

“We are All Needed for Each Other’s Spiritual Growth”

Acts 15:36-41

As we listened to Tracy’s story of God’s work in her life it is obvious that there were multiple people along the way that pointed her to Jesus and helped her grow in Jesus. And this is part of all of our stories. God grows a church collectively through numerous individuals – like ourselves – to help us grow spiritually. Spiritual growth is God’s goal for us. Or another way of saying it, conformed to Christ. When we confess our sins and our need for Jesus’ forgiveness, who alone paid for our sins, we receive the Spirit of Jesus, which begins a new work of God which He will complete on the day Jesus returns (Phil. 1:6).

None of us were saved to grow alone; God saved us into the body of Christ, called His church and we fellowship, worship and study in geographically localized bodies of believers. We need each other and we all have a role to play in each other’s spiritual maturity.

Last week we were in Acts 15. Here Paul and Barnabas along with the apostles met together to discuss an issue raised by Jewish believers concerning Gentile believers. It was clear that the gospel was moving beyond just being a Jewish movement. Should Gentiles have to become Jewish converts first? Circumcision, Sabbath, Jewish meal regulations. After significant discussion the answer is no. They only need to change from their formerly pagan practices of eating meat with blood in it and other idolatrous practices which would be offensive to Jewish believers especially. And those are behaviours that would change in time as they grew.

Hopefully, our former sinful choices and behavioural patterns will change. But this is an important point to remember as we look at the last 5 verses of Acts 15.

Don’t Assume Everyone is Growing Spiritually **(15:36)**

After the Jerusalem Council Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch where they “*taught and preached the Word of the Lord*” (15:35). V. 36 begins

Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.

‘See how they are doing’. How they were growing. How they were faring under any persecution. How the church was dealing with the Jewish/Gentile issue. Barnabas agrees of course because they care about these brothers and sisters in Christ. And when you care you get involved. Making disciples doesn’t mean get people to make decisions for Jesus. It means leading them to Christ, baptizing them and ongoing teaching them everything Jesus commanded us. Paul and Barnabas want to do more teaching. They care, so they go. There’s always a going when you want to help people grow spiritually. It can be as basic as go to your phone or keyboard but it needs to move to personal time with people. If we want each other to grow, we have to go be with them. We have to spend time with them.

Paul and Barnabas did not assume the church was growing; they were intentional about seeing how people were doing. That's an area we can all improve in. How are you doing? Can we ask one another good questions like, what are you doing for maintaining spiritual growth?

Who are you getting together with for mutual spiritual encouragement?

What are you reading right now in your Bible?

How can we pray for you? Can we pray with you?

Those are 'How are you doing' questions that we should be asking each other when we get together. And if someone is absent over a while do we call them and say 'Hey, everything okay? We miss you? What's up?'

The book of Hebrews shows us that the opposite of growth isn't disobedience; its drifting. Drifting is when you do nothing and you allow the current to take you where it wants you to go. Drifting results in disobedience. Listen to Heb. 2:1,

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away..

Drifting is easy. We stop reading our Bibles, we miss worshipping together, we stop being involved and we get used to it. It's easy to do; we're not really rebelling we're just not doing anything. And we drift. Listen to the what the author of Hebrews says in Ch. 5:11

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. ¹¹ *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. **6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.*

The writer had some deeper truths he wanted to share but because they had drifted away and weren't growing as they should he said, I have to review the basics for you. Which isn't terrible since we always need to review all truths but these folks should not have needed that.

So Paul and Barnabas wanted to revisit the churches they had started and help these disciples mature. And there were others involved too; Mark and Silas. Before we talk about their disagreement let's acknowledge that it takes everyone to help grow a church.

We All Have a Role and We're All Gifted **(15:37, 40)**

Paul never worked alone. He always partnered with others in God's work. He saw the value of team ministry, shared responsibilities. In Ch. 16 we'll see more people join him in the work. Paul believed that everyone had a role to play because everyone was gifted spiritually. God saves us and

equips us to help each other grow. Paul will struggle to take Mark along this time but before we're done we'll see that Mark and Paul reconcile later on.

1 Cor. 12 is a great chapter to remind us of our place in the work of God. Like a body, Paul says, every part is important and every part has a purpose. Not all the same roles but all necessary. Read Romans 16 where Paul greets all these believers he knew were helping out in ministry somehow and someway. We all have value and a role to play in the body of Christ.

But as we see here, because of our sin nature we sometimes disagree about people's roles or involvement. Barnabas wants to take Mark while Paul doesn't.

³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company

Back in Ch. 14 when Barnabas, Paul and Mark went to the island of Cyprus (where Barnabas was from) Mark left them when they went to the mainland in Asia Minor (Turkey) and returned to Jerusalem. Paul says he deserted us. He quit. I don't want to take him along. Yet Barnabas wanted to take Mark along, partly because Mark was Barnabas' cousin. They had a sharp disagreement. Who was right? Luke is very careful not to take sides. It's hard to say. But when we work together with fellow sin-natured Christians we're going to disagree at times on how things get done, not necessarily on why we do it. Both are in agreement on revisiting the churches; Paul doesn't know if they can count on Mark again. And so when we're working together

We Need Spiritual Wisdom When to Show Grace and When to Exercise Discernment (15:38-39)

Barnabas was known as the Son of Encouragement. This is his cousin. He's going to side with Mark. Barnabas is that 'let's give him a second chance' kind of guy. Paul knew the work was serious. Maybe Mark got sacred the first. Paul probably thought I don't have time to babysit Mark. Both would have had good arguments.

1 Peter 4:8 says, *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

But Paul also wrote about *choosing leaders in 1 Tim. 3:8-10*

⁸ Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

Paul held to a standard that said you shouldn't put untested people in leadership positions. He felt Mark failed and so it was wise not to involve him. Both good arguments. Who was right? Difficult to say. Barnabas takes Mark and gives him a second chance. Mark will grow from his early mistakes and be found to have grown tremendously. Look at these two passages later on in Paul's writings:

Col. 4:10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

So Paul saw the value in Mark later on. Under Barnabas' encouragement Mark matured and Paul acknowledged that. Even more so, near the end of his life, Paul said this of Mark.

2 Tim. 4: 9 Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

Whether Paul was a little too hard on Mark here is hard to say, but to his credit he was willing to forgive and partner with him again. Praise God for this testimony in Scripture. And yes, Barnabas and Mark would revisit the churches on Cyprus while Paul and Silas go to the churches in Galatia, somehow

God Sovereignly Overrides our Weaknesses When We Agree on the Mission (15:40-41)

God can override our stubbornness and disagreements at times to do more than we can imagine. Thankfully, Paul and Barnabas were committed to the ministry of encouraging believers and helping them mature in Christlikeness. That was not something they would disagree on. And God used their disagreement to reach more people and reconcile all of them over time. And who knows if it wasn't for Barnabas we may not have Mark's gospel with us in our Bible's.

The passage began with Paul and Barnabas wanting to go back and strengthen the believers and it ends with them doing just that, maybe in a way that wasn't planned but God used. We need to stay focused on the mission of making disciples. Making disciples begins with getting people saved but continues with helping people become more like Jesus. That's our responsibility for each other. You and I all have that role to play through the various gifts God has given us. We must be careful we don't let each other drift away. It can happen too easily. If the Spirit nudges you to call someone, to visit, to ask how they are doing, do it. If you need direction for spiritual growth, ask for it. Not sure where to read your Bibles or need help growing ask. If we are responsible for each others' Christlikeness, then let's use our times when we are together to see how we're doing. And to do what we can to make us more like Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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