

November 10th, 2019
The DNA of the New Testament Church
Acts 4:32-37

“Then sings my soul, my savior God, to Thee How great Thou art, How great Thou art”
And one of the greatest things about God is found in the words to the song we just sang... “how great is Your love for us!” The greatness of God and the great love He had shown through Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross changed the lives of the members of the New Testament Church and caused them to share a spiritual DNA that helped them take the good news of Jesus to the known world! It is very much my prayer today that Northshore Church has the same DNA in every cell of our spiritual body! I pray we will allow that DNA to motivate and propel us to passionately reach out to a lost and dying world with the good news of Jesus’ forgiveness, love, and great purpose for every life! Let’s pray and ask God to teach us the mission critical nature of the DNA of the New Testament Church. Pray!

Review of sermon series

So far in this mission critical series, we’ve talked about the mission of the New Testament Church, their decision making process, their Spirit, their message, their cornerstone, their boldness, and today we’ll talk about their DNA! What is DNA? According to the website Science Daily...

“Deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, is a nucleic acid that contains the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms. The main role of DNA molecules is the long-term storage of information and DNA is often compared to a set of blueprints, since it contains the instructions needed to construct other components of cells, such as proteins and RNA molecules. The DNA segments that carry this genetic information are called genes, but other DNA sequences have structural purposes, or are involved in regulating the use of this genetic information.”

How important is DNA to our body? Without it cells could not regenerate or at least regenerate correctly and once the original cells we were born with were depleted it would be game over! It’s quite an interesting study to see at what rate our cells replace themselves following the DNA patterns they are given. On the science portion of the “How Stuff Works” website I discovered this...

“Red blood cells...enjoy a quick life span of only about four months as a result of their arduous journey through the circulatory system.”

Curiosity.com states that: “White blood cells, the main players in fighting infections, can last from a few days to a little over a week. In contrast, your fat cells live a fairly long time — an average age of 10 years.” And it takes hundreds and hundreds of crunches to shorten their life span! I’m a witness!

Hair cells have a life span of about six years for women and three years for men and zero years for me!

Listen to this from the “How Stuff Works” website...

“There are also some cells that never leave us and may aid the aging process, or at least the body's breakdown over time. While the eye's cornea can regenerate itself in as little as one day, the lens and other areas don't change. Similarly, neurons in the [cerebral cortex](#) – the brain's outside layer that governs memory, thought, language, attention and consciousness – stay with us from birth to death. Because they aren't replaced, the loss of these [cells](#) over time can cause maladies like dementia.”

So you can see how important DNA is to our physical bodies. DNA determines so much about the life of your body! In our physical bodies DNA is responsible for the replication of life giving cells. Now let's turn our attention to the Spiritual Body of Christ, His Church, you and me, followers of Jesus! In much the same way that DNA is extremely important to our physical bodies, our spiritual DNA is mission critical to the survival of the Church!

Today we're going to look at the DNA of the New Testament Church, what it was and why it was so critical in the health and life of the church. Our physical DNA has 92 strands. I don't know the total number of strands that makeup the spiritual DNA of the church, but today we will look at just six strands found in our text in Acts 4:32-37...

Acts 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Acts 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales

Acts 4:35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 4:36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),

Acts 4:37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

One of the Strands of The DNA of The New Testament Church was...

Their Unity

Acts 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind.

“One in heart and mind!” The definition of unity is...

Unity - Together, harmony, agreement, accord, unison, in concert, as one

The Antonym, or opposite of unity would be – disarray, discord, disagreement, alone! That is definitely not what Jesus wanted for His church, His body of believers. In fact, Jesus had prayed about this intensely before His crucifixion. Listen...

John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

John 17:16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

John 17:18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

John 17:19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

John 17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

One of the reasons the New Testament Church was able to accomplish so much, even though they were a very diverse group of people, made up of Jews and Gentiles, was the fact they were unified in heart and mind! They were an answer to our Lord's prayer! Their hearts had been radically changed when they realized they were sinners and cried out to Jesus to be their Savior! Their minds were laser focused on the common mission to take the life changing message of Christ to the world! In fact, after the early church was scattered by persecution, they continued to be unified in their hearts and minds even though separated physically. One of the churches that grew up in the dispersion was a church at Antioch, a large Roman City about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. And I love what a black pastor from Arlington, TX, Reverend William McKissic Sr. said about the unity of that church...

"The first Gentile congregation did not start out segregated. It was begun by a multi-ethnic team in a multi-ethnic city, resulting in a multi-ethnic congregation with a multi-ethnic leadership team from Africa, Asia, and Europe!"

Listen to these words from Acts 13 and you'll see how the DNA strand of Unity was replicated in this early church plant...

Acts 13:1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.

Acts 13:2 While 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."

Acts 13:3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Later on, this Saul, better known as Paul, gives instructions on the importance of the DNA strand unity to another New Testament church plant at Philippi...

Phil 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort

from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

Phil 2:2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Folks, we don't have to agree on every single little thing, but if we are not one in heart and mind, one in spirit and purpose, and motivated by the love of Jesus, we'll never reach the hurting people of our community and world! Divided we fail, united we follow our purpose, accomplish our mission, and fulfill our vision!

A second strand of The DNA of The New Testament Church was...

Their Selflessness

Acts 4:32 ...No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

The people of the N.T. Church had crucified self and become alive to the will and purposes of God! They let go of their grip on things and discovered the great freedom found in selfless living. They knew it wasn't wrong to own things, but if holding on to, and gaining more and more physical possessions was the purpose, mission, and vision of their lives, what a sad, shallow existence!

When you grip things, things grip you! You have to own it! You have to control it! You have to hoard it! You have to hold it! You have to have more of it! Listen to these words from Matthew Henry's Commentary...

"Men's holding their own, and grasping at more than their own, are the rise of wars and fightings."

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

We must come to understand Christ's words...

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Luke 9:25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

The members of the New Testament Church had come to the realization that everything they had was a gift from God and even the abilities they had used to work for what they had were gifts from God! They now had a new mission in life which encompassed eternal goals and eternal vision! The world and its high value on things, no longer motivated them. Paul said it so beautifully in his words to the church at Galatia...

Gal 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

The world boast in what they have, what they own, how much, how big, how glamorous and they like to point out how they attained and accomplished everything! But according to Matthew Henry, the members of the New Testament Church...

“had, in affection, forsaken all for Christ, and were continually expecting to be stripped of all for their adherence to him. They did not say that aught was their own; for we can call nothing our own but sin. What we have in the world is more God's than our own; we have it from him, must use it for him, and are accountable for it to him.

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

A third strand of The DNA of The New Testament Church was...

Their Message

Acts 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus...

And what a message they had! Jesus had risen from the dead! They had seen Him crucified, His lifeless body taken down from the cross, and laid in a tomb. However, they had also seen the empty tomb and then on numerous occasions seen Him alive, heard Him speak and had even spent time with Him at a fish fry on the banks of the Sea of Galilee!

A few weeks ago I preached an entire sermon on the message of the New Testament Church. Their message was a part of their DNA. It was foundational! Their message of the resurrected Lord was that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Their message was clear that God was offering people freedom from their sin, and a personal relationship with God through Christ, if they would only be willing to repent of their sin and place their trust in the sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God! Remember the message Peter had preached to the onlookers when God healed the crippled man?

Acts 3:18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Acts 3:20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus.

Here at Northshore Church we too have discovered the resurrection power of Jesus in our lives as we have repented of our sins and have experienced the refreshing joy of being forgiven of our past, and being given an amazing purpose and hope for our future! I pray the strand of DNA we consider our message at Northshore Church never, ever changes! Our methods of sharing that message may change as we seek to communicate to an ever changing world, but our message must never change, for it is anchored in the divinely revealed and absolute truth of God's precious word! May we never abandon's our responsibility to preach the whole council of God's Word! To water down, change, adapt, or reinterpret God's Word to make it fit our ever changing culture would be to infect the very structure of our DNA and that would have deadly consequences for the Body of Christ, His Church. Paul was clear on this when he wrote these words to the church at Thessalonica ...

2 Th 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

2 Th 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,

2 Th 2:17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

2 Th 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.

A fourth strand of The DNA of The New Testament Church was...

Their Theology of Grace

Acts 4:33 ... and much grace was upon them all.

Grace is the undeserved favor, love and acceptance of God! God's grace was upon them because they had accepted His Grace, preached His grace, and lived by His grace!

Before Jesus, it was all about the letter of the law! But things changed with Jesus. He had fulfilled the law which allowed believers to live by grace. In the early days of the New Testament Church it was all about grace. However, as time went on, there were those who wanted to change the DNA of the church. They wanted to go back to the days of the law and living by the law for salvation. Listen to the following story...

Acts 15:4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Acts 15:5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

Acts 15:6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

Acts 15:7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

Acts 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

Acts 15:11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Acts 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

People who have been saved by grace live by grace! Listen...

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

Titus 3:6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,

Titus 3:7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Grace is one of the most important strands of the DNA of The Lord's Church, the Body of Christ. This is the DNA strand that we all have in common: We are all sinners saved by God's Grace!!!!

A fifth strand of The DNA of The New Testament Church was...

Their Good Stewardship

Acts 4:34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales

Acts 4:35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

The people and the leadership of the New Testament Church were good stewards. It was a part of their DNA! Listen to these words from the writers of the Holman Bible Dictionary...

“Stewardship permeates the pages of the Bible because how we respond to God is at the heart of the Book. Often, stewardship is thought of only in terms of finances, but the Bible teaches that stewardship is a far greater concept, involving how we respond with all of our life to Him who is the giver and sustainer of life. The call to absolute commitment to Christ is the central theme of the New Testament (Mark 8:34-36). Jesus asked for obedience to God's original intention for the world. Jesus was calling for a radical reversal of the world's values (profit) and a revolutionary return to God's purpose (lose life for My sake). Jesus never seemed to be satisfied with a slice of the pie of our obedience. He did not rejoice in the tithe or a big offering as much as He did in the sacrificial, complete giving of a widow. but Jesus called all disciples to absolute surrender of ourselves and our substance to Him.” Holman Bible Dictionary

What has happened so many times in my experience has been that when I give something up to God, if He gives it back again it's in a better way! I'm no longer controlled by that thing and have the power to use it for good and for God's glory. If I give something up to God and He doesn't give it back to me, I didn't need it!

Listen to this description given by Matthew Henry concerning this strand of DNA when people laid things at the apostles feet...

“Observe, The apostles would have it laid at their feet, in token of their holy contempt of the wealth of the world; they thought it fitter it should be laid at their feet than lodged in their hands or in their bosoms. Being laid there, it was not hoarded up, but distribution was made, by proper persons, unto every man according as he had need. Great care ought to be taken in the distribution of public charity,”
(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

Folks, this strand of DNA is so important to your staff and the leadership team here at Northshore Church. Many of you saw an example of this at our yearly business/vision meeting last week! We believe so strongly in being good stewards by seeking God's will and direction in every spending decision. We truly want to follow our Lord's teaching in this area, personally and as leaders in this church. Jesus said...

Luke 16:10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Luke 16:11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

Luke 16:12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Luke 16:14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

One last strand of The DNA of The New Testament Church found in our text is...

Their Godly Leadership

Anyone in this room believe we need Godly leadership in our churches today? Amen!
Our text states that...

Acts 4:36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),

Acts 4:37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Why was Barnabas chosen as an example? Several reasons. First he was a Levite.

Once again I quote from Holman the Bible Dictionary

"Later, God chose the tribe of Levi to carry out the responsibility of offering sacrifices for Israel. The tribe of Levi was appointed because it was the only tribe that stood with Moses against the people who worshiped the golden calf. The Levites were not given a tribal inheritance in the Promised Land (God was their inheritance) but were placed in 48 Levitical cities throughout the land. The tithe of the rest of the nation was used to provide for the needs of the Levites. Since the Levites were dependent on the generosity of others, families were encouraged to invite the Levites (as well as widows, strangers, and orphans) to join them in their eating and their celebration of the joyous national feast. These factors point to the total dedication of the Levites to the work of the Lord rather than the earthly concerns of making a good living."

Why was Barnabas chosen as an example? He was a Godly man!

We later read this about Barnabas...

Acts 11:23 When he (Barnabas) arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

Acts 11:24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

He led by example

Acts 4:37 (Barnabas) sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Now this doesn't mean we are to all go home and sell everything we have! But all of us should be willing to trust God with our material blessings and dedicate all we have to

God, trusting Him to lead us in our stewardship so that we never let things become our priority! The point of this strand of DNA is that Barnabas was an example of someone who trusted God 100% and wanted to be an encourager! None of us are Levitical Priest, but we can all be Godly men and women who lead by example by refusing to bow down to the golden calves of our culture! We can make the decision to follow the example of the New Testament Church in...

Our Unity, our Selflessness, our Message, our Theology of Grace, our Good Stewardship, and our Godly leadership! Let's pray!