



The Art of Encouragement

Barnabas

Objectives

- To define encouragement.
- To learn how to encourage by following the example of Barnabas.

Overview

Encouragement in Scripture has a broad range of meanings and hundreds of applications. Jonathan encouraged David; Mordecai encouraged Esther; Nathan encouraged David; Barnabas encouraged Paul. In fact, virtually all the great Bible characters had at least one encourager behind them. This points out one universal truth about encouragers: They tend to work behind the scenes. Encouragers aren't necessarily anonymous – people like Jonathan, Mordecai, and Barnabas aren't exactly unknowns – but encouragers usually stay out of the spotlight. Instead, they put the spotlight on others, helping them to find the comfort or strength they need to keep going.

So this week's session provides an important balance to last week's. Last week we looked at people who set the world on fire with their go-getter, riot-inducing faith. This week we look at the people who fan their flames...the ones who put the *go get 'em* into the go-getters. Without encouragers we wouldn't have any conquerors.

Generally, encouragement can take three forms:

Lift Up (comfort)

Encouragers cheer the spirits of those who are down. They lift us up when we're hurt, often by hurting with us, praying with us, and sharing words of hope with us.

Back Up (affirmation)

Encouragers also affirm our strengths and push us to move out and use our gifts. Paul often encouraged Timothy in this way. Timothy was a gifted minister, but his youthfulness and timidity tended to hold him back. So Paul constantly backed him up by reminding him of his upbringing, gifts and calling. Without Paul's affirmation, Timothy could not have led the churches he did.

Pump Up (exhortation)

Sometimes encouragers kick us in the pants with a strong challenge. Because they believe in us, they don't allow us to get away with less than our best. If we get distracted from the truth, fall into sin, or get out of step with God's Spirit, encouragers come alongside to pump us up and get us back in the game.

If you've ever been encouraged, you know the power it has.

If you've ever lacked encouragement, you know how much it hurts.

If we all became encouragers, there would be plenty to go around!

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching". Hebrews 10:24-25



Outline

Barnabas provides an excellent example of the many forms encouragement can take. This outline is a brief character study of Barnabas, highlighting four ways he encouraged others.

The Ultimate Encourager

1. Encouragement Defined

- a. Types of encouragement – lift up, back up, pump up
- b. “Barnabas” – a nickname meaning “son of encouragement”. This man defined the term!

2. Encouragement Illustrated

a. Encouraging the Needy (Lift Up)

“Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:37

We usually think of encouragement as *encouraging words*. But in this case, the form of encouragement is a financial gift. Barnabas sold his property so that the poor in his church could have their basic needs met. The result of such generosity is mentioned three verses earlier: “There were no needy persons among them”. Wouldn’t it be great if we could say that of our group?

b. Encouraging Paul (Back Up, Pump Up)

“When Paul tried to join the disciples, they were all afraid of him, not believing he really was a disciple. But Barnabas brought him to the apostles. He told them how Paul had seen the Lord and how he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.” Acts 9:26-27

Barnabas backed up Paul in his attempt to gain acceptance into the church. Though they all had reason to believe that Paul was a fraud, trying to trick and trap them, Barnabas believed the best. He affirmed Paul’s experience with the Lord and challenged the church to accept him as one of their own.

c. Encouraging new believers (Back Up, Pump Up)

“When Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw the evidence of God’s grace, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” Acts 11:23

Antioch was one of the first places in which non-Jews became Christians. The Jerusalem church was suspicious of this and wanted to check out the validity of their faith. So they sent Barnabas. He saw God’s grace and their faith at work. He happily affirmed them and challenged them to love God with all they had.

d. Encouraging Mark (Lift Up, Back Up, Pump Up)

“Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.” Acts 15:39

Mark, a young believer with unrealized potential, had earlier joined Paul and Barnabas on a missions trip. But for some reason, he had abandoned them part way through. Now, as they prepared for a second journey, a dispute broke out between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance; but Paul felt Mark had already proven himself unreliable.

So the two parted company. Paul took Silas and sailed off on some of the most famous mission trips ever. Barnabas took Mark and went on a mini-trip to Cyprus, his homeland. From that time on, Barnabas is never mentioned again in this book of Acts.

But he lifted up, backed up, and pumped up Mark. This young man went on to write a book of the Bible. He was also reconciled to Paul and assisted him in ministry many years later. Barnabas made the ultimate sacrifice, laying aside his prominence to allow men like Paul and Mark to reach their potential.



Discussion Guide

Open

Use a personal illustration to open your session. If you have a note or letter of encouragement that someone sent you at a critical time in your life, explain the situation and read it.

- When was the last time you were encouraged? (Share your stories.)
- What does encouragement mean to you? How does it minister to you?
- How many of you would say that you could use more encouragement in your life? How many of you would say that you sometimes neglect or forget to encourage others?

Dig In

1. **Start your study** by defining encouragement. Explain its three forms, comfort, affirmation, and challenge (lift up, back up, and pump up). Then introduce Joseph, whose nickname was Barnabas, “son of encouragement.”
2. **Work through a sketch of Barnabas’ life.** Set up and read the following passages. For each one, have your group answer three questions:

Questions:

- What character traits do you see in Barnabas?
- How does Barnabas encourage others in each situation? Does he lift up, back up, or pump up?
- What are the affects of his encouragement?

Passages:

- a. Acts 4:32-37 – Barnabas encourages the needy
- b. Acts 9:1-5, 19-22, 26-28 – Barnabas encourages Paul
- c. Acts 11:19-24 – Barnabas encourages new believers
- d. Acts 15:36-41 – Barnabas encourages Mark

Close

1. What price is there to pay for being an encourager?
2. What benefits and blessings are there for being an encourager?
3. What personal challenge do you take from this study? How can you become a son of encouragement – how can you learn from it and practice it?
4. Encourage kids to return next week with at least one story of how they encouraged someone. Build this into your sharing time next week.