

The Vibrant Heart and One Accord

Vigorous and Resilient Like a Tree

The following verse is what I aspire to be in the years ahead:

Psalm 92:14:

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;

No, I'm not saying that I want to gain weight! This verse describes *a tree* that is *vigorous and resilient*. If we start a few verses earlier, we'll better understand what "fat and flourishing" means.

Psalm 92:12-14:

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing [or, as several other translations put it, "full of sap and green"];

I want to be "*full of sap and green*" when I grow up; or to put it in a human context, I want to remain *vigorous and resilient: lively and able to bounce back*. So just how does a tree stay that way?

"*Full of sap*" is the first quality mentioned, indicating *vigor*. Sap is the lifeblood of a tree. It delivers nourishment in the form of water and minerals traveling up the tree through its internal channels. The food that the sap circulates consists of sugars derived from photosynthesis, and is fed back into the tree and leaves during growth periods.

The sap is also a defense mechanism against insect infestation. Not only does the sap prevent invasive insects from laying their eggs, it's also designed to entrap them when they try to bore into the tree. So the sap not only feeds the tree; it defends it from encroachment.

“Full of sap” therefore embodies the idea of **vigor**, strong and well-protected. Well, like a thriving tree, I want to be vigorous throughout my life, don't you?

“Green” is the second quality mentioned, indicating **growth**. **Green** is evidence of **life**, both inside and out. Healthy trees have new growth yearly. The branches are full, with lots of beautiful, green leaves. A branch in good condition also bends under pressure, which is a characteristic of a living branch; and when scratched, it shows green underneath.

“Green” therefore embodies the idea of **resilience, not only flourishing, but flexible**. Well, like a sturdy tree, I want to be resilient throughout my life, don't you? Not only do I want to grow, but I want to stay flexible and not cave under pressure.

The Vibrant Heart

Let's take another look at Psalm 92 to see what the tree analogy teaches us about a **vibrant heart**.

A vibrant heart is **fruitful**, continuing to put forth life, year after year.

Psalm 92:14a:

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;...

A vibrant heart is **vigorous**, mentally, morally and spiritually.

Psalm 92:14b:

... they shall be fat [**full of sap**] ...

A vibrant heart is **resilient**, willing and **able to learn and to yield**.

Psalm 92:14c:
... and flourishing [green];

A vibrant heart looks to glorify God above all.

Psalm 92:15:
To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

The Vibrant Heart and One Accord

Today I'd like to consider how a vibrant heart contributes to one accord. To see this, let's study the collaboration over time between three ministers in the Book of Acts: Mark, Barnabas, and Paul.

We'll keep on the lookout to see how through multiple transitions in their service together, these three men maintained an attitude of heart that enabled them to emerge victorious in one accord despite potential difficulties and challenges along the way.

Mark

Let's start with John Mark, the most junior of the three from an age perspective. John was his Hebrew name, Mark, his Roman name. A Jew by birth like Barnabas and Paul, he went on in later life to minister primarily to the Gentiles.

The first time we hear about Mark is when the angel escorted Peter out of prison in Jerusalem.

Acts 12:12:
And when he 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.

Evidently Mark was known to those in the early Church, and that is why he is cited here. Of all the places they could have gathered to pray for Peter's release, they chose Mark's mother's home. Surely this family was more than just acquaintances with Peter. Later in life, Peter writes of Mark that he is "my son" — a spiritual designation of great endearment, spoken of one known very well.

We're all familiar with the record in the next chapter where, when asked to accompany Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey, Mark decided to part ways with them after their very first stop. This was the last mention of Mark's collaboration with Paul until the end of Paul's life.

Barnabas

Barnabas was a formidable figure in the early Church — perhaps more formidable than we realize. He may well have been the same person named Joseph called Barsabas who was one of two people in contention to be numbered with the eleven apostles. It should be noted that the criteria were:

Acts 1:21,22:

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

If indeed, therefore, Barnabas was one and the same as this person, he would have known Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, and would have been a witness of the same. Whether or not this was the case, Barnabas was clearly loved, admired, and respected by all as a good, kind, generous, and godly man. It's not surprising therefore, that it was only with Barnabas's recommendation that the Jews at Jerusalem were able to overcome their misgivings about Saul the persecutor of the Church when first introduced to him.

Acts 11:22-26:

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord [that's a vibrant heart, glorifying God above all].

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Not surprisingly, in these early years Barnabas was the person people thought of first when the two were ministering together.

Paul

It was evident from the start, however, that Paul had much to do for God, following through on his initial encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

Acts 9:4-6:

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 9:22:

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

As the years went on and Barnabas and Saul set out on the first missionary journey together, Paul's ministry started coming to the fore. The only dissension and debate we see mentioned is not between Paul and Barnabas, but with those of the circumcision party. Paul and Barnabas, however, were focused on all that God had done with them.

Acts 15:1-4:

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.

It was only afterward as they prepared to do revisits, when Barnabas wanted to bring Mark with them, that a conflict arose between Barnabas and Paul. Unable to come to an agreement, Barnabas and Mark departed for Cyprus, and Paul for Asia Minor, where he eventually teamed up with Timothy.

It's intriguing to note that the Scripture doesn't say that one party was right and the other one wrong following this contention. And this definitely was not the end of the story, as we shall see.

Many years later Paul refers to his fellow minister Barnabas when writing to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 9:6:

Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

People were saying that Paul and Barnabas had no right to refrain from working for a living. Evidently the two of them were still collaborating, and that is why people were thinking of them in the same breath.

Barnabas and Paul weren't holding grudges, their vibrant hearts were resilient and they bounced back.

Paul hadn't forgotten about Mark either. Near the end of his life while imprisoned in Rome, he writes of Mark:

2 Timothy 4:11:

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Paul continued to have Peter's protégé Mark on his heart and mind, desiring greatly to see and work with him.

Whatever bad feelings may have existed between Paul and Mark after he was denied the opportunity to go on the second missionary journey, the two were clearly reconciled. Their vibrant hearts were resilient and they too bounced back.

Later, Mark went on to write the Gospel of Mark. Addressed to a Gentile Roman audience, it illustrated the qualities of Jesus as a servant: faithful, helpful, focused, action-oriented, prayerful and believing. These were likely characteristics of Mark's life too.

Vibrant and in One Accord

Over the course of a lifetime, our lives may intersect with those of numerous other ministers and believers. With some, we may collaborate for a short time; with others, for the long term. As we keep our hearts vibrant — fruitful, vigorous, resilient and looking to glorify God — we will enjoy the fullness of one accord with those brothers and sisters. Let's be “full of sap and green” our entire lives as we rejoice in one accord with God and man.