

## ***Barnabas Spirit– 15/09/2019***

***Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. " Acts 4:36-37***

Beloved in the Lord,

There is a saying that behind every great man there is a great woman. Today we could often say that the opposite is also true. Either way, the point is that behind any successful person, there is usually someone who has encouraged and supported them. There is another saying, "no man is an island". We are created by God to function in community. God has so ordained it; that we need other people. We need one another.

Thinking about the New Testament, most of us are somewhat familiar with the Apostle Paul. He was a dedicated, fanatical Pharisee who had made it his mission to blot out Christianity. One day Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and Paul was radically changed forever. He became one of the greatest Apostles and defenders of the Christian faith. He wrote about 1/3 of The New Testament. How many have heard of Joseph the Levite, who was nick named Barnabas? God used Barnabas in a very special way, and without Barnabas Paul would never have achieved what he achieved.

Barnabas was instrumental in convincing the Apostles that Paul's conversion was genuine, and that he was no longer an enemy. The Apostles were very wary of Paul when he came, and no doubt scared of him. They found it hard to accept that this man who had so viciously persecuted Christians was now a Christian himself. No doubt they thought he was using a trick to infiltrate their group in order to arrest them. We read:

***"When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord."* Acts 9:26-28**

If Barnabas had not stood up for Paul, then I doubt if the others would have ever accepted him, and history would have been a lot different. Praise God for Barnabas.

What the Christian Church and society in general needs, is a lot more people with the Barnabas spirit. The word Barnabas comes from the Greek word "Paraklesis" which is the same root word for "Parakleitos" which Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit. This word means to encourage, to be an advocate, to stand besides, to support, to comfort.

Commentator William Barclay wrote in one of his commentaries on The letter to the Hebrews:

*One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement... It is easy to laugh at men's ideals; it is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage*

*others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word.*

Barclay's comment here is spot on. Far too often, either knowingly or unwittingly, we manage to pour cold water on someone's enthusiasm. For some reason we generally find it easier to criticise than to encourage and praise another.

I loved a little story I read the other day about a boy who got tired of practicing his piano.

*A little nine-year-old boy got tired of practicing the piano. His mother heard the great Paderewski was coming into town to do a concert. She bought two tickets, one for herself and one for her boy. And she dragged him along, sat him down by her in his little tuxedo, and she began visiting with her friends. He looked up on the platform and there was this giant, ebony black, Steinway concert grand piano. The lid on the keyboard was lifted and the leather bench was there. He looked at the piano, popped his knuckles, and said to himself, "Oh, man, I'd like to play that."*

*So, he slipped down the aisle, walked across the front, up the steps, sat down, and started playing "Chopsticks."*

*Well, the people down front said, "Who...who is ....?" "Quit!" "Hey, kid stop!" "Where's his mother?" Of course, she was embarrassed beyond words.*

*The great Paderewski, who was back fixing his tie, heard what was going on. So, without the boy seeing him, he slipped out on the stage and came in behind the little boy, reached around him and improvised a beautiful melody to go with "Chopsticks." Then he said to the boy, "Keep playing. Don't quit. Don't stop."*

We don't know whatever happened to the boy, but I can imagine if he did go on to become a great Pianist, he would always remember the day that the great Paderewski encouraged him to never quit. Paderewski was well known as an encourager of young composers and musicians.

Encouraging someone can make a huge difference in their lives. It can be the catalyst for many a successful and fruitful career. There are a few people who have the Barnabas spirit, and who are natural encouragers, but not all of us are. We can, however, learn to be. There is a great satisfaction in encouraging someone to do something good and then seeing them achieve it.

There are many ways that we can encourage others, show gratitude and support. I am going to share some with you today in the hope that it will encourage you to live with a Barnabas spirit.

**Call:** Pick up the phone and ring someone. Tell them something nice that will encourage them and lift their spirits.

**Send a text:** If you don't have time to call, a text message can be a very good way to cheer someone on and encourage them.

I have received many a great text of encouragement, and not always it is words, sometimes a simple emoji, a smiley face or a thumbs up, or hands of gratitude.

**Write a letter or send a card:** This is also a great way to encourage others.

**Pay someone a sincere compliment:** “Nice to see you today” or you look great”; “You are doing a wonderful job...”

**Pray:** Find out a person’s need and offer to pray for them and maybe even with them.

**Fulfil a need in someone’s life:** If you are able to help, then do it.

**Take time:** Have a coffee, have a chat, drop in for a visit.

**Point then to an applicable Scripture:** Where appropriate you can encourage someone with a Word from God’s Word. When someone is distressed I like to share Psalm 23 with them or one of my favourites is also Isaiah 41:10: **“Do not fear, for I am with you;**

**Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.**

**I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,**

**Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’**

**Tell the truth:** The Bible teaches us to always speak the truth in love.

**Be forgiving:** When someone wrongs you, forgive.

**Love:** Show love to everyone, always.

**Be a good example:** again, to everyone and always.

**Give Godly correction:** If someone is erring, then gently correct them and point them in the right direction.

**Listen:** Many people need nothing more than for someone to take some time to listen to them.

**Give your full attention:** That means put your phone in your pocket, look and listen.

**Be patient:** Self-explanatory.

**Cry with them:** Be sympathetic and cry with those who cry, where appropriate.

**Agree with them when appropriate:** Where possible, don’t argue.

**Give a meaningful gift:** Growing up, I had a friend who would never give you a gift on your birthday or Christmas, because that was when you expected it. Rather, he would give a gift when not expected and it would always be something meaningful.

**An affirming look:** Sometimes a look, a nod a gesture is enough to encourage someone.

**Pass on helpful information:** You have something that is helpful, where appropriate share it.

**Express loyalty:** Self-explanatory.

**Love those whom they love:** This is a very powerful affirmation for someone, and we should strive to do it where appropriate.

**Assist in an area where they feel inadequate:** This again is a very powerful way to encourage someone.

**Smile:** This is my favourite one. A smile can achieve so much and costs nothing.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but I share it with you in the hope that it gives you something practical to take and utilise. I pray that you would join with me on a mission to be encouragers. May God give us plenty of opportunities to encourage, and may we seize them and use them, and at least make our corner of the world a little better.

May God give us all the Barnabas spirit. Amen.

**Pastor Colvin MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney. All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.**