

CHURCH TURMOIL AND CHALLENGES

Antioch: The Next Step

Discussion

It's not a coincidence that Southview, located just outside Washington D.C., and the early church at Antioch have so much in common. Both are located relatively close to the ocean, both are in the center of commerce and politics, both contain a mix of religions both Jew and Gentile all living in a prosperous economic area rich in resources with an educated population, and both areas are seen as safe havens from religious persecution. And just as with Southview today, the congregation at Antioch was made up of many different ethnic groups and cultures.

Believing that God has a specific plan and purpose for Southview, and that perhaps that plan mirrors His plan for Antioch as a model for us - a local church with a heart for spreading the gospel locally and around the world - then what is the next step in achieving that plan?

Clearly we've all seen the blessings that God has poured out on Southview in recent months. Many have come to know Christ as their personal savior, there have been many baptisms, many new families have joined, new staff members are feeling God's call to specific ministries, visitors are coming in increasing numbers, facility improvements are occurring everywhere that add to our ability to worship and minister as God leads, and we are receiving amazing finances to support the work.

So, what's next for us as we look at the weeks and months ahead? What has God planned for us to do, and will we be ready when He reveals it? What's our next step? Perhaps God will call mission-driven people from within our midst as He did Paul, Mark and Barnabas from Antioch, who traveled for God and the church at Antioch to spread the gospel through the Mediterranean. Perhaps He will raise up teachers and preachers from among us to support our growing body or to follow God to other parts of the country to begin a new ministry. Maybe He will continue to bring workers and those in need to Southview, and our focus will be on serving local needs and ministries. Or perhaps He will raise up a national ministry from with Southview - we do not know. But we can sense that, very soon, change, challenge, and new ministry opportunities will be upon us. Will we be ready?

Then what is our next step, if we are to be like the faithful church in Antioch? The next step sounds simple, and yet it was at the very core of all that Antioch did, whether it was famine relief or using their gifts of prophecy and teaching or even sending out the first missionaries - it was prayer. When you study the Antioch church, you will quickly infer they didn't plan a mission focus a year in advance, they didn't "vision" a famine relief program, they didn't design an education program. No. They prayed constantly and consistently that God would use them for His purpose, and they stayed focused in prayer all through their ministry. Prayer, prayer, and more prayer; that is the next step.

Is your prayer time what it should be? Are you a part of a group that meets regularly for prayer? If not, should you be starting such a group? Is prayer your first priority? We cannot take the next step in accomplishing God's great plan for our individual lives, or the ministry at Southview, if we are not first and foremost focusing our total efforts in prayer. Praying for the lost, praying for the staff, praying for Christ to keep Satan at bay, praying that God will reveal Himself and His plan to us. Prayer - without it, we cannot move another step - with it, we can move mountains.

In Christ,

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