

ALL IN—growing FAITH
Acts 4:32-37

Welcome back to ALL IN—during this series we are asking Jesus “WHAT’S NEXT?”—and DEEPENING our DISCIPLESHIP. You may want to get out your VISION booklet so that you have a place to take notes—I hope you have read the booklet and that it is becoming like a spiritual diary as God leads us through this season. If you have not yet received one—please stop by the ALL IN display in the hallway. I encourage you to be with us each week of this initiative—this is the most consequential thing I have ever asked our church to do—it has the potential to change us as individuals and as a church as we go ALL IN together. Our goal is that 100% of our people will go ALL IN together. May 7/8 is our commitment weekend—please make it priority to be here—we need you.

Story: Last Sunday evening, several members of our staff and church leadership gathered to make our early commitments to ALL IN to inspire the rest of the church as we all prepare to make our ALL IN commitments on May 7/8. (1 Chronicle 29) I am thrilled to share with you that 56 families committed early to ALL IN that night. [Applause!]

I am excited to share some even more encouraging numbers with you—5 of these 56 households became BRAND NEW GIVERS to Reynoldsburg UMC! [Applause!] This is one of the most exciting things! Now, there are some of you out there like those 5. You have never given to Reynoldsburg UMC before—and you are considering what it would look like to go ALL IN and LIVE GENEROUSLY. I encourage you to take a look at that gift chart and commitment card in your Vision booklet—pray over it—and consider what it would look like for you to make a generous sacrifice for ALL IN in two weeks. Don’t stand on the sidelines. I challenge you to go ALL IN.

From last Sunday’s commitments, there are a few of families I want to share with you which really encouraged and inspired me:

- One family who is moving in the near future—made a commitment—investing in the community that has nurtured them.
- Another family multiplied their giving over 4 times, going from \$3000 the past two years to \$13,000 in the next two years for ALL IN.

- Another family is multiplying their giving 3 ½ times, going from \$1,400 the past two years to \$10,000 in the next two years for ALL IN.
- There is another family going from \$250 the past two years to \$4,000 for ALL IN. That's 16 times their regular giving!!
- And yet another family is increasing their giving by 50%, going from \$24,000 the past two years to \$36,000 in the next two years for ALL IN.

Will you celebrate with me the amazing goodness of God as these families take huge steps in their generosity?! [Applause.]

Now there are some of us whose ALL IN commitment will represent radical increases like that. You may already be thinking about what your commitment will be. You've had conversations with your spouse. You've even prayed with God about it once or twice. You've even been listening to my sermons about it. Well, maybe. 😊 Perhaps you have even begun to put a number down on a card. But what if God would lay something new and more powerful on your heart during the next two weeks? Would you be open to that? **Would you be willing to allow God to GROW your FAITH?**

Our goal is a lofty one—**to receive \$10M** over the next two years—toward our ALL IN ONE FUND goal. Hey, if we didn't change a thing and just continued to give as we have these last 2 years, **we would receive about \$6M**. We are a generous church. Our Goal includes that \$6M—PLUS this generosity acceleration we are calling ALL IN—**to receive \$4M more** than what our normal giving has been over these next two years. Some of us can increase like those who came last Sunday evening and double, triple, or even give 16 times more than we have in the past. Others have been GIVING EXTRAVAGANTLY already—you're already giving a huge percentage of your income, well over the tithe, so your increase may be smaller—but the call is for each of us to take a radical step of FAITH. Reaching our goal is doable—but it will require ALL of us—each ONE of us—to TRUST GOD and take part.

ALL IN is an opportunity for us to grow spiritually perhaps more radically than we ever have before, and I do not want you to miss out on that. Take the challenge. You won't regret it. This is ultimately not about anything the church wants FROM us—but rather what God wants to do FOR us—IN us—and THROUGH us—God wants to BLESS us and CHANGE our COMMUNITY for Jesus.

To provide focus for this initiative, we have been asking: **When it comes to my relationship with Jesus—am I a CONSUMER or a FOLLOWER?**

The early FOLLOWERS of Jesus had a transformational moment when they made the transition from being CONSUMERS to being FOLLOWERS of Jesus—when they realized it was not just about what they received FROM Jesus—but what God wanted to do THROUGH them for Jesus. FOLLOWING JESUS COST them something.

Not much has changed in last 20 centuries. We get a lot from God. It is easy to CONSUME the BENEFITS of faith—better marriages—improved parenting—increased peace and patience—sound financial advice—decreased anxiety—sobriety—and more. These are all things God WANTS to give us—but if we stop there—with the BENEFITS—like CONSUMERS—we miss out on a lot that that God ultimately wants to do IN us—FOR us—and THROUGH us.

ALL IN has the opportunity to be a transformational moment—and how we respond will determine a lot about the impact of our lives for Jesus. My prayer is that it will **GROW our FAITH.**

This story in Acts 4 can help us learn how to take the next step forward in GROWING FAITH. In the first few months of the Christian movement, the disciples shared everything they had. **“ALL the believers were ONE in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they SHARED EVERYTHING THEY HAD.” (4:32)** This is not an example of communism or socialism—it is an example of EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY—they were ALL IN for each other—and it changed their life paradigm—they were willing to LIVE GENEROUSLY for a community they LOVED.

It did not last long—which is human nature because some of the first words we learn are ME and MINE.

Illus: Joy is almost two—and she has a sense of what is hers—EVERYTHING—time out at day care for defending her toys—watch this video of her getting mad at our dog Clover for taking her toy.

Video: Joy and Clover

We do the same thing. As adults we wrestle with the same attitude about our possessions—my house—my car—my 401K—my time—my life—and that blocks our GENEROSITY.

In this story, we find a group of Jesus followers choosing to LIVE GENEROUSLY—and as the story unfolds—one man stands out as a person of incredible FAITH.

His name was Joseph—but he is not remembered that way—he is remembered by his nickname—Barnabas—which means son of encouragement. **He would later live into the full meaning of his name**—being generous in spirit to Paul—encouraging, befriending and advocating for him when no one else would—and then taking the cause of John Mark when he disappointed Paul—and Paul did not want to take him on their second missionary journey. Barnabas—son of encouragement—embodied his nickname.

What would your SPIRITUAL NICKNAME be? If the folks around you would give you a nickname that reflects your character and the difference you are making in this world—what would your nickname be? Would it give honor to God—or cause Him to blush? Would it point people to Jesus—or cause confusion? What would your nickname be? Ask those who know you the best to give you a SPIRITUAL NICKNAME. It might give us pause to examine our life and actions—moving us from being CONSUMERS to FOLLOWERS.

BARNABAS was a person who LIVED GENEROUSLY. In this passage, **“BARNABAS...SOLD a field he owned and brought the MONEY and PUT IS AT THE APOSTLE’S FEET.” (4:37)**

With this act, he trusts God to deliver security he no longer has. I would be really resistant and afraid to do that—but Barnabas—experiencing an ALL IN moment—exhibits a level of FAITH that would mark his legacy in life. That type of GENEROUS LIVING is always coupled with the FAITH that is behind it.

Where are you on the journey to LIVING GENEROUSLY? Think for a moment about your pattern of GIVING—does it reflect GROWING FAITH in God? If you would like some help in GROWING your FAITH in terms of GIVING. I encourage you to read pages 18 and 19 in the ALL IN Vision Booklet to see various giving

scenarios—and pages 20-22—they are filled with practical ad creative ways to give.

Illus: Don't come before the Lord empty-handed.

Illus: \$2 a day—nearly 2 million

Barnabas was a KINGDOM GIVER—giving extravagantly to the cause of the Kingdom in a community he loved. He sold some of his stored resources—and gave them to the work of the Kingdom—to help a community he loved. We sometimes think that stored resources are things that other people have—things like stocks, property, or gold—but in reality—all of us have some form of stored resources. Think of the five most valuable possessions you own—those are stored resources.

Story: 66 Mustang—sold it to pay for Paige's wedding. I was willing to liquidate a stored resource so that I could use it for something important to me. Beth and I are thinking about doing something similar with some of our other possessions for ALL IN. What does that look like for you?

Every once in a while—sometimes once in a generation and other times only once in a lifetime, we get the opportunity to be a part of something BIG God is trying to do in the world—and when that happens, God invites us to go ALL IN—so that he can accomplish his mission to CHANGE the WORLD. Such a moment takes FAITH. I believe we, as a congregation, are at an ALL IN moment. Standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us—we are committed to BUILDING our PEOPLE—BUILDING INFLEUNCE for JESUS in our COMMUNITY and BUILDING our FAMILY LIFE CENTER—in an effort to reach the 67% of our community who do not have a meaningful relationship with Jesus. This is a BIG VISION that is doable with God's help and ALL of US being willing to go ALL IN. This is about more than what God wants to do THROUGH us—but also about what God wants to do FOR and IN us. God wants to build our FAITH.

Look at Barnabas. Why shouldn't we be like Barnabas? If God is whispering that kind of ALL IN commitment to you—listen. However, remember this: It is possible for us to be people that give generously—meet all the financial goals—and launch this initiative—while missing the most important things God wants to

do in our lives—and I do not want us to miss that. This initiative is NOT just about WHAT we are doing—what’s MORE important is the WHY.

This is not about what the Church wants FROM us. I have heard some folks say—this is just about the building—that is not true. If that were the case—the focus would be on drawings—we would have a model down in the café—and a 3D fly through video of the building. This is not about the BUILDING.

I have heard others say—this is just about the money—that’s not true. Let me say it this way. If someone walked into my office tomorrow and wrote the church a check for \$10M—we would still do this initiative. Because it’s NOT about the money—it’s NOT about the building—it’s about DEEPENING our DISCIPLESHIP. This is NOT about what the Church wants FROM us—**it is about what God wants to do FOR us—IN us—and THROUGH us.** God wants to BLESS us and CHANGE our COMMUNITY for Jesus. Get this: At the end of this ALL IN journey—the greatest success will be if we as a community have become different through it. Having BIGGER FAITH—and a MORE EFFECTIVE WITNESS—THAT’S the REAL PURPOSE.

Let’s talk about this in terms of FAITH—and taking a step. Looking at Barnabas—I don’t know if I have that much FAITH—to sell some property and give it all. We don’t know the exact size of his FAITH, but we do know it was CONNECTED with God.

How BIG is your FAITH and what is it CONNECTED to? We put FAITH in things all the time—the stock market—doctors—employers—people—pastors—ourselves, but how BIG in our FAITH in GOD? Listen: **A little faith in a BIG GOD is better than a BIG FAITH in something other than God**

Illus: Climber falling off a cliff—grabs a branch—what matters?—only that the branch is anchored

Barnabas had a FAITH that was DEEPLY ROOTED in his TRUST of God.

Where is our FAITH ROOTED? Who/what is it ANCHORED to? Why does one have to GIVE to show one’s FAITH is anchored to God? Because the Bible consistently shows that GIVING and FAITH are connected—our greatest temptation is to put our FAITH in something else—in money and

possessions. Most of us don't think we do this—but when the stock-market drops—anxiety ripples through our culture—or if we lose a job—we worry. We don't think we put FAITH in money when we have it—but when it is gone it exposes our FAITH in it.

That's why God calls us to give—to willingly and intentionally create a vacuum so that we have to put something different there. It teaches us to ANCHOR our lives in God as the source of our SECURITY and ETERNAL HOPE—to **GROW our FAITH**. My greatest prayer in this initiative is not just that the FINANCIAL GOAL would be met—but that God would make us different—because our lives are ANCHORED in God and we have a GROWING FAITH. God calls us to GIVE for the sake of our FAITH—to ANCHOR our lives in God—the source of our eternal security and hope.

I am CHALLENGING all of us to PRAY about giving the largest gift that have ever given during the next two years—but not for the sake of the initiative—but to GROW our FAITH and ANCHOR us to God. This is the growing edge for Beth and me. We are inviting each other to come to the edge of ourselves—to the place our abilities end—and to take the step of being ALL IN in FAITH—to **have a little faith in a BIG GOD—rather than a BIG FAITH in something else.**

Truth: If we will GROW our FAITH—God will do immeasurably MORE than we can ever ask or imagine!

Barnabas was a man of deep faith. The gift he made is not the most significant thing—because it is possible to make a gift—to meet the financial goals we have set—and miss the work that God wants to do IN us. Barnabas' gift met a need—but it was about so much more—it revealed the FAITH he had in God—which marked his life and was continually revealed in his character. He teaches us it is better to have a little faith in a BIG GOD—than to have a BIG faith in something other than God.

So what about you? Are you willing use these next two weeks to grow your FAITH in our BIG GOD? **Will you go ALL IN—in GROWING FAITH?**

Stand? Pray