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90 Day Challenge II: The Acts of the Holy Spirit
By the Spirit We Are Mentoring
Acts 11

My favorite memory this week during Day Camp: As I walked around the campus, I was standing right up there in the balcony, looking down at the kids sitting in the pews. As they listened to the speaker I was amazed at the energy that was being released just in sitting there... lots of moving body parts as they listened to their leader.

Day Camp was a wonderful illustration of the topic I want to discuss this morning which is spiritual parenting. More and more of you are becoming familiar with the term "spiritual parenting"—disciples who are making disciples who are making disciples, or "3D". For those of you who are new to Chapel Hill, we have started a new disciple-making process that involves identifying where you are in your own spiritual journey with the Lord, and then taking you through Next Steps to grow in your walk. The last step on the wheel is spiritual parenting, and we offer a one day class called Multiply that helps life group leaders understand their role of expanding the ministry through the multiplication of leaders. In our reading today, Barnabas gives us a great example of spiritual parenting. Let me tell you the story about Barnabas and his ministry at the church in Antioch.

ACTS 11:13-30

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he 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. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread throughout the whole Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."

This is the word of the Lord!

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman world behind Rome and Alexandria. It possessed a thriving economy with a population of about 300,000. Luke tells us that it was evangelized by men from Cyprus and Cyrene. They reached out to the Greeks, and God blessed their work. Scripture says that "a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

The amazing thing about this part of the story is that we do not know any of their names! We only know where they are from. The first great missionary thrust to the Gentiles was accomplished by disciples whose names are unknown to us in Church History, yet they ignite through the Holy Spirit what will turn out to be one of the most significant outposts of Christianity in the early church.

News of the revival among the Greeks in Antioch made its way back to the church in Jerusalem. When the disciples heard the news they sent Barnabas to investigate. You remember Barnabas right? We first met Barnabas in Acts 4. His real name was Joseph and he was a Levite from Cyprus. In Acts 4 Scripture says that Barnabas sold some of his property and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.

In just a few words Scripture captures the kind of person Barnabas was. He was generous and encouraging! No wonder the apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch. Every church needs armies of people like Barnabas who are generous and enthusiastic and can bring energy and encouragement to the work of God.

Have you ever noticed how infectious encouraging people are? I don't know about you, but I want to be around encouraging people. Encouraging people give me hope and energy to persevere in my walk with God. They inflate my faith! They help me believe that "all things are possible through Christ who strengthens me!"

As I studied and thought about Barnabas this week, I realized how the qualities in Barnabas are the qualities I think God desires in spiritual parents. I want to touch on a few of these in the rest of my message.

By the way, if you don't consider yourself to be at a place in your spiritual walk like Barnabas, don't worry about it. Just listen and ask the Lord to make you into a person like Barnabas! After all, the Gentile believers in Antioch were just starting out in their walk with Christ.

Let me touch on a few qualities of spiritual parenting that I see modeled by Barnabas: **Spiritual Parents model enthusiasm for Christ's mission.**

Barnabas was willing to be a missionary. And I use the word "missionary" in the broadest sense of the term. He was willing to be sent on a mission, or stay in one place and do ministry. Either way he loved Christ, and he possessed missional zeal.

First he was sent by the Jerusalem church to Antioch; then he went and grabbed Saul in Tarsus to help in the work. That, by the way, was not across the street. That was an 86-mile jaunt from Antioch to Tarsus. After finding Saul and going back to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul met and taught the disciples for a year. Then Barnabas and Saul took an offering back to the Jerusalem church to help out the church during a severe famine. Then Barnabas returns to Antioch, and in Acts 13 we see the Holy Spirit telling the church to set aside Barnabas and Saul to go on a missionary journey. Barnabas had great enthusiasm for Christ's mission.

The truth is, a person can have this kind of missional zeal at any age! In this respect spiritual parenting is not an age issue; it is a heart issue. That's why it struck me at Day Camp this week that some young people were modeling spiritual parenting because they were showing the kinds of behavior young children need to see in order to become mature adult followers of Christ. They modeled stuff like enthusiastic singing (worship), listening to the teachers teach from God's word, following directions from the leaders. All these behaviors are aspects of being a spiritual parent, and they were being performed by some young people in our church who taught even younger ones about following Jesus. [Example of Assistant Crew Leader: junior high aged youth leading first, second, and third graders... tough stuff!] Day Camp shows us that you do not need to be advanced in age to practice spiritual parenting.

Some of you may wonder, where does that enthusiasm for Christ's mission come from?

The answer is it comes by being "filled with the Holy Spirit" and faithfully walking with the Lord day by day. Listen to the way Luke describes Barnabas' spiritual parenting style when he arrived at Antioch.

"When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God he was glad and he encouraged the believers to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." 11:24

This is what a spiritual parent does; they urge other believers to “remain true to the Lord with all their heart. ”

What does it mean to “remain true to the Lord with all your heart? It means: opening up God’s word daily and reading it, studying it, soaking and meditating on it; praying every day or throughout the day; choosing to go to church on the Sabbath; and deciding to hang out with other believers in a LifeGroup each week.

These are spiritual disciplines that define what it means to remain true to the Lord with all your heart. I suspect that for some of you here today this is what the Holy Spirit wants to speak to you about... remaining true to the Lord with all your heart.

Over and over again we are tempted to stray—roving eyes, making idols for ourselves, giving up on Church because people hurt us, giving up on your walk with God because He seems absent, giving up on a marriage relationship because of disappointment, retiring from church work because “I’ve already done my part throughout the years”—over and over we are tempted not to remain true to the Lord with all our hearts.

So this morning you may be sensing a nudge from the Spirit. Where do you need to remain true to the Lord in your life right now? Where are you tempted to stray?

Spiritual parents model enthusiasm for Christ’s mission.

Here’s another aspect of spiritual parenting I see in Barnabas: **Spiritual Parents demonstrate faith in God’s ability to change people.**

In Acts 9 Barnabas did something very courageous. He believed in Saul’s conversion when all the other believers were running as fast as they could away from Saul. Let me read part of Acts 9

“When he (Saul) came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.” 9:26-28

Spiritual parents can spot a diamond in the rough. They have faith in God’s ability to change people. When you see someone who clearly doesn’t know the Lord, think about who they could be in Christ! What would that look like? Imagine that. Pray for it. Spiritual parents have that faith capacity to see and believe what God can do in the life of another.

Spiritual parents model enthusiasm for Christ's mission and demonstrate faith in God's ability to change people.

And thirdly, **spiritual parents reproduce themselves.**

This is one of the greatest challenges facing the Church today.

Let's look again at the life of Barnabas. First, Barnabas goes out of his way... he walks 172 miles roundtrip to get Saul in Tarsus, to take him to Antioch. Talk about intentionality! Then Barnabas and Saul teach the believers for a year.

What is Barnabas doing? First, he's being a "scout"... he spots "diamonds in the rough." He looks for people with potential. He works alongside Saul and other potential leaders in Antioch training, discipling, mentoring, parenting. How does he do this primarily? Through encouragement. People blossom when they are encouraged!!

How do we know this is happening? Because in verses 29-30 we are told that the disciples in Antioch decide to send Barnabas and Saul with the gift to Jerusalem. If there were not others leaders who were disciplined and trained and ready to go, Barnabas and Saul couldn't go. Who would teach the church at Antioch? But we know from what we read in Acts 13 there were a number of Greek speaking disciples who were capable teachers and prophets who took over the ministry while Barnabas and Saul were gone.

Herein lays our greatest challenge in the church today. Every believer needs to grow to the point where they are spiritual parents and can disciple younger believers... who will mentor other believers. This process has been taking place for 2,000 years throughout church history. However, the church stops growing and eventually dies when the disciple-making process stops—when the current generation doesn't think about the next generation of disciples and is instead content simply riding out their days in comfort.

A true spiritual parent reproduces themselves so that the leadership base of church or ministry will expand, and the ministry will continue to grow.

Spiritual parents reproduce themselves. They train others who can take over the ministry. This requires intentionality and commitment on the part of the disciple. Barnabas walked 172 miles round trip to find Saul and take him to Antioch. He worked with Saul and he groomed him for further ministry. Who are you working with to disciple? It's not beyond anyone's capacity in this sanctuary. I saw it happening again and again in Day Camp. Remember, it's not an age issue; it's a heart issue.

So Barnabas is a prototype of a spiritual parent, someone who: 1) Models enthusiasm for Christ's mission, who 2) Demonstrates faith in God's ability to change others, and 3) Reproduces themselves.

Challenge:

This morning you may or may not see yourself at a place where Barnabas was as a spiritual parent. However we can all be challenged by the things Barnabas did –

1. Barnabas said to the church at Antioch – “Remain true to the Lord with all your heart.” Right now, where in your life is God calling you to remain true to him? Where in your life do you need to be true to God instead of going your own way?
2. Maybe the Lord is exhorting you to trust him, to believe that He is at work in that person with whom you are totally frustrated... but that you're not to give up on, because God hasn't given up on them.
3. Maybe the Holy Spirit is challenging you by saying: “Hey, you can be a spiritual parent, or you are a spiritual parent, start being one! You can reproduce yourself in ministry. Maybe you need to consider starting something new: a new LifeGroup, a new ministry—bring someone else along with you, so they can replace you. Remember God didn't call Moses to do his most important work until he was 80. Time and age are irrelevant to God. “A thousand years is like a day to the Lord...” God is seeking open, willing hearts.