

✠ A Day in the Life... my life... your life?

- *In 1967 The Beatles released their icon album “Sgt. Peppers...”. Last track is “A Day in the Life”- many consider it to be most important work of pop music in history. Opens with refrain of a typical boring day in the life of someone living in London.*
- *Lately spent time with people whose days have not been boring. Been hard. Conflict, frustration, grief, doubts, fear, burnout, anger- toward themselves, other people, and God. Here’s thing: these people are some of most mature believers I know.*
- *But wait a minute. If we are mature in our relationship with Christ, spiritual people, walking by the Spirit, no big disobedience in our lives... things are always supposed to be good right?*
- *I mean, we all know good, godly people may experience difficult and unfair circumstances, but when it comes to US- in our soul- if we are good Christians, we should always be able to say ‘it is well with my soul’... no internal struggles. Right?*
- *Friends, if you are laboring under shame and guilt because your life is far from perfect- I have some good news for you, and it flows from a short note Luke gives us at the end of Acts 15. It’s just six verses, a transition between the Jerusalem council and the next major section of Acts.*
- *But from this story we receive a GIFT - knowing that God does not expect you to be perfect. In fact, whether or not you have everything together, your Christian ‘A-Game’ on all the time- isn’t the most important thing to Him.*
- *We see this redemptive truth in a very unexpected glimpse Luke gives us into the relationship of Paul and Barnabas. It turns out these two men- two of the preeminent leaders of the church, the two men God has used more than any others to grow the church throughout the Mediterranean world- two men who had risked their lives for the Gospel and glory of God- these men were NOT PERFECT.*
- *SO, if you a perfect Christian, with no questions, struggles, or conflict anywhere on your radar... For the rest of us... Bible- Let’s go. Acts 15:36, picking up story right after J.C.- where P&B have a...*

✠ The ‘sharp disagreement’

**Acts 15:36-41** *Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”<sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,<sup>38</sup> but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.<sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,<sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.<sup>41</sup> He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

- *Encouraged by the results of the JC, Paul wants to go and check on the new churches from 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey.*
- *Barnabas says “Great! You know, it would be great to take my young cousin John Mark”.*
- *And here things fall apart. If you remember, near the beginning of their 1<sup>st</sup> journey, JM had abandoned them, turned back and gone home. The sense of the story is Barnabas wants to give JM a second chance, but Paul refuses- stakes are high, this is a mission, and we*

*can't trust JM not to fail us again. It's possible Paul might have had some lingering frustration with JM after he left them earlier.*

- *This leads to what NIV calls a 'sharp disagreement'. That's probably putting it nicely. Word Luke uses carries sense of "anger, irritation, exasperation". In other words, this was a very tense, very difficult, very PERSONAL, conflict between two friends.*
- *We need to remember Paul and Barnabas' story up to this point. Paul first met Barnabas when he was fleeing for his life from Damascus. Jerusalem, he was feared and rejected until Barnabas befriended him and advocated for him. In a human sense, Paul owed his ministry, and possibly his life, to Barnabas.*
- *Then, when Paul was basically living in exile back in Tarsus, it was Barnabas who sought him out and brought him back into ministry in Antioch. Follow that with their journey we just covered, where together they risked their lives and experienced the miraculous work of God in their midst. Finally, they had stood side by side before the Jerusalem council and testified to the work and grace of God among the gentiles. THEY WERE DYNAMIC DUO of first century church. They weren't just ministry partners, they were BROTHERS in most profound way possible.*
- *NOW, their partnership, brotherhood, is BROKEN, because of disagreement over another person.*
- *It's easy to judge Barnabas and Paul, asking "which one was right", and "which one was wrong." There was a conflict, frustration, exasperation- so somebody must have sinned, right? Moreover, if Paul and Barnabas were 'walking by the Spirit' as they were regularly preaching, surely this never would have happened. I mean, Godly men-people- don't fall prey to frustration and conflict. Right?*
- *This brings us my goal for today... dispel a MYTH- a pernicious myth rooted in our old human nature, that holds many sincere believers in bondage.*
- *TODAY we are dispelling the myth, NEXT WEEK we will explore the New Covenant's amazing response to the reality of life that lies beneath this myth.*

✠ **The Myth!** As disciples of Christ, if we are living faithfully in a dependent relationship with Jesus Christ, we will NEVER STRUGGLE with conflict, frustration, fear, worry, impatience, unanswered questions, and \_\_\_\_\_. We will always be genuinely smiling, our marriages will be perfect, we will continually think "I am so blessed", and life will be just PEACHY KEEN.

- *Make no mistake! CHRIST IN US is always working to bring about TRANSFORMATION in our lives- healing of our minds, wills, and emotions- and leading us- one step at a time- into spiritual, emotional, and mental health. FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT is Peace, hope, joy, love... this is the journey we are all on!*
- *And yet, given the right circumstances, even the most sincere, consistent, mature, and healthiest saint may experience times of conflict, frustration, fear, confusion, depression, worry, even anger.*
- *WHAT THEN? What happens when you come to church and I shake your hand and say "How are ya!"*
- *Might plaster a fake smile and lie thru your teeth... "Great!"... then survive church, go home and try to figure out what's wrong with you, how to get your act together so you can be a good Christian again.*
- *"God is good, I am bad, I just need to try harder"... wash, rinse, repeat.*

- *Friends, this idea that good, sincere, Godly people should never experience these internal struggles- not only a myth, it's a dangerous...*

† Why this myth is so dangerous...

- It places us under condemnation and shame.
  - *This distortion puts God in the place of the accuser, rather than the redeemer. THIS, in turn, makes it difficult for us to tell the difference between condemnation and conviction.*
  - *Enemy condemns. "You are bad. There's something wrong with you at the level of your being, who you are".. you're not going to make it through this."*
  - *Or, enemy may play on our pride, "You're totally fine, and all these problems are with the other person"*

The Spirit never condemns! The Spirit CONVICTS, and God's conviction always leads toward redemption, healing, and freedom.

- *"Yes, you made a mistake. You are thinking in a way that's not healthy. Here's an area you need to lay down your anger, your pride, and surrender.... BUT YOU, believer, are beloved, my child, my precious creation, and that will never change. I'll never leave you, my home is in your heart, and I'm walking with you as you take this next step back toward me.*
- *God convicts, but he doesn't condemn. The Spirit brings truth, and truth can be hard- but God's truth is always a light pointing toward freedom, not the darkness of guilt and shame.*
- *Romans 8:1, SAY IT WITH ME...*

**Rom 8:1-2** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

- **ANOTHER distortion this myth brings:**
  - It fosters unhelpful and uninformed attitudes about peoples struggle with MENTAL HEALTH.
    - *This can lead us to lack compassion, support, and patience with people- maybe ourselves- who struggle with issues of mental health- depression or otherwise.*
    - *The myth of the 'perfect Christian' can render us blind to the very real pain and suffering that can't be addressed just by telling people the correct way they need to believe and act.*
  - *One more reason this myth is dangerous*

- It makes it easy- and tempting- to judge the struggles of others.
  - *It's temptation toward pride and self-righteousness. If all is good with me, it's because I'm doing things right. If that person is struggling, it's because they are not. The problem must be with them.*
  - *Here's the deal. We may be doing things 'more right'- and the people we are tempted to judge may be making bad decisions, may have wrong, distorted, destructive way of thinking. MAY BE TRUE*
  - *BUT- when our self-righteousness leads us to judge- where I think "my life is good because I am right, their life is hard because they are wrong".... This thinking robs us of compassion- may also just be incorrect- and can cause us to miss- not to see- the work God is wanting to do in that person, and in us.*
  - *SIDE THOUGHT- I've developed an interest in the private sector space industry- watched interview with Elon Musk- whatever you think of him, he said something that really struck*

*me... when you are building a rocket- doing something where failure may be existential- first rule is to remember that you are WRONG. We are all wrong. The goal then, is to be less wrong. Every day, a little less wrong.*

- *This sounds negative, but it's actually incredibly positive. It's called HUMILITY.*

✠ Reality! In Christ, who we truly are, we are New Creations- holy, righteous, dearly loved, and seated with God in the heavenly realms. This is ALREADY true of us... but it is ONLY true because of God's Grace and Mercy.

- *KEY! Apart from God's Grace and mercy, I would be JUST AS LOST as the person I am most tempted to judge. As we realize this, as we internalize this, it will increasingly lead us to be people of compassion, patience, and grace- to others, AND to ourselves.*
- *And when we need to put up boundaries and or make a painful decision- as happened with Paul and Barnabas- we are more able to do so within the wisdom and grace of God, not out of the judgement of pride and self-righteousness.*
- *Some years later Paul would write his 2 letter to the church in Corinth. I wonder if Paul had in mind his conflict with Barnabas when he wrote...*

**2 Corinthians 4:6-10, 16-18** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- *And now, each day, in the midst of this life as it really is, we are on the journey of God transforming the jar of clay that is our SOUL into the fully righteous New Creation we already fully are in our SPIRIT.*
- *THAT is what we will explore next week. But for now...*

✠ Bottom line: *The myth (of the perfect Christian) is bad theology. It is a misunderstanding of God's call upon our lives.*

- *God doesn't call us to be perfect. God calls us to come to Him, to receive our life, our hope, our freedom, OUR SOURCE... from Him.*
- *And we will look deeply into this miracle next Sunday*