

When I was in my late forties I decided to go back to school and train to be a marriage and family therapist. I was serving fulltime as a pastor of a very active church, but I was able to enter a four-year program designed especially for clergy.

It was an on-hands program where right from the start we counseled clients in therapy sessions, working under the guidance of a supervisor. We would meet weekly with our supervisor, and change supervisors twice a year.

About mid way through the program I received a rather dismal evaluation from my supervisor. I was stunned. While I was far from being a seasoned therapist, I honestly felt I was learning at about the level of the other students in my group. Thoroughly discouraged, I was about ready to throw in the towel and quit the program. But I decided to hang in.

Then I changed supervisors. My new supervisor apparently had a different view of me and my skills. She gave me positive feedback. She in no way gave the impression that she saw me as being subpar in my counseling skills. She instilled new confidence in me. She affirmed me as a person and validated my potential to be a good marriage and family therapist. I finished the training program, and went on to become a licensed marriage and family therapist.

How many times over the years I've thanked God for this supervisor who believed in me and motivated me to stay with my dream. Her name was Joellyn Ross.

I'll bet you've had Joellyn Rosses in your life – people who encouraged you when you were down on yourself, believed in you even when you had lost faith in yourself, inspired you to keep on going when you were ready to quit. I hope we all remember to thank God for these people who have helped shape our lives in positive ways.

Barnabas was one of those people in the Bible who was an encourager. In fact, his name means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). He was the Bible's version of my Joellyn Ross.

I want to be a Barnabas, a Joellyn Ross, to others. It's so easy to criticize people and point out their shortcomings, isn't it? Sure, there are times when we need to be honest with people and help them face an unpleasant reality about themselves. But for every one of those times there are a thousand times when, if we could just see the best in someone and encourage them, we could impact that person in a good way for the rest of their lives. We might be the person God sends in their path to keep *them* following *their* dream.

*Pastor Harry*