

BIBLE CHARACTERS
BARNABAS-SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT
ACTS 4.32-37, 9.27-28, 11.24-26

How many of you have been watching the Olympics?

I just caught a few moments of the opening ceremony.

There was this beautiful dancer performing on this huge platform held up by people.

I watched the dancer but I wondered about the platform.

Almost as if reading my mind the announcer said;
 the dancer represented each of the Olympian performers;
 the platform, symbolized the Olympics, the stage on which they would perform;
 and all the faceless figures in the darkness holding up the platform represented all those family and friends, who sacrificed and supported, encouraged and lifted up the Olympic performers.

How so true that proves to be.

Sixteen-year old US gymnastic star Shawn Johnson finally got her dream come true. She performed well in the balance beam and finished the evening on the top step of the winner's podium, sporting the gold medal, hands full of flowers, face aglow, listening to the national anthem being played in honor of our nation

In was very touching to see her parents, bury their faces in each other's shoulders, shedding "a tear or two" after she'd won.

More profound than her performance was the fact that her parents had mortgaged their house, mortgaged their house two or three times so that they had the money to make sure Shawn got her gymnastic lessons.

Just think of their investment of time, money, and effort. ;
 running her to practices, eating late meals,
 getting up early in the morning, traveling to meets,
 packing her cloths, food, and equipment, rubbing her sore muscles,
 staying awake with her when she couldn't sleep,
 holding her when she cries, hugging her when she is happy,
 and just plain cheering her on, especially when she needs to be cheered on.

That certainly is a lot of love and lifting up...a lot of encouragement.

But no one in the Olympics illustrates encouragement to me any better or more than Derek Redmund's father Jim.

Derek had been hurt in the 1988 Olympics

and had to overcome the injury and some twenty plus surgeries.

He made it to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain,
and was running in the 400meter qualifying heat.

He was doing well, too, through the first half of the race.
Then he heard this haunting “pop” and felt this burning pain.
He had torn his hamstring.
He pulled up, grabbed his hamstring, and went down.

The rescue crew came out to help him.
He told them to leave him alone,
he was going to finish the race,
He painfully got up and painfully hobbled towards the finish line.

At the same time his dad scurried down the steps of the stands,
jumped the fence, dodged security guards, jogged up to his son on the track,
took Derek in tow, and said, “I’m here son, we’ll finish together.”
And they did. Derek limping, supported by his father finished
as tearful fans clapped and cheered them on.

Those are two wonderful stories of sacrifice and support,
stories of encouragement, of someone lifting up another.

And that is what we want to talk about today.
As people of faith we need to be encouraged in the performance of faith,
And we need to encourage others as well.

That is the genius of God.
Paul tells the Romans in Romans 15.1-2 (MSG),
*“Those of us who are strong and able in faith
need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter...
Strength is for service, not status.
Each of us needs to look after the good of the people around us,
asking ourselves, “How can I be of help?”*

In the Bible I can think of no one who comes along side to comfort and encourage,
who does it any better, other than Jesus or other than the Holy Spirit, than Barnabas.

According to David Jeremiah,
Barnabas demonstrates for us three essential characteristics of an “Encourager.”

First an **ENCOURAGER PERFORMS RATHER THAN PRETENDS**
Second an **ENCOURAGER SEEKS THE POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE RATHER THAN SEES PEOPLE AS PROBLEMS**
And third an **ENCOURAGER VALUES PEOPLE RATHER THAN PROMINENCE.**

AN ENCOURAGER PERFORMS RATHER THAN PRETENDS

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.”

This is how God provided for the early Christian community.
Those that had wealth shared their wealth, so that none went without.

Has anyone ever helped you when you were down and out.
You needed something and “walla,” it appears.

It wasn't that you didn't work or try to make a living.
Maybe you could or maybe for some reason you couldn't.
But you just needed a little help, a little boost, a little lift, a little...encouragement.

Even if what others gave wasn't enough, wasn't it encouraging that you got something?
If you see others give, isn't that encouraging, too?

Rick Warren is the successful writer of “Purpose Driven Life.”
The book has sold over 15 million copies.
He's given the church back all of his salary and put most of the money into programs
to feed, or to educate, or to provide needed medicine, or to rehabilitate those in prisons.

That's encouraging in our day and age, isn't it?
Contrast that with what we think of the CEO's we hear about that
getting enormous salaries, bonuses, or paybacks, and especially from failing companies
while the workers of those companies lose wages and pensions.

In this particular situation, Barnabas' giving really stands out because
as we move from chapter 4 into chapter 5 we are introduced to Ananias and Sapphira.

Like Barnabas, they sell land.
Like Barnabas, they give money to the community.
But unlike Barnabas, these two don't give it all and then they lie about it.
And they died because they lied-right there on the spot.

Ananias and Sapphira were pretenders,
unlike Barnabas, unlike Rick Warren,
unlike Shawn Johnson's parents, and unlike Jim Redmund.

Know that when you give you are not only taking care of the needs of others,
but you are providing a powerful incentive, a powerful witness for the rest of us.

It not only encourages us to give,
but it is an encouragement to some that faith is real, and faith works.

Secondly, Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement,
**WAS ABLE TO SEEK THE POTENTIAL IN OTHER PEOPLE
RATHER THAN SEE PEOPLE AS PROBLEMS.**

There is no greater illustration than that of when Paul seeks membership in the community. Remember at first Paul starts out persecuting Christians.

Persecution seems too mild a term for what Paul was doing. He terrorized Christians by dragging from their homes, torturing, and killing them. He could easily have gotten a job as a Gestapo agent in Nazi Germany or been substituted as the Osama Ben Laden of our day.

I remember well Ben Laden's gleeful, evil chuckle that we heard on his video after the Towers went down.

Thus I can imagine Paul's sick grin and light hearted, gleeful, evil chuckle as he takes pleasure, great pleasure in killing and torturing the early Christians.

But then in Acts 9 we read of God's incredible power and Paul's incredible conversion to Christianity. He saw the light, literally, and now wants membership in the Christian community.

What would we think if Osama Ben Laden walked through the door, told us he had committed his life to Christ, and wanted to worship with us today

You know we pastors would ask him to fill out a guest card, take the gift of the Jesus DVD, and stay after worship for some donuts and coffee.

And at fellowship I know most of you would offer to shake hands and greet him with a kind, considerate, and encouraging word, right?

Well the early Christians weren't quite so hospitable. Some actually tried to kill Paul. Some were afraid and didn't really believe Paul was there for their good. But Acts 9.27 tells us that,
"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."

How could Barnabas do this...why could Barnabas do this? We know Barnabas saw the potential of Paul, he didn't look at Paul's past or see him as the problem.

The people probably still didn't really believe that Paul was converted. They simply trusted Barnabas and let Paul stay. They knew Barnabas was trustworthy. So we know character counts.

Now what is really interesting to me is that, the same kind of things happens again. Only this time Paul is upset with John Mark

and refuses to take him on a mission trip.

Barnabas stays in character. He is consistent.
He always seeks and sees...the potential of people.

So, Barnabas confronts the powerful Paul and intercedes on behalf of John Mark.

In the NIV, Acts 15 tells us that Paul and Barnabas had “sharp disagreement.”
Actually sparks fly, the Message says, their “tempers flared!”

Barnabas and Paul eventually do split up.
Barnabas practices what he preaches, he takes John Mark with him.
And Paul takes Silas.

I find it interesting that even though Paul was accepted and given support by Barnabas,
he was reluctant to do the same for John Mark.

Paul does come around and later invites Mark on a mission trip.

First, we know an **Encourager** doesn't just pretend or fake his faith,
he lives his faith, he performs based on his faith in God's faithfulness.

Second, we know an **Encourager** seeks the potential in people and doesn't see people as the
problem.

And third, an

ENCOURAGER IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE THAN THEIR OWN PROMIENCE

Barnabas shows us that an encourager has to be assertive
and maybe even aggressive at times .
But Barnabas also teaches us that an encourager is humble as well.

Here is a good example.

Early missionaries in Bible times had great success sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles,
the non-Jewish people in the city of Antioch.

So, the Bishops appointed Barnabas to go there and check it out.

Here is what the Bible says happened, Acts 11.23-24,

***“When he arrived and saw evidence of the grace of God,
he was glad and encouraged them all
to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.***

***He (Barnabas) was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith,
and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”***

Things were going well.

What does Barnabas do, bask in the glory himself?

No, Verse 25, ***“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,
and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.”***

Barnabas goes and gets help, for the good of the people and for the glory of God.
He cares more about the people getting the Gospel than him getting the glory.

Also we find in Chapter 13 and 15, a subtle but significant change that again tells us of Barnabas' humility.

When they are together in the beginning of these chapters it is Barnabas and Paul.
At the end of the chapters it is Paul and Barnabas.

Again, an encourager is more concerned about people than his prominence.
An encourager steps up, actually steps down when needed,
and shares the responsibility and the spotlight.

I pray that Barnabas is an inspiration to you.

If you are an encourager, check it out.
My bet is you already provide rather than pretend,
you already seek the potential in people rather than seeing them as a problem,
and you put people first, rather than your own prominence.

If you aren't an encourager these three principals might be the place to start.

Then in the end having given your life to Christ,
having fought the good fight and finished the race,
having kept the faith, having been encouraged and encouraged other,
you'll find yourself, not on the winner's podium, but in the throne room of heaven;
not standing, but kneeling;
you won't hear the national anthem but you'll hear the angels sing,
you won't get flowers and medals but you'll receive a crown, the crown of righteousness,
and it won't be placed on your head by just any official of heaven,
but by none other than the Lord of Righteousness himself,
and not only your head, but all who long for his appearing.

Now that's some kind of encouragement.
Let us pray.

