TOPIC: ENCOURAGEMENT

You Can Be A Minister of Encouragement
Acts 4:32-37 (NKJV)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Acts, chapter four. And let’s read verses 32-37.

Acts 4:32-37 (NKJV)

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,

37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.
INTRODUCTION

William Arthur Ward once 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.*

I want to talk to you for a few minutes this morning about one of the greatest needs in our Churches today and that is the need for MINISTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

You may feel as though you don't possess any special talents or gifts. You may not be able to preach or teach a Sunday School Class. You may not be able to play the piano or sing in the choir or sing a solo. There are LOTS of things you may NOT be able to do, but **YOU CAN BE A MINISTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT!!**

*The word “encourage” means, “to come alongside of” or “to lend energy to another.”*

**Illustration:** Have you ever come out of a store and got in your car and turned the key and your car wouldn't start? Chances are someone came along in your time of distress and offered to give you “a jump start” by connecting your dead battery to their fully charged battery; and in no time you had your car started and running again.

In a sense, that is what we do when we encourage someone. **We come alongside of them** in their time of weakness or discouragement, or when their spirits are low, and through an encouraging word or deed, we give them a “jump start” and get them going again.
All of us can use “an emotional or spiritual jump start” now and then, can’t we? All of us can use a little encouragement from others. That is why it is so critically important that each of us practices THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT in our every day lives.

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In our scripture text this morning we meet one of the most beloved men in all the Bible. He never performed a miracle. He never preached before thousands. He never established any Churches that we know of. And he never wrote a Bible book. Yet God used this man to make a profound difference in the lives of others.

His given name was JOSES. But you and I know him better as Barnabas. Barnabas was “the nickname” given to Joses by the apostles because of the one thing he did really well! He was an encourager of others.

That is what the name Barnabas means in Aramaic; “son of encouragement” or “son of consolation.”

Barnabas’ ministry of encouragement unfolds in three different scenes in the Book of Acts.

I. Barnabas Encouraged Others By Practicing STEWARDSHIP (Acts 4:36,37)

Acts 4:36,37

36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,

37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.
1. Let me give you a little background to help you understand why Barnabas’ gift to the Church in Jerusalem was especially encouraging.

2. If you will remember back in Acts chapter one, Jesus had ascended from the Mount of Olives back to His heavenly Father.

   And while the disciples were standing there watching Jesus ascend into the heavens, two men in white apparel said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11 NKJV)

3. Shortly after the ascension, people from fifteen different nations descended upon the city of Jerusalem for the annual observance of Pentecost. (Think of how the size of Greenville swells when the ECU students return after summer break.) That is what Jerusalem was like at Pentecost.

4. On the day of Pentecost the scriptures tell us the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and Peter the other apostles preached the gospel to the thousands upon thousands who were there. And on that day the Church was born as three thousand repented of their sins and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
5. Then all those who had come from foreign lands went home, right? Wrong!

As Peter and the other apostles began teaching these people about JESUS they learned that JESUS was coming back. Believing He might return at any time, many of those foreign converts never went back home. They stayed in Jerusalem because they didn’t want to miss the return of Christ.

6. Now think about that for just a moment. These foreigners had traveled to Jerusalem with plans to stay in Jerusalem through Pentecost then go home. They had come with only enough provisions to last a few weeks at the very most.

7. When they decided to stay in Jerusalem until Jesus returned their money and physical provisions soon ran out.

How was the Church going to provide for the financial and physical needs of all these foreigners? We find our answer in verses 34,35

34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.
8. But among all those who gave, the gift of one man stood out in particular, and that was the generous gift of Barnabas, “the Son of Encouragement.”

It wasn't the amount of his gift that made it so special, it was something else. We learn in verse 36 that Barnabas himself was one of those foreigners. He was from the island of Cyprus.

9. Now think about that. Barnabas is one of those foreigners who is supposed to be receiving help from the Church. And yet we learn in verse 37 he sold his land, presumably back home in Cyprus, and brought the proceeds and laid it at the apostles' feet.

9. Can you imagine what an encouragement it was to the apostles, as well as to everyone in the Church, when they saw Barnabas give cheerfully and sacrificially all he had to help others in need?

APPLICATION

One way you and I can be MINISTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT is by PRACTICING STEWARDSHIP. That means we understand all of the money and physical possessions we have belongs to GOD and we have the opportunity to use what He has blessed us with to make a difference in the lives of others.

There are people all around us who are in need, whether it is the lowly widow on a fixed income, or the family that has been hit hard by medical expenses; or that family whose main bread-winner has been laid off or lost his job, or that young man or woman who is trying to raise financial support to go on a missions trip.
Do you want to be used by GOD? Do you want to make a difference in the life of someone else? If you know of someone in need why not encourage them this week by sending them an anyonymous monetary gift or a gift card from Food Lion to buy groceries, or go pay one of their bills for them anonymously. You never know how GOD will use a simple gesture of generosity like that to make a huge difference in someone’s life!

19th Century preacher, George MacDonald said, “If I can put one touch of rosy sunset into the life of any man or woman, I shall feel that I have worked with God.”

Let’s make it our aim in life to “put a touch of rosey sunset into the lives of others.” Let's be MINISTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT!

Not only did Barnabas encourage others by PRACTICING STEWARDSHIP......

II. Barnabas Encouraged Others By Extending FRIENDSHIP

Turn over a few pages in your Bibles to Acts chapter nine, and let's read VERSES 26-28......

ACTS 9:26-28 (NKJV)

26 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.

27 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.

28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.
1. Saul is at a critical crossroads in his life. He is literally a man without a friend in the world.

2. Remember in Acts 7 Saul had held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. That execution fueled Saul's passion to launch an all out persecution against the Church in Jerusalem. We read about that in Acts 8.

Saul's attack was so vicious the Christians in Jerusalem fled the city and scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. But Saul relentlessly pursued the Christians and had many of them thrown into prison.

3. By the time we get to Acts chapter nine Saul has pursued Christians as far away as Damascus in Syria. But you remember before he arrived in Damascus, the LORD blinded him and confronted him about his persecution of his people.

4. Long story short, Saul, while still blind, went into the city of Damascus to the home of Ananias on the Street called Straight, and Ananias taught him about Jesus and Saul's eyes were opened physically and spiritually, and he was baptized into Christ, and became a devout follower of Jesus.

5. It wasn't long before word got back to Jerusalem that Saul had converted to Christianity. Those who had been supportive of Saul's persecution of the Christians turned against him.

And the Christians were very, very suspicious of Saul, in fact they were even scared of him. They couldn't believe that Saul had become one of them after all the terrible things he had done to their brothers and sisters-in-Christ.
6. It was at this point, BARNABAS stepped in and befriended Saul. He was the first to accept him as a true brother-in-Christ. And by EXTENDING FRIENDSHIP to Saul, Barnabas “bridged the gap” and encouraged others to befriend Saul, and accept him as their brother, as well.

APPLICATION

Illustration: One of the greatest ministers of encouragement I ever met was Bro. Louis Hall. Louis had a very tender spot in his heart for those who had failed or fallen. And over the years he befriended a lot of people who had been shunned or cast aside by our Churches.

Louis told me something one time I have never forgotten. He said, “Reggie, God doesn't throw people away when they fail or make mistakes. God is in the business of salvaging broken lives.”

As you may remember, Bro. Louis was scheduled to hold our revival last fall, but he went to be with the LORD a year ago this past March. I would like to share with you something I said about Louis in my funeral message that day:

“In the front of my old NIV Preaching Bible, I made a list of The Preachers Who Have Greatly Influenced My Life.” At the top of that list is my dad, Bob Braziel, who preached the word of GOD with power and boldness tempered with love and grace.

Louis Hall is the second name on my list. Beside Louis’ name I have written: “Filled with love and grace; a champion and encourager of the fallen.”

I went on to say, “There was a time in my life when I was one of “the fallen” and with the love of Jesus Christ, Louis Hall reached down and lifted me up out of my pit and embraced me with God’s grace and mercy. He became my champion! He encouraged me to “dust myself off” and stay in the race. And today, by the grace of GOD, here I stand.”

(March 8, 2015)
Sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, we Christians are guilty of shunning certain types of people; whether its the person who has been through a divorce......or the person who has experienced some kind of moral failure......or the parents of a handicapped child......or the poor family in the Church with smelly clothes.....or the person who has lost a mate or a child.

Whether we mean to or not, we sometimes make some people feel like outcasts or “rejects.” One of the greatest ways to be a MINISTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT is to EXTEND FRIENDSHIP to those who have been shunned......neglected... or rejected. That is what JESUS did with the “outcasts” of His society. It is what BARNABAS did with Saul. And it is what you and I can do to truly make a difference in the lives of others.

Paul encouraged others by PRACTICING STEWARDSHIP and by EXTENDING FRIENDSHIP, and thirdly.....

III. Barnabas Encouraged Others By BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS (Acts 11:22-26)

Acts 11:22-26 (NKJV)

22 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.

23 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.

24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

26 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.
1. Some of those whom Saul had persecuted in Jerusalem prior to his conversion had scattered as far north as Antioch on the Syrian border.

   At first they only ministered to Jews, but in time they began reaching out to Gentiles and won many of them to Christ. In fact they had such an influx of Gentiles, they couldn't keep up with all the teaching that needed to be done to strengthen these new converts. So they sent word to the Church in Jerusalem to send someone to help them. Well who better to send than BARNABAS, “the Son of Encouragement.”

2. When Barnabas arrived, the Church at Antioch was greatly encouraged that he had come to partner with them in this ministry. They would continue to reach out to more Gentiles and Barnabas would disciple them through preaching and teaching the word.

3. As the Church continued to grow, Barnabas realized he himself needed to bring in another partner; “an associate minister” if you will. Barnabas knew the right man for the job, his dear friend Saul. So Barnabas traveled from Antioch to the city of Tarsus, Saul's hometown; and brought him back to partner with him in the ministry at Antioch.

4. The fact that Barnabas had enough faith and confidence in him to bring him in as a ministry partner was a great encouragement to Saul. And about a year later, with the Church at Antioch as their financial partners, Saul and Barnabas departed on their first missionary journey.
CONCLUSION

A man and his wife were awakened at 3:00 am by a loud pounding on the door. The man gets up and goes to the door where a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, is asking for a push.

"Not a chance," says the husband, "It is 3:00 in the morning!"

He slams the door and returns to bed.

"Who was that dear?" asked his wife.

"Just some drunk guy asking for a push," he answers.

"Did you help him?" she asks.

"No, I did not, it is 3:00 in the morning and it is pouring down rain!"

"Well, that certainly wasn't a very Christian thing to do," says his wife. "Can't you remember about three months ago when we broke down, and those two guys helped us? You need to get back out there and help that poor man.

The man does as he is told, gets dressed, and goes out into the pounding rain.

He calls out into the dark, "Hello, are you still there?"  "Yes," comes back the reply.

"Do you still need a push?" calls out the husband. "Yes, please!" comes the reply from the dark.

"Where are you?" asks the husband.  "I'm over here on the swing set," replied the drunk.

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Chances are this week you and I will meet someone along the way who could use “a little push”.......”a little encouragement”

The late William Barclay once said, “One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement. It is easy to laugh at other’s ideas. It is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm. It is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. What we need is encouragers. Many times a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a person on his feet. Blessed is the one who speaks an encouraging word.”