

## *The Encourager*

“There was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus”  
(Acts 4:36).

If you could be any character in Acts, who would it be? Would it be Peter the Pentecost preacher? Would it be Dr. Luke the prolific writer? What about Paul the magnificent missionary? How about Apollos, the mighty man of Scriptures? Would you settle for Timothy, the learner? I’ve dreamed of being like all of those. However, there is a champion that stands out; Barnabas, the encourager. That was his nickname; one that has stuck throughout the ages. If fellow believers, coworkers, or family members were to give you a nickname, what would it be?

Barnabas is best remembered for only one thing: he put courage into the hearts of others. It was his constant attitude; a way of life. He is one of the most influential men in the New Testament. He didn’t write any of the books of the New Testament himself (except possibly the Book of Hebrews). However, he was indirectly responsible for most of the New Testament. Without Barnabas, it is doubtful we would have Paul’s letters, Luke’s Gospel or Acts, or the Gospel of Mark. How did Barnabas accomplish this? The answer is short but not always simple. He encouraged them. Through utilizing encouragement the Gospel spread throughout the whole world. He assisted others in their personal, ministerial, and spiritual growth. He invested in the lives of others, to “edify” them or build them up, and expected little in return. The end result of his efforts was always the same: the church was strengthened and the kingdom of God expanded.

J. Robert Ashcroft, a theological college president, once said, “Let your emphasis be on the creative and constructive above the critical and corrective.” He counseled a developing former student, “There’s nothing wrong with being critical and corrective, just don’t put your emphasis there. Give yourself to being creative and constructive.”

Fault-finding is not a spiritual gift. Locating problem areas in any relationship, team, family, ministry, and/or organization is not difficult. Solving these takes initiative, innovation, insight, intelligence, inspiration, inventiveness, imagination, and input. Being critical and corrective is the easy, low road. Being creative and constructive is the difficult, high road. The difference is night and day.

One of the challenges of getting older, or being part of any group for an extended period of time, is not becoming cynical or critical. We tend to carry many painful memories, moans, misfortunes and mistakes of the past and allow them to color the future.

Someone has said, “The young want to change the world and the old want to change the young.” It is fairly easy to look at the next generation in any movement and criticize, condemn, complain and caution. It would be more correct and constructive to confirm (affirm), en-courage, charge, consecrate, and comprehend.

“Encourage” is a fifteenth century word that means that we can inspire with courage or confidence. It is an attempt to persuade, to spur on, to help. It is the effort to build confidence. We can do that!

Barnabas risked his life and reputation to encourage Saul and to bring him to the apostles at Jerusalem. “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that

he was a disciple. 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...Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:26-31, NKJV).

Later, he again seeks out Saul (Paul) and brings him to Antioch. "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then 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. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:21-26, NKJV).

Barnabas encouraged Paul, and he became one of the greatest missionaries of all times. He encouraged the church at Antioch, they were strengthened, and it was there that believers became known as Christians. John Mark was rejected by Paul, but Barnabas didn't give up on him. John Mark went on to write the Gospel of Mark. Later, because of Barnabas' tender encouragement, Paul wrote, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Paul could only see the failures, shortcomings, and liability John Mark. Barnabas saw beyond that to his fullest potential. He injected courage into him. Otherwise, the young man would

have returned from his missionary trip discouraged, disgraced, and dejected. He could have drifted away fading in the pages of Acts and never heard of again.

One would think with Paul being a recipient of encouragement, care, compassion, and consideration he would have been reciprocal. It certainly didn't manifest itself in his dealings with John Mark. Eventually, Paul gets it, and matures to encourage others. His books to Timothy and Titus are letters of encouragement. All of Paul's epistles contain such elements and were designed to strengthen the church. But, this is best seen in Paul's letters to Timothy, his adopted son in the ministry. He encourages him to keep the faith (1 Timothy 1:3), stir up the gift (2 Timothy 1:6), and to pass on the truth to others (2 Timothy 2:2). The Apostle Paul could have understandably been critical and cynical as he sat in a cold, damp dark prison cell, close to the end of his earthly life. Instead he was creative and constructive. Under the direction of the Spirit he penned supportive words to Timothy and Titus. He made every effort to encourage tomorrow. He understood and integrated the example Barnabas had so aptly modeled with him.

Ever wonder why the Early Church did not select Barnabas to be one of the senior leaders? A valuable lesson can be learned: it is not necessary to be selected for an office in order to faithfully serve and/or impact the organization.

Barnabas clearly was not position-minded or power-hungry. Most are prone to defend their territory or what they consider their acquired ministry or earned place in the kingdom of God. Not so with Barnabas. Amazingly, as Paul's popularity and ministry grows, the ministry and reference to Barnabas begins to shift and fade. We see things starting out as Barnabas and Saul (Paul) (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7), shifting to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:46; 13:50; 14:12; 15:2, 12, 22; 25; 35; 36); and

finally Barnabas fades altogether and Paul takes center stage. The real test of leadership is how a leader responds once he no longer is in the spotlight. Many have turned into a chief disappointment.

According to Bob Sanders, “the acid test of an encourager is the ability to let someone else take the lead and get the credit. To recognize potential in a colleague and encourage him/her to move ahead without becoming jealous or resentful—that’s Barnabas.”

Barnabas knew how to call forth the best in others through encouragement. Rowland Croucher in “Barnabas the Encourager: May His Tribe Increase” told of how an elderly man sent him a note. It said, “If he earns your praise bestow it; If you like him, let him know; Let words of true encouragement be said. Do not wait till life is over. And he’s underneath the clover; for he cannot read his tomb-stone when he’s dead.”

One of the significant ways that Barnabas encouraged others was through his words. Rudyard Kipling said, “Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.”

Glenn Pease said, “Words are powerful tools of influence. All of us can speak words and so all of us have the power to encourage or discourage others.”

**Speak a Word:** Wise Solomon spoke of words that are fitly spoken (Proverbs 25:11). There is power in words; the right words at the right time. “So encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18, NLT). “So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NLT). “We sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God’s co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in

your faith, and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles” (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3, NLT).

**Share a Word:** As I was working on this lesson a dear friend called to share an encouraging Scripture. When was the last time you shared the Word with a friend? God’s Word will lift a person’s spirit and increase his faith (Romans 10:17). Isn’t it great when you read in the Bible, “And the word of the Lord came...saying”? “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25, NLT).

**Write a Word:** A young, struggling friend met an elderly lady. He wrote, “A woman told me she had something to show as she handed me a book, *God’s Promises for Me*. She told me to read the first thing I came to. I opened the book to this, ‘But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing’ (James 1:4). She will never know how I felt at that very moment but this verse is so true in my life right now.” Take time to send a note to someone to encourage them. It doesn’t have to be long. “I have written and sent this short letter to you with the help of Silas, whom I commend to you as a faithful brother. My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God’s grace for you. Stand firm in this grace” (1 Peter 5:12, NLT).

**Pray a Word:** Prayer unites your words with the forces of heaven. Take every opportunity to pray for someone needing encouragement and do it while he is listening. “As soon as I pray, you answer me; you encourage me by giving me strength” (Psalms 138:3, NLT).

Here is your assignment: Think of a time that someone spoke a word, wrote a word, shared a word, and prayed a word with you. How did it

impact your life? Be willing to share one of these experiences with others.

Your next assignment: Speak a word. Write a word. Share a word. Pray a word. Do this for someone this week. Why not today? Be the encourager!

In closing, let us share a personal prayer:

“Lord give me a ministry—  
Not of pulling down, but of building up—  
Give me a ministry—  
Not so much of confrontation, as of  
reconciliation.  
Not so much of criticism as of intercession.  
That life might be a prayer and benediction for  
those You love”  
(Rowland Croucher)