

Becoming Barnabas Acts 11:19-26

Good morning! Today, I'd like to start a new series. I'm calling it "The Acts of a Christian." We're going to look at a few characters in the Book of Acts and see what we can learn from their lives. Because the truth is, they are our models. Of course, our true model is the Lord Jesus. Some people will say, "I can't really be like Jesus because he was the Son of God. He was perfect. He's not ordinary. It's hard to be like him." Well, early followers of Jesus, they strove to be like Jesus and they did it. Jesus trained and he guided some of his early followers so that they can become our examples. That's why Christianity spread. That's why people were attracted to Jesus because they saw these little Christs. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." So, if they were able to do it, we can do it, too. Say to your neighbor, "You can do it! By the grace of God."

So, in this series, we're going to look at the lives of these early Christians, not their whole life or we'll stay here till evening, but just a particular event in their life. And we'll glean certain principles that we can learn and apply in our lives today so that people will see Jesus in us, and that Christianity might continue to spread. Amen? Today, we're going to look at one of these followers of Jesus in the book of Acts.

If someone were to give you a name indicative of your personality, what would it be? What nickname or adjective would sum up who you really are?

We do that sort of thing all the time. For instance, if I mention Honest Abe, you immediately know that I am talking about...Abraham Lincoln. If we are discussing Football and I mention the GOAT, you know that I'm talking about...Tom Brady. If it's basketball and I say His Airness, you know I

mean...Michael Jordan. If it's entertainment and someone mentions The King of Pop, you immediately say...Michael Jackson. I thought I heard BTS. I said King of Pop, not K-Pop. So, before K-Pop, there was King of Pop, ok? Shows my age, right?

In the Philippines, we do that too, right? And oftentimes the nickname is about a person's physical feature. When I was young, we used to call someone "Boy Lapad". Because the back of his head is flat. Then there was "Jun Kirat". Because one of his eyes is always shut. There was also "Neneng Sakang". Because she had bow-legged legs. Filipinos can be cruel. We make fun of people's physical features. Is there anyone here who has a nickname like that? Or you know one? I grew up with a nickname "Rolly Pogi", I mean, "Rolly Polly". That was just a slip of the tongue, ok. Only my mom believes that. And my wife is rolling her eyes.

Anyway, in the Bible names were often used in the same way. That is, a name was often given to a person in order to reveal his character, personality or destiny. For instance, Abraham means, now I'm testing your Sunday school knowledge, "Father of Multitudes," Jacob means "Cheater," Peter means "Rock," and Nabal means "Fool." On the female side, Naomi means "Pleasant" and Esther means "Hidden".

This morning, I'm thinking of a man who was named for his spiritual gift of encouragement. Do you know who I am talking about? Remember, we're in the book of Acts. So, I'm sure you do. The name is in the title of my message, **"Becoming Barnabas"**.

Now, let me give you a little background of Barnabas. His given name was Joseph. He was from the island of Cyprus. He was a Levite. He was an early convert to the Christian faith. He was a great friend of the Apostle Paul. The first time he is mentioned in the Bible is when Dr. Luke introduced him. He says in Acts 4:36-37, **"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas"**

(which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." BTW, this is where Cyprus is located. Meanwhile, this is how the modern world looks now.

So, Joseph was his given name; his nickname was Barnabas, which is Greek and it means "Son of Encouragement." The apostles gave him this nickname for his spiritual gift because it perfectly reflected his character. We'll get back to Barnabas in a little while. For the moment, let's look at his spiritual gift.

Paul says in Romans 12:6,8, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us... if it is to encourage, then give encouragement." The Greek word for encourage is very interesting. It is *parakaleo*. Para is a preposition meaning "alongside of" and kaleo is a verb meaning "to call." So *parakaleo* means "to call alongside of." It has the idea of coming to the aid or assistance of someone else. In particular, it implies an ability to help someone in an area where he cannot help himself.

It's the picture of a weary traveler stumbling down the highway with a heavy load on his shoulders. His head is low, his shoulders stooped, his knees wobbly, his feet barely moving. Each step is an agony. As you watch him, he staggers and begins to fall. You can see that he will never make it. So you rush from your place, come alongside and you lift the load from his shoulders and place it on your own. Then you put your arm around him and say, "It's all right, my brother. I'll help you make it." And together you walk on down the road. That's *parakaleo*. It's coming alongside another person to help him in his moment of need.

The person who does that is called a *paraclete*. That's the Greek word used in John 14:16 for the Holy Spirit and in I John 2:1 for the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first case, the word means that the Holy Spirit comes alongside to give us strength to live the Christian life. In the latter case, it means that the Lord Jesus is our Advocate who speaks up in our defense.

So this gift could be called exhortation or comfort or consolation or advocacy or encouragement. It is the divine ability to lift the load from a brother or sister and help them along the way.

The spiritual gift simply means that some of us will have a special ability in this area. Have you filled out a Spiritual Gifts Inventory before? The inventory form lists different kinds of gifts. The gift of encouragement is also termed the gift of “Exhortation” and it is defined this way: It is the special ability God gives to certain members of the body of Christ which enables them to come alongside another person to give encouragement, challenge, counsel or earnest advice as needed in such a way that the person is helped. That last phrase is worth pondering—”in such a way that the person is helped.”

That, I think, is a key sign of this gift. When a person with the gift of encouragement spends time with you, you inevitably feel better. Even if they are counseling you about some weakness in your life, their words somehow make you stronger.

Here are a few other marks of the gifted load-lifters:

1. They genuinely like people.
2. They are strongly relational.
3. They root for the underdog.
4. They are open-minded, forgiving and tolerant.
5. They are quick to respond to human needs.
6. They are quick to give the benefit of the doubt.
7. They are usually well-liked by others.
8. They are talkative.
9. They are quick to spot spiritual potential.
10. They are good coalition-builders.

The gift of encouragement is the “How-to” gift. People who have it are hands-on, practical types. They don’t like a lot of theory and get bored with doctrinal discussions that have nothing to do with real life. This is also the “Counseling” gift. People who have it enjoy spending hours helping other people work through their problems. It is also the “Cheerleading” gift. People who have it love to shout encouragement to those on the field—“You can do it. We’re behind you all the way. Don’t quit now.” Encouragers are often good leaders, but they don’t feel like they have to lead. They are just as happy to cheer on someone else.

Thank God for the men and women who encourage the rest of us. What a sad and dreary world it would be without them. They light the way and lift us up when we fall down. Many of us would have quit long ago if someone hadn’t encouraged us to keep on going.

In all the Bible there is no better example of this gift in action than Barnabas. He is “exhibit A” of the gift of encouragement. The biggest part of his story is told in the book of Acts. In fact, there are seven different occasions when he used this spiritual gift and proved himself to be a true “Son of Encouragement.” For our purposes this afternoon, we are only going to focus on one of those seven examples.

This example is found in Acts 11:19-26. Let me read these verses to you.

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the

grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

Without a doubt, Barnabas was a great help to those around him. When there was a need He was the first person to step forward. For example, in Acts 4 which we read earlier, he was the first to sell his property and lay the proceeds at the apostles’ feet. In Acts 9, he was the first to recognize what God was doing in the life of Paul and encouraged the Apostles to receive Him. Then, in Acts 11, which we are studying today, he was sent to Antioch to see what God was doing among the gentile believers. He encouraged them. Also, in Acts 15, when Paul decided to not bring John Mark anymore with him as he went around various cities to preach, Barnabas separated from Paul and took John Mark with him. He saw too much value in Mark to leave him behind.

The book of Acts reveals Barnabas’s mentoring relationship with Paul, Mark, and the leaders of the Christian Church as a significant factor in the development of influential leaders in the early Christian church.

Today, we need more Barnabases in a world where everyone wants to be Paul. Now, I know the Bible tells us that Barnabas had the gift of encouragement that’s why he was so effective in encouraging others. But that shouldn’t be an excuse for us to say, “I don’t have that gift and so I don’t think I can encourage anyone”. That’s the same excuse that people say about witnessing to others. “I don’t have the gift of evangelism and so I don’t think I can witness to others.” You see, if encouraging is just for those with the gift, then why did Paul say in 1

Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Then the writer of Hebrews (3:13) also says, “But encourage one another daily.” For sure, they’re not talking only to those who have the gift. So, this work of load-lifting is something all of us are to perform for each other as we see the need and have the opportunity. Encouraging others is a duty that we must do whether or not we have the gift.

Now, Barnabas was an early leader in the Christian church through his financial gift to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36), his selection as a representative of the Jerusalem church to confirm the work of God in Antioch (Acts 11:22), and the prominent position his name occupies in the list of leaders in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Barnabas was a mentor, a hero maker.

Now, mentoring is described as “a relationship in which a more experienced leader helps a less experienced candidate to succeed”. You see, Barnabas’ relationship with Paul began when he introduced him to the apostles in Acts 9, but his mentoring relationship started in earnest when Barnabas recruited Paul to help him teach the new followers of Christ in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas guided Paul during his development from a novice follower of Christ to the greatest propagator of the faith in the early church. Folks, senior leaders today can follow the example of Barnabas and contribute to the development of the next generation of leaders.

Now, in Acts 11:22-24, you will see how Barnabas encouraged the believers around Him toward spiritual renewal. Who else did he encourage? Saul. In verse 25, it says that Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. For what? To encourage him to come with him and preach and teach in Antioch. And their ministry became so fruitful, lives were being changed, that people who were not Christians started to call them Christianos which literally means in Greek, followers of Christ.

Now, as we know, Saul is otherwise known as Paul. Why the name change? Did Jesus change his name like he did Peter's from Simon? This is a trivia question. Let me test your Sunday school knowledge again. (Anyone knows?) Actually, Saul is his Hebrew name and Paul is his Roman name. He was a Roman citizen, right? Most likely his parents, who were Jewish, gave him that name because they lived in **Tarsus, a Roman city, the capital of the province of Cilicia.** During that time, people had dual names, a Hebrew or Aramaic name and Roman or Greek name depending on where they lived. So, in the book of Acts, Luke refers to him as Saul from chapters 7 through the middle of chapter 13. In 13:42, Luke changes it to Paul. Why? Because it was when Paul started to preach to the gentiles. Meaning, Saul started to introduce himself as Paul so that the Roman gentiles and others who he was preaching to can relate to him. His audience were now gentiles, no longer Jewish. Got it?

Anyway, what I really want you to see is that in chapter 11, Luke refers to the tandem of Saul and Barnabas. Then in chapter 13 it became Paul and Barnabas. Apparently, their roles reversed. We can only conclude that Barnabas pushed Paul to center stage. So, you see, it takes a special kind of person to be an encourager of others. Which means fading in the background while someone else comes to the foreground. And this is how Luke describes him, **"Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord."**

Ok, I'm done with the introduction. Now, what lessons can we learn from this Son of Encouragement? That's my goal today. I'd like to share with you **6 Lessons that can make you and me become like Barnabas.**

1. Encouragers are available to be used.

In verse 22, the church in Jerusalem **"sent Barnabas to Antioch"**. Encouragers are people who are available to be used. Whether that's on a dangerous mission or to step out in faith or giving a special gift for the success of

others, they are ready. They get their encouragement directly from Christ and they extend it to others. Encouragers are green light people – they are ready to take risks for the Kingdom in order to learn and grow. They do so with humility and love for God. It has been said, “the hardest instrument to play in the orchestra is second fiddle.” You see, Paul wrote most of the epistles and Mark had a Gospel in his name, and Barnabas? He had to settle for a nickname and remain in the background. Can you be a Barnabas in a world where everyone wants to be a Paul?

2. Encouragers observe what God is doing and join in.

In verse 23, Barnabas observed “what the grace of God had done.” Sometimes, you see, it is just slowing down, sitting back and having our eyes opened to the wonders God has performed. After all, it is His work, His mission, His renewal, and His people. If we are always looking to advance ourselves or always looking solely to other people for encouragement, we will be disappointed. Human beings are fickle, but God is faithful. Watch what the grace of God is doing in your community and be an encourager and be encouraged! Yes, God is working in your life, but God is also working in others, in new ways, and in unexpected ways. God is working in mature saints and in immature saints, in seasoned ministers and in novices. Can you see a diamond in the rough? Some people can only see chaos, confusion and lack. Barnabas saw potential! He saw acres of Diamonds. Have you read or listened to Russell Conwell’s story, Acres of Diamonds? The lesson he shares is simple: You don't need to look elsewhere for opportunity, achievement or fortune. All of the opportunities you could possibly want can be found where you are now — in the people around you, in your present community, job, family and other circumstances.

So, encouragers are people who observe what God is doing and join in to maximize the potential around them. Barnabas saw something in the early Church,

in Paul, in Antioch and in John Mark. He saw acres of diamonds. What do you see in those around you?

3. Encouragers Know How to Celebrate Others

In the middle section of verse 23, it says that Barnabas “was glad and encouraged them”. Another translation says that Barnabas “threw himself in with them” and “got behind them.” What project or group of people in our church or neighborhood are you getting behind? I love the sense of gladness, joy, and celebration that I see in Barnabas. He and so many others were blown away by what the Holy Spirit was doing in their time and place. There was passion, enthusiasm, and excitement.

When God is moving powerfully, we should celebrate, we should be filled with joy and we should encourage all those around us! When Barnabas met Paul, a novice, in the rough, he celebrated what God had done and he celebrated what God was going to do. When he saw what God had done in Antioch, he celebrated what God had done, and went to find Paul to come assist him in teaching because he saw what God could do in the church and in Paul. Notice Barnabas knew where Paul was and kept tabs on him. Encouragers know how to celebrate others.

4. Encouragers Point Others to The Truth

We have all been around exciting people who are passionate about the wrong things. What about Barnabas? What did he do? “He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (verse 23c). Perhaps this was his way of saying: Remember this day always. Remain true even when temptation comes. Remain true when the culture goes against you. Remain true when you are threatened with your life (a reality for the early church and for many believers around the world today). Barnabas had a beautiful way of encouraging them toward the truth of the Lord.

You know, the best way to stay true to the Lord is by abiding in His word. Barnabas and Paul spent a lot of time teaching the church at Antioch. Emotions were running high, false prophets and teachers were all around, but they must stay true to the Lord. You see, an understanding of God's word is the measuring stick for truth. Sincerity is not a measure of truth; positive thinking is not the measure of truth. Truth is the only measure of truth. We must remain true to the Lord, even when the world is changing and full of compromise. When Barnabas arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord.

5. Encouragers Are Good People Full of The Holy Spirit and Faith.

The first half of Acts 11:24 is simply a description of Barnabas as a person. "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith." You see, the Holy Spirit is always pointing us to Jesus and reminding us of everything that Jesus taught. When we call to mind Jesus' words, we have a great foundation for encouragement. Sometimes it is best to just share His words, not try to make up our own! His words have power and will work. Barnabas was a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Many of our churches have been stuck for a long, long time. It feels like nothing is going to change. But when we get a new and fresh look at Christ, we know that He is the source of faith. He gives that faith out generously to His people. In Mark 9:14-29, we read the story of a father who is needing a miracle for his son. The dad was struggling with doubt and unbelief concerning whether Jesus could heal his son. Jesus responded to his doubt by saying "Everything is possible for one who believes." (Mark 9:23)

Things looked bad, the disciples had failed, the boy was in the dirt and the Father was in unbelief, yet Jesus said, only believe! What a great, simple reminder that nothing is too hard for God. Encouraging People Are Good People Full Of The

Holy Spirit and Faith that remind us all is not lost. You can get up again! You can make it. Your journey ends with victory.

Finally,

6. Encouragers Often See Incredible Renewal.

There are many instances in the Bible where people who prayed for renewal didn't get to see it, but the book of Acts is just the opposite. After Barnabas laid his offering at the apostles' feet in chapter 4, many people were helped, and great numbers were added to the church. After Barnabas sponsored Paul, the apostles accepted him, his teaching gift was enhanced, and many people were added to the faith. After Barnabas encouraged the Church at Antioch, growth exploded, and the church sent missionaries to the world. Acts 11:24b says, "A great number of people were brought to the Lord." Isn't that why we're doing this? Isn't that why we get out of bed in the morning? I am not encouraged by the process of growing my reputation for its own sake. I am not craving center stage or the spotlight. But I will give my life to be part of a movement that sees "a great number of people brought to the Lord." That is why we pray, meet, use social media to reach out and sacrificially give. We want to see new believers come to faith and nominal Christians experience the power of spiritual renewal.

I hope that you were encouraged by the son of encouragement today! Be a Barnabas in a world where everyone wants to be a Paul. Be a supporting cast member when everyone wants to be the star. How different the early church would have been without Barnabas. Barnabas did for Paul, John Mark, and the church at Antioch, what Priscilla and Aquila did for Apollos, what Andrew did for his brother, Simon Peter. And what my former pastor did for me.

Will you do the same for someone else?