

THE NATURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH — ACTS 11:19-26; 13:1-3

1. When you first started attending a local church on your own what were you looking for there? What—if anything—has changed about what you see as important for the church?

Last week we explored the essence of the church, as the universal body of believers across time and space, rooted in the eternal plan of God. This week we're reflecting on the outworking of God's plan in real time by considering the local church in Antioch—one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire—which became a major center of Christian growth and mission within a few short years after Jesus's death and resurrection.

To form a fuller mental image of the Antioch church, it's helpful to begin by looking at the earlier summaries of the Christian community in Jerusalem. **READ ACTS 2:42-47 & 4:32-37.**

2. List out the characteristics of the church emphasized in these passages? Is there anything that stands out or surprises you about these early Christian communities?
3. What in these passages do you think is intended to be the normal experience for believers throughout time and space?
4. What gaps are there between what you read in these passages and your own experience of the church? What causes the gap(s)? What is one thing you could change about the way you're engaging with the church that could make the gap smaller?

The Christian community at Antioch was devoted to many of the same things as the believers in Jerusalem, but was novel in its multiethnic makeup and its intentional commitment to sending out missionaries. **READ ACTS 11:19-26 & 13:1-3.**

5. How is our Triune God described as being involved with the church at Antioch? When, like Barnabas, do you see the "grace of God" at work in and through our church and rejoice?
6. How was an awareness of God's presence and guidance cultivated within the church at Antioch? What relationships, experiences, and/or practices do you need to pursue to cultivate a similar awareness?
7. Barnabas was initially sent to inquire about the church in Antioch, but once there he invested himself fully in that body of believers. Over this next year, how do you sense the Lord leading you to invest more fully *at* and/or *through* The Journey?

PRAY

Ask the Lord that we would become a church that shares many of the same characteristics as the early church in Antioch. And ask for the Spirit to give each member of the group a clear sense of how God is leading and guiding them to engage and invest in the church.