

More Men Like Barnabas

Acts 4:32-11:22

Dick and Rick Hoyt are a father-and-son team from Massachusetts who together compete just about continuously in marathon races. And if they're not in a marathon they are in a triathlon —26.2 miles of running, 112 miles of bicycling, and 2.4 miles of swimming. Together they have climbed mountains, and once trekked 3,735 miles across America.

Those are remarkable accomplishments — all the more so when you consider that Rick can't walk or talk. When Rick was born in 1962 the umbilical cord was coiled around his neck and cut off oxygen to his brain, causing cerebral palsy. He was classified as a spastic quadriplegic. The doctors told Dick and his wife Judy that there was no hope that Rick would ever develop, and that they should just put him away. But they refused. In a few years, Rick had two younger brothers, and their parents treated them equally, as if they all had the same level of intelligence.

Dick and Judy looked at Rick and believed that he was an intelligent human being, even if he couldn't talk to them. These dedicated parents taught Rick the alphabet, and in 1975, Rick was finally admitted into a public school. Two years later, using a special computer that allowed Rick to share his thoughts with slight nod of his head, he told his father he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run for a local lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident.

Dick, far from being a long-distance runner, agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair. They finished next to last, but to them it was a victory! That night, Rick told his Dad, using his special computer, that while they were competing in the race, he didn't feel disabled. Rick went on to graduate from high school, and then went to Boston University, where he graduated in 1993 with a degree in special education.

I don't know if Dick and Rick are believers, but I do know that the kind of commitment and encouragement demonstrated by Dick toward his son is a great example for all of us. We need more men like Dick Hoyt, even if their sons are not in wheelchairs.

On Mother's Day we explored the topic, "*More Women Like Deborah,*" and we looked at a few of the character traits of Deborah, the only woman ever to serve Israel as a judge. We talked about her godliness and wisdom. We pointed out that she listened to God, and that she challenged others to follow God. And we saw that God used her faithfulness in a mighty way to give victory and freedom to Israel.

Today we turn to the book of Acts to one of my favorite characters in the New Testament, except of course for the Lord Jesus! We take a look at the life of Barnabas, and we quickly come to the conclusion that we need more men like him! In our day when things are changing

so rapidly, and when the times are so uncertain, we need men who are not afraid to step up and be counted for Christ. Turn on the television and watch almost any comedy which features a family; almost without fail the father will be the one who doesn't know what is going on, the one who is immature and selfish, the one who makes the mistakes and provides the comedy.

And there are not very many commercials that picture the man as being intelligent. He is usually the family idiot, the one who doesn't know how to properly feed himself, wash his own clothes, or take care of the kids. Now I realize that in some cases that may be an accurate depiction (!), but there are many men who do not fit that stereotype. Today I want to challenge the stereotype of society, by pointing to the Scriptures and declaring, "We need more men like Barnabas!"

1 We need more men like Barnabas: men who are selfless, 4:32-37

We read in Acts 4:32, *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."* That's quite a shock for a society of modern Christians who selfishly hoard everything, who share little, and who think that one stewardship sermon a year is too much! But then we read in verses 34-35: *"There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."*

This wasn't a requirement, but many were doing this. But there was one whose selflessness and generous spirit caused him to stand out, so much so that Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, singled him out as the prime example, in verses 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."*

So here is what we learn about Barnabas from these two verses. His real name was Joseph. He was a member of the tribe of Levi, which meant that he and his relatives were responsible for serving in the Temple when called upon. We learn that he was from the island of Cyprus, an island known for its rich commerce, timber and mineral wealth. It is quite possible that Barnabas was from a wealthy family, and that this property he sold was a portion of the family estate.

Colossians 4:10 tells us that Barnabas was the cousin of John Mark. Tradition says that the Upper Room, where Jesus celebrated the Passover and where the 120 had gathered when the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost, was located in John Mark's home. Barnabas had been introduced to Christ, and out of love and gratitude to Jesus for what He had done for him, Barnabas sold some real estate he owned, and gave the money to the apostles for use in the ministry.

There is one other very important thing we learn about this man. Apparently his life and character were already marked by such selfless acts, since the disciples had already given him a nickname. “Barnabas” means “Son of Encouragement,” and that was something this man was known for. Barnabas was the one going around encouraging people, lifting them up, praying for them, challenging them. I believe this act of selfless giving was a direct result of the encouraging spirit that resided in him. With only one exception, every place in the New Testament where we see Barnabas mentioned, he is encouraging someone else, building them up, believing in them.

We need more men like Barnabas! We need men who put the needs of others first, men who think beyond the lines and borders of their own little lives, men who are constantly thinking about how they can help others. We need men who will stop, put their hands on someone else’s shoulders, look them in the eye and say, “Brother, let me pray for you.” We need men who are not afraid to use their own personal resources, financial or otherwise, to help someone else. We need men whose lives are characterized by selfless deeds of compassion.

2 We need more men like Barnabas: men who are not afraid to take chances for the sake of others, 9:26-27

Chapter 9 of Acts is where we read the story of Saul, “*breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples*” (v. 1). While he was on the way to Damascus to arrest still more Christians, Saul encountered the Lord. He had such an experience with Jesus there that his life was totally turned around. The problem was that not everyone believed his story. They were afraid that Saul had fabricated the story as a way to flush out more believers and have them arrested, and even killed.

So we read beginning in Acts 9:26: “*When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.*” But something very important took place in verse 27; in fact, all of the rest of the New Testament may have looked very different had verse 27 never happened. “*But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.*”

Think about this: Barnabas was probably the perfect one to stand there with Saul. He had such a good reputation that others tended to believe him when he spoke up. Picture the scene: the Greek words translated “*but Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles*” implies that he took Saul by the hand and led him in before the apostles to stand up for him. Let me ask you a question: Is there a verse 27 in your life? By that I mean, is there a time when you need to stand up for someone else, to believe in them and defend them before others? Think of how

differently things turned out for Saul/Paul because Joseph/Barnabas believed in him! Think of how differently things turned out for us because long ago someone named Barnabas believed in a guy named Saul!

We need more men like Barnabas! We need men who have the courage not only to believe in others, but who are willing to put their reputations on the line for the sake of someone else, realizing that the end result may be a blessing to many others for years and years to come. We need men who are willing to go out on a limb for someone else when that is what is necessary. Is there someone you need to believe in? Is there someone you need to take a chance for? It could be someone you know at work, or a neighbor, or even a perfect stranger. But the best place to begin is at home.

A few years ago the cartoon strip, *“For Better or for Worse”* showed Dad coming into the room where his teenage daughter was sitting on the couch watching television, eating popcorn. So he decided to sit down next to her and help himself to the popcorn.

As he was sitting there, a little thought balloon appears over his head. He’s thinking, “I remember when she was so young. I held her in my arms and loved her, and it was wonderful. Now look at her. She’s all grown up, and such a beautiful girl, too. I wonder what she would think if I held her like I used to and told her again that I love her?” He finally concludes that she would be uncomfortable if he did that.

While he’s thinking that, the little thought balloon pops up over his daughter’s head, and we learn that she is thinking, “I wonder why Dad never hugs me anymore?”

Well, Dad, sometimes it pays to take a chance every now and then, especially when it comes to your children. I firmly believe we need more men who hug their children, men who are not afraid or ashamed to say on a regular basis, “I love you.” We need more men like Barnabas, men who are not afraid to take chances for the sake of others. That certainly would include your children, but it also includes others. Especially in our world today we need men who are willing to believe in others and step out on their behalf. We need men who will stand up on behalf of others and say to the world, “I believe in this guy,” or “I’m standing with this young lady.”

3 We need more men like Barnabas: men who can be trusted, 11:19-22

When we get to Acts 11, we learn that the Gospel was beginning to spread into new territory. We learn in verse 20 that some men from Cyprus (which was where Barnabas was from, by the way!) and Cyrene went to Antioch and began telling the Greeks about Jesus. As a result, we read in verse 21 *“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”*

Now it begins to get a little sticky. Pick up with verse 22: “*News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.*” Why was that important? At this stage, the Christians were mainly Jews, so the idea of Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus was a totally new concept. They weren’t so sure that this was legitimate. They needed someone who could go and bring back an accurate report of what was really going on. They chose Barnabas as the perfect candidate to make the trip. Why Barnabas? One reason may have been because he also was from Cyprus; perhaps he even knew the men who were telling about Christ and could vouch for them.

But I think the main reason is because Barnabas was especially qualified for this assignment. The Christians in Jerusalem *trusted* him. This task was far too important to give to just anyone! In fact, this may have been another pivotal moment in the early spread of Christianity. Is Christianity going to remain strictly a Jewish faith, or will it include others as well? Aren’t you glad it includes us, too?

Well, Barnabas was the one who had given so much to the cause of Christ already, and he was the one who was so willing to take people by the hand and lead them to Christ. He was the one who believed in others so deeply that he was willing to risk everything for them. So Barnabas was trusted by the church at Jerusalem and was sent to Antioch.

Verse 23 tells us what happened when Barnabas got there. *When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*” By the way, the best and highest definition of *encouragement* in my estimation is when someone does what Barnabas did, encouraging them all “*to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*”

Then verse 24 gives us further insight into the kind of man Barnabas was: “*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*”

That’s what happens when we have more men like Barnabas—good men, trustworthy men, men who are full of the Holy Spirit and faith. We need more men like Barnabas—men who aren’t afraid to take on a new assignment, men whose lives have been examined before others and found to be trustworthy enough to take on the major responsibilities.

4 We need more men like Barnabas: men who partner with others for the Kingdom of God, 11:25-26

With all these new Christians, Barnabas realized the work was bigger than he was, and he realized that he was going to need some help. Antioch was a rather large city, one of the most corrupt in the then-known world. The Christians there were surrounded by all kinds of sensuality, cults and immorality. They would need someone who could understand that kind of

mindset, someone who had the intellectual and spiritual training to be able to take these Gentile Christians to the next level in their spiritual commitments. Who would be a good choice for that?

Continue reading on into verses 25-26: *“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”* Barnabas was not afraid to reach out and include others in this great work. He was not afraid to share the limelight with someone else if it meant that more people would be reached for Christ. So for an entire year, Barnabas and Saul worked with these new believers. At the end of the year, the Christians there had learned a valuable lesson about partnering with other believers.

We need more men like Barnabas, men who are not afraid to admit that they can't do it all on their own, men who are willing to reach out and include someone else who may be a little better qualified than they. We need men who have received a burden from God, and are willing to reach out and include others in that burden for the sake of the Kingdom, men who see the distinct advantages of partnering with others in this great work of ours.

5 We need more men like Barnabas: men who believe in the goodness of others, 15:36-40

By the time we get to chapter 15, the two men have made what we know now as their first missionary journey. So let's find verse 36 to see what happened next: *“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.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”*

Earlier we saw Barnabas coming alongside Saul and believing in him when no one else would. Now several years later he is doing the same thing with John Mark! We don't know exactly why John Mark had left them, but Paul was ready to give up on him. He let them down once, and Paul wasn't willing to trust him again. But Barnabas was! We need to be more like Barnabas, don't we?

I don't mean that we should let people run over us. I don't mean that we should blindly trust others with no regard to anything that might have transpired. But I am saying that we should look for the good in others, to spot the potential that might be in them. Let's face it: everyone of

us needs a second chance. Some of need more than that. How refreshing it is to find someone like Barnabas who is willing to offer that opportunity to those who need it! We need more men like Barnabas!

But watch what happened: Barnabas drops out of Scripture for the most part, but we do see a good bit more of John Mark. He is mentioned as a “*fellow laborer*” with Paul in Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:10. Paul wrote about Mark in 2 Timothy 4:11, “*Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.*” Things sure changed, didn’t they?

Well, what was it changed, exactly? What made the difference in John Mark? I believe it is because one man, a man named Barnabas, Son of Encouragement, believed in him, saw the goodness in him, refused to give up on him. John Mark became so encouraged in the Lord, that he had to write about the story of Jesus—what we know as the Gospel of Mark! And it might never have come to be had not someone named Barnabas made the effort and was willing to believe in the goodness of John Mark, even after he had let others down.

The bottom line through all of this is that our New Testament—in fact, the entire shape of Christianity as we know it—may have been entirely different had it not been for the life and ministry of Barnabas. The thirteen letters of Paul may never have been written without the influence of Barnabas on his life. The Gospel of Mark may never have been composed unless Barnabas believed in that young man. Some scholars believe that Matthew and Luke used Mark’s Gospel as an outline for their own. And I believe the book of Hebrews was written by Barnabas himself.

Now think about the people around you today. Who needs the kind of encouragement you can offer them? What kind of influence can you provide? Who knows the difference you can make in their lives and in the lives of others for years to come because you believe in them and encourage them?

We don’t need any more men who will stand back with their arms folded and refuse to get involved. We don’t need any more men who are apathetic about the things of God. We don’t need any more men who have confused being a man with complacency about spiritual things. We don’t need any more men who always believe the worst about others. We have enough of them!

Instead, we need men who give of themselves and their resources with no regard to themselves. We need men who are willing to take chances for the sake of others. We need men who can be trusted with major responsibilities in our church and in the Kingdom of God. We need men who

are willing to reach out and partner with others so that the Gospel might be spread. And we definitely need men who believe in the goodness of others. We need more men like Barnabas!

Who better than you? And when is a better time than now?