9/23/2007

 final draft Encourage Repeat the chapter and verse references

(Note added in 2020 … I think I probably gave the Sunday “sermon” on this day. Full Life church was in-between pastors and we could not always get an outside speaker for the service.)

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Fifty-one years ago, on June 18, 1956, a freak accident happened on a lake in New York. A speeding motorboat bounced on a wave and two of its passengers, a 50-year old man and a little girl fell into the water. To keep her from drowning, the man held her head above water while the boat circled back. They rescued the girl. But the man sank and drowned. That’s how Dawson Trotman died, the founder of the Navigators, an international discipleship ministry. According to a quote in Time Magazine, “He lived to save others. His death was just the way he would have planned it.” “Dawson Trotman, was always holding someone up.”

Holding somebody up. We might use the word encouraging to describe holding somebody up. The Bible has quite a bit to say about encouraging others. The Bible instructs us to encourage others and gives us examples of encouragement in action.

Jamie spoke about Encouraging a few weeks ago. The message this morning will continue that theme.

I. What does the word encourage mean?
Dictionary … Give support, confidence, hope to someone; give support and advice so that they will do or continue to do something The New Oxford American Dictionary 2001

The word Encourage is used 59 times in the NIV Bible 16 OT, 43 NT. Encouragement 13 times all NT. Vines New Testament Dictionary 1996 page 198 Acts 18:27 to urge forward, persuade 1 Thess 2:11 , 5:14 counsel, advice John 11:19,31 it means to comfort
As a noun ( Hebrews 6:18 ) encouragement, “a calling to one’s aid”, exhortation
It is close to the Greek word used for paraclete or advocate … Holy Spirit the comforter

Pray for the message

II. There are good examples in the NT of People Who Encouraged
Paul writes in Ephesians 6:21-22 v21 Tychicus, my dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you, so that you too may know about my circumstances, how I am doing. 6:22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

Paul also writes in 1 Thessalonians 3:1 So when we could bear it no longer, we decided to stay on in Athens alone. 3:2 We sent Timothy, our brother and fellow worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen you and encourage you about your faith, 3:3 so that no one would be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.

( Please turn to Acts chapter 4. ) The examples of Tychicus and Timothy are good but there is a longer example in the NT of someone who encouraged others. I am sure you have heard of him. His name was Joseph from Cyprus. He is mentioned 28 times in Acts and had a major role in the spread of the gospel. Raise your hand if you remember reading about Joseph from Cyprus in the book of Acts.

Perhaps you know him by a different name. Let’s read from Acts 4:36,37
Acts 4:36 So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated “son of encouragement”), 4:37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles’ feet.
Barnabas was his nickname, a name given him to match his character. This morning I want us to look at some passages in Acts that teach us about the encouraging ministries that Barnabas had in the early church. We are going to see that his nickname was appropriate. As you hear the ways Barnabas was an encourager, I want you to consider if some of these encouraging ministries could be your ministries.

III. Barnabas 1. Turn to Acts 9, verse 26. One characteristic of Barnabas was that he did not prejudge people. Barnabas was willing to take a risk on a new Christian.
Do people who have a bad reputation ever become Christians? How would we react if someone with a bad reputation wanted to come to our Church? Would we get to know that person ahead of time and introduce him or her to people in the congregation?

After Saul (Paul) accepted Jesus he came back to Jerusalem to meet the apostles. But he didn’t have much success on his own. This is not long after Saul had persecuted the church and searched out Christians to put them to death.
Acts 9:26-27 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to associate with the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, because they did not believe that he was a disciple. 9:27 But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Let us not shy away from people who had a bad reputation but now are seeking Jesus. Be a person like Barnabas, don’t prejudge, help new Christians get to know others in the body of Christ.

In preparing this message I had a picture of a body (not this Church body) made up of thin strings, like stretched out cheese when you pull apart slices of pizza. This body had each person only knowing one other person in the body. It was a picture of a weak, flimsy body. What makes a body strong? a muscle strong? It is many little muscles side by side. Let’s be a body of many connections, of people working side by side. Let’s be a body that helps people work alongside others in the body. Then the church body will have strong muscles and be effective in God’s work.

Be like Barnabas, introduce new Christians to other Christians.

2. Please turn to Acts 11, verse 20 We also need to follow the example Barnabas gave in telling people to keep the faith. As the early church expanded, Gentiles heard the gospel that Jesus had died for their sins and they accepted Jesus. The church in Jerusalem received the report of revival and wanted someone to investigate and help build up the new believers.

Acts 11:20-26 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 11:21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 11:22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 11:23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 11:24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,
and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord.

This is a quick quiz. Where was Barnabas from? (Answer, Cyprus, Acts 4, note that this is the home of the missionaries to Antioch)
It is about 300 miles as the crow flies from Jerusalem to Antioch
The island of Cyprus is about 100 miles west of Antioch.
Barnabas made the trip, saw God working among the people, and taught them to “keep the faith.”

Did you notice some other characteristics of Barnabas that helped him be an encourager? In verse 24 Barnabas is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith

If we want to be encouragers we should be preparing ourselves. Keep full of the Holy Spirit. Keep your faith renewed and strong. Then encourage others!

If you don’t feel ready to encourage others, then pray for God’s strengthening of your supply of the Spirit and faith. God is the giver of good gifts and will strengthen you so you can strengthen others
and encourage others to keep strong in their faith

3. There are certainly times when we can’t do all the ministry that needs to be done. Another characteristic of Barnabas is that he didn’t try to do all the work alone. He saw that he needed help in Antioch.
Acts 11:25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul, 11:26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

Tarsus (Saul’s home) was about 100 miles, by land, away from Antioch. This was quite a trip but Barnabas knew Saul could be used by God in teaching new Christians.

We too should go out of our way to bring others into ministry. Be like Barnabas and get others involved in spreading the truths of God’s word!

4. Please turn to Acts 14 verse 21
It was not just in Antioch that Barnabas exhorted Christians to keep the faith. Acts records how Barnabas and Paul spent the return portion of their missionary journey encouraging new Christians.

Acts 14:21-22 After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch. 14:22 They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions.”

Sometime you should read the earlier verses in Acts 14. Barnabas and Paul were chased out of some of these cities. Opposition and persecution may come, but a person who is an encourager will not give up. We need to persevere in reminding each other to “keep the faith.”

5. Please turn to Acts 15 verse 22
Barnabas took part in decisions that led to encouraging communication.

The ministry to the Gentiles in Antioch had stirred up questions and concerns in parts of the community of Jewish Christians. A council was held in Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision of Gentiles. Barnabas and Paul were at that council meeting.

Acts 15:22-32 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. 15:23 They sent this letter with them: From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings! 15:24 Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused you, upsetting your minds by what they said, 15:25 we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, 15:26 who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15:27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas who will tell you these things themselves in person. 15:28 For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules: 15:29 that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well. Farewell. 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter. 15:31 When they read it aloud, the people rejoiced at its encouragement. 15:32 Both Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with a long speech.

Barnabas did not write the letter, but I am confident he had a part in making it “encouraging.” Let’s follow this example and be encouraging in our communication with others.

Please look at Acts 15 verse 36
6. Barnabas also showed encouragement by not giving up on a young Christian, John Mark
In Acts 12 an angel gets Peter out of prison in Jerusalem. Acts 12:11 When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen.” 12:12 When Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered together and were praying.

Acts 13 describes the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul. John Mark started out with them on that journey.

After the first journey was finished we read in Acts 15:
Acts 15:36-40 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing.” 15:37 Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, 15:38 but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. 15:39 They had a sharp disagreement, so that they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus,

Barnabas and Paul disagree

d about taking John Mark on the second missionary journey. John Mark had deserted Barnabas and Paul partway through the first missionary journey they made. Barnabas chose to disciple John Mark. Note too that they went back to Barnabas’ home, Cyprus. A place that John Mark was probably familiar with. Here John Mark recovered his ministry.

What name do we use for John Mark today? (pause) It is Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

later, Paul changed his attitude toward John Mark

Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him).

2 Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is a great help to me in ministry.

All Christians may stumble at some point. How should an encourager respond? Don’t abandon them, help them. Be like Barnabas!

This is the end of the example of Barnabas. In his role as an encourager he reached out, taught, and discipled. We can learn more about encouragement in other sections of the New Testament.

IV. So, how are we instructed to encourage others in the New Testament?
1. Encourage each other to live for God, to show love and have good works

Hebrews 10:19-25 10:24 And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, 10:25 not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

Meeting at church is a good time, but not the only time, to talk to each other and speak a word of encouragement. I hope you are taking advantage of the time on Sunday (and other days) to encourage people. I think I could do a little more of this, how about you?

2. We should also encourage each other to trust God for life after death

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18 v16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-14 For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 5:10 He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him. 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing.

V. We encourage people by our words and also by the way we live.
Titus 2:1-10 v5 But as for you, communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching. 2:6 Encourage younger men likewise to be self-controlled, 2:7 showing yourself to be an example of good works in every way. In your teaching show integrity, dignity, 2:8 and a sound message that cannot be criticized, so that any opponent will be at a loss, because he has nothing evil to say about us.

Philemon 1:7 1:7 I have had great joy and encouragement because of your love, for the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

A Christian lifestyle encourages people.

VI. Encouragement also involves helping those who are doing God’s Work
We will read from Acts 18 verse 25 in just a minute. Repeat the chapter and verse.
Paul’s writing to the Corinthians is probably familiar to you about holding people in too high of honor.

1 Corinthians 3:5 What is Apollos, really? Or what is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, and each of us in the ministry the Lord gave us. 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused it to grow. 3:7 So neither the one who plants counts for anything, nor the one who waters, but God who causes the growth.

God did want Paul to plant.

 God did want Apollos to water, because God wants growth.
Before Apollos did any watering with the Corinthians something else occurred.

Acts 18: 18:24-28 v25 Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker, well-versed in the scriptures…18:26 He began to speak out fearlessly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately. 18:27 When Apollos wanted to cross over to Achaia, (glc Greece) the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he assisted greatly those who had believed by grace, 18:28 for he refuted the Jews vigorously in public debate, demonstrating from the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Priscilla and Aquila acted with encouragement. They could have told Apollos: “Go Home! You don’t have your story straight!” Instead they helped him have better understanding of Jesus. And the church in Ephesus fostered the growth of Apollos and gave him letters of introduction to the Christians in Greece. Then Apollos went to Greece and poured water on the spiritual seed Paul had planted. If the church in Ephesus had not encouraged Apollos, there may have been a lack of water for the Corinthians.

VII. I think we should also know that encouragement grows and multiplies
Please turn to 2 Corinthians 7:4
God has supplied the original encouragement by sending Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins. We have been accepted by God by accepting Jesus’ sacrifice. Listen to the overflow of encouragement in this passage.

2 Corinthians 7:4-7 v4 I have great confidence in you; I take great pride on your behalf. I am filled with encouragement; I am overflowing with joy in the midst of all our suffering. 7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our body had no rest at all, but we were troubled in every way – struggles from the outside, fears from within. 7:6 But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. 7:7 We were encouraged not only by his arrival, but also by the encouragement you gave him, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your deep concern for me, so that I rejoiced more than ever.

VIII You may say that no one has ever encouraged you. That would be sad, but you can still receive encouragement --- from God’s word.
Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope.

VIX. Conclusion

We read in Acts 4 that Joseph from Cyprus was nicknamed Barnabas (son of encouragement).

What is your nickname? Could people mistakenly call you “Barnabas,” son or daughter of encouragement? Right now, please take out a pen or pencil and write down one way you could encourage someone. …pause… Listen to this summary of what we learned from scripture today.

What can you encourage someone about today?
1. You can help new Christians become more a part of the local church body. (Barnabas and Saul)
2. You can help people strengthen their faith in God (Barnabas in Antioch)
3. You can help someone get more involved in God’s work (Saul in Antioch)
4. You can disciple someone (John Mark)
5. You can take part in encouraging communication (Jerusalem council letter to the church in Antioch)
6. You can spur others on to love and good deeds and remind them earthly death is not the end
7. You can encourage others by the way you live (Titus)
8. You can help someone as they minister (Priscilla and Aquilla with Apollos)
9. You can watch encouragement multiply! as you get reports back from the people you encourage
10. You can let the Bible encourage you.

Be part of the blessing God has for his people by sharing encouragement this week.

ALTAR CALL You are invited to come to the altars now. Some may come up front to receive encouragement. Some may come up front to encourage others who come to the altars. Some may come up front to pray that God would strengthen them as an encourager.