

COMMITMENT

The Bible allows us to take a look into some of the first apostolic teams. Peter and John, the twelve, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Timothy, etc. Did they have a specific policy? Was there a clear commitment? Was that necessary?

JOHN MARK, BARNABAS AND PAUL

The clearest story to me about apostolic commitment is the one of Paul's first journey. After working under the direction of Barnabas as a teacher and prophet to Antioch, in Syria, the Holy Spirit confirmed to the elders that God was calling these two men to be apostles to the gentiles. Hands were laid on them, and off they went.

In their journey, Barnabas brought John Mark with them. This is the same who wrote Peter's gospel, called the gospel of Mark. He was a highly educated Jewish man, who lived in the house in Jerusalem where the Last Supper was held. It was the same house where the apostles received the Holy Spirit in Pentecost, seemingly a large place where many people were welcomed and gathered often, as seen in this text:

*And when he [Peter] had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of **John, whose surname was Mark**; where many were gathered together praying.*
Acts 12:12 KJV

Furthermore, we see that he was relative of Barnabas:

*Salute you doth Aristarchus, my fellow-captive, and Marcus, **the nephew of Barnabas**, (concerning whom ye did receive commands—if he may come unto you receive him,)*
Colossians 4:10 YLT

There is more to say about this man, but for the purpose of this teaching I think this is enough information. We must also review who Barnabas was, what was his character like, his personality. Scriptures show us that besides his loyalty, clearly revealed in his perseverance during the first mission trip, the Bible says this:

*And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, **The son of consolation**,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
Acts 4:36-37 KJV

He was a faithful, generous, committed brother who had a warm heart and a deep knowledge of the Torah. The apostles gave him Barnabas as a nickname, seeing his character. It was him the one who trusted Paul when no one wanted to meet him, and introduced him to the twelve:

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they all were afraid of him because they wouldn't believe he was a disciple. Barnabas, however, introduced Saul to the apostles, telling them how on the road Saul had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how courageously he had spoken in the name of Jesus in Damascus. So he freely circulated among them in Jerusalem, speaking courageously in the name of the Lord.
Acts 9:26-28 ISV

We see here how he truly was a "son of consolation," conciliating people and building relationships. A real shepherd. When he was sent as apostle to Antioch, he went and searched for Paul in Tarsus, to equip and train him in the work of Syria.

And the Word was heard in the ears of the church in Jerusalem. And they sent out Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch; who was glad when he had come and had seen the

grace of God. And he exhorted all with purpose of heart to remain near to the Lord. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And many people were added to the Lord. And Barnabas went out to Tarsus to seek Saul. And finding him, he brought him to Antioch. And it happened to them a whole year they were assembled in the church. And they taught a considerable crowd. And the disciples were first called Christian in Antioch.
Acts 11:22-26 MKJV

So, we see that Barnabas was a gentle kind man of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, versed in the Scriptures, who was a strong supporter of the work in Jerusalem and was sent to strengthen and organize the church in Antioch. There he reached out to Paul, a beloved a fellow brother, and trained him in Antioch. When they were sent into their mission, it appears evident that Barnabas was leading the work. This conclusion is easy to take since the first four times the team was described, Barnabas appears first and Paul (Saul) second.

*which they also did, sending to the elders by the hand of **Barnabas and Saul**.*
Acts 11:30 MKJV

*And **Barnabas and Saul** returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled the ministry, having taken with them John, whose last name was Mark.*
Acts 12:25 MKJV

*And in Antioch some among the existing church were prophets and teachers. (such as **Barnabas**, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch) and **Saul**. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate **Barnabas and Saul** to Me for the work to which I have called them.*
Acts 13:1-2 MKJV

*who was with the proconsul of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man. He called for **Barnabas and Saul** and asked to hear the Word of God.*
Acts 13:7 MKJV

And in every occasion the pair is mentioned by the Jewish brothers in Jerusalem, Barnabas is still mentioned first, since he was of higher reputation there (Acts 15). After their journey in Cyprus, Paul appears first, and he was not long after even called the chief speaker of the two:

*And they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercury, because **he was the chief speaker**.*
Acts 14:12 MKJV

We see in Barnabas the real disciple-maker's heart, stepping back to allow his trainee to become stronger than himself. A beautiful relationship, a strong bond. A man that loved integrating, helping, teaching, training.

Before their first mission trip, when he and Paul went to Jerusalem bringing an offering, they decided to take John Mark with them back to Antioch (Acts 12:25). As we have seen, John Mark was his nephew (Colossians 4:10). When they left on their first journey, John Mark was with them as an assistant, but after a while he decided to leave the team, for reasons unknown. See the following texts:

And when they were at Salamis, they announced the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they also had John as an assistant.
Acts 13:5 MKJV

And Paul and those around him sailed from Paphos and came to Perga of Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem.
Acts 13:13 MKJV

We can only speculate about the appointment they had made with each other. We do see that the relationships were intense, deep, they were truly committed to each other. Nevertheless, at some point, John Mark aborts the mission and goes back to Jerusalem. Was this a positive or negative experience? Read what happened before the second journey:

*A few days later, Paul told Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." Barnabas wanted to take along John, who was called Mark, but **Paul did not think it was right to take along the man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and who had not gone with them into the work.** The disagreement was so sharp that they parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and left after the brothers had entrusted him to the grace of the Lord.*

Acts 15:36-40 ISV

Obviously, Paul and Barnabas had a different standard for their apostolic missions. Paul needed someone he could fully trust, thinking more strategically, and Barnabas was more led by his love and affection, and desire to train and equip. If you read chapters 13 and 14 of Acts, you see how many difficulties and hard work they faced during their mission, Paul being even stoned to death. Paul needed a lot of spiritual, practical, and moral support from his team. It was a risky work, they needed each other. For Paul, having someone who he could not fully rely on was not possible.

It didn't mean though that Paul refused to work with John Mark in other occasions. We see Paul even asking Timothy to send Mark to him when he was imprisoned in Rome:

*Do your best to come to me soon, because Demas, having fallen in love with this present world, has abandoned me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. **Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.***

2 Timothy 4:9-11 ISV

Here it is evident that others had left Paul alone, and that Mark outstood as a faithful servant who would be useful in Paul's work. Either a reconciliation had taken place, or Mark was useful for other kind of service.

In conclusion, we see from this intense story, that there was an expected commitment between the workers of each apostolic team. Sufferings were expected, hard work was normal. There had to be a standard of prayer, work, and loyalty.

SUGGESTED LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

As you might have read in a previous lesson in 1:1 Discipleship, the Word of God shows many principles and how the disciples expressed those principles or values in different ways according to the customs of those cultures and times.

In our modern days and western societies, we need to adapt ourselves to the idiosyncrasies of the people we are trying to reach. If you can make a calculation of the average free time your team members have per week, you will be able to see what they can commit themselves to. Once you know what would be the minimum, you can start building up towards reaching that minimum.

For example, a friend of mine works towards using a 10% of his team's free time to fulfill their commitment to the mission. It works like this:

$$24\text{hrs} \times \text{day} = 168\text{hrs} \times \text{week}$$

$$10\% = 16.8\text{hrs}$$

Simplifying the numbers, we speak of 16.5hrs a week committed to the mission work. He divided the commitment to 3 areas: prayer, team building, disciple-making. So, a total of 5.5hrs for each area became the minimum standard for his team.

In my team, which is a Kingdom Family (or spiritual family), we are trying to make it grow to an apostolic team. To do that, we need to raise our standard of prayer to a higher level. If I would present it as a one-day change, giving the Dutch culture in which we live, it might become too intimidating. Instead, we are building first personal discipline in prayer and we meet once in a while to pray together for an extended period of time. My goal of course is to pray more, since apostolic work can't be done without a committed prayer life.

Besides that, we spend at least 5 hours per week together, and we have set up a goal of spending at least one part of a day in disciple-making. That means, a morning, afternoon, or evening spent in training someone in the ways of the Kingdom of Jesus. Once that is reached and stabilized, we can start planning strategically and taking more intentional action into the mission field.

SETTING REACHABLE GOALS

Our brothers from T4T Movements have put together the **S.M.A.R.T. acronym** to help us set up reachable goals that will allow us to grow as disciples of the Lord. Here is its meaning and some examples:

SPECIFIC	Set goals like "I will read the whole Gospel according to Mark and pray each day", "I will keep a journal of my bible studies, prayer points and their answers".
MEASURABLE	Aim for a Chapter a day, set out a list of people and things you want to pray for and make sure you get through the list.
ACHIEVABLE	Find out if you're a morning or a night time person and chisel out a set amount of time each day to do these things. Don't set yourself up to fail. Make it easy on yourself. Don't bite off more than you can chew. Start small and work upwards.
REALISTIC	You might get sick, go on holidays or have a family emergency. So, build in a safety margin into your time frames. For example, Mark has 16 chapters so instead of 16 days set your goal at 32 days or round it off to one month. After all you will hit areas that you may wish to further explore.
TIME BASED	Aim to read a chapter a day and start with 15 minutes a day prayer time when you first wake up. Meet with your mentor every night on a Wednesday to discuss what you have learned, where you are up to and practice your skills. If your goals are realistic then put some real effort to stick to whatever time frames you came up with.

Taken from <https://meetgodathome.com/following/SMART>

REMEMBER: These are practical tips aimed at Kingdom Families who can grow into apostolic teams, or for people who have received an apostolic calling and are setting up a team to work among certain people group. Do not use this with babies in the faith, or with people who are just now being trained to develop basic skills. Use this with people who are mature, stable and experienced in the work of the Kingdom.