

Where do you fit in the Family of God?

Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

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Have you ever known someone who feels the need to be “first” in everything? During my many years of working with children, I have noticed that some children are willing to be followers, but there are others who pout, sulk and get really disgruntled if they are not chosen as captain of teams, first in line, first to be the center of everything that is going on around them. They are so intent on getting their voice heard that they don’t listen well.

Many times these types of children grow up to choose professions that are not a good fit for them because of their desire to be seen and heard. Good leaders spring from good followers.

The Bible tells us to be careful where we place ourselves in importance. In Luke 14:11, it says “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Today I want to focus on a Bible character that was happy to be behind the scenes and build others up. We first find his name in the book of Acts chapter 4:36-37. His name was Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. The Levites assisted the priests in the necessary duties of the temple. The Apostles called him “Barnabas” which means “one who encourages others.” Barnabas is referred to in several passages and though there isn’t much written specifically about him, he played a very important part in getting the church established in the early days following the ascension of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 4, Peter and John were intent on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking the truth about the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, and many people believed. They were bold in their declaration of the history of the rebellion of the Jews and the rejection of Jesus as the King of the Jews and the religious leaders of their day were indignant and determined to extinguish the Holy Ghost flame that was spreading all over the surrounding areas by their ministry. The message was that Jesus was the stone that the builders rejected and He is the cornerstone of the Church that He promised to build and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. They declared that “Neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” The council realized that Peter and John, though they were unlearned and uneducated in the religious realm, yet they spoke with power and conviction and healings and miracles followed their message. People believed

and received the gospel. The religious leaders couldn't deny that a man who had been born lame from birth was now standing before them completely healed. It was a witness to them that God was manifesting his power through the Apostles and they could not say anything because the evidence of the Holy Spirit working through his people could not be denied. The one thing that they could do was to try to force Peter and John to keep quiet about Jesus by using threats and fear tactics. Thus they were threatened and commanded to refrain from speaking about Jesus name and to refrain from spreading the gospel among the Jews. But as soon as Peter and John were released they offered a prayer to God praising Him and acknowledging that God made the heavens and the earth and all that is contained within. They included in their prayer a rendition of prophecies which had been fulfilled concerning Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah who came to the earth to free men from the bondage of sin. Though the Jews rejected Jesus and crucified Him, God raised Him from the dead and He is our mediator between God and man. They praised God that through the name of the Holy Child Jesus, that miracles were taking place. They continued to preach and to win converts to Jesus Christ. People sold their properties and brought money to the Apostles and everyone's needs were taken care of as the apostles distributed fairly to those who needed it.

Barnabas was a generous man and he believed the message of the gospel. He owned a piece of land, sold it and brought the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed among those that were in need. He supported the ministry of Peter and John and God's blessing was upon him. Throughout this book of Acts, take notice of how Satan tried so many methods of disrupting, destroying and extinguishing the truth of the gospel.

In Acts 9:21 there is the story of Saul being converted to Christianity after meeting Jesus in a personal encounter as he was on his way to Damascus. He purposed to get written permission to arrest and bring believers back to Jerusalem to be imprisoned because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Saul never reached his destination because a bright light shone on him from heaven; he fell off his horse and he heard Jesus call his name and it changed his goals, his life and his eternal destination. He began preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and persuading and convincing Jews that Jesus is the Son of God and that what the apostles were teaching was the truth and Jesus called him to take the good news to the Gentiles. However, because of his former actions of trying to destroy the infant church, the disciples in Jerusalem didn't want anything to do with him. They were afraid of him and felt that he had no place with them. Other people were amazed at the change in Saul and they discussed it among themselves. "Isn't this the person who was trying to destroy all that called on Jesus' name in Jerusalem and came with the intent of bringing people bound unto the chief priests?" they asked.

But Saul continued preaching and proving to people that Jesus is the Christ and the Jews took counsel after awhile to kill Saul. Saul heard about the scheme and his friends lifted him over the city wall in a basket so he could escape as the gates to the city were guarded so he would be apprehended. Saul arrived in Jerusalem and when he tried to join himself to the apostles, he was turned away. However, Barnabas spoke to them and convinced them that God had truly called Paul and he was an apostle just as they were. They trusted Barnabas and through his intervention, Paul was accepted and was able to labor with the other apostles.

Barnabas also had the gift of exhortation. In Antioch, the hand of the Lord was with the apostles and a great number of people believed their message and many turned to the Lord. The disciples in Jerusalem heard about the move of God and they sent Barnabas to Antioch to encourage the new believers. When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he exhorted them to cling to the Lord with all their hearts. The Bible says that he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Many people came to the Lord through his ministry. He left and sought Saul and brought him to Antioch. They stayed an entire year and established the church teaching the people the doctrines of Jesus Christ. The church was first called Christians at Antioch. Barnabas is often throughout the New Testament spoken in connection with Paul's ministry.

In Acts 13, Barnabas is called a prophet and a teacher who was brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. The Spirit spoke to the disciples to separate Saul and Barnabas from the other apostles for missionary work. They journeyed to Cyprus and on to Lystra.

Barnabas and Paul were humble men before God. Saul's name was changed to Paul. Paul commanded a man who had been born with crippled feet to stand upright because he discerned that the man had faith. The man jumped up and started walking around.

People were amazed and they believed that these two men were gods. They called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul was called "Hermes" because he did the talking. The priests of the temple of Zeus began preparing a sacrifice for an offering to them, but Barnabas and Paul stopped them from doing so because they informed them that they were just human as all who were present. Barnabas was an effective worker for the Lord as he assisted Paul in his journeys. See Acts 14:8 .

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul speaks about the fact that people in the ministry have a right to make a living from their calling. However, he and Barnabas worked making tents to provide for themselves even as they preached the gospel. Barnabas was a worker and assisted Paul in everything he did.

The Bible says that one plants, one waters, but God gives the increase. We are to work together and be quick to lift up others that we all may be equipped to share the burden of building up the kingdom of God. We are to seek the approval of God rather than to desire the praise of men. Paul worked to mentor young Timothy so he could replace him after his work on earth was done. Be willing to share your talents and your gifts with those around you so that the work of the Lord can flourish and spread. May we have a heart like Barnabas who didn't care about getting credit or having a lead part in the process, but was willing to assist others and carry their burdens and be effective in finishing the course faithfully. Barnabas certainly is a role model for all of us. Behind every God honoring church are people who stand behind the ministry in prayer and in giving. Time, talent and money are all used by God to bless his people and to store up treasures in heaven. We are called of God to bear one another's burdens and to care for those who are around us. Be good and faithful servants until Jesus returns with rewards.