

# The Unwavering Church

Global in Perspective

November 9, 2025

Acts 10:1 - 11:18

## Introduction

A few years ago, specifically 2020 and 2021, our second-born son (Jonathan) was growing like crazy—shooting up in height, getting quite tall and staying quite thin almost overnight. At one of his checkups, our pediatrician took the unusual step of pulling out a tape measure and asked Jonathan to hold out his arms. Dr. Lee measured his wingspan and compared that to his height. It turns out that if your wingspan is much longer than your height (along with other symptoms), it can be a sign that you have Marfan Syndrome, which could point to potential heart problems and a few other things.

So for just a moment there, the growth that we thought was really healthy was nearly a sign of his unhealthiness. His growth looked impressive, but it might not have been healthy. You might put this way: **Healthy children grow, but not all growth is healthy.**

## Body

### The Healthy, Growing Church

One of the things that has particularly stood out to me this week as I've pondered the church's journey through Acts is that Luke seems to be going out of his way to communicate the numerical growth and expansion of the early church. Consider the following passages that we've studied thus far in the series. (SLIDES for each one below)

*So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. Acts 2:41*

*(They were) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. Acts 2:47*

*But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. Acts 4:4*

*Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—multitudes of both men and women. Acts 5:14*

*In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number ... Acts 6:1*

*The word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7*

*So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. Acts 9:31*

When I was growing up, our middle and high school operated on a “9-weeks” schedule. Every 9 weeks, we got a report card. But at the 4-week mark, we would be sent home, not with a report card, but with a “progress report” ... a document meant to give parents and students some idea of how that 9-week segment was shaping up.

**(TITLE SLIDE)** These statements of Luke are like progress reports, giving his readers some idea of how all the things the church did and all the things the church experienced were impacting the church. And the **answer at every progress report is that the church was numerically growing.**

**It is logical and biblical for us to conclude that healthy churches grow numerically.**

**In the same way that healthy children grow, healthy churches grow.**

**But if you go back to Marfan Syndrome, we also know that not all growth is healthy.**

**Likewise, yes, healthy churches grow, but not all church growth is healthy.**

So, was the growth of the early church healthy, and if so, is there anything we can learn and apply to ourselves and to Beech Haven? I believe the answer to that question is YES and YES.

If we look back at the very passages I just walked through, we’ll see that every progress report that Luke gives is preceded by one or more of the following. **(ONE SLIDE below)**

- **Unity in prayer**
- **Proclamation of the gospel**
- **Personal integrity and holiness**
- **Spirit-led leadership**
- **Suffering and perseverance**

So I take from this that healthy churches are **praying churches**. Healthy churches are out there **having gospel conversations**. Healthy churches have people who **walk with integrity**. Healthy churches have **leaders in step with the Spirit**. Healthy churches have people who **persevere in suffering** like Jesus. And when this is going on in a church, we can expect that church to grow. **It’s not a formula. It’s not an “if this then that” conditional expression that**

it is programmed in. But broadly speaking, when these things are going on in a church, it's a healthy church, and we can expect those churches to grow.

**(SLIDE) So the goal of the church is not to be growing by any means necessary, but to be healthy and expect growth.**

And as we push deeper into the book of Acts and see more Gentiles coming into the faith, **we see even more healthy practices.**

## Gentile Explosion

Let's pick it up where we left off last week. Last week, we saw where Gentiles began coming to faith in the town of Cesarea. But as it turns out, that wasn't the only place Gentiles were hearing and believing the good news about Jesus. In the middle of Acts 11, Luke tells us that when Stephen was martyred, many of the Christians scattered. And in their travels, they spread the news of Jesus not just to Jews, but also to Gentiles. Look at Acts 11:20-21 with me.

*(SLIDE) But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. Acts 11:20-21*

## Gospel Affirmation

When news of the Gentile revival reached Jerusalem, the church sent Barnabas (the "Son of Encouragement" ... the guy who sold his land and gave the proceeds with integrity back in Acts 5) to see if it was genuine. Pay close attention to what Barnabas does and the result. Look at vv. 23-24.

*(SLIDE) When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord. Acts 11:23-24*

What Barnabas found was unmistakable evidence of the grace of God at work. Instead of suspicion or control, Barnabas responded with **gladness and affirmation**. He celebrated what God was doing in the new believers and encouraged the believers to remain faithful to the Lord with devoted hearts. That's gospel affirmation. Gospel affirmation goes beyond speaking well of a person's virtues (thought that may be helpful as well). Gospel affirmation is when we see God at work in someone and we speak to them about what we see God doing in them.

When Barnabas saw the grace of God, he didn't pat the Antioch believers on the back for their ingenuity; he glorified the God who was changing them. It still makes you feel good when someone does this, but not because you have done something. It's because God has done something. Gospel affirmation is really a form of worship. It trains the whole congregation to recognize and celebrate God's work in their lives and therefore give Him glory for it.

And as you can see in v. 24, Barnabas's encouragement didn't just make existing believers feel good. It expanded the mission. *Large numbers of people were added to the Lord.* Gospel affirmation releases gospel courage. Courage to serve more. Courage to share more. When we know the grace of God in us is seen and valued, we are eager for more people to see the grace of God work in us. So a big part of a healthy church that grows is one that overflows with gospel affirmation.

In his book *Practicing Affirmation*, Sam Crabtree puts it this way: (SLIDE)

*Just because we don't drink poison doesn't mean the body will be healthy; it must also receive nutrients.*

## Gospel Education (Acts 11:25–26)

Yet another element of healthy churches is found in vv. 25-26. Look there with me.

*Then (Barnabas) went to Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. Acts 11:25-26*

Barnabas didn't stop at encouragement; he **strengthened the work through instruction**. He brought Saul from Tarsus, and together they taught the believers for a full year. The result was depth, maturity, and a new identity—"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

**There's a very real sense in which we are known for what we are passionate about, and when we are passionate about something, we know a lot about it.** There's more to being a Christian than being a good theologian, but the relationship between knowing Jesus and living like Jesus is a very tight one. Our life groups and discipleship groups and special events around teaching at Beech Haven are a critical part of our being a healthy church.

## Gospel Participation (Acts 11:27–29)

Beyond affirmation and education, there is also participation. Look at vv. 27-29.

*In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the reign of Claudius. Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea. Acts 11:27-29*

When a famine was prophesied, the Antioch believers didn't retreat into self-preservation. They immediately moved to action, sending relief to brothers and sisters in need. Their generosity was not imposed from above but inspired from within, each giving according to ability.

A healthy church doesn't hoard blessings; it shares them. Gospel participation means joining God's mission through practical compassion, proving that the gospel we believe is the gospel we live.

### Gospel Commission (Acts 13:1–3)

Finally, in addition to all of these, we also see that a healthy church is on mission. Look at Acts 13:1-3.

*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As 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." Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off. Acts 13:1-3*

The church didn't cling to its best leaders; it released them in obedience and prayer. They laid hands on them and sent them out, confident that the Spirit who called would empower.

**Beech Haven, a healthy, growing church holds on to its comfort loosely and the mission tightly. Gospel commission is the heartbeat of a healthy church.** The church didn't make decisions that made itself comfortable. The church made decisions that made the fulfillment of the mission possible. Their health led to their growth, and even when that growth cost them Mr. Encouragement and Mr. Bible, they made the hard decision to send them because healthy churches are more committed to the mission than they are to their comfort or convenience.

## Conclusion/Application

**(TITLE SLIDE)** For the Christian and for the church, the story of the early church can be something of a measuring tape. "Are we healthy? Are we pursuing health? Is our growth the result of health, or is it something else?"

And here's what we know from the Bible. While there is no formula to follow ... while God gives growth ... It is broadly true that **when a church is healthy for all the reasons we've seen in the text today, the church grows. Healthy churches grow!**

So, are we affirming others and being affirmed by them? Are we discipling one another in relationships? Are we participating in the mission of the church? But perhaps the biggest question of all is this: **are we committed to the mission of the church?** Are we willing to send off or do without the things or the money or the time or the people in order to be on mission? I believe we are.

And if you are not yet a Christian, what you see in this story is that the call to follow Jesus is a call to give your life to knowing Him and being on His mission. (Invite to belief)