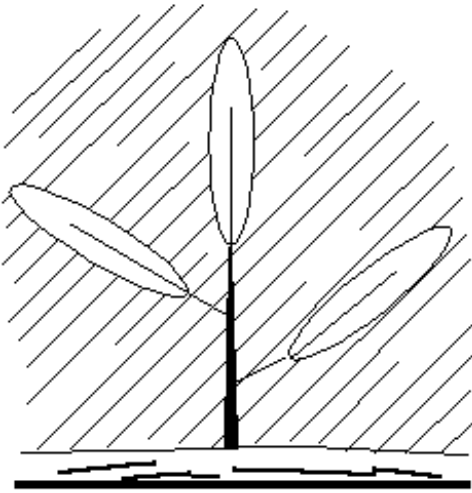


The Antioch Story



Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Antioch (modern Antakya) was a Hellenistic city in north-west Syria. It was situated on the Orontes River, some twenty miles from the sea. It had been founded about 300 BC by Seleucus Nicator in honour of his father — sixteen cities of that name! Nearby Seleucia had an excellent harbour. Antioch also lay on the most important land route between Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine. It had a splendid palace, spacious boulevards, parks and gardens and — the only city of its time to have street lighting at night! By the end of the fourth century AD the population was estimated as high as 800,000. There was a mixture of races, including large numbers of Jews.

The account of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 makes no reference to Antioch or Syria. Yet when the early church was choosing seven helpers to supervise the distribution to the widows, one of the number was “Nicolaus, a Gentile from Antioch who had earlier been converted to Judaism” (Acts 6.5).

But we are conscious of the “real action” at Antioch from Acts 11. This is where the good news was first preached to Gentiles as well as Jews (v. 20). So many were converted that the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas. He saw what was going on, gave his encouragement and then went off to Tarsus to look for Saul and “for a whole year the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group”. Then Luke makes this comment, “It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians” (v.26).

We can see why when we read on. A severe famine came “over all the earth” (including Antioch!) and they decided to send relief to their fellow-believers in Judaea (vv. 27-30).

In Acts 13 we read that there were three “prophets and teachers” in the Antioch church besides Barnabas and Saul. (One of them, Lucius of Cyrene, may have been Luke). The whole church had a real concern to reach out further with the good news, and, as they fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit said to them (exactly how, we aren’t told), “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul...” (v.2). So Antioch became the first “sending church” in that early missionary movement. It was the place that sent Paul out on his missionary journeys and that received his report “about all that God had done with them” (14.27; 18.22,23).

The Antioch Christians had experienced the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. They had a thirst to learn, to grow in understanding of their faith. They put it into practice in both evangelistic outreach and practical help.

The Church has been commissioned by her Lord to “make disciples” (Matthew 28.18-20). The task includes evangelising, nurturing, equipping... The Antioch School is about “growing disciples”— both in helping you to grow as a disciple and in equipping you for involvement in growing others.

➤ **Module 1** aims to help you “to gain a mature understanding of the Christian Gospel, Christian beliefs and the Church’s mission in the world and to relate Christian beliefs to daily life.”

➤ **Module 2** aims “to establish a deeper understanding of the contents of the Bible, concentrating on Biblical events in their historical setting and major themes and narratives. It is hoped that this will produce a more mature knowledge of the Bible which will prompt a more confident reference to and use of the Bible in daily life and witness.”

➤ **Module 3** aims to “help each believer discover and use their spiritual gifts for building up the Body of Christ and to help individual members and the whole Body to communicate the Gospel effectively in the Australian context.”

➤ **Module 4** aims to help you “to understand the wholeness God intends for us all in Christ, to discover ways of overcoming our own barriers to personal wholeness and to become people who can help to encourage others to personal wholeness.”

Running through all the modules is the need for us to develop our own relationship with the Lord through regular worship, Bible study and prayer.

We are in this together, and we will be encouraging one another each week in **Prayer Cells**.