

## **God Transformation In Action – Part II**

I am so glad to be here this morning – this has been a hard and difficult week. Being here I can turn from the world and worship the Lord among brothers and sisters of Christ. Thank you for being my family in Christ. Let me pray for our time in God’s Word this morning and may it lift you spiritually as much as it has me in my study and preparation.

In today’s passage we continue with our observation of leaders emerging in the early church. As when the early church was birthed and all the way through its history to this day - **what the church needs is Spirit-filled, Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting, self-abasing, servant-leaders, persevering in this corrupt world exerting biblical influence for the glory of Jesus Christ.** Does this describe you? Christians mentor others to become leaders in their families, church, workplace and the world. Both Barnabas and Saul demonstrate the marks of true biblical Christian leaders. We, my beloved, are all called to lead – many or a few. God calls His children to be risk-takers and proclaim the Gospel. We are called to be disciplined by other Christians deepening our spiritual lives. We are called to disciple others to help them grow spiritually. We are called to encourage others to boldly live out their faith. Let’s see what we can glean from scripture this morning that applies to our lives.

### **Introduction**

In the last few Sundays, we learned of Saul the persecutor of the people of “[the Way](#)” or believers in Jesus as the Christ becomes a believer himself. Jesus

meets Saul in a dramatic way on the road to Damascus and everything is changed. Today, I want to spend time looking at how God calls His children to be risk takers and reach out to the lost to share the Gospel and expand the kingdom of God. Without believers in Christ taking risks over the centuries – well, we might not even be here. Their taking risks, like a pebble dropped into still water continues to ripple throughout the world. We do not know the long-term effects of our risk taking for the kingdom and what our taking risks will have on the future of God’s kingdom. Like the Apostles and all the risk takers that followed they often did not see the full results of their actions.

If we desire to glorify God with our lives and have an impact on others who will have an impact on others – we will need to be bold and take risks. I believe this especially true as persecution of Christians is growing worldwide and here in America. I want to examine a few, certainly not all, of the marks of a Christian citizen who is a discipler, people-builder and leader-builder of others. Interestingly when one takes risks, takes the time to disciple others and helps others to grow spiritually – the result is not only the spiritual growth of others but those who disciple others grow deeper in their faith and spiritual wisdom also.

### **The Five Marks Of A Christian**

What are the marks of a Christian discipler and leader-maker? That’s today’s question. There are several that I see in the life of Barnabas and Paul and many others throughout the scriptures. These marks transcend generations of Christians. What began 2000 years ago impacts today, just as what happens now will impact the future of the Church.

Under the providence of God in the life of the early church, we are encouraged by the ministry of a number of men but two leaders in particular are

the result to the encouragement of Barnabas. These two leaders are Paul and John Mark. As far as we know, Barnabas wrote none of the New Testament. But the men he nurtured wrote a third of it: Paul wrote 13 of the epistles of the New Testament and Mark wrote one of our four gospels.

Let's look at the marks of a Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker in the life of Barnabas, the man whom the apostles nicknamed, "[son of encouragement](#)". (Acts 4:36) Coupled with the transformation Saul who became a great man of God, risk-taker to disciple, mentor and build leaders of others. Open your Bible to Acts chapter 9 as we begin our scripture journey this morning. We will be spending our time in chapters 9, 11, 13 and 15.

### **Willing To Take A Risk**

A Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker takes risks to proclaim the Gospel, disciple others enabling them to become spiritually mature and leaders to expand the kingdom of God as they disciple others who will disciple others.

Open your Bible to Acts chapter 9. After being disciplined and proclaiming the Gospel for 3 years in Damascus verse 26 tells us "[When Saul had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.](#)" The believers in Jerusalem had not forgotten in the span of 3 years the brutal persecution of Saul in Jerusalem as the High Priest's emissary of death. Now, 3 years later he reappears claiming to be a Christian convert and the church in Jerusalem is asking what is Saul's real game plan? In Pakistan there was a man who fanned conversion and for 5 years participated in the underground church. We did not know he was part of the Secret Police and after collecting information and names for 5 years he directed the Secret

Police in a raid that resulted in 2 dead and several arrested as everyone scrambled to get underground. So, I understand the believers in Jerusalem being cautious.

God has sent Saul back to Jerusalem but he experiences opposition. Is there anyone who will take a risk for Saul? Is there anyone who can see in him the making of a great leader? God calls one man to stick his neck out when everyone else was afraid to give Saul a chance to prove himself; Barnabas again lives up the meaning of his name “[son of encouragement](#)”. Reading verse 27, “[But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.](#)” Barnabas became Saul’s advocate. What was the result of Barnabas’ intervention? The church accepted Saul and his ministry flourished in Jerusalem. Barnabas watched, guided, disciplined, mentored and supported Saul. This would not be the last time he supported Paul’s ministry.

So, the first mark of a Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker is the willingness to take risks on behalf of other believers in the hope they will become disciplers, people-builders and leaders of others. All the other disciples were afraid. But Barnabas had the courage to give this remarkable young man Saul a chance. We, my beloved, are among the millions throughout history that benefited from Barnabas being a risk taker. God will provide opportunity for you to step out with the Gospel in a world that opposes God, will you be willing to take the risk?

### **Encouraging To Others**

A Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker has a glad heart encouraging others with God’s grace. Just like the soft glowing embers an encourager uses the wind of God’s Spirit to bring the spiritual embers of a

Christian to flaming life. For many believers their belief and life in Christ is a secret to the world around them. The encourager comes and fans those embers into flames of passion for Christ that the world cannot ignore. From last week's message the Church in Jerusalem was concerned but encouraged by reports of the Gospel spreading to Antioch. Flip a few pages forward to chapter 11 of Acts at verse 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.<sup>22</sup> The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch." The church in Jerusalem, which came to be led by James the half-brother of Jesus, wanted to make sure the work happening in Antioch was true to the Gospel, for remember in other books of scriptures we know the evil one very quickly sent false believers, prophets, teachers and even those claiming to be Christ into the church to destroy it from within. The one man the Church knew would be an encourager and also hold fast to God's true Gospel was Barnabas and this proved to be correct. As verse 23 tells us, "When Barnabas came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,<sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Barnabas' encouragement to both believers who were taking risks to proclaim the Gospel and the disciples who responded resulted in<sup>24b</sup> "a great many people were added to the Lord." Barnabas' passion for Christ, God's Word and for souls to be brought into the kingdom of God was contagious. My beloved, our attitude about God, Jesus and the Bible, either positive or negative, can affect those around us. The question before us is are we encouragers or complainers? Do we lift ours up others or deflate them? Do we

build or tear down? Is life all about us or is it about God and how we can serve others?

Those who are focused on God and others sense the spiritual embers within people and take the risk to fan the embers into flame and encourage others to growth in spiritual wisdom for the purpose of reaching the lost with the truth of the Gospel. Unfortunately, there are others in the Church who carry around buckets of criticism ready to pour it on the spiritual embers within people to make dead ashes of people's imperfections, tearing down people instead of building them. A discipler fans spiritual embers with grace and encouragement to build people up for service to the kingdom.

Those who have a passion for Christ can either tear down or build. This was most evident when Joyce and I worked overseas. We met missionaries who were passionate; some for legalism and being in charge and used the Scriptures to try and cow people into submission. Then there were those who came to serve people with the love and grace of God to show people a better way, the Way of Christ, that brings peace, love, grace, mercy and eternal hope into people's lives. How will we live? Will we share the love and grace of God that He gave us even though we did not deserve them? I pray we will be used as spiritual encouragers building people to live for Christ. This leads to the next mark of a Christian discipler and people-builder.

## **Humble**

Christian disciplers, people-builders and leader-makers are humble and self-effacing. That means that they have the beautiful gift of fading into the background while pushing others into prominence. They are not addicted to the praise of men and do not crave the limelight. Again, let us look at Barnabas. Let's examine what

Barnabas does when his ministry flourishes. Staying in chapter 11 of Acts and reading at verse 25, “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,<sup>26</sup> 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.” Barnabas’ ministry in Antioch was so successful that the converts were everywhere. Now there is one kind of person who would say at this point; I am now a respected leader. I have earned a good reputation for my work. It is now time to confirm my gains and establish myself as a prominent preacher and leader in this part of Syria. But what does Barnabas do? Instead of maneuvering for his own exaltation, he leaves town to look for an associate that he knows good and well is a more dynamic leader and a better preacher than he is, namely, Saul, as verses 25 and 26 tell us. They worked together for a year proclaiming, discipling and building people spiritually in the Church. Barnabas strategically invested in Saul’s life and call to ministry and had no problem staying in a secondary place and promoted Saul to take the lead. Barnabas was a humble man of God.

What happens when Barnabas fades into Paul’s shadow? Just like that mechanic keeps the race car on the track and the driver gets all the credit. Like many men who are far more than they could be, because of a wife that supports and encourages them. Like being a better pastor because of Joyce.

Barnabas has fulfilled the call of God for him to disciple, mentor and partner with Saul. Now we go a few pages forward in your Bible to Acts chapter 13 at verse 1, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: *(Take note of the meaning of each of these men’s names)* Barnabas *(Son of encouragement -he lives out his name with Saul and many others)*, Simeon *(Harkening – a man who will harken or call people to Jesus)* who was called Niger *(Black)*, Lucius *(Bright White Light - a man who will proclaim the light of Christ)*

of Cyrene, Manaen (*Comforter, to the people of Christ*) who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (*Desired – God desired and called Saul to be His great missionary*).<sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’<sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.”

(NKJV) The Holy Spirit now separates Barnabas and Saul to go to the unreached cities of Cyprus and Galatia. Notice also here in verse 2 the order of the names; Barnabas first and Saul second. In verse 6 when they get to the island of Paphos (**paf-os**), now known as Cyprus, we read, “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos (*Boiling*), they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus (*Son of Jesus*),<sup>7</sup> who was with the proconsul (*Roman civil overseer of the area*), Sergius Paulus (*Earth born and bound*), an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.<sup>8</sup> But Elymas (*el-oo-mas*) the sorcerer (for so his name is translated in Arabic from the Hebrew Bar-Jesus)) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.<sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who also is called **Paul** (*first time Saul is called Paul, he his known as both Saul and Paul from this point forward the Book of Acts. The name Saul is not used after the Book of Acts. From this point forward Saul or Paul is given first place and Paul is in charge.*), filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him<sup>10</sup> and said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?’<sup>11</sup> And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.’ And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.<sup>12</sup> Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” (Acts 13:1-12 NKJV) The transition from Barnabas first to Paul being listed first is immediate, reading verse 13, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos,



they came to Perga (*Perg-ay*) in Pamphylia (*pam-fool-ee-ah*); and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.” Barnabas is not even mentioned here in verse 13 and in the rest of scripture whenever these two are together Paul is first and Barnabas second. The one exception is in Acts 15 when they return to Barnabas’ home turf of Jerusalem. In Cyprus we are seeing the emergence of Paul the greatest missionary and the greatest theologian of the first century church and the older Barnabas, giving way for Paul to take the lead. What also becomes clear as the ministry of Paul grows is that a son of thunder boldly proclaiming Jesus is more likely to suffer persecution than the son of encouragement who works quietly behind the scenes. These two roles have their different costs. Barnabas pays the price of humbleness and eventual obscurity. Paul pays the price here in Lystra of being stoned and his persecution grows with the expansion of his ministry.

A Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker as modeled by Barnabas is humble and self-effacing. He looks for people with better gifts than his own and pushes them forward.

### **Patient**

A Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker is patient with the failures of others. This will be clear from the way Barnabas handles the desertion of John Mark. Barnabas, son of encouragement and a man of patience was moved to stand up for John Mark.

First, let me begin with some background of who John Mark is. In Acts chapter 12 (v. 25), we learn that Barnabas and Saul brought a young man named, John Mark to Antioch to assist in ministry. Mark’s mother’s name was Mary and she had a house in Jerusalem used by the disciples to pray when Peter escaped from prison. (Acts 12:12) Mark was among the persecuted believers of Jerusalem that

followed the death of Jesus and His resurrection. We are informed in Colossians chapter 4 (v. 10) that Mark and Barnabas are cousins.

John Mark is assisting Barnabas and Saul but something happened after the team left Cyprus. Now go back to chapter 9 of Acts and look at verse 13, “**Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga (*Perg-ay*) in Pamphylia (*pam-fool-ee-ah*); and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.**”

Luke is very reserved here. He passes no judgment on John Mark. We have to wait until Acts chapter 15, please flip the pages of your Bible to chapter 15, here we come to understand this was a serious issue. It has been two or three years since the first missionary journey, and after the Jerusalem council has settled the issue of Gentile circumcision, and now Paul and Barnabas are back in Antioch teaching and preaching, Paul is convinced that the time is right for them to return to the first missionary field to strengthen the saints. Reading at verse 36, “**After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’** <sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia (*pam-fool-ee-ah*) and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.” (Acts 15:36-40) Barnabas wants to take John Mark but Paul thought it best not to take him because of John Mark’s desertion. There arose a sharp contention, so that Barnabas and Paul separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him, but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

Barnabas exhibits patience with John Mark's failure, he is the son of encouragement and wants John Mark to have another chance. However, Paul disagrees and the disagreement is so deep that it cannot be resolved, and these veterans whose friendship goes back at least 15 years, and who owe each other so much, part company. Neither will yield.

### **Unencumbered**

A Christian discipler, people-builder and leader-maker is free from materialism. The world loves money and the power and material goods it brings. Christians love Christ above the world. In Acts chapter 4, verse 36, Luke tells us that the apostles gave Joseph the name Barnabas because it meant “[son of encouragement](#)”. The next verse says he, “[sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.](#)” (Acts 4:37) Why did Joseph, who is now Barnabas do this? Verse 34 says he did it to meet the needs of the poor in the Christian community. God gave Barnabas a love of people and not of money and material things. It was a permanent change within his heart for 20 years later Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, <sup>4</sup>“[Do we not have the right to eat and drink?](#) <sup>5</sup>[Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?](#) <sup>6</sup>[Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?](#)” (1 Corinthians 9:4-6) Twenty years has passed and here is Paul and Barnabas work to proclaim the Gospel and work with their hands to support themselves, refusing to take gifts from Corinth. Why do Paul and Barnabas take this stand? In order to make perfectly clear that they do not minister for money, they serve God and minister for their love of His people.

**God calls all His children to serve.** Let me ask when you have time to dream, what do you dream of? Is it cars or houses or promotion at work or stereos

or new TV and entertainment system or vacations or investing to gain more wealth and I could go on and on. Do our minds fill with dreams of possessions or things of God and the love He has placed in our heart for people and how to fulfill the needs of the church? I dream of people's potentials and people strategies – God has a plan for each of your lives to serve Him. As the pastor I want to help each of you fulfill your calling. I want each of us to maximize our influence on people for the sake of Christ. What does that look like? My beloved dream, dream of Christ, your Lord and Savior, dream of how He can use your personality and gifting to serve people and show them a love the world does not understand and does not want to hear but needs so desperately. Become a risk-taker, an encourager lifting people up, be humble by placing others before yourself and being pleased to be in the background helping others to the forefront, be patient with people for not everyone grows at the same speed and think how patient God was with you. Train yourself to dream of God and how to free yourself from materialism to better use the resources God has given to help the brothers and sisters of Christ and the poor. If you work to retrain your mind by the study of God's Word and time spent in prayer and stepping out to serve; as your mind is retooled for the kingdom your heart will follow and you will know the joy, peace and deep love of God in all circumstances. May the Lord fill Canyon Bible with disciplers, people-builders and leader-makers with the heart we find in the scriptures of people like Barnabas and Paul. I close with Paul's words to the church at Philippi, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.<sup>22</sup> Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose.<sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—<sup>24</sup> but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." (Philippians 1:21-24) As long as you remain in the flesh God is doing so for the sake of His kingdom and the people in your life. Serve your Lord with passion! Amen!