

Encouragement

Barnabas: The Son of Encouragement

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Today I want to continue basically the theme I have been on, on how we can serve the brethren and also in how we interact with each other in our lives. Our service to God is how we conduct our lives and the character that we reflect of Jesus Christ, not just with the brethren, but with everyone that we encounter. And it should be an aspect of our lives that we are working on every day.

I would like to start out in I Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 11.

I Thessalonians 5:11-14 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

The word here, both for comfort and exhort, comes from the same Greek word, which is *Strong's* #3870, which means to admonish, exhort, console, to strengthen, and encourage. And we should never underestimate the power of encouragement and how it can enrich each of our lives. We all need encouragement to sustain this life, this Christian life that we are living.

I come across a quote I thought was interesting by Joe Zantamia. And the quote is, "You choose your words, you cannot choose the effect that they will have on people. Always speak out of love. True power does not crush others but helps them to see their own greatness." I think these are powerful words and they really are effective because it is the words that we speak to each other. That is how we help each other, by our words. And we are all, brethren, in need of encouragement.

The opposite of encourage is discouragement. And there will be times in this physical life that we live in this world that we will have difficult times and we will have issues and problems and trials. And there will be times that you will lack courage and hope and you will struggle with the ability to move on. And I am sure that all of us have been there, and it can be very frustrating. And sometimes you do not know how you are going to go forward. And then someone says just something small to you, an encouragement. And it does not take much to make a difference in our lives. It could be just a simple gesture, or a word, but it would lift your spirits, and it helps you to move on to that next step. And it is amazing how much just a little bit, a little encouragement can go a long way.

I have learned that in my business with our inspectors, if you just stay behind them, encourage them, you get a whole lot more production. And it is the same thing with us in our personal lives. And it is not hard to be encouraging. It is not; it does not cost you anything but it has a tremendous effect on folks. And again, do we do it enough?

In fact, when it comes to our children, encouragement is a powerful parenting tool. Encouragement is a fundamental principle in teaching your children. It is a priceless gift that we give to them that pays us back in dividends. The professionals in the field highly recommend that parents be encouraging to their children. So encouragement is one of the greatest things that we can give our children. It is only second to them by teaching them God's truth and how that impacts their lives. And so, if you want your children to have self-worth, and to move further along in their lives, encourage them. It will be a much greater factor in their lives than you will ever realize.

And as we see today, encouragement is an important part of our Christian character. It must be a part of our daily practice. And when I say practice, I mean just like a doctor practices medicine. As Christians, as sons of God, it is our responsibility to admonish and encourage others. It should be our practice. It should be our daily routine. And the Scriptures are full of examples of encouragement and encouraging people, and their examples show us how high a duty this is to be a Christian. Again, it should be our practice.

And I do believe that it is a special gift that God gives us through His Holy Spirit, that is developed as we draw nearer to Him. Because that is one of His characteristics and He wants to give Himself to us. And it is something we all have to work at through our relationship with God, with studying the Scriptures. It is a process, but to learn to be encouraging to others. And we need it, especially in the church, not just outside the church, but we need it here as well. It is something that we never stop developing. And it does not matter who you are as well. You could be the shyest person, but you can always give a little bit of encouragement.

You see, we understand trials and difficulties that people go through. And I believe that empathy is a strong motive for having the ability to encourage. When you have gone through the same type of trials and tests, then you are understanding of what they are going through and you know even more how you can encourage others. Jesus Christ walked this earth. He understands our difficulties. He understands the pain, the trials. And so, He wants to give us encouragement because He has empathy for us. He wants to strengthen us. So we can go on especially because He wants us to be a part of His nature, and that is what that is.

Now today, I want to focus on one gentleman in the Scriptures. This is a man in the New Testament, not seemingly a major player in the New Testament, not a great name. But I think it is safe to say that he is one of the unsung heroes of the early church. His name was Barnabas. He does not show up much in the Scriptures. But he had a tremendous impact, a positive impact on the early church. And we will also see that he was highly respected by the apostles in Jerusalem, and that he was a mentor to men like Mark, who wrote the gospel, and to Paul. And so we are going to focus on the life of Barnabas for a little while here today.

So first, please turn to Acts chapter 4, verse 36. This is where he is first mentioned in the Scriptures.

Acts 4:36-37 And Joses [or it could be Joseph, as it would be in the Hebrew], who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Now, there were many in the early church who were doing the same thing. They were taking their possessions and selling houses and property and bringing it to the church. And that is how we are introduced to Barnabas here in the book of Acts. He sold property and he brought it to the church. So he could be an encouragement to them as well.

It is interesting that he was a Levite but he was from the country of Cyprus. That means he was not born in Judah. He was not a Jew. But he was an Israelite because he was a Levite. And I also find it interesting that this man is only known by his nickname. His name was Joseph but we know him as Barnabas. So, there must have been something extremely positive, encouraging about the attitude of this man and the impact that he had on the early church to be given such a special nickname.

He was a leader who was kind, forgiving, encouraging, compassionate, and I think he was always looking for the good in men. In Acts 11:24 simply says, "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." And so as we look at the life of Barnabas, you will find that there are many, many lessons that we can apply in our lives as we develop God's character and leading us into a greater amount of humility and drawing nearer to God.

So as we see Barnabas was a man known for uplifting others. Again, he had that positive attitude and I believe that that attitude came from humility and selfless generosity, a willingness to mentor the weak and the misunderstood, and the courage and humility to step out of the spotlight so others could thrive. I think we are going to see that here in just a few minutes. And we need men and women like Barnabas in our lives because we need to be encouraged. When we receive encouragement, we receive hope. And it gives us what we need to keep going on in this Christian life. This is the impact that Barnabas had on the early church. That is why he was named the son of encouragement.

Now, I was thinking about this, to be called the son of encouragement, then who is the Father of encouragement. Please turn to II Corinthians chapter 1.

II Corinthians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort [That

word comfort means exhortation, admonishment, and encouragement.], who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now, if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is your consolation and salvation.

You see, our heavenly Father is the Father of encouragement. And I think back in verse 4, it says here that we are also to be encouragers as well. This is a tremendous gift that Barnabas was given, and it is a tremendous gift that we are given as well. We all need help sometimes, as I said. And so, we need to go to that Source of encouragement first. We might be encouraged by others, but when we are down and suffering, we need to go to the core. We need to go to God in prayer and ask Him for His encouragement.

You know, that is exactly what Jesus Christ did when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He openly showed His humility, His humanity, experiencing agony and sorrow, sweating drops of blood. And He even said, "Let this cup pass from Me." He prayed to the Father for help. He prayed for strength and His Father provided it. He was encouraged. He was strengthened, and He had the ability to finish the work He had started. He was able to lay down His life in service to us. He understands. He understands the need for encouragement. Again, He has suffered everything that we have. And He has received what we have as well through encouragement.

We have the same opportunity to partake of comfort and encouragement that God gives to us, and we need to give that on to others. Again, back in verse 4, it says, "That we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble." Paul is saying he expects us directly to be partakers of God's gift of encouragement. We are supposed to share that with others. It is not a suggestion, it is a command. It is not an optional. It is a fundamental expectation of our faith. When we receive comfort and help from God, we are to share it.

The interesting thing is it does not take much encouragement. And you know something, when we are encouraging others, we are encouraged as well in that same process.

So the Father is the giver of encouragement. Jesus Christ is the giver of encouragement. And because of God's interaction in the life of Barnabas, he became the son of encouragement.

Now, I want to continue in the life of Barnabas here because this was a man that always looked for the good in people. And that is what God wants us to do. He wants us to look for the good in people, to focus on the positive and not people's faults. I think it is very easy for us to focus on each other's faults. It is a common human nature. But you know something, Barnabas did not do that. I am sure that he saw people's faults. I am sure when he looked at people he saw their weaknesses and their strengths. But he focused on the potential that God wanted for those people.

So that is why I want you to turn to Acts chapter 9. We will see a perfect example of this way of thinking. At the beginning of Acts 9 we see Paul's conversion on the Damascus road followed by being baptized by Ananias. And I want to drop down to verse 26.

Acts 9:26 And when Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

You know, the disciples there in Jerusalem, they were terrified of this guy. They were literally terrified. They were afraid that if they exposed the congregation to this man, that he may be going out to everyone around. They did not want to take the chance. This man had been in charge of the squads that went out and arrested Christians as an agent of the Sanhedrin. And then he would stand by and give permission for people to be stoned or to be put in prison. Paul had done everything in his power to destroy the church and the disciples believed maybe he was undercover here. He was not sincere. He was just trying to get into their inner group. But then we see in verse 27,

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Just a short time of Barnabas having an interaction with Saul, he was able to see that God was working with this man and he was willing to stand in the gap between Paul and the apostles. I mean, they may have said, "Forget you, Barnabas, you're out of here. We don't believe it." But you know something, there must have been something about Barnabas that the apostles really, truly respected. Even though they could not see the good in Paul, he did. And there is no doubt in my mind that Barnabas was inspired by God and he provided the right encouragement at the exact right time. You know, it gives you a little bit of an idea, reading between the lines here, of just how respected this man was. For him to say he is okay, and the apostles will say, okay. It does not say what position he had or what, if any, power whatsoever. But we can see that he had a tremendous influence on the early church and on the apostles there in Jerusalem.

And I was thinking, put yourself in Paul's shoes just for a moment here, at this moment. You know, he had responded to God on that road and he managed to turn his life around, no doubt putting a target on his own back as he began to preach. Paul was a changed man. He wanted to join this group in Jerusalem. He wanted to be a part of the disciples. He wanted to be in contact with them. Instead he was rejected. You know, was he discouraged? He might have been. I mean, Paul's rejection by the disciples must have been another painful reminder of all the things he had done and all the people he had hurt and that suspicion continued to surround him. He might have thought that his ministry might even flounder at that point, before it even began.

But the encouragement, the support that Barnabas displayed here helped launch his ministry. Oh, there is no doubt that God was involved in all this. But again, we see Barnabas playing such an important part in Paul's early life. And then we see Paul's ability to, once he had that encouragement, that support, be able to go out and to preach with the backing of all the apostles.

And you know something? At the same time, his words probably encouraged the apostles as well. It gave them comfort and support. Because again, they feared Paul. Barnabas had the ability to set their minds at rest and give them peace, give them strength. That is what encourager does.

Please turn to Acts chapter 11. That is going to continue here in Barnabas' life.

Acts 11:22-23 Then the news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

You know, I wonder, maybe they sent Barnabas because he was from Cyprus and those from Jerusalem were saying, "I don't know if we want to go there or not, but you know what, we know somebody who can handle this for us." Again, you see the confidence that the apostles had in Barnabas. And you know something, Barnabas provided exactly what those folks needed. He was able to provide the support, the encouragement, and through that power of encouragement, changed the lives of so many. Verse 24 says,

Acts 11:24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

He had great influence on that early church, both in Jerusalem and outside of it as well.

The next point is that Barnabas was an unselfish mentor. Again, as I said a little earlier, Barnabas had the humility to step out of the spotlight and let others thrive. Again, he played a massive role in the launching of Paul's ministry. And something interesting that I came across. We have later in chapter 11, verses 25 and 26 when he was in Cyprus, he went to search for Paul and he brought him back. And he kept Paul with him for a year.

You know, what is interesting to me here is that in the beginning, Barnabas was the senior figure in this relationship. He was the mentor. He was the old man. He was the established leader from the Jerusalem church. But you

know, he gladly shared the platform and eventually, Paul took the lead in the missionary journeys. Clearly, again, God was using Paul and he used Barnabas to help in that. It is no small thing. I think it is interesting as we will go a little further down here in the books of Acts, you will see that at the beginning there, it would say, Barnabas and Paul. But then eventually it started saying, if you notice, Paul and Barnabas, which clearly shows you the shift in roles. You know, at the beginning of the first missionary journey, we are seeing this in Acts 13:1-2, Acts 13:7. But then by the time we get to Acts 13:42, it says here that Paul became the chief speaker, as it says. So here is another example for us. Great leaders do not have to fear being outshone. They can actively build up and promote those around them. Because we need to see the big picture. Barnabas saw the big picture. He saw how God was using this man, and he happily stepped aside and let him take the lead.

And then there was John Mark. In Acts 15:36-41 we see here that Barnabas and Paul, they had their moment of disagreement. And during the first missionary journey Paul became very upset with John Mark because he decided to abandon the journey. We really do not know why. We do not know if he got sick. Or he was afraid. Or got homesick. But he left them and went back home to Jerusalem. And then a few years later on their second journey, when Paul was wanting to go, Barnabas wanted to take Mark that time as well. And Paul said, no, I do not want him to go. Again, we are not told why.

And so we see two different personalities clashing here. I see Paul as a man that is very headstrong and he was focused on the mission. And again, he was still a young man. And so he insisted on taking Silas with him. You know, Barnabas did not back down because he saw something in Mark that Paul did not see. And I believe that Barnabas was full of empathy for Mark. You see, Paul, I do not believe, even took into consideration how that rejection might have affected Mark. But I think Barnabas did. Again, here is a man that saw potential. He saw a potential in Mark, and he did not give up on him.

In fact, in Colossians 4:10, it gives the impression, that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. I do not know how much of a factor that played into it but we do know that Barnabas chose to invest in John Mark anyway. And so they went back to Cyprus and they continued God's work there. He took this

young man under his wing and mentored him the same way he had done Paul and eventually helping him become a highly useful leader. Again, as I just said, the ironic thing is that Paul was rejected but it was Barnabas that stepped into the gap. And here between Paul and Barnabas, he steps into the gap for Mark.

There is something special about the man. Something special. And that is the kind of man that we need to be. To step up, to give support, to encourage. Because, you know something, we really do not know how much God is going to use one of you. And so we need to always look on the positive side. We need to look for the good and not focus on the faults of our brethren but look on the positive. Because we never know how much God is going to use you or use another person. And today we do benefit greatly from Barnabas' work. Mark wrote a gospel of Jesus Christ. It is one of the gospels. And of course, Paul went on to write all those epistles.

There is another lesson here for us. We need to make sure that we give second chances to people when they fail. And we need to encourage them and help them so they will hopefully grow and overcome their weaknesses. We have that opportunity to give people chances. Again, we never know how powerfully someone is going to be used by God. But when we show love and encouragement and patience, it makes that opportunity even greater.

So you can see here in Acts how powerfully God used this man in his life, and his ministry. And it is easy to understand why he had such a nickname of son of encouragement because it is a dominating characteristic in his life. He was a man that was positive and encouraging to others. Very special, and we can learn so much from him. And I will tell you something. I believe that Paul never forgot the support and encouragement that he received from Barnabas.

I will just read a few scriptures here of Paul's writings.

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) Do not let any unwholesome talk come from your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who hear.

I Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV) Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are doing.

I Thessalonians 5:14 (NLT) Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

Please turn to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 23. Same thought.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching.

Brethren, we are commanded to come together on a weekly basis. We are called out of this world and we are commanded to assemble. There are those who do not want to assemble together. They like being on their own. But there is a reason we are here. There is a reason why we come together as a congregation, even though we may be scattered around the world. It is because this is our support system. This is where we get our encouragement. And I will tell you, encouragement should never, ever be something that we take lightly or take for granted, because it is a gift that God has really given us and that we need to be sharing with others.

God places us in the church where He wants us. And He wants us to be encouraging others, admonishing and supporting the brethren. That is what is important. It is also where we can be nurtured and encouraged, not just the giving, but also the receiving. We all need it. This is where we get it. We get it through our interaction, our conversations. We get it through the sermons. There is a spirit here. That is why God wants us here and it is wonderful. It is wonderful to have a blessing like this. It is special. It is priceless. And it is something that God can build on in us.

Philippians 2:1-3 (NET) Therefore, if there are any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself.

You see, that was the example of Barnabas. He demonstrated this attitude, an unselfish generosity, a willingness to step out of the spotlight and give others the opportunity to thrive. He was a constant source of strength and encouragement and that is what God is looking for in you and me.

I am about ready to close here.

I Peter 4:10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Brethren, be a good steward of the blessing and that gift of encouragement. Nurture it, grow it, and use it for the benefit of your fellow brethren. That is why God has given it to you. It is to be a blessing for all of us.