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OPENING PRAYER

Father, we don't always get to choose our circumstances, but You are never without a plan. As we open this passage, show us where You are sending us — even through doors we didn't open ourselves. Speak, Lord. We're listening. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING QUESTION^(OPTIONAL)

Tell us about a time you ended up somewhere you never planned to be — a move, a job, a country, a detour — that turned out to matter more than you expected.

WORD

Acts 11:19-30 ESV

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. 27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers[d] living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Luke has been building to this moment since chapter 8. Stephen is executed, a violent persecution breaks out, and the Jerusalem believers scatter. There is nothing noble-sounding about it — people are running for their lives, carrying what they can, heading wherever the roads lead. And yet Luke's word for what they do as they run is the same word used for a farmer sowing seed. Scattered people, scattering the gospel. What looked like the church being broken apart was the gospel being planted in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and a major Roman city called Antioch.

Notice who does the decisive thing. Not the apostles. Not a commissioned team. "Men from Cyprus and Cyrene" — unnamed, unofficial, un-sent — who start telling Greeks about Jesus. No committee approved it. The entire Gentile mission of the New Testament turns on a hinge that history didn't bother to name, and Luke's only explanation is: "the hand of the Lord was with them."

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Then Jerusalem sends Barnabas — "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" — not to control the movement but to bless it. Barnabas fetches Saul out of years of obscurity in Tarsus, and for a whole year they teach. It's at the end of that year, not the start, that outsiders coin a new word for these people: Christians. Identity followed formation. And a church made mostly of new Gentile converts, less than two years old, hears of a famine coming on Judea — the very region whose persecution scattered them — and sends money back to "the brothers and sisters" there. Disruption became mission. Refugees became senders.

Reflection:

The scattering was the strategy. God didn't rescue the church from the disruption — He worked His mission through it. Your disrupted season may be the delivery method, not the interruption.

Ordinary, unnamed people moved first. No apostle, no title, no permission slip. They just kept talking about Jesus in a new city. You already have everything you need to do the same.

They crossed a line nobody authorised. Speaking to Greeks "also" was a risk. Mission often starts when someone stops playing it safe inside familiar boundaries. **"The hand of the Lord was with them."** Not their competence. Not their plan. His hand. That's still what makes the difference.

Barnabas encouraged; he didn't inspect. When God is moving somewhere new, the right response is to bless it and build it, not audit it.

Formation took a whole year. Not a weekend, not a moment of hype. Unhurried teaching. Ask what a full year of that would actually shape you into.

Identity followed formation. They were called "Christians" after the year, not before. What people call you follows what you're becoming.

Antioch gave back to the ones who scattered them. Family language — "brothers and sisters" — stretched across culture, distance, and history. Real community reaches outside the room.

Gospel Invitation:

- If you're in the middle of your own scattering, hear this: the same Jesus these unnamed believers couldn't stop talking about is available to you the same way — not despite your circumstances, sometimes precisely through them. You can turn to Him today.
- Some of us have been living on the fuel of one past moment of enthusiasm. Jesus is inviting you back into real, sustained relationship — surrender, not just a memory.

Missional Activation:

- Name your Cyprus and Cyrene. Identify one "unplanned" place you're in — a job, a street, a waiting room, a group chat — and this week say one true thing about Jesus there.
- Commit to a year, not a moment. Pick one rhythm of formation — this Life Group, a mentor, a daily time in the Word — and commit to it for a season, not a spurt.
- Stretch your "as each one was able." As a group, choose one specific need outside our immediate church family — a community, a ministry, a person in another city — and give toward it together before you meet again.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the passage, who actually spreads the gospel to Antioch — and why does it matter that Luke doesn't give us their names?
2. Where is God sending you right now that doesn't feel like a mission field because it wasn't your plan — a relocation, a job loss, a hard season, a workplace, a household you didn't choose?
3. Barnabas "saw the grace of God and was glad." When you encounter something new God is doing, is your first instinct to celebrate it or to scrutinise it? Why?
4. Antioch's disciples were shaped over "a whole year" of teaching before anyone had a name for them. What would change if we measured our spiritual health less by our first response to God and more by what a full year of unhurried formation is producing in us?
5. Who are the "brothers and sisters living in Judea" in your life — believers in another city or culture, maybe even people connected to a hardship you went through — that God might be calling you toward with practical generosity, not just goodwill?
6. Be honest: is there a disruption in your life right now you've been treating only as loss? What would it look like this week to start asking God whether it's also a doorway?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, You take what looks like scattering and turn it into sending. Where we may see only disruption, give us eyes to see the doorway. Send us through the doors we didn't open, shape us over the long haul, and make us the kind of family whose generosity reaches people we've never met — for the sake of Your name in every nation. In Jesus' name, Amen.