

Being a Brother Like Barnabas

Acts 11:27-12:25

Wouldn't it be great if someone could live your life before you do? Now, we know that's not possible, but what if it were? What if you had a good helper who could basically "pre-live your life" in advance and then guide you every step of the way? Just think of it! If you listened to your helpful guide, whatever you do would prosper! In the words of Joshua 1:8, you would have "prosperity and good success." Now if this idea is appealing to you, then you will be excited to know something; this is one of the reasons that the Bible was written. It's the way that the Lord gives you everything you need "for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). And by getting your mind going – exercising it in the Word of God – you can be ready. Be ready to what? Be ready to make the right choice between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). The Bible refers to this as "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And the Lord gives us that instruction by telling us about Christian brothers like Barnabas. Most amazing of all, it shows us how to become like Barnabas.

For instance, here's an interesting challenge: How would you respond to a worldwide pandemic or a worldwide famine? What would you do? Where would you go? How would you prepare? Would you hoard your resources? And if those resources were no longer available, what would you do?

Raising these difficult questions shows us the impressive nature of Acts 11:27-30

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth [famine] throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Near the beginning of this 2020 COVID-19 crisis, we raised some of these questions in a message entitled "[How to Prepare for Hard Times](#)" (based on Acts 11). The disciples at Antioch responded wonderfully to that impending crisis. They decided to help those who had invested so much in giving them the Gospel. Where did those dynamic disciples come from – especially in a newly planted church? In that message, we sought to answer that question. Where did they get those dynamic disciples who responded to a famine that covered the known world?ⁱ

1. Dynamic disciples are produced by the Spirit-filled preaching of the Gospel of God's Grace. 19-21
2. Dynamic disciples are produced by encouraging others – exhorting them to follow the Lord with purpose of heart. 22-24
3. Dynamic disciples are produced by the faithful teaching of God's Word. 25-26

Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," was right there in the midst of this marvelous ministry. As a Jewish man, he crossed ethnic lines to minister to those Gentile people in Antioch. As a brother in Christ, he saw the grace of God in the lives of those who had been converted. He used his energies

to encourage them to hold fast to the Lord. And, in a surprising move, Barnabas had left that fledgling church to go find Saul of Tarsus. When he returned with Saul, they taught God's Word faithfully for an entire year. The historic impact of this preaching, exhorting and teaching can be seen in the words, **"And the disciples were called 'Christians' first in Antioch"** (Acts 11:26). The Lord used our brother, Barnabas, to bless so many people. And the Lord could use you in the same way.

Annie J. Flint wrote, *"When we have exhausted our store of endurance, when our strength has failed ere the day is half done, when we reach the end of our hoarded resources, our Father's full giving is only begun."*ⁱⁱ "Our Father's full giving" could cause us to overflow with God's grace, just as Barnabas did.

In Antioch, the believers were called Christians because they were identified with Jesus Christ. But more than that, they were in union with Christ. This is an important reminder for all of us. It is one thing to know about Jesus Christ. It is another to be identified with Him because you have entered into essential union with Him (Romans 6:8-10). The unique death, burial and distinctive resurrection of Jesus Christ was not just a heart-rending story for them. No, they had recognized that by the death, burial and rising again of Christ, they were saved – delivered for all eternity (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The Gospel had made such a difference in their lives that the people in their community called them "Christians!" Would your co-workers and neighbors call you a Christian? What could we do to help those around us be Christians? How could we be Christian brothers (and sisters) like Barnabas?

A Humble Brother

In the last message, we noted the surprising choice that Barnabas made to leave the ministry in Antioch (briefly). When things were going so well, he must have asked the question: "How could we be better?" And his conclusion was that he needed to search for Saul and bring him to Antioch. Barnabas did that, and the rest is a history of God's remarkable blessings. Barnabas wanted God to receive all of the glory; he did not insist that he had to be a big part of the story. If you want God's hand to do great things through you, then be a humble brother like Barnabas.

An Encouraging Brother

As the son of encouragement, he directed the saints to the source of their encouragement: that they would cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). Undoubtedly, his teaching in Antioch was designed to cultivate courage in the congregation.

The Lord's comment to Ananias about the newly-converted Saul brings this encouragement into sharp focus. The Lord predicted, **"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"** (Acts 9:16). Let that sink in. In advance, the Lord said that Saul would suffer great things for the sake of the Gospel. How would you approach your future if you knew this would be true of you? To endure all that, you would need encouragement. So who was the Lord's instrument of encouragement to Saul? His nickname was "Barnabas," because the apostles called him "the son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Which suffering saint could you encourage this week? And which

serious problems will you face where you will need an encouraging brother or sister to step up to help you?

Perhaps Paul's later instruction to the church at Rome reflects the encouragement he learned from Barnabas:

“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, ‘The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.’ For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(Romans 15:2-5)

An Influential Brother

The self-sacrificial ministry of leaders like Barnabas greatly influenced the brothers and sisters at Antioch. We learned about the sacrifice that Barnabas made in Acts 4:36-37. He sold land that he possessed and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. It is likely that this sacrificial choice required him to enter into the workforce. (In his missionary ministry, he apparently refused financial support, 1 Corinthians 9:3-14ⁱⁱⁱ.)

Keep that in mind as you read about the actions of the disciples at Antioch: **“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”**

In Acts 4, Barnabas made his choice to bless others. But he probably had no idea how his choice would affect him and others to whom he would minister in the future. His sacrificial approach to ministry undoubtedly imbued his Scriptural exhortations and teaching. He knew from experience that one could trust the Lord to meet his needs. So we can see the impact of his ministry when **“the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren . . .”** Like Barnabas selling what he had in order to be able to give, the disciples gave, according to their abilities. Our children and our fellow believers are watching our pattern to learn how to live and how to serve. Let's be like Barnabas, an influential brother.

A Trusting Brother

Who were the most influential leaders of the fledgling church in Antioch? Barnabas and Saul were at the top of the list. Their faithful ministry of the Word was momentous in every sense of the word. Their service was of great importance, making a significant contribution in Antioch and the future of Christian missions. And this fact introduces yet another surprise in these pages in the Book of Acts: **“Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul”** (Acts 11:30). If you had taken a poll of the least likely people to be sent out by the church, it would have been Barnabas and Saul. But they trusted God – trusting the Spirit of God to do a magnificent work in the church. They had diligently labored to produce dynamic disciples. And those disciples were ready to take the lead.

Picture it this way: What if in an upcoming business meeting you were presented with this proposal? Let's send the foremost pastors from our congregation on an extended mission trip for the next year or so. How would you vote? We would all be asking, "Wait a minute, who is going to be preaching and ministering to our congregation?!" But this part of the story from the Book of Acts highlights an important emphasis in other passages. Who is supposed to be doing the work of the ministry? Please turn over to Ephesians 4:11-16:

And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Why are the saints being perfected (or equipped), according to Ephesians 4:12? It is for the work of the ministry, the building up of the body of Christ! Further, it is to build up unity and Christlike maturity, with each member learning and sharing Biblical doctrine (Acts 2:42). This is the Biblical way that a congregation grows – building itself up in love.

Are you prepared to use the Scriptures to serve the saints in our congregation? If you are not, and you've been a believer for a while, then aren't you like those in Hebrews 5:12? Of them it was said, **"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."**

Every single one of us needs to be exercising his or her senses in the Word of righteousness to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:11-14). Have we become "dull of hearing?" That's the indictment in Hebrews 5:11. Isn't it clear that the church at Antioch was not dull of hearing? Within one year, they were ready to take leadership and keep on serving the Lord – even in the extended absence of Barnabas and Saul. Dear friends, this is what the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish through us. He wants each and every one of us to be ready to step up to use our spiritual gifts. Being "dull of hearing" has destroyed churches like ours. Don't let it happen here. The Lord could call our next pastors right out of our own congregation. I receive a number of phone calls from pastors who are contemplating retirement. But they can't find anyone to recommend to their congregations to replace them. What if we could be used of the Lord to grow pastors and leaders for this entire region of our country – and the mission fields around the world? That would start by our receiving the Word of God eagerly and earnestly, ready to put it into practice. May God be pleased to raise up leaders right out of our own congregation!

Let's talk about a common objection we hear: "Our church has such talented people that they really don't need me." There are several problems with this objection. It compares talents, which is

a foolish mistake (2 Corinthians 10:12). It presumes that talented people have unlimited time. (They don't.) It assumes that we are just trying to maintain our present ministry rather than growing to reach others. It often comes from people who assume that they have no spiritual gifts, or that God cannot use their spiritual gifts in this congregation. Read Romans 12:3-16, and Ephesians 4:7, and stop using that objection. Use your spiritual gifts instead.

The process that Paul later described to Timothy is what happened in Antioch. Paul wrote, **"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also"** (2 Timothy 2:1-2). Barnabas and Saul were willing to commit the leadership of the church to faithful men. If we would like to see our church become like that church in Antioch, we need faithful men and women. We need those who would be willing to be equipped in such a way that they can teach others. Don't be dull of hearing; do be faithful, and watch how the Lord could use you in these trying times ahead. Let's be like Barnabas – brothers and sisters who trust the Spirit of God to do a magnificent work here in our own congregation.

An Encouraging Brother

We next read about Barnabas in Acts 12:25, **"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."** But we would make a mistake if we continued our story there. Let's back up to look at the events in Acts 12:

- King Herod violently persecuted the church, including killing James, the brother of John. 1-2
- Herod saw that his efforts increased his popularity with the Jewish people, so he arrested Peter. 3-4
- The church met to pray earnestly for Peter's deliverance. 5
- Answering their prayer, the Lord sent His angel to deliver Peter from prison! This overturned the efforts of Herod and the Jewish people who hated believers. 6-11
- Peter showed up at the prayer meeting where the people were praying for his deliverance, but they responded to his escape with disbelief! 12-17
- Peter's escape created an uproar at the prison, and Herod ordered that those in charge of security be executed. 18-19
- Then King Herod traveled down to Caesarea, where he was treated like a god by those who wanted to flatter him. 20-22
- The angel of the Lord destroyed Herod with worms because he would not give the glory to God. 23
- In all these things, the ministry of the Word of God grew and multiplied. 24

If you were being heavily persecuted, wouldn't you want someone to help you – to give you some relief? In a remarkable demonstration of God's timing, help and relief were on the way from Antioch. Barnabas and Saul were privileged to be God's messengers to help their brothers and sisters. The servant-leader will trust the Lord's timing, knowing that God will use His servant to fulfill His intended purpose. Undoubtedly, the people were overjoyed to see Barnabas. To relieve their great distress, the Lord sent "the son of encouragement" to help them endure their trials.

Perhaps Barnabas was in those prayer meetings when the persecution was taking place. Perhaps they all prayed that the Lord would “turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (2 Samuel 15:31).^{iv} The Lord delivered humble Peter and destroyed proud Herod. Servant-leaders can observe situations like this and gain new strength for the days ahead. They continue to glorify the Lord with simple obedience, even when it seem as if the whole world is given over to glorifying man.

Throughout this series, we have noted what the Scripture tells us about the encouraging manner of God’s servant, Barnabas. Would you be willing to be like Barnabas? In the hard times ahead, God’s people may face persecution and imprisonment. This persecution could turn violent, especially if politicians believe it can make them more popular. What will God’s people need in those dire circumstances? They will need encouragers. They will need people like Barnabas, “the son of consolation.” As a careful steward of his own possessions, and as a faithful trustee of what had been entrusted to him, Barnabas ministered comfort. You and I can do the same to encourage others.

And, in closing, let’s ask: whom will we take with us? About Barnabas and Saul it was written, “. . . **and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.**” Even though they were preparing to return to the dynamic disciples at Antioch, they recruited more disciples. This is a great approach to life. If you and I are intent on carrying through on the model of 2 Timothy 2:1-2, we will be looking for faithful men to disciple. And they chose John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (see Colossians 4:10). And though it was a bumpy road ahead, that Mark is the one whom the Lord used to write the Gospel of Mark. Barnabas shows us that the servant-leader will always be watching for disciples to recruit in order to equip them for the work of the ministry. And those disciples may be members of our own families.

So when we think about the impact of his encouragement on the early church, we want to enlist to be like Barnabas. We could be a brother like Barnabas, and only eternity will reveal the historic impact of our ministry. With Barnabas as our trailblazer, you and I could learn how to encourage others.

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ⁱ For more about this famine, see “The Famine of Acts 11” accessed at http://www.biblehistory.net/newsletter/acts11_famine.htm

ⁱⁱ Annie J. Flint, He Giveth More Grace, (Hymn) accessed at https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/He_Giveth_More_Grace/

ⁱⁱⁱ Paul’s point in that passage is that Barnabas and he had the right to expect financial support, but that they exercised the liberty to forego that support.

^{iv} 2 Samuel 15:31 See “How to Pray in Perilous Times” accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/how-to-pray-in-perilous-times/>