

THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

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THE MAIN THING:

Barnabas means 'Son of Encouragement'. He came alongside a young man named John Mark who needed to be encouraged, and transformed a man prone to back away in trials to one who founded a church in Egypt and stood to the end as a martyr. Such is the power of encouragement in a persons' life.

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. Have you had a transforming experience with someone who encouraged you? Describe it.
2. What are some traits of an encourager? What is the difference between a compliment and an encouragement?

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. Read and review the tribulations in Mark's life. How did Barnabas illuminate Mark's value, and later how did Mark become valuable to Paul?
2. At a time when Mark felt like a cast-off, Barnabas showed up at his door to take him along. . What was Barnabas giving up? Why would he choose this? (Acts 15). How would you feel if you were Mark?
3. Reflect on Colossians 4:9-11, 1 Timothy 4:9-11, and 1 Peter 5:13. What fruit did Barnabas' encouragement bear?
4. Encouragement means 'to make someone strong' in order for that person to grow and be 'useful'. What kind of time commitment did Barnabas make with Mark to do this? Speculate on what they did together. How is this an example of true Biblical discipleship?

APPLICATION: *Working out the Word*

1. Everyone needs a Barnabas (encourager) in their lives. Who might you encourage in your sphere of influence? If you cannot identify one who is encouraging you, pray for one or more 'Barnabas'.
2. What sacrifices may you have to make in bringing out the best in others through encouragement?
3. Ashwin suggested writing an encouragement card to someone. Consider making these 'cards' a habit to encourage others.

THE WORD (NIV)

Mark 14:51-52 - 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. 52 When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Acts 12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Acts 12:25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Acts 13:13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:36-41 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, 38 because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Col 4:9-11 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. 10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

1 Timothy 4:9-11 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

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A man named Joseph was a prominent leader in the early Church and a model for all encouragers. While his actual name was Joseph, we know him better for his nickname, Barnabas. It means Son of Encouragement. He was a tremendous influence on the Apostle Paul. He stood up for Paul at the church in Jerusalem and later in Antioch where he and Paul ministered together as Paul began taking on leadership roles. Barnabas changed the course of Paul's life.

Barnabas also influenced another life as recorded in Scripture. It was John Mark. We see in Acts 15:36-41 that Paul and Barnabas were at odds over a young man named John Mark, Barnabas' nephew. He first appears at the end of the Gospel bearing his name as one who fled naked in the garden at Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:51-52). He apparently grew up in a Christian home (Acts 12) where he, together with his mother, opened their home as a meeting place for the early church, and he accompanied Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25). However, not long after this, he returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This was his second desertion recorded in Scripture. We can only speculate as to why he left, though it was serious enough for Paul to choose not to take Mark along, but Silas instead.

Paul was a highly disciplined, passionate follower of Jesus with high personal standards. Perhaps he saw Mark as not having the stomach for the tough battles ahead. The work came first. For Barnabas, the person came first and he believed he deserved another chance. His heart of encouragement was set to build up others, bringing the best out of them as he mentored them. In spite of their disagreement, they parted well without holding grudges.

The heart of encouragement is to communicate a person's value. People struggle with self-worth when they fail. When Barnabas gave Mark another chance he communicated his worth: Mark was important to him and to God. Those who stay with you in your failures are the real deal. Encouragement means to 'make someone strong' in order for that person to grow. It is not just speaking nice cheerful words but skilfully and truthfully correcting someone in a way that builds them up and doesn't tear them down.

What was the outcome of this? After Acts 15 we hear no more of Mark in Acts. However, 15 years later when Paul was in Rome writing to the Colossians, he includes his fellow prisoners there. Mark is one of them — and is commended (Col 4:10-12). In the intervening time there had been reconciliation. Not only that, but God had changed Mark so that he became a companion of Paul who brought him comfort. Where he had once caused Paul pain Mark now brought him relief and comfort. Paul speaks of Mark as a fellow worker (Phil 23-24) and asked for him by name because of his usefulness (2 Tim 4:9-11). In this latter passage we see that Paul was lonely as most had deserted him just months before his death. Such a turn-around! The Greek for 'useful' is a word used to describe a vessel that was fulfilling its purpose. Mark had changed from one who was a quitter and not useful to one who now was not just fulfilling his purposes, but called by Peter as his son. History tells us that Mark wrote not just the first Gospel account of Jesus' life but that he also went to Egypt and established a church there. Mark was called the first Bishop of the church in Alexandria (ref. the historian Eusebius) and was martyred there. The one who had quit when faced with pressure was, in the end, faithful to the death. Barnabas faded into obscurity but his encouragement carried on in the lives he touched.

God is not done with you. As with Mark, He believes you are valuable and wants to transform your life and make you useful for His kingdom. God used a Barnabas who believed in Mark so much that he put everything at stake and took him along. When we believe in people we bring out the best in them. Encouragers who believe in people and stand with them through the ups and downs change lives. Today many give up too soon because of heartbreak or other pain. Have you given up on someone who needs encouraging? Everyone needs encouragement in their lives. When we tell people there is hope through the transforming power of God's grace and stand with them in their failure, we then become God's agent of encouragement in their lives. Who can you encourage today?