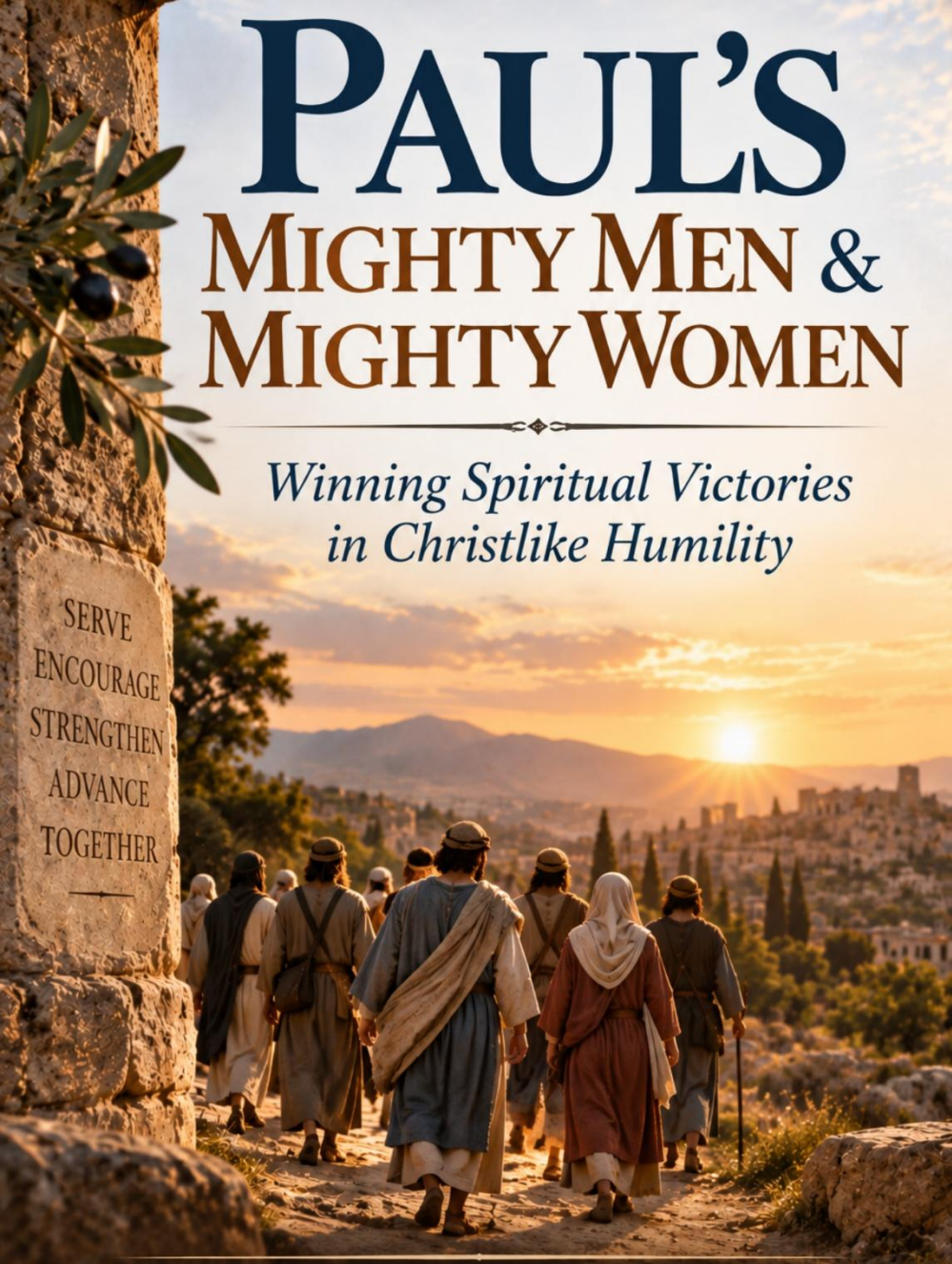
PAUL'S MIGHTY MEN & MIGHTY WOMEN

Winning Spiritual Victories in Christlike Humility



FRED FARROKH

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Winning Spiritual Victories in Christlike Humility

Fred Farrokh

AGWW INT'L MINISTRIES | GLOBAL INITIATIVE REACHING MUSLIM PEOPLES

Paul's Mighty Men and Mighty Women: Winning Spiritual Victories in Christlike Humility

by Fred Farrokh

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Dedication

To notice the unnoticed,
To celebrate the quiet,
To praise the ones in every place
Who seemed to cause a riot.

To women who blazed trails,
To men who dreamed God's dreams,
To each who through humility
Brought power to their teams.

To those, who from Islam,
To Christ their hearts have turned
To those through Holy Scripture
Its lessons they have learned.

To us the journey beckons
To Jesus Christ, the Way
Walking with our Savior
Until that brighter day.

Foreword

Of those who write books on the critical subject of discipleship and character development in the lives of Muslim Background Believers, none stands out more than Dr. Fred Farrokh. His observations and applications are not theoretical; they come from a cauldron of experience. As a convert from Islam himself, Dr. Farrokh's background and life experiences place him in a unique position to speak to these issues.

For many years I have known Dr. Farrokh as a man who practices what he preaches—and he does it with great integrity. In both national and international venues where he frequently ministers, a common refrain is: "This man knows what he is talking about. When can we get him to come back?" His superb leadership and implementation of God-given vision in various ministry contexts have resulted in untold numbers of new believers from Muslim backgrounds who have chosen to follow Christ as Savior and Lord.

One of Dr. Farrokh's greatest contributions is in the area of discipleship for Muslims who have chosen to leave Islam and follow Jesus. It goes without saying that conversion is the first and most important step, but it does not stop there. Long ago, Dr. Farrokh recognized the critical need for biblically addressing the topic of discipleship and follow-up. The volume you are about to read is but the latest of his many valuable contributions to this important genre.

In this latest book, *Paul's Mighty Men and Mighty Women: Winning Spiritual Victories in Christlike Humility*, Dr. Farrokh has produced a superb guide for discipling Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) who need to allow the important formation of humility in their lives. A unique insight by Dr. Farrokh is that MBBs sometimes bring with them "vestiges" of their previous

lives as Muslims. These transferred vestiges often hinder the process of discipleship in the life of a new convert from Islam. One negative vestige is the enculturated tendency to sometimes be unnecessarily arrogant and less than honest in matters of character formation and relationship-building. The obvious result can be a lack of humility in personal relationships and a lack of the qualities needed for those called to leadership. The book you are holding serves as a counter or corrective for MBBs who would long for a biblical solution to this particular character flaw.

To undergird his thesis, the author has chosen to focus on the Apostle Paul's ministry partners as examples of the importance of possessing the character trait of humility—especially in carrying out the duties of team-ministry, church planting, etc. Each ministry partners' life contains nuggets of truth about the formation of humility in their lives. The author carefully highlights how each of the Apostle Paul's partners exhibited a willingness to be humble—which, in one way or the other, contributed to successful ministry partnerships with the great man of God.

While this book is primarily focused on MBBs, it would be a worthwhile read for any follower of Christ who desires to look into the mirror of God's Word and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the importance of humility in the area of character development.

In reading this book, you will be struck with the vision and passion of a man who has dedicated his life to sharing the gospel with resistant people groups, primarily Muslims. I believe the Holy Spirit will speak through these pages and stir you to be a part of the great end-time labor force to take the gospel to the most resistant peoples of the earth.

Dr. Jim Bennett
Director of Ministries
Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples

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INTRODUCTION

We Are Not All Paul

This book has been written at a time in history in which many Muslims are coming into the Kingdom of Christ. Our focus is Christlike humility. I believe it is one of the foremost character qualities which Muslim-background believers (MBBs) and those ministering to them should prioritize in discipleship.

The Human Problem of Pride

People have struggled with the problem of pride since the Garden of Eden. Satan enticed Eve to eat a fruit that would make her become like God. Tragically, she and her husband, Adam, took Satan's bait. This brought ruin upon themselves and their children, right down to our generation. Millenia after they ate the forbidden fruit, the Apostle John warned believers about the worldly nature of the "boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

Islam is a religion that has no answer to the human problem of pride. Like many religions, Islam teaches salvation by works, which inevitably results in self-righteousness. The same results can be observed in any legalistic system. Those of us who have come to Christ from this religious background should be aware of the tendency of works-based systems to produce the boastful pride of life.

Jesus frequently confronted the Pharisees for their spiritual superiority complex. According to their self-evaluation, they were

successfully observing the Torah. But what began as a Jewish holiness movement devolved into something that drifted far away from God. The Pharisees' self-righteousness not only resulted in hypocrisy but also in the blinding of their eyes to the long-awaited Messiah living in their midst.

The Lord Jesus Christ dealt with the problem of pride and every other sin plaguing human beings on the Cross. He humbled himself, appearing to all as a disdained and forsaken criminal, as He shed the blood that would purchase forgiveness of sins. Those who believe in this Second Adam receive not only remission of sins, but liberation from the fallen nature, which has bound human beings since Eden. Praise the Lord that Jesus not only died but rose again! His victory over sin and death won salvation and provides hope for real character transformation for those who believe in the Lord Jesus.

The Bible tells us that Christ is the example and source of godly humility:

> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; [4] do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. [5]Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, [6]who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7]but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. [8]And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. (Phil. 2:3-8)

The link between Christ and humility stands in stark contrast to the boastful pride of life. Since God emptied himself, people should not be too "full of themselves."

We're Not All Paul

The person who wrote this passage to the Philippians was one of Jesus' early followers, the Apostle Paul. Though scorned and persecuted in his life, Paul shines through history as a beloved disciple of Christ and a theologian who penned thirteen canonical epistles in the New Testament. His missionary career, narrated partially by Luke in Acts of the Apostles, remains exemplar for Christian missionaries today.

While most missionaries dedicate their first few years on the field to learning language and culture, Paul had no need to do this. He moved straight to planting churches and working miracles right from the start. While in Paphos, Cyprus, on his first missionary journey, he even called upon God to strike a man blind who was opposing the gospel!

Not too many new missionaries would risk such an encounter backfiring. Soon, the realization dawns on us: *We're not all Paul.*

Underneath the "ministry headlines," Christians often overlook that Paul ministered in team settings. He was not a one-man show. Neither was he bossy. He did not epitomize the shallow celebrity Christianity we often observe in modern times. Yet, when situations demanded a stern response or a confrontation, Paul demonstrated the leadership required by those situations.

Notably, Paul did not plant "Pauline" churches. Throughout his life, he remained committed to glorifying Christ alone, as well as to the spiritual development of many missionary associates. Several dozen of such men and women are named in the New Testament, though some worked more closely to Paul than others. Countless other unnamed Christians would have served in those localized church settings or as part of the traveling missionary teams.

We remember *what* Paul and his missionary associates did. They preached the gospel, worked amazing miracles, won disciples of Christ, and planted many churches. This study focuses on *how* they did it. What character qualities enabled these missionary teams to function with remarkable unity, flexibility, and strength? The answers provide profound teachable moments for MBBs today.

Paul's Mighty Men and Mighty Women

The title of this book adapts the descriptor of "David's Mighty Men." These thirty warriors brought David to the throne and served him throughout his royal reign. They were tireless, faithful, and courageous.

Paul's mighty men and women demonstrated their strength not with the sword but in making the gospel known. They were not only mighty men, but mighty women, too. In the case of young Timothy, we could also extend our application in this book to mighty youth as well.

Many of Paul's associates went on to serve as prominent pastors and bishops after the period covered by Acts and Paul's epistles. They would prove they could lead as well as they could follow. Historical references, as well as bona fide church traditions, tell their stories. However, this study will focus on material provided in the New Testament.

Christlike Humility: The Key to Successful Teams

Each of the following chapters is devoted to one of Paul's co-workers. *The Scriptures provide clear statements of how their love for Jesus overflowed in Christlike humility.* Such character qualities empowered them to serve together joyously and fruitfully.

Not all Christians mentioned in the New Testament exhibited this Christlike humility. For instance, the Apostle John states: "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, *who loves to be first among them,* does not accept what we say" (3 John 9, emphasis added). Diotrephes demonstrated the carnal nature. It is not surprising that one who always wanted to be pre-eminent would likewise be unteachable.

For MBBs, our goal is to be like Christ rather than Diotrephes. We want to be humble and teachable rather than arrogant, clutching to power and craving honor. Such a mindset is countercultural. It stands in stark contrast to the glory grabbing commonly observed in honor-shame societies. Such a Christlike spirit will have a catalytic effect upon the Christian revival now sweeping the Muslim world.

How to Use This Book

This book has been written to be used by individuals and by groups. Though written by a Muslim-background Believer to other MBBs, any reader may find this material edifying. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter promote reflection or conversation. Each of Paul's mighty men and women contribute something that we can learn from 2,000 years later. Let us dig into the Bible study now.

CHAPTER 1

Barnabas

Encouraging the Success of Others

> *Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), [37] and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.* (Acts 4:36-37)

No person did more to encourage the success of the Apostle Paul than did Barnabas. Without Barnabas, Paul's appearance in the New Testament may have been quite brief, like that of Stephen. Through Barnabas, things would take a different turn.

Joseph of Cyprus was well connected to a leading family of the Early Church. His cousin, John Mark, was the son of Mary at whose home believers met to intercede for Peter when he had been incarcerated by Herod. When an angel miraculously freed Peter from prison, he immediately went to Mary's house (Acts 12:12). Also, Barnabas was from the priestly tribe, the Levites.

Nonetheless, Barnabas' value to the early Jesus movement was not simply through "connections." Barnabas joined this movement when he was still known by his birth name Joseph. The early

believers exhibited tremendous sharing. Barnabas exemplified this other-centered *agape* love in sacrificially contributing the proceeds of a property sale to the church. As Acts 4:36-37 notes, the believers nicknamed him "Bar-nabas," meaning the "Son of Encouragement" or "Son of Consolation." The nickname stuck. It was not merely the sacrificial giving, but the spirit with which he gave that encouraged the others.

Barnabas was also a risk-taker. Two believers took tremendous personal risk to bring Saul of Tarsus safely into the Jesus movement after his Damascus Road conversion experience. First, Ananias of Damascus moved forward in faith, though also in fear and trepidation, as Saul sat visionless in Damascus. Saul had neither eaten nor drank for three days. The first word the future apostle would ever hear from the lips of a Christian was "Brother" as Ananias reassured him: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Ananias then slips out of the New Testament just as Saul slipped out of the grasp of those in Damascus who sought to kill him.

After Saul arrived in Jerusalem, the church leaders were understandably afraid to associate with him. They worried he might have feigned conversion to get access to more believers and continue his savage persecution. "But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27).

In the case of Ananias, Luke records how God spoke to him in a vision to help Saul. In the case of Barnabas, no such divine intervention is recorded. Both situations required tremendous courage. The results could have had life and death implications. Furthermore, had Saul turned out to be an imposter, Barnabas' reputation would have likely been ruined.

Many Muslim-background believers have encountered distrust and suspicion from more-established non-MBBs. Deception comes more easily to sinful humans than does sincerity, so wariness about new believers is understandable, especially if they come from a markedly different background. Couple that with the Islamic proclivity to dishonesty, it is no surprise that some MBBs have gone through painful rejection. Others have been kept "in the waiting room" for a long time to test their sincerity. They hope someone like Barnabas will emerge to vouch for them. In our days, more men and women are stepping forward to play the role of Barnabas to encourage MBBs.

Returning to Acts, Barnabas is called into duty when a mixed Jewish-Gentile church is established by unnamed evangelists in Antioch. The Jerusalem church wisely sent the Son of Encouragement to strengthen the work. The establishment of the first missions-sending New Testament church, in Antioch, warrants a reading of that entire passage:

> The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. [23] Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; [24] for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. [25] And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; [26] and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:22-26)

Several aspects of Barnabas' character become notable in Antioch. When he arrived, he did not ask for the church to "set up meetings" for him to appear as special guest speaker. Instead, "he arrived and witnessed the grace of God." He humbly observed what

God was already doing through the believers, and "he rejoiced." Then "he began to encourage them." The Holy Spirit writes that Barnabas was a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith." Let that be written on a believer's tombstone—that he was a good man—and that will be enough.

Barnabas recalled that his old friend Saul had a calling from God to minister to the Gentiles. Possibly seven to eleven years or more had elapsed since they had seen each other—a variety of interpretations exist regarding this timeline. Barnabas could have selfishly thought, as we are often tempted to do, "I can handle this myself," or "The apostles sent *me* here not Saul," or even, "This is *my* ministry now." Instead, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul to bring him into the ministry which he knew the Lord had prepared for his friend. Barnabas encouraged the success of another in a way that is instructive to all of us.

As the narrative progresses, Barnabas demonstrates the willingness to transition to the role of supporting Paul's lead role. Initially, as the Antioch church leadership is listed in Acts 13, Barnabas' name appears first and Saul's last:

> Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (Acts 13:1)

Barnabas' name is listed first as the first missionary team is sent forth: "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). During this vital mission to Cyprus and Galatia, the order of importance begins to shift, with Saul taking a new name Paul as well as the leading role in the ministry. Barnabas transitions into the supporting role in an

exemplary fashion, such that many converts are won and churches planted to the glory of Jesus. Barnabas must have rejoiced to see Paul succeeding in his ministry. He had taken great risk to put Paul in a position to succeed, both in Jerusalem and in Antioch.

Believers today, including MBBs, have much to apply from Barnabas' example. He did not grasp the glory, the credit, or the leadership to himself. He was not threatened by the success of others. In this case, he caused Paul's star to rise while seemingly his own began to wane. How welcome that spirit is today in our world of self-absorption! I can imagine that if he were alive today, Barnabas would have rarely if ever used the "selfie" setting on his phone camera.

The chapter concludes with the contentious parting of ways between Paul and Barnabas before the second missionary journey. The dividing issue was whether to include John Mark on this missionary team, since he had deserted them midway on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). Barnabas wanted his cousin, Mark, to come with them, but Paul insisted otherwise. So, they split ways, forming two teams.

How can Christians interpret this split? Was it simply two strong-willed leaders butting heads and parting ways? Did Barnabas succumb to nepotism since John Mark was his cousin? Or perhaps did Barnabas resent Paul stealing his limelight?

Barnabas' central motivation *to encourage the success of others* helps unlock this puzzle. Barnabas sought to encourage John Mark with a second chance. Paul was not in agreement. Yet, Barnabas was ultimately successful in encouraging Mark. His cousin would later be reconciled with Paul, plant the church in Egypt, and write the second Gospel. Once again, Barnabas would be eclipsed by someone else he had encouraged to succeed.

Muslim-background believers are typically raised in honor-shame cultures that tend to induce glory-seeking. People aspire to become great men. Yet, nowadays, we see many who were advertised to be "great" men were not actually even good men. They harbored secret sins. Hypocritically, they posed to be great when they lacked integrity. Let us be content, as Barnabas was, to be good (Acts 11:24). What people see is what they should get. Authenticity and sincerity flow from the life of Jesus into the life of His believers. In the same way that Barnabas encouraged Paul, and God encourages us, let us aspire to encourage others!

Discussion Questions

1. To what extent do people typically seek their own success in ministry as compared with encouraging the success of others?

2. What advice would you give to someone trying to determine if a new convert is sincere or an imposter?

3. What would you want written on your tombstone?

CHAPTER 2

John Mark

Failure Is Not Forever

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John [Mark] left them and returned to Jerusalem. (Acts 13:13)

Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. (2 Tim. 4:11)

Islam declares that Allah protects prophets from committing significant sins. However, this doctrine makes it difficult for regular people to learn from those prophets. The Bible, on the other hand, paints a realistic picture of prophets. They are sinners who committed sins. They all needed a Savior. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came from heaven to earth to rescue all people from sin.

The New Testament paints pictures of people who struggled and others who outright failed. Judas Iscariot represents the most glaring failure. He betrayed the Master with whom he walked for three years. One of Paul's co-workers failed him: "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10).

Other heroes of the Bible struggled. Peter was impetuous, often speaking without thinking. On one occasion he was even tempted by Satan to state that Jesus would not die:

> "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; [32] but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." [33] But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" [34] And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:31-34)

By grace, God helped Peter to continue serving Him even after these failures.

Our spotlight now turns to the intriguing character named John Mark. History knows him as Mark, though Luke calls him "John" during Paul's first missionary journey. For simplicity, I will call him Mark for the rest of this chapter.

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. He joined the first missionary trip with Paul and his relative Barnabas. As stated earlier, this family was well-connected to the early Christian movement, and especially to the Apostle Peter.

Sometimes we wonder if people get ministry appointments because of connections or because of merit. The question arises here, since Mark deserted the first missionary team after they finished their tour of Cyprus and landed upon the Galatian shores of Asia Minor: "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13).

Paul also later recounted to the Galatians his physical trials on that first missionary journey:

> You know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; [14] and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. (Gal. 4:13-14)

Thus, while Paul was dealing with the desertion of Mark, he was facing his own illness in quick succession. The Galatians buoyed him up on this trip, but Mark was nowhere to be found.

As Paul and Barnabas planned their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. Paul was indignant in rejecting this proposal:

> After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." [37] Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. [38] But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. [39] And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. [40] But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. [41] And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36-41)

If I were Mark, I would have felt terrible about separating these two great missionary leaders. Talk about wanting to hide under a rock! For comparison, Paul insisted Mark not accompany the second missionary journey, while he very much wanted Timothy to join that team (Acts 16:3).

Despite this notable failure, Mark continued his ministry with Barnabas in Cyprus. Rev. Bernard Evans is a dear pastor who has

imparted much to younger people in ministry. Once, during a difficult season of my life, Pastor Evans told me, "If things are going hard, just try to keep putting one foot in front of the other." Mark kept putting one foot in front of the other, too. Though he primarily served with Barnabas and Peter, Mark wisely did not close the door to his relationship with Paul.

We later note that Paul commends Mark right near the end of his life. He did not hold a grudge. Paul instructs Timothy: "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for *he is useful to me for service*" (2 Tim. 4:11). Instead of being mired in failure, Mark is described as useful in the ministry.

Mark's notable contributions to Christianity come later. First, he wrote the Gospel of Mark, based on firsthand material recounted to him by Peter. Irenaeus describes this in *Against Heresies*:

> Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia. (*Against Heresies*, 3.1.1.)

The life of the Lord Jesus was so dear to Mark, that he devoted himself to making His life known to all through his Gospel account.

Second, Mark went on to plant the church in Egypt. For 2,000 years, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt has hailed Mark as its founder and patron saint. He was martyred in Egypt in AD 68—about the same time Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome.

As such, Mark made a very big impact on early Christianity. This seems remarkable for a person who failed miserably in one of

his first ministry assignments. Nevertheless, God's grace allowed Mark to persevere.

Believers today can draw strength from the example of John Mark who came to realize that the big picture was not about his own reputation but Jesus' glory. Mark's testimony echoes across history as someone who continued walking with the Lord, even after failure. He did not throw away his relationships but would later be reconciled to Paul and considered another key co-laborer.

In many Muslim contexts, failure results in a cloud of shame overshadowing the person who failed, and even that person's extended family. Second chances may be hard to come by. Since we all fail at times, we all can learn from Mark's example to persevere. Those ministering to MBBs may need to learn how to shepherd newer believers through flops and failures.

In the end, Mark did not quit the ministry in rage or self-pity. The grace of the Jesus Christ enabled Mark to continue serving the Lord.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some possible reasons that Mark deserted the first missionary journey?

2. How would you have felt if you were Mark, knowing Barnabas and Paul were arguing about you?

3. What can we apply to our lives from Mark's example of continuing to serve Jesus even after failure?

CHAPTER 3

Silas

Suffering Together

The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. [23] When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; [24] and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

[25] But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; [26] and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. [27] When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" (Acts 16:22-28)

Silas was an Early Church leader and prophet serving in Jerusalem. After the Jerusalem Council, the other leaders

appointed Silas and Judas Barsabbas to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. There they delivered the decisions reached by the Jerusalem Council. At that time, Silas encouraged the Antioch church with a lengthy message (Acts 15:32).

Peter also commends Silas in his first epistle, using his long form name Silvanus*:* "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (1 Peter 5:12)! It is likely they were well-acquainted with each other from serving together in the Jerusalem church. Luke's inclusive language in Acts 16:37 indicates Silas was also a Roman citizen, rounding out his biographic sketch.

Silas' major role in the New Testament emerges during Paul's second missionary journey. Paul suffered much throughout his missionary career, so it is not surprising his co-workers would also share in that suffering. Indeed, God showed Ananias of Damascus that suffering was part of Paul's calling: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; [16] for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

The Lord Jesus Christ was the Suffering Servant. The body of Christ, which embodies the spirit of Christ, still suffers today. Jesus informed Paul, then called Saul, that in persecuting the church he was actually persecuting Jesus (Acts 9:4-5). In Paul's case, the hunter would become the hunted. Later, Paul would describe this "fellowship of His sufferings" as central to the Christian life (Phil. 3:10). Since the same verse couples suffering with the power of Christ's resurrection, Christians can be confident of victory, even if through pain.

Returning to the second missionary journey, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, began to minister in the prominent

Macedonian city of Philippi. After enduring continual harassment from an evil spirit which possessed a fortune-teller, Paul finally cast the spirit out of its young host. This triggered an economic crisis for the girl's owners, who brought the hammer of persecution down upon the apostles.

All over the world people are looking for win-win relationships. People rarely seek out relationships which result in shared suffering. Silas found himself in just such a relationship. He joined Paul in prison chains after they had been beaten with many blows. Roman prisons featured hand cuffs and ankle cuffs that cut into a prisoner's skin, causing both pain and inevitable infection.

In this context, at midnight, Luke narrates that Paul and Silas were singing praises to God. The other prisoners listened intently to this fascinating concert of praise. God immediately intervened with an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. Everyone's chains miraculously fell off, at which time Paul immediately began pastoral ministry among the prisoners and the jailer.

Silas' accompaniment of Paul reinforces the blessings of suffering together. Paul drew strength from his colleague. Together, they were able to move past pain into worship. That worship became a witness to the lost—something difficult even to think about while suffering.

Suffering does not always end in such a heartwarming fashion. John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod and later beheaded. No doubt he was starved and tortured in that Roman prison. John's faith was tested: "Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples [3] and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" (Matt. 11:2-3). Jesus nevertheless commends John as the greatest in the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:11). The lesson here is that God does not mind doubt during suffering, as long as we address our doubts to Him with humility.

Another response to suffering is to seek to avoid it altogether. Peter collapsed when the walls began to close in around him during Jesus' arrest and trial. He could not even muster a witness unto Christ, denying before servant girls that he even knew his Lord (Matt. 26:69-75).

While it is easy to criticize Peter, we see the same tendency in our own hearts. The normal human reaction is to take the easy way out. Indeed, Peter left Jesus alone at His most vulnerable hour. At that point, Peter was not ready to suffer together with his Lord. Later, he would be strengthened. Eventually, Peter would be crucified upside down as a witness for Christ.

Paul would have had a much more difficult and lonely time in that Philippian prison had Silas deserted him at that critical hour. Yet Silas stood firm and worshipped freely. By standing with Paul, he demonstrated both faithfulness to Christ, as well as the other-centered humility which is the subject of this booklet.

Sadly, the body of Christ is marked by many divisions today. Christians are often more willing to criticize their brethren than to suffer with them. The example of Silas encourages us to stand together and suffer together as the global persecution of Christians becomes even more pervasive.

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). When storms or plagues come, all branches suffer together. As the life of Jesus flows into the branches, Christians are empowered to withstand suffering, together. Silas provides a mighty example to MBBs today.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel suffering more often draws believers together or drives them apart? Why?

2. What aspect of Silas' life and ministry encourages you the most?

3. Are there any suffering believers you know of whom you could encourage at this time?

CHAPTER 4

Timothy

Not Arrogant

> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope, [2] To Timothy, my true child in the faith…* (1 Tim. 1:1-2)

Of all his mighty men and mighty women, Paul indicates that Timothy was perhaps the dearest to him of them all. Paul specifically recruited Timothy to come on the second missionary journey. He uses superlatives as well as endearing terms to describe him: "my true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2) and "I have no one else of kindred spirit" (Phil. 2:20).

Timothy's name appears in ten New Testament books, more than any other of Paul's associates considered in this book. These references paint a vivid picture of Timothy's personality and character. The full scriptural narrative indicates that Timothy struggled with fear and insecurity. Even in writing his final letter, 2 Timothy, Paul tells his beloved disciple: "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Timothy entered full-time ministry from a mixed Jewish-Gentile family background. Perhaps this "in-betweenness" created the insecurity, yet a fuller explanation is not given. We also know

Timothy was young, and Paul insisted that he not allow the Ephesians to look down on his youthfulness (1 Tim. 4:12).

Paul often sent his co-workers on special assignments. As will be detailed later, he commissioned Timothy to enter the ministry jungle of Corinth, with these instructions: "Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am" (1 Cor. 16:10).

Despite his insecurities, Timothy's love for Jesus overflowed in several exemplary ways, especially humility. Specifically, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth since his humble Christlike character stood in contrast to their arrogance. Paul uses the term *physio'o,* (arrogant, puffed up, conceited) solely in the Corinthian letters. Here is one example, with that term in italics:

> Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. [17] For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. [18] Now some have become *arrogant*, as though I were not coming to you. (1 Cor. 4:16-18, emphasis added)

Of all the New Testament churches, Corinth appears to have had the most problems. These included divisions, incest, lawsuits, misuse of spiritual gifts, eating food offered to idols, and chaos surrounding the Lord's Supper. For these reasons, they should have been the least likely church to have had a problem with arrogance. Yet, they struggled with this problem as well.

To properly understand Timothy's mission of modeling Christlike humility to the Corinthians, we must examine several passages in 1 Corinthians which highlight their arrogance:

> It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even

> among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. [2] You have become *arrogant* and have not mourned instead so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

In this tragic episode, the arrogance of the church members prevented them from grieving appropriately, repenting, and implementing proper church discipline.

Regarding the problems associated with eating foods offered to idols, Paul probes again into a root issue of arrogance: "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes *arrogant*, but love edifies" (1 Cor. 8:1). Paul later continues this comparison with the "Love passage" of 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is *not arrogant*" (1 Cor. 13:4).

Paul specifically sent Timothy into the spiritual mess that was the Corinthian church to model humility in contradistinction to the prevailing spirit of arrogance. Timothy was a sincere, younger leader who was mentored by Paul himself. His mixed ethnic background—Jewish and Gentile—may have spawned within him greater empathy. His relationship with Jesus certainly overflowed in beautiful humility.

Neither Paul's epistles nor Timothy's mission would solve the pervasive problem of divisions in the Corinthian church. Bishop Clement of Rome addressed similar issues about forty years later when he wrote his *First Epistle of Clement* to the Corinthians in AD 96. On this occasion, younger leaders of the Corinthian church deposed the older leaders. Clement wrote to rebuke this overthrow.

Sometimes believers may be tempted to take on a "savior complex," a type of empathy gone wrong. Christians have the power neither to save the souls of others nor to make decisions for them. We ought not consider Paul and Timothy failures because of the problems plaguing Corinth. In fact, their problems, contrasted

with the Christlike humility and freedom from arrogance exhibited by leaders like Timothy, provide a lesson for the Church in perpetuity.

Timothy learned the lesson of humility as a younger leader. Later, he would age into an older leader. Timothy eventually became the pastor and overseer (bishop) at Ephesus, which served as an important regional hub of ministry in Asia Minor.

For those of us coming to Christ from a Muslim background, we deal with an additional challenge. Islam, like any works-based system, tends to produce pride and arrogance. Jesus frequently rebuked the Pharisees for their self-righteous arrogance. Such a spirit is antithetical to the spirit of Jesus. As we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, He will replace arrogance with the other-centered, *agape*-driven spirit of Jesus.

The New Testament gives us pictures of how ministry should be done and how it should not be done. Even in Ephesus, Timothy's future ministry home, Paul warned of upcoming challenges in his farewell message to the church's elders: "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and *from among your own selves* men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The sobering message is that these wolves would rise from within the church; they were lurking already. Furthermore, they would draw away disciples unto themselves.

In his Acts 5 advice to the Sanhedrin, wise old Gamaliel portrays two similar types of arrogant would-be leaders:

> For some time ago Theudas rose up, *claiming to be somebody*, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. [37] After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and *drew*

away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

Regarding Theudas, Gamaliel notes that he was "claiming to be somebody." In our days of self-promotion, this rebuke rings ever true. Judas of Galilee, like the wolves of Ephesus, purposed in his heart to draw away people after him.

The New Testament model was for the disciples to lead people to Jesus. They refused to draw people away to follow them in cult-like fashion. They were not arrogant, such that Christocentric identity flourished in the early Christian movement. May it also be so among MBBs in our generation.

Discussion Questions

1. According to your experiences and observations, what root problems contribute to divisions in the church?

2. Is the word "humility" or the word "love" a more accurate antonym (opposite) to arrogance? Why?

3. Why are arrogant people often hard to teach or correct?

CHAPTER 5

Lydia

Courageous Trailblazer

> *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. 14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us*. (Acts 16:13-15)

When the Holy Spirit directed Paul, Silas, Timothy and their team away from Asia Minor via the Macedonian Vision in Acts 16, readers may feel great suspense of what will happen next. The answer came in the person of Lydia—the first convert to Christ in Europe.

The Acts 16 narrative above describes how the apostolic team went down to the river to pray. They met some women there, including Lydia, a seller of purple fabrics. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe in Jesus. She believed and was baptized.

For 2,000 years, the gospel has penetrated hard soil. In any context, it is difficult to be among the first believers. There in Philippi, Lydia became the first believer on the European continent. Her household members later believed and were baptized also.

Nevertheless, Philippi was a high-persecution context. It did not take long for Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods and then thrown into jail for their ministry. Only a miraculous earthquake sent by God ensured their escape from bondage. After their release, the apostolic team went directly to the home of Lydia before departing from Philippi. This event indicates the important role Lydia played in the overall history of gospel implantation in Macedonia.

Muslim-background believers can relate to the difficulty of being the first believer. A Saudi friend and colleague named Nasser from the Wasla Media Project shared how his family begged him not to publicly reveal his conversion. Yet, his faithfulness to Christ would not allow him to keep silent. Though his whole family suffered consequences—even though they were Muslims who did not believe in the Lord Jesus—Nasser states that if he had kept silent, perhaps his sister would not have later come to faith in Jesus. He asked, "How could I actually be loyal to my family by keeping secret about the best news they could ever hear?" That Good News is the gospel.

Lydia was both a pioneer and a trailblazer. Though these words are nearly synonymous, their coupling provides emphasis. Lydia could not have known the massive impact the gospel would have in Macedonia and Greece, and later by extension into all of Europe. Someone had to be the first convert, and that was Lydia.

When the gospel enters a new area, it threatens the evil spirits and principalities which have long been entrenched there. A similar

situation happened in Ephesus when the gospel entered and dethroned the pagan goddess Artemis. Evil spirits provoked unbelievers to persecute the preachers, so a riot ensued. This followed the pattern of Philippi, in which the handlers of a demon-possessed, fortune-telling slave girl could not stand to see their profits vanish. They were not happy that their slave found deliverance. The gospel never enters an area without a spiritual confrontation. Persecution will invariably follow.

Interestingly, Lydia's livelihood involved purple fabrics. The Lord Jesus wore a purple robe to Calvary: "Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. [2] And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a *purple robe* on Him" (John 19:1-2). Purple or crimson is the color of the persecuted Savior. No Christian will ever wear a vestment more honorable than that blood-stained purple robe that Jesus wore on the day of His crucifixion.

Some Muslims are called to be pioneer trailblazers by leaving behind Islam to follow Jesus. They cannot control whether family or friends will also follow Him. Neither can they control how the community will react. For 1,400 years, the rejection has been one of persecution, since Muhammad commanded, "If someone discards his religion, kill him." This command came from a demonic spirit. Yet, as Jesus staggered to Calvary on the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Pain, so MBBs must don the purple robe of suffering in many cases. By blazing this trail, like Lydia did long ago, they testify of their love for Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your main takeaway from the example of Lydia?

2. If a secretive Muslim convert to Christ asked your advice about making their conversion public, how would you advise him or her?

3. Can Christians avoid persecution? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 6

Priscilla

A Good Teacher

> *He [Apollos] began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.* (Acts 11:26)

Priscilla was a woman of God who is named six times in the New Testament. In each reference, her name appears with that of her husband, Aquila. Luke calls her Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26), whereas Paul utilizes a short form of her name, Prisca (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).

The six Bible references give us a clear picture of the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila. First, they served the Lord together as their names are always mentioned together. Second, in four of the references (twice each by Luke and Paul), Priscilla's name is mentioned *before* that of her husband. Third, the couple were Jews who had to flee Rome at the time Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). Fourth, they were tentmakers by trade (Acts 18:3).

Fifth, they traveled with Paul (Acts 18:18). In fact, the timeline of Acts 18 indicates they were with Paul as he commenced his ministry in Corinth, working alongside him as tentmakers. They were also with him when he left to return to Antioch (Acts 18:18).

In between those time markers, Paul remained in Corinth to teach there for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Luke does not mention Priscilla and Aquila leaving Corinth during that time, so they were likely there during this season of teaching ministry. Paul, therefore, would have come to know them quite well and vice versa.

Sixth, Paul reports that a church met in their house (1 Cor. 16:19). This indicates a strong likelihood that they were providing spiritual leadership to that body of believers. In each of these areas, Priscilla's name is mentioned as having a direct hand in the ministry or work. If she had not been in public ministry, her name probably would not have been featured so prominently.

Seventh, and most pertinent to the theme of this chapter, Priscilla, along with her husband, fulfilled a teaching ministry in Ephesus. That city emerged as one of the key ministry contexts of Acts. Prior to Paul's ministry there in Acts 19, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos began preaching in Ephesus. However, he had only been instructed in the New Testament teaching up until the baptism of John. Luke writes, "But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26).

The term used here for "explained" connotes expounding or bringing meaning out from within. Peter used this term in Acts 11:4: "Peter began speaking and proceeded to *explain* to them in orderly sequence, saying…" At the climax of Acts, Luke also uses the same term to describe Paul's teaching ministry in Rome:

> When they had set a day for Paul, people came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was *explaining* to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. (Acts 28:23)

Priscilla was able to teach in this manner. She and Aquila explained to Apollos the full teaching about the risen Christ that was known and propagated by Jesus' apostles. Since Apollos only had received teaching up through John's baptism, Priscilla and Aquila had quite a lot of material to impart to Apollos.

The ministry of teaching is a bona fide ministry near to the heart of Jesus. People in Jesus' time called him "Good Teacher," as did the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17). Teaching constituted a central function of rabbinical ministry, which Jesus modeled perfectly. This teaching ministry flowed through the Holy Spirit into many of Jesus' disciples and Early Church leaders, such as Priscilla and Aquila.

Since this book focuses on the Pauline ministry context, some may wonder how to explain the Apostle's instruction to Timothy: "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12). Was Priscilla violating this principle? Or was she in compliance because she was serving under the authority of her husband? Should women be allowed to teach at all if a man is in the audience, classroom, or congregation?

Though we may not be able to unpack all these questions at this time, several points are pertinent from the perspective of Muslim-background believers. God initially created people in His own image: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). This creation guarantees some type of equality of essence between the genders which is absent in Islam. Islam states that men are superior in essence to women (Q4:34). This Islamic paradigm creates an overall trajectory resulting in the subjugation of women.

Some tension exists in the New Testament regarding the role of women in ministry. I was asked to serve on a national committee considering this very question in a Muslim-majority country in

which I had been ministering. I observed that earnest, Bible-believing Christians may come to different conclusions on various issues related to women in ministry.

Two points appear true simultaneously in the New Testament. Men are called to shoulder responsibility in the church, family, and society. If they shirk these responsibilities, everyone suffers. Jesus called twelve men to be His original core disciples, not six men and six women. Yet, women remained very active in His ministry and throughout the Gospel narrative, beginning with Elizabeth, His mother Mary, Mary Magdelene, Mary, Martha, and many more. Luke chronicles the proximity, activity, and support of the women close to Jesus:

> Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, [2] and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, [3] and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. (Luke 8:1-3)

Second, women who are born again are gifted Spirit of God for various ministries, regardless of their marital status. Here, Priscilla exhibits a clear teaching gift that blessed a man, Apollos. Since Paul included Priscilla, a gifted teacher, in his ministry team, it seems contradictory to conclude that he forbade women teaching *in all circumstances*. John notes that Jesus' public ministry starts when He participates in a plan initiated by a woman—His mother—when she instructs the servants at the wedding of Cana, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5).

In conclusion, we may expand our focus outward to the overall role of teaching and education in life. Many of the best teachers that children will ever have are women. This includes home teaching environments as well as institutional classroom settings. When I look back at my own life, most of my teachers in childhood were women who loved their students and the teaching craft as well.

Many godly women are able Bible teachers. They bless their students at Christian schools, Bible colleges, and seminaries. They should be encouraged and supported as they fulfill this important ministry to which Jesus has called them. All teachers, whether men or women, or even youth teaching other youth, may demonstrate their love of Jesus through their teaching.

Women are also able to impart spiritual life by teaching the Bible. Whether men, women, or youth, the critical element for the Christian teacher is commitment to the Word through extended study. Prayer, preparation, and constructive input further hone a teaching ministry as exemplified by Priscilla. Christian teachers, including MBB men and women, are needed who walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master Teacher. Teach well!

Discussion Questions

1. Which aspect of Priscilla's ministry encourages you the most?

2. If you had to provide the full New Testament message to someone who was only acquainted with the baptism of John, where would you begin?

3. What is the most important quality of a good teacher?

CHAPTER 7

Chloe

Reliable Information

I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. (1 Cor. 1:11)

We live in an age in which it has become increasingly difficult to obtain reliable information. With the advent of technological "deep fakes"—putting words into the moving lips of a person on video—the challenge is only growing. People simply do not know what to believe anymore.

Wisdom flows from a principle: "Don't listen to gossip." Yet, Paul did not employ this in the way we might assume. He had great spiritual concern for the churches scattered throughout the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East. It was impossible in those days to pick up a phone and call people to find out how they were doing. Paul often sent his mighty men and mighty women to visit these churches, to encourage them, and to inquire about their spiritual welfare.

Paul planted the church in Corinth amid tumult and persecution. He remained in the city to teach the believers for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Therefore, he likely knew the first

generation of believers very well. He wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus just a few years after he planted the church.

Paul must have suffered great internal pain, as well as spiritual concern, when he learned from Chloe's people (or team) that things were not going well in Corinth. Chloe is not otherwise mentioned in the New Testament, yet she and those on her team are credited with providing reliable information to Paul about the situation in Corinth. The *entire* premise of 1 Corinthians is based upon this report.

The first problem Paul mentions is divisions within the church. Another major sin in Corinth was immorality. Paul corrected the church based on the report from Chloe's people: "*It is actually reported* that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul considered the testimony so reliable that he pronounced judgment based on this report: "For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present" (v. 3). Paul placed tremendous trust in the accuracy of Chloe and her co-workers.

Providing reliable information is not easy. Sometimes an observer witnesses a situation which yields only a few data points. However, such limited information does not always give an accurate representation of the full situation. For this reason, tourists often give a different report about the condition of a country than the people who actually live in that country.

Furthermore, humans frequently possess mixed motives. Often, these motives contain malevolence or bias. Hypothetically, someone could have told Paul, "The situation in Corinth is a mess. They need someone *like me* to go clean it up!" The self-serving motive is thinly veiled in this case. A reasonable person might detect that such a report is therefore biased.

In the case of Chloe, Paul trusted her for her accuracy, honesty, wisdom, and ability to do appropriate fact-finding. He knew she would not underreport the problems she observed. Neither would she give a "rosy picture" by only reporting the positives. By contrast, political dictators create this problem for themselves. They keep everyone in fear and trembling such that people only tell them what they want to hear.

One issue addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians is observance of the Lord's Supper. Jewish worshippers celebrated the Passover annually. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the eternal Passover Lamb, instituted the Lord's Supper, or Communion, during His last meal with His disciples prior to His crucifixion. His disciples and apostles took this celebration and remembrance wherever they went.

In Corinth, the Lord's Supper devolved into chaos. Some people got drunk. Others gorged themselves. The situation needed correction. Paul softened the sting a bit as he wrote about the report: "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and *in part I believe it*" (1 Cor. 11:17-18, emphasis added).

Pastors for the last 2,000 years may be thankful for this problem in the Corinthian church, since in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul gives a template for administering the Lord's Supper. However, this chapter addresses the issue of collecting and acting upon reliable information. In the verses immediately above, Paul again takes a corrective tone with the Corinthian church. He calls them out once again for their self-indulgence and lack of order.

MBBs face various obstacles to the communication of reliable information. First, many believers are new to the faith, and thus not spiritually mature. Second, the honor-shame paradigm often

manifests itself through putting others down by half-truths, gossip, or outright lies. The culprit hopes he will advance at the expense of others.

Third, Islam provides no answer to the human problem of dishonesty. Islamic societies are rife with dishonesty such that an honest person may seem to be naïve. MBBs must therefore pay close attention to honesty. This includes living with appropriate transparency, as well as sharing reliable information with others on a need-to-know basis.

Chloe shines as a wonderful role model for MBBs. Her honesty and reliability transcend the centuries. MBB churches and fellowships will benefit greatly from having honest Chloes in their midst.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the leading reasons people share unreliable information about others?

2. Do you think Paul would normally have done "fact checking" (getting secondary confirmation) when getting a negative report about a person, group, or church? Why or why not?

3. What is the difference between gossip and sharing reliable information?

CHAPTER 8

Tychicus

Accurate Portrayals

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. [22] *I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts*. (Eph. 6:21, 22)

As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. (Col. 4:7)

Tychicus builds on the model of reliable information given to us by Chloe. Whereas Chloe gave information *to* Paul, the Apostle Paul endorsed Tychicus to provide accurate information *about* him.

An accurate portrayal of the Apostle Paul remains as elusive today as it was in his lifetime. God gave the "Apostle to the Gentiles" tremendous insights into how to shepherd large numbers of newly believing non-Jews into Jesus' messianic movement. Scholars contemplate the extent to which Paul rejected his Jewishness and the extent to which he embraced it. In the 1980s, an entire school of thought emerged known as the "New

Perspective on Paul," seeking a fresh biblical interpretation of the Apostle's life and theology.

The Apostle Paul was frequently misrepresented in his own lifetime. When he returned to Jerusalem in Acts 21, James and the elders told him what people were saying about him: "They have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). Paul had actually been teaching *the Gentiles* that they did not need to be circumcised. He did *not* teach this to the Jews. Someone had started malicious rumors about him.

The same malicious accusations spiraled further:

> When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, [28] crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." [29] For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. (Acts 21:27-29)

Often people make erroneous assumptions, even when operating out of good motives. These visitors from Asia Minor had one motivation—to get Paul killed. They were almost successful. Having seen Gentiles with Paul in Jerusalem, they propagated a lie which seemed credible: Paul brought Gentiles into the Jewish Temple to defile it.

Paul was also being misrepresented in Corinth among those beloved believers he had previously won to Christ. Paul describes the rumor bearers as "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Cor.

11:13) who boasted about themselves and sought to disparage Paul. Essentially, they sought to steal the flock for whom Paul was the original apostle and shepherd. In 1 Corinthians 9, they question Paul's apostleship. In 2 Corinthians, they claimed Paul was a poor speaker: "They say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible'" (2 Cor. 10:10).

Given this swirl and deception and intrigue, whom could Paul trust to paint an accurate portrayal of himself? Enter Tychicus, Paul's traveling companion, who also hailed from Asia Minor (Acts 20:4). Not only did Tychicus travel with and serve alongside Paul, but the Apostle frequently sent him on church visitations and short-term missions.

The verses presented at the top of the chapter, to the Ephesians and Colossians, are similar. Paul describes Tychicus as "beloved," "faithful," and someone who will "comfort your hearts." Paul tells the believers that he trusts Tychicus to give an accurate portrayal of how he is doing.

The application of Tychicus' wisdom, accuracy, and fair descriptions are exemplary to all Christians. Tychicus' love for Jesus manifested in his faithful service as well as in honesty. Since Jesus identifies himself as "The Truth," such honesty proves exemplary.

Though Paul was misrepresented during his lifetime, the misrepresentation of Jesus was even more severe. The crowds said, "He has lost his senses," (Mark 3:21), suggesting He had gone insane. The scribes declared that Jesus was demon-possessed: "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22). These condemnations hurled toward Jesus demonstrate the potential of evil humans to misrepresent the godly.

The situation today for believers is perhaps even more difficult to navigate. Gossip has always existed, but social media gives faster circulation and stronger bite to malicious rumors. Many people fail to retain a healthy suspicion about what they read or hear. They do not consider the motives of those who are in fact seeking to destroy others. Since the ungodly often want to undercut the witness of Christians, discerning believers should not immediately and unhesitatingly believe the worst about other Christians, until the facts have been verified.

Tychicus stands as a role model for believers today. He could discern truth from error. Paul trusted him to deliver an accurate portrayal—not the flattering portrayal of "yes-men" who simply want to stay in the good graces of their overlords. Tychicus, like Chloe, was a reliable source for information.

We also live in a time of marketing and promotion run amok. The same celebrity status culture that has taken over music, film, sports, and the arts has also bled over into the Church. Fundraising requires optimism not pessimism, yet realism may be lacking in many ministry reports and advertisements.

Accurate portrayers of information retain a biblical view of the human condition. People are sinners and the hearts of humans are deceptive (Jer. 17:9). Jesus knew the sinfulness of humans: "But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, [25]and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25).

As more MBBs come into the body of Christ, the need grows for those who are accurate portrayers of information. This ministry requires a rare blend of honesty, discretion, foresight, and understanding of how that which is said or not said impacts others. Jesus is the Truth. His grace flows into His followers. Disciples of Jesus should therefore be trustworthy, like Tychicus, to give accurate portrayals of people and situations.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do people start malicious rumors about others?

2. Does God always protect Christians from believing inaccurate information? Why or why not?

3. What aspect of Tychicus' character most stands out to you?

CHAPTER 9

Aristarchus

Not Easily Deterred

> *When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"*
> *29 The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.* (Acts 19:28-29)

Aristarchus was a Thessalonian living in Macedonia. Paul asked him to join the third missionary journey. Aristarchus receives additional mentions throughout the timeline of Acts. His name appears five times in the New Testament—several of those times with his Macedonian colleague Gaius. However, this chapter will focus solely on Aristarchus.

Ephesus was the spiritual stronghold of Asia Minor. The city housed the Temple of Artemis, which was considered one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World." The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his team from entering Asia Minor in Acts 16, redirecting them to Macedonia instead. Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila conducted some of the preparatory ministry prior to Paul and his team finally arriving in Ephesus in Acts 19.

The residents of Ephesus languished under a spiritually-binding covenant with their goddess. This explains their volcanic reaction to Paul's polemic preaching that "gods made with hands are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26). Artemis, also known as Diana, was the "goddess of the hunt." Her servants wasted no time in hunting down the gospel preachers. They dragged Aristarchus and Gaius through the streets into the theater. The disciples must have thought that their time on this earth had drawn to a close. Only the calming influence of the town clerk settled the demonically inspired, spiritually jealous, bloodthirsty crowd.

After this trial ended, it would have been understandable if Aristarchus and Gaius asked to be excused from that third missionary venture and returned home. It is likely that they suffered some injuries being dragged through the streets by an angry mob who wanted them dead. They could have taken an honorable discharge and left. Nevertheless, as the narrative continues in Acts 20, Aristarchus and Gaius are still traveling with Paul. They were not easily deterred.

The third missionary journey ends with Paul in chains in Jerusalem. From there, always escaping death by a thread, he was sent to Caesarea. On the way to Rome, he suffered shipwreck and ends up marooned upon Malta. Aristarchus continues to be with Paul throughout these ordeals. Acts 27:2 reports that he is on the ship as a prisoner also. After surviving the riots of Ephesus, he then escaped near death on the Mediterranean high seas. When writing to the Colossians, Paul notes that Aristarchus is his "fellow prisoner" (4:10). To Philemon, Paul refers to Aristarchus as his "fellow worker" (v. 24).

Like Silas, Aristarchus persevered through persecution. Today, we may scarcely recognize his name. Yet, Aristarchus' love for Jesus overflowed in persistent and faithful service.

Christians in ministry to Muslims, as well as Muslim-background believers in Christ, have a lot to learn from Aristarchus' example. He did not give up when things became difficult. He was not active in the Lord's work merely for a moment in time, only then to disappear. He remained steadfast in serving Jesus Christ.

Aristarchus also overcame trauma. Due to wars, internal conflicts, and relational breakdowns, many people suffer from physical, psychological, and spiritual traumas. Aristarchus faced near death in the theater of Ephesus, as well as in the raging waves of the Mediterranean Sea, yet he persisted.

While the Scriptures do not give us much information about Aristarchus' inner life, the biblical narrative points to a man who was not easily deterred, even by trauma. Such faithfulness requires willpower. However, human drive is not sufficient to overcome all the obstacles thrown up by Satan. A deep, continual refreshing in the presence of Jesus is the only true remedy for the type of challenges Aristarchus faced.

Through Jesus' grace, believers can experience the total and unconditional love of the Heavenly Father. This is *agape* love: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God" (1 John 3a). This love is stronger than the stormy seas or angry mob.

Aristarchus leaves MBBs with the example of perseverance. Few character qualities are as important in our time as this one.

Discussion Questions

1. What emotions do you imagine Aristarchus might have experienced in the theater of Ephesus among the angry mob?

2. Why do some people persevere in the Lord's work, while others drop out of ministry?

3. In what ways does being part of a team influence the ability of believers to persevere in the ministry?

CHAPTER 10

Phoebe

Serving the Church

> *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; [2] that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.* (Rom. 16:1-2)

Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Rome from Corinth. According to a note in the *Textus Receptus* manuscript, he sent this epistle to Rome by the hand of Phoebe, who served in the nearby church of Cenchrea. Since Paul mentions Phoebe first in his extensive list of greetings in Romans 16, this narrative appears very credible.

Paul describes Phoebe as a "servant (*diakonos*) of the church," as well as a "helper (*prostatis*) of many." Since Phoebe is the only woman specifically referred to in the New Testament as a deacon, many have deliberated whether Paul was endorsing female deacons as officers in the local church. That discussion is beyond the purpose of this chapter, especially since the term *diakonos* is used more generally for servants in the New Testament. For example, at the wedding of Cana, Mary tells the servants (*diakonos*), "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). We will explore the church office issue below.

Paul's description of Phoebe makes one thing clear: *Phoebe's love for Jesus overflowed into laudable service in the church of Christ.* Today, the Holy Spirit beckons men, women, and children to likewise commit themselves to service in the local church. Phoebe's example shines brightly twenty-one centuries later.

Paul's commendation of Phoebe provides two key exhortations. First, she was grounded and serving in the local church. While it is important to be active in the community, family, and even in parachurch organizations, there is no long-term excuse for not being committed to a local church body. For Muslim-background believers, such commitment brings pastoral care, accountability, and many opportunities to learn and serve.

Second, Paul notes that Phoebe was helpful to many, including himself. Phoebe manifested that other-centered *agape* love that flowed from her relationship to Jesus. It can be challenging enough to help one other person or even a few, yet Phoebe is described as a helper *of many*.

Why Don't We Serve in the Local Church?

It is not uncommon for believers, including Muslim-background believers, to float or drift on the periphery. Often, they do not get grounded in a local church. They may permanently remain "between churches," or they may have simply given up attending a local church—which could certainly include home churches or underground churches in many settings. Many believers have gone through negative church events or episodes. Some have experienced toxic church environments, or even abusive situations.

In many Muslim societies, the "strong man" controls all power in his hands. This may hold true for government, family life, and

also for religious communities. By simply becoming Christian, the tendency does not go away unless specifically identified and addressed. We will do so now by considering the other-centered, servant attitude of Phoebe.

Overlooked for Ministry Positions?

As Muslim-background believers, we must exercise patience regarding church offices and titles. I am aware of and have personally felt that discouraging sense of having been overlooked for ministry appointments. I recall one time, when I was a young man, thinking, "Why did the pastor appoint such-and-such a person to that ministry? Did I not have the same talents as the person appointed?" It was not a healthy thought process since such thinking can lead to bitterness.

A few years later, I was invited to serve on the church staff of that venerable pastor, Bernard Evans, whom I mentioned above. He used to drop gems of wisdom at any given moment. On one occasion, he mentioned something that has remained with me for nearly forty years. He told me, "Fred, don't look to obtain a ministry. Instead, look to develop the message of your life. If you develop the message, the ministry will take care of itself." He modeled how to develop the message of our lives through prayer, Bible study, and learning from others.

I understand that not everyone has enjoyed the blessing of serving under someone like Rev. Evans, who trained many people in the ministry. He did not look at his assistants as vehicles to arrive at a goal, but as up-and-coming servants of Christ to whom he could impart much spiritual life. We were like Phoebes to a contemporary Paul.

Phoebe demonstrated a heart to serve others. Indeed, that is the main difference between pastors, elders, and overseers, as compared to deacons. The former positions carry the responsibility to rule in the church, not as dictators, but as decision-makers. Deacons, on the other hand, are intended to serve in the church. For this reason, the apostles instituted the position of deacons in Acts 6.

Due to personal insecurities, we may crave the validation that comes with an appointment to a high office. If we are not careful, a proud spirit may develop that yearns for power. Phoebe's example of serving and helping reflects a different spirit—a humble, Christlike one.

Avoid Minimizing the Task

Being a courier is not the most prestigious ministry assignment. However, imagine if Phoebe had not fulfilled what the Apostle Paul asked of her. What if she had lost the physical copy of the Epistle to the Romans? What if she took a detour of some kind before she ever got to Rome? Paul sent perhaps the most important epistle he would ever write through the hand of a Christian woman he knew to be unassailably reliable. Phoebe was a faithful servant who reminds us of a goal to one day hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

As MBBs, we do well to take Phoebe as a role model. Whatever we are asked to do, let us do it well. What opportunities for service exist in the local church? It is said that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work in the church. We can help balance that equation.

Getting Plugged in for Healing

The local church can be likened to a spiritual hospital within which the healing waters of the Lord Jesus flow. Local church

involvement does not merely involve serving through completion of tasks, but it was intended by Jesus to be a life-giving station to rescue and repair souls. Of course, that is Jesus' ideal. Not all churches feature these qualities, yet Jesus, as Head of the Church, is continually transforming the body of Christ into His own image.

Phoebe helped and served others, but as she came to Rome, she too would need help. Paul exhorted the Roman believers to assist her.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your main point of inspiration from the example of Phoebe? Please explain.

2. What experiences keep us from plugging into a local church or fellowship group?

3. If new MBBs ask you how to start serving in the local church, where do you recommend they begin?

CHAPTER 11

Titus

Walking in Synergy

> *As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker* [synergos] *among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.* (2 Cor. 8:23)

Paul wrote canonical epistles to two young pastors: Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete. Titus typically garners less attention among Christians than does Timothy. Perhaps this is because Timothy is mentioned in the Book of Acts, whereas Titus is not. Also, Paul wrote two epistles to Timothy, which are both longer than his single epistle to Titus. Our purpose is not to compare Timothy and Titus, but to appreciate what we can learn from each of them as we humbly walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Titus enters the biblical narrative at two important occasions. Both will be described below. More importantly, Paul describes Titus as his "fellow worker" (2 Cor. 8:23). The Greek word here, *synergos*, is a compound word "union-work," meaning "working together." There is a spirit of unity, harmony, and mutual appreciation in this term. Paul does *not* state that Titus and others are working *for* him or serving *under* him. Rather, his emphasis is that all the gospel ministers are literally serving the Lord Jesus Christ together, synergistically.

This term “synergy” is now a power word in many modern contexts. A synergistic relationship describes that coveted “win-win” relationship in which both parties are edified. Everyone desires a synergistic workplace, home life, marriage, and church family. Synergism does not indicate an absence of strong leadership, but rather a prevailing spirit of blessing and mutual edification. Paul’s mighty men and mighty women exemplified synergy.

Synergy flowed from the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not “lord it over” others. In fact, when the mother of James and John sought a preferential placement for her sons, causing a squabble among the disciples, Jesus rebuked them:

> Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. [26] It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.” (Matt. 20:25-26)

The Lord incarnated this synergistic spirit of service. Jesus concludes this statement in Matthew’s Gospel by saying, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, *but to serve,* and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). In Luke, He declared, “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? *But I am among you as the one who serves”* (Luke 22:27). This spirit of Jesus infused and empowered the Early Church, including Paul’s mighty men and mighty women.

Paul specifically uses the term *synergos*, co-worker, to describe:

- Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3)
- Urbanus (Rom. 16:9)
- Timothy (Rom. 16:21)

- Titus (2 Cor. 8:23)
- Apollos (1 Cor. 3:9)
- Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25)
- Clement (Phil. 4:3)
- Justus (Col. 4:11)
- Philemon (Phile. 1)
- Mark (Phile. 24)
- Aristarchus (Phile. 24)
- Demas (Phile. 24)
- Luke (Phile. 24)

The Apostle's operative descriptor for his associates was *synergos*, co-laborers. Interestingly, neither Paul nor the other Epistle writers—James, Peter, Jude, and John—*ever* use the term "disciple" in their letters. Paul certainly did not want to give the impression that converts won to Christ through his ministry would center their identity in him. He rebukes the Corinthians:

> Each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." [13] Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? [14] I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. (1 Cor. 1:12-13)

The spirit of the Early Church movement was Christo-centric.

Paul describes the important role Titus played in 2 Corinthians when he not only defends his apostleship but also bares his heart in a transparent fashion. Twice in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul mentions "losing heart" (vv. 1, 16). He describes this as a state of being "perplexed but not despairing" (2 Cor. 4:8). By 2 Corinthians 7, Paul describes his state worsening from being perplexed to being depressed:

> For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. [6] But God, who *comforts the depressed*, comforted us by the coming of Titus; [7] and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. (2 Cor. 7:5-7, emphasis added)

Titus brought synergy into this difficult situation by comforting the depressed. A servant's heart of this quality is truly an underappreciated gift today, yet Paul exuded thanks for his co-worker Titus.

While Timothy received the challenging pastorate in Ephesus, Titus was given perhaps a greater challenge: serving the new believers in Crete. Titus was from a Gentile background (Gal. 2:3), so serving among pagans should not have shocked him. Paul describes the context as full of "rebellious" people (Titus 1:10) and dishonesty: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' [13] This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:12-13). Any pastor who has been called to a church in chaos can empathize with the challenges facing Titus.

Furthermore, the believers in Crete did not have established leadership. Paul directed Titus to appoint elders in the various cities of Crete (Titus 1:5). This type of ministry required firmness, faithfulness, as well as exemplifying honesty and synergy. Paul knew that Titus, with God's help, was up to the task.

Titus provides an excellent example for modern believers, too. MBBs will benefit from the synergistic spirit of co-laboring exhibited by Titus and the New Testament missionary teams. Such

a spirit is other-centered and service-oriented. Titus serves as the prototype for MBBs as a young leader who wants to see Jesus Christ glorified and the Church built up.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find that most people desire to serve or to be served? Why?

2. Can you recall an experience where synergy was flowing in a win-win situation? What caused this positive occurrence?

3. What is the first thing you would have done in Crete to improve the situation if you had been in Titus' shoes?

CHAPTER 12

Epaphroditus

Risking His Life for Christ

I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; [26] because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. [27] For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. [28] Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. [29] Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; [30] because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. (Phil. 2:25-30)

At first glance, Epaphroditus appears to be one of those biblical characters with a long name who is not long remembered by history. However, Paul presents Epaphroditus as one of his mighty men. His qualities merit consideration by Christians in any age.

Philippians 2:25 provides five descriptions of Epaphroditus:

- Brother in Christ
- Fellow worker
- Soldier

- Messenger
- Minister

This would seem to be quite an exhaustive job description for any minister of the gospel!

Paul paints the picture of a soldier when describing Epaphroditus. The call of a soldier demands singular focus and commitment. Paul told Timothy: "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). When Jesus asked that the cup pass from Him in Gethsemane, He completed the prayer that the Father's will be done. Such was Jesus' soldierly mentality.

Soldiers risk their lives to win wars and to protect others. Though we wrestle not against flesh and blood, the backdrop of the entire missionary project in the New Testament was one of unending spiritual warfare. The riots faced by Paul in Philippi, Ephesus, and Jerusalem did not occur because the apostles were a rowdy and boisterous bunch. Rather, the message of Jesus threatened the entrenched demonic strongholds and those who were animated by those evil spirits. It is impossible to prevail in spiritual warfare over the long term without a soldier's mentality.

Epaphroditus reveals another component of Christlike character: the soldier filled with compassion. Roman soldiers commonly "took money by force" as reported by John the Baptist (Luke 3:14). The soldiers who crucified Jesus were completely devoid of compassion. They mocked Him and laughed as they beat Him and gambled for His garments.

On the other hand, Paul tells the Philippian church regarding Epaphroditus: "...he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick" (Phil. 2:26). Epaphroditus' love for Jesus overflowed into deep concern for others. He was not self-absorbed—a stark contrast with most people today.

Soldiers risk their lives. From time to time, one will hear of a soldier who signs up for duty, not expecting to be deployed to a combat theater. He hopes to get a salary and a pension without significant risk. Then he becomes dismayed when sent into a "hot war." This is not the type of soldier any commander wants to lead into battle.

Epaphroditus risked his life for Jesus. As Jesus poured himself out for us, Epaphroditus poured himself out for the church and for the lost, yet we may ask: Was Epaphroditus suffering burn out? This is a pertinent question for people serving Jesus on the mission field as well as in domestic contexts.

About 14 years ago I went through a difficult stretch of years in my own life. I had been serving the Lord full-time and was also attending seminary. Our children were younger then, so I started doing a lot of my seminary work in the middle of the night. After completing the degree, I transitioned into missionary work, which included a lot of international travel. The combination of travel, jet lag, adrenaline, and anxiety caused me to suffer through many nights in which I barely slept. Those who have not gone through this may simply dismiss it: "Well, when you get tired enough, you will fall asleep." However, I would get so tired that when I laid down my body would start twitching. I would lay awake all night and then need to get up and teach the next day. This period seemed to me to be a form of torture, though others may have processed these same circumstances without such difficulty. Praise God, the situation is quite a bit better now. Not perfect, but I needed to learn how to slow down and rest more.

Other servants of God go through periods that could be described as burnout. I recall a pastor's wife in South America recounting that her husband had gone through burnout. Many challenging situations had arisen in the local church, but few church members were willing to step up and assist the pastor,

leaving him feeling alone and demoralized. The list of examples could go on.

In the case of Epaphroditus, his weakness was caused by sickness. His ability to serve became limited, though his willingness continued steadfast. He came close to death, but the Lord preserved him.

As Christians, we have a glorious predicament. If we die, we go to be with the Lord. If we live, we can serve Him here. Paul reminds us that death is an enemy that we should try to repel: "The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Therefore, we should not seek to die, yet neither should we fear death.

With this perspective, all Christians should seek balance in their physical, spiritual, and emotional lives. We are still somewhat fragile as human beings, though we often think ourselves to be invincible. We need wisdom to run our marathon well.

Due to the punitive nature of Islam regarding those who leave the faith, Muslim-background believers can expect persecution. Apostasy for MBBs may mean risking death for Jesus' sake. This requires a soldier's mentality for the inevitable spiritual warfare ahead.

Epaphroditus teaches us several lessons. He provides an example of someone who loved other believers. He risked his own life to serve Jesus and to serve others. All of this reflects the godly humility within his heart.

Epaphroditus was not invincible; he was afflicted with a serious illness. Taking sufficient rest can teach Christ's followers that they are not indispensable to the Kingdom of God. Each member of the body is part of the team and has a role to fulfill.

Discussion Questions

1. Of the five characteristics Paul provides in Philippians 2:25 regarding Epaphroditus, which one do you think was most important?

2. How can believers give themselves wholly to the work of the Lord, but also avoid burnout?

3. How do you think the concerned believers in Philippi would have reacted when they finally got to see Epaphroditus again?

CHAPTER 13

Stephanas

Refreshing the Spirit

> *Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), [16] that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. [17] I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. [18] For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.* (1 Cor. 16:15-18, emphasis added)

We often hear that there are two types of people: those who put energy into people and those who suck energy out of people. We are all familiar with the second type: complainers, whiners, the lazy, and the bossy-types. As soon as a person sees them coming, their hearts sink and the wind flutters out of their sails.

Though the Corinthian church had its problems, it was not without its bright spots. Paul entered Corinth and immediately began preaching the gospel. Opposition arose, and Paul may have even intended to leave town, but the Holy Spirit gave him needed guidance and reassurance:

> The Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; [10] for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10)

This vision must have encouraged Paul. The threats must have been significant. Even Paul, who was not usually prone to fear, seems to have feared for his life. Most encouraging was that the Lord was calling "many people in this city" of Corinth to follow Jesus.

One of the first believers in Corinth was Stephanas. He and his family were baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:16). Stephanas enters the picture again at the end of 1 Corinthians in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Paul reiterates that his family was among the first fruits in Greece. He mentions that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus were coming, and certain positive characteristics are attributed to them. For simplicity's sake, the remainder of this chapter will refer solely to Stephanas, though the reader can easily see the attribution to all three.

Specifically, we will focus on two exemplary aspects of Stephanas in the eyes of Paul. First, Stephanas's coming birthed such joy in the Apostle's heart. Stephanas ostensibly visited Paul in Ephesus. Second, his presence had refreshed Paul's spirit, just as it had refreshed his home church in Corinth.

My father tells the story of his two aunts in Iran. They would come occasionally for several days of visiting the family when he was young. One aunt was dour and serious. She would shake the young children awake at 5 a.m. for morning prayers. The other aunt was relaxed and loved to play with the children and tell them stories.

My father recounts that when the day of departure would arrive for the first aunt, the children would "helpfully" arrange her belongings together and make sure her shoes were next to the door.

When the day came for the second aunt's departure, they actually hid her shoes! Such was their desire for her to stay. She brought joy to the children.

We all can probably recall similar situations. Some people bring joy, others sorrow. Some put energy in, and others take it away. Paul testifies that the very coming of Stephanas caused his heart to swell with joy.

In addition to joy, Stephanas brought spiritual refreshment. The term here used in 1 Corinthians 16:18 means "to give rest" or "to refresh." Jesus uses the same term in Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will *give you rest*." Stephanas' quality of bringing refreshment flowed from his relationship to Jesus, who gives rest.

People in ministry are often pouring out to others. Their spiritual reservoir may become depleted. Ailing souls drain energy from those who give to others. How refreshing it is to encounter someone like Stephanas, who brings both joy and rest!

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think some people put energy into people while others suck the energy out of them?

2. Sometimes we may need to refresh an app, a phone, or a computer screen. How is that like or unlike refreshing someone's spirit?

3. Is it possible to refresh the spirit of someone you do not know well? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 14

Epaphras

Deep Concern

...just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf. (Col. 1:7)

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. [13] For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. (Col. 4:12-13)

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. (Phile. 23)

Paul planted each of the churches to which he wrote Epistles, except for Colossians. Who was his link to the church at Colossae? An unsung hero named Epaphras.

Epaphras features in three Bible passages—two in Colossians and one in Philemon. From these passages we learn that Epaphras was from Colossae and that he preached the gospel there in his home city.

Later, Paul mentions that Epaphras was his co-prisoner. These set of facts indicate that Epaphras must have left Colossae and been traveling with Paul's ministry team, ultimately ending up with him in jail.

Epaphras provides a key linkage from Paul to the church at Colossae. He must have told Paul a lot about this church, resulting in the canonical letter in our New Testament. That Epaphras did not hold selfishly to his own flock, but introduced them to Paul, was itself a meritorious gesture. Epaphras provides something MBBs can learn from today.

This chapter focuses on the deep concern that Epaphras expressed in prayer for the saints at Colossae. It is natural for people to be concerned for themselves, their families, and their kinsmen. Epaphras was from Colossae. Perhaps some natural affection was at work, but the emphasis is on deep concern for the believers.

The story does not end here regarding Epaphras' concern for the Colossians. It was not compassion turned inward. Instead, Epaphras manifested his deep concern for the Colossians through vigorous prayer. Epaphras was the type of intercessor that has caused the Kingdom of Jesus to advance for 2,000 years.

Epaphras' prayer burden for the believers at Colossae flowed naturally from his relationship with the Lord. Paul describes him as a "faithful servant of Christ (Col. 1:7), and a "bondslave of Jesus Christ" (Col. 4:12). Epaphras' prayer life was kindled by his love for his Lord.

Jesus provides the eternal example of the Savior-intercessor: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). At Gethsemane, He prayed with an intensity that caused Him to sweat drops of blood. In John 17, He concluded

the Last Supper with His disciples by praying for them, and for those whose souls would be won through them.

Epaphras followed the Lord Jesus onto his knees. Deep passion drove his intercession. Paul describes him as "laboring earnestly" for the Colossians in prayer. Few of us, when asked what type of work we do, would respond that we are laboring earnestly in intercession for others. Prayer can be intense, a holy wrestling that ultimately wins victories for God.

The content of Epaphras' prayer is also instructive for us today. He cried out to God that his believing brethren would "stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12). While we observe Christians who are at times slumping, drifting, and falling away, Epaphras prayed that the believers would "stand perfect."

He also knew the challenge of discerning the will of God. Paul had gone through such a confusing situation as the Holy Spirit forbade the missionary team from entering Asia Minor. At just the right time, the man from Macedonia appeared to Paul in a night vision beseeching them to come there. Prayer can result in God's guidance coming at just the right time.

In conclusion, Epaphras' love for Jesus overflowed into deep concern for the Colossian believers he had won to Christ. He labored for them in constant prayer. Rather than the entertainment and self-centered internet surfing so common today, he entered his prayer closet to do business with God. Such a lifestyle requires hard work and godly humility. Epaphras, Paul's fellow prisoner and co-laborer, demonstrated both traits. As such, Epaphras remains an unsung hero of the New Testament. Certainly, he was one of Paul's mighty men and mighty women.

Paul completed the circle of communication by reporting back to the Colossian church that Epaphras, who planted their church,

was still serving admirably. As such, the impact of the church at Colossae rippled outward to all the places their founder ministered.

A former pastor of mine, Rev. George Dodd, once stated regarding missions, “To get the job done, you have to send your best.” Such was the case with the Antioch church’s missions teams. The same formula held true with Epaphras, the man of deep concern, who touched the nations.

Epaphras leaves us with a lasting picture of the *agape* love of Christ. That other-centered spirit of giving, sacrifice, and concern are marks of a true disciple. I pray all MBBs, myself included, will become like this mighty man of God.

Discussion Questions

1. How does human nature work against our desire to intercede on behalf of others?

2. If Paul had not met Epaphras, what would his relationship with the Colossian believers have been like?

3. What passions cause “deep concern” within us? How are these like or unlike the deep concern exhibited by Epaphras?

CONCLUSION

The missionary initiative of the Antioch church represents one of the high points of the New Testament. God's people launched out into God's work to expand the Kingdom of Jesus. They left in their wake a growing Christian movement throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Their efforts continue to provide both inspiration and practical examples of how missionary work can best be done.

Though these efforts are often known as "Paul's missionary journeys," they were truly team efforts. While Paul provided indispensable leadership, we do not observe the planting of "The Pauline Church of Ephesus," etc. In fact, the Apostle insisted that the highly divisive Corinthians not retain factions committed to Paul or Peter or Apollos. Rather, the Church should have its sole identity in Christ.

This type of self-effacing leadership spread contagiously throughout the missionary teams. Throughout the Acts narrative, Luke presents many exemplary leaders whose love for Jesus overflowed in godly humility. The grace of Jesus empowered them to serve together to advance the gospel in the face of continual opposition.

Paul's mighty men and mighty women stand in sharp contrast to some self-centered workers in the same era:

> Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. [18] For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, [19] whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Phil. 3:17-19)

By comparison, Paul's co-workers demonstrated wonderful character and teamwork qualities that overflowed from their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Through and through, they were grace-filled and other-centered. Let us review these qualities:

1. Barnabas encouraged the success of others.
2. John Mark overcame failure.
3. Silas suffered together with Paul.
4. Timothy was not arrogant.
5. Lydia was a courageous trailblazer.
6. Priscilla was a good teacher.
7. Chloe provided reliable information.
8. Tychicus gave accurate portrayals.
9. Aristarchus was not easily deterred.
10. Phoebe, a *diakonos,* served the church.
11. Titus understood the power of synergistic teamwork.
12. Epaphroditus risked his life for Christ.
13. Stephanus refreshed the spirit of others.
14. Epaphras expressed his deep spiritual concern through intercession.

These character qualities share the common thread of Christlike humility. Such a trait is much needed today for growing MBBs churches and movements. The power-grabbing and honor-seeking human tendencies common in Islamic societies are not part of the spiritual DNA of the body of Christ.

We often focus on *what* activities Paul's missionary teams accomplished: evangelism, miracle ministry, discipleship, teaching, and church planting. This study probed into *how* they served. The *what* was the external fruit. The *how*—serving in Christlike humility—was the internal root from which that fruit grew.

Without the *how*, the *what* may never have happened. The Antioch mission and the Pauline missionary teams retained remarkable unity despite the deep theological tensions inherent in bringing the Gentiles into the Kingdom of Jesus. The key to such unity was humility. We can pray for and work toward such humility and unity among MBBs today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Fred Farrokh and his wife, Annette, are International Trainers with Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples. Fred is an ordained missionary with Elim Fellowship. Before joining Global Initiative, Fred served as Executive Director of Jesus for Muslims Network in Metro New York, and Special Projects Officer with SAT-7 in Cyprus. A Christian of Muslim-background, he completed his PhD in Intercultural Studies through the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in 2014, with a dissertation on Muslim Identity. He has ministered in over thirty countries.

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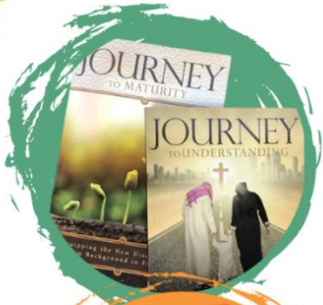

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