch in Acts chapter 11. And then in a minute, we'll go to Acts chapter 13.

We'll start in Acts chapter 11 verse 19. Luke tells us, 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 Jews. But there were some of them, men of 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 with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And a 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.

For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

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 hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Exhortation number one for us from the church at Antioch. Let's raise up ordinary people in the church who will do extraordinary things in the kingdom. Let's raise up ordinary people in the church who will do extraordinary things in the kingdom.

Verse 19, those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus, speaking the word of no one except Jews. But there were some of them who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. Some of them.

Now, that commentary takes us back a few chapters before this to chapter 8. So turn back there with me. Acts chapter 8, verse 1. Right after Stephen is stoned, at the end of Acts chapter 7, Acts chapter 8, verse 1 says, There arose on that day a great persecution, this is what Acts 11, 19 is referring to, against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the church, throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

Except the apostles. So this was not Peter and John being sent to Antioch. This was not Philip and James going to Antioch.

These are unnamed men and women. Unofficial. Leaders.

No seminary training, no church planting experience, no convention behind them, no official direction before them. Just some people. Acts 11, verse 20 says, Who would start one of the greatest churches, literally, in the history of Christianity? Ordinary disciples of Jesus, making disciples of Jesus.

This is how the gospel is spreading through the book of Acts. And if we are not careful, we are tempted to miss this in our day. You want to grow a church today? You want to plant a church today? Get a very gifted communicator.

Get particularly gifted musicians. Get a good place to gather. And organize programs for all of the ages and stages represented there.

And you are set. Yet none of these things are mentioned in the start of the church at Antioch. Instead of professionals, places, and programs, all you've got is some people who are preaching the gospel.

And this is how God intends for His gospel to spread in our communities, throughout cities in North America. Not through constructing bigger buildings, not through creating cooler programs, not through putting out sharper presentations, but through equipping ordinary people to make disciples and do extraordinary things in the kingdom. Let's learn from our brothers and sisters in the book of Acts.

Let's learn from our brothers and sisters around the world. I think about brothers and sisters in Asia. And I've had the privilege of gathering with in secret and putting on a dark jacket with a hood over it, and

getting into the back of a car and going under the cover of night into the middle of this remote village, getting out of the car with this hood over my head, walking down this dark path, and rounding a corner into a tiny room nowhere near the size of the stage, just crammed full with believers, sitting on the floor, the little lightbulb hanging from the top of the ceiling, and they're sitting there with their Bibles open quietly, just ready to worship God.

Not one of them had come to that place because of who was speaking that night. Not one of them had come to hear all the great musicians that night. They were coming together for worship at the risk of their lives.

And they would leave that place to go tell other people that Jesus is worthy of following their lives, and these unnamed disciples in this country, in Asia, were spreading the gospel like wildfire. Isn't this what we want to be a part of? Church growth that does not point people to particularly gifted communicators or gifted this or that, but church growth that points people to one place, the glory of our God through unnamed men and women. Watchman Nee once said, The church is suffering not so much from the prominence of the five talent members as from the holding back of the one talent members.

The life of the whole body is hampered and impoverished by the burial of those single talents. We must be careful not to exalt the unique giftings of particular leaders with particular talents while we ignore the Holy Spirit gifting in every single person in the body of Christ. Is the most effective way to reach North America really by building buildings for them to come hear you and me talk? Or by sending as many people as possible out into those cities so they're talking about Christ every single day of the week? Not long ago, just this last year, there was a group in our church who came to me after worship one day.

We were talking about this kind of thing in the Word, and they said, Alright, Pastor, here's the deal. They live about 20 minutes away. They're a small group and a couple other small groups.

They said, We've been thinking that we can more effectively make disciples in our community if we would start gathering for worship there instead of trying to get people to come 20 minutes down the road and come listen to you. So they said, Would it be okay if we started gathering as a church there? I said, Yes. I said, I want you to leave.

And I told the church, Let's all do this. Now, one day everybody's going to do it, and I'm going to be left with a big building, but so be it. So be it.

Our evangelistic strategy is not built on bringing as many people as possible into a building where we have nice programs. Our evangelistic strategy must be built on sending out as many people as possible to be God's people, ordinary men and women, making disciples, multiplying churches, doing extraordinary things in the kingdom. Let's raise up ordinary people in the church who will do extraordinary things in the kingdom.

I've got to move on. Second exhortation. Let's embrace, let's embrace suffering as a God-ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

Let's embrace suffering as a God-ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. So stay here in Acts chapter 8 for just a minute and tie it with what we've already seen in Acts chapter 11. The church at Antioch was started because of persecution.

If Stephen had not been stoned, killed, the gospel, for all we know, would still be stuck in Jerusalem at this point. So martyrdom in the church led to multiplication of the church. And that is a frightening thing for us to realize, especially when we realize that this was God's design.

God does not just allow suffering among His people. He ordains suffering among His people for the accomplishment of His purpose. All throughout the New Testament, we see the gospel spreading, not in spite of suffering, but precisely because of suffering in Christians' lives.

And it makes sense, doesn't it? How are we saved from our sins? By a suffering Savior. Jesus died, was killed, was crucified. We are saved from sin by a suffering Savior.

So then, ask the question, how is this salvation going to spread? And the answer is, this news of a suffering Savior will spread through suffering servants. Colossians 1 makes clear that we fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Philippians 1 says that it has been granted to us not only to believe on Christ, but to suffer for Christ.

Philippians 3 said we count it a joy to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Now, it's different. Jesus suffered to accomplish salvation.

We suffer to spread salvation. His suffering was for propitiation. Our suffering is for propagation.

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Behold, I send you out like sheep among wolves. All men will hate you because of me.

Do we get this? The danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ. So apply this here. Pastor, if you and I are going to be serious about the spread of the gospel to the darkest, most difficult places in North America, it will not be easy.

We cannot continue to build our churches and pad our budgets with convenient programs for comfortable Christians if we really want to penetrate North America with the gospel. We sacrifice and we expect suffering. The more we give ourselves to planting churches on this continent, the harder it will get for us, not easier.

And church planters, many of you know in ways that I do not that when you are on the front lines planting churches in frontier lands, it is not easy. It is costly. It is costly for you.

It is costly for your family. It is costly for your wife. It is costly for your children.

And it can be discouraging if you forget that this is actually God's design. God has ordained suffering as a means through which we will show the world that Christ Jesus is better than health. And Christ Jesus is better than wealth.

And Christ Jesus is better than ease and prosperity and comfort and possessions in this world. How will we show a suffering Savior to North America if everything always goes well for us? I think about brothers and sisters that we have sent out from our church to one of the most, if not the most, dangerous part of our city. Families, there are 15 of them who have packed their bags and sold their homes in comfortable suburbia, moved into the inner city to live out the gospel, make disciples, multiply churches.

And I get an email from a mom who tells me what it's like to have gunshots resounding around her children's bedroom at night as she prays that a stray or intended bullet does not come through their wall.

And she writes, Pastor, this is not easy. And then in the next sentence she says, But it is worth it.

Yes. Because she knows, and they know, they're not surprised. They know that suffering is a means that God will use for the accomplishment of the great commission.

That's the beauty of Acts chapter 7 and 8 and 11. Yes, Christian, our suffering is inevitable, but get this, our mission is unstoppable. Satan's strategy to stop the church in Acts 7 only served to advance the church in Acts 8. Don't you love this? Satan strikes down God's choicest servant.

Ha, he thinks, I'm winning now. Next verse, everyone scattered and preached the gospel wherever they went. Take that.

Oh, and it gets better. Think about it. Luke tells us, Saul was there approving of the execution.

So Saul leads out and the persecution of Stephen, which leads to the scattering of believers, which leads to the founding of the church at Antioch, which becomes the church that sends out Saul, slash Paul, on global mission. Ha, ha, ha. You can't write a script better than that.

Saul, he didn't know he was doing it, but he was starting the church that would one day send him out. Mark this down, brothers and sisters. Satan's strategies to stop the church will ultimately serve to spread the church because our God is in control and he has ordained suffering as a means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

I love what one prominent Romanian pastor on this one said. He was experiencing persecution, been arrested numerous times, beaten numerous times, threatened. And he wrote about a time when he was under house arrest and being interrogated.

He said, during an early interrogation, I had told an officer who was threatened to kill me, sir, let me explain how I see this issue. Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying.

Here's how it works. You know that my sermons on tape have spread all over the country. If you kill me, those sermons will be sprinkled with my blood.

Everyone will know I died for my preaching and everyone who has a tape will pick it up and say, I'd better listen again to what this man preached because he really meant it. He sealed it with his life. So, sir, my sermons will speak 10 times louder than before.

I will actually rejoice in this supreme victory if you kill me. After I said this, the interrogator sent me home. He continues, another officer who was interrogating a pastor friend of mine told him, we know that that other pastor would love to be a martyr, but we are not that foolish to fulfill his wish.

They outsmarted him. He wrote, I stopped to consider the meaning of that statement. I remembered how for many years I had been afraid of dying.

I had kept a low profile. Because I wanted badly to live, I had wasted my life in inactivity. But now that I had placed my life on the altar and decided I was ready to die for the gospel, they were telling me that they would not kill me.

I could go wherever I wanted in the country and preach whatever I wanted, knowing I was safe. As long as I tried to save my life, I was losing it. Now that I was willing to lose it, I found it.

Yes, you give your life, you give your family, we give our churches to advancement of the kingdom of God and North America and the nations. It will not be easy. It will not be comfortable.

It will cost us. It may cost us or people in our churches their lives, but it doesn't matter because we will succeed. Guaranteed, we will succeed.

So let's embrace suffering as a God-ordained means for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Third exhortation. All right, I promise, they're going to speed up.

I promise. Number three. Long sentence, so follow along with me.

Three, let's penetrate lostness. Let's penetrate lostness through externally focused, intentionally faithful proclamation of the gospel. Let's penetrate lostness through externally focused, intentionally faithful proclamation of the gospel.

We'll unpack that and hopefully catch it up and break it up. First, let's penetrate lostness. Back to chapter 11, verse 20.

It says, These men coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. So these unnamed believers were specifically targeting Greeks, going to Hellenists. They set their faces on the lost to preach the gospel to them.

Now that seems basic, but it is in danger of being forgotten in the way we are pastoring and planting churches. We all know, we have been humbled by the statistics of the amount of church growth that is simply the transfer of Christians from one congregation to another. Even among church plants.

Many are focused, even designed around what appeals most to church people. The stark, humbling reality is that the majority of people coming into churches, even into church plants, are coming from other churches. And so we must come face to face with the fact that we are pastoring and we are planting churches, but in all that we're doing, on a whole, we are not penetrating lostness.

We're not pushing back the darkness. So, let us penetrate lostness through externally focused, so external focused. These believers going to Hellenists, where they were, people that were not being engaged with the gospel.

And we must be careful. So much evangelism today is built around creating safe environments for people to come to in order to hear the gospel. But evangelism then, i.e. Antioch, was totally different.

Instead of building safe environments for people to come to, they were going into dangerous environments that no one else would go to. So, pastors, let's go. And let's lead our people to go into the tough places, to the dangerous places, to the people in our cities who are least engaged with the gospel.

Let's penetrate lostness through externally focused, intentionally faithful proclamation of the gospel. Intentionally faithful. It says they were preaching the Lord Jesus, and then verse 21 says, the hand of the Lord was with them.

And a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Let me just pause here. I can only imagine the level of discouragement that may be present in some brothers and sisters in this room tonight who are laboring and toiling and preaching in difficult places among difficult people, and you are struggling to see fruit.

And I want to just say to those brothers and sisters what Christ said to Paul in the difficult city of Corn. Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking.

Do not be silent. He said to Paul, I have many people in this city, so maybe for one or two or more of you, this is the word more than anything else that the Lord just wants to encourage your heart with in this conference. Don't be afraid.

Keep on speaking. Don't be silent. Trust, believe, hope, pray, and work like Christ has many people.

And that's it. Penetrate. Let's penetrate lostness through externally focused, intentionally faithful proclamation of the gospel.

Fourth exhortation, let's not build our ministries on counting decisions but on making disciples. Let's not build our ministries on counting decisions but on making disciples. We won't read verses 22-26 over again, but once men and women came to faith in Christ at Antioch, they grew in faith in Christ at Antioch.

The goal was not to report numbers. The goal was to raise up disciples. And we live in a day where it is easy, it is so easy for people to give intellectual assent to Jesus.

And it is so easy for us to count people who give such intellectual assent. But we must call people to so much more. These disciples at Antioch were the first ones to be called Christians, the first ones to be radically identified with the person of Christ.

They knew that Jesus was worthy of more than casual association and church attendance. Jesus is worthy of complete abandonment. So in our evangelism, in our efforts to proclaim and spread this gospel, may we never minimize the claims of this gospel upon the lives of the men and women we preach it to.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted already tonight, when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. Brothers and sisters, let's call people not to make a decision but to die to themselves and to live in Christ. And let's show them the radical implications of what that means for their lives in this world.

Let us be finished and done with nominal Christianity that dishonors the name of our Christ. Let's raise up passionate disciples who live and die for identification as Christians. Let's not build our ministries on counting decisions, but on making disciples.

Fifth, let's lead and plant churches that not only go aggressively after spiritual needs, let's lead and plant churches that not only go aggressively after spiritual needs, but also give sacrificially towards physical needs. Let's lead and plant churches is to not only go aggressively after spiritual needs, but also give sacrificially toward physical needs. So this highly evangelistic church was also a highly effective church when it came to helping, hurting brothers and sisters around the world.

Verses 27 through 30, they hear about famine, and they send relief to the brothers living in Judea. We find out later in the New Testament that many such churches, like the church at Antioch, were not wealthy, and many of these Christians were poor, but they all gave according to their ability. So yes, we need to ask the question, in the churches we pastor and the churches we plant, are we verbally proclaiming the gospel among the spiritually needy? We need to ask that.

Are we verbally proclaiming the gospel among the spiritually needy? But we also need to ask, are we visibly living out the gospel among the physically needy? So let's intentionally consider, in the communities

and cities where we pastor and we plant churches, how we might best, most wisely, give to the glory of God among the urban poor in the cities in North America, among the severely malnourished brothers and sisters among the nations. Let's lead our churches, let's plant churches that are passionate about selling possessions to give to the poor in a way that is good for them and brings glory to God. So, six exhortation.

Now these last ones come from Acts chapter 13, so go ahead and turn over there with me and look at this brief portrait of the church at Antioch. Acts chapter 13, verse one says, there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Menaeon, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Ah, I love this. Six exhortation.

Let's love the glory of God more than we love our own lives. Let's love the glory of God more than we love our own lives. We're not gonna spend a lot of time here, this is simple, but it cannot be overestimated.

Here we see the church at Antioch in worship. The language of the New Testament, you know, you studied this passage, they were literally blessing the Lord in worship. Now we realize what we're about to see.

From this point on in the book of Acts, we're about to see the missionary expansion of the church to the ends of the earth through Paul, his other companions, going out from the church at Antioch. People in the chapters to come, they're gonna be saved. Churches are gonna be planted.

The gospel is gonna spread all across the Roman empire. And I want you to see that it all starts in a scene of worship. People who love the glory of God will live to spread the gospel of God.

Worship drives the mission. Worship fuels mission. Why do we go throughout North America making disciples and multiplying churches? Because our king is worthy.

He's worthy of the worship of 260 million lost people in North America. That's why we go. That's why we go.

It's why we give. Not just in the Southeast, but in the Northeast, in the Northwest, in the Midwest, Canada, all over this continent. Why? Because our king doesn't just deserve the praise of people in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Our king deserves the praise of people all over New York, and North Dakota, and Vancouver, and California, and Alberta, and everywhere in between. So let's love the glory of God more than we love our pocketbooks and our programs. Let's love the glory of God more than we love our own lives.

Seventh exhortation. Let's fast and pray in desperate dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Let's fast and pray in desperate dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

They were worshiping and fasting. After fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. And as they went out, they were sent by the Holy Spirit.

Oh, who are we kidding in this room? Like we in this room have the creativity, ingenuity, money, technology, gifting to see North America transformed by the gospel. Do you realize how ludicrous our

message is? Go to the inner cities and amidst liberal cultural elite of this continent and tell people that they are wicked at the core of who they are, condemned in their sin before God and destined for eternity in hell. Then if they're still listening, tell them that 2000 years ago, the son of a Jewish carpenter claimed to be the son of God and he was nailed naked to a wooden cross and their future is entirely dependent on denying themselves and declaring him God, savior and king.

That is a tough sell. And especially in your and my mouth, with all our fears, all our quirks, all our different struggles, for us to call them to surrender their lives and their money and their plans and their possessions and their future, all that they are and all they have to Christ, not a chance. Brothers and sisters, we are desperately dependent on the spirit of God to do that which we cannot do on our own.

Let us not fool ourselves, thinking that we can come up with a good enough strategy and cool enough plans to penetrate this continent with the gospel. Let us not fool ourselves, let us instead deny ourselves. Let us fall on our knees in prayer.

Let us forsake food and fasting. Why? Because we need spiritual power more than we need physical provision. More than our stomachs long for food, our souls long for God to show his glory in our day.

More than we want our hunger pangs to cease, we want God's kingdom to come. So pastors and church planters, are you fasting? Leading churches to fast and pray. If God gave you today everything you're asking for, what would you have? Let's remember the words of Samuel Chadwick.

The devil fears nothing from prayerless work, prayerless studies and prayerless religion. He laughs at our wisdom, he mocks at our toil, but he trembles when we pray. So let's fast and pray in desperate dependence on the Holy Spirit of God, for him to do things in and through and around and among us that we could never do on our own.

Let us throw aside our sinful self-sufficiency. Let's humble ourselves before God. And pastors, church planters, let's devote ourselves to the ministry of the word and prayer.

Let's devote ourselves to the ministry of prayer, to the ministry of pleading before God, day in and day out, hour after hour, for his power and his presence and his leading and his guidance, by his grace, for his glory. And as we do, God will raise up people, just like he's doing here in Acts 13. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.

And he does it, which leads to exhortation number eight, let's commission brothers and sisters in the context of community. So as God raises them up, let's commission brothers and sisters in the context of community. The local church, in the context of community, the local church is God's chosen mean for the training and sending of pastors, church planters, and missionaries.

I praise God for the North American Mission Board, International Mission Board, state conventions, local associations, all of which aid local churches who lead the way in making disciples and multiplying churches. So pastors and church planters, let's call every member of our churches to pray about the possibility that the Spirit of God may be sending them out. The way we talk about it around Brook Hills is everybody, blank check on the table.

Whenever we're gonna send out a church planning team in North America, the nations, all right, everybody blank check, who's he calling out? Let's pray, let's fast, who's he leading to go? He'll say, I don't know if I'm ready to put a blank check on the table. Oh, this is the essence of what it means to be a

Christian. Do we trust God? We trust him to save us, how can we not trust him to lead us? He's good, he knows what is best for us.

So call everybody, put the blank check on the table. Maybe he'll lead us all, maybe lead just this person or that person. Let's see what the Spirit says.

And then as pastors and church planners, let's affirm those whom God calls out. Let's walk with them through that journey. Yes, let's benefit from the way we've served so well by North American Mission Board, International Mission Board, others.

At the same time, let us not farm out our responsibility to train up these pastors and church planners and missionaries from within our midst to go. Let's pour our lives into them, affirming them, sending them out, not alone, but together in teams, two by two. Nobody intended to plant a church alone, by themselves, with brothers and sisters alongside them and behind them, fasting and praying for them.

And let's not be afraid to send out our best. You think about this, Paul, if Paul is on staff at my church, I want him to stay there. Barnabas, the guy who was instrumental in the foundation of this church, these are the two best guys.

Why would you send them out? Because the Holy Spirit said to and the church celebrated him. Let's nurture this kind of atmosphere in our churches. Let's stop measuring our success by how many people we can get to come into our buildings.

Let's start measuring our success by how many people are leaving our buildings to take the world on with the gospel. Let's stop bragging about seating capacity and let's increase sending capacity. Sending them out.

Let's commission brothers and sisters in the context of communion. Ninth exhortation, let's trust. Let's trust that intentionally making disciples, let's trust that intentionally making disciples inevitably leads to multiplying churches.

Intentionally making disciples inevitably leads to multiplying churches. So see the simplicity of this thing. Not ease, I'm not talking ease.

I already said it's not easy, it's costly. But simplicity. Paul and Barnabas went out and preached the gospel.

They led people to Christ, baptized them and they showed them how to follow Christ. They raised up leaders and they were gone. So many of the things that we associate with the church are nowhere to be found in the book of Acts.

Exquisite buildings, elaborate programs. You have the people of God, the word of God, spirit of God, that's it. And apparently that's enough.

The more we complicate disciple making, the more we will stifle church planting. So let's learn from our brothers and sisters in Antioch and our brothers and sisters around the world. I think about Rajesh, pastor at the end of his rope in India, area of India where we're working, lives in one of the most spiritually, physically desolate places in India.

Home to the poorest of the poor, 0.01% evangelical. Death rate in Rajesh's community area is 5,000 people per day, which means that every day about 4,950 people in his area are thrust into hell. And for generations, spiritual ground has been hard, physical poverty, harrowing.

And in his words, Rajesh was ready to quit. He went to a training on disciple making we were helping put on. He was challenged to find a totally unreached village, walk into that village and say to the first person he met, I am here in the name of Jesus and I would like to pray for you and your home.

Rajesh thought it was nuts, never worked, but at the end of his rope, so he agreed to try. First village he walks into, first man he sees, Rajesh says to him, I am here in the name of Jesus. Before Rajesh could say anything else, the man says, Jesus, I've heard a little about him.

Can you tell me more? Rajesh was shocked. The man invited Rajesh into his home, invited all of his friends and family to gather together to hear about Jesus from Rajesh. Within two weeks, 25 people had trusted in Christ as king.

Now get this, those 25 people started doing the same thing in other villages. Today, I was talking with one of our workers at International Mission Board the other day, telling me specifics of how this is being followed. Today, they have planted churches in 115 different villages.

So this is what we see here in the church at Antioch. So look at these maps on the screen, let me show you a couple maps. And just see, this first one right here, this is, if you look over to the right, over on that side where the red and blue come together, that's Antioch.

And so blue arrows are them going out, Paul and Barnabas. They went out in Cyprus, go up north, red arrows are them coming back. Everywhere they're going, they're making disciples, and churches are being multiplied.

The epistles we have in the New Testament are just coming alive as churches are being birthed, disciples are being made. Look at this second map, same thing. Again, Antioch, the far right section over there, halfway up, they go north into some of the places they've been, that's when Paul gets the Macedonian call, he goes north to Macedonia, goes and preaches the gospel up there in places like Thessalonica, Corinth, and comes back through Ephesus.

What God is doing, they're making disciples and multiplying churches. Third map, up here on the screen, they go out again, Paul goes out this time, he goes again, retracing his steps, and we know after that he went down to Jerusalem, which is in the bottom right, and he ended up going to Rome in shackles. So everywhere they went, making disciples, multiplying churches.

That's what happened. Now, could it be that God desires to do the same thing from each of our churches? Making disciples, multiplying the gospel. Maybe in your community that map, cities in North America like that, and collectively all across the United States and Canada.

Let's trust that intentionally making disciples will inevitably lead to multiplying churches. This plan is good. It works.

We trust it. Which leads to last exhortation. Let's leave a legacy of disciple makers, church planters, and pastors.

Let's leave a legacy of disciple makers, church planters, and pastors all across North America for the fame of God's name. Brothers and sisters, let's leave a legacy of disciple makers, church planters, and pastors all across North America for the fame of God's name. Let me show you a couple more maps.

Look at this next one with me. This map is an illustration of the regions that were known to contain Christians, basically when the church at Antioch was founded. Again, you'll see Antioch over to the right, and you'll see, it's probably hard to see from where you're sitting, but on this map, there's a little bit of yellow in a couple of different places.

The yellow represents areas that were known to contain Christians right about the beginning of the church at Antioch. So you can see around Jerusalem, a little bit of yellow, Antioch, a little bit of yellow, and straight down the middle of the map, you can see Rome has a little bit of yellow. So those were areas known to contain Christians at the beginning of the church at Antioch.

Now, Antioch sends out Paul, Barnabas, they go, they're planting churches, making disciples, multiplying churches. In just a second, I wanna show you a map that illustrates the areas that were known to contain Christians at the end of Paul's ministry as a result of what Antioch had sent him out to do, and I want you to see if you can tell the difference. Look at this next map with me.

You see those yellow areas just light up right there? Right where he was planting churches? All right, Corinth, between Antioch and Corinth, all through Macedonia. Again, in Rome, growing, Jerusalem. Now, you look at that and you think, wow, that's, and obviously that was not just Paul, it was not just the church at Antioch, but this was birthed out of the church at Antioch.

But you look at that map, and you still see a lot of area that is not yellow. You look all the way over to the west, and you see Spain, and Paul's ambition was to get to Spain, and you don't see any yellow there. So does that mean the church at Antioch failed? Does that mean the church at Antioch really didn't have that much of an effect for the kingdom? I mean, yeah, some, but not as much as they would like to have had.

But before you think that, I wanna show you in just a second another map, and this map is gonna show you the areas that were known to contain Christians within two centuries after Paul's death. So within two centuries of this work that God had begun in the church at Antioch, and I want you to see if you can tell the difference. Look at this last map with me.

Do not underestimate what our God will do, what your God will do. For the church, pastor, church planner, who's totally surrendered to him, who is aggressively making disciples, do not underestimate what God will do. The continent of North America, their brothers and sisters who are desperately dependent on the Holy Spirit of God, and actively obedient to the reveal of the will of God, making disciples of multitudes of churches.

You bow your heads with me. I want to close this time in the word before Aaron comes back up, by simply praying for you. And I, I want to lead us in a prayer of surrender and hopeful surrender.

God, use us to see this gospel spread all throughout this continent for your glory. Father, we confess tonight that we are desperately dependent on you. Thank you for saving us from our sins.

We know that we find ourselves in the positions where we are at this moment, not because of any merit in us, but solely because of mercy in you. And so we glorify you for your mercy. Thank you, Jesus, for the cross.

Thank you for saving us from our sins. Thank you for calling us to yourself. Thank you for, hope of eternal life.

And thank you for calling us into leadership in your church. God, we know that not one of us deserves this honor. We know that we have not been called into the churches where we're serving, the ministry capacities where we're leading, because of any strength in us, but because we are weak and we need your strength.

And so we pray. I pray specifically for these brothers and sisters. I pray that your spirit would be strong upon them, that you would endure them with power from on high, that you would build up the brothers and sisters who are discouraged, you would uphold them with your righteous right hand, and that you would use difficulties and discouragements in our midst now and in the days ahead to resound to your glory.

Lord, use, we pray, use cancer, use tumors, use struggles in our families, churches that we lead. Use these things to accomplish your mission, we pray. We want your glory more than we want our own lives.

We wanna see your name hallowed in North America. We wanna see your name revered and held high in cities all across the United States and Canada. And so we pray for this, Lord, we long for this.

Give us grace to pray long for this and to fast for this and to plead for this. Send out more workers into your harvest field from churches all across this room. Send more and more and more out.

Paul's and Barnabas's and others, send them out in power to preach your God's word. We pray for your gospel. We pray for spiritual awakening in our country.

We pray for a massive turning to Christ that can only be attributed to the power of your spirit and the glory of your name. We pray that you would help us in the areas where you have put us to faithfully preach, proclaim your gospel day in and day out. Raise up from our midst ordinary brothers and sisters who are doing extraordinary things in your kingdom.

As together we long for the day when we will see your face and we will gather around your throne with every tribe and tongue, people and nation, and we will give you the praise you are due. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, we pray in your name, amen.

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