

Serving God for a Lifetime:

The Mature Servant

Introduction:

1. A congregation is not only as strong as its weakest member. Analogy: A local church is not a *chain* but a *net*. Strength lies in the aggregate of mature members.
2. However, the 80/20 rule generally holds true: 80% of efforts is spent on 20% of the members. Supporting the weak and pacifying the complainers consumes much of a church's energy.
3. Character studies in the NT. If I could handpick a local church (but on the other hand, if we culled out the best, the "leaven," where would the rest be?) ...

1. Barnabas: Son of Encouragement

A. The value of a Barnabas to the kingdom:

1. Generosity – Ac 4:36-37. Was his land any less an investment than ours?
2. Mediation – Ac 9:26-27. A mediator can see both sides yet work toward common ground. This requires suppressing one's own opinions, desires.
3. Maturity – Ac 11:22-24. "*Full of the Holy Spirit and faith*" means that he saw things as God saw them; he was filled with the character of God. Thus he could overcome the prevailing prejudice against the Gentiles.
4. Flexibility – Ac 13:2, 13. Barnabas was from Cyprus, lived in Jerusalem, moved to Antioch, traveled with Paul, received praise and endured persecution. Too often we have narrow parameters in which we are willing to serve God.
5. Courage – Ac 15:2-3, 12. Barnabas was not afraid of controversy and stood for truth. But he did not become embittered; he continued to encourage with news of what was happening among the Gentiles.

B. For balance's sake, Barnabas was not above mistakes. He differed with Paul to the point of severing their working ties (Ac 15:36-39), and he succumbed to social pressure in hypocritically snubbing the Gentiles (Gal 2:13).

C. However, it takes little talent or intellect to be a complainer and critic. We **all** can see what is wrong; it is much harder to figure out solutions that are scriptural and beneficial *and then implement them and take responsibility for them*. General traits of murmurers: 1) contribute little, 2) make no converts, 3) children are lost.

2. Priscilla and Aquila: Active Workers

- A. Secularly employed – Ac 18:3. They had to financially support themselves, yet they did not let this dominate their lives and distract them from spiritual service.
- B. Served where they were – Rome/Corinth (Ac 18:2), Ephesus (18:19), Rome again (Rom 16:3). We do not know where life will take us, but our faith must be stronger than belonging to any one particular local church.
- C. Zealous for truth – Ac 18:24-26. They were not intimidated by an eloquent and intelligent man like Apollos; they took the time and interest to instruct him. *Consider their knowledge and persuasive skills to teach a man like Apollos!*
- D. Risked their lives for Paul/truth – Rom 16:4. Their reputation spread far and wide among Gentile churches who knew of their love and devotion. *Husbands, are you leading your family in such a direction? Wives, are you a sail or an anchor?*

3. A Stable of Teachers in Antioch

- A. The church in Antioch was well endowed with competent teachers (Ac 13:2).
- B. Timothy was to “commit these (truths) to faithful men who will be able to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). Yet we are more proficient in quoting Jas 3:1: “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”
- C. A good teacher ...
 - 1. Is not merely a “facilitator” of discussion. Too many classes are free-for-alls.
 - 2. Is a good student. He/she doesn’t merely study the lesson but learns twice as much so that he can frame the lesson in a broader setting.
 - 3. Gently corrects erroneous comments and guides to a clearer understanding.
 - 4. Says “I don’t know” when he doesn’t know.
 - 5. Is enthusiastic about learning and broadcasts that enthusiasm to others.
 - 6. Doesn’t “retire.” Too many ladies get to the height of wisdom and knowledge only to back off and “let the younger mothers teach the children.” True, we may lose some energy and mental sharpness, but we’ll lose it *faster* if we “retire.”
 - 7. Is harder to find than ever. The world has encroached to the point that many are too busy, too committed, too frazzled to teach. They want to rest, keep their options open, etc. ***Where are the Barnabas’, Priscilla and Aquilas, Apollos’, Timothys and Titus’ of our day?***