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## Acts 11:19-30

### Outward Church: Mission vs. Maintenance

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What are the two happiest days in a boat-owner's life? The day they buy the boat... and the day they sell the boat. Some say a boat owner is happiest the day they sell their boat and buy a bigger boat. I never want to own boat, but I would like to have friends who own boats. I also want a friend with a pool.

Boats require a lot of maintenance. From what I gather, the day you buy a boat is happy because it's the fulfillment of a dream. Maybe you grew up on your family's boat and it's the day you get to return to start new memories. But those romanticized memories are confronted with the actual costs of boat ownership.

You have to figure out where to dock your boat, maybe at your house, or some sort of rented dock. Then you have to transport it there, so you have to buy a trailer. Once your boat is in the water you have to keep it maintained because there's nothing like water to damage a boat. But if there's a storm or the weather get's cold, you got to take your boat out and figure out where to dock it and cover it with those big white tarps.

And maybe that's why so many people are so happy the day they finally sell their boat. All that maintenance is finally gone! If you're a boat owner, I'd love to enjoy the fruit of all your boat maintenance with you.

A church is a bit like a boat. We set sail on *The Good Ship Cornerstone* in 2015 into the deep blue sea of Westford. We had a lot of excitement and vision for church planting, for starting a new gospel-preaching church in Westford, but then maintenance mode slowly set in. We realized it's a lot of work to run a weekly service and to maintain a building. It's a lot of work just keeping going what we already have.

We switched from Saturdays to Sunday mornings last fall and added a Christian Education hour. I felt like we were gaining some momentum and then... Covid-19 hit. A global pandemic brought a lot of our ministries and ideas to a grinding halt. Let's just keep the church afloat.

During this complex season we have set sail to new places. We ran a Westford food pantry fundraiser and we went from renting our boat to owning it when [Immanuel Church](#) sold us the building. We've been discussing diversity and racial reconciliation as part of our [Race, Class, and the Kingdom of God study series](#). These are good changes and things we should celebrate.

But I think maybe even if we're not willing to say it out-loud, we might be thinking, "When Covid-19 is over, that's when we'll start ministry back up again..." Some are estimating we won't have a vaccine and herd immunity until the end of 2021 at the earliest, but even that's just a guess. No one knows for sure. Are we really going to wait till the end of 2021 to get back on mission? We've lost the wind in our sails. We've begun to drift. Do you want to get back on mission? I want to ask us this key question:

### **How can we be on mission and not just in maintenance mode?**

Do we just want to keep things going, or do we want to pursue a new season of ministry that looks different and requires us to engage in new and creative ways? Today we're going back to the book of Acts. When persecution struck, the early believers could have tried to keep things as close to normal as possible, or to trust the Holy Spirit and step out in faith. God, in his providence, pushed his people outward in faith.

The early church had just experienced its first tragedy with the martyrdom of Stephen, one of the church leaders. When you touch a flame, what do you do? You pull back. The flame burns you and you want to withdraw and isolate. But what if God wants to use the flame for good? What if God wants to use the flame of persecution to spread the gospel? That's what he did in Acts. As I read the Scripture passage in Acts [I have a map](#) so you can see where the story is located.

**Acts 11:19-21** (ESV) 19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

When Stephen was stoned to death, many believers scattered west towards Northern Africa or north towards modern-day Lebanon called Phoenicia back then. God is providentially fulfilling what Jesus promised when Jesus left his disciples and ascended into heaven. Jesus gave them a road-map for their mission.

**Acts 1:8** (ESV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Jesus sent his disciples on mission to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. They're finally starting to get to the Greek-speaking ends of the earth when they arrive in Antioch. When they get there, some of the Jewish believers only preach about Jesus' death and resurrection to the Jews. They're doing what they're used to. They're "on mission" but they're also "maintaining the status quo."

Another group comes along who sees that not only do the Jews need to hear about Jesus, but so do the non-Jewish Greek-people called Hellenists. The Hellenists spoke Greek and lived a completely culturally foreign lifestyle than the Jews. It was quite extraordinary for these Jews to preach about Jesus' death and resurrection to them, but they did. They were not in maintenance-mode, but mission-mode for Jesus, and this happened:

**Acts 11:20-21** (ESV) 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

When we get out of our comfort zone, and cross cultural and ethnic boundaries with the gospel, God rewards it. It is out of my comfort zone to go to the [Living Waters Center of Hope](#) next Saturday. It's not just out of my comfort zone because of Covid, it's out of my comfort zone because I can think of a bunch other things I'd rather do. But Scripture suggests that when we get out there and try something, God rewards it.

Let's go back to our question. How can we be on mission and not just in maintenance mode? I see **three things that move us from maintenance to mission**:

## 1) Spirit

We need the Holy Spirit to lead us out on mission. The Holy Spirit has been working through the entire church movement. He's been showing up and doing miracles in ways people had never imagined and he's not done yet. This time God uses a man "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" to advance the mission.

**Acts 11:22-24** (ESV) The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The church in Jerusalem hears about the Greek people coming to faith and they send Barnabas to check it out. When we were last in Acts in September, we saw how some of the Jewish Christians were pushing back against the Gentiles coming to faith. But God gave Peter a vision of unclean animals coming down from heaven, and he told him to take and eat, and then God called Peter to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, to hear the gospel message. God showed Peter he had opened the way for the Gentiles to become a part of the Christian community through faith in Jesus Christ. But many still question if the Gentiles really belong.

Many trust Barnabas. Back in Acts 4 he sold some of his land and gave the money to the church leaders. He was such an encouragement they renamed him Barnabas, “which means son of encouragement” (Acts 4:32-37). Barnabas also vouched for the vigilante Saul when he saw Jesus in a blinding vision and had his dramatic conversion on the Road to Damascus. Barnabas is a trusted leader, and it’s not hard to see why. When he sees the Gentiles coming to faith, instead of fighting the change, instead of trying to go back to maintenance mode with ministry to the Jews, he recognizes God is at work. He rejoices and encourages them to keep going. Why? Because he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He listened to what the Holy Spirit was saying and he did it.

We need those in our church, especially the older generation or those who hold more authority, to recognize what the Holy Spirit is doing in up-and-coming leaders and movements and to encourage it. We see someone with authority and power and every right to entrench become this new ministry’s biggest advocate. Barnabas recognizes God is doing something special, but that he doesn’t have the gifting for it.

**Acts 11:25** (ESV) So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,

Barnabas has so much humility to say, “I’m not gifted to lead what God is doing here, but I know who is, and he goes and get’s him.” He recognized this by being in-tune with the Holy Spirit. He spends time in prayer and that gives him the eyes to see the Lord’s calling on Paul’s life.

What powers a sail boat? The wind! I’ve never seen anyone take a whole bunch of fans out to their sail boat and try and blow their own sail. If we want to be on mission, we have to catch the wind. We got to pray. How might we begin to pray more as a church? I like the models of sailboats in glass bottles. I’m always wondering, “How did they get that boat in there?” It sure looks nice. It’s beautiful and intricate. Everything is pristine and organized, but this ship will never sail. A little boy playing with a stick in a river will have greater adventures than that ship in a bottle.

How have we as a church put ourselves in a glass bottle? We can have all the best structures and systems and nicest facilities in the world, but if we’ve lost our mission we’re like a ship in a bottle. I’d rather be a simple stick in the river than that. I’m not saying rigging isn’t important, but catching the waves and the wind is what it’s really all about. It’s messy and dangerous for a church to follow the Holy Spirit outside its glass walls, especially during Covid. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to fill our church’s sail and propels us to mission.

I’d also ask you to ask yourself if you’ve put yourself in a glass bottle. Have you forgotten your mission to your family members, coworkers, and friends? Are you in a bottle or sailing the waves of adventure with the Holy Spirit as you love those around you? The Spirit moves us from maintenance to mission. And second...

## 2) Discipleship

Barnabas goes up to Tarsus to find Paul.

**Acts 11:26** (ESV) ...and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

We see both one-on-one discipleship and gathered church discipleship in this passage. Barnabas pours into Paul, and together they teach the entire church. People didn't know what to do with this odd group of Jews and non-Jews talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus, so they called them Christians. The Greek word Christ means Messiah, which is God's special chosen king, so it was like they were calling them "Messiah freaks!" (N.T. Wright). They were mocking them by calling them "Christians" and it stuck.

This community was on mission, doing discipleship and teaching, following the Spirit, and became marked by the name of Jesus. The Spirit and discipleship move us from maintenance to mission. And third...

### 3) Generosity

You would think that in a time of persecution and suffering the believers would hunker down and stockpile, especially if they heard more trouble was coming, but that's not what they do.

**Acts 11:27-30** (ESV) Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

A prophet tells the church that they're going to face a great famine. But instead of taking their boat to dry-dock, they send what they can to Jerusalem because they know the believers there will be worse off than them. They don't ask, "How much do they need?" which is really asking, "How little can we give?" but rather, "How much can we give?" Their generosity drives the mission. When we start asking, "How much do I have to give to keep things afloat?" we're sunk. Rather, let's ask, "How can we give in such a way as to grow God's kingdom?" The Spirit, discipleship, and generosity move us from maintenance to mission.

As I was preparing for this sermon I came across an [article on Mission vs. Maintenance](#). It showed a chart of the difference between a **maintenance church** and a **mission church**. I've adapted it in our slides.

A maintenance church is concerned with: attendance, programs, preserving tradition and what they are already doing, and getting the members involved in activities.

A mission church is concerned with equipping and sending believers out into the world, hope for the future, reaching the outside community, and cares about how God has called and gifted people.

A maintenance church is anxious about change while a mission church embraces it.

Church	Maintenance	Mission
Concerns	Attendance Programs Preservation Traditions Members Activities	Equipping Sending Future Community Calling Giftedness
Change	Anxious	Embrace
Strategy	Church-based	Outside in community

The strategy of a maintenance church is centered on getting people into the church building while a mission church is focused on getting outside into the community.

Can you see how trusting the spirit moves us from focusing on attendance and programs to equipping and sending? When we're more focused on the Spirit than duties, we take the time to listen to gifting and calling. If discipleship is the end-goal, to help people follow Jesus and his teachings, the forms don't matter. God calls us to be generous. How can we be generous even during Covid?

This is really hard to do. It takes risk, and trust. But it helps to know that even if we step out and completely fail, God still loved us enough to send his son to rescue us. He died for us, and gave us eternal life. We don't have anything to fear. And even if we do succeed, we can't be prideful, for the same reason. But we can be glad, we can be glad that Jesus has forgiven us and is leading us out on mission to a lost and hurting world.

I hope today serves as a wake-up call for our church body, but also for us as individuals. If you're just going through the motions with your frontline, your non-Christian relationships you're around every day, I hope you'll begin to pray for them anew and sense the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### ***The Spirit, discipleship, and generosity move us from maintenance to mission.***

Did you know there were two boats that responded to the Titanic when it was sinking? One boat, the Californian, was about 20 miles away. They turned off their radio about ten minutes before the Titanic hit the ice-berg. They saw rockets and flares shoot off in the distance. They couldn't figure out why another boat was shooting rockets and flares, but they didn't turn on their radio, and they didn't investigate. They saw the boat's light turn off, but thought it was just turning its light off for the night. The crew of the Californian were so in maintenance-mode with what they were already doing, they couldn't imagine the Titanic sinking. For the rest of their life the crew members of the Californian had to wrestle with why they didn't go.

But there was another ship, the Carpathia. It was 58 miles away. But its radio was on, and when it got the call that the Titanic was sinking it powered up all its engines and headed straight for the Titanic, navigating icebergs in the night. It ran full-power ahead for 3.5 hours, and when the crew showed up at the scene of the disaster, many had already perished, but they saved 705 lives from the life boats. The Carpathia was on mission. Which would we rather be? The Californian? Or the Carpathia? Maintenance or mission? A church just trying to get by? Or a church with wind in our sails and a sea of possibilities before us? Let's pray.

#### **Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)**

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references. You can also listen on [Apple podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What's the difference between maintenance mode and mission mode as a church?
2. How can we seek the Spirit? What are some ideas for praying more as a church?
3. What things keep you busy and from participating in discipleship? Who is discipling you? Who are you discipling?
4. How can we be more generous as a church to other churches in need?
5. How does the gospel shape us from maintenance-mode to mission?

## **Sources**

Hull, William E. *Strategic Preaching: The Role of the Pulpit in Pastoral Leadership*. January 2006. Chalice Press. p. 209-213. \*This is where I read the Titanic, Californian, and Carpathia illustration.

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