

BARNABAS, MOVE OVER!

By Lorella Rouster

The primary purpose of the following lesson is to teach the Christian child about his individual worth in God's eyes. When you have finished teaching, each child should know that he doesn't have to be the first or the best to be happy with himself. Our desire is that he will learn to accept his God-given position in life with joy and enthusiasm.

"Barnabas Move Over!" begins with a short story about a boy who missed getting the lead part in a church play. The remainder of the lesson is a short biography of the life of Barnabas, whom God led to take "second place" on two occasions in his life. Both the Gospel and the lesson truth are knit throughout the text.

Passages Used: Acts 4:34-37; 9:20-28; 11:19-30; 12:25; chapters 13-15. Galatians 2:1-14; Luke 9:46-48; 14:7-11; II Timothy 4:11; Romans 12:3.

Memory Verse: "...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God..." (1 Corinthians 3:8,9).

Try a listening technique to teach this verse. Ask questions similar to those given here to help the child learn the meaning of the verse. After each question, having someone read or recite the verse, using different voices to repeat the verse for variety, emphasizing the part of the verse which will aid the child in hearing the answer. Through this repetition of concentrated listening the child will be better able to learn the verse. Then, have the children repeat the verse each time, adding the same voice emphasis.

Tell the children, "Our memory verse tells us something about Christians. Do you know what a Christian is? (Pause) A Christian is one who has received the Lord Jesus as his Saviour from sin." As you listen to the Bible verse, find the answer to these questions.

1. How many Christians will receive a reward? (Repeat the verse slowly after each question.
2. Whose reward will each receive?
3. What will his reward be given for? (Pause) Labor means the things he does to serve God. Think of some ways you serve God. (Pause)
4. Who helps you in serving God?
5. Does God notice how you serve Him?

After the memory verse activity, let the children share some of their answers to the questions themselves. (Bring out that the most important thing a boy or girl who has received the Lord can do, is to obey his parents. Allow children to discuss ways in which they serve the Lord.) Ask if they think God will be fair in the way He rewards. Remind them no one will be forgotten or unnoticed. (Be sure you notice and commend any who take part in discussion.) Repeat the verse together to facilitate its memorization.

Suggested Songs: Choose any songs the children know about serving Jesus.

Visuals and Other Teaching Tools: Draw simple figures to illustrate the story, or ask the children to act out various parts.

Visual for Song:

Prepare from stiff paper, three large visuals, accordion style, for use with song “J-O-Y.” Place letters J, O, and Y on covers. When unfolded, visuals should spell JESUS. OTHERS, and YOU. Three children hold the visuals, folding and unfolding as song is sung.

Teaching Schedule: Use the entire program with older primaries/juniors for an extended session of 1-1/2 hours. Use the lesson only for twenty-minute teaching time.

- Song
- Prayer – Ask God to show us something we can do to serve Him today.
- Teach Memory Verse
- Song – “I Want to Serve Jesus” (Question children concerning word meanings).
- Bible Lesson – “Barnabas, Move Over!”
- Invitation to Unsaved
- Role play situations to emphasize aim for Christian child
- Counsel those who respond to invitation

Introduction to the Lesson (Story):

Annie bolted out of the school and raced down to the church. Tonight Mrs. Darko would announce who would receive the leading parts in the church play. When he arrived he waved to his friends.

“Hey, Bill! Mrs. Darko here yet?”

“Yes! She’s inside. But she’s not telling who got the parts until everyone comes .”

“I sure hope I get to play Noah – think I probably will. Nobody else was as good as I was. Wasn’t I good, Bill?”

“Yeah, you were okay. We’d better go on inside now.”

Arnie and Bill could feel the excitement as they gathered with the other children in the auditorium. Mrs. Darko waited patiently for them to quiet down. Then she spoke.

“First, I want to thank each of you for being willing to do anything you can to help make the play a success,” she said. “Everyone of you did very well at the tryouts. In order to present the best program possible, we will need some of you to work behind the scenes

with props, sound effects and music. We've tried to assign each of you to a place where your talents and abilities can best be used.

"Now, the part of Noah will be played by Bill Hassler, Japheth by Neil Peavy, Shem by Kevin Lear, Ham by Teddy McBohne. Arnie, we need you to help design and make the background scenery."

Arnie was shocked! He didn't get the part of Noah. His name had been mentioned last! He jumped up and ran out.

How do you think Arnie felt? Why do you think Mrs. Darko had asked him to design the scenery instead of playing the lead role?

Not everyone can have the leading part. It is often hard to work behind the scenes – to take what seems to us second place. But sometimes second place – or third, or fourth – may be just where God can use us the most.

Transition to the Bible Lesson:

I'm thinking of a man in the Bible Book of Acts who sometimes had to take second place. He was a Jewish man named Joseph.

Development of the Bible Lesson:

Joseph was born on the island of Cyprus and later moved to Jerusalem. We don't know exactly when Joseph heard of the Lord Jesus and received Him as Saviour. Perhaps he was one of three thousand Jews who trusted Jesus as Saviour when Peter first preached in Jerusalem. Or perhaps Peter, John or another follower of Jesus was the one to tell him how he could be saved from sin.

Sometime, somewhere, Joseph had heard that God loved him, that Jesus, God's only Son, had died on the cross for him—to pay the penalty for the bad things he had done and thought. He had learned that Jesus didn't stay dead—He rose and lives in Heaven. And Joseph believed what he heard. He asked the Lord Jesus to save him from sin. He was one of the first to be called a Christian.

Joseph's life was changed. He heard of other Christians who needed food and clothing, so he sold his land and brought the money he received to the leaders of the Christians.

"I want to help," he may have explained. "Use this to buy food to encourage the Christians who are hungry."

No wonder the Christians began calling Joseph by a special nickname, Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement."

"Thank God for Barnabas!" the Christians must have said to one another. "He sold his land so we could have food. Oh, how this encourages us."

“Barnabas kept on encouraging the Christians in Jerusalem. One day a young man named Saul came to see the Christians.

“It’s true I once hated you Christians,” Saul told them. “It’s true that I arrested many Christians and threw them into prison. But now, things are different! Jesus Christ appeared to me. When I saw Him and heard His voice, I knew He was God’s Son. I am a believer in Jesus now. I have become a Christian too!”

Can you imagine how the Christians in Jerusalem felt when Saul said that he had become a Christian? Did they believe him?

“Saul? A believer in Jesus? Impossible!” the people may have whispered. “He must be trying to spy on us! He will get all of our names and have us all thrown into prison! Don’t go near him—he’s a dangerous man!” The Bible says “...they were all afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple.” (Acts 9:26)

But one man believed Saul. Do you know who that man was? Right! It was Barnabas. Barnabas went to the leaders of the church who were meeting together at Jerusalem and took Saul with him. “Saul has become a Christian. He has preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27). He now believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” Because of Barnabas’ words the church leaders welcomed Saul. Barnabas was truly a son of encouragement. Barnabas, Saul and the other Christians must have spent many hours together discussing all that God had done in their lives and learning how to share this good news with others.

Some time later good news reached Jerusalem. “Christians have gone to Antioch,” a messenger reported. “They’ve been telling the people there that Jesus can save them from sin and that as many as receive Him can be members of God’s family. Many people in Antioch have received the Lord Jesus as Saviour from sin.”

“We need to send someone to teach and encourage the new Christians.” Someone suggested.

“What about Barnabas? Look what he’s done for us here in Jerusalem. Surely he will be the one who can help the new Christians at Antioch,” the believers agreed.

So Barnabas, the son of encouragement, was chosen to go to Antioch to help teach the new Christians (Acts 11:22). What an important job. Barnabas was happy when he saw what God had done in Antioch!

“Keep on loving and trusting the Lord Jesus,” he urged the new Christians. “Remember that God loved you so much that He gave His only Son to be your Saviour.”

Barnabas preached in the city. Many more people received the Lord Jesus as they heard what He had done for them

It wasn't long before Barnabas knew he needed help to teach all of these people. Who would be a good helper? Barnabas thought of Saul. He went to find him. Saul was glad to help Barnabas in Antioch. They worked together in the city for a whole year.

One day Barnabas and Saul met with other Bible teachers of the church at Antioch for a special time of prayer. The Bible gives the names of those present. Whose name do you suppose is at the beginning of the list? Yes, Barnabas. He must have been the leader. Saul's name was listed last. As the men prayed, God the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." God had a new job for Barnabas and Saul. He wanted them to leave Antioch and go as missionaries to tell people in other places about Jesus. Would Barnabas be willing to leave his job as leader and go as a missionary?

"Yes, I'll go wherever God chooses for me," Barnabas must have said. "The place God wants me is the best place to be."

The other men placed their hands on Barnabas' and Saul's heads and prayed for them before they left the city. What do you think they asked God to do for them? (Wait for answers.)

Perhaps one of the men led in prayer. "Oh, God, help Barnabas and Saul wherever they go. May many people believe that Jesus is God's Son, the only Saviour from sin."

After they got their things together, Barnabas and Saul got on board a ship headed for Cyprus, an island about 170 miles away. (Make a comparison with local distances.) Barnabas' nephew, John Mark, went along, too.

The believers in Antioch gathered to say goodbye.

"Goodbye! God bless you! We'll be praying for you!" They probably shouted and waved until the ship was far out at sea.

As soon as they arrived in Cyprus, Barnabas, Saul and John Mark began walking from town to town across the island. They told people in each town about the Lord Jesus. While they were at a town called Paphos, they received a very special message. Sergius Paulus, governor of the whole island of Cyprus, wanted them to come and tell him about Jesus! How excited they must have been! Don't you think Barnabas and Saul prayed that God would guide them as they went to speak to the governor?

At last Barnabas and Saul arrived at the governor's palace. "We are glad to tell you more about Jesus. Jesus is God's Son—He loves you—He is the only one who can forgive your sins and make your heart clean in God's sight.

Elymas, a wicked magician, was with the governor. He kept interrupting and contradicting the words of Barnabas and Saul.

The Bible doesn't tell us what Elymas said, but perhaps with a sneer, he shouted, "Don't believe that bag of lies!"

"Listen to us!" Barnabas spoke. "Jesus rose from the dead, proving He was the Son of God. He was seen alive by many people."

"Rose from the dead?" Elymas mocked. "Who would believe a tale like that?"

Saul stared at Elymas. Suddenly he spoke. God the Holy Spirit was guiding his words.

"You are full of lies and mischief! You are a child of the devil, and an enemy of everything that is right. Won't you ever stop lying about the ways of the Lord? The hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for awhile." (Acts 13:10)

Suddenly Elymas shouted, "I...I can't see! I can't see! Please... someone...anyone...come and help me!"

When the governor saw what happened to the wicked magician he was afraid. Perhaps the governor cried out, "I believe you! You are telling the truth! Jesus really is God's Son. Jesus really did die on the cross to take the place of sinners. He really did rise again! He is the only Saviour, just like you said. Saul, and you, too, Barnabas, you have told me the truth."

Do you think Barnabas was jealous as he saw God use the one who had been his helper? How do you think Barnabas felt as he listened to Paul speak to Elymas, the wicked magician? Paul had once needed Barnabas' help to assure the Christians in Jerusalem that he had really become a Christian. But it didn't seem he needed Barnabas now.

Before these men left Antioch for the trip to Cyprus, God the Holy Spirit had said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul." Now, as they left Cyprus, the Bible speaks of "Paul and his company..." It seems God was saying, "Move over, Barnabas! You'll have to learn to take second place. Paul is the leader now."

Instead of being angry or jealous, Barnabas stood by to encourage and help as Paul needed him. Barnabas wanted more than anything else to be in the place where God could use him.

The Bible says they traveled to Perga. John Mark went back home from Perga. We don't know why.

Barnabas continued to travel with Paul to town after town. Paul usually took the lead in preaching now. But Barnabas didn't mind. He wasn't ashamed to take second place—he could be happy there if that was where God wanted him. His job was to encourage and help Paul. He knew this was God's best place for him.

Later Paul wrote, "...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:8, 9). Do you think perhaps Paul was thinking of Barnabas as he wrote those words Paul knew that Barnabas, and each Christian, would receive rewards according to his own faithfulness in doing what God asked him to do.

I can imagine Paul praying, "Thank You, God, for Barnabas. He is the one who encouraged me by persuading the Christians in Jerusalem that I really believed and that my life had been changed. You used him to encourage and train me to be a missionary!

Paul realized that each Christian works as a partner with God.

As you tell others the good news about Jesus, God helps them to believe it is true. So it's not important if you have "first place" or "second place." The place you have is best if that's where God wants you. In God's plan every person is special. You will be rewarded, not according to whether you had the biggest job or the first place, but according to how faithful you were in doing the task God assigned to you. What's important is doing your best.

After their missionary trip was over, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they worked once again in the church. They were busy teaching and preaching in the city. John Mark was there too.

After many days of working at Antioch, Paul came to his faithful helper, Barnabas, and suggested "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they do" (Acts 15:36). They began making plans. Barnabas suggested they take John Mark along again.

"Oh, no!" Paul must have insisted. "Mark quit once—but he won't have a chance to do it again!" (Acts 15:38).

"But I feel I must work with John Mark," Barnabas replied. Paul and Barnabas could not reach an agreement so Paul asked another man to join him to visit the cities where he and Barnabas had preached.

Then Barnabas took John Mark with him on his own missionary trip.

Barnabas must have been sure God wanted him to encourage and train another worker. He was again the leader of a missionary team. The Bible doesn't tell us about their experiences, but we know that under Barnabas' guidance and encouragement, John Mark, too, became a leader for God. Years later, Paul wrote a letter asking that John Mark come to visit him. "He is profitable to me for the ministry," Paul explained (II Timothy 4:11). Paul meant John Mark was now a good worker. What made Paul change his mind about this young man? What had made John Mark profitable? Don't you suppose it was the help Barnabas had given him?

It was later that God used John Mark to write the Gospel of Mark in our Bible. And He used Paul to write fourteen* books of our New Testament. Did you know that Barnabas did not write any part of the Bible? How do you suppose Barnabas felt about the success of these two men?

First, he had to move over and let Paul take first place. Later he had moved over for his young nephew John Mark to take first place. What men would call second place the very best place for Barnabas--because that was where God could use him best.

Life Application for the Saved Child

Have you ever had to take what seemed to you like second place when you wanted to be first? (Let children respond.) Can you think of a reason God may have allowed this to happen to you?

Perhaps you, like Arnie in the story we began with, didn't get the part you wanted in a play or program. Or was it choir or band. Or maybe you're sometimes the last one to be chosen when the kids are choosing up sides. How did you feel? What did you do? What would you have done if you had remembered God had a plan for your life and that this disappointment was part of His plan? Maybe you have a brother or sister who receives better grades than you, even though you do your best. Or perhaps it seems someone else gets more attention than you do at school or at church. How do you feel? Sometimes it seems you are in second or third place even though you have done your best. What should you remember at that moment? (Review the memory verse.) You are very important to God. He has a special purpose for your life. Perhaps God wants to use you to encourage others.

You can be like Barnabas and be happy and useful in the place God gives you! God has a reward for you if you do faithfully and well the thing He has given you to do.

Invitation for the Unsaved Child

But perhaps you have never received Jesus as your Saviour from sin. You need to do this before you can serve Him. He wants you to trust Him. God's Word promises, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). If you would like to receive Him today, you may.

(Invite the children to respond to receive Christ. Ask them to indicate their decision by one of the following methods: standing, staying in their seats while others stand, opening eyes and looking at you during prayer, raising their hand, meeting you in a designated spot following the club or a method you have found most effective. Designate counseling area. Close in prayer.)

Review Activity--Role Play: Role play events from Barnabas' life. Choose from the following:

- 1) Barnabas bringing his money to share with needy Christians.
- 2) Barnabas bringing Saul to meet Christians at Jerusalem.

- 3) Barnabas and Saul going out as missionaries from Antioch (John Mark goes with them.
- 4) Paul asks Barnabas to return with him to visit the new Christians.
- 5) You could help children role play a pretend situation: Barnabas meets Paul and John Mark after they have become well known because of their ministry including the Bible books they have written (now a part of our Bible).

Guide the children in planning conversation. To keep thinking in the right vein, try displaying your lesson aim worded in first person: “ That I may realize my worth to God, Accepting with joy and enthusiasm the plan God has for me.”

Through the role play, encourage each character to express this truth.

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