

Well, my name is Nick Schatz. I'm one of the pastors here at Hershey Free and excited to open up the Bible, God's word, and teach you all today. So we're gonna be in Acts chapter 11. I'm gonna read, I didn't count how many verses, I have 10 or 15, something like that. And then after I've read the whole thing, we'll slow down and we'll go back through it, okay? That sound good? So we'll start in verse 19. It'll be up on the screen if you don't have a copy of the Bible with you, that's fine. Acts 11 verses 19 through 26. "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among the Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks as well, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. When Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." This is the word of God for the people of God.

Hey, before I launch into talking about this text, I wanna show you a picture, a little bit of a blast from the past, kind of a throwback day. So this is a picture of me and my wife, of course. This was the first church that called me to be a pastor. I was 21 years old. We had been married for a whole week at this point. Yeah, so I was fresh out of college. I finished college, a week later, got married, and then a week later started here. So that was kind of, it's kind of a wild and crazy and amazing two or three weeks. And this is me with, I'm ready, I got my suit, I got my tie, I got my loafers, I got my King James Bible, which I have here, this is the same one that's in the picture here. I was excited, I love the gospel, I love the local church, and I was ready to charge hell with a squirt gun. Man, let's go. And I still am, I still am, if you wanna go. But after the message, I worked hard on this, seriously. So, that was a joke.

So anyway, I went to this church, and it was a small town in Indiana. We had two stoplights and one flashing light. I guess that's two and a half. We had no Walmart. This is how you measure the size of cities in Indiana. And so, we were in this city here, and I noticed very quickly, it was a pretty church area, and there was kind of a great divide between those who had a church background, those who were used to attending churches, and those who were not churching. And shortly after coming here, especially within six months or so, we had more and more people that were coming to the church that didn't have any kind of church background. They were unchurched. And so, you know, there was different baggage with different people that came. We had some with dysfunctional family backgrounds, some that struggled with drug addiction and drug issues. There were people that were incarcerated at different points. There was someone coming who had a warrant out for their arrest, and they hadn't been incarcerated yet. That was an interesting conversation. So anyway, I could tell you more stories later, but we had a lot of people coming to the church now that were new, and they didn't have any kind of church background, hadn't been to church before, and they were coming into the church.

So, it was an exciting couple of years there. This was a small church. I was the only person on staff. I was a solo pastor at CLBC. There were two other elders that were part of the church. It was myself and the two older guys. They were at least three times my age, both of them, individually. And so, I just love those guys and how they adjusted and how they just loved the new people that were coming to the church. And so, I have a couple stories that I wanna tell you about those guys, about those elders and their wives. So, the first one is this. One day after service, there were kids just kind of running around the building. And they're just being kids. They're being loud, being rowdy, playing tag, whatever. And a couple of them run over to the piano, and they were able to figure out how to turn the thing on. They turn the volume all the way up, and they just start banging on the keys, man. It wasn't Beethoven. It was just, it was something else.

They're just banging on the keys, you know. And it was loud in there. And so, I rush over there. Guys, you can't be on the piano. Get off of there. And I'm reprimanding them and turning the thing off. And these elders and their wives, they come over and talk to me. And I just start apologizing all over myself. Like, hey, guys, I'm sorry about the noise. I'll try to watch the kids better. I'll try to make sure they don't ruin the piano, the sound system. I'm really sorry about that. And they said, you know, we don't wanna mess the piano up. We don't wanna bust the sound system or whatever. But I just wanna let you know, for many years, it's been really quiet in this building. And we're really glad to hear the sound of youth again. So, you know, don't break the piano, but man, don't apologize for the kids being loud. I just wanted to hug those guys, right? That was just a cool moment. It's one of those memories that's just kind of wedged into my warm and fuzzy part of my heart. You guys have a warm and fuzzy category, right? So I got a memory wedged in there.

There's another memory where I was at an elders meeting. This was after at least a year of being there. I was at this elders meeting with these two guys. And one of them said, hey, Pastor Nick, we wanted, Fred and I wanna talk to you about something. We've noticed that lately when you preach, you haven't been wearing a suit coat anymore. And we've noticed that sometimes you don't even wear a tie. I don't know if you've ever been like, you feel like you're being accused of something, like the heat starts rising in my body. Am I gonna have to fight or flight, defend myself, whatever. But before I said something dumb, or opened my mouth, they said, hey, we're just wondering. We've noticed that a lot of people coming to the church now, like they don't have nice clothes. Like why would you own a suit nowadays anyway? We only wear a suit on Sunday. We don't wear them to work. So people don't own these kinds of clothes. They don't wanna buy these kinds of clothes. Do you think we should start dressing down too? Should we take our suits and ties off? Should we wear jeans? Jeans? They didn't mention shorts. But hey, should we start dressing down? And I just, man, I just wanted to grab Ernie and give him a kiss, you know? I didn't do it because this pacemaker would have gone nuts. But man, I was just, I was so excited. Wow, this is so cool. These people, they did not wanna be a part of a church that was made and crafted for churchy people. They didn't wanna be a part of a church that was built for churched people. Even though for decades, for three times as long as I've been around alive, they had been raised in that church. And they were used to these certain ways of dressing and acting and the way things were, but they were willing to make this an environment that was accessible to those without a church background. It was, man, I love those guys. I loved all those people. It was a great couple of years being in Indiana.

Well, hey, today's text that we're gonna look at today, it is not a text about churchy people and un-churchy people, but I think there's a comparison, and we're gonna show you that in a second. It's a story about some Jews, some refugees that were fleeing Jerusalem, because after Jesus was crucified and after he rose from the dead, this persecution came out against those who pledged their allegiance to him, like these five or six individuals did here this morning. They were fleeing literally for their life. And so they left Jerusalem, kind of the Mecca of Judaism, right? They left Jerusalem, and they were going to all these different cities. And as they went into these different cities, they began telling people, like, here's why I'm fleeing. Here's why there's persecution. Here's the people I'm running from. So let's look at the text again for the background, Acts 11 and verse 19. "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed." So Stephen was an evangelist, and he was martyred for his faith, and persecution broke out. "They traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, and they were spreading the word." So as they were leaving, they were spreading the word about here's why I'm leaving, and here's this Jesus that we've pledged allegiance to and why people were after us and why we had to leave.

But very soon, they encountered a problem that they probably didn't expect to encounter. More and more people were hearing about Jesus and the resurrection and the eyewitness accounts, and they wanted to follow Jesus too. They wanted to believe in Jesus too, and many of them were Jewish, but there were several people who weren't Jewish. They didn't have any kind of Jewish background, and they also wanted

to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus. And so this was a question that popped up, and they spent a lot of time discussing this as a people. Question: should the non-Jews who believe in Jesus be required to become Jewish? Should the non-Jews who believe in Jesus be required to become Jewish? And if you think about it, Jesus was Jewish. His first disciples were Jewish. I mean, this was kind of a breakout from Judaism. The early church was mostly Jewish people. So should the non-Jews who want to believe in Jesus, should they become Jewish in order to become Christians? And the answer to that question kind of fell into two different camps. And those two different camps really formed the structure of the message that I have for you all today for Hershey Free Church, all right?

So here's my outline for today. The early Christians had to make difficult decisions about making the message of Jesus accessible to people who just weren't like them in their upbringing, right? And there were some, here's the first category. Verse 19 is gonna show us that there were some who were not really willing to change much at all. You know, the worship of our God looks like this. And non-Jews look like that. And if they want to worship with us, they have to not be that anymore, and they have to be this. They need to cease to be Greek or Gentile. Those words can be used interchangeably. They need to not be that, and they need to start looking like and acting like and practicing the things that we do as Jews. They need to become Jewish.

And so when it comes to the food laws, we have very strict food laws. They need to follow our food laws. There were different practices like the Sabbath day. Hey, we stop work and travel and productive things at sundown on Friday, and we rest and worship and stuff until sundown on Saturday. And so they need to do that. They need to make sure they follow the Sabbath. But believe it or not, one of the biggest practices that they thought the Greeks or the Gentiles should start doing to follow Jesus is they need to be circumcised. And you know, you think I'm crazy. What? This was actually a major deal. There was actually a sect of Jews who called themselves of the circumcision party because hey, if you're a Greek and you want to worship this Jewish Jesus, you need to be circumcised first. I mean, just imagine if that was part of our baptism class. But I'm serious, that was a major, major deal. There was this big conference that was called. I mean, we'll get into that in a minute. But hey, they were unwilling to change much at all. You need to become this because this is what the worship of God and Jesus looks like.

There were some that were unwilling to change much at all. In verse 20, we're gonna see in just a minute that there were others who were willing to change everything or at least almost everything. They completely changed their style of worship. The kinds of buildings or no building at all that they met in was different. The day of the week that they met became different. Again, the food laws and some of those other practices, they kind of threw those out because we want to make the message of Jesus accessible to those who don't have any kind of Jewish background like we had, the language that they used. And listen, because they were willing to change everything, a church was started in the city of Antioch. And you may have not have heard of this church, but you should have because this church of Antioch became the first multi-ethnic church, Christian church, in the history of the world. And they also became the first Christian church ever to send out missionaries to all the nations, the church of Antioch. I mean, we're here because of the church of Antioch, if you want to put it that way.

Now, I just want to give you a warning here because in the next point, we're going to talk about what you're willing to change? Hershey Free is, I mean, real talk, we're like a really good church for church people. This is a really great church if you have some kind of churchy background. Now, some of you don't have that church background, but most of you who come here, you already had some church background coming in. So the question I'm going to be asking is, are there ways that we can make this place a church that is acceptable to those who aren't churchy? Because after a while we get kind of churchy, right? We start acting and talking and dressing and looking churchy. What are we willing to change to make it accessible? Now, again, I want to put a quick warning before we get into this. Some of you are going to

think I'm talking about becoming a seeker church. And if you don't know what a seeker church is, that's awesome. We'll talk about that later if you want to, we won't get into that. I'm not talking about becoming seeker driven. I just want to talk about becoming accessible to those who don't have a church background, who aren't churchy, like me, people like me, right? So that's what we're going to talk about today.

We tend to think that persecution almost killed the early church. That's not the case. Persecution made the church explode with growth, believe it or not, ironically. It wasn't persecution that almost killed the early church. It was tradition. It almost killed it. Thankfully, in verse 20, we're going to meet some people that kept that from happening. So here's our outline for today. The early Christians had to make difficult decisions about making the message of Jesus accessible to people who were unlike them. So we're going to look at this first point. There were some who were unwilling to change much at all. Let's look back at verse 19 and read through the rest of the verse. Now those who had been scattered, once again, they were from Jerusalem, persecution broke out, they fled for their lives. And they traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they were spreading the word, look at this, only among the Jews. They were spreading the message of Jesus, but only, not to those Greeks, heaven forbid, no, only to the Jews. Now I know how this sounds. It sounds racist, let's be honest, right? Well, why would they do that? I can't believe someone would want to bottle this message up and only package it for a certain people group, for a certain ethic. Why would they do that? But before we get all up in arms, I just want us to put ourselves in their shoes, because honestly, if I was alive in those days and in their shoes, I would probably do the same thing. So first, let's try to identify them, identify with them and see where they're coming from. There's at least two reasons why they only wanted to present the message of the gospel to Jews, only to Jews, okay?

Here's a couple of reasons. The first, the Greeks aren't chosen. They're not a chosen people, all right? The Jews had their founding of their faith in that God had chosen the Jewish people. He had chosen the Hebrew people, you could use that word interchangeably. He had chosen them as his people. The Greeks, the Gentiles, they had their own gods, they had their own temples, they had their own ways of worship, they had their own things that they did, their own things that they believed, but if you worship the Jewish God, you are a Jew, or you become Jewish, okay? This was just what you did. The Greeks, they are not a chosen people. The Jews, we are chosen. And I just want you to picture this. Imagine that you grew up as a Jewish boy, as a Jewish girl, your whole background of growing up, your grandpa told you about all the Greeks that he met, right? Oh, it was crazy, I barely escaped my life, right? You heard all those stories about the crazy Greeks. Every time you're with your mom shopping or whatever, and a Greek comes the other way, your mom grabs her purse, right? She clutches that thing, oh man, it's a Greek person. There's a Greek person coming, right? Can I go over to so-and-so's house? He's Greek, no. Can he come over here? No, all right. You can't, we can't have contact with the Greeks. Every movie you ever watched, the bad guys were? The Greeks. Every book that you ever read, every scripture you ever read, who were the bad guys? The Gentiles, right? Your whole frame of reference is that the Greeks, no, they're very sus. You stay away from them, right? Lions and tigers and Greeks, oh my, right? I mean, this is your frame of reference. The Greeks, they're not chosen, we're chosen, and there's reasons for that, right? This is your background growing up. And if you want to worship our God, that's okay, but you need to leave that, you need to become this, because this is what worship of Yahweh, of our God, and of Jesus, a Jewish person, is like. You can't do that, you gotta be this. You gotta become this. So why were they unwilling to share Jesus with the Greeks? Well, for one, the Greeks were not a chosen people, they were not chosen.

Secondly, the Greeks were not clean. They were an unclean people, they were not clean. And here's what I mean by clean. For us, especially post-COVID and in this modern world, when you think of clean, you think of sanitation, you think of disinfectant, you think of germs and stuff like that, and that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about ritual purity, okay? For an ancient Jew, some things were clean, and some people were clean, and some things and people were unclean. If you were clean, you were presentable before God. You were acceptable before God. You can enter into God's presence, I could use different examples or

ways of putting that, but you were clean. There were other things and other people and other way that they were unclean. It's not presentable before God. And so within the temple, there's only certain things that were in the temple, and they had gone through these different rituals. People, even Jewish people, could become unclean. Maybe you get really sick, maybe you get some kind of disease, leprosy or whatever. Maybe you touched, there was a dead animal, and you touched the dead, maybe you didn't even mean to touch the dead animal, but there were a slew of things that you could do to make yourself unclean, and you were unrepresentable before God. So you had to quarantine yourself, you had to go through these different cleansing rituals. You had to go see your priest, in extreme cases, you had to move from your house, right? I mean, like there were some extreme things sometimes you had to do in order to become clean, and then you can go and worship again. The Greeks, they're never clean, right? None of the Greeks are clean. They've never done the purity stuff, they're always touching dead stuff, right? And if you could just put the clean stuff away, in general, Greeks are gross. Like, they eat pigs. You know, the animals that like roll around in their filth, and they don't sweat, they just absorb their own toxins, and they eat, like the food, what do we call the food we give pigs? We call it slop. I mean, they eat these things. Like have you ever been to another country, and oh, we have a delicacy, it's a boiled rat brain, no, that's just gross. The Greeks, they're just gross. They eat pigs, and then there's blood everywhere. Jews don't do blood, right? They make terrible nurses. They don't do blood. The only time you see blood if you're a Jew is when you have sinned, and you need to make atonement for your sin. It's a serious thing. So you bring one of your spotless animals to the priest, and they have to slaughter the animal as a sacrifice for your sin. It's a graphic picture, and besides that, we don't do blood. We don't touch dead bodies. We don't touch dead animals. If we are bleeding, we are unclean, and we have to fix it. Like they don't eat blood, and raw meat and stuff. Like they don't do blood. The Greeks, there's blood everywhere. They're slaughtering their pigs, and wiping it on their apron, and going over and sticking their steak knife in the thing, and eating it, and they go to their gladiator things. There's violence everywhere. There's blood everywhere. The Greeks, they're not chosen. They're not clean. They're kind of gross. We don't do stuff with Greeks. You just don't do that. They're the bad guys. I'm trying to be dramatic for a point, because this is how they thought. This was their upbringing, and if I had been brought up in that, I would probably also think, I don't know if this Jesus is for them. They can accept Jesus, but they need to become this first.

And by the way, let me show you a picture that just kind of drills us in, and makes it a little more clear. So here, this is Herod's temple. It was a Jewish temple that was built. It was being constructed during the time that Jesus was alive. It was finished shortly after he was resurrected. This is Herod's temple, and you don't need to read the words and the numbers. I just want to show you a picture of this. This is immaculate. It's an enormous temple. The very top, you can see a comparison of an American football field of the temple. This was this enormous, beautiful building that was built for Jewish worship. This, like this is what worship for God should look like. It should look like this. It's a nice, immaculate, clean building. If you can't come to a building like this, at least have a synagogue that looks very similar. You need to make sure in the main place, the holy place, there's like a priest who has done all the purity stuff. He's dressed a certain way. The priest has to look like Dumbledore, right? He has to dress in a certain way. There's, you can't read it, because the font's too small, but there's a women's courtyard and a men's courtyard. This is what worship looks like. The women worship over there. The men can go this far and worship over there. And it's just segregated even more. At the very top and the very bottom, you see there's a Gentile's courtyard. So if you're not Jewish, you haven't become Jewish, you can stand out there and you can like look over the wall at us or whatever, but you can't be in here. I mean, everything is like segregated. This is what worship looks like. And if you want to worship our God, that's fine, but you gotta become this, because this is what worship looks like.

And so again, there was this interesting problem coming up. All the, not a problem, I guess that's a good thing. All these non-Jews began hearing about Jesus and they wanted to become Christians. They wanted to become Jesus followers, but the question was, I don't know, they're Greeks, that I think they should

become Jewish in order to become Christ followers, because Jesus is a Jewish person. He came to the Jewish people. He's the Jewish Messiah, right? Back to our outline. The early Christians had to make difficult decisions about making the message of Jesus accessible to people unlike them. And there were some who were unwilling to change much at all. And we can understand that, right? I think we can identify with them. However, in verse number 20, excuse me, there were others who were willing to change pretty much everything. Let's look at what it says here. Let's go back to verse 19 and read through the end of verse 20. Excuse me. Now those who have been scattered, remember the persecution, they're fleeing for their lives. They travel as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among the Gentiles. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, they went to Antioch, a very not-Jewish area, right? It's like the third most popular, populated city in the Roman Empire. They went to Antioch, and they began to speak to the Greeks also.

I thought, we can't just glaze over those. If you're not Jewish, you can glaze over those words like it's nothing, but these are like two key words in the whole letter of Acts. A lot of people only went to the Jews. However, there were some who went to the Greeks, they went to the Greeks to share the message, the good news of the Lord Jesus. You even notice a difference there. When they go to the Jews, they talk about the Messiah, the Christ that's been born, but non-Jews, they don't understand, what does that even mean? So they even changed the way they present the gospel, right? I wanna tell you about the Lord Jesus. He resurrected from the dead, whatever. They even changed the way that they talk about this. Now this is the first time, this verse is the first time that Jewish missionaries were actively sharing the gospel. They were missionaries to people who were not Jewish. This is the first time. Earlier on in Acts, you see that they are going into synagogues, they are going specifically to Jewish towns, specifically to Jewish districts, Jewish areas, and sharing the gospel among the Jews.

Later in chapter eight of Acts, you see they go to the Samaritans, begin to share the message of Jesus with the Samaritans. That was a people group that was half Jewish and half Gentile, half Jewish and half Greek. Later on, you see that they meet, one of the missionaries meets an Ethiopian, but the Ethiopian, he's kind of initiating. He's already got a copy of the Hebrew Bible, and he's reading that scripture, he's asking questions. He's the one kind of doing this conversation. Later on, you see this guy named Cornelius, who was a Gentile, but he's the one who initiated. He sent people to go and get missionaries to come to him. This is the first time in the whole letter in which the Jews, the missionaries, were going out of their way and going to the Greeks, the Gentiles of all places, to share the message of Jesus. The first time.

Speaking of the Jews, I wanna tell you about probably the most Jewish Jew that ever was. The most Jewish Jew that ever was. His name was Saul. He comes up later in our text. We'll read that in a second. But he went by the name Saul of Tarsus. You know how last names, you just went by your dad's name or the city. So Saul of Tarsus, all right? He was raised from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Jewish person. He was a Pharisee at one point, knew the law, the Old Testament law very well. So he was steeped in Judaism. But as more and more, as he traveled around and shared the message of Jesus with more and more people, there were more and more non-Jews, these Greeks, these Gentiles who began accepting the message of Jesus. And so he became like the guy that was starting churches, starting congregations like this for people who were not Jewish. He was the guy. And the more he did it, the more he got flack from people in Jerusalem, all right?

In fact, there's this thing that comes up in chapter 15 where the church of Jerusalem calls this big council, and Paul, you need to come here and give a testimony because there's all these non-Jews that are becoming Christians. We don't know about this. Can you explain yourself? It was a whole deal, okay? This was like a whole deal for him. There were always Jewish people breathing down his neck. Like you need to be making sure that they become Jewish. And I can only imagine that Paul found himself in these kind of conversations with Jewish Christians all the time. Like, hey, hey, hey, Saul, in those new churches that

you've planted, there's a bunch of non-Jews being converted. I guess that's okay. I guess we didn't say, but I have a couple questions for you, Saul. In these new churches, you call them churches, right? Is that what you call the thing you're doing? Okay, so these new churches that you're starting, you know, the Jews are pretty particular about the temple and the place that we worship at. So you guys are meeting in some kind of temple or synagogue or something, right? Oh no, we changed all that. That wasn't very accessible. We actually meet in people's houses. Sometimes we just meet outside. I mean, no, we completely changed the location in which we meet. In that practice, we changed that. Oh, I guess that's acceptable. Okay, well, I have some more questions. So the Jews have very specific cleansing rituals, right? In order to worship God and be presentable to God, you have to make sure you wash yourself in a certain way and have certain times of cleansing and things like that. I mean, surely you do that at least with these non-Jews. They've become kind of Jewish, right? At least you do that. Oh no, we don't do that. We don't have the cleansing rituals and stuff. We've gotten rid of that practice. You've gotten rid of that practice, really? Okay, well, what about the leadership of these, what do you call them again, churches? What about the leadership of those things? Because in the Jewish world, it's all male leadership and you have to segregate the women from the men. So you segregate your churches, right? Don't you do that? Oh no, men and women, they worship together. Women are serving as deacons, they're prophesying in mixed audiences. They're leading house churches. No, no, we don't practice that anymore. My goodness, you're kidding. What about the food laws? I mean, surely you guys are kosher. You're following food laws. You're not eating pigs, are you? Actually, yeah, we do, right? No, every week we have this big feast. We call it a love feast. We get together and we break bread and share wine together and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the death of the Savior. Paul or Saul, it sounds like you're changing a lot of things. I'm changing myself. I have become all things to all people so that by all means, I might save some. But Saul, what about this? All things, all means. But Saul, what about that? All things, all means. But Saul, what about all things, all means? I'm not married to a method. I'm married to a mission. And my mission is to spread the message of Jesus to everyone, men, women, boys, girls, red and yellow, black and white. That's my mission. So I've changed the method completely because I want it to be accessible to people who didn't grow up Jewish like me. All things, all people, all means so that I might save some.

I wanna talk a little bit more about Saul. But first, I wanna take a timeout. We're gonna call it timeout because I have a feeling that some of you may be hearing me say something that I'm not saying. So we're gonna take a timeout. I just wanna make sure that we're on the same page, okay? First off, some of you may be thinking that I'm saying we should just take our beliefs, our theology, our doctrine, whatever word you want. We just throw that out the window and people can come and believe whatever they wanna believe. I know Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, but you know what, there's many ways. Believe that if you want to. Nope, I never said that. I never said that. You know, I know Jesus said some specific things about sexuality, about marriage and stuff like that, but you know what, you do you, you do you. Nope, I never said that. Never said that. I never said that we need to throw out our beliefs, our convictions, our doctrine, our theology. Here's what I am saying, that like the Christians, the missionaries in verse 20, we should be willing to throw out any practices that we have that are unnecessarily churchy to make this place accessible to those who don't have a church background. Because later on I'm gonna show you that more and more, that's the case. Less and less people have a church background.

Others of you may be thinking that I'm saying we should become a seeker-driven church, which I said that earlier today. A seeker-driven church model is one that you make the church look as much like the not-church world as possible so that maybe even in some sense, people come into the church not even knowing they're in a church, right? You just kind of blend right in. That's not a bad model, I'm not hitting on that model. But I'm also not saying that, okay? Oh, Nick, you're saying that we need to start watering down the message to having these little 10-minute feel-good devotionals. Nope, I never said that. Nick, you're saying that the speakers on stage should wear skinny jeans. Nope, I never said that. Nick, you're saying that the worship service should become a heavy metal rock concert. Nope, I never said that. I don't like heavy

metal. My son likes heavy metal. I'm praying that he never starts a garage band, right?

But I never said that. I never said that, okay? I'm not saying we should become seeker-driven. What I am saying is that we ought to make this place accessible to those who don't have a church background. Just like the Jewish missionaries had to make this new thing called the Church of Jesus Christ accessible for those who don't have a Jewish background. They kept a lot of things, they still had elders, you know, all that stuff. But they changed so much to make it accessible to those who, what's a messiah? I have to cleanse what? I have to do what? They changed all that to make it accessible.

All right, okay, time out, time out's over. We're back into the game. We're back to the game. Let's get back to Saul. Remember, he was the most Jewish Jew there was, right? But where did he learn to get rid of all these practices, these old methods, to marry his mission and not his method? Where did he learn these things? He didn't think it up himself. He actually had a mentor that showed him these things. And his mentor's name was Barnabas. Actually, his mentor's name was Joseph. He was renamed Barnabas, which literally means, in that language, the son of encouragement. And you're gonna find out why he received that nickname in just a minute. Here, read with me in verse number 22. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. So in other words, the people in Jerusalem, the Jews in Jerusalem who had converted to Christianity, they're hearing about these non-Jews becoming Christians, and they're saying, hang on, that doesn't sound right. I don't know, the Greeks? They're becoming Jewish, right? They're not? Okay, we need to send somebody. So they send Barnabas. You need to go check this stuff out. I don't know about this. And Barnabas may not have known about it either. He wasn't quite sure about it. It's a little skeptical, right? So when he, when Barnabas, when Saul's mentor arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and he encouraged them. Son of encouragement. That was his name. He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. Now I may be reading between the lines here, but the way that I read this is that Barnabas went down there not fully convinced. I don't know about these Greeks becoming Christians. Maybe they should be circumcised and follow the food law. I don't know about this. I don't know if he was fully convinced. Because the text says that when he arrived and when he saw what was happening, he was like, I think something changed in his heart. I think they're real believers. And I think we should start something different that is accessible for them. I think he had a change of heart, right? Question, what if we made this church a place that's not just for churchy people, but it was accessible to those who aren't churchy, like me? Moving on, Barnabas, he was a good man. He was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, but great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. There's Saul of Tarsus. There's the Jew that I told you about, the Jewish convert. And when he found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. And for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with this church and they taught great numbers of people. And the disciples were first called Christians right there in Antioch. That's where Saul learned to be willing to change everything. But to become all things to all people by all means, so that I might say something. He learned it from Barnabas, the son of encouragement. So here's the question I wanna leave us with. What are we at Hershey Free Church, what are we willing to change in order to make this a house of worship that is accessible to those who don't have a church background like I have? What are we willing to do to make this a place that is accessible to those who don't have a church background? All right, and I'll go first, I'll go first. I've been thinking about this and I'm willing to change the way that I say things, the words that I use, especially when I teach, but even one on one when I'm talking, I wanna change the way that I say things so it doesn't sound churchy. I talk so churchy. You guys wouldn't believe how churchy I talk, right? I use these words that nobody understands. Just three and a half weeks ago, I was sitting down at Troegs with some new buddies of mine. We were sharing a pint. And most of these buddies of mine, they're not Christians. They would openly say, I am not a Christian. And I asked them this question. I said, hey guys, I didn't have a Bible with me, but I said, hey, I got a question for you about the Bible. Do you guys believe, I know you're not Christian, but do you guys believe that the Bible is inspired? And they furrowed their brow and they looked

at me like I had two heads. What does that inspired mean? What does that even mean, right? And look, I've been to seminary. I know that inspiration means God breathed, right? That's not helpful. What does that mean? So I didn't go into launching to that. What in the world does that mean? So I back up, okay, okay, back up. Do you believe that even though the Bible was penned by like humans, by people, that it was in some way foundationally authored by, it was authored by God. And from there we could have a more intelligent conversation because I'm using language they understand, right? It's authored by God, like a ghost writer kind of deal, right? And so whenever I teach, I wanna use words that actually make sense to people who are not in the room so that when they come in the room, they have some idea. I wanna level the playing field. Let's put everything on the bottom shelf so that the giraffes and the rabbits can get it, right? Now here's what I wanna ask you. Maybe you lead a group, connect group, live, love, lead group, support group, whatever. Are there things about your group that are just churchy? You're just a bunch of churchy people, right? Are there things that are not accessible or would make someone who's an outsider feel like an outsider? Maybe you lead a ministry, it's alpha, you volunteer in KidStep, Compassion Ministry, you know, whatever the case is. Are there things about that ministry that there's an extra hump, an extra step that people have to step over in order to access, you know, the things that you're doing in that ministry?

Here's one for all of us. I want you to think about this. When's the last time that you walked into this building for a worship service or a Wednesday night thing or whatever and you talk to someone that you don't know? Because here's the most churchy thing that ever churchd. You ready? The most churchy thing that ever churchd is to get clickish. That is super churchy, right? And so many of us, we get so accustomed. We come in this building and we look for faces we know and we talk to them and we don't branch out of our way. It's natural, we naturally do this. I'm not saying like you're abnormal. This is normal, let's not be normal. And let's be as accessible as possible to those who are new. And there's two ways that you can know somebody's new, okay? Here's the first way you can know if somebody is new here. First off, they arrive on time or early. It's possible. And then after they start coming for a while, they're late, right? That's just how we do, that's how we roll at Hershey Free Church, okay? That's the first way. The second way is they're looking around at the signs and stuff, right? Oh, live, love, lead, what does that mean? Most of you don't even know that sign's up there, right? Because you don't notice these things. But if you see someone looking around like they're a tourist, they're new here. Go out of your way to talk to them, right? Don't be clickish. That's the most churchy thing that ever churchd. Don't do that. And you can think of, those of you on the welcome team, like your minds already going like, oh, because this is how you think, right? If you're a leader in our church, like your mind's already, you're 10 steps ahead of me. That's great. Just think about things that we can do. How can we be willing to change Hershey Free to make it accessible to people without a church background? And in case you're not convinced, I have one study that I wanna share with you. I have one more thing I wanna share with you. This is a report that came out just a couple months ago, September of 22, Pew Research Center, Modeling the Future of Religion in America. That's just a screenshot. It's a free report online. This report, it shook me. It shook me. Here's what they say. They project that in the next few decades, America will have more unchurched, no religious affiliation, any religion at all. There will be more people with no religious preference at all than people who are Christian or anything else. By the time my kids are my age, the largest religion in America, by the time my kids are my age, the largest religion in America will be no religion at all. They'll fill out a survey and check no affiliation, no religious preference, none, whatever. The largest religion in a few decades will be no religion at all.

Here's the other thing they found out. The other thing they found in this study is that whenever someone switches their faith, when they convert to, say, Christianity, when they convert, it almost always happens before the age of 30. Look at all of our baptisms today. It almost always happens before the age of 30. I believe that Hershey Free has one of two paths, one of two futures ahead of us. Here's the first future. The first future is that we commit to engaging a younger generation that is unchurched, de-churched, under-churched, what's a church? We can engage a younger generation of people that are more secular and less

church than ever before in American history. Or we can gradually become older as a congregation and eventually close our doors. You may think that I'm being dramatic. I'm trying to be realistic. I believe I'm being realistic because a lot of churches will close their doors in the next decades or so. But will we intentionally engage a generation? As America becomes more and more secular, as America becomes less and less churched, will we change the way that we do things to become accessible to those who have no church background? They don't get the lingo, they don't walk the walk, they don't walk like you, talk like you too, right? The early Christians had to make difficult decisions about making the message of Jesus accessible to people unlike them. Some were not willing to change much at all. Others were willing to change everything. And by the way, were it not for that second group, were it not for the guys, the men and women, in verse 20, I'm not sure there would be a church of Jesus Christ today at all. There would be this other denomination, this sect that branches out of Judaism where they read the Jewish scriptures and they practice the Jewish faith and they remain Jewish but they also read the teachings of Jesus, of Nazareth, son of Joseph. I believe that would be the case if this second group didn't exist.

Number three, what are you willing to change to make the gospel of Jesus accessible to those who have no church background, who aren't churchy? Do you fit in verse 19 or in verse 20? Let me pray for us as we wrap up today.

Father, I'm not a Jew, to my knowledge, I don't have any Jewish blood in my body. And I love the Jews, nothing against the Jews. But if it weren't for you sending your son Jesus to die for people like me that were outside of that faith, outside of that ethnicity, were it not for 2,000 plus years of people that were continually contextualizing the gospel, continually changing things to new cultures and new lands and new ages, I would not be a follower of Jesus today. I may not be alive even because this message has changed the course of the world in all parts of the world. And so Father, I thank you for that. Lord, I wanna pray for myself and for my friends here, for my friends at Hershey Free, that you would give us ideas, that you'd give us promptings, that you'd give us fresh eyes to see the way that we worship, the way that we lead our groups and ministries, the way that we just position ourselves as we come into a building like this, that you would give us ideas of ways that we can become accessible in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, but even right here, that we can become accessible to people who don't have church backgrounds and don't understand the words that we use and that we would just frame ourselves, that we would posture ourselves differently so that we can make the message of Jesus accessible to those who don't have that background. Would you give us the ideas, give us the fresh eyes and give us the courage to make changes that are necessary in an increasingly secular and unchurched nation. I pray this to you Father, in the name of your son Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Well, thank you everybody for your kind attention. As you leave, I just wanna remind you that I am not dismissing you, but I would like to send you. You are sent to be a people turned outward, not turned inward. You are being sent to make the message of Jesus accessible to those who don't already know him or believe in him. You are not dismissed, you are sent. Thank you