

Session 5

July 2, 2023

BARNABAS AND PAUL

Acts 9:26-28; 11:22-26; 15:36-40.

Audrey (not her real name) arrived at the college fresh out of trouble. She was all attitude and anger, and threatened to drop out before she was even admitted. Half of the students ignored her; the other half was afraid of her. The same was true for most of the faculty! After one semester, I wrote her off as incorrigible. But another student reached out to her, befriended her, and took her under her wing, introducing her to others and including her in outings and events. Slowly, Audrey was transformed into a model student, a dedicated disciple, and ultimately an IMB missionary. I know that God had something to do with this transformation, but so did that young lady who saw Audrey's potential and invested herself in Audrey's life!

The story of Paul and Barnabas is just like that. Everybody knows Paul, but without a Barnabas to guide him, Paul may never have had the acceptance—and subsequent impact—that he had. This week's lesson highlights three principles we see in this unique relationship.

Mentors see potential (Acts 9:26-28). As to the timeline here, there is some dispute. Paul was converted to Christ on the road to Damascus, and upon his arrival there, joined with the other believers and “immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues” (v. 20). Galatians 1, however, states that Paul did not consult with anyone after his conversion, but instead spent three years in Arabia. This need not be a contradiction. After his days with the disciples in Damascus and the Jews' plot to kill him (9:23), Paul escaped from the city and headed to Arabia. Three years passed when the story picks up here in verse 26. But the reception back in Jerusalem was quite cool, tempered by both fear and skepticism (v. 26). This is where Barnabas came in. Barnabas was uniquely qualified to vouch for Paul. Acts 11:24 calls him “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” But Acts 4 reminds us who Barnabas was: *the son of consolation*. Simply put, Barnabas was an encourager. People knew him and responded to him. And when Paul needed some credentialing, Barnabas spoke up. Paul had been gone for 3 years, but he was a changed man: Barnabas knew the backstory and he knew the risk. But he also knew that the Lord was with him and saw the potential for kingdom work that Paul could accomplish. For reflection: *If everyone was perfect and mature, there would be no need for mentors. Mentors come in to help people reach their potential.*

Mentors take the initiative (Acts 11:22-26). By Acts 11, faithful followers of Christ who had been scattered by persecution were proclaiming the gospel to Jews outside of Jerusalem. But some who had made their way to the city of Antioch had begun to evangelize the gentiles there. This caused a bit of an uproar among the purists who considered Christ the Messiah of the Jews alone. Church leaders in Jerusalem then sent Barnabas to Antioch to evaluate the situation for authenticity. Barnabas was sufficiently impressed by the new believers' faith to applaud their devotion and vouch for their conversion (v. 23). But new believers need discipling! For this reason, Barnabas “went to Tarsus to search for Saul” (v. 25). Barnabas must have been certain that Paul would gladly join him in Antioch. Together, they stayed for a year, discipling “large numbers” of new converts. For reflection: *Barnabas celebrated the movement of God in Antioch*

but realized the need to disciple. He could have ignored it or done it himself. Instead, he found the best man for the job.

Mentors know when to let go (Acts 15:36-40). The great successes of Paul and Barnabas led Paul to want to revisit the work of their first missionary journey; not to gloat, but no doubt to strengthen the churches they had planted, settle any disputes, and scout areas for further work. Barnabas was obviously agreeable but wanted John Mark to accompany them again (see Acts 12:25). Paul, however, thought it was inappropriate to take Mark along since he “had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work” (v. 38). The dispute led to disassociation, and Barnabas and Mark went in one direction while Paul and Silas went in another. In reality, Paul didn’t need Barnabas any longer...and Barnabas didn’t need Paul. What was awkward for them was beneficial for the kingdom, as one team of missionaries had now become two. For reflection: *Read 2 Tim. 4:11. What lessons do we learn from Paul’s account?*