



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 34 Devoted Discipleship
By Pastor Jody May 05/21/2023**

Acts 11:19-26 ESV

The Church in Antioch

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ 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, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ 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.

[INTRODUCTION]

I am an NFL fan and have always been. Growing up I had the unique experience of going to a gym where all my football heroes went. Later in my life I had the experience of meeting a few, and even befriending an NFL player. I was always amazed by the stories of camp and behind the scene life. Let me tell you on their behalf it is no picnic. The average career life span of an NFL player is **3.3 years**, the average age is **26**, and the average **NFL player** earned **\$2.7 million a year**, as of the 2018 season, but not all of them save and prepare for a time in the near future when they won't enjoy that kind of income. About **80 percent** of NFL players go **bankrupt or suffer financial hardship** within two years of leaving the game. Because of this the NFL works hard at disciplining their young players to make a quick transition from college to the NFL.¹

¹ <https://work.chron.com/long-average-career-nfl-player-12643.html>



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The NFL’s Rookie Transition Program is a program which communicates with credibility, clarity and consistency, and covers a wide range of topics so that incoming players understand the league’s expectations, the benefits **they have earned** and the local resources — along with those from the league and the club — that are available to them.²

Mandatory topics include:

- A video introduction to the NFL and league policies
- Player benefits and benefit resources, including their [NFLPA](#) player rights and resources, and the [NFL programs](#) that are available to them.
- Player expectations, including the importance of sportsmanship, respect in the workplace, [media responsibilities](#) and how to work with their club’s public relations staff.
- Social responsibility for players, which covers league policies and the ramifications of issues like driving under the influence, or committing acts of domestic violence or sexual assault.
- Maintaining strong mental health and fitness, and an introduction to the health and safety resources available to all players and their families in times of need.
- An introduction to the culture, values and history of the league and a player’s club.
- Rule changes from college to the pros.

The truth of the matter without an intense time of discipleship and training many NFL players never come to fruition and tend not to produce a lot of fruit for the amount of investment that has been put in their lives to make it to that point.

[PROBLEM]

This is how it is with church life as well. New believers are the recipients of God’s Grace, that is an **unlimited blessing (Eph 2:7)**, that needs to be nurtured so they too can produce fruit one day that will resemble the one that brought them into this new life. New Christians, need to be discipled and trained because this world is all about squashing the life out of God’s people to ensure they never amount to much. And just like the NFL if we are not Devoted in our Discipleship, we can waste our opportunities to live for Christ.

Just like the NFL, God has provided a Rookie Transition Program, whereby keeping the main thing the main thing – **Jesus above all** – become totally reliant and

² <https://operations.nfl.com/journey-to-the-nfl/nfl-development-pipeline/nfl-rookie-transition-program/#:~:text=The%20NFL%20Rookie%20Transition%20Program,that%20are%20available%20to%20them.>



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responsive to the **HS**, learn proper doctrine, bear fruit, be open to mentorships and in turn disciple others helping the church continue this cycle of *Devoted Discipleship*. In Ephesians 4 Paul briefly describes this process for us.

Ephesians 4:11-17 ESV

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until **we all attain to the unity of the faith** and of the **knowledge of the Son of God**, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may **no longer be children**, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The goal of the program here in Ephesians is to give everyone the basics or the unity of belief in the Son of God (v.13), to become like Him (v.13), so that you don't get fooled by everything coming out of this world (v.14) that is to say **becoming like Christ is how you don't get carried away with all the nonsense of this world**. Then when you know the basic knowledge you are to make sure you are plugged into a body of believers (v.16). Seeking out how to love them rightly which is that picture of being joined together, the individual parts working together. This body is what then shines the light of God's glory. – This is the results of **The New Believer Training Program**.

In our story today in Antioch we have just seen an intense work of the HS Effectively Evangelizing people from the most debase of all societies. God sent people, other Hellenistic Jews, with Cultural Confidence and some Good Gospel sense to evangelize people that looked like them and it went well under God's good hand. It went so well that news reached back to Jerusalem which must have caused quite a stir for people who were not of the mind to take the Gospel to non-God fearers first (11:1-18 – old prejudices die hard).



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Jerusalem at this point, are the protectors of the Doctrine of the church, they were the first converts so to them this must have come as a shock, since they were not there to instigate this movement of the HS. So, they are going to assure quality control, they are going to send one of their best recruits to check it out. They send an old friend of ours now, Barnabas, and how he will institute the Training program for Antioch a ***Devoted Discipleship*** which consists of 4 parts, **Accountability, Encouragement, Instruction, and Fruit**. All of that to produce in these people the **image of Christ**, so that they are **not carried away** by the world, which would always be a danger for them in Antioch.

1. Accountability

22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

When news of spiritual enlightenment leaks into this world it is the **job of the church to check those things out**. I know that most of you in here are not plugged into the church world as I am, that's ok but it is still my job to investigate things when I hear them, especially when it might be something that could lure you away from the truth, or from pursuing Christ, I am called to put things to the test.

Need to hold others Accountable:

Over the last three years I have spent time studying the anthropological movement of **wokism**, I studied its' roots, I read books, I listened to teachers, I discussed these things with leaders in different fields. The result of that study is we **left the A29 network** when I witnessed them embracing Marxism Ideology when no one in their leadership seemed to mind and not too many members seemed concern about A29 taking money to push that agenda. In return we preached from the text the dangers of man's ideologies infiltrating the pulpit. That is all to point out when talk of spiritual enlightenment comes within earshot of the church it is the church's role to check it out.



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Just so you know we are doing that again with the new movement of Christian Nationalism. It recently has become a hot topic whereby a proposition has popped out from political and religious leaders alike demanding that Christians take a side on whether they believe that the country should be run by Christian laws and rulers. Now that sounds good, but no one as of yet, has defined Christian Nationalism, and that term will be something that will be thrown at you, just like Wokism or BLM over the next decade, to try and earn your vote. Again, it is time to get to work to hold all of that **accountable** to God's Word.

The need to hold the Church Accountable:

Accountability is important not just when we hear of things happening outside these four walls but for us corporately as well. This is why churches should not shy away from church denominations, while at the same time, in the spirit of Protestantism, we don't stay in them just because they may have favor with man. Churches as well today, can seek accountability in networks putting them around other leaders and bodies that think and pursue God with like mindedness. Lastly, they can seek to align themselves with Creeds and Confessions that hold to a consistent translation of scripture.

All of that HCC has worked hard to do by distancing ourselves from **denominations** that do not align with Sola Scriptura. We also embrace **affiliations** with churches and leaders that embrace the 5 Solas and traditional reformed teaching. We also offer our **accreditation** by adhering to the LBCF 1689 and that is an ongoing self-examination as we use that as a tool to better strengthen this body. At HCC we are **NOT** as much as concerned as numerical growth as we are about spiritual growth, for if we neglect our spiritual **accountability** our numerical growth will lack value, and maybe instead of saving souls we are helping them walk that narrow path to Hell.

Accountability is needed in our lives as we grow as Christians, and you will see later that there is also an individual element to this as well.

2. Encouragement



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²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent **Barnabas** to Antioch. ²³ 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**, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

Alright so the leaders of the church send the best man they have for this job, Barnabas. His qualifications: 1st He's from Cyprus, so he can mix with these Hellenists, 2nd he's also great at encouragement, he won't necessarily look down on what's going on, he will be positive in his assumptions.

By God's Grace the leaders in Jerusalem were persuaded not to send someone like them, but instead they picked someone suited for the job. BTW **all churches should function like that**, the pastor should not be the first line of defense for every situation that arises in the church. There is a body of believers here, and all have gifts of sharing the gospel in some way, that means **all of us** should be involved in speaking truth and especially **ENCOURAGING one another**. Every church needs more than just instruction they need someone gifted in the art of encouragement; this type of person is different though than what the world considers to be an encourager.

The world today would consider someone to be encouraging if they were good at **empathizing**, if they could understand how one feels, and then accept what that person wants to do for their life, **based on feelings as the right thing to do**. The world loves that type of encourager. I mean right now the therapist ranks are growing with these type of people, the type that listen to gender dysphoria and help people decide that transition surgery is right for them no matter the age. We have empathetic surgeons that are quick to encourage families to pay money so they can mutilate such people, no matter the age. We have therapists and social workers that don't try to get people off of drugs, but help people think up ways to justify staying on them, and provide services so they can live on the street and escape life. We have politicians that are so empathetic to a minority that they kick out people in our military that can't get on the woke bandwagon. We have NCAA officials that are so empathetic to transgender athletes that they are all for discriminating against female athletes removing the protection of Title IX rights.



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Yes, the world **definitely has different ideas on what makes for a good empathetic encourager.**

With that being said let's go back to scripture to define what an encourager is.

First off, an encourager is someone that has been **radically changed by the Gospel** for only a saved person can encourage you in the right way, that is to pursue Jesus, not the justification of your feelings. Look at v.23 again with me. **²³When 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, ²⁴for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.**

Barnabas was a GOOD MAN (v.24). What made him good was not what he did as in the **exhortation or empathetic encouragement**. He wasn't good because he was glad at what he saw in other people, feeling good about people is not what makes you good, it's **not your power of empathy**. What Luke is telling you, by the grammar in the sentence is first, we know he is good because he saw the **GRACE of GOD**. He saw how people were changed not by anything they did but by God's elective grace and the reason he could see it, at the end of the sentence, was because **He was full of the HS and Faith**. What makes us good is being filled with the HS and filled with faith that God is still saving! That goodness, the indwelling of God in us, is what allows us to see God's Grace when it is really on a person. Seeing that is what justifies what has already happened in us.

The 2nd thing that makes Barnabas so good at encouragement is look at what he encourages them to do – **²³...he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose**, He doesn't tell them that when the going gets rough abandon ship **even when you feel like it**, he encourages them to keep going, keep up the good work of fighting for faith, because **he understands the value of it!** A good encourager is someone that gets what life was like before Christ, and now they put all their efforts in getting others to cling to Him.

So, a **good encourager** is someone who can **see God's Grace** at work in people's lives and then **cheers them on** to keep going after it! But with that there is a need for more.



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3. Instruction

²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ 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.

So Barnabas, sees the need for backup and he's strategic in his process. He goes and gets his friend Saul. Sometimes it's ok to slow things down and do things right. Barnabas needs help and he needs the specific gift mix of the man that can relate to Gentiles better than him. He understands that he is leaving all the excitement behind, but he wants to make sure that these people are getting what they need so they may grow into the image of Christ. He doesn't want them swept back into the worldly life of Antioch.

He's not worried about wasting time even when evangelism coals are hot.

He's not worried about his rep or sharing the limelight.

He's not worried about not having all the influence.

He's concerned with making sure they are becoming Christ-like and are not tossed to and for on the waves.

This is a much different approach to the popular church models of today.

The modern trends of church growth are to generate excitement, produce comfortable entertaining venues, and hire administration not pastors to engage with attendees. Let me tell you about another institution that has done that as well, the Westernized University System.

Over the last twenty years the largest number of employees on a scholastic campus has switched from full time professor to administrator. *These administrators are now in charge of equity enhancement principles whereby they can engage the student's feelings to ensure the maximum enjoyment at the campus while they can punish any professor worth their salt that raises any questions about what they should be teaching.* In turn this is killing the quality of education. I recently was listening to a report whereby Hospitals and law firms were no longer fighting over the Ivy league school graduates because they know those students were not forced to do standardized testing, that grades were



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manipulated based on perceived slights of social injustices, in other words they are no longer desirable.

The church is embracing the same model guys, and the byproduct of that is he who gets to administrate is he who gets to lead. So, if we have a bunch of underqualified managers facilitating a church, managing programs based on felt needs and not on glorifying God, then what will the American church produce, I wonder?

Devoted Discipleship can't happen unless the church gets serious about what it is teaching and stops fretting over how it is facilitating programs, policies, and procedures producing posers not prophets. If we don't we will miss the blessing which is the last part of Devoted Discipleship.

4. Fruit

²⁶ ... For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called **Christians**.

This is the first time in scripture that this word is used **5985** Χριστιανός (*Christianos*), οὗ (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.pr.masc.; ≡ Str 5546; TDNT 9.493—LN 11.35 **Christian** (Ac 11:26; 26:28; 1Pe 4:16+)³ It is someone that is recognized as looking like Christ. What commentators agree on is that this is a tremendous moment not just in Antioch, but in all of human history.

This title was not self-imposed this was a title bestowed on these people by the people around them, by the Antiochians. What that means is where there was a distinction between Jew and all Pagan races that now the Antiochians now see 3. What they are really seeing is the physical manifestation of God fulfilling a promise, He will call out His true descendants by faith, and make a people for Himself. Based on the teachings of Christ and the rate of expansion as Luke records a great many people were taught, is we have people that resemble the man they make much of. The fruit of Devoted Discipleship is that people have

³ Swanson, J. (1997). [*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)*](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



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grown into the head (Eph. 4:15) who is Christ, so as the fame of the church grew so did Christ.

The Fruit of Devoted Discipleship for you is you get to spend time learning why you love Jesus and in return He spends time making you known to others around you.

If that sounds like something you want, I have somethings for you to consider.

[CHALLENGE]

Accountability – holding one another to the ‘standard’ of Christ.

The Need to hold each other Accountable.

- **Luke 17:3** - *Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,*
- Where is your own accountability? Do you work hard trying to make your life open to others, or do you hide how you are living?
- Who are you holding accountable to God’s Word? Are you spending time praying for those that you have a vested interest over them and their souls?

Encouragement – learning to catch people doing what is ‘good’.

Today you have three camps you can belong to.

- You are good at correcting, and that is a good skill to have, but correction without encouragement binds people to the law, not grace.
- You are good at ignoring sin, and you would rather see people happy than out of relationship with you, but that is a sin of omission for it withholds the Truth of Christ, so they remain in the dark.
- OR you are at working on encouragement, you know how to correct with love, and you practice **catching people doing what is right**, and Paul’s instruction lives in you:
- **Philippians 4:8** -*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*



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Instruction – fighting against worldly passions.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 - *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

- Two points I want to leave you with here what are you learning and who are you teaching?
- As the world speeds up and the religion of secularization gains prominence you will need to be self-educated.
- A person that can discover the joy of learning about Christ will become a person that enjoys teaching others about Him as well.

Fruit – producing what looks attractive to this world.

Matthew 5:14-16 - *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

- The goal of Christ was to love you and let the world see the effects of His love on you, so what are you doing to shine in front of others?
- Is there time in your life where you are engaging with the world so that they see your light among the darkness?
- Realize that a lot of joy in the Christian life, whether for good or for bad, is when people realize you look like Christ.

[PRAYER]

[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that was first devoted to us and spared not the highest cost of His Son to rescue us from our sin.



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Go in the name of the Son, that endured the hardships and suffering of this world to become the fruit of the tree of life that we His people would need.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that will make in us fruit so that the world can see Christ now go and share that goodness with others.