



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No. 1235
Selected Passages from
Acts
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July 7, 2002

Encourage Me! Encourage . . .Me?

Let me begin with a story about a man who fell into a pit. After he had been down there awhile, a SUBJECTIVE person came along and said: "I feel for you down there." The CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST came along: "You only think that you are in a pit." The PHARISEE said: "Only bad people fall into a pit." CONFUCIUS said; "If you would have listened to me, you would not be in that pit." BUDDHA said: "Your pit is only a state of mind." The REALIST said: "That's a pit." The EVOLUTIONIST said: "You are a rejected mutant destined to be removed from the evolutionary cycle." In other words, the man in the pit is going to die and will not reproduce any "pit-falling offspring." The COUNTY INSPECTOR asked if he had a permit to dig a pit. The SELF-PITYING person said: "You call that a pit?! You should have seen the pit I fell into yesterday!!" The OPTIMIST said: "Things could be worse." The PESSIMIST said: "Things will get worse!!" JESUS, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit. Which person do you think the man in the pit appreciated most? We need to be like Jesus . . . people who care about one another and are willing to get involved.

We need to encourage one another. It's like teaching your child to ride a bicycle. At first they need you to come along side, tell them they can do it, and that you will be with them, hanging onto the bike, all the way. Later, that same adult, that same "encourager," will find themselves standing on the curb with only an occasional need to give suggestions or safety tips. You see, we all need to be encouraged at various stages and situations in life.

During my recent surgery and recovery, the CPC family really encouraged Diane and me in many ways...from the Elders' support, to the meals we received, to all the cards, phone calls, and visits. I brought one card to show you. It's the get-well card the Junior High group had Sandy deliver to me in the hospital. And we will never forget your prayers for us. You have given Diane and me a renewed sense of the value and impact of receiving encouragement at times of great need and stress. And I want to thank you all here and now for your love and kindness. And there are so many other ways we can get discouraged: personal and family losses, business setbacks and failures, unfair criticism, financial reversals, illness, and even spiritual confusion and dryness.

We need encouragement because life is often difficult and hard. We can always find encouragement from God Himself. Paul writes, in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 3 to 4: **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."**

But we are also told to help and encourage each other, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us in chapter three: **"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today,**

so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first"

(vv. 13-14).

You see, we need both to be encouraged and we are commanded - it's not an option - to encourage others. Everyone needs recognition for who they are and what they do, but few people make their need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father: "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say 'Wonderful!'". Well, we all do pretty well receiving encouragement but are we willing and prepared to give it to others? Diane recently reminded me that I've often said that, when I die, I'd like my tombstone to read: "Son of Encouragement." How would you like to be remembered? What impact will you leave on your family, workplace, neighborhood and on God's kingdom? So, if we all need to be encouraged and we all need to encourage others, how does that happen? What is encouragement?

I. Encouragement includes two separate actions.

When I encourage someone it means I inspire him or her with courage and hope. It means that verbally, and in other ways too, I foster, stimulate, or incite them to produce or achieve a particular end or effect. Encouragement really has two dimensions or two actions. First, it consoles and comforts, meaning I am present when someone is down or hurting...to help them get back up. But encouragement also includes the idea of exhorting, advocating, or motivating towards something. This happens when I help guide someone in the right direction or steer them away from danger.

A form of the word is used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, "parakletos." It is defined as "one who comes along side." He comes along side to both comfort and guide us. To encourage someone means that we will both comfort and guide them. So when we speak of biblical encouragement, we aren't referring to an easy simplistic "Home On The Range" concept of encouragement. You know, "...where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day." It's one thing to understand what's involved in encouraging others but it's another thing to see myself as an "encourager." And how is biblical encouragement different from the world's encouragement? To answer those questions, let's look at the second part of our topic first, "Encourage...Me?" There are five behaviors I need to develop in order to become an "encourager."

II. To become an encourager:

A. I need to involve myself in the lives of others. To understand the first behavior let's read Acts 4:34-37: **"Those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was**

distributed to anyone as he had need. 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."

Barnabas is a great role model for anyone who wants to learn about encouragement and how to become an encourager. This passage in Acts introduces him and he has the nickname "Son of Encouragement" which is translated from "paraklesis," a word similar to the one John used for the Holy Spirit. Barnabas was someone who was known for coming along side and helping others.

Now you know how people get nicknames. They get identified with some quality or behavior, be it positive or negative. You tell me . . . what do we call someone with red hair -- "RED." Someone very smart is called -- "BRAINS." A tall person is called -- "STRETCH." And so on. And what nickname do you think I get called? You guessed it -- "BALDY." Hey, if you're not a redhead, tall, or smart...there's not much left!

The point is we hardly even know Barnabas by his real name, Joseph. It's by his nickname that we know him. And I think that would tickle Barnabas because that means we see encouragement personified in his life. Just look at this passage. What do we learn about him. We learn that he was aware of the needs of others and then sought to meet those needs. He recognized that everything he owned belonged to God...his time, his abilities, and even his possessions.

Barnabas had learned what we need to know...that there's no impact without contact. He mixed it up with people and got to know them so he would know when they needed encouragement. We each need to follow him in this first behavior. Get to know people here at CPC, in your neighborhood and at work.

You have so many options. Try practicing the "3-Minute Rule." Never heard of it? If you're serious about getting to know people and learning how you can encourage them, take the first three minutes after every service and talk with someone you don't already know. They may be a visitor or guest that really wants to get involved and they're just looking for an opening. Be that opening for them. Or write a note or email, make a phone call, arrange to meet someone for lunch or coffee, or offer to do some repair job around their home.

You could help out in the Children's or Youth Ministries. Call the church office and they'll help you find a place where you're needed. Look in the bulletin for other ministry opportunities. Join a small group or Community Group. Stop by the table in the lobby, somebody will be there today to answer your questions. You have opportunities to be a Greeter, a Meals Ministry or Prayer Team member. You could join Higher Power or the Global Outreach Team. There's no lack of opportunities for you to meet, get to know, and encourage people here at CPC.

Remember what earned Barnabas his nickname and made him so effective as an encourager. It was that he got involved in the lives of those around him so he could understand their needs. Knowing and helping people was the most important thing in his life. Not only do I need to get to

know people and learn about their needs by building natural relationships but I also need to understand what they need to be encouraged about. That leads us to the second behavior.

B. I need to understand the message God wants me to use to encourage others. How do I encourage others? What is my goal...my purpose? What message do they need to hear? The focus of a biblical encourager's message is uniquely Christian. It's not simply "pumping sunshine." You know what I mean. The world says "you'll be fine," "don't worry," "look on the bright side." Let's look again at Barnabas' example: **"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts"** (Acts 11:22-23).

How did Barnabas encourage the members of the church at Antioch? What were his words "to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts"? In other words, he was telling them to continue to live by faith. He exhorted them, that second action or dimension of encouragement, not to abandon their new way of life and return to the old way that had kept them separated from God and His love. They had been saved by grace through faith and they were to continue to live by grace...to remain, cleave to, and continue in it.

So, our words of encouragement, our message of hope, should direct others back to a recommitment to Christ and an embracing of His love for them. Sometimes that means they need to confess and turn from sin, exhortation. Other times, it will involve words of comfort, consolation, for harms and injustices they have suffered. The root of my encouragement must be to return others to a trust and dependency on Christ. As I understand the message of encouragement God wants me to communicate to others, I must become that message myself. Let's look at the next behavior.

C. I need to grow into the person I encourage others to become. "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24). In this passage we see the character of an encourager. Barnabas had practiced a personal integrity that earned him the right to speak into the lives of others. He practiced what he preached. He was a teacher and had demonstrated his ability to help others learn about God and about living by faith, leading them to salvation and maturity. He was able to help the hurting and downcast see themselves as God does, whole and a new creation. He also knew how to defend the faith. In Acts 15:2 and elsewhere, he "disputed" and "debated" with those who tried to pervert the message of salvation and living by grace. He was sent to Antioch because he had a track record of sincerity and discernment within the Jerusalem church.

He is described as a good man, one that is worthy of admiration. He is said to be "full of the Holy Spirit" and "full of faith." He had a sufficient and complete persuasion and conviction that Jesus was the answer to everyone's need, before and after salvation. He knew that, in order to proclaim good news, he first had to be good news. Barnabas discovered that you don't work harder at encouraging others. Instead, you allow the Holy Spirit to encourage you in your areas of need. Then you will be freed to encourage others by the example of your life. For Barnabas, the medium, his life, truly was the message.

In preparing this message, I ran across a story of a pastor and his wife who were leaving a building and encountered a

man who appeared to be in distress. He didn't speak English very well. As he tried to explain himself, it became apparent that he was looking for the Department of Motor Vehicles. They pointed the way and told him that if he traveled east he would find it on the left. As they got in their car to leave, the wife suggested that they should invite him to follow them so they could take him right to the DMV. He gladly accepted. As they drove pass the DMV and saw the man turn in, they concluded that he probably would never have found the DMV had they not taken him directly to it. He seemed very grateful. We can learn from this story that we are much more effective when we show people the way with our lives rather than simply give them directions with our words.

We learn one more important facet of Barnabas from Galatians chapter 2: **"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray"** (vv. 11-13).

What we see in Barnabas isn't perfection but teachability. Paul confronts Peter and Barnabas because their behavior was in opposition to the message they had believed and preached. Barnabas had to acknowledge that he had been wrong. It must have been difficult to admit publicly but he did it.

He didn't try to pretend that he was perfect. He knew he was not. We must do the same. You know what they say: "If you find the perfect church, don't join it...you'll ruin it!" He was still growing and in process. Barnabas' example teaches us that encouragers need to exhibit honesty and grace when they make mistakes in judgment or fall into sin. Once my own faith and trust in God take root, I am ready to respond to the specific situations and people God wants me to encourage. Now we can look at the fourth behavior.

D. I need to seek out and empower others, as God directs. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27). Earlier in this chapter, it states that the disciples in Jerusalem were "afraid" to meet with Saul. But Barnabas took a risk, sought him out, and then took him to meet the apostles. Only Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," overcame his fears recognizing what was to be gained by taking the risk of meeting with Saul, a former threat to the church. Encouragers take risks. CPC is an encouraging risk-taking church. Stop and think for a moment. Can you imagine what we would have lost if CPC's leadership a few years ago had been afraid to start something as outrageous as an outreach to those in recovery? Fortunately, the Elders weren't afraid and look at the positive impact Higher Power has had in saved souls and restored lives. Was it worth the risk? Always!

But Barnabas doesn't stop there. **"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"** (Acts 11:25-26).

Barnabas shows us that an encourager isn't competitive or protective of their "turf." He didn't care who got the credit.

Encouragers find ways to provide opportunities for others to use and grow in their gifts. They rejoice when someone they've encouraged eventually surpasses them. They don't hang onto position or control. In the six short verses between Acts 13:7 and Acts 13:13, the story changes from "Barnabas and Saul" to "Saul and his companions." Quite a blow to Barnabas' ego, if that was his motivation. Will Rogers once said that, "We can't all be heroes because someone has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by." I need to remember that God is in control...not me! Give others a chance to grow and watch God do the rest. Encouraging others is not a one-time event but rather requires ongoing support that may come at a personal cost. And now let's see the final behavior I need to practice if I'm going to be an encourager.

E. I need to support and promote the value of others. Look at Barnabas' reaction to Paul's concerns about John Mark: **"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches"** (Acts 15:36-41).

He defends John Mark and his value as a person. He doesn't desert him, even though John Mark had deserted Saul and him in Pamphylia. Barnabas even stands up to someone of Paul's prominence and stature. Barnabas sees the value of developing leadership and giving those who have failed a second chance. He maintains loyalty to the one he is encouraging.

When I was on the Junior Varsity wrestling team in my sophomore year of high school, my brother, Dennis, was a senior and had a great record as a Varsity wrestler. The Junior Varsity team always wrestled first and one day, as I was waiting for my match, the Principle of the high school, who didn't know who I was, walked up to Dennis and asked, "Is this guy (meaning me) any good?" I didn't know how Dennis would respond. But he didn't skip a beat and just said as if no other comment would be necessary, "He's my brother." The Principle nodded and walked over to a group of parents. My brother stood up for me and my spirits soared. I won my match that day.

Encouraging others sounds like a lot of work...even a little painful. I'm not sure I can be an encourager like Barnabas. How will I last over the long haul? It's fair to ask this question and it's time to look at the first part of our topic, "Encourage Me!". It's vital to understand how God encourages the encourager.

III. God encourages me as . . .

A. I grow in my relationship with God.

"But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the

glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17).

As we seek to be encouragers, our own faith and confidence in God grows as we see Him working through us to making breakthroughs in the lives of those we encourage. When things get tough, God and our Lord Jesus Christ are right there to hold us and give us encouragement.

B. I build a team. When you find yourself in a group of people all aiming to achieve the same goal, watch out. Everyone is encouraged to do his or her best. Being part of a Community Group or ministry team automatically brings you encouragement because you're no longer alone and your life has meaning and purpose.

C. I recognize my impact. We never read again about Barnabas after he and Paul split up. You might think that Barnabas must have felt he had missed the boat and his opportunity to be used by God. But look at his record. The Church at Antioch still exists today.

Saul (later Paul) became one of the most influential Apostles and wrote over half of the New Testament. John Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark under Peter's influence, was recognized, even by Paul a few years later, as a valued leader and servant in the church. And we have no way of knowing how many other lives and situations were the direct and indirect result of Barnabas' ministry of encouragement.

Arthur Ward wrote, "Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. (But) Encourage me, and I will not forget you." Encouragers are never forgotten by God or the people they encourage.

D. I anticipate my reward. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul shares with us how he was instructed to share Communion, the "Lord's supper." His instructions conclude with the words "until he (Christ) comes." Therein is our promise that He is returning to take us to be with Him, forever, in heaven. What an encouragement that truth is. With that assurance, I can live by faith and spend a lifetime encouraging others to do the same and experience the same joy.

Does that promise encourage you? Can you encourage others with that same reality? Remember, the definition for encouragement is to inspire with courage and hope. Take courage to live by faith in God's love and provision. And to have a hope that, with the Lord's return, we will enter into our new, eternal, existence. As we prepare for Communion this morning, be encouraged that our Lord is returning for us, His church.

Father, thank you for the encouragers you placed in my life. I ask that you would build each of us into encouragers of our families, our neighborhoods, and Your church. Help us to follow Barnabas' example so that we may cause many to grow into Your disciples and to place their hope for eternity in You. Amen.

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