

STORYTELLERS
The Encourager
Acts 11

TESTIMONY: CARY and STACY MCRAE

Do you want to know what stands out to me about Cary and Stacy when you are around them? It is not their sorrow over what has happened. It is certainly not bitterness or anger or resentment. It is their constant spirit of ENCOURAGEMENT. These two people LOVE to encourage the people around them. They are a healing salve for others who are hurting or lonely. The truth is, many people who meet them would never guess that they had gone through such sorrow as the loss of a precious child. But that is the nature of an ENCOURAGER. Today, I want us to look as deep as we can into the character of an encourager. His name is BARNABAS. Please turn to ACTS 11 where we will read today.

So, have you ever needed encouragement in your life? I know I have! It is a desperate need of people everywhere. I love being an encourager, and I love being encouraged. But it is a challenge. Encouragement is much more than just fluffy words that make someone feel temporarily better. **Encouragers are not just cheerleaders; they are also challengers!** Sometimes, encouragement can even HURT! But it is a helpful hurt. This morning let me give you a different perspective on encouragement that might help you to better recognize it in your own life.

Scripture describes the encouragement that we are talking about today as the idea of exhortation. It is the ability to inspire people with a powerful motivation toward God. But encouragement is far more than just words. True encouragement is a total package!

Encouragement is INVESTMENT, but . . .
You can only invest what you POSSESS!

Another way of saying this is you can only invest what you yourself are full of! So, what are YOU full of? [Hot Air? Smoke? Self?] We know what Barnabas was full of; scripture tells us! **Acts 11:22-24 NLT**

22 When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. **24** Barnabas was a **good man**, full of the **Holy Spirit** and strong in **faith**. And many people were brought to the Lord.

Barnabas was 1) A good man, 2) Full of the Holy Spirit, and 3) Strong in faith. These were the foundation and the assets that resourced his reputation as an encourager. Using this biblical assessment of his character, I want us to see how it relates to his gift as an encourager.

ASSETS OF AN ENCOURAGER:**GOODNESS: Moral Authority**

***Uprightness of Character:** Creates an atmosphere of TRUST!

-He was trusted two key times with supervision: **Acts 11:19-22 NLT**

*He was a man of TRUTH and DISCERNMENT.

*He was a man who wielded GODLY INFLUENCE.

-He was trusted two key times with MONEY: **Acts 11:29-30 NLT**

-In what ways are you financially trustworthy?

***Beneficial:** His life benefitted and served others.

-So, what were the practical assets that he used to benefit others?

MONEY – Acts 4:34-37 NLT

34 There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them 35 and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need. 36 For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. 37 He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

-His first act of encouragement was not flattery; it was finances!

*Have you ever had a nickname? [Mine – Sasquatch]

-How do YOU “encourage” the church and her members?

*Financial investment, Giving to needs [food pantry, soul food, etc]

WISE WORDS – Acts 11:23 NLT

*Barnabas encouraged new believers in their walk with God.

*His words were powerful, positive words of encouragement.

-Goodness is also translated: Pleasant, Happy, and Joyful.

-What do YOUR WORDS create in others: Joy or Despair?

*Types of words: Critical, Gossip, Affirmation, Hope, Truth

-Where do your words LEAD others?

TIME – Acts 11:25-26 NLT

*He went to great lengths to find Paul to work with him in Antioch.

["Look for" = "Search out, Seek diligently"]

*He interrupted his own life for over a year to disciple new believers!

*His time resulted in significant impact. ["First called Christians here!"]

-What “rubs off” of you when you spend a lot of time with others?

*Bitterness, Anger, Joy, Hope, Cynicism, Love?

-What attitudes accompany your investments?

THE HOLY SPIRIT: Spirit-controlled

*He was God-centered. Was EVIDENT to everyone he met!

-God was “in all of his thoughts.”

*Sensitive to God for direction [1st missionary journey!] **Acts 13:1-4 NLT**

1 Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. 2 One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." 3 So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. 4 So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus.

FAITH: Courageous Trust

*Encouragement requires faith-driven COURAGE.

-He took a chance with Paul: **Acts 9:26-28 NLT**

26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! 27 Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus. 28 So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

*Paul's history as a terrorist and the church's fear!

-He moved into unfamiliar settings for the sake of the Gospel [Acts 11, 13, 16]

-He crossed RACIAL and RELIGIOUS lines for the sake of the Gospel

*He was next to the Apostle Paul in opening the door to the Gentiles.

*Encouragement is an act of faith by its very nature:

Encouragement refuses to be limited to what IS.

Encouragement looks FORWARD to what God has set out before us.

The investment of encouragement is A RISK that seeks a RETURN!

*All investments SEEK to get a R.O.I.

-What returns are you looking for on your investments?

*Growth in the Faith of others?

*Increase in the Kingdom of God

*Glory to God?

*Personal growth?

*Personal promotion or selfish gain?

*Encouragement is able to LOOK BEYOND times of suffering and loss.

-Barnabas faced inconvenience, rejection, and persecution, yet . . .

Acts 14:21-22 NLT (Set this up first by describing the scene in Acts 14)

21 After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas **returned** to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, 22

where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

-Barnabas stood up for John Mark after he had failed! **Acts 15:36-39 NLT**

36 After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing." 37 Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. 38 But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. 39 Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.

*This was a costly stand for a while

*This removed him from prominence in Acts

*This was ultimately a BLESSING to the Body of Christ

-Paul later expressed his need for John Mark: **Colossians 4:10-11**

-John Mark wrote the GOSPEL OF MARK!

-Barnabas impacted many people in his generation for Christ.

-Barnabas impacted OUR CULTURE by his life: "first called Christians . . ."

Are YOU seeking to be an encouragement to others?

Don't try to begin with influence; begin with INVESTMENT.

Investment requires that you CULTIVATE the proper ASSETS in your inner life:

How are you cultivating goodness, God-centeredness, and Faith?