

The Question:

What did the apostles mean when they encouraged the new believers in Antioch to “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose”? What is the deeper spiritual meaning behind this exhortation?

Scripture Context - Acts 11:22-24 (ESV)

22 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.

Understanding the Exhortation

Barnabas’s instruction to the new Gentile believers in Antioch—“to

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remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose”—was more than a passing encouragement. It was a vital theological charge to anchor their faith deeply and sincerely in Christ, with hearts fully committed to Him.

The Greek word translated as “steadfast purpose” (prothesis tēs kardias) literally means “the deliberate intention of the heart.” This points to a wholehearted devotion, not driven by emotion or external blessings, but by a conscious, inner decision to follow Christ—no matter the cost.

The Importance of Right Motives

Throughout Scripture, God is shown to care deeply about the motives of the heart. The call to remain faithful with a sincere heart was crucial because many might be tempted to follow Christ for the wrong reasons: personal gain, social standing, miracles, or blessings.

But the gospel calls for repentance from sin and faith in Christ as Savior and Lord (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9). A superficial or self-serving faith will not endure trials or persecution (Matthew 13:20–21).

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This verse reminds us that God’s Word exposes the true intent behind our faith. He sees whether we follow Christ out of love and truth or out of convenience.

True Faith Is Rooted in the Gospel

Biblical faith is not transactional (i.e., “I follow Christ so He will bless me”); it is transformational. It means trusting in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) and surrendering our lives to Him as Lord (Luke 9:23-24).

2 Corinthians 5:15 (ESV)

...and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.

Following Christ for material gain or comfort creates a fragile faith that cannot endure hardship. But those who follow Jesus to be freed from sin, to walk in holiness, and to glorify God will remain steadfast, even in suffering (Philippians 1:29; James 1:12).

Why This Teaching Matters for New Believers

The apostles knew the early church would face persecution, false teaching, and spiritual distraction. That’s why Barnabas immediately emphasized the foundation of wholehearted devotion. A church rooted in truth, rather than trends or benefits, would thrive under pressure and spread the gospel faithfully.

Even today, it is crucial to disciple new believers with this same principle: to follow Christ for who He is, not for what we want from

Him.

Luke 14:26-27 (ESV)

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

This shows that true discipleship requires a complete reordering of life's priorities with Christ at the center.

The Right Heart: Following Jesus for the Right Reasons

The correct purpose of the heart is this:

To follow Christ in order to be delivered from sin

To know and love God as He truly is

To live in obedience and worship of Jesus as Savior and King)

To treasure eternal life in Him, not temporary blessings

John 6:26-27 (ESV)

Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life...

Many in Jesus’ time followed Him for miracles and provision but left Him when His words challenged their hearts (John 6:66). The same is true today. A heart rooted in self-interest will walk away; but a heart rooted in Christ will remain.

Conclusion: Remain Faithful With a Steadfast Heart

Barnabas’s words are timeless. God is still calling us to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose—a deliberate, sincere heart that seeks Christ above all else.

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Let us teach and live a gospel that goes deeper than emotion, prosperity, or popularity. Let us follow Jesus because He is worthy, because He saves, and because He alone is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

May the Lord bless you and keep your heart steadfast in Him.

What Does It Mean to “Remain True to the Lord with All Your
Heart”?(Acts 11:23, ESV

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