

The Power of Encouragement Part II

By Denise Bostic

Lessons From Barnabas

“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.” (Acts 4:36-37 NIV)

Of all the characters of the Bible, we find one man who personified encouragement. According to what we learn of him in scripture, he truly lived up to his name! Using three examples from the New Testament, we can learn how Barnabas was instrumental in giving support, strength and courage to men who were called to do great things for God’s Kingdom while on earth. His encouragement helped to make a tremendous impact on key leaders in the infancy of the Church. His life and legacy has become a shining example to the Church throughout the ages of how the power of encouragement can affect the lives of others and the Kingdom of God.

A New Order

This man Barnabas is first introduced to us in Acts chapter four. His original name was Joseph and he was a Jew from the tribe of Levi but the apostles evidently already knew of his encouraging nature and had nicknamed him Barnabas, which literally means “Son of Encouragement.” It is recorded that he performed an act, which we find has great significance.

“Barnabas...sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:36-37 NIV)

Why does this have great significance? Under the old order of the Law of Moses, only the Levites were allowed to be priests and collect offerings from the people of God. But here we find Barnabas, a Levite, giving an offering to the newly ordained apostles of the Church instead.

The sacrifice of Jesus and the instituting of the New Covenant had changed the old order of the Levitical priesthood and **“when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change in the law.” (Hebrews 7:12)** Only God can change His own law. He changed the law after His own Son, Jesus, became God’s Lamb offering for the sins of the whole world and was resurrected in power to sit at His right hand. Through Jesus’ life, death, burial and resurrection, he qualified to be our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. God had already foreordained that Jesus would become the eternal High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant. (Hebrews 7:17-28, 8:1-6, 9:11-15, 10:1-14)

Barnabas was already a believer and by laying an offering at the apostles’ feet, he was making a public statement that he understood God’s new order and received Jesus as new High Priest and also His divinely appointed leadership of the New Testament Church. Being accepted by this Levite must surely have encouraged these newly commissioned apostles. By his public example, Barnabas not only encouraged these apostles of the Lord, but also by example, was able to encourage all the new converts to accept and support this new order of leadership ordained by God as well.

Today, we can all encourage those that God has placed in leadership within the body of Christ. It’s not easy to be in positions of leadership because the responsibility and sacrifice is so great. Many times ministers of Christ are often persecuted, criticized negatively, misunderstood, unappreciated and taken advantage of. Ministers are oftentimes in need of much encouragement in order to continue fulfilling the call of God on their lives.

If we allow God to use us as instruments to encourage the ministry, He will give us exactly what to say and do to have a maximum impact upon them. We should remember that the exhortation to encourage one another is for all of the saints - including our brethren in the ministry. Many people are afraid to approach the ministry and "minister" to them in any way. We should not be timid in approaching God's leaders but boldly step out to encourage them. The people of God are to under gird and support their leaders in various ways, including encouraging them in their calling and work for the Lord. When you see the impact that it will have on their lives, you will be so glad that you did!

Barnabas Befriends Paul

One of the more notable acts of Barnabas was when he befriended a former enemy and persecutor of the Church, Saul, whose name was immediately changed to Paul after his dramatic conversion. This heartfelt story tells of how Barnabas comes to the aid of Paul at a time when he was in great need of a friend and ally. It also was the beginning of a strong friendship and ministry connection for the two men who later both became apostles of the Lord and went on missionary journeys together. The story is given to us in Acts chapter nine.

After a newly converted Paul narrowly escapes death in Damascus, he then heads to Jerusalem to seek refuge and try to join the Church there. He finds himself being rejected however due to a bad reputation of being a former persecutor and tormenter of the Church and the local brethren found it hard to believe that Paul is now a true disciple of the Lord. Then an amazing thing happens.

"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles." (Acts 9:27)

Barnabas believed that Paul was a true convert of Christ and he goes the extra mile to make sure that the Church there accepts Paul by taking him directly to the leadership. Shortly afterwards, Paul is then accepted by the Church as a bonafide believer.

What encouragement this must have given Paul! His zeal and desire as a new convert and wanting to identify with the people of God was so strong that at first, it surely must have been a disappointment for him to receive rejection from the Church members there. During this crucial moment in Paul's life however, Barnabas stepped in to give aid, strength, support and courage to him when he most needed it. Being accepted by the Apostles and the Church at Jerusalem was very important for Paul, not only as a new convert but also for his future calling and destiny to be an Apostle of the Lord. By supporting Paul, Barnabas was able to have a positive impact upon his life and help him along on his journey towards his destiny. In turn, the impact that the apostle Paul would have upon the Church then and ultimately, down through the ages would be truly astounding! The power of encouragement can have greater impact than we realize.

Unfortunately, there are some today who may, like Paul, find themselves being rejected by the Church because of their former life or because they may happen to be very different from others. Those who are rejecting and discouraging members in the body of Christ need to realize that they are actually hindering the purpose of God for the lives of these people and ultimately robbing the Church of the blessings and benefit that God intends to give through these chosen brethren. We should help rather than hinder the calling of God on people's lives. We can do this through the power of encouragement.

We must understand that God makes each of us unique for His own special purposes. It is so vital for each of us to aid the purpose and cause of the Lord by encouraging one another as often as we can by loving, embracing and celebrating our differences so that the Church as a whole may be built up and become all that she is called to be.

We need some modern day Barnabas's to come to the aid of those who need it most so that they too may find acceptance within the Church and be encouraged to fulfill their destiny in Christ. The power of encouragement or lack thereof can make all the difference in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Like Barnabas, we need to be friends and allies of those who need to be received by the Church in order that God can fulfill His perfect will. True, godly love will encourage others.

A Second Chance

Barnabas practiced encouragement as a way of life and obviously was not a respecter of persons. As we learned from the previous story, he allowed God to use him as a vessel to bring encouragement to others even when it went against popular opinion. This is a very important lesson for all of us to learn. So many follow the crowd or go along with the popular opinion of others but this may not always be the right way. The snap judgments and opinions that we form about others may not always be correct. This is why it is so important to look to God to help us judge situations correctly. We must depend and rely on the Holy Spirit to help us to judge circumstances with righteous judgment and lead us to say and do the right things at the appropriate times. This gives us a great introduction into our next story.

After receiving their apostolic callings together, Paul and Barnabas set out on their missionary journeys together and had great success working in unity as a ministry team. When some time had passed, Paul suggested that they return to all the towns that they had visited and preached the gospel to find out how the people were doing. (*Acts 15:36*) This wonderful plan however, turned sour when Barnabas suggested that they take a young minister along with them called Mark, whom they had taken with them on their previous journeys. (*Mark was a nephew of Barnabas and scripture also refers to him as Marcus. Colossians 4:10*) The scriptures give us the details of what happened next.

“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.” (*Acts 15:37-39*)

Paul did not think that Mark would stick with them on their journey; after all, didn't he fail them by deserting them before? Paul was dead set against taking another chance on this young man again. Barnabas however, felt differently. He had confidence that if they gave Mark a second chance, he would not let them down. Instead of siding with his good friend Paul however, Barnabas makes a surprising decision. He decides to part company with Paul and take Mark with him to Cyprus. Barnabas made a conscious decision to encourage Mark to continue on with his ministry by giving him an opportunity to redeem himself. (*Acts 15:39*) Barnabas took this responsibility personally by taking Mark under his protective wing.

We find later in scripture that Barnabas' decision to support Mark was the right one and even Paul later confirms this fact. Later in Paul's life, when others were deserting him after being thrown into prison, we find that Paul specifically requests Timothy to bring Mark with him to visit him and confesses that Mark has been a great help to his apostolic ministry. (*Philemon 24, II Timothy 4:9-11*) Another apostle, Peter, also thought so highly of Mark that he considered him to be a spiritual son. (*I Timothy 5:13*)

Barnabas' decision to not give up on Mark and give him a second chance not only helped to encourage Mark in his spiritual life but also as a minister who would later prove himself to be a worthy laborer for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. Without the encouragement and support of Barnabas, who knows what would have happened to this young minister in training? He may have become so discouraged that he may have given up on his calling had it not been for some loving support and encouragement on behalf of someone who was willing to take the time to give him a second chance.

This is so much like God! God is a God of second chances. When Adam and Eve fell from glory and earned the wages of sin (death), He provided redemption and restoration for them and all sinful humanity. Even though each and every one of us have sinned and fell short of His glory, He made a way for us to come back to that glory. He has given every person on planet earth the opportunity to accept this second chance at eternal life and become His sons by receiving His Son, Jesus Christ. (*Romans 3:22-23, 6:23, John 3:16, John 1:12-13*) God did not give up on mankind.

There are many today that God is calling to the ministry and it is the responsibility of the Church, both leadership and brethren, to encourage and support those who have been chosen or hand-picked by God to work in His service. For those who have the encouragement and support of their entire Church, this is wonderful and is the way it is supposed to be. There have been many however, that have been converted, come into the Church, heard the call of God to serve in ministry and are on fire to serve the Lord but have had that fire put out by others through being ignored, rejected, discouraged and persecuted from their own Church family. The stark truth is, not everyone has had the love, encouragement and support that they have needed

to flourish in the house of God. This can change however, if Churches are willing to conform to Christ by hearing and following the divine will of God through the guidance of the Spirit. (*Acts 13:1-3*)

The Church's loving encouragement and support or lack thereof will make all the difference in the lives of young converts and ministers. Young ministers must go through many trials, tests and mistakes before they can mature and reach their potential in Christ. Without the proper loving, nurturing and encouraging environment, some will not live up to their godly potential. Sadly, in my earlier years of conversion and call to the ministry, I had seen many who were on fire to serve the Lord become so discouraged by being rejected and persecuted by the Church that they dropped out completely and went back into the world or are sitting at home wounded by the damage that has been inflicted upon them by those who were supposed to love and support them. Leaders and brethren, THIS SHOULD NOT BE.

The Church as a whole must provide a loving, nurturing environment for those who are called to serve God in the ministry and I don't just mean "ministry" that is usually defined as the ordained ministry such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. (*Ephesians 4:11-12*) All of the saints of God should be encouraged to use the gifts that God has given them for His Kingdom work and fulfill the purpose for which He has called them. All of us have a divine purpose in this earth. The whole Church should be working and cooperating with the Holy Spirit to help fulfill the great commission given to us by the Lord. We should not be trying to fit others into our mold, but allow God to mold and shape them and the Church should be upholding and confirming those whom the Lord chooses. (*John 15:16, Acts 13:1-3*)

The power, nature, blessings and benefits of Christ lie within each and every believer and will remain dormant unless we release it to others. The power of encouragement will help to give others courage to keep going when they need it most. We can affirm, confirm, support, embolden and spur others on towards their destiny with this power. We all have the capacity to love, encourage and support one another with the aid or help of the Holy Spirit. We should all seek God on who He would have us to encourage in the body of Christ. We must choose to build up God's house instead of tear it down. Our words and actions have the power to do either, it's just up to us as individuals to choose the right one. As you use your God-given power to encourage, only time and eternity will reveal the impact that your encouraging words and actions will have on the life of an individual, the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God as well.