

Voices: Encourage someone: Be A Barnabas

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We all can learn from the ministry of Barnabas.

When we read the book of Acts, we focus most of our attention on the Apostle Paul. From Chapter 8 onward, the narrative seems to narrow to Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Though he becomes our focal point, within the narrative, Barnabas is another person who shows us what faithful, loving ministry looks like.

Barnabas first appears in Acts 4:36 where we are told his name means "son of encouragement." Two instances in the book of Acts show how Barnabas lived up to his name.

Barnabas encouraged Saul

We find the first instance in Acts 9. The account tells us Saul was transformed by his vision—and subsequent lack of the same—on the road to Damascus. He then proclaimed the Messiah in the synagogues of Damascus and had to flee for his life after a plot to kill him was uncovered.

Saul arrived in Jerusalem, where some were skeptical about his motives. You can understand the hesitation on the part of the Christian church. Saul was a man who persecuted and plotted to arrest and kill followers of Jesus. And now he was standing before them claiming to be one of them.

Many who did not believe Saul, but Barnabas vouched for him. Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and explained to them what Saul experienced on the road to Damascus. Barnabas testified to the validity of Saul's

conversion.

Barnabas put his reputation on the line for Saul, the man who not so long before sought to destroy the church. Barnabas knew the power of Jesus, and he recognized the work of Jesus in Saul.

Barnabas was sent out again, this time to see the work of the Spirit among the church in Antioch, and he brought Saul with him. Barnabas and Saul's mission work began in earnest in Antioch.

Barnabas encouraged John Mark

We find the second instance in Acts 15:36-41. Barnabas and Paul—formerly Saul—were about to return to the churches of their first mission (Acts 13-14) to check the churches' progress and to encourage their faith. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark along.

Including John Mark was a problem for Paul because John Mark abandoned them on a previous journey. Therefore, Paul didn't find him trustworthy. Paul didn't want to get burned again, but Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance. Their disagreement split their ministry team. As a result, Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul returned to Asia Minor with Silas.

In both instances, Barnabas saw the best in people when no one else could or would. In both instances, Barnabas stood for those who were written off by others. Saul was not welcomed because of his past, nor was John Mark trusted because of his. Barnabas encouraged both by sticking his neck out for them. Barnabas said: "Trust me. God is working in him and through him." Barnabas clearly was a man of second chances, a man of forgiveness and grace.

Who can we encourage?

We all need a Barnabas in our life. We all need someone who will put his or her reputation on the line for us and meet us with grace and confidence in God's transforming work in our hearts.

Likewise, we all need to be a Barnabas to those around us. Who do we know who has been counted out because of past failure? Who can we encourage and stick out our necks for? Who can we come alongside to recognize God's transforming work in their hearts?

Be a Barnabas. Keep your eyes and ears open. Ask God to reveal to you where he is at work. Come alongside those he is redeeming and restoring, and be their advocate. Encourage the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

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