

## BARNABAS: Empowering through a Ministry of Encouragement

### Introduction:

Barnabas is one of the most underrated contributors to the expansion of N.T. Christianity. It is Luke's vignettes in Acts which describe the remarkably significant "ministry of encouragement" of this relatively unknown "good man" who was "full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24). The story unfolds in five passages in the book of Acts (4:32-37; 9:23-31; 11:22-30; 12:25-14:28; 15:1-40). The portrait of this "son of encouragement" is further clarified by three passages from Paul's letters (Gal. 2:11-14; Col. 4:10 and I Cor. 9:6). From these passages we discover the ways in which Barnabas empowered God's people in the early Church through a ministry of encouragement.

1. Barnabas empowered others as a gracious giver. (Acts 4:32-37)
  - a. He cared for the needy in the Jerusalem church.
  - b. Although a foreign born Levite, he was affirmed in his giving by the apostles who called him a "son of encouragement."
  - c. His giving was characterized by sacrifice and integrity.
2. Barnabas empowered others as a bold sponsor. (Acts 9:23-31)
  - a. He believed in the genuineness of Saul's conversion.
  - b. Although the apostles in Jerusalem were sceptical, he convinced them Paul was a true disciple of Jesus Christ.
  - c. His sponsoring was characterized by discernment and risk.
3. Barnabas empowered others as a strategic networker. (Acts 11:22-30)
  - a. He linked Gentile Christians at Antioch with Jewish Christians at Jerusalem.
  - b. Although some questioned the validity of the conversion of Gentiles, he affirmed the reality of the grace of God among them.
  - c. His networking was characterized by affirmation and bridging.
4. Barnabas empowered others as a team player. (Acts 11:25-26).
  - a. He sought out Saul and brought him to Antioch to help disciple new believers.
  - b. Although Saul was a younger man with less experience, he partnered with him in ministry to a cosmopolitan group of believers which confirmed Paul as a leader.
  - c. His teamwork was characterized by devotion and synergism.
5. Barnabas empowered others as a wise releaser. (Acts 12:25-14:28)
  - a. He helped Paul appoint elders in every church on the first missionary journey.
  - b. Although the elder, he encouraged and supported Paul as the primary leader.
  - c. His releasing was characterized by trust and loyalty.
6. Barnabas empowered others as a dedicated defender. (Acts 15:1-35; cp. Gal. 2:11-14)

- a. He bore witness, with Paul, to God's miraculous work through them in calling out a people for Himself among the Gentiles.
  - b. Although fear of the Judaizers intimidated him, he stood with Paul in defending the gospel of grace as the only basis of salvation for both Gentiles and Jews.
  - c. His defense was characterized by certainty and sensitivity.
7. Barnabas empowered others as a committed advocate. (Acts 16:36-41; cp. Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; I Pet. 5:13)
- a. He sided with his younger cousin, Mark, when Paul refused to take Mark on the second missionary journey because of his desertion on the first journey.
  - b. Although Mark had been a failure, he affirmed and redeemed Mark's ministry by taking him back to Cyprus.
  - c. His advocacy was characterized by patience and commitment.
8. Barnabas empowered others as a humble servant. (I Cor. 9:6)
- a. He gave up his right of financial support and worked for a living.
  - b. Although others rightfully received financial support from the churches, he, like Paul, refused to do so that the gospel might be offered free of charge.
  - c. His service was characterized by self-denial and flexibility.

#### Conclusion:

As a giver, sponsor, networker, team player, releaser, defender, advocate and servant, Barnabas' ministry of encouragement was the basis of his significant role in the expansion of the gospel in the 1st century. He is one of the finest historical models of a mentor who found it "more blessed to give than to receive." Thus it is not surprising to discover his sphere of influence far transcended his own life and ministry because it was multiplied through others like the Apostle Paul, John Mark and believers in Jerusalem, Antioch, Cyprus and Turkey. So we today are called to a similar ministry of encouragement through which we mentor and empower emerging leaders and national church movements.

#### Questions for thought, discussion and interaction:

1. Who am I currently mentoring?
2. How am I encouraging and empowering them?
3. Who is mentoring me?
4. How are they doing so?