

This is Us

2. Encouraging

May 8-9, 2021

Welcome to week 2 of our message series “This is Us.” How many of you have seen the TV show by that name? It’s a quality show about a family living in Pittsburgh back in the 70’s and 80’s.

We’re calling this message series, “This is Us.” The “Us” refers to a church family in the Pittsburgh region called Crossroads Church! As a church, we are the family of God on the mission of God. Our Life Group is our immediate spiritual family who are on Jesus’ mission together; our Weekend worship service is gathering of extended family to exalt God and altogether we are a family.

Every family operates on a set of values, whether they are aware of them or not. As a church family, our values come from Jesus, and this series is about those values. It is based on Jesus’ teaching to his apostles in John 13-17. Those chapters record what Jesus said and did on the last night before his arrest. That night, Jesus gathered with his twelve closest disciples for a final Passover meal. During that time, he gave them some key last instructions.

Last week Pastor Christy got us off to a great start looking at Jesus’ command in John 13 to serve one another. Serving is a value of our Crossroads church family; we serve one another and the world. It’s what we do.

Today we’re going to look at John 14 and how we *encourage one another* to love and obey Jesus.

When Linda and I were expecting our first child, natural child birth was all the rage. That meant delivering the baby without anesthetic. So we went to Lamaze classes together to prepare for the birth. We were told what to expect and breathing techniques to control pain during contractions. When labor started, however, I never felt more useless than when I was standing next to Linda’s bed, even though I was a fully-trained breathing consultant!

I was fairly certain that Linda could have breathed without me reminding her, but I realized that my main role was to be an encouragement to her. Labor is long, and Linda tells me it was just a little more bearable because I was there telling her she’d make it. She did great, by the way. I have to say, I never respected Linda more than during those hours in the labor and delivery.

In John 14, Jesus encourages his disciples because he knows they are going to need it. They are about to go through a tough time. He knows they are going to see him crucified, so he encourages them not to become hopeless when they see him die. In **John 14:1**, Jesus starts out saying “*Don’t let your hearts be troubled...*” He tells them that he will take them to be with him in heaven, and that he was preparing the place for them.

Then Jesus challenges them to obey what he tells them. In **verse 15-16** he says, “*If you love me, keep my commands.*” Obeying him was so essential that he repeats it again in **verses 23-24**: *Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.* Jesus couldn’t be more clear: if we love him we will do what he says.

That’s why we define what it means to be a disciple as: **Disciple = “love and obey Jesus.”** We don’t obey so that God accepts us; we obey *because* we are accepted. We are saved and accepted by undeserved grace. We don’t obey Jesus in order to get him to love us. We obey *because* we love him. Our motivation is not to earn his love; we obey him because loving him makes us want to.

And Jesus knew that sometimes obedience is easier said than done. The disciples wouldn’t always feel like doing what Jesus says, so he encourages the disciples by telling them they will receive help: **John 14:16-17** “*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever --- the Spirit of truth.*” Jesus said that the Spirit would help them by giving them the power to do whatever Jesus asked them to do. That must have been encouraging for them to hear.

We need encouragement to obey Jesus, too. That’s why the Apostle Paul writes: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**; *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing...* and **verse 14** says *...encourage the disheartened.* He is saying to keep on pursuing Jesus. We are all called to encourage each other because we all need to be encouraged!

Chick-Fil-A founder Truett Cathey said that there is a fool-proof way to know who around you needs to be encouraged and here it is: Ask yourself, “Is that person breathing?” If they are breathing, they need encouragement. Is anyone around you right now breathing? If so, you know what that means – they need to be encouraged. And here’s how you know whether a person needs encouragement to obey Jesus: if they are a Christ-follower. Does anyone around you agree “Jesus is Lord”? Then they need encouragement to obey.

The world around us will discourage us from following Jesus, but here in our Crossroads Church family we cheer each other on to love and obey Jesus. It’s what we do. Encouragement is listed as a spiritual gift in **Romans 12:8**. It is so important for our well-being that God gives some people a special ability from the Holy Spirit to do it at an

exceptional level. But like all gifts, it's not only those with the gift who are to encourage. **1 Thessalonians 5** reminds us that we are all called to encourage.

The book of Acts tells us about a guy who had the gift of encouragement: **Acts 4:36** *Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement")*. This guy was such an encourager that the people who knew him best changed his name to "son of encouragement." That makes me believe that I would like the guy!

Barnabas shows up in several places in the book of Acts. He shows us what encouragers do. We're going to look at five ways that Barnabas encouraged others. As we do, realize that you and I can encourage the people in our spiritual families in the same way.

To encourage others to obey Jesus: first, choose a generous attitude. The first time we hear of Barnabas he was being financially generous. **Acts 4:36-37** *Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.* Barnabas was a giver, not just financially, but he was also generous with his support, his time, his endorsement of other people.

Encouragers are generous in many ways because they are focused on building up other people. I heard about one couple who make it their mission to encourage others when they go to worship services. They view anyone sitting alone as an emergency that requires their immediate action. They introduce themselves and introduce the person to someone else in the church they might have something in common with. That is a generous spirit.

When we go to our Life Groups we can go with a generous spirit: We can walk in thinking, who can I build up? How will I pray for someone today?

Another way to encourage others to obey Jesus is to set an example. Barnabas felt the Spirit prompt him to sell his house and give away the money, and he obeyed the Lord publicly. **Acts 4:37** – **"put [the sale money] at the apostles' feet"** Other believers saw what Barnabas did, and it influenced them to do the same thing. The book of Acts tells us that many disciples sold property and gave it away. I can imagine a couple sensing the Spirit's prompt to do that thinking, "Are we crazy to be giving away this much?" Then they see Barnabas doing it and they get the courage to follow through on what God told them to do. It's hard to take bold steps of obedience if you feel like the only person doing it. So when others see you obeying God it will encourage them to do the same thing.

Years ago, in a group that I was in, the topic of tithing came up ("Tithing" is giving 10% of our income back to God). One of the group members who had never done this before asked another member of the group "Do you give 10%?" The other person said

“Yes.” After the group, they talked together about the specifics of how it worked. That is encouragement by example.

Each week in our Life Group meetings, we ask some form of the questions, “What is God saying to you through this passage or message?” and “What will you do about it?” When you come back the next week and tell people “Here’s what I did this week, and here’s how it went, it gives courage to others in the group to obey the Lord themselves.

A third way to encourage others to obey Jesus is to see their potential.

Barnabas was a central player in another key moment in Church history. A guy named Saul was persecuting Christians, putting them in jail and even executing them. Then the risen Jesus appeared to Saul and he was dramatically converted. He changed his name to Paul. The believers heard that Paul was converted, but they were still leery of him. That’s understandable - they didn’t want to end up in prison or dead for showing up at a meeting where he was. ***Acts 9:27 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.***

Jesus called Paul to be a church planter and tell people about Jesus. Barnabas encouraged him to obey Jesus’ call by vouching for him to the apostles. He risked his own safety and reputation in order to help Paul do what Jesus said.

We each need people like that in our lives, people who not only accept us for who we are, but see who we can become. We need people around us who can see us as sold-out followers of Jesus. Jesus told his first disciples “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” They obeyed Jesus because he told them what they could become.

I am speaking to you today largely because when I was an underclassmen at college, my future-wife, Linda, said to me, “I think some day you could be a good pastor.” I wanted to do what God called me to do, and it was easier because Linda made it clear she believed in me. If she had laughed and said, “You? A pastor?” maybe I wouldn’t have followed through on God’s call.

A number of you are leading groups or mission projects or worship leading because someone told you, “I think you would be good at that.” Many of us think, “Who me? I’m not qualified.” That’s why we need others to encourage us, to see beyond the present.

A study by the Barna organization found that young people who grew up in the church and remain followers of Jesus are far more likely to have had meaningful relationships with adults and admire the faith of their parents. So, parents you make a huge impact on your children – no matter how old they are – by seeing them as saying “yes” to Jesus in every area of their lives and believing that they will do that.

Adults, you can make a major difference in the lives of Middle and High School students. Perhaps some of you will be willing to **point out their progress**. The leaders of the church heard that a move of God was happening among non-Jewish people in Antioch. A lot of them were becoming followers of Jesus. They didn't expect this, so they sent someone they trusted to follow-up. They knew who to send: Barnabas.

Acts 11:21-23 *The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.* Barnabas "saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad..." There's that generous spirit again. He didn't focus on himself; he didn't care that he wasn't the one who led them to Christ; he didn't compare himself to them. He was glad for what God was doing in them. He saw how they were following Jesus and he celebrated it. Then he "encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." In other words, he encouraged them to obey Jesus.

Paul replicated this in his own ministry: **Philippians 1:6** *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Another trait of an encourager is to **look past their failures**. Barnabas was such an encourager that he wouldn't give up on people even when they failed. **Acts 15:36-40** *Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.*

Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on an earlier mission trip. When it came time to for the next one, Barnabas said, "Let's give Mark another chance." Paul said, "No way." Paul was just being practical. Missionary trips were dangerous, and they needed to know they could depend on each other when things got tough. But Barnabas wouldn't leave Mark behind, so he and Paul split up into two different teams.

Encouragers don't give up on people easily. They don't ignore their failures and they just don't assume that's the last word. Redemption is the essence of our faith. We don't write people off. Of course, we have to use wisdom: there are times we have to change the way we work with people based on past experiences. The key is to leave the future open.

When Paul was in prison and awaiting execution, he wrote to Timothy: **2 Timothy 4:11** *Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry*

Barnabas' encouragement of Mark made a difference. He completed the missionary journey with Barnabas. At the end of his life, Paul asks for Mark and says he is useful. He doesn't see him as unreliable any more. Mark went on to write the Gospel of Mark in our Bibles. None of that would have happened without Barnabas showing encouragement.

We are a church family, and we operate on Jesus' values: We serve one another, and we encourage each other to stay on the path of obeying what Jesus says. Let's take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit what he wants us to take away from this message today.