

Four People Who Will Strengthen Your Church

Introduction. This morning we discussed the four types of people who will destroy your church: the heretic, the egotist, the complainer, and the matador. Though different in the way they attack the church, they are nonetheless unified in their goal of establishing self above others, and in turn, above God. This makes them, if for no other reason, dangerous to keep around completely unchecked.

Instead of looking at the ones who destroy a congregation, now we will look at some of the people that help to grow a congregation, whether physically or spiritually. Contrary to the destroyers, these are people who will lower themselves to the point of anonymity in order to better serve the church. With a few exceptions, they are hardly ever noticeable, serving in the shadows to keep everything running smoothly.

These are people you want around. These are also people you want to cultivate among your current members, many of whom are eager to help, but may not know how to best utilize their talents. These are the type of people that Paul spoke to 2,000 years ago, when he remarked to Timothy, “make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5).

I. The Encourager

- A. Barnabas had a great nickname: “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). The apostles chose the name after carefully observing his nature.
- B. Though a lot of points have been shared about Barnabas over the years, such as his longsuffering nature with John Mark, his cousin in the flesh (Colossians 4:10), who Paul wanted to separate himself from (Acts 15:36-41), or his trustworthiness in handling the contribution for the saints of Judea (Acts 11:27-30), but the one that gets often overlooked is his endorsement of Saul.
- C. Acts 9 details the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus. He is baptized by Ananias for the forgiveness of sins. After publicly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, Saul is then hunted down by the Jews and only saved because of the intervention of the disciples in Jerusalem who sent him to Tarsus (vv. 26-30).
- D. It was there that Saul stays for a while, and right before Acts 11 closes, we encounter Saul again, who is still in Tarsus, and is recruited by Barnabas to return with him to Antioch.
- E. Barnabas puts a lot on the line to ally himself with Saul; not only is his reputation at stake, but his life and the lives of countless other Christians too. How would the story of the early church have changed were it not for the actions of Barnabas? What if he had let his fear and worries prohibit him from doing what he strongly believed to be right?
- F. All Christians, at some point, are indebted to a Barnabas that went out of their way to teach us the gospel, and moreover, to a Barnabas that helped us along the path. Where would the church be without self-sacrificing Barnabas’s that put others before themselves? These types of people refresh our spirits (cp. Romans 15:32; 1 Corinthians 16:18; 2 Corinthians 7:13; 2 Timothy 1:16; Philemon 7).

II. The Worker

- A. While there are definitely people that will be able to move mountains with their words, the church also needs those who can move them by their deeds —

people who are simply in motion: motivated, diligent, and always on the lookout for something to do.

- B. After the Babylonian exile, there were a lot of tasks that needed to be completed before business could return to Jerusalem like normal. Homes needed to be rebuilt, the Temple had to be restored, and, last but not least, the wall surrounding the city needed to be restored.
- C. If Nehemiah had an army of stone workers and carpenters handy, the task of rebuilding the city walls would not have been such an undertaking. Unfortunately, all he had were exiles who simply “had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6).
- D. A cursory glance at Nehemiah 3 looks like a laundry list of builders, compiled of dozens of names, but a closer examination reveals some interesting facts.
 - 1. For one, the type of people that worked on the wall is not at all who would be expected. Instead of stone workers and carpenters, the people who performed the backbreaking labor were perfumers, goldsmiths (Nehemiah 3:8), and even priests (Nehemiah 3:1). No one was exempt from the work.
 - 2. Furthermore, a group known as the Tekoites are mentioned twice: once in Nehemiah 3:5 as making repairs near the Fish Gate (despite their nobles not supporting the work), and again in Nehemiah 3:27 on the great projecting tower and the wall of Ophel.
- E. All of these people went above and beyond the simple task of rebuilding the wall to look for ways that they could be of further service. Bible history shows that people knew how to band together and work: Israel against Gibeah (Judges 20:11), the exiles rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:8-10), and Gaius (3 John 5-8).
- F. A church full of people willing to put their experience and status to the side and perform double-duty without being asked is worth more than its weight in gold, as Nehemiah discovered.

III. The Adventurer

- A. For whatever reason, heretics get bored with the status quo, and, in search of greener pastures, begin to strike out on their own in a desperate attempt to find something new and exciting. They will usually find a field of false doctrine that has already been plowed before by someone else (Ecclesiastes 1:9).
- B. The adventurer is cut from a similar cloth, with the one huge difference being their established standard: the adventurer does not leave the Bible, for any reason (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). All of their activities and adventures stem from that singular root.
- C. They do, however, leave their area of comfort. Adventurers thrive in new environments, whether that means in a physically different place than they have been before, or in a new task that they had not previously embarked on, such as the office of a deacon or bishop, or in public worship service.
- D. Truthfully, almost every “hero/heroine of the faith” in scripture was an adventurer at some point in their life. Whether it was Abraham leaving Ur for Canaan, or Rahab leaving Jericho for Israel, or the apostles leaving their nets to follow the Messiah, being a child of God necessitates change in some form or another.
- E. The difference between workers and adventurers is the field in which they participate. Workers are always willing to lead singing, visit people, and teach

their friends, while adventurers are always thinking of new ways to reach the lost, new ways to connect with others, and a host of other scripturally-based activities.

- F. These are people who push us to support more men in foreign works and locally, go overseas, advertise more aggressively, update the building to show we care about guests, and talk to others via door knocking and other personal and mass-market methods (Acts 8:1-5; 13:1-3; 17:1-3; 18:4-6; 19:8-10).
- G. Where workers provide momentum, the adventurers provide the initial blast to get moving. Adventurers are powerful everywhere, but perhaps nowhere more so than in congregations that have reached a plateau in their growth, or have already started their decline. Adventurers breathe new life into a congregation, and kickstart them in a direction that will get the other members moving.

IV. The Example

- A. Not everyone is an able-bodied worker, adventurer, or encourager (at least on the surface), but everyone can, and should, be an example. Dorcas, a fantastic example to all, fits this mold perfectly.
- B. By all accounts, Dorcas should never have been immortalized in scripture. She didn't heal anyone, didn't teach anyone, and didn't really go anywhere (at least that we know of), but nevertheless, her example was evident to all in Acts 9. The only time we read about her is at her funeral, where the text says she was "full of good works and almsdeeds" (Acts 9:36).
- C. Dorcas may not have thought much of her deeds among the saints, but the zealotry of those she impacted gave credence to her status among people. Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."
- D. We struggle with knowing what to do and what to say, but encouragement is not constrained by words and actions. Sometimes, it is as simple as showing up early for services despite the fact that your body has been ravaged by chemo. Or reading the Bible at your desk during lunch. Or sending a card or text because you care. We need people to lead the way in righteousness (2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:3).
- E. We exalt larger shows of humanity because we think that what impresses us also impresses God. David was revered because of his heart, not his stature. The widow's mites were glorified because of their cost to her, not because of their street value. And the examples that you can set for others will be judged based on the dedication of your soul, not by the amount of applause you receive.
- F. The most beautiful part of examples in local congregations is that the one performing them may never realize the impact they make on others. And it will not matter whether or not anyone, including yourself, remembers it. All that matters is that your character and the habits you developed in times of trial and success, have helped another person endure their own trials and successes.

Conclusion. The church has enough enemies in the world without being its own worst one. Be someone who can contribute to the spirituality of the group, and then actually do it. God rewards the people who can and who will.

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