

The Church in the New Testament, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Growing Disciples

Acts 11:19-26

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Antioch is where the class gets to watch a church grow from the ground up, and the story starts with a funeral. Luke opens by reminding us that these believers were “scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen,” the same Stephen the class met in Lesson 3 serving food, the same Stephen who preached and was stoned. The stoning was meant to end the movement. It spread it four hundred miles. Help the class feel that irony, and then guard it carefully: God did not authorize the murder of Stephen. He overruled it. That distinction is the same one the class worked through in Lesson 2 at Acts 4:28, and it is worth reinforcing rather than assuming.

The engine of this lesson is who did the preaching. Luke goes out of his way to say these were unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene, not apostles, not officials, just Christians who had been run out of their homes and who talked about Jesus in the new city anyway. No commission is mentioned, no strategy, no sending church. They spoke, and “the hand of the Lord was with them,” and a great number believed. Then when Jerusalem heard, it sent Barnabas, and this is worth a careful word to the class: Jerusalem sent help, not orders. There is no headquarters in the New Testament, no mother church with jurisdiction over daughter churches. What we see is one congregation encouraging another, which is exactly what Christian cooperation looks like without hierarchy.

Aim the lesson at the difference between converts and disciples, because that is where Antioch has something most churches need. Barnabas arrives, sees the grace of God, and rather than pronouncing the work finished, he exhorts them to remain faithful with steadfast purpose, then fetches Saul from Tarsus and spends an entire year teaching them. A year. Two of the best teachers in the church, in one congregation, for twelve months, feeding new believers. That is the unglamorous work that produced the church which would later send Paul to the nations. And it is at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. Let the class end with the plain question: are we making converts and moving on, or are we making disciples the way Barnabas did?

Question 1

Student Question:

In verse 19, believers scattered by persecution “went as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch.” How did God use persecution to advance the gospel, and what does this teach about His sovereignty?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene so the class feels the cost before they admire the outcome. These were refugees. They had watched Stephen die, they had lost homes and livelihoods, and Saul was “ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Luke’s word for scattered is the word used of sowing seed, and that is the picture, but do not rush to the pretty image. Being scattered was terrible before it was fruitful.

Now show the class what God did with it. The church in Jerusalem had been told to be witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), and eight chapters later it was still in Jerusalem. Persecution did what preaching had not: it put Christians in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. The enemy’s best weapon carried the gospel four hundred miles up the coast to the third greatest city in the empire, where the first Gentile church would be born and from which Paul would eventually be sent to the nations. Satan lit a fire and God used it to spread seed.

Then make the same careful distinction the class learned in Lesson 2, because this is exactly where it applies. God did not cause the persecution. He did not need Stephen dead, He did not author Saul’s cruelty, and He never sanctifies evil. What He does is defeat it, often by taking the very thing intended to destroy His people and making it serve them. That is what He did at the cross, which the church confessed in Acts 4:27-28, and it is what He did here. Joseph said it exactly: “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Both halves of that sentence are true, and the class must keep both.

Guard against a cheap application. Romans 8:28 does not say all things are good; it says God works all things together for good for those who love Him. Do not let the class walk away thinking every hard thing has a visible silver lining, because the Christians in verse 19 could not see one. They were not told they were fulfilling Acts 1:8. They were just displaced people trying to survive who kept talking about Jesus. The good was real, and they did not live to see most of it.

Bring it near, gently. Ask the class where they are currently in the middle of something scattered and senseless. This passage does not promise them an explanation. It promises that God is not finished, and that the people in verse 19 had no idea they were standing at the beginning of the church that would evangelize the world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The scattering was real suffering before it was fruitful; Luke does not minimize the cost (Acts 8:3)
- Persecution accomplished the spread commanded in Acts 1:8 that the church had not yet undertaken
- God overruled the evil; He did not author or cause it (Acts 4:27-28; Genesis 50:20)
- Sovereignty means God accomplishes His purpose through evil, never that He decrees it
- Romans 8:28 promises God works all things for good, not that all things are good
- These believers never saw what God was doing through their displacement

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you in the middle of something scattered and senseless right now?
- How do we hold together “they meant evil” and “God meant it for good” without making God the author of evil?
- These refugees never knew what their preaching started. What does that suggest about faithfulness we cannot measure?

Question 2

Student Question:

Verse 20 says some began “speaking to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Why was this step significant, and what does it reveal about the universal nature of the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make sure the class sees the wall being crossed. Verse 19 says the scattered believers spoke the word “to no one except Jews.” That was not malice; it was the deepest assumption of their lives. Then verse 20 says “but there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also.” That little word “also” is one of the most consequential words in the book. Someone finally said the name of Jesus to a Greek.

Notice who did it. Not the apostles. Not Jerusalem. Unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene, which is to say men who had themselves grown up outside Judea, among Gentiles, and who therefore found it natural to talk to their neighbors. Luke never gives us their names. The single most important missionary step in the early church was taken by Christians whose names we will not know until the resurrection. Help the class sit with that, because it says a great deal about how God’s work actually moves.

Then draw out the theology that was catching up to them. Peter had already been to Cornelius’s house two chapters earlier and had said, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34-35). The promise in Acts 2:39 had always included those “who are far off.” The blessing to Abraham was that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8). The gospel was never a Jewish possession that got extended to Gentiles as an afterthought; it was always for the world, and the church was slow to believe its own message.

Let the class feel why that slowness is so understandable and so instructive. These were not bad people. They were people whose category of “us” had been formed over centuries and was not easily enlarged, even by a Lord who had commanded them to go to all nations. Ask the class where their own “to no one except” line runs. Every congregation has one, and it is rarely stated out loud, which is precisely what makes it durable.

Then point at the result, because it settles the argument: “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” God put His approval on the men who crossed the line. He always had. They were simply the first to act like it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Verse 19 shows the church still preaching only to Jews; the “also” of verse 20 breaks a centuries-old assumption
- The step was taken by unnamed ordinary Christians, not by apostles or officials
- God shows no partiality; the gospel was always for all people (Acts 10:34-35; Acts 2:39)
- The promise to Abraham always intended blessing for all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8)
- The church was slow to believe the universality of its own message
- God’s hand was with those who crossed the line, confirming the gospel’s reach

Discussion Prompts

- Where does our own “to no one except” line quietly run?
- Why do you think Luke never gives us the names of the men who took this step?
- What makes an unstated assumption harder to change than a stated one?

Question 3

Student Question:

According to verse 21, “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” What does it mean for the hand of the Lord to be with the church’s work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the phrase itself, because it is an Old Testament expression the class will recognize once you point at it. “The hand of the Lord” is God’s active power at work, the same language used of the exodus and of God’s help to His people again and again (Ezra 7:9; Nehemiah 2:8). It does not mean God was watching approvingly from a distance. It means God was working, and that the result belonged to Him.

Now let the class see the balance Luke strikes in one sentence. The men preached. The hand of the Lord was with them. Both are in the verse, and neither cancels the other. Paul says it plainly: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). The preaching was real work and it mattered, and it produced nothing by itself. Help the class hold both, because we tend to drop one. Drop the first and we become passive; drop the second and we become proud and exhausted.

Be careful what the class hears in this. The hand of the Lord being with them does not mean miracles were occurring, and Luke reports none here. It does not mean everything was easy. And it certainly does not mean God overrode anyone's will and compelled belief; notice the verse says "a great number who believed turned to the Lord." They believed and they turned. God worked through the word they heard, exactly as Romans 10:17 says, and people responded genuinely.

Then ask the class the practical question. How would you know if the hand of the Lord were with our work? Not by the crowd, and not by a feeling. Luke's evidence is that people believed and turned to the Lord, which is to say lives changed direction. That is a measurable thing, and it is a different measure than the ones congregations usually reach for.

Finally, let it comfort them. Every Christian who has ever tried to talk about Jesus has felt the inadequacy of it, the sense that words this small cannot possibly move anyone. That instinct is right, and it is the point. The hand of the Lord is what makes the difference, which means our job is to be faithful and God's job is to give the growth. That is a far lighter load than the one most of us are carrying.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "The hand of the Lord" is Old Testament language for God's active working power (Ezra 7:9; Nehemiah 2:8)
- Human preaching and divine working are both real; neither cancels the other (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)
- The phrase does not imply miracles here; Luke reports none
- God did not override anyone's will; they believed and turned (Romans 10:17)
- The evidence of God's hand is changed lives, not crowds or feelings
- Faithfulness is our work; giving the growth is God's

Discussion Prompts

- How would you know if the hand of the Lord were with our congregation's work?
- Which half do you tend to drop: that the work is real, or that God gives the growth?
- How does "God gives the growth" change the weight you carry when you talk about Jesus?

Question 4

Student Question:

In verse 22, the Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch. Why was it important for established churches to support and encourage new congregations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with what Jerusalem heard and what it did. Report reached them of Gentiles believing in a distant city, and their response was to send help. Notice they did not send an investigator to shut it down, and given the church's history in Acts 10 and 11, they might have. They sent Barnabas, whose name literally means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Whoever chose him understood what a young congregation needs.

Now set a boundary the class genuinely needs, and set it plainly. Jerusalem sent help; it did not send orders. There is no headquarters in the New Testament. Antioch was not a branch office, Jerusalem was not a mother church with jurisdiction, and Barnabas arrived with no authority to govern. The New Testament knows congregations under their own elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:2), cooperating freely, never a hierarchy of churches ruling churches. Help the class see the difference between the denominational structures they may be familiar with and what is actually on the page here: brethren helping brethren, without control.

Then draw out why the help mattered so much. A brand-new congregation of Gentile believers, in a pagan city, with no elders yet, no Scriptures of their own, and no experience, is enormously vulnerable. They needed teaching they could not generate themselves, and they needed someone who could tell them that what was happening to them was real. Every young work needs both. Left entirely alone, that congregation would have had to invent Christianity from scratch, and no one does that well.

Point out the humility running in both directions, because it is easy to miss. Jerusalem had to accept that God was doing something significant somewhere else, without them, among people they had recently been unsure about. And Antioch had to receive a man they had not asked for. Both of those require a congregation to believe that the work belongs to God rather than to itself. That is the soil cooperation grows in.

Bring it near. Ask the class who our congregation is encouraging, and who encourages us. Congregations, like Christians, drift into self-absorption without meaning to, and the cure is the same: look outward at what God is doing elsewhere and go help it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jerusalem sent encouragement, not orders; there is no headquarters church in the New Testament
- Each congregation is autonomous under its own elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:2)
- Cooperation between congregations is voluntary and free of hierarchy or control
- Barnabas was chosen for his character; his name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36)
- New congregations are vulnerable and need teaching and confirmation they cannot supply themselves
- Cooperation requires humility on both sides: to accept God working elsewhere, and to receive help

Discussion Prompts

- How is what Jerusalem did different from a denominational headquarters overseeing a branch?
- Whom is our congregation currently encouraging? Who encourages us?
- Why does receiving help require as much humility as giving it?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 23 says Barnabas “saw the grace of God” and “was glad.” What did the grace of God look like in this young congregation, and how do we recognize it today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Fasten the class on the verb: he saw it. Grace was visible. Barnabas did not deduce the grace of God from a doctrinal statement or a report; he walked into Antioch and looked at people and saw it with his eyes. Ask the class what exactly he was looking at. Gentiles who had been idolaters were worshipping the true God. People who had no covenant, no law, and no history with Israel had turned to the Lord and were living differently. Grace had left marks you could see.

That tells us something important about grace, and the class needs it. Grace is not merely a doctrine we affirm or a feeling of being accepted. It is God’s unearned favor actually at work, and where it is at work it changes people. Titus says the grace of God has appeared, “training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:11-12). Paul said, “by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace is not opposed to effort; it produces it.

Guard the boundary in both directions here, because grace gets distorted two ways and your class has probably met both. Some treat grace as a license, as if being under grace meant obedience no longer matters, which Paul answers with horror in Romans 6:1-2. Others treat their standing with God as something they earn by performance, which empties grace of its meaning. Barnabas saw neither of those at Antioch. He saw people who had been given everything freely and were visibly, gladly living like it.

Now notice what Barnabas did with what he saw: he was glad. That reaction is worth pointing out, because it was not automatic. These were Gentiles, converted without becoming Jews, in a church nobody planned, by preachers nobody authorized. A different man would have arrived with a list of concerns. Barnabas looked for the work of God first and found it. Help the class see that this is a discipline, not a temperament. What you go looking for is largely what you will see.

Then ask the class the honest version of the question. If Barnabas walked into our congregation this Sunday, what would he see? Not what would he be told, and not what does our sign say. What would grace look like from the parking lot?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace was visible; Barnabas saw it in changed lives (Acts 11:23)
- Grace is God's unearned favor actually at work, and it trains and changes those who receive it (Titus 2:11-12)
- Grace is not opposed to effort; it produces it (1 Corinthians 15:10)
- Against treating grace as license to continue in sin (Romans 6:1-2)
- Against treating standing with God as earned by performance
- Looking for God's work rather than for concerns is a discipline, not a temperament

Discussion Prompts

- If Barnabas walked into our congregation this Sunday, what would he see?
- How can grace be visible without becoming performance?
- Barnabas looked for God's work and found it. What do you tend to go looking for?

Question 6

Student Question:

Barnabas "exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose" (v. 23). Why is this kind of encouragement essential for new believers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice first what Barnabas did not say. He did not congratulate them and go home. He had just seen the grace of God and been glad, and the very next thing he did was urge them to remain. That word is the whole issue. It assumes something the modern mind resists: that a person who has genuinely begun can fail to continue. If remaining were automatic, exhorting them to remain would be pointless.

This is where the class needs careful teaching, so give it plainly. Scripture never treats perseverance as guaranteed. Jesus said "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13). The Hebrew writer warns brothers against "an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God," and says we share in Christ "if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:12-14). Peter describes people who escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Christ and became entangled again, ending worse than they began (2 Peter 2:20-22). Paul warns the Galatians that they have "fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). These are not warnings to unbelievers. They are warnings to Christians, and they are meaningless if falling away is impossible.

So set the boundary kindly: the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” does not survive Acts 11:23. Barnabas exhorted them to remain, which is not something you say to people whose continuance is certain. But be equally careful not to swing to the other error. This is not a warning designed to leave Christians anxious and insecure, forever checking whether they are still in. The eunuch went home rejoicing in Lesson 4, and he was right to. Assurance and vigilance are not enemies. God keeps His promises perfectly; the question is never whether He will let go.

Now look at the phrase “with steadfast purpose,” because it tells you what remaining requires. This is a settled resolve of the heart, a decision made in advance and held. Barnabas is not asking for a feeling; he is asking for a fixed intention that will still be there when the novelty wears off and the cost arrives. New believers especially need this, because conversion is often accompanied by strong emotion, and emotion is not what carries anyone through year three.

Then bring the class into the work. Barnabas did this for Antioch, and Scripture asks all of us to do it for each other: “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Ask your class who is doing this for the newest Christians among them, and who did it for them when they began. Most people who drift away are not argued out of the faith. They are simply not held on to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Barnabas urged them to remain, which assumes that continuing is not automatic (Acts 11:23)
- Scripture repeatedly warns Christians against falling away (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 3:12-14; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Galatians 5:4)
- Against “once saved, always saved”; the warnings are addressed to believers and are meaningless if apostasy is impossible
- Vigilance is not the enemy of assurance; God’s faithfulness is never in question
- “Steadfast purpose” is settled resolve, not emotion, and it is what carries a believer past the novelty
- Exhorting one another daily is every Christian’s work, not only a leader’s (Hebrews 3:13)

Discussion Prompts

- Who exhorted you to remain when you were new? Whom are you doing that for now?
- Why is “remain faithful” a strange thing to say if a Christian cannot fall away?
- How do we take the warnings seriously without living in anxiety?

Question 7

Student Question:

Verse 24 describes Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” What qualities made Barnabas effective in this work, and how should this shape the kind of people we send to strengthen congregations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class notice that Luke described the seven this way in Lesson 3, and now he says it of Barnabas: full of the Holy Spirit, and full of faith, and good. Luke reserves this kind of description for very few people, and he adds “good,” which is not a word he uses lightly. Ask the class what a good man is. Not impressive, not gifted, not persuasive. Good. The kind of man who does the right thing when it costs him and whose presence makes other people better.

Then show the class Barnabas’s track record, because Luke has been building this portrait for seven chapters. In Acts 4:36-37 he sold a field and laid the money at the apostles’ feet during the events of Lesson 2. In Acts 9:26-27, when the whole Jerusalem church was afraid of newly converted Saul and would not touch him, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and vouched for him. Later, in Acts 15:37-39, he will risk a friendship with Paul rather than give up on John Mark. This is a consistent man. He gives away what is his, he believes in people nobody else will believe in, and he keeps showing up for them.

Now connect the character to the assignment. Antioch needed exactly this man. A suspicious man would have found problems. A proud man would have taken over. A timid man would have reported back and waited for instructions. It took a good man, full of faith, to walk into an unauthorized, irregular, wildly promising Gentile church and see the grace of God rather than a threat. Help the class see that the fitness for the work was character, not skill.

Keep “full of the Holy Spirit” anchored, since the class met this phrase in Lesson 3. It is not a special anointing or an experience marking a spiritual class above ordinary Christians. Luke tells us what it looked like in Barnabas: goodness and faith. It is the fruit of Galatians 5:22-23 evident in a life, a man so governed by God that you can see it.

Then make it a searching question rather than a character study. We tend to send the capable. God’s pattern here is to send the good. Ask the class who we would send to help a struggling congregation, and why, and whether our instincts match Luke’s. And ask them the harder version: would anyone describe you the way Luke described Barnabas? That is the only qualification in the verse, and it is available to everyone in the room.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Luke describes Barnabas as good, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of faith; character, not skill, fitted him for the work (Acts 11:24)
- His track record is consistent: generous (Acts 4:36-37), willing to vouch for Saul (Acts 9:26-27), unwilling to give up on Mark (Acts 15:37-39)

- “Full of the Holy Spirit” describes a life visibly governed by God, shown in fruit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- It is not a second blessing or a mark of a spiritual elite
- The temptation is to send the capable; the New Testament pattern is to send the good
- These qualifications are available to every Christian, not to a gifted few

Discussion Prompts

- Whom would we send to help a struggling congregation, and why? Do our instincts match Luke’s?
- Would anyone describe you the way Luke described Barnabas?
- Why would a suspicious or proud man have ruined what Barnabas accomplished at Antioch?

Question 8

Student Question:

In verse 25, Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Saul. What does Barnabas’s decision to seek out Saul teach about recognizing and developing the gifts of others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the backstory, because this verse is quiet and enormous. Saul had been converted years earlier. He had preached in Damascus, escaped in a basket, come to Jerusalem, and been so dangerous to be around that the brethren sent him home to Tarsus for his own safety (Acts 9:29-30). And then nothing. Silence, for something like a decade. The most gifted man in the history of the church was sitting in his hometown, unused, while the gospel spread without him. Barnabas is the one who went and got him.

Notice what that required. Barnabas had to remember Saul, believe in him when there was little visible evidence, travel roughly a hundred miles to a city to look for a man who may not have been easy to find (Luke says he “went to Tarsus to look for Saul,” which implies searching), and then hand him a congregation Barnabas himself was leading. Every one of those is a choice most of us would not make. He was not recruiting an assistant. He was bringing in a man who would eclipse him, and who eventually does; Luke soon stops writing “Barnabas and Saul” and starts writing “Paul and his companions.”

Let the class sit with that, because it is the heart of the question. Barnabas gave away his own prominence and never seems to have noticed the cost. That is only possible for a man who believes the work belongs to God rather than to himself. Ask the class what makes that so hard for us. Usually it is that we are quietly measuring our value by our position, and a man who does that cannot afford to develop anyone who might surpass him.

Then draw out the practical shape of it. Recognizing gifts means actually looking at people and noticing what God has put in them, which requires knowing them. Developing gifts means giving

away real work rather than tasks, and making room rather than making promises. Barnabas did not tell Saul he had potential. He went and got him and put him to work for a year. That is what development looks like: proximity, opportunity, and time.

Bring it home two ways. Ask the class who their Saul is, the person they can see something in who is currently sitting in Tarsus, unused, perhaps because no one has gone to get them. And ask the gentler question: is anyone in this room sitting in Tarsus right now, waiting for someone to come? Both questions have people in them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul had been in Tarsus for years, unused, after the brethren sent him away for safety (Acts 9:29-30)
- Barnabas remembered him, searched for him, and handed him a work; this took deliberate effort
- He developed a man who would surpass him, and the narrative soon shifts from “Barnabas and Saul” to Paul’s leadership
- Giving away prominence is only possible for someone who believes the work belongs to God
- Developing others means proximity, real work, and time, not encouragement about potential
- Gifts in the body are to be recognized and put to use, not left idle (Romans 12:6-8)

Discussion Prompts

- Who is your Saul, the person sitting in Tarsus that someone needs to go get?
- Are you sitting in Tarsus right now, waiting for someone to come?
- What makes it hard to develop someone who might surpass us?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verse 26 says they “met with the church and taught a great many people” for a whole year. What does this commitment to sustained teaching reveal about what it takes to build a healthy church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Land on the timeframe and do not let the class hurry past it. A whole year. Two of the ablest teachers in the church, in one congregation, teaching great numbers of people, for twelve months. Nothing about that is exciting. There is no miracle in verse 26, no shaking building, no mass conversion recorded. Just meeting with the church and teaching, week after week, for a year. Luke thought that was worth writing down, which tells you how much of the church’s real work looks like this.

Draw out the difference the class needs to see: converts versus disciples. Antioch already had believers before Barnabas arrived; a great number had turned to the Lord in verse 21. He could have declared victory. Instead he concluded that people who had turned to the Lord needed to be taught, at length, by the best teachers available. That is the difference between counting responses and making disciples. Jesus did not say make converts; He said make disciples, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Teaching is not what happens after discipleship. It is discipleship.

Ask the class why a year was necessary, and let them reason it out. These were former pagans with no biblical background whatsoever, no Old Testament literacy, no framework for one God, no ethical inheritance from the law. Everything had to be built. And frankly, that is not so different from the situation of most people converted today. We badly underestimate how much teaching a new Christian needs, and how long it takes for truth to become a way of life rather than a set of answers.

Now let the class notice what this year produced, because Lesson 6 is standing right behind it. The church that gets taught for a year in Acts 11 is the church that sends Barnabas and Saul to the nations in Acts 13. The missionary movement that reached the empire came out of twelve months of unglamorous instruction. Sustained teaching is not an alternative to mission; it is what makes mission possible. A church that will not be taught has nothing to send.

Then take up the name, because verse 26 ends with it: “And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.” Outsiders coined it, watching these people, and what they saw was Christ. Notice they were not called after Barnabas or Paul, or after a doctrine, or after a movement. Help the class feel the weight of wearing His name and nothing else, exactly as Peter did: “if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Peter 4:16). And notice why the name stuck here of all places. It was a year of teaching that made these people look enough like Christ that the city needed a word for it.

While you are here, guard the name from quietly becoming the very thing it denies. Scripture describes congregations as “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16), and the phrase is plural because it says whose they are, not which organization they belong to. It is a description of ownership, not a brand. The moment a congregation treats the words on its sign as a denominational label, so that being inside it is what puts a person right with God, it has become a denomination while still objecting to the word. The name never claimed more than that these people are Christ’s, and it cannot save anyone who wears it. Antioch did not get that name by hanging it on a door. They got it because a year of teaching had made them look like Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A full year of teaching by the best available teachers is what Luke records as the work of building this church (Acts 11:26)
- Making disciples is teaching them to observe all Christ commanded, not merely gathering converts (Matthew 28:19-20)

- New Christians need far more teaching than we usually assume, and truth takes time to become a way of life
- The teaching of Acts 11 produced the sending church of Acts 13; a church that will not be taught has nothing to send
- The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch; the name points to Christ alone, not to men or movements
- Christians wear the name of Christ and glorify God in it (1 Peter 4:16)
- “Churches of Christ” is plural and descriptive; it says whose a congregation is, not which organization it belongs to (Romans 16:16)
- The name is a description of ownership, not a brand, and it saves no one who wears it
- A congregation that treats its sign as a denominational label has become a denomination while objecting to the word

Discussion Prompts

- Are we making converts or disciples? What would the difference look like here?
- Outsiders coined the name “Christian” by watching them. What word would our neighbors coin for us?
- Why is a year of ordinary teaching more important than it sounds?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Acts 11:19–26 as a whole, what principles of evangelism, discipleship, and church growth does this passage model for congregations today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class trace the whole arc, because it is a complete cycle and they now have every piece. Persecution scattered ordinary Christians. They spoke about Jesus where they landed. Some crossed a cultural line and spoke to Gentiles. The hand of the Lord was with them and many believed and turned. An established church heard and sent help rather than control. The helper looked for grace and found it, and urged them to remain. He went and got an unused man. The two of them taught the congregation for a year. And the world had to invent a name for what it was watching. That is a church being built, from scattering to sending.

Point out how much of it was done by people whose names we do not know. The men of Cyprus and Cyrene started the whole thing and Luke never identifies them. Barnabas is not an apostle. Antioch had no strategy, no plan, and no permission. Help your class see the implication clearly, because it removes every excuse in the room: the most important church in the first century after Jerusalem was built by displaced laypeople talking about Jesus and a good man who taught them for a year.

Then name the pattern the class should carry. Evangelism happens where Christians already are, in the ordinary course of a disrupted life. Discipleship happens through sustained teaching over time, not through events. Growth comes from God, through the word, and it is measured by people turning to the Lord. Cooperation between congregations is help freely given, never a hierarchy. And leadership looks like Barnabas: seeing grace, urging faithfulness, and going to Tarsus to get someone better than yourself.

Keep them from romanticizing Antioch, because it was not a perfect church and Scripture does not hide it. This is the congregation where Paul later had to oppose Peter to his face over hypocrisy about eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14), and it is the church from which the dispute of Acts 15 arose, which the class will study in two weeks. Antioch was faithful, not flawless. The two are not the same thing, and only one of them is available to us.

End with the mirror. Two questions, and let them sit. First: if our congregation were scattered tomorrow, would the gospel go with us, or does it depend on the building and the schedule? And second, the one this whole lesson has been aiming at: are we making disciples, or just counting the people who turned?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The arc runs from scattering to sending: ordinary Christians spoke, God gave increase, teaching built the church
- The work was done by unnamed believers and a non-apostle, without strategy or permission
- Evangelism happens in the ordinary course of life, where Christians already are
- Discipleship is sustained teaching over time, not events; growth is God's to give and is measured in changed lives
- Cooperation between congregations is freely given help, never hierarchy
- Antioch was faithful, not flawless; Paul later confronted hypocrisy there (Galatians 2:11-14)

Discussion Prompts

- If our congregation were scattered tomorrow, would the gospel go with us?
- Are we making disciples, or counting the people who turned?
- Which part of the Antioch pattern is thinnest among us right now?