

# GROWTH GROUPS WEEK 2

WEEK OF MAY 5



## GROWTH GROUP SPRING 2019

**FOCUSED: EXPERIENCING & EXPRESSING THE TRANSFORMING LOVE OF CHRIST**  
WEEK 2 – MAY 5, 2019 - ACTS 12:24-13:3 AND ISAIAH 65:17-25

### SETTING THE CONTEXT

This week we want to look at the diversity of the church in Antioch, as well as consider the ways the church can make an impact in our own community as we meet physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Our first reading is from Acts and the second reading is from Isaiah 65.

Paul and Barnabas have returned from a trip to Jerusalem. (We will talk about this some more in a couple of weeks when we read Acts 11:27-29). At this point Luke wants us to see the ethnic diversity of the church in Antioch. Acts 4:36 tells us that Barnabas was from Cyprus. Simeon is a Jewish name, but he is more than likely a black African. Some have thought that he could actually be Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Jesus. Lucius came from North Africa. Manaen was connected to Herod the Great. Finally, Saul/Paul was from Tarsus. This was quite the diverse group.

In the church at Antioch God brought together a diverse group of teachers and prophets. There were Jews and Gentiles, including those who were friends and those who would have been foes of God's people, before Jesus Christ. The church in Antioch revealed the way in which the Gospel has the ability to bring unity and joy, amidst a diverse population. People from various backgrounds and cultures learned how to worship and serve together. It is an important reminder for the church of today.

While they were at worship, it became clear that the time had come to send Paul and Barnabas out on what would become Paul's first missionary journey. It is interesting to note, from the very beginning, the church found it important to plant new communities of faith.



# EXPLORING THE TEXT

## Read Acts 12:24-13:3

*12:24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. 25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from[a] Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. 13:1 Now 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. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

- 1) We all started attending church at different ages and stages. Share a memory you have from when you first attended a church.
- 2) Have you ever been at some sort of worship gathering or prayer service where it was evident that the Holy Spirit was moving? What happened? How did people respond? How did you respond?
- 3) We see that the church in Antioch mirrored the ethnic diversity of Antioch. Do you think we see this kind of diversity within most local churches today? Why, or why not?
- 4) How can we be more intentional about interacting with the diverse population of San Diego? What kinds of activities could we engage in?

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

In Isaiah 65, we have a vision of the city to come. God is going to do something new, and one of the things he is doing is creating a new city, a new place, for the people of God. Ultimately, this is a city that can only be brought and created by God. It points us to the final return of Christ, when all things are restored.

However, the images of this new city, in Isaiah 65, also gives us some insights into the kinds of things that we could possibly work for, within our own city. God does not allow us to simply throw up our hands and abdicate our personal responsibility, when it comes to social issues within our community.

Our text gives us an understanding of not only the city that God will bring one day, but it also helps us to understand the kinds of conditions we are to seek to establish, as we minister alongside people in our community. Notice the public celebrations, healthy older adults and children, housing and food for all, and the absence of violence. These will be marks or characteristics of God's new city, but they should also serve as guideposts for us as the kinds of things that we should be working on as we try and reach our own communities.

# EXPLORING THE TEXT

## Read Isaiah 65:17-25

*17 "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. 19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. 20 "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. 21 They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. 23 They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. 24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord.*

- 5) Share about a time when you felt like you were able to bring about some kind of change, (see examples in our passage). When did you care for the elderly, or help a child, or help someone with housing or food. How did that make you feel?
- 6) Do you think the church should play a role in helping meet the social needs of our community? Is that something that should be handled by the government or other institutions, or does the church have a role and responsibility?
- 7) Isaiah 65 describes the new Jerusalem, which was later picked up by New Testament writers, (see Revelation 21:1-2). All of this is pointing to the second coming of Christ, when everything will be restored, when we get to experience everlasting life. When you think about the promise of everlasting life, what do you think about? Does Isaiah 65 offer any insights?
- 8) Is there something your growth group could do in May or June that would help with some of the needs you see in San Diego?