

# Back to the Future

discerning God's purpose for our life as His church

Every so often it's important to pause and take stock. How are we doing? What are we seeking to accomplish? Are we growing, making progress?

Such seasons of 'reflection' are as important in our communal life as a local church as they are in our individual lives.

This series of studies aims to provide a focus for such a season, a chance to let the Word of God inform our understanding of all that he calls us as His church to be and to be doing in these days of great turbulence and change.

You can find the background to this short series [here](#).

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## 4. The next step

(Acts 11.25-26)

[w/b Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020]

*“.. Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul ..”*

Although this study focuses on just a couple of verses, what these two verses record is hugely significant: indeed it could be argued that they narrate the most pivotal moment in the remarkable growth and expansion of Christ's church.

The 'next step' is always an important one - both for individuals and for fellowships. Bear that in mind as you seek to apply what you're learning to yourself and your church.

*[Although there are 7 questions, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 3 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]*

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**1. Read Acts 11.19-26.** Remind yourself of the sequence of events which led to the birth of the church at Antioch, the arrival and ministry of Barnabas there, and then this crucial 'next step'.

Can you identify in your own life a decision you made or action you took, which seemed perhaps relatively minor at the time but which has proved to be so very significant?

Have you tried keeping a journal of some sort? What would you see as the benefits of such a practice?

**2. Read Acts 11.19-24.** To understand what lay behind this important decision of Barnabas to bring Saul of Tarsus to Antioch it's helpful to think through the background again.

It's thrilling when people are being brought to the Lord in numbers - but it can create some challenges too! What sort of 'challenges' might there have been in Antioch?

What challenges might there be for ourselves here when significant numbers of people are brought to the Lord?

**3. Read Acts 11.24-25.** These two verses are best read together: the important truths about Barnabas had two consequences - the conversion of many, and the constraint to go to Tarsus.

Barnabas' bringing Saul of Tarsus to Antioch was a *wise* step, stemming from a Spirit-given discernment: how can we cultivate in our own lives that grace of discernment?

Barnabas was 'full of the Holy Spirit and faith': in what ways was this action on Barnabas' part also a *bold* step of faith?

What bold steps of faith have you had to take?

**4. Read Acts 21.39, 22.3-5; Gal.1.13-14; Phil.3.4-6.** Barnabas recognized that Saul was the man for the moment in Antioch: knowing Saul's background helps us see why.

What do you learn about Saul from these various passages which made him a 'good fit' for Antioch?

How have God's providences in your upbringing, education, and experience shaped you for His service?

**5. Read Acts 9.1-27.** This is the first of 3 times in Acts when Saul's conversion is narrated: Barnabas was clearly familiar with the Lord's remarkable work in this man's life.

Why do you think Barnabas was able and willing to vouch for Saul when the disciples in Jerusalem were all afraid and suspicious of him?

What's your tendency - are you suspicious of 'surprising' conversions - or too gullible about professions of faith?

Barnabas knew Saul well enough to know the vital fact set out in v.15: within the life of the fellowship, how might we ensure that we spend enough time with others to get to know them (and the Lord's dealings with them) properly?

**6. Read Acts 11.26.** The reason for bringing Saul to Antioch is now made clear: it was to exercise a sustained teaching ministry among God's people.

Why do you think Barnabas saw it as so important that the church at Antioch needed to be taught? And why did that necessitate bringing Saul to teach them as well?

How has the clear and practical teaching of the Word of God consolidated you in your walk with the Lord?

**7. Read Acts 11.26.** For the very first time, the followers of Jesus were designated 'Christians' (and not as a compliment!) - this was a consequence of the teaching Barnabas and Saul had given.

Why do you think this was the name given to the followers of Jesus by people in Antioch?

What does the giving of this name to the disciples at Antioch tell us about the teaching of Barnabas and Saul?