



Amazing Conversions Part 4

Saul: A New Family

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I'm not sure if it's still a perennial childhood threat, but when I was a kid on a bad day, your mom had made you mad or your dad had made you mad or your big brother had made you mad, you would threaten to run away. That's just... And that's like just pulling the card right there, I'm just going to run away, that's what I'm going to do. Now, I knew several kids in elementary school who contemplated it and occasionally threatened it. Maybe one or two planned it, and just a few really just ardently resolved kids would actually do it. I mean, they would pack their backpack. They would head out the door. They'd march out and say, "I'm done. I am running away."

But for most of those kids, probably like those you knew, that lasted about two hours and they were back, Maybe if they were really, really torqued, they'd be gone for, I don't know, maybe a night. They would spend the night at their friend's house. They'd realize that living in a cardboard box at the park down the street was probably not what they would want to do. It's not as good living under the underpass of the freeway. They intuitively recognize this isn't going to work out. And what they did is they got all of their family conflicts in perspective and their emotions calmed down and they said, "You know, whatever I'm going through right now, it's not worth trashing my family life and my home for this." They understood that.

Now, I wish I could say the same for all of the Christians that I know. And I say that because just like children are designed to have a family and live in that family in a home, so it is that Christians are designed to have a congregation, to be in that congregation and to live in that church. That really is what God has designed for every Christian. And sadly, sometimes its eight-year-olds seem to have the wisdom to realize, "Listen, this isn't going to work out for me. Yeah, I can get food at the cafeteria and put a few things in my backpack, probably make it through the night and the grass down at the park, it's kind of comfy. Maybe I could sleep there." But they don't end up just doing it. They know intuitively this is not good. This is a bad thing. It's going to tank my future. It's going to cost me too dearly. And out of fear and out of concern they say, "I'm going to get over this and I'm going to go home."

But in the church, there are plenty of people who get their feelings hurt, that engage in spiritual sibling conflict. They get frustrated and they pack up their emotional backpack and they march out of the church parking lot and they say, "I'm done," and they run away. And far too many of them successfully do it, they stay away, they're done. And some even justify that, "Well, you know, kids, it's like kids. They grow up and the more they're mature and figure this out on their own, they'll be 15, 16, 17. You won't see them much and then they're gone." They don't realize that in Scripture it's just the opposite. Kids may be made for a family and a home and then they get launched. Well, it's just the opposite in the spiritual family. As Christians, we are designed to be a part of a congregation in a church and according to the Bible, we need that all the more "as we see the day approaching." I mean, this is something you never grow out of.



And so your spiritual maturity does not give you license to say, "Well, I feel like I'm ready now to venture out on my own and to run away from my church." We need to understand how important the church is. It's so good at the beginning of Saul of Tarsus' Christian life, who would be known as Paul the Apostle, that he recognized the importance of his church family. Matter of fact, he is heading back here as we pick up the story again in Acts Chapter 9 and he is heading to what we would assume in his own mind would be his home church. Right? He had spent a few years in Damascus and in the Northern Arabian desert. He was, of course, I'm sure, rereading and restudying the Scriptures from a Christological perspective in the Old Testament. He had cut his teeth in ministry in the synagogues of Damascus, and now he's coming back to Jerusalem. I mean, that's where he started. It had been a few years now, but he's coming back to get acquainted and to get integrated and to become a, to say it lightly, a highly committed participant in the church at Jerusalem.

And that's where we pick up our story today. I think what we can learn is that the church is essential and Paul proves that even though it doesn't start well. Matter of fact, I want us not to read this verse like so many do, beginning in verse 26, thinking, oh yeah, it's just a simple notation about what Paul does. It really is something that if you think about it, it's cause for conflict. I mean, you want to get your feelings bent out of shape, live in the sandals of Paul when he's walking into what should be his home church. You'd think they'd all be thrilled that they have the persecutor now turned preacher as a part of their congregation. But that's not what happens.

Now in the end, it all works out. But I want you to see it. I'm going to read it for you. Follow along, please. If you haven't already gotten your Bibles open to Acts Chapter 9 verses 26 through 31. And I want you to see this turn of events as Paul is coming into Jerusalem. I'll read it from the English Standard Version for you. When it says in verse 26, "And when he," of course Saul, now Paul, coming to be Paul, "had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were..." so thrilled he was there, they had a potluck, they had a banner up for him, "Welcome to our church." Warm, nice right hand of fellowship was extended to Saul. No. "All were afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple."

Was he a disciple? Interactive eleven o'clock crowd? Yeah, well, he was a disciple. I mean, he had a conversion experience. He was bearing fruit. He was a disciple. But they said, "I don't think you're a disciple." I mean, again, you can read that real quick like most of us do as we read through our Bibles and say, "Well, yeah, OK, well, it all got ironed out." Well, it does get ironed out in the next verse, but that must have hurt. Now, it's a misunderstanding, maybe an understandable misunderstanding, but it's a misunderstanding with some personal consequences. I mean, here is my new church family and it got started on a rocky note.

Well, thankfully, there is a guy there we've already met in the book of Acts named Barnabas. We know he is quite a guy and he is a caring guy. And if you really want a more modern interpretation of that phrase, Son of Encouragement, I mean, he was there to help. That was his heart. And he sees this and he's in a position to help, and it says, "But Barnabas," thankfully, even though they were afraid and they didn't believe him, "Barnabas took him," that is Saul, "and brought him to the apostles," the leaders, the pastors, if you will, of the



church, "and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus." Strong word, just fearlessly, courageously preaching.

Verse 28, just one little word in our English text, but "So he went in and out." It worked. We got over this bump and again, I'm just wondering who the most vocal people were against having Saul in their midst. I wonder who scowled the most. I mean, Paul's a sharp guy, and he's got to think about all the people who initially did not believe him. We don't have any of that description. We don't have any of that pettiness that we even can assume. But you got to think if you and I were there, that would be tough. And yet it gets ironed out and, "He goes in and out among them at Jerusalem." And just like he's a kid, you're moving from your base of operation at your home every day, every week, and you're going off to school and going off to your after-school job and all that, so it is with the church. Right? We're going in and out, part of the church, everything's copasetic now with his church.

And he was doing exactly what Barnabas said, he was preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. Now, not just in Damascus, now he's down south in Jerusalem and Judea and he's doing that. And he goes into these Greek-speaking Jewish synagogues and he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. And much like in Damascus, their head must have spun around. This is the guy that just a few years ago was going out in agreement with us to stamp out the people of The Way, these disciples following Christ. And of course, they didn't like it. Matter of fact, how well did his disputations go? Middle of verse 29. They want to kill him. "They were seeking to kill him."

Church family, verse 30, "And when the brothers learned this," here's his new church, "they brought him down to Caesarea, that's the maritime coast there, "and they sent him off to Tarsus," 300 miles away. Tarsus is where he went to school. That's where he hailed from, it's 10 miles inland in modern-day Turkey up there. If you know your geography, up the Mediterranean coast. And he goes there for a number of years. But he gets sent off. All of that for his own good, for his own protection because he had a target on his back, a hit that was all contracted on him.

Commentary from Luke on all of this, look at this, "So the church throughout all Judea," that region down south, "Galilee," that region up north, that place in between, "Samaria" that we've already seen has already been penetrated now with the gospel. These churches. Right? We've been reading in this text about these individual congregations, but spoken in a very interesting way. The Church. Right? All these individual outposts of the work of God in Judea, Samaria and Galilee, they all had peace and they were being built-up. "And walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." Look at that verse 31, again. That's a good snapshot of something you'd say, "Wow, that feels good. That feels good to read that about the church at this point."

All throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria, they had peace. They were being built-up. Do you old-timers remember the word "edification?" Our translations used to use that word, that's the word here, often translated edification. Built-up, like a house gets fortified and it's coming



together and it's being constructed. It's looking good. It's strong. Why? Well, in part because they were "walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Spirit," like that Psalm 2 passage, where we have that tension between like you rejoicing, but you're trembling with fear as you serve him. They wanted to stay on the path of God's will and yet they were comforted. They knew they're right in the center where God wanted them to be. And so what does God do in those healthy churches? Multiply, it's growing. People coming to faith in Christ. We've seen that throughout the early chapters of Acts and we'll see it in the rest of the book of Acts.

Luke keeps stepping out, saying look at it grow. Look at it grow. Look at all these people. Thousands of people coming to faith and repentance in Christ. Built-up. That's a great picture in verse 31, but as I said, it didn't start so well for Paul as he tried to join the church. They weren't having the red carpet laid out for him because they had their arms crossed, saying, "I don't know, this guy killed Stephen or at least he stood there in agreement holding the cloaks as they stoned him to death. We don't trust him. We don't believe him." It started with a church that was feeling and thinking and saying things to one another that was not in keeping with reality. I asked you the question, was he a disciple? And your answer is yes. Barnabas stepped up to prove it. He was an advocate, a mediator who made sure that they understood it. But at first they did not say what was right.

Paul would learn immediately that his churchmates in Jerusalem, they weren't omniscient. They didn't always know the truth. They didn't know the truth about his heart. They didn't know the truth about what was in his mind. They didn't know the truth about his motives. They didn't know the truth even about his conversion. So he's got a church right now which has people in it that don't affirm what he knows is true. And that had to be, I just want you to emotionally connect with that, that had to be disappointing.

Now, I hate to ask you this question, but I wonder if your church has ever disappointed you. Have you ever noticed that your church mates are not omniscient? Sometimes you know they're wrong about their opinions, that they think things that you know, that's not right. They say things in your small group like... They have misunderstandings even about you that you know I can't believe they think that about me. That's a good reminder for us as Paul integrates into his new church that the church is not perfect. I think if we're going to look at the importance of the church in a passage like this, we ought to step back and just make that simple observation and affirm it as our affirmation and say we just need to know this.

Number one, if you're taking notes. Real simply, we need to "Expect Imperfection." Paul is going to join his new family here in Jerusalem and that family is imperfect as was reminded in the very first verse of this passage. They don't rightly understand the heart of the apostle Paul. They don't know the truth about his conversion. They've heard it. They don't believe it. There's suspicion. There's doubt. And I'm just saying this about the church that you go to. It will not be perfect either. I know that we expect a lot from the church because as you compare it to your workplace and you compare it to the culture you live in and the headlines and the blogs that you read, you realize the church ought to be as close to the good as you can get. And it should be. And I'm all for that.



The point did not read this way. Note this. I did not say expect to have a terrible church. That's not the way I worded the point, because this isn't a terrible church. But it does remind us it's not a perfect church and it's filled with people who aren't perfect. They don't always agree with one another. Barnabas was proving that he did not agree with the prevailing opinion in the church. And of course, Paul did not agree with them, saying he wasn't a disciple, he was a disciple. So there's disagreement and imperfection because we are limited, finite, mortal people who don't know everything. I'm not trying to say, like a lot of pastors like to stand up and air out dirty laundry and revel in their shame. I'm not trying to talk about that. I don't want us to sit here and say the church is awful. It's the bride of Christ. It's got some spots. It's got some wrinkles. We're trying to scrub those spots out, trying to iron those wrinkles out. We're always working to aim for that better, more Christ-like congregation. But I've just got to say, because you're in it and I'm in it, it's going to be an imperfect place.

You've heard that a lot, but I think it's good for us to remember that. And two verses, if I can give this to you, that I think you ought to contemplate when you get your feelings hurt at church and you think, "See there, these people are bad. I want to pack my emotional backpack and run away." When you feel that way, I just want you to think of these two texts. Can you write this first one down? James Chapter 3 verse 2, James Chapter 3 verse 2. James 3 verse 2 says this, "We all stumble in many ways." That's a good place to start right there. That's the first part of verse 2, but let's just embed that in our mind. "We all stumble in many ways." And at this point you're like, "Yawn... I know that." No, do you really know that? Do you know that James, who's writing this text, uses the first-person plural pronoun? "WE all stumble in many ways."

If you want proof of it, I just want you to think about your mouth, because that's what setting up this whole section in James 3, if you know your Bible, about the tongue, the mouth, things we say. He says, if we didn't make mistakes with our words we'd be perfect and of course, we're not perfect. It's a passage about not being perfect and the problem of our mouth expressing that in so many ways. We need to stand back and say, "OK, yes, James, even James is not perfect." He's going to stumble. We all stumble in many ways. And you know, some of the things I'm sure that were whispered and said and probably some of the things that were said in the presence of Paul or part of his entourage, some of the things that Barnabas was hearing, those were hurtful things. Feelings got hurt, relationships got strained.

It'd be good for Paul to remember and of course, he does and he states it clearly elsewhere in his writings, we're not perfect. We are all in process. And so in one sense, I've got to take my expectation and I've got to adjust it. Right? This is not the Princess Bride - "get use to disappointment." I'm not saying get use to disappointment. Matter of fact, I'm saying adjust your expectations so that you won't always be disappointed when someone in your small group hacks you off. When something you hear from the pastor makes you really angry. When something that happens in your sub-congregation is like, "I can't believe they do that at that church." Just first of all, recognize this, that even if you're right, because Paul was right and yet it was hurtful, you just need to remember we all stumble in many ways and none of us



are omniscient and none of us are perfectly holy and we're all in process. So just start with that. James Chapter 3 verse 2, "We all stumble in many ways."

OK, here's the second one, Romans Chapter 15 verse 7. Romans 15:7. The next step, which is a much more active thing, that's just remembering now that we all stumble. Here's what Paul later says to the Romans, he says, you ought to "Welcome one another," that's a great word, isn't it? Because that's what Paul needed right now in the church at Jerusalem. "Welcome one another just as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God." I'm doing this with a sense, OK, for God's sake, for the glory of God, for the good of God, to make God look good, I need to welcome one another. I need to embrace, accept one another within the body of Christ, who are imperfect people, as Christ accepted me.

OK, here's a misunderstanding in the church. It's an understandable misunderstanding, but it's one that is because people don't know everything. And do you think Saul of Tarsus who would become the apostle Paul would ever be in the same kind of situation where he is going to do something out of an ignorance that he probably should have known but didn't know? Well, of course. Matter of fact, you might remember that scene when he was standing there before the Sanhedrin and someone said, "Hey, punch him in the mouth, smack him in the mouth." And so he gets hit, he gets slapped, he gets punched in the mouth. Whatever it is, he gets somehow hit in the face. And he responds with a very curt retort. He says, you know, I bet you're going to be struck. You should be struck. "You whitewashed walls."

So he says whoever told them to strike me and he calls them a name. And then someone you can see them leaning over and saying to Paul, "Hey, that's the high priest." Remember I said last week there are three Ananias's in the book of Acts. That's the third one, Ananias, the high priest. And Ananias here was just called a whitewashed wall, which doesn't mean much to you. But picture some, you know, derogatory statement about a hypocrite. He says that. And when they tell him that you remember what Paul's response is Sunday school grads? I did not know. "I did not know that he was the high priest." And then he quotes Scripture, "I shouldn't speak evil against the ruler of the people." I mean, he's still right. Just like some people who say I'm right to be suspicious of the guy who was holding the cloaks to kill Stephen. And yet they're ignorant, they don't know everything, and Paul would have that experience too.

It's good for him to say I'm going to even, to think one layer deeper, I'm even going to welcome these people who aren't welcoming of me because they're not omniscient, don't know everything, because, you know, even in my life, as we see one scene there in his life, just an example of I'm sure many, I've done things sometimes with a lack of full information. And sometimes, you know, I've done things I shouldn't. I've said things I shouldn't say. So there are things in Ecclesiastes says that you should not take to heart when you hear them, because even you have said things you shouldn't have said that have been derogatory and painful to other people. So just we just need to recognize that we're in a church that's imperfect. And you're saying, "Pastor Mike, you don't have to preach this long on this first point." I know that. OK, can you just remember that when you are tempted to pack up your emotional backpack and storm out of the church and go, "I'm not going to go to that church anymore."



Let's just start there. I should have known going in. My disappointment won't be that great because my expectation was a little bit lower than perfection. In a world where you can go, for instance, on your laptop and experience church, and if the music's too loud, you can turn it down. If it's not loud enough, you can turn it up. Guess what? When you come to the real church, you can't do that. We're not going to let you run the soundboard. Sorry. I mean, just that's how it is, right? When the sermon's too long, right? "The sermons way too long. It should have a halftime." Well then you can pause it and you can wait and you can come back after a sandwich and you listen to the rest of your pastor droning on and on about the Bible. But when you come to the real church, that's different.

The reality of how things are in a church as you interface with it and your life starts to overlap with the lives in the church and you have the real experience of interacting in that spiritual family, you're going to realize this. There are going to be things that frustrate me and I can't change them. The people who are entrusted with my oversight are going to make decisions I don't agree with. There are going to be things that I'm going to struggle with. That's your church. As kids were designed for a home and a family, you were designed for a church and a congregation. And this is your home, I'm assuming, for most of you. And you need to say, I am recognizing that it will be imperfect. I'm expecting imperfection in this church. Great. Didn't say expect the terrible just expect an imperfect.

Verse 27, thank God that in the church of Jerusalem, there was someone there to mitigate the misunderstanding and fix it, his name was Barnabas. Take a look at the passage afresh, verse 27. "But Barnabas," love that contrasting conjunction. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them," listen, I can testify to this, "how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus." Barnabas is saying, "You got to believe this guy's conversion. You should not be doubting. You should not be not believing. You should be believing him. I saw it. You guys, you need to believe it."

Now, I just know that Barnabas was probably not the pulpit pounder. Right? I can see him in a gracious way appealing to these people as an advocate for the apostle Paul. He fixes this misunderstanding. By the way, the kind of church you probably won't want to run away from is a kind of church that has Barnabas's in it who are ready to fix misunderstandings. And by the way, there are Barnabas's in this congregation who haven't stepped up to do some Barnabas stuff this week, this month, this year, and you need to. You need to do number two. You need to "Fix Misunderstandings." If you're taking notes, jot that down, you fix them. You see a misunderstanding and I got two different opinions here and we need to fix them.

I know we looked at this back when we met Barnabas and that phrase Son of Encouragement, right? Which didn't mean his dad was encouragement. It means that, like a chip off the old block, he's like the embodiment of encouragement. And that word "Parakletos," which was only fun to talk about Greek words when you have compound words with prepositions attached in the compound. And "Para" "Kaleo," we talk about parakletos, it's used in a variety of ways in the New Testament. But it's a great picture, as I like to say, and



you've heard me preach on this many times. It's like a knee brace. It comes in alongside of. "Para" is "next to," right? Called in - next to. Kaleo is "called in." So to be called in alongside, it helps. It does a lot of things. It supports, it fixes. It's the same word that we're going to see in verse 31 "to comfort." Right?

Things come along like your blanket comes around you and it comforts you. A knee brace will support you. Here's this tenuous situation between the church, this new church of Paul, and Paul and he comes in and he fixes it, he helps it. We meet Barnabas, do we not, in the beginning of Acts here, who is seeing a need in the church, and he's willing to sacrifice to give the proceeds of property, he's going to sell and liquidate his asset, to come now and to bring money to meet the needs in the church. This is a guy who is helpful. You want more Barnabas in your church. Generous, sacrificial. I want to fix problems. If there's a misunderstanding, I'd like to step in and see if we can solve this. So we need to have fixers in the church. And I hope that all of us, in one way or another, we see that role, the onus, the responsibility upon us to say we need to be fixers.

You see that misunderstanding, and I tell you, how many times do people march out of the church and say, "I'm gone, I'm done, I'm not going to be a part of this. I'm running away." And they never get a chance because maybe Barnabas is too afraid to step up and do this, to mediate with an air of the experience to say, "Well, let's hear the other side. Let's get the whole story out. Let's hear more about this." Before I march off with my feelings hurt and go to the next church telling them how much I didn't like the last church because those jerks there and you have that experience. Can we just... maybe we can talk and we can work on it.

Before I get to that, though, there are two different problems on each end of that that I want to talk about. If you're taking sub-notes, I guess that's kind of the "B" category. Let's talk about "A" and "C." "A" is this, where we don't even need a Barnabas. Can we talk about this for a second? Number two, we're going to fix misunderstandings. Here's one way to fix misunderstandings. Letter "A," if you will, it's for you just to overlook it. Can you jot this down? Proverbs 19:11. Proverbs 19:11. It talks about the fact that you should not be quick to be angry and that, I think is certainly important for us to hear in our day and culture in the Twitter-verse that we live in. "Slow down with your anger and it's a glory to overlook an offense." It's a glory to overlooking offense. I mean, you should sit back and say, man, part of my sanctification. It's a good thing, it's a credit. It's like, man, that's a character aspect of my life to overlook an event. There are some things you should just learn to suck it up and overlook it. And man we can use that in a day when everyone is so hypersensitive and, you know, the biggest problem in the world is hurting my feelings. OK.

You're in an imperfect church. You can fix some of those misunderstandings by just being the one who absorbs the problem and just says, "I'm going to be the bigger person and overlook that. Yeah, someone said something. Yeah. They didn't do the thing I would have done. Yeah. I think that was a dumb decision about how they did the programming. And I don't like the way they did Camp Compass or I don't think we should have this or we should have had that or the music's too loud or whatever." Sometimes just can we just overlook? This is our family. There were a lot of things in your childhood, in your family, I'm assuming, you just had



to learn to overlook. It's my family. That's just how we are. It's not perfect. And so I'm going to fix this problem, this relational problem, by overlooking it.

The third thing before we get back to the second thing, letter "C" would be when it's no, it's a deal-breaker. And that's where some of you think I'm too idealistic talking about being loyal and faithful to your church, being all about being used to the fact that it's going to be imperfect. You think, "No, no, no, no, no. There are reasons to leave your church." And I'm going to say, I'm not dumb, I realize that. Not that dumb at least. I'm smart enough to know there are times to leave your church.

OK, let's put this one down. Titus Chapter 3 verses 10 and 11 would be a good passage to remind you of this truth. Titus Chapter 3 verses 10 and 11. Here are people that, Paul uses the word, at least the English translation of it, is to be warped. There's the word. "Warped and sinful and self-condemned." There are people who do things in the church that are warped and sinful and self-condemned. And it may be that the church affirms that sinful, warped, self-condemned thing. And so we ought to do what Paul tells Titus to do on Crete in those churches and that is, two things, "to warn them," first of all. Right? And then "have nothing to do with them." So if we're going to apply that corporately, there is a time to have nothing to do with this church. And you march out and you run away and you need to run away because there's something that is affirmed as a willful, as the Old Testament put it, a high-handed sin where they say, "No, I don't care what the Bible says, I don't care. I'm not interested in doing it." OK.

Your responsibility is to warn them. To warn them. And then to have nothing to do with them. And I will say this, there are some people who march out of this church or whatever church if you're listening on the radio, whatever church you go to, they leave and they go around saying "That church is warped and sinful and self-condemned. There's so unbiblical. And that's why I had to leave." And I'm just going to ask this question. Listen, just for the sake of propriety, did you warn them on the way out? If it's the misunderstanding between Paul and the Jerusalem Christians was such that it was such a big deal-breaking thing, that now you're going to say, "OK, you can't be a part of that church." And if Paul said, "Well, I can't be part of this church," then I just think there needs to be a clear warning. At least write the pastor a letter. I mean, let us know what it is.

And I think that's the manning-up kind of thing that you should do. I'd like to have an open Bible and say, "Here's where you are high-handedly, willfully being disobedient to God." If you have to separate from your spiritual family for that reason, I get it, I get it, But at least you'll find out if whether or not the third category is actually in the second category. And that is we just need to sit down and figure this out. And the second category is this. Jot this down, Galatians Chapter 2. Galatians Chapter 2 verses 11 through 14. It is a bigger example of the category we're in when Barnabas has to step in and say, "I need to mediate this problem, it needs to be called out, "Hey, church, you're doubting and being suspicious of Paul, and you should not be."



Paul to the Galatian churches is giving testimony to having to call out Peter the Apostle. And he's doing that because he says he's being hypocritical and he's leading others to be hypocritical in the fact that they are changing their habits when these people of the circumcision party, they're concerned about the ceremonial laws, coming to town and Peter used to eat with the non-kosher people. And no problem there. They realize the ceremonial law is gone. But now when they got the right audience, they're not going to do that and so they're being hypocritical. And here's what Paul says. It was because of fear that what Peter was doing was not in step with the truth of the gospel. OK.

So here's something that may happen in your church. And this is more than a misunderstanding, this is a disagreement. I'm saying before you pack up your backpack and leave and march out and run away from your church, I mean, maybe we need the Barnabas situation where we say, I need someone to sit down and let's make sure we get the things out on the table and say, here's the problem. Because if, for instance, number three, someone says the category three, letter "C," if they say, "Well, I'm leaving this church because it's unbiblical. Sometimes I want to say, well, let's see what your unbiblical charges are. And if I'm saying it was not a highhanded, absolute willful disobedience to God's word. Matter of fact, what you're saying is helpful and maybe one of the reasons we weren't doing that, the reason that small group leader wasn't doing that is because of fear or they were stumbling in their Christian life in some way. Maybe we can fix it with a clear confrontation.

And in a way, it doesn't feel like a confrontation, that's what Barnabas is doing in the church, is he not? He's basically saying, "Guys, you're wrong about Saul. He really is a disciple. He really did get converted. He's been preaching boldly up in Damascus." You're going to be part of an imperfect church, even if you're not a part of this one, it doesn't matter what church you're in, imperfect church. That's your church family, though, you're designed for that. I'm saying fix the misunderstandings wherever you can. Feel a bit like a potpourri. But speaking of Barnabas and what he did here, you can look now in verse 28 in our passage, Acts 9, and you can see, look carefully at this now, you can see Luke echoing what Paul just said, only now in a new geographic context regarding Saul.

Look again at verse 27. Barnabas took him and brought him before the leaders of the church, "Declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had," look at this phrase, "preach boldly in the name of Jesus." That's a sign that he's a genuine apostle. He's willing to boldly, which, if you study that word, it's an idea of this courageous, fearless, like openness. He's not afraid of whoever's there. He's fearless because, much like verse 31 says, he fears the Lord more than he fears his opponents. It's going to get him in trouble and put a target on his back. Nevertheless, he's going to boldly preach or he did boldly preach up in Damascus. And now Luke says, "So he went in and out among the disciples at Jerusalem." The problem solved. And then he says he's "Preaching boldly in the name of the Lord." Now, he was doing that in Jerusalem.

There were a lot of things you could have said about Paul's preaching in Damascus. And it didn't have to be with such a strong word. I don't want to overstate this, but I mean, it is kind of a big compliment to say he wasn't just sharing the gospel. Right? I could say that about



someone in my small group, for instance, "Hey, this guy. Yeah, he shares his faith at work." That's one way to say it. But to say, "Ahhh! Fearlessly, courageously, BOLDLY, he's freely and openly talking about Christ." I mean, that's a complimentary thing. And then Luke sits back and goes that's what Paul was doing.

Which, by the way, have you ever noticed, as we've been reading through Acts, how complimentary Luke is about so many people? I mean, about Barnabas. I mean, we saw that early on, Luke saying things that just put him on a pedestal. We see him say of Steven, remember Stephen? "He's full of grace, full of power. He's speaking with wisdom and no one can contradict it." Right? And even in that phrase and when we were studying that passage in Chapter 6, like, you know, "like a face of an angel." Right? And I'm thinking, OK, let's talk to his wife about him. Now, you've gone too far, right? "A face of an angel, full of good works? I mean, not every day, not every day is he full of good works." Luke does that before our chapter is out with Tabitha in verse 36. Right? "She's full of good works and she's full...," that word still applies to that next phase, "full of acts of charity." You think, now come on.

It seems like this big superlative discussion about people is just so positive. Of Barnabas, he says later in Acts 11:24, "He's a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith." I just want to say that's a very affirming way to talk about these people. Barnabas is very affirming in the way he talks about Saul, and here you have Luke being very affirming about the way he talks about Saul. I'm just saying you can see the pattern. I think that it's a lot harder to run away from a church and pack up your emotional backpack and march out mad when you're in a church that does a lot of this. The Barnabas's are not only there to solve the problems, there are Barnabas's who are there to do the kinds of things that Luke is doing, and that is to affirm people when they're caught doing the right thing. In this case, he's "fearing the Lord" enough to be fearless when he's doing the will of God in the marketplace and in the synagogues.

Number three, let's just put it that way, because we have a church like this, please. Let's "Honor the Courageous." Let's honor them. Number three, honor them. You and I need to be much more perfuse with our praise of other people. Some say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, Pastor Mike. We do not praise people. We praise the Lord only." OK, stop with that. How about this, Proverbs 31. You know the Proverbs 31 woman list at the end it talks about "Beauty is vain, charm is deceitful, but a woman who fears the Lord," should not be criticized. Remember that passage? A woman who fears the Lord, you probably shouldn't gossip about. A woman who fears the Lord, occasionally, you should let her have, you know, I don't know, a good seat up front at the women's tea. No. "A woman who fears the Lord is to be...," do you know the word? The same word that's used as we talk about God.

Now, later on, Paul would be mistaken as a Greek god and he would say, "No, don't do that. I'm just a man. I'm here to bring the gospel to you so you can turn from these vile things like idolatry." So we're not talking about the deification of people. I don't want you to worship anyone in our church. I'd like you to praise some people in our church. I'd like you to look for people who are doing courageous, bold ministerial things. As a matter of fact, it's hard for me to overstate how much of the Bible emphasizes this thing. And I guess if you did



psychoanalysis on the kids who do actually run away, you would probably find those households aren't filled with a lot of affirmation. Matter of fact, that's probably absent.

If we have a church that fixes relational problems and misunderstandings and is really active and focused on having a kind of affirming discussion when people are caught doing good things, I think we would probably have a lot less defections. We would have people who say, "You know what? Yeah, there are things that torqued me and I got my feelings hurt, but it's a place where I'm affirmed. There is a lot of honoring going on. When I serve the Lord, I get thanks for it." I'm going to have you in your small groups look at a passage, you'll see it on the discussion questions this week in First Corinthians 16, Paul starts talking about Titus, talking about how important these guys are in his life, and he talks about them, Fortunatus, Achaicus. And then he tells the Corinthians, you ought to be honoring people like this, "You ought to be recognizing them. That's the English translation of the word. You ought to know them, which means they had to be in your mind as promoted people. You ought to think of them highly.

First Thessalonians 5, same thing. It talks about, you ought to see those who labor in the Lord, they're laboring and serving in the church and in that case, some of those that are above them in terms of leadership in the church. And he says and you ought to "highly esteemed them in love because of their work." And I'm just telling you, that has to become more a part of the culture of a church like ours. I mean, yeah, I get it. Some say, "We're hardline Bible teaching. That's the Bible-thumping church. That's why some people don't care much for our church." I get that.

But when you come here, you come here, even if there are relational problems, even if there are misunderstandings, even if there are hurt feelings, I hope you have a church filled with Barnabas's who are going to fix those problems and they are going to step in and help and fix them, and they're going to be the kind of people that, hey, someone does something good, something bold for the Lord, works hard, labors and all, they're going to honor them. They're going to respect them. They're going to praise them. They're going to give thanks for them. They're not going to be afraid to write a note in a letter, in a text and to say how great they're doing.

If you're not doing that, you find if I'm talking about this you go naah-naah-naah, here's a couple of reasons you might not. Number one, you think that praise only belongs to the Lord. Well, there's a certain kind of praise that is reserved for God, but you better be praising people, honoring people, respecting people, esteeming people, thanking those people. Some of you think it's flattery and I'm saying this, let's think just at least a little bit longer than saying, "I don't want to do this, so I'm going to call it flattery." Flattery, as Paul said to the Galatian churches, he said there are people out there that flatter. They make much of you so that you'll make much of them. They have an ulterior motive. I don't want you to flatter anyone. Flattery is you saying things with an ulterior motive to get something out, to manipulate them, to try to aggrandize yourself and hoping that if you do this to them with your word, they'll do that to you or you've got an angle.



I don't want you to have an angle. I want you to really consider others as more important than yourselves. And I want you to honor them and respect them, particularly when they do something good. Someone comes to your small group and says they did this thing for the Lord or they shared the gospel, they took someone through Partners. I want you to praise them. I want you to affirm them. When you get a lot of that going on in the church, it's hard to run away from a church like that. I mean, I'm going to stick that one out. I want to be a part of that because I recognize those people recognize good things when they happen. Honor the courageous. Paul was courageous. He was doing praiseworthy work and the church in this case, not only Barnabas but Luke as he looks back on it as an associate of Paul's, says and he was doing it boldly. Preaching the word of God and that should give you some applause.

Oh, I said two things. You're going to wish I would have skipped this and actually fully forgotten that. You got not a lot of perfume life-words coming out of your mouth to the praise people in the church that do good things. It may be because you are prideful. How's that? OK, I got one taker on that comment. (audience laughs) Let me give you some Scripture for this. Luke Chapter 18. Jesus is going to tell a parable about a tax collector and a sinner go up to the temple to pray. But he starts it this way, I'm telling this parable for these people. Right? "They trust in themselves that they are righteous, and they treat others with contempt." In other words, their focus on aggrandizing themselves, they're really concerned about what everyone thinks of them and therefore as a necessary component of that, guess what they do? They're always putting other people down.

And in the parable, that's what happens, right? The Pharisee says, "I'm glad I'm not like that guy over there." And you know your Bible. What happens at the end of that parable? Well, it's the guy who can't even look up to pray who goes home justified. He's in sync and in step with God at the end of the time at church. And the other guy, not so much. Why? Because he's got the wrong view of himself. Pride, as we've talked about in the series already, is going to derail so many things in your Christian life. And here's one expression of righteousness that's going to be dammed up, it's going to be plugged up if you have it. That is you're going to look at your life and say, "I never praise anyone, I don't like to do it. I don't feel right about it. I don't want to blow their head up. I don't want to..."

Listen, it's not your job to keep people in your small group humble. That's not your job. It's just not. So give it up. That's not your job. God's really good at that. Your job is to praise praiseworthy things. Your job is to honor honorable things. Your job is to say when someone boldly proclaims the gospel, they boldly proclaimed the gospel. This is a complimentary thing. And some of us aren't as complimentary as we should be. Matter of fact, if we added up the compliments that come out of your mouth that are not manipulation, not flattery, but sincere statements of honor and respect and esteem and thanksgiving and praise to other people, I just wonder what those thermometers would look like over your head. And then I'd say I'll bet there's a correlation for some of you that even your excuse about flattery is really a cover for the fact that I just really want people to see me as the good guy. Ouch.

Verse 29. We have preached a lot about this in the book of Acts so far. I get this. Right? He's going to be bold and do the right thing. He's going to go in and dispute with the Hellenists and



it's going to get a target on his back. We've talked about that, persecution. When you do the right thing you're going to have pushback. Sometimes it's going to be costly persecution. In this case that's what's going on. What I want to focus on is when that happens, look at verse 30. "Then the brothers learned of this." The church finds out about it. His new churchmates there in the church of Jerusalem see what's going on. They learned of this and they said, "Hey, we got to protect you." "They brought him down to Caesarea Maritime and they sent him off to Tarsus," hundreds of miles away. And he goes up there and is in safety.

Now, in a church about loyalty, really, I'm talking about the goodness of the church, priority of the church, don't run away from your church, you going to say, "Well, they shipped him off." Well, they didn't ship them off because they didn't believe he was a disciple. They shipped him off at this point because they said you are under threat of execution, we're going to protect you. And at this point, they loved him. Right? They thought this guy is boldly preaching and Luke is giving that perspective because that's the perspective now of the church. And I'm just saying this, if the apostle Paul was in your church, would you want him to stick around in your church? I don't know, he's pretty good at teaching Sunday school. I mean, the guys that he takes through Partners, they get a lot of insight from Paul.

I mean, he's writing the New Testament in time. You don't want to lose that guy. Right? Talk about a guy you're going to mourn when he has to go to another church, you're going to feel bad about him. And yet they sacrificed to make sure that he was protected. Why? Because for him doing the right things, not only did he get praise from the church, from the outside world, he got persecution.

Now, I doubt there's anyone in your small group who's under threat of death right now because they're standing up for Christ in their workplace, their community, their neighborhood, their family. But to stretch that word in a spectrum, in a category, let me just say this to you. You and I ought to be all about what these brothers were all about. Number four, you ought to be protecting the persecuted, "Protect the Persecuted." And you may not have anybody being, you know, almost martyred this week because of their faith. But I'll bet you got some people, let's get back to the thermometer over people's heads. I want you to picture your small group right now. Your group that you overlap within our church, those are the people you do the Christian life with. Those are your brothers and sisters of Christ. And I want you to picture their faces, put the thermometer over their head right now and say, OK, for doing the right thing. Right? Who's getting the most heat for that? Think about that. Who's getting the most heat for standing up for what is right in their family and their extended family, at their workplace, in their industry, in their neighborhood? Who is getting heat for doing the right thing?

Here are the brothers who are willing to say we want to protect you. Just like in Damascus when they lowered him out of the window in the walls and said, "Listen, we want to protect you." That's what the church does. And we'd like to protect those who you know in the church who are being targeted because of their righteousness. Who is suffering for righteousness' sake, I guess, is my question? Do you know anybody? "I mean, well, it's not martyrdom." Well, great. It's not martyrdom. What is it? Can you just say, "OK?" There is one face, two



faces, yeah, I can see the thermometer going up. I mean, it's over, you know, 98.6. They're getting some heat here." Can you now, because of this sermon, say I need to do what the brothers did and that is at whatever sacrifice I need to make, I want to protect them.

How do you protect them? Well, it depends on what the problem is. Let's just start with the general frustrations we get because we're Christians in our workplace or whatever. I mean, someone, I talked to someone last night, I mean, I can go on and on about people who I know in our church who are getting grief and guff for being a faithful Christian. And sometimes it's in their own home. And so I think you, as an interfacing person in their lives, ought to say, I'm going to stand with them. Barnabas, parakletos, it's a great word, he is the encourager, he comes alongside of. Now, there may be no advocacy that you can do, no mediation you can do, but you can certainly text and write and go and have coffee and say I'm standing with them when they're getting the heat turned up for being righteous. You need to stand with them. You know, it's hard for people to pack up their emotional backpacks, storm out of the church and say, I'm running away from this church when they know that when the times are tough, the people in that church stand with them. And so you've got to say that's got to be my commitment to protect the persecuted.

It may be someone's lost a job. Think back to Barnabas. Barnabas, we meet Barnabas liquidating real estate so he can meet the needs of people. There may be a situation where you got an extra car or whatever, you should sell it, use that money to help someone in your small group who's lost their job and you can legitimately, carefully, thoughtfully, strategically stand with them and protect them in that financial threat. Some of you have skills just like the guys who said I got a basket and a rope. Let's get him down and get him to safety. There may be some of you that have skills, career skills, where there are people who are suffering because of their Christianity. They stood up for righteousness. They're getting pushed back. And you may be a paralegal or an attorney. Maybe they're getting sued because of their stand for Christ. I'm thinking of names and faces right now in our church.

And I'm thinking in that small group, I hope there are people. If it's not them, it's someone they know that's outside of the small group in our church who can say, "Listen, I can give you some legal advice, I can help you. I can step up and do something here." I mean, you could have a trade skill, you could be a plumber or you could be someone who is an electrician, and here's someone because of their stand for Christ, they have not gotten the promotion, they've gotten, you know, unemployed, laid off. And you can say, well, I can at least I can fix your plumbing problem. I'm going to stand with you and I'm going to pray with you while I'm there. And I'm going to be your advocate in the midst of your persecution.

And just because of the direction of this text, I don't want to stretch this too far, but, you don't want anyone to be in danger and there is a danger when you're outside the will of God and there are some people you need to physically, just like Paul had to be physically released, you need to physically release people at great sacrifice to yourself because they, if they were to step out of God's will, would be in trouble.



Case in point, we send off these groups to plant these churches all the time, and it's painful, I get it. Some of your best friends go and, you know, every now and then we announce another and another pastor's going. "Yeah, that was my favorite pastor." Listen. Can you say just like the church of Jerusalem said, we're going to let Paul go? We'd much rather have him here. He'd be a great pastor on our team. He'd be a great preacher, a great theologian in our church. We're going to let him go because we don't want this person in this case, like our church planting teams, to be outside the will of God.

Can you stop moaning and complaining about it? Can you suck up your tears and say, "I'm going to protect them from stepping off the road of God's will," which according to First Corinthians, as Paul would later say to them, you know, sometimes you're outside of the will of God. Some become "weak, sick and even die" under the discipline of God when they're fighting the will of God. Why are you making it harder for people to do the will of God because you're not willing to release them? "Well, tears," I get it. We're going to have some tears when our best friends and our tight ministry leaders in our pastoral team get sent off to church after church. Why? Because we're committed to the great commission. We're committed to church planting. We're committed to repentance and faith. And I'm just saying that's part of protecting the persecuted in these cases, I don't want them to be in peril. I know that's a stretch, but at least it makes me think of the direction of this text leaving people down away from our church. Protect the persecuted. But in most cases, it's something else. Conflict, it's social outcasting, it's being a comfort, being a financial aid to people in the midst of their troubles.

Verse 31. Luke's commentary, "So the church throughout Judea and Galilee," down south, up north, "Samaria," in between, this embattled middle part, "had peace and was built up," was edified, was fortified, was strengthened, "walking in the fear of the Lord," godly, obedient people, doing the hard stuff, "and in the comfort," there's our word, parakletos, there's the noun form, right? They've had the thing called in alongside it. What is it? "with the comfort of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit and them we're in step, as Paul would put it, to the Galatians. "And then it multiplied."

All of those are great. I mean, that's a great snapshot of the churches really firing on all cylinders right now, even though they just had to ship off Paul. But, man, it's good, it's a good divine commentary on what's going on. And it's all stuff that Luke says you just need to see this. And again, if you really get familiar with how Luke is narrating all this in the book of Acts, you get this sense of just how often he steps out and goes, here's a snapshot and so many of those are positive. He stops to celebrate the good seasons and the good things. And even in the midst of persecution, the good fruit that comes out of it. He celebrates the victory. And I'll tell you what, a church that does that, that's a lot harder church to pack up your emotional backpack and leave as well.

Number five, let's put it this way. You need to "Celebrate the Victories." Celebrate the victories. There are victories, there are five of them in this passage, and I bet there are some parallels to stuff in your church. Let's just look at them real quickly. Peace. I mean, there are seasons that are hard and then we get through those hard seasons when there's a lot of conflict and then the conflict starts to kind of let up. And we're never going to be without



conflict in the world. But there are a couple of things that are happening here. Number one, you got Saul who you're trying to protect because he's a great preacher now in Jerusalem, whereas before he was trying to kill you. So the pressure was a little bit off there.

Tiberius, who was amenable to the Jewish population in Jerusalem, was now being replaced by Caligula and there was now this pressure upon the Jews and the Jews now had less emotional capital and hostility and angst to aim at the Christians, that sect of The way, so to speak. And so they were now fighting their battles with the Roman representatives. So there was relief there. We had a shift. So you had a little bit of pressure was off. You felt a lot of pressure and a lot of persecution and while it was still going to be there and we'll see more of it, it was at least at this point now there was some peace and that was good.

And certainly there was peace in the church in the sense that when you had people misunderstanding the apostle Paul and where he stood with God, you got guys like Barnabas making peace. You got guys like Barnabas fixing misunderstandings. Peace in the church. I don't know, is there anything in our church, is there anything that in this season that you can step back, identify under the banner of peace and say, yeah, we've had some victories of peace and we want to celebrate those? We've gotten through some hard times on a multitude of layers and levels. We should identify it, we should celebrate it.

What's the next one here? Edified, built up. Such a general statement, but I mean, I don't know, is there anything that stronger in the church now than it was before? Is there anything stronger in your small group now than it was before? "Well, nothing in my small group." Well, when there is note it and celebrate it. I don't know. Bring a cake, get off your diet for a day, celebrate and say we should thank God for the good that's happening. We're out of this tough season and it feels like things are letting up and over here there's something good that has happened that has strengthened the church. I mean, think about it. You pull out, some of you are parked over in the Compass Bible Institute lot, and I hope you go to your car and you think, man, there's a victory right there. Talk about the fortification of the church at Aliso Viejo. Think about that. You should say, "Man, I got to thank God for that. I don't think our small group has ever celebrated the birth of the Compass Bible Institute. We're going to bring a cake. We're going to have a party." Great.

Celebrate the victories. It's harder to leave a church that's doing a lot of celebration of the good things that are happening. And Luke periodically does that and here's one here. Celebrate the victories, celebrate the fortification, the building up of the church. We're about to start the 2020 construction, the Compass 2020 campaign and one of the phases we haven't done yet because we're in the middle of permits right now, we're going to start tearing all this out. And first, it's going to start with the classrooms in Building 140 and all that. When that happens and you're like, "Ahhh, the dust and it's messed up." Let's stop with all that. Just say this is a fortification of the church, the church is getting stronger. Right? We're able to see the expansion. Your kids are going to have better classrooms. Your grandkids are going to have better classrooms. We're going to have a better place to do ministry.



I told you back in the day we signed a 20-year lease on the buildings here that we don't own and though we couldn't purchase them because they wouldn't sell them to us, I mean, that's something we said, OK, now we're going to invest some money in this property. And when you start to see those things happening, every phase of that you ought to celebrate. I mean, you really ought to. And when you do that, it's harder to walk away from a church that's celebrating those kinds of victories.

Look at the next one in this list. The fear of God. There are a million things you could look at, I'm sure, in the lives of the people who you know. Here is how they are fearing the Lord more than they're fearing the push back. Whatever that is, celebrate that. Someone says they did something that they report on that you've been praying about in your small group, your sub-congregation, celebrate the fact that the fear of God and the obedience of the saints is happening. Whenever it happens, celebrate. Comfort by the Spirit. I don't know, those sometimes can be hard to quantify, but sometimes there are those seasons where people get through the difficulties. Sitting in some meetings recently, people say, "I've just felt that God just really... I'm getting through this, the peace in the midst of the storm." Let's celebrate that.

And then, of course, we've talked about Luke always liked to step back and talk about the exponential multiplication of the people. Right? We're about to have baptisms, I think it's next weekend, are we not? And we're going to get more testimonies on this platform in the two tanks and they're going to give... Those ought to be times where you celebrate. There ought to be a sense in which, yeah, we're going to celebrate. We're going to talk about that. You can go home talking about things you don't like and all the misunderstandings you have with people at the church or you can talk about the things and celebrate the things that are victories among us. Peace, edification, fear of God, comforted by the Spirit, exponential growth and so much of that discussion going on throughout this book.

Thursday afternoon, I went to visit a 92-year-old member of Compass Bible Church. And as I sat there on the porch of her nursing home and we reminisced about things, she started to do some math and added up that we've been part of the same spiritual family for 32 years. And, you know, here I am having this conversation and recognizing this 92-year-old lady that I've been her pastor for over three decades. And I thought to myself, if nothing else, as I'm bouncing in and out of this passage, getting ready for the weekend, here's a gal who didn't run away. I mean, this is amazing. And just considering and doing kind of the proportional math here that I became her pastor when I was in my 20s and she was in her sixties. Right? She had a lot of reasons to find problems with me. Right? I mean, there were plenty of things she could have said, "I'm out of here." Right? "He can't do this." I mean, there's plenty and I could have provided plenty of reasons for her.

She has stuck with this thing through thick and thin and in our church family, in my ministry for 32 years. And as we talked about that and thought about, just kind of reminiscing about things, you know, I remember when her husband died. I was at the funeral there, and before that, I couldn't help but when I got back to the office and I looked up correspondence with her and her husband. And I thought about going on our Israel trips and she being a part of that, a



key part of it, really helped launch the first one and part of her work to make that happen. It was like this gal is part of my family.

I mean, her health, and she's so shut-in at this point, she can't get out. And she's sitting there with tears in her eyes thinking about just what it's like not to be here with us and not being able to be here, but she watches and listens and all that. And I think to myself, that picture of kind of going through the thick and thin, think about how many highs and lows in the last three decades that she's been through together with me and some of you who have been here for a long time. I mean, that just was something worth saying, "there is a gal with plenty of reasons and several misunderstandings because she's no rollover kind of lady. Let me just say that. Matter of fact, before we left, we have a theological discussion about some things that were like, OK. And all I'm telling you is we work through it all. We work through it all.

And I just think that is really what we need. Now, I know your jobs might take you and missions, you know, and calls of God and... You may not be here for the next 30 years. I get that. But I'm telling you, barring those kinds of things, there should be a sense of security within your church family that this is your church family, as imperfect as it is. We're working on it, ironing and scrubbing, we want the wrinkles and spots to go away as much as possible. But we're willing to work through the misunderstandings, we want to continually affirm and honor the people in our church, which can't be the sole responsibility of the pastor, you understand. We're going to protect people when they're being persecuted, when they're being opposed, when the temperature goes up for them. We're there to stand with them through their trials and problems, including their sicknesses and being shut in and in a nursing home.

And when there are good things, we're going to celebrate them, just like we did. You should have seen the tears talking just about the new Compass Bible Church work of this church. And I think there's a gal we're not sitting complaining about the bad stuff that's going on that people don't like. That is what we need more. So I pray that God would ramp up in your heart the priority of your church family, knowing that unlike children who are too immature to appreciate what they have until they leave it, that we can right now in the good old days of the present say I'm really grateful for being a part of my church family and being an active, highly committed participant here with all of its imperfections, we're going to celebrate, we're going to protect, we're going to honor and we're going to fix when things are not as they should be. With that, I hope we'll be encouraged in the midst of some interesting times outside the walls of the church.

Let's pray. God, I know it is hard sometimes to think about being stuck in one family and this is our church, and wouldn't it be exciting and fresh to go somewhere else? And God, of course, there are times for that and plenty of reasons people have to, in this mobile society, make those kinds of decisions. But, God, I pray that we would settle in those of us who are capable to do that because of the factors in their lives and say we're not running. Even as we preached on before, sometimes when the sheep do wander, we want to be the Barnabas that goes and tries to fix those things even when it's outside of the church when someone is gone. God, let us care about that, let us care about each other, let us honor one another, let us protect each other. And I'm so thankful, God, that in that church experience of the apostle



Paul in Jerusalem, that you were good enough to even highlight and itemize some of these things for us in this text. They're easy to observe here and we get to see that as a template for our behavior. So, God, please help us make the church all that it should be so that we can do this all the more until we see the day approaching until we are 92-years-old.

In Jesus name. Amen.