

## “Barnabas Type People”

Barnabas was a distinguished leader in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, yet most people know little about him. He was a Greek-speaking Jew, a Levite, from a family of priests. He was converted to Christ, and became a follower of Jesus. Until the Apostle Paul rose to become a superstar in the church, Barnabas was one of the most prominent leaders in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church.

We are introduced to him in Acts 4:36-37: "There was a Levite from Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet." The earliest Christians were so committed to each other that many sold possessions, and pooled their belongings, so no one would be in need. Barnabas sold some land and brought the proceeds to the apostles. Barnabas' name was really “Joseph”, but he was surnamed “Barnabas”, which means “*son of encouragement*”. In Bible times a person's name represented one’s character. We'll discover that this is an apt description of this man! Barnabas is not mentioned a lot in the Bible, but he comes across as someone who always seemed to be *encouraging others!*

Barnabas' name comes up in Acts 9:26-27: "When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus." This took place soon after the apostle Paul's conversion. Prior to that he was Saul of Tarsus – a “terrorist”, responsible for the arrest and murder of Christians. Saul met Christ in a vision on the road to Damascus, but Christian leaders didn’t trust him, that he was genuinely changed. It was Barnabas who got in touch with him, brought him to the apostles, and vouched for the fact that Paul really did meet the Lord and was a different man!

In Acts 11:19-26 - the Scripture reading today – the church is scattered because of persecution. As these believers resettled, the gospel began to be preached not just to Jews, but now to non-Jews/Greeks. A great number of people became believers. Church leaders in Jerusalem heard about this, and sent someone to check things out, and to encourage the new converts. Guess whom they sent! *Barnabas!* "News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion" (Acts 11:22-23). Notice how he's described: "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24). Barnabas so impressed with how God was working that he went to Tarsus to get Paul, brought Paul back to Antioch, and both stayed there a whole year teaching the people.

End of chapter Acts, chapter 11, when there was a great famine in Judea, believers took an offering to help bring relief. Guess who took the money to encourage hunger-stricken Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding area? You got it – *Barnabas*, along with Paul. "The disciples determined that, according to their ability, each would send relief to the brothers and sisters living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29-30).

Later in the Book of Acts it describes how Barnabas, along with Paul, strongly encouraged

Jewish converts to remain steadfast in the faith: "When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43).

Are you beginning to get the profile of this man, Barnabas? Everywhere he turns, he seems to be encouraging people around him!

Now I think I need to point out that Barnabas wasn't perfect! In fact, he is involved in one of the biggest personal squabbles recorded in the New Testament! It's mentioned in Acts, chapter 15. "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Come, let us return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing. Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the brothers and sisters commending him to the grace of the Lord" (Acts 15:36-40).

Paul and Barnabas are going on their second missionary journey, to visit places they had preached at in their first missionary trip. Barnabas wanted to take young John Mark. Paul said no. Mark had been with them on their first trip, but he quit, and went back home. So there was a sharp division between Paul and Barnabas over this issue. These great church leaders never again worked together after that (as far as we can tell).

Here's the interesting thing about this incident. The difference between Paul and Barnabus was that Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance, even though Mark had quit on them once. Paul didn't think this was the smart thing to do. Mark had a cheerleader in Barnabas. Apparently Barnabas still believed in Mark, encouraged him, and wanted to give him a chance to redeem himself. (Eventually Mark *did make good*, and became useful in his service to the Lord, including writing the gospel of Mark).

Wouldn't you like to have a friend like Barnabas? Someone to cheer you on, believe in you, call forth the best from you! Wouldn't you like to *be* a Barnabas? When you think about it, the Apostle Paul was brilliant, a dynamic personality who left his mark on the Bible, the church, and Christian history. But, he could be rather abrasive! I think if I had to choose between them which one I'd like as my friend, would be Barnabas!

In the Book of Hebrews it says that Christians are to encourage one another. "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Don't we all need encouragement in life? Certainly we need it to live as a follower of Jesus in today's world!

Encouragement is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; Barnabas no doubt had that gift. Romans 12:8 lists "exhortation" or "encouragement" as one of the Spirit's gifts.

So often in life we don't get encouragement, do we? What do we get? We get criticized. We get put down. Maybe from our parents. Maybe at work. Maybe in school. Maybe in our marriage. These cuts, these criticisms, these put downs can **discourage** us!

Someone has collected actual statements made by airline flight crews and passengers. On one occasion, a pilot made a really bumpy landing, hammering the aircraft hard onto the runway. This airline had a policy that required the first officer to stand at the door while passengers exited, give a smile, and say, "Thanks for flying \_\_\_\_\_ airline!" In light of the bad landing, the pilot remarked that he had a hard time looking passengers in the eye, thinking that someone might have a negative comment. Finally, everyone had gotten off the plane except this little elderly lady walking with a cane. She said, "Sonny, mind if I ask you a question?" "Why no ma'am," the pilot said, "what is it?" She said: "Did we land, or were we shot down?" Another time a plane made a really hard landing. One of the flight attendants came over the loudspeaker: "We ask you please to remain seated as Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal."

These kinds of putdowns can be humorous – but some cuts aren't funny, are they? A man tells the story of a young boy in the neighborhood who lost his father during the winter. That spring, as dads and sons hit the front or back yards to play baseball, the boy felt all alone. So he took a bat and ball to the old familiar spot in the front yard where he and his dad had played, and he started his own game.

With a chipper spirit, he threw the ball into the air and swung with all his might. He whiffed. A neighbor boy, watching, yelled, "Strike one!" The young boy quickly picked up the ball, threw it up, and swung again. He missed. "Strike two!" the taunting neighbor boy yelled. With some hesitation, but determined nevertheless, he threw the ball up again and swung. And he missed again. "Strike three, you're out" screamed the unwanted umpire. Then he added, "You're a lousy hitter!" The little boy kind of sucked it up, marched over to the fence and yelled back, "I'm not a lousy hitter. I'm a great pitcher! I just struck myself out!"

Some of us, perhaps, didn't get much encouragement early on in life. Maybe we heard more about how bad we were, or what we didn't do or couldn't do, than what was good about us, or what dreams we might be able to achieve.

I've seen people in therapy who grown up in that kind of atmosphere. They got virtually no encouragement from mom or dad or significant adults in their lives. People like that have a way of winding up in a counselor's office – going through life depressed, or with low self-esteem, or little motivation, or feeling angry and resentful. Some of us still carry the hurts of how someone along the way put us down or in some way took the wind out of our sails. I will usually ask this person, "Who *did* encourage you? Who *did* believe in you?" They may say it was an uncle, or grandmother, or person at the church, or an adult neighbor. I try to get that person to get in touch with those affirmations they might have received from these caring persons. Life is full of put downs, isn't it...people who have a way of **discouraging** us? But Barnabas was a man who had

a habit of *encouraging* others

Who are the “encouragers” in your life? Edward Steichen, who eventually became one of the world’s most renowned photographers, almost gave up on the day he shot his first pictures. He was 16 years old when he bought his first camera. He took 50 photos, and out of the 50, only one turned out – a portrait of his sister at the piano. Edward's father thought that was a poor showing, but his mother insisted that the photograph of his sister was so beautiful that it more than compensated for the other 49 pictures. Her encouragement convinced the young man to stick with his new hobby. He did. It was her encouragement and ability to spot excellence in the midst of failure that got him going.

There was a man ousted from his job, his profession, for some indiscretion. As a result, he took a job as a laborer on a construction crew just to put bread on his table. He was suddenly plunked down into a different world. Instead of going to an office each day in a suit, he was doing work he wasn't trained to do. He was hauling loads of concrete block up to the 5th level of a construction site. Instead of soft music piped through corridors of office buildings, there were blaring boom boxes. Any girl who walked by was subject to rude remarks and whistles. Profanity filled the air, especially from his foreman, who criticized and intimidated the workers most of the time. “For \_\_\_ sake, you blanket-blank...can’t you do anything right? I never worked with such bunch of \_\_\_\_\_ in all my life!”

Near the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, the man felt he couldn’t take any more. “I’ll work till break time this morning, then I’m going home.” He’d already been the butt of more than one joke when his lack of experience caused him to do something stupid. “I just can’t handle any more of this.” A bit later he decided to finish out the morning, then leave for good at lunch break. Right before noon, the foreman came around with the paychecks. As he handed the man an envelope, he made the first civil comment in three weeks. “Hey, there’s a woman working in the front office who knows you. She says she takes care of your kids sometimes.” “Who?” The foreman named the woman, who sometimes helped in the nursery of the church where the man and his family went. The foreman continued his rounds, and as the man opened his pay envelope he found, along with a check, a handwritten note from the payroll clerk: “When one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer with it. Just wanted you to know that I’m praying for you these days.” He stared at the note, amazed at God’s timing. He hadn’t known the woman worked for this company. Here, at his lowest hour, she had given him the encouragement he needed to go on.

When I was doing my training to be a marriage and family therapist, early on in the training I had a supervising therapist who gave me a very poor rating at one of the report sessions. In comparing myself with the others in our class I honestly thought I was about at their same level of training. I had a lot to learn, but I felt the supervisor's evaluation was unfair. Discouraged, I thought of quitting my training. But I continued. I'm glad I did. My next supervisor was a lady who affirmed me, and gave no indication that I was ill prepared to be a therapist. I went on to graduate, and get my license as a marriage and family therapist – thanks in great part to a lovely woman named Joellyn Ross, and encouragement I received from her.

Over the years, my wife Nancy has been a great encourager, and I thank her for it!

Are you, am I, *encouragers* for others? Or are we better at criticizing people, putting them down?

Who have been the encouragers in your life? Who along the way has trusted you, cheered for you, believed in you, in ways that have made a positive impact in your life? Thank God for these people! And, hopefully, if you haven't done it already, let them know how much you appreciate the encouragement they have given you!

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