

Building People Or Empires?

"Barnabas wanted to take John...Mark with them."

Acts 15:37 (NIV)

Paul and Barnabas were discussing another great adventure as missionaries together. Paul had the notion of visiting the churches they had founded on their first missionary journey. Barnabas is excited and suggests they include John Mark who had started with them on the first journey but quit when the going got tough.

Paul had no time for a quitter such as John Mark who had left them in the lurch (Acts 13:13). He only wished for tough people who would be sure to endure. Barnabas, on the other hand, was the encourager who desired to give doubtful people another opportunity. After all it was Barnabas who got Paul into the Jerusalem Church when the leaders were doubtful of Paul (Acts 9:26-27).

Then it was Barnabas who, again, got Paul back into ministry when Paul was in the backwater of Tarsus, his home town (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas saw the trees while Paul saw the whole forest. We need both types in the church, leaders who have a great vision for the world and other leaders who see individuals with promise.

All Barnabas desired to do for John Mark was what he had twice done for Paul, first in Jeru-

salem, and then in Antioch. This was the ministry of Barnabas, to give another opportunity for an unpopular person to prove himself. Paul forgot how he had risen to a leadership role at the hand of Barnabas and insisted that John Mark was not coming with them.

A division occurred between these two great missionary spirits of the early church and they parted never to work together again. As far as we know they never crossed paths again either. The worst of it was they parted in anger. Paul left the man to whom he owed everything, and Barnabas left the greatest missionary spirit of the ages.

When Paul comes to the end of his life and is facing execution the man he calls for is John Mark (2 Timothy 4:11) and the man he must thank for making John Mark into the kind of person you desire to see when dying is his own benefactor Barnabas.

Possibly you have been misjudged in your church life or have been rejected like John Mark over a failure you had when young in the faith. Possibly you have even caused a division between two church leaders like Paul and Barnabas.

Take heart because this story in Scripture is for people who have fallen and need help getting up.

Look for a Barnabas near you. Seek out someone who wears their heart on their sleeve. Look for a person who has spoken encouraging words to you in the past. Draw alongside that person and ask for their guidance. Submit to their wise counsel recognizing you need help from a more mature person.

Whatever you do, do not give up. Do not think of yourself as a loser in life. You just might be a John Mark ready to be built up so that the very person who rejected you will come and ask for your help. The Lord delights in both empire builders and those who build people. There is a place for both in God's work.

Today I seek to encourage those who need to look for a people builder to get back on track. The Lord has someone there for you if you look around. Find your Barnabas and get going for the Lord.

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