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BARNABAS: ONGOING ENCOURAGEMENT



What are some interesting nicknames you've encountered over the years?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

No one views a skyscraper in its early stages and marvels at the extensive nature of its rebar. We don't want to see what makes it stable. We want to see what makes it pretty.

Even though rebar isn't pretty, it's incredibly necessary. It's what gives a building its stability and strength. It's what holds everything together below the surface.

In a similar way, we've all had people who propped us up at different points in our lives. These people have supported us in our faith even when it felt like the whole world was being turned upside down. And though these people might never receive the applause, they play an essential role of support in our lives.

It takes incredible strength of character to be this kind of support for another. It's easier to drift down the road of criticism. The Christian, though, must resist that temptation. We must choose to build up instead of tear down. In this session, we'll look at a man whose own nickname reflected his consistent encouragement of others—and we'll see in his life an example worth following.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Acts 4:36-37

³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The first few chapters of the Book of Acts provide a beautiful glimpse into the early days of the church. These followers of Jesus, who had earlier scattered in fear during His crucifixion, had been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They emerged from that experience no longer timid, but boldly confident in the authority of Jesus as the rightful Lord of the universe. They gladly shared the good news of forgiveness in Christ, and thousands more believed.

Thus, the church was born—this new community of people who, apart from their shared faith, had no reason to associate together. Old divisions of creed, economic status, and educational level disappeared, and the new church found great joy in growing closer to God and closer together. They freely shared what they had and encouraged one another daily. (See Acts 4:32-34.)

Among those new believers was a man named Joseph. He earned a nickname, Barnabas, that literally means “son of encouragement.” It seems that Barnabas was a man of means who lived up to his nickname, and who went so far as to sell one of the fields he owned and bring the money to the apostles for the mutual good of God’s people.

Like Barnabas, we too have been given resources—talents, time, finances—and we have to choose what to do with them. We can either use these resources to encourage others, or we can hang onto them for our own security, comfort, and convenience. For us, as it was with Barnabas, our willingness to use what we have for others will be driven by our faith.

What makes generosity a source of encouragement?

QUESTION #2

Acts 9:26-27

²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

You may have heard about the apostle Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Originally known as Saul, he was a key leader in the Jewish persecution of the early church. In fact, Saul was known for his zealous campaigns to root out pockets of Christians, throw them in jail, and in some cases even put them to death.

All that changed when, on a particular mission of persecution, Saul was knocked off his high horse and came face-to-face with the risen Jesus. (See Acts 9:1-9.) As a result, he was dramatically and irreversibly changed. The great persecutor became the great missionary. The hater of Christianity became its most ardent defender. The oppressor of the church became the defender of her doctrine.

But consider how history might have been different if not for the encouraging spirit of Barnabas.

The early church leaders knew about Saul; they'd seen what he did to their brothers and sisters. They lived in fear of the day when he might come for them. Then, suddenly, a rumor circulated that Saul had completely changed course; he was now with them instead of against them. We can understand their hesitation. Surely there were more than a few who thought this supposed conversion was just another scheme to infiltrate their ranks.

But Barnabas, the encourager, was willing to take a chance on this new convert. Barnabas was confident enough in the power of the gospel, having experienced the saving power of Jesus himself, to believe this miraculous conversion could be real.

What risks do we take when we stand up for others?

QUESTION #3

CHOOSE ENCOURAGEMENT

Use the following template to encourage someone who has been on your mind in recent weeks. In the days to come, rewrite these words on a card and send it to that person.

Dear _____ ,

You have been on my mind for a while because _____

You are someone I admire for many reasons, including _____

Also, you are a blessing to me when you _____

I always smile when I think about the way you _____

I'm thankful to call you my friend!

*"God never gives us discernment
in order that we may criticize,
but that we may intercede!"*

—OSWALD CHAMBERS

There are few things more powerful than someone willing to stand up for someone else—especially when that person has done nothing to deserve it. Think about how encouraging it is to hear, just when you're at your loneliest and most vulnerable position, that someone is speaking on your behalf.

Those moments can change a person's life.

Acts 11:19-26

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

As we've seen, Barnabas encouraged others through his generosity, and the early church flourished. Then, by encouraging and supporting Paul, Barnabas helped the other apostles to accept his ministry in its early days. And, as we see in this passage, Barnabas encouraged the spread of the gospel in unlikely places among unlikely people.

Who has encouraged your spiritual growth over the years?

QUESTION #4

It was always God’s intent that the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and the Jewish population there; it has always been in His heart that the church be made up of people from every tribe, tongue, nation and people. (See Matt. 28:19.) Yet when the gospel began to be preached to the Greeks, a group of people the Jews considered out of bounds, many Jewish believers were skeptical. So they sent their trusted emissary, Barnabas, to check out the situation.

Having seen the grace of God at work in these new Gentile believers, Barnabas turned to what was second nature to him: encouragement. Specifically, he encouraged these new believers to grow spiritually.

How do we encourage spiritual growth in someone else? The example of Barnabas gives us some keys:

- ▶ **Encourage with joy.** When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he saw what God was doing and “he was glad.” Our greatest joy should come from seeing the work of God in other lives. To see someone be born again, and then to play a role in encouraging them to grow in Christ, are wonderful opportunities of eternal consequence.
- ▶ **Encourage with faith.** Barnabas encouraged these new believers “to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.” Through the Spirit, he sought to help them discover what the Holy Spirit could do in and through them as they lived out their faith.
- ▶ **Encourage with perseverance.** Barnabas brought in Saul, and together they persevered in discipling the believers in their walk with Christ. We shouldn’t make the mistake of thinking encouragement is a one-time thing. Spiritual growth is a lifelong process that calls for perseverance on our part. After all, that’s the way God deals with us. (See Phil. 1:6.)



How can you use your resources, gifts, skills, or talents to encourage others?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to offer support and encouragement to others in the days to come? Consider these options:

- ▶ **Encourage friends.** Think of the people who are closest to you right now. What is one specific sentence you can say to each of them to encourage them?
- ▶ **Encourage your pastor.** Your pastor might be someone you don't consider when you think of encouraging someone. Take time this week to do so with a note or a conversation.
- ▶ **Encourage others in your community.** Part of encouragement is being willing to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. As a group, identify those people in your community and plan some actions you can do to stand up for them.

You are who you are because someone was willing to encourage you. That person, along with many others, form the “rebar” of your life—the support and structure that makes you stable. Now go and do likewise in the lives of others.

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLsecondnature**