Let’s All Be Encouragers!
ACTS 4:36,37

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

Read Scripture Text

P R A Y E R

INTRODUCTION

This morning I want to preach on a subject I believe to be one of the greatest needs in our Churches today. And that is the subject of ENCOURAGEMENT!

Out of all the weapons in Satan’s artillery, perhaps none is used more often than the “fiery dart” of DISCOURAGEMENT. Satan knows if he can keep you and me discouraged it will hinder our effectiveness and dampen our spiritual enthusiasm for the Lord.

How many times a day would you say you get discouraged? Once? Twice? Three times? Or do you seem to just be discouraged all the time?

For many people life is HARD! Their days are filled with more SHADOWS than SUNLIGHT. Many people live in a world of lonely isolation, wrestling with troubles and heartaches no one can see or understand. When someone seems unusually quiet or distant or detached, you can be sure there is a burden they are carrying or a battle they are fighting you may not be aware of.
The late Ruth Bell Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, once said, “In every pew sits a broken heart.” Is that person seated beside you this morning? Or is that person you?

The Church ought to be the most encouraging, most uplifting place in the world. But sadly, the opposite is often true. Sometimes the Church can actually be the source of some of our greatest discouragement.

*Church can be a discouraging place when hurtful words are exchanged or spoken.

*Church can be a discouraging place when our expectations are greatly disappointed.

*Church can be a very discouraging place when in the time of need, our brothers and sisters aren’t there for us.

*Church can be a discouraging place when our brothers and sisters are friendly to our face then run us down behind our back.

What can Christian Hope Church of Christ do to avoid being one of those kinds of Churches? What can we do to create an ENCOURAGING, UPLIFTING environment in this Church?

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If someone were to give you a special nickname to describe your most predominant character quality, what would it be?
ILLUSTRATION: Speaking of nicknames, that reminds me of the story about the lady who was interviewing several women for an open secretarial position.

The first woman to be interviewed was neatly dressed and very attractive. The interviewer asked her to state her name. She said my name is **LILLIAN**, but everybody calls me **LILLY**, because they say the day I was born a **LILLY** fell on me from the sky.

The second woman to be interviewed was also very attractive. The interviewer asked her to state her name. She said my name is **ROSEMARY**, but everybody calls me **ROSE**, because they say the day I was born a **ROSE** fell on me from the sky.

The third woman to be interviewed was very unattractive. In fact, you might say she was just **down right ugly**. The interviewer asked her to state her name. She said my name is **PATSY**, but everybody calls me **PIANO**... (now some of you may not get that until about half way through the sermon.)

In our scripture text this morning we meet a man who had a very special **NICKNAME**, a nickname given to him by the Apostles.

His real name was **JOSEPH, the LEVITE**. But the apostles saw something so **encouraging** and **refreshing** in Joseph’s **character** and **personality**, they started calling him, **BARNABAS**, which meant, “**Son of Encouragement.**”

Encouragement was more than a good personality trait or character quality in Barnabas, it was a spiritual gift.

The Apostle Paul says in **Romans 12:8** “If a person’s gift is encouraging, let him encourage.”

Now does that mean if I don’t have the gift of encouraging others I can’t be an encourager? No, it does not mean that at all! ALL of us can be and should be ENCOURAGERS. But there are some, like **BARNABAS**, who are especially gifted when it comes to encouraging others.
In ACTS chapters 4 through 15, we see BARNABAS model for us FOUR CHARACTERISTICS of an ENCOURAGER.

Let’s look at these four characteristics.

First of all……….

I. Encouragers Sacrifice For the Good of Others

1. At the end of Acts 4 and the beginning of Acts 5 the Lord lets us see two very similar situations laid side by side.

   ACTS 4:36,37    Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

   Now let’s continue right on with Acts 5:1,2 and notice the similarity.

   ACTS 5:1,2  Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

2. Barnabas sold some land. Ananias and Sapphira sold some land. Barnabas brought the proceeds and laid it at the apostles’ feet. Ananias brought the proceeds and laid it at the apostle’s feet.

3. But while the apostles accepted Barnabas’ offering, they rejected Ananias’ offering? What was the difference? In a word, MOTIVE.

   BARNABAS gave sacrificially with a humble servant’s heart. He didn’t give to receive personal recognition or glory, but rather to encourage others to give sacrificially.

   The fact that in the next two verses we see Ananias and Sapphira do as Barnabas had done, tells us they were ENCOURAGED by Barnabas’ example. But unlike Barnabas, they gave SELFISHLY rather than sacrificially.
4. In his commentary on the Bible, John MacArthur says,

“These two (speaking of Ananias and Sapphira) are two classic examples of hypocrisy among Christians who faked their spirituality to impress others. Keeping back a portion of the proceeds was not a sin in and of itself. However they had promised, perhaps publicly, that they were giving the full amount received to the Lord. Their outward sin was lying about how much they were giving to the Church, but the deeper, more devastating sin was their spiritual hypocrisy based on selfishness.”

(The MacArthur Bible Commentary, by John MacArthur

5. In all this there is an important point to learn about ENCOURAGEMENT. God can and will do extraordinary things through someone who is willing to give sacrificially. But God will not do extraordinary things through anyone driven by selfish ambition and selfishness.

6. Brothers and Sisters, may we all be willing to MAKE SACRIFICES FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. BE AN ENcourager!

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Secondly……

II. Encouragers Support the Friendless

Let’s turn over in our Bibles to ACTS chapter 9.

READ---Acts 9:23-29

1. In Acts 9 we read the account of Saul in the days just prior to his becoming a Christian.

At that time Saul was breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He was driven by his passion to track down and persecute as many Christians as possible.
2. It was while Saul was on such a mission to Damascus, the Lord blinded him and instructed him to go to the home of Ananias (not the same Ananias we read about in Acts 5..... remember he’s dead!)

3. Ananias taught Saul in the ways of the Lord and Saul accepted Jesus Christ and was baptized for the remission of his sins.

   We learn later in Galatians 1:17,18 that after his conversion Saul disappeared into the Arabian desert for a period of three years. It was during those three years of seclusion, the Lord prepared Saul, who would later be named Paul for his new mission in life.

4. When Saul re-emerged from those three years of seclusion, he soon discovered his new Christian family still remembered him from his days of persecuting the Lord’s Church. And they were extremely reluctant to welcome SAUL as a fellow brother--in-Christ. In fact, verse 26 tells us, “they were all afraid of him, not believing he really was a disciple.”

   Not surprisingly, it was BARNABAS, the Son of Encouragement, who befriended Saul, when no one else would.

5. Through his ENcourAGEMENT, Barnabas “bridged the gap” between Saul and his fellow Christian brothers. Through Barnabas’ example, others accepted Saul as their brother-in-Christ.

6. For one reason or another there seems to be these “invisible walls” in a lot of Christian circles. Sadly, at times Churches can be very cliquish and those who are not part of the “in crowd” can be made to feel like a lonely outsider.
7. Now I haven’t been here long enough to detect any cliquishness in this Church. And I pray I never see any cliquishness. But if for some reason or another this Church has a reputation of being cliquish, I pray that each and everyone of us will work together to change that reputation.

8. May this be a congregation where each and every person who walks through these doors is treated with equal LOVE, COURTESY, DIGNITY and RESPECT.

8. Brothers and sisters, BE A FRIEND TO THE FRIENDLESS! BE AN ENCOURAGER!

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Encouragers **Sacrifice** For the Good of Others.
Encouragers **Support** the Friendless.

THIRDLY......

**III. Encouragers Strengthen the Church**

**ACTS 11:22-30**

1. Many of the early Churches and individual Christians experienced horrible persecution for their faith in Christ.

   While the goal of those doing the persecuting was to stamp out Christianity and put a stop to its growth, it accomplished the exact opposite. Persecution caused Christianity to grow as Christians scattered into new geographical areas taking the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.
2. This is what happened here in Acts chapter 11. After Stephen was stoned to death in Jerusalem, many followers of Christ scattered to new areas such as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.

As these disciples settled into these new areas they started telling others the good news of the gospel. And as a result, people from these regions also became disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. Antioch, in particular, saw a great number of converts. And when the Church in Jerusalem heard this great news, they thought, “We need to send someone to encourage these new brothers and sisters-in-Christ.

Well who better to send than BARNABAS, the Son of Encouragement.

4. Through Barnabas’ encouragement the Church at Antioch was greatly strengthened and many more people came to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Remember I told you earlier, God will use a selfless encourager to do extraordinary things.

5. As this Church in Antioch grew stronger and bigger, Barnabas realized he was going to need some help, so guess who he went looking for? SAUL! Through Barnabas, God had now opened the door for Saul to begin his ministry to the Gentiles.

6. And it was here in ANTIOCH, the followers of Christ were first called CHRISTIANS.
7. ENCOURAGERS strengthen the CHURCH in a number of ways……

THE ENCOURAGER will always be the first to respond when you are in need…….the first to offer a hand when you have fallen……
the first to offer an encouraging word when you are discouraged……
the first to forgive when you have failed…….the first to give a pat on the back for a job well done……the first to say “thank you” for your time and effort……and the first to pray for you.

THE ENCOURAGER will be the last to criticize you……
the last to spread gossip about you…….the last to believe a rumor about you…….the last to break a confidence……
the last to judge you…….and the last to turn his back on you!

8. ENCOURAGERS STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH.
LET’S ALL BE ENCOURAGERS!

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Encouragers Sacrifice For the Good of Others.
Encouragers Support The Friendless.
Encouragers Strengthen The Church.

And finally……

IV. Encouragers See Potential Others Do Not See

Read: ACTS 15:36-41

1. When Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey, they took along with them a young Christian named John Mark.

Somewhere along that journey, John Mark turned around and went home. The scripture don’t tell us the reason. Since he was young, many believe he simply became homesick.
2. Here in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas are preparing to leave on their Second Missionary journey.

   Barnabas says to Paul, “Hey, why don’t we take John Mark with us again.”  Paul says, “No way! Absolutely not! Have you forgotten John Mark deserted us on our first trip?”

   Verse 39 tells us Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement over John Mark, they ended up parting ways.  Paul ended up taking Silas. And guess who Barnabas took? That’s right, JOHN MARK!

3. As it turned out, John Mark grew and matured in his faith and later the Apostle Paul even sent him to some Churches he had established to encourage the saints in those Churches.

4. What if Barnabas had just written John Mark off as a lost cause?  What if he hadn’t seen potential in him that at that time Paul couldn’t see?

5. There is a difference between the way ENcourAGERS see people and the way DIScourAGERS see people.

   DIScourAGERS can’t see beyond a person’s past. They can’t see beyond a person’s failures, their mistakes, their shortcomings. DIScourAGERS tend to write people off quickly and for good.

   ENCOURAGERS on the other hand can see beyond a person’s past. They can see beyond a person’s failures, mistakes and shortcomings. An encourager SEES a person not as they are NOW but as they can BECOME.

6. That is the way JESUS saw the men he picked to be his disciples. And it’s the way BARNABAS saw young John Mark.

7. May each and everyone of us determine to SEE the BEST in each other. LET’S ALL BE ENCOURAGERS!
CONCLUSION

One Sunday a preacher preached a message on spiritual gifts. At the door he was greeted by a woman who said, “Preacher, I think I have a special gift that’s not mentioned in the Bible.” Hesitantly the preacher asked, “And just what might that special gift be?”

The woman said, “I have the Gift of Criticism.” She went on to explain………………...

“A lot of people are fooled by the hypocrisy of others, but not me! I have a special gift to discern the faults and shortcomings in people and I tell them what I think!”

The preacher said, “Do you remember that person in Jesus’ parable who had just one talent?” Do you recall what he did with it?

The woman said, “Yeah, he went out and buried it.”

The preacher said, “I suggest that THOU GO AND DO LIKewise!”

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We’re building up or tearing down,
In everything we do.
Are you part of the Construction Gang
Or a member of the Wrecking Crew?

Brothers and Sisters, like Barnabas, LET’S ALL BE ENCOURAGERS!