

Barnabas: A Friend's Faith

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Meet Barnabas. You may not know much about Barnabas, but whenever he appears in the Bible, what Barnabas does is encourage people...Barnabas courage into people wherever he goes. Barnabas shows us what it means to be a friend in Christ...and encouragement makes.

Acts 4:32-37 * Barnabas encourages fellow believers in the Early Church

The young church in Jerusalem is growing, but so is the opposition. Some of their leaders are in jail. Some members have lost homes and jobs because of their commitment to Christ. The congregation tries to help, but funds are running low. It is an exciting, challenging, and often discouraging time. Enter a man named Joseph, from the island of Cyprus. He had committed his life to Jesus Christ and became part of Christ's church. In the midst of these tough times, he sold some real estate and gave the proceeds to the apostles to help the church's relief efforts. And that act of financial generosity put courage into the entire congregation. They gave him the nickname: Barnabas, which in Aramaic means "**Son of Encouragement.**"

At HPC, we have a Members In Need Fund, administered by the Trustees and the Pastor, to help people in our own congregation who need short-term assistance. Your generous giving supplies this fund that is for people out of work, people needing medical help, people unable to pay their mortgage or feed their families. Like Barnabas, it has put courage into the hearts of many people, right here in our own church family.

Acts 11:19-26 * Barnabas encourages new believers and a newcomer named Paul

News comes to the church leaders in Jerusalem from Antioch – the third largest city on the Roman Empire – that great numbers of people are coming to Christ there...and the apostles know just who to send. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch he saw the grace of God and "**he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.**" That is exactly what new believers need - old believers too...someone to put courage into them. Someone like Barnabas who sees the grace of God and rejoices. Someone who can look past the problems and see the promise. Someone who sees God at work and infuses the power of God into us...that is what "en-courage" means..."to bring inner strength to another".

For Christians, that is the Spirit.

It worked as "**...a great number of people were brought to the Lord.**"

Barnabas needed some help...so he brings in an old friend named Saul (or Paul, as he comes to be known). This same Paul had been one of the most feared persecutors of the church. But the Lord Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus and changed his life. The problem was no one in the church trusted him...except Barnabas. In Acts 9, we find that it was Barnabas who introduced Saul to the Early Church. Unfortunately, Paul was so zealous for the Lord that he kept getting into trouble with the authorities. So the church leaders sent Saul back to his hometown. Barnabas brings Paul to minister in Antioch. Can you imagine what that meant to Paul? For years he was rejected by Jews, feared by Christians, and forgotten in Tarsus. Talk about putting courage into a person! What might have happened if Barnabas had not reached out to Paul...its greatest missionary and theologian? But Barnabas, the encouraging friend, believed in Paul and brought him into a leadership position in Antioch.

Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball. Breaking the color barrier, he faced hostile crowds. One day in his home stadium, he committed an error. The fans "booed". He stood at second base, humiliated. Shortstop Pee Wee Reese went over and stood next to Jackie. He put his arm around him and faced the crowd. Suddenly the fans grew quiet. Robinson said later that arm around his shoulder saved his career. That is a Barnabas.

Paul with his extensive knowledge of Scripture and zeal for the Lord Jesus - Barnabas with his generous spirit and his loving acceptance of people...they were an amazing team. The Early Church flourished and Paul flourished – and it was the Church in Antioch who came to have the heart for reaching others for Christ...sending Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey. Acts 13, as they begin they are listed as "**Barnabas and Saul**" (v.2,7) and by the end of the chapter as "**Paul and Barnabas**" (v.42,43,46,50). Barnabas the encourager begins as the leader and then steps back as Saul (now Paul) becomes the leader. One of the acid tests of an encourager is the ability to let someone else take the lead and come into their own.

Acts 15:36-41 * Barnabas encourages John Mark

On that first missionary journey one of their team, a young man named John Mark, deserted them. We don't know why – it could have been illness or homesickness or fear...but he bailed on them. Next journey Barnabas wants to take John Mark along, but Paul says "no". It wasn't Paul's finest moment. Paul saw the failure...however Barnabas sees the potential. Barnabas believes John Mark can become faithful and effective if someone will mentor him and put courage into him. Paul and Barnabas broke up over this...but God brought about two new missionary teams. And instead of writing John Mark off as a loser, Barnabas takes him on as a partner.

Barnabas is a walking, talking picture of the grace of God – grace that finds us and claims us and keeps us in spite of our failures. Grace that believes in us when no one else will. Do you have a Barnabas somewhere in your past? Someone who believed in you in spite of your track record? I know I do – several of them, in fact – and I thank God for them.

Imagine what would have happened if Barnabas had not been there for John Mark. Maybe, like so many, he would have given up in shame and drifted away from the Christian community never to be heard from again. Thankfully that did not happen to John Mark – because of a friend named Barnabas. Years later John Mark became the traveling companion and secretary to the apostle Peter. He recorded Peter's preaching about Jesus and those records formed the basis for what we know as the Gospel of Mark – this very same John Mark. By the way, there is one other reference to John Mark in the New Testament. At the end of 2 Timothy (the letter Paul wrote before he was executed in Rome) in 4:11, Paul tells Timothy, "**Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.**" Even Paul came to value this young failure whom Barnabas encouraged and mentored into a man of faith.

At HPC, we are blessed to have some ladies called The Barnabas Group...I fondly call them my "Barna-babes". They pray for every person in our directory every week...for God to bless you with His Spirit and faith...for you to be encouraged in your faith. There are so many things that discourage us, that take courage out of us. The actress Celeste Holm said, "We live by encouragement and die without it – slowly, sadly and angrily." She's right. We need people who put courage into others like Barnabas -- by giving generously, by building up new leaders, by believing in past failures, by living out the grace of God for the rest of us to see.