

ENCOURAGEMENT: THE BARNABAS FACTOR

A SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION (3 May 2020)

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Call your family together for a Family Devotion. (The time you would have gone to church) Set 60-90 minutes aside for Praise and Worship, Word Reading and Study and Prayer. Encourage the involvement of every family member. The outline below will assist you.

Exciting News! **#homedevos** We have three family devotions available for you to this coming week. It builds on the theme we discussed today. Please go to: www.christiancentre.co.za

Woven into the fabric of the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's epistles is the quiet life of a man who was a life-changer. He was mentioned at least fifteen times in the New Testament. This was a man who so epitomised the meaning of the word encouragement, that the disciples changed his name from Joseph to Barnabas.

The term Barnabas was derived from two words: "bar" meant the "son of" and "nabas" referred to a way of speaking that encouraged or built another person up. So, the name Barnabas literally means the Son of Encouragement -- the one who refreshes. To call someone the "son of something" in Jewish culture was a way of describing their character – as if they were the offspring of a particular behaviour. For instance, the disciples of Jesus, James and John, were from the Zebedee family but their nickname was "Sons of Thunder" – presumably because of their personality.

To be known as Barnabas was a supreme compliment. It was a nickname that stuck with this man, Joseph, throughout most of his life.

Question: What is the meaning of your name? Why did your parents give you your name? Please share with one another.

Journey with me to Acts, chapter 4 . The young, persecuted church was backed to the wall and financially strapped. The physical needs of many of the believers were desperate but Barnabas came through – he sold a field that he owned and gave the proceeds to the church to distribute to those who had needs.

Acts 4:36-37 NKJV And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

In chapter 11, the church is exploding with growth. It is quickly getting too big for the leaders to handle. So, what does Barnabas do? He goes searching for Saul of Tarsus, who was still an outcast to many in the church because of his former life of persecuting Christians. But Barnabas had never been afraid to stick his neck out for a new Christian, so the "Son of Encouragement" took Saul who became the apostle Paul by the hand and brought him to Antioch and introduced him to the entire church as brand-new leadership material.

Acts 9:26, 27 NKJV And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Acts 11:22-26 NKJV *Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

The final references to Barnabas in Acts are the most telling of all. Let me read it with you.

Acts 12:25 NKJV *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.*

*Acts 13:13 NKJV *Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John (called Mark), departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*

Acts 15:36-40 NKJV *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.*

Let me set this scripture in context. The second big missionary journey is about to begin. As Paul and Barnabas begin to discuss the details of the trip -- the inevitable topic arose -- John Mark, the young man who had not measured up on the first missionary journey. Apparently, Mark began the journey with them but turned back*. Can you just imagine that discussion. "No way", said Paul. "He bailed once. . . who's to say he isn't going to do it again?" "Yes", insisted Barnabas. "He can and will succeed if we give him that second chance. He has grown up a lot since then. He just needs a little encouragement." Paul would not withdraw his negative vote. Barnabas stood his ground, believing in the young man's potential, despite what had happened before. Two strong wills that clashed sharply, and the author of this passage of Scripture, Luke, is very honest in allowing us to see the humanity of two men he admired so much.

Without Barnabas' encouragement, we might only have had three gospels, for tradition has it that the John Mark of Acts was also the author of the gospel of Mark.

There are many things in life that cause us to experience discouragement. Sometimes it is a crisis, sometimes it is simply tiredness or sickness, or sometimes it is the cutting words or actions of another person. To encourage is to do the direct opposite -- It puts back what has been taken or that which has leaked out of us.

The Barnabas factor is really the gift of encouragement.

What is critical here is not understanding what encouragement is as much as what it does.

Let me suggest three things that this Barnabas factor does.

1. First, when we encourage people, **we build them up** – People with the Barnabas factor affirm other people. There is a crucial difference between appreciation and affirmation.
 - We appreciate what a person does.
 - We affirm who a person is.

As important as appreciation is, affirmation is far more crucial because it goes far deeper. It is directed at the person. To be appreciated, we get the distinct impression that we must earn it, but affirmation is a gift that comes whether we earn it, whether we succeed or fail. We have the sense that we are valuable to someone not for what we can do, but simply for who we are.

While each of us grows with encouragement, it is important not to be dependent on it. Some of us crave the approval of others so much, it can be crippling. That kind of dependency can make slaves out of us – especially if our self-esteem is dependent on affirmation. If we always need encouragement, constant praise, pats on the back from everyone, then we make the grave error of allowing the world to define who we are.

2. People with the Barnabas factor focus on the positive in other people.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Most of the high spots in our lives come about through encouragement.

For some of us, our first inclination is often to criticize, not encourage. It is often far easier to notice what is wrong with the situation than what is right. It is important to trouble-shoot problems, but when our first inclination is to pounce on the negative, it can be quite destructive in relationships.

Illustration: Joyce Landorf Heatherly wrote a little book entitled *Balcony People* almost twenty years ago and it is still in print perhaps because her concepts are so simple yet so profound. She describes the difference between basement people – the kind of people who tend to evaluate and criticize first – and balcony people – the people in our lives who always seem to be able to offer a word or gesture of encouragement first. Balcony people are those who have a large dose of the Barnabas factor and they know how to use it well. Real encouragement comes from a place of honest and genuine awareness. Someone said, "Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you."

3. And, finally, people with the Barnabas factor see the potential in people that others might miss. I think one of the reasons they called Joseph Barnabas was because he looked at people in the same way God does. People who cultivate the Barnabas factor have an open mind to consider what God may be doing in another person. They somehow see the grace of God at work in the lives of others and they take the time to encourage it. They understand that some people just need time to grow in maturity. People who can see raw potential in others have an amazing ability to mentor others in ways that immeasurably change lives.

The implication in this story is that while Barnabas was initially the mentor to Paul but was comfortable enough to encourage both Paul and John Mark to grow. Barnabas was at ease enough with himself to encourage others to take over his role as leader to become strong leaders themselves.

Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success. I believe that behind most people who have accomplished great things is at least one person who loved them, believed in them, and encouraged them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you name one person who has believed in you when others wanted to write you off? Tell a little bit more...

2. Who are you believing in or investing in today whom others might want to write off?

In all our life relationships, we can be critical or encouraging. To affirm or to tear down. To be an accuser or an advocate. The Barnabas factor can make a huge difference in the lives of those around us.

Pray and Break Bread together

Pray for one another and encourage one another. Trust the Holy Spirit to speak through you,