

Becoming a Blessing to Others

Praise God for this spiritual home. Whenever I think of our spiritual family, my heart is filled with thanksgiving. God has led our church to move from 10th Ave to Knight St., then extending from Knight St. to Fraser Lands; from a monolingual ministry (Cantonese) to a bilingual ministry (Cantonese and English) and ultimately to a trilingual ministry (Cantonese, English and Mandarin). Most importantly, since 2007, God has impressed upon the Elders Board to adopt the multi-site church model to plan and implement the future ministry of our church. This is totally the evidence of God's grace (Psalm 127:1).

We are indeed a blessed church; God's grace for us has been abundant. His will for us is not to be indulgent in this luxury of grace, but to strive to become a channel of blessings. Jesus reminds us that: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35). The Antioch church's example reminds us of how God equipped His church to evangelize to the gentiles and to give with a grateful heart. As a newly formed church, the Antioch church had five distinct attributes from which we can learn.

A Congregation with the Passion to Evangelize

The formation of the Antioch church was a result of the persecution of the Jerusalem churches, when apostles and believers were all scattered (Acts 8:1-4). As they settled in Antioch, they spread the Gospel not only to the Jews, but also *began to speak to the Hellenists (Greeks)* (Acts 11:19-20). *Those who had*

been scattered preached the word wherever they went (Acts 8:4). This fulfilled what was promised earlier: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8).

Praise the Lord, since the inauguration of the Knight Street church in 1966, God has given us a passionate heart to spread the Gospel near and far, not only in Vancouver but also overseas. From 1972, we have been hosting the Missions Conference as a gesture of learning the lesson of a faith pledge as well as learning about and supporting foreign missions. The church cannot grow and accomplish God's Great Commission without a united vision and passion for evangelism. May God continue to bless our church and spread the gospel with a united heart. With the multi-site approach we hope to extend the opportunities of outreach and care to many parts of the city and the lower mainland so that many more people can hear the gospel message.

A Church Filled with God's Grace

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:22-23) When Barnabas arrived at the Antioch, he was thrilled by God's grace in their midst, so he *encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*

Grace is given unconditionally by God, although we do not deserve it. When God decides to bless the church, she will experience growth and become a blessing to others. The Antioch church is a good example of a blessed church: the more they received God's grace, the more ready they were to share with others. They planted many churches in different cities including the Corinthian, Ephesian, Philippian and Thessalonian church.

God's grace for our church is abundant, as evident in the growth in the size of our congregation, new believers, pastoral staff, lay workers, church attendance and financial stability. Furthermore, God has established numerous new ministries in the past five years such as the Alpha Course Ministry, Stephen Ministry, Small Groups Ministry, Women's Café, and Seniors Ministry. New departments including Worship, Finance, Caring, and Follow-Up were formed. We also established new policies concerning the Church Vision, Mission Statement, Core Values, Internship, MSCM and Financial matters. The purpose of setting different policies is to follow the biblical teaching that *"everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way"* (1 Cor. 14:40).

The growth of the Fraser Lands Church is a good example of God's grace to our church. In 1991, a core group of brothers and sisters from the Knight Street site started a new outreach ministry at the Champlain Heights Community Centre, which developed into the Fraser Lands Church. From an average Sunday worship attendance of 50 in 1991, the

number grew to 722 in 2006. I strongly believe that *Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.* (Psalm 127:1) May all the honor and glory go to our Lord. May He continue to encourage us to become a channel of blessing by using the MSCM to share the gospel with more people and build up new sites to advance His kingdom.

A Church Adopting a Team Ministry Approach

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26) When Barnabas witnessed God's grace in the Antioch congregation, he went to Tarsus to find Saul. Together, they pastored the believers and coordinated the ministries for the church. This is the core foundation of a team ministry approach.

In due course, the Antioch church leaders benefited from this team effort. *In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.* (Acts 13:1) Although they came from different backgrounds, professions and talents, the Antioch church managed to build their ministry in a well-coordinated and harmonious way as a team serving together.

Dear brothers and sisters, please remember Jesus' teaching: *If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand* (Mark 3:24-25). A united heart is of upmost importance under any model or style of ministry. May the Holy Spirit remind us to serve in unity.

A Church Teaching Biblical Truth

The strength of the Antioch church is their insistence on teaching according to Biblical truth. Barnabas and Paul collaboratively spent an entire year teaching the disciples truth from the Bible. As a result, the believers admired God's words, thus building a solid foundation based on His Word, which had a far-reaching impact on church ministries. God's word had initiated every single ministry in that church. Because the Antioch congregation strived to grow in knowledge of the Bible, they became the best mentors to teach others.

Christian education is very important in the church. In fact, the Knight Street church first started the Sunday School ministry back in 1968. The Bible should be the foundation of church ministry and of a believer's life. If the foundation is shaken, what can a righteous man do? Therefore, it is essential for every Christian to explore the deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

Today, we need more spiritual leaders to assist others to grow towards maturity. Jesus is our spiritual mentor, and He expects us to nurture others. In the Great Commission, Jesus instructed us to teach. Before He ascended, He said, *...teach(ing) them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:20). Paul also reminded Timothy to pass on the spiritual lessons he had learned to other faithful servants among the lay workers.

A Church Emphasizing Perseverance of Prayer

The Antioch church valued prayer, especially fasting. *Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off* (Acts 13:2-3).

Before they set off, the church fasted and laid hands on Barnabas and Paul. Fasting is an act of humility, which truly demonstrated their entire dependence upon God.

When they fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit commenced work by delegating their best spiritual leaders Barnabas and Paul to spread the Gospel and plant many churches. This proves that the Antioch church was not just a praying church but also a church that valued mission. When we fast and pray earnestly, we will be so close to God's heart that we will understand the will of the Triune God. For example, some Korean churches have mobilized thousands of missionaries for cross-cultural mission work solely because of their emphasis on prayer.

Prayer, being so important, is in fact a core value of our church: we should never attempt any ministry without prayer, because every ministry should begin with prayer. Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray earnestly for our church, so that we can experience the depth of the Spirit's blessing. As a result, our church will become a channel of blessing to unbelievers from far and near.

Fanny Jane Crosby (1820 - 1915) was an outstanding hymn composer. In her 95 years, she wrote several thousand hymns. Inscribed on her epitaph is the verse "She did what she could" (Mark 14:8).

May God continue to bless our church to become a channel of blessings under the MSCM. May God praise us as "we did what we could" and we did all this, for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (I Cor. 9:23).

**Blessings,
Pastor Ivan Leung**