

Biggest Loser 7

What else can we learn about how to be a strong and healthy church from the early church as it began in Jerusalem and began to quickly spread into Asia and Europe. The last several weeks we have looked at some key characters and the behavior they modeled: **Stephen**- laymen serve, deny self, keep our eyes on Jesus; **Ananias and Barnabas**- praying for the lost, coaching and coming along side new believers, affirm gifts and callings; **Peter**- keep divine appointments, reach out to all people, everyone is welcome. Today we're going to look at a church instead of a person.... Not the one in Jerusalem, but the one in Antioch.

Antioch- In Syria, (now part of Turkey) on the river Orontes, about 16 miles from the Mediterranean, and some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the metropolis of Syria, and afterwards became the capital of the Roman province in Asia. It ranked third, after Rome and Alexandria, in point of importance, of the cities of the Roman empire. It was called the "first city of the East." Christianity was introduced very early there. It is intimately connected with the early history of the gospel. It was the great central point from where missionaries to the Gentiles were sent forth.

—Easton's Illustrated Dictionary

Nicholas, one of the original deacons, was a proselyte of Antioch, according to Acts 6:5, meaning he was of another race/religion and went through the appropriate rituals to become a Jew. During the persecutions following Stephen's stoning,

many Jerusalem Christians fled to Antioch where they preached to Greek-speaking Jews and to Greeks.

Barnabas served to greatly strengthen the ties of fellowship between the church at Antioch and the mother church in Jerusalem. Barnabas secured the services of Paul to be a teacher there and it was Barnabas and Paul who personally carried the relief offering from the Antioch church to the suffering Jerusalem church. The followers of Christ were first given the name “Christians” at Antioch.

1 In the local church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.” **3** Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off. **Acts 13:1-3 (HCSB)**

How significant was this that the church at Antioch “set apart, fasted, prayed, laid hands on, and sent off” Barnabas and Saul. Was it just a unique, once in a lifetime, special event in the life of that church at that time and the life of Barnabas and Saul, or was it something that should happen frequently in any and every healthy church?

I contend strongly that it was, and is for us, the latter. This kind of activity should be going on in every healthy church. I strongly believe that under the second part of Jesus’ Great Commission to “teach disciples” and thus the second part of our mission

statement that we “teach disciples,” that we should be regularly sending out young people and adults who are called to the ministry. Those who are called out from our midst to enter into full-time, lifetime service to the kingdom of God through the church and beyond. We must on a regular basis- fast, pray, lay hands on and send off pastors, missionaries, youth pastors, worship pastors, children’s pastor, teachers, counselors, etc... This is absolutely necessary for the continued health of this church as well as the whole church. These young people must be the next generation of Saul and Barnabas, George Whitefield, and Billy Graham.

So far, we’ve had a pretty good start.... Those who have publicly declared a call to full-time Christian service since New Hope started....Finished college/serving- 5, In college- 6, In HS/MS- 2

Is sending out some of our best really the best thing? Consider all those we have already sent out and are now serving or are in college- What if they were all here to do what God called them to do right here in Cape Coral? Wouldn’t we be a better, healthier, stronger church? Wouldn’t Cape Coral be better off? You’d better believe it. You know we would! So why do we keep sending them off?

Please understand this: The kingdom of God and His purposes are so much bigger than this local congregation. We, New Hope Baptist Fellowship have an international responsibility to make and teach disciples for the glory of God. It is why we give financial support to the Royal Palm Baptist Association, Florida Baptist Convention, North American Mission Board, the

International Mission Board and Grace Global Network. It is why we regularly send out youth and adult teams on outreach projects and mission trips to this community, this region, this nation, and the nations of the world. It is why our youth pastor and a team of our youth are headed to Tennessee right now. It is why we are sending a team of adults to Cuba in September. And, it is why we send out some of our very best young people, who are wonderfully gifted and called by God, into full time Christian ministry to other places. It's not just about us. It is about the kingdom. And it has got to be more than just being kingdom minded in our prayers and giving. We especially must be kingdom minded in creating fertile ground for our young people to hear the call of God to go and then sending them out with our blessings.

How can we be sure that New Hope is the kind of church where God can get hold of young lives and call them to the ripened fields of the world?

Healthy churches Send out:

Make **Children/youth priority**

From day one, I have personally and I have led the church to make ministering to children and youth a top priority. I make no apology for that. Two Reasons: (1) This is by far the age when most people come to Christ for salvation, if they ever do. (2) When God calls someone to ministry, it is usually when they are a teenager.

My granddaughter went to her first GA camp this week at our Florida Baptist Camp at Blue Springs in Marianna, FL. Many of

our young people have been to camps there. I prayed that it would be life changing for her. I am so pleased that she is in a church that believes in investing in the lives of eight year old girls like Beth.

13 Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. **14** Then Jesus said, "Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this."**15** After putting His hands on them, He went on from there. **Matt** 19:13-15 (HCSB)

Teach and Model servant leadership

First and foremost pastors and teachers, but also all of us. We have to show our children and young people how to conduct ourselves in and out of the church, how to love each other, how to cooperate for the good of the church, and how to serve each other. If they don't see and catch on to the absolute joy of serving God, how will they ever hear and respond to God's call on their lives.

1 But you must speak what is consistent with sound teaching. **2** Older men are to be self-controlled, worthy of respect, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance. **3** In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to much wine. [They are] to teach what is good, **4** so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and children, **5** to be sensible, pure, good homemakers, and

submissive to their husbands, so that God's message will not be slandered. ⁶ Likewise, encourage the young men to be sensible ⁷ about everything. Set an example of good works yourself, with integrity and dignity in your teaching.

Titus 2:1-7 (HCSB)

I find, and studies have shown, a prominent thinking that is pretty common and consistent among most adults that the church exists to meet their needs and help them feel good about themselves. That is at best only partially true. If we are already saved, the church also exist to be a channel for us to use our spiritual gifts and our natural abilities to lead others to Christ and build them up. And, one of the greatest areas for us to do that is in children and youth ministries.

Opportunities to serve and discover (go on mission trips, to teach, to preach, lead worship)

I make no apologies that our worship leadership is infiltrated with students.

1 Then he went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ² The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to go with him, so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled through the towns, they delivered to them the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the

faith and were increased in number daily. Acts 16:1-5 (HCSB)

Why did Paul, the master missionary, evangelist, church planter actually want to take on this young, inexperienced, immature kid Timothy along with him on his ministry journey? As hard, distracting, and challenging as it would be, Paul understood the absolute necessity of investing his life and energy into mentoring young people. Mentoring was an integral part of His diverse ministry.

It would be very easy, especially in these times of financial, moral, political and spiritual upheaval to choose to keep our resources, our talent, energy and brightest young people right here where we need them. Like tithing, it doesn't make sense, when we're struggling ourselves, to send out money and people to the Lord's work in other places. At least it doesn't make earthly sense. But it makes perfect sense if we're thinking kingdom mindedly. It's not about you. It's not about us! It is about the kingdom of God!

Melissa K.- Whether she is in the Middle East, Mid-America, or the Mid-point bridge, she will be doing kingdom work. That's what God has called her to do.

You can choose to be offended if you prefer because you may think that you and/or the group you are part of doesn't get as much "attention" as the children or youth. But I have a better idea-volunteer, teach, mentor, coach, or lead in our children's or youth ministry. And if you don't feel gifted or called to those areas, at least model servant leadership in what you do.

Are you new to New Hope? Please don't misunderstand. If you have needs you're in the right place. We will love you, help you, and encourage you. But then expect eventually to be challenged to serve. It's about the kingdom of God!