

Who's Your Barnabas? You Need an Encourager Acts 4:36-37 September 28, 2008

Wow, hasn't this been a tough week! The stock market was on a roller coaster ride, the nation's economy threatened to crash, and personal credit has gotten tougher to get. On top of that some people have received bad medical news about themselves or a member of their family. The stress and the strain of life is taking its toll on a lot of people. So if you are going through a tough time, let me ask you "Who's your Barnabas? You need encouragement!"

Just to set the record straight, if you see that I am not wearing my wedding ring today, don't worry about it. I didn't take it off because Joan and I are having marital problems. I took it off because I got stung on the ring finger on Wednesday and my hand is still too swollen to put the ring back on.

Life does have a way of tearing us down. Whether it is the things people do or say, or the way things are going in our economy; whether it is poor health or family problems; there are times when life can become overwhelming. When that happens, we need a little encouragement. Encouragement can go a long way in make our lives better. Did you know that Academy Award winning actors and actresses have lived an average of four years longer than their costars and those nominated who did not win? It's true.

Remember, God never gives up on us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. The Apostle Paul tells us, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

Because God never gives up on us, He sends people into our lives to encourage us. Barnabas was one of those people. Actually Barnabas was his nick name. Joseph of Cyprus was given the nick name Barnabas because of the encouragement he gave. Not only did he sell a field and give the money to the early to church to help the poor, he welcome Saul after his conversion to the faith and introduced him to the disciples. Then he took Saul with him on a number of missionary journeys where he became known as the Apostle Paul. Some time later when Paul didn't want to take a young man by the name of John Mark with them on one of their mission trips, Barnabas encouraged John Mark to travel with him.

We all need to be encouraged and need people to encourage us. That encouragement can take different forms. But the results are the same because the encouragement lifts our spirit and helps us to move forward just like Rodney's father encouraged him in the video clip we saw at the start of the service. So who are the Barnabas' we need in life.

First there is the “Good Samaritan Barnabas.” Just as the Good Samaritan gave help to someone he didn’t know but encountered in his daily life, the “Good Samaritan Barnabas” is the person who practices “Random Acts of Encouragement.” They are the people who make a sport out of encouragement and try to see how many people they can encourage every day. This is the person who walks by and says “Nice Smile” or “You look great today.” They are the person who gives a thumbs up to someone who looks like they are struggling or lends a quick hand to help someone along the way. They are the people who tells a fellow runner in a race, “Keep going. You’re doing great!” They are the people who stand along the road during a race and encourage the runners to keep going.

Another Barnabas type is the “Big Brother.” These are the people who remember us by name and encourage us by name. They are the people that remind us that “God is love!” He is not just a judged to be feared. They are the people who awaken the best in us when we start sleep walking through life They will climb into the fox holes of life with us just to be with us. They are the people you find in the hospital room with you, the person who goes to see the lawyer with you, the person who volunteers to make the long drive home with you. They are the people who are like Robin to Batman or Tonto to the Lone Ranger for us.

Then there is the “Prayer Partner Barnabas.” This isn’t the person who says “I’ll pray for you” just to get you to stop talking about your problems and then never remembers to pray. They are the people who actually pray for you, and sometimes even with you. Instead of turning away in tough times, they ask if they can pray with you. These are the people who help you hear God’s voice and work to keep you in balance. They are the behind the scenes encouragers that are praying for you and pulling for you when they can’t be with you.

There is one type of encourager we can’t forget about, “The Laugh with Us Barnabas,” the person who helps lift our spirits when we are down. Laughter really is good medicine. Laughter opens our hearts to hear the Good News of God’s love. Laughter breaks the tension and opens a path for your Barnabas to encourage us.

Then there is the “Marathon Barnabas,” the person who is with you for the long haul. They just don’t give up. Ruth was one of those people. She was married to one of Naomi’s sons. Noam and her family move to Moab during a famine. After her husband and two sons died, she decided to return to Israel. She told her two daughters in laws to stay behind. One did, but Ruth refused and said, **"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."** (Ruth 1:17)

We all have a “Partner Barnabas.” Even if you don’t feel like there is anyone in your life right now who can or will try to encourage you, you have a partner who will. He is called the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples and said that the Spirit would be the one

who help them to remember everything He taught them, who would give them the right words to speak when challenged, who will give them joy and peace. The promise that Jesus gave to His disciples, he gives to us today. We are his disciples and have the gift of the Spirit. His presence and encouragement in our lives goes a long way.

In these tough times, remember to be a Barnabas, to encourage the people around you. A little encouragement can go a long way. Join us next Sunday as we continue our series on Yield Investments as we ask, “Whose Your Peter, Your Paul? You need a Yoda!”