

# THE **crossing** **small groups**

## The Great Dechurching | Acts 11:19-30 Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

**Purpose of Discussion:** To be faithful to God in this age of the Great Dechurching.

**Icebreaker:** What is a way that being a Christian feels different now at this time than it has before in your life?

### Discussion

#### Read:

#### Acts 11:19

<sup>19</sup> 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 Jews.

**Note:** Phoenicia is the territory just north of Galilee (modern day Lebanon), Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean, and Antioch is a major city in what was then the region of Syria (today southwestern Turkey).

**Transition:** After the great persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen, Christians were scattered throughout the area. Most were no longer in Jerusalem nor in Judea where there was a large community of Jesus followers, where they had their spiritual rhythms, and where they had a sense of what following Jesus looked like. Now, they were a small minority outside of even a Jewish context living in pagan cities. They had to shift what following Jesus and being on his mission looked like in this new place God had them.

One major change today has been what Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan Burge have called "The Great Dechurching." Read these stats together:

- 25 million Americans have left the church since 1990.
- To dechurch is to move from attending once a month to attending less than once a year in their data.
- Who has left the church?
  - Fairly equal between men and women
  - Not just younger, but many in their 50s and 60s
  - More leaving are from the political right than the left currently.
  - Growing number of people call themselves evangelicals for somewhat political reasons but don't attend church.

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- More people with less education and less income (only 3% of people have dechurched with a master's or above degree).
- Why have people dechurched?
  - The number one reason was that someone moved.
  - About half were categorized as casually dechurched.
    - They moved.
    - They got busy with kids activities.
    - COVID threw them off.
    - Traumatic event like divorce or job loss
  - The other half of dechurcheders were casualties.
    - Felt burned by their experience in a church
    - Abused or mistreated by someone in the church
    - Disenchanted by church scandals
- How willing are they to come back?
  - 100% of casual dechurcheders said they would be willing to return
    - They just need to be invited and have a positive experience at a church
  - Very unlikely casualties will return.
    - They need a long process requiring humble Christians who actively listen, have a posture of curiosity, and are willing to admit the wrongs the church has done.

1. What's your reaction to these statistics? What was surprising? What makes sense of what you have seen from your experience?

## Read:

### [Acts 11:19-21](#)

<sup>19</sup> 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 Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

2. Why was it a big deal to start spreading the message of Christianity not just to Jews but to Greeks?

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## Read:

### Acts 11:22-26a

<sup>22</sup> News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. <sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

3. How did the church lean into this new work God was doing?
4. Just like this new church needed to be immersed in teaching to know what it meant to follow Christ, Keith mentioned that we need to “spiritually train” in order to face the challenges of the Great Dechurching. What is a way you can spiritually train?

### Acts 11:26b-30

<sup>26</sup>...The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. <sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

5. What traits began to characterize this young church?
6. What difference would it make in this time if this is what we were known for?

## Sharing and Prayer:

Have people share about someone they know who has dechurched that is weighing on their heart. Either pray together for those named and that we would lean into this mission he has us here to do, or have people pray silently for those they named and have someone close in prayer.