

## **LESSON 13**

## STUDY THIRTEEN MINISTRY ENCOURAGERS

Both father and son were excited. John was running a race as part of the high school track meet. His father positioned himself near the final turn before the home stretch. When John came to that final turn he was not in the lead. "Go!" his father cried out as loud as possible. John recognized his father's voice, gained new determination, increased his speed, and eventually won the race. After the race John commented how his dad's words of encouragement and support helped bring out the best in him and helped bring the victory. John's dad was an encourager. He helped someone else to achieve his best. John's dad never made it into the limelight that day; yet, he played the significant role of helping someone else succeed and become better. That's the important work of encouragers. You've heard it often: behind every great person is someone who helped them become great. We call those people encouragers. They are the backstage people who



encourage, console, and exhort others to live to their full potential.

The church has always had such people. While not on the stage and known by everyone, encouragers are key to the development and growth of the church. How can you recognize them? Encouragers have an unselfish style of helping others.

Do some sharing. Who are the encouragers in your life?

Who are the encouragers in your congregation? Why do you think encouragers are important people in the life of a congregation?

From your experiences develop a list of

characteristics of encouragers.

Encouragers were very important and influential in the early church according to Acts. The best example for us? Barnabas, the one called the "Son of Encouragement."

### BARNABAS, THE MAN

Acts 4:36 - "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 apostle's feet."

Colossians 4:10 - Mark (also called John Mark) and Barnabas were cousins.

What does the activity of Barnabas tell you about him? How is he acting as an encourager?

According to Acts 11:22-24 What are the spiritual features of an encourager?

### BARNABAS, THE MENTOR

An encourager is a winsome, warm, and personable person. He or she supports others, brings out the best in others, speaks well of others, finds the good in others. Encouragers are quiet, influential people. They help. They teach.

The modern term used for them is mentor. It's really not a modern term. Mentor goes back to the time of Homer's Odyssey (900-810 BC). Odysseus entrusts to his friend, Mentor, the education of his son Telemachus. Consequently, a mentor is a trusted counselor or guide or helper of others.

Mentors care about others. They establish relationships not so they can gain from these relationships, but so they can give to them. Mentors convey knowledge, wisdom, and skills to others. They model and coach others.

Mentors correct (exhort) others when they are

wrong. Done in a winsome and loving way their correction informs and trains.

Mentors connect people for the benefit of both parties, for the resourcing of one another and for greater service.

Who are the carers, the conveyors, the correctors, and the connectors in your congregation? This is another way of identifying the encouragers.

How can you use these people more effectively in your ministry?

Of all the people mentioned in Acts, Barnabas gets the credit for mentoring/encouraging Saul/Paul.

Acts 9:26-27 (These verses follow Paul's conversion to Christ while on the Damascus Road) "When he (Paul) 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 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."

Acts 11:25-26 (in Antioch believers tell the good news about Jesus to non-Jewish people. This upsets the church at Jerusalem. They send Barnabas to Antioch to inquire about bringing the Gospel to Gentiles. Barnabas saw their faith and was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord.) "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."

What do you learn about mentoring and encouraging from these two passages?

Who in your life can you help by introducing

them to others? By defending them before others?

Discuss how mature Christians can get involved in a ministry of encouragement and mentoring to new Christians such as Barnabas did with Paul.

## BARNABAS, THE MISSIONARY

James D. G. Dunn states that Barnabas was "an absolutely critical figure in the expansion of Christianity beyond Israel and out to the Gentiles." So true! Consider what the "Son of Encouragement" did. He backed Saul when others were hesitant to accept him as an apostle and fellow gospel proclaimer (Acts 9:26-27). Imagine what might have happened to outreach to the Gentiles had Barnabas not stepped in to support Paul.

He became a bridge man, building a bridge between the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church's outreach to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19-24). Imagine what

might have happened to outreach to Gentiles had Barnabas not accepted and encouraged the new Gentile Christians at Antioch.

He led the mission team chosen to penetrate the Gentile world with the Gospel (Acts 13:2-3). Thank God for such vision and courage. He held the line at the Jerusalem Council on behalf of inclusion of Gentiles into the church with no strings attached. Imagine where the church would have gone without this encourager's stand on behalf of others.

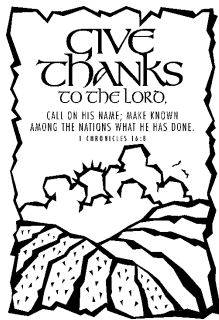
Encouragers are missionaries. Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," was a missionary. In Acts 13-14 you can read about the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. Wherever Barnabas encouraged Christians, non-Christians flocked to become believers.



We are rarely in situations where there isn't someone we can encourage. Our tendency is to criticize instead. Does your congregation encourage or criticize more? How about relationships with other Christians and other Christian communities - encourage or criticize?

Why do you think we are inclined to criticize rather than encourage?

What does criticism do to mission outreach to the unchurched and lost?



Why are encouragers good missionaries?

### BARNABAS, THE MENDER

After the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) Paul, Barnabas, and others delivered the decision of

the Council to the Christians at Antioch. The church was encouraged and strengthened by Judas and Silas. These two returned to Jerusalem, but Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch.

Acts 15:36-40 "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."

In this story, where do you see Barnabas, the encourager, at work?

How does he live up to the name given him by the apostles?

How did Paul and Barnabas handle conflict? What clues are there for us when it comes to handling conflict?

How did God turn a disagreement into increased mission opportunity? What are the results of most church disagreements today? How can we change the usual outcomes? What is the role of the encourager in church disagreements?

William Barclay calls Barnabas "the man with the biggest heart in the church." Not the biggest reputation, hero, or well-known person - encouragers aren't that way. Supporters of others are caring, optimistic, warm, winsome, personable, quiet, loving, gentle, and generous. The church needs such people. Effective outreach needs them.

The Greek word for encourager ("parakales") literally means to be called alongside someone. That's what they do - come alongside to help, to equip, and support others.

Who is God calling you to come alongside of and encourage?

How will your congregation utilize encouragers?