

Forgotten Lives

Barnabas

Acts 4:32-37

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HDBC

Continuing our series ***Forgotten Lives***. Looking at people who are easily overlooked, as they are overshadowed by more well-known people.

When U.S. gymnast Carly Patterson won the silver medal at the world championships in 2003, Mary Lou Retton, the only American woman at that time to have won all-around gymnastics gold, took notice. She sent Patterson a poster with the words ***I saw you win silver at the worlds, but I'll see gold on you in Athens.***

Patterson hung that poster on her bedroom wall, using it to fuel her preparation for the Athens games. After winning the gold medal in the all-around competition, the first person she called was Mary Lou.

That is encouragement!

Former boxing writer Harold Conrad visited a women's prison with heavyweight fighter Muhammad Ali. *All the inmates lined up, wrote Conrad. They were oohing and aahing as he went along.*

There were some good-looking ones. But he kissed only the unattractive ones. After they left the prison, Conrad asked the fighter to explain why he chose to kiss only those women. Because no one ever kisses them,

Straight-A students get compliments. Good athletes receive cheers. But average people don't expect such attention. They just tend to blend in with the woodwork. But everybody needs affirmation of his or her intrinsic worth—a person created in God's image and loved by him. We all need pats on the back, smiles, hugs. Everyone needs to be noticed and affirmed. Everyone needs encouragement.

That brings us to Barnabas. He is the ***Mr. Encouragement*** of the NT.

We first read about him in Acts 4:32-37. So, let's look at this passage and use it to begin our look at this incredible man. Then let's consider four marks of an encourager that we can learn from him.

So, what do encouragers do?

1. Encouragers give to meet needs. (4:32-37)

There was a crisis among the early believers. Many were poor before becoming believers. Getting saved secured them a mansion in glory, but did nothing for their economic status on earth. Getting saved is not a ticket to wealth.

Others became destitute after they were saved. Often non-believers would *black-ball Christian businessmen* by refusing to continue to do business with them.

Notice what Mr. Encouragement does. He stepped up to the plate, giving from his own resources to help those in need. **Do you remember a time when you were encouraged by the giving of someone else? It happened to us more than once while in seminary and very poor. Can you remember a time when you gave from your own money to help someone in need?**

Ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a group of citizens in North Platte, Neb. heard a rumor that soldiers from their town, part of the Nebraska National Guard Company D, would be coming through on a train on their way to the West Coast. Five hundred people showed up at the train depot with food, cigarettes, letters, and love to give the boys.

When the train showed up, it was not the Nebraska National Guard Company D; it was the Kansas National Guard Company D. After a few awkward moments, a woman handed a young man she'd never seen the gifts intended for her own son. Everyone else followed that lead, and there were hugs and prayers and love shared all around. It was a spontaneous

act of genuine devotion that touched both the soldiers and the people who came to the depot that day. That alone would have been a beautiful illustration of the willingness to "sacrifice for one another." But the story continues.

A few days later, a 26-year-old woman named Rae Wilson wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper recounting the profound experience they'd shared that night. She then suggested the town organize a canteen, so they could do something similar for every troop train that came through. She offered to lead the effort as a volunteer. For the next four and a half years, the people of North Platte and the surrounding communities met every troop train that came through their town.

Every day, they prepared sandwiches, cookies, cold drinks, and hot coffee. They had baskets of magazines and books to give away to the soldiers, and snacks for the train. There were even birthday cakes for anyone having a special day. And they did this, some days, for as many as 8,000 soldiers and sailors.

The statistics are staggering. By the time the last train arrived on April 1, 1946, six million soldiers had been blessed by the North Platte Canteen. Forty-five thousand volunteers had served faithfully until the war was over and most of the troops had been transported home.

Most of the troops had only ten minutes to sprint from the train, grab some food, maybe dance with a pretty girl, hear the appreciation of those present, and sprint back before the train left without them. But in those ten minutes, they got more than a meal. They received a dose of unconditional love that they remembered later—during the heat of battle as well as decades after the war was over.

Bob Greene, whose book *Once Upon a Town* made the North Platte Canteen story known to the world, wrote that, as he interviewed those few surviving soldiers who had experienced the canteen firsthand, there was a universal reaction from the men (who were by that time in their late seventies and eighties): **they cried.**

2. Encouragers stand with the outcasts. (Acts 9:26-27)

Poor, the persecutor had become a Christian and none of the believers trusted him. They thought it was a manipulative trap. Everywhere he turned he was rejected by his own brothers and sisters. Then along comes Barnabas to the rescue. He takes Paul by the hand and introduces him to the brothers and sisters and describes all that God had done. And it worked. They trusted Barnabas.

For the first time in his adult life, Paul was the outcast. He needed a friend to come alongside and get him over the hump, someone to speak up on his behalf. He needed someone who would vouch for him, stand with him, and risk their own reputation for his benefit. Barnabas was that man.

AC Dixon told the following story that happened to a friend of his.

Rising early one morning, he said, "I heard the barking of a number of dogs chasing a deer. Looking at a large open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across the field and giving signs that its race was almost run. It leaped over the rails of the enclosed place and crouched within ten feet of where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, and the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. Just then I felt that all the dogs in the West could not and would not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength.

3. Encouragers rejoice when others succeed. (11:19-24)

Other believers were sharing their faith and having considerable results. Barnabas was sent to investigate. When he arrived he saw the great work that they were doing. Instead of trying to redirect it, or take it over, he simply patted them on the back, encouraging them to keep it up.

They may not have been doing it the same way that he was. They were not a part of his immediate group, but they were successful. And rather than being jealous, he was excited. He rejoiced in their success.

Rejoicing with others may be one of the hardest things to do, especially when things are not going so well for us.

Businesspeople face it when another company is rising ahead of them.

Athletes face it when someone else is more successful than they are.

Pastors face it when other churches seem more successful.

The encourager rises above the temptation to be jealous or resentful. It is a true mark of Christ-likeness to rejoice in the success of others.

4. Encouragers restore wounded soldiers. (15:36-37)

Paul and Barnabas were going on a second missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to take Mark. Paul refused to take one who had turned back during the first trip. Barnabas refused to give up on Mark. He saw Mark as a wounded soldier and was determined to restore him.

Just what was it that Mark had done? Mark became an assistant of the apostle Paul on the first missionary journey. His cousin Barnabas was there too. But something happened in a place called Perga of Pamphylia: Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas.

He turned back at a time when Paul needed him. We don't know the details. We don't know the reasons. There are a lot of speculations. Regardless of the reason, in Paul's mind it was inexcusable. Mark clearly had made a bad choice. And Paul refused to let him off the hook for it. Paul wanted Mark to be held accountable for his decision and actions. Nothing wrong with that. But Barnabas had a better plan. He wanted to restore this fallen brother.

On the battlefield there are three options for wounded soldier:

- 1) Leave them alone. Some will survive, others will die
 - 2) Offer medical attention and save a life.
 - 3) Shoot them and get them out of their misery. Then move on.
- Only one is best for the soldier and for the army.

Years ago I heard that it was said that ***the church is the only army that shoots its wounded.*** What a terrible indictment. Shame on us if that is true.

We should be just as aggressive in trying to rescue our wounded members. We must care enough to take necessary steps to restore and renew those among us who are in danger are drifting away, becoming inactive, or disillusioned. It will take awareness and commitment to act. It will cost time, energy and effort. But it will be worth the effort.

Notice what Barnabas Did

What Mark did not need was condemnation. He needed loving guidance and encouragement.

Notice what Barnabas was willing to give up to restore Mark. He was willing to sacrifice his association with Paul, the key missionary leader of the New Testament and go into a more obscure direction all to mentor and encourage young Mark.

This is where it is hard for many active believers. You establish a group of friends at church that you like to hang out with. You focus on them and fail to even see the hurting believers around you. Wounded soldiers who desperately need for a healthy believer to make some room for them in their life. Unlike Barnabas and Paul it does not always mean breaking with one person to help another. Usually it simply means making some room for someone new. Take them to lunch. Invite them to your house after church.

Knowing that there is someone out there who will come to your rescue is important.

1865 letter from William Tecumseh Sherman to U.S. Grant: I knew wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place you would come--if alive.

Barnabas did not simply pat Mark on the back. He got him back involved. Are you involved in ministry? Go out and find a wounded member and ask them to join you. Get them back into the swing of ministry and you will be amazed at what a difference it will make.

Being involved in ministry will help recreate the sense of belonging and of contributing that the wounded soldier once felt. Being involved in a joint effort with someone else will create accountability and stickability.

Did it work? Yes

Mark later wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Probably the first of the four accounts of the life and ministry of Christ.

He also became a very valuable companion and friend of Paul. When Paul was facing sure death, Mark was one of the few people whom he wished to come and see him. Listen to his words.

2 Tim 4:9-11

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens {has gone} to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

In a world filled with people who are narcissistic, pessimistic, and distracted with selfish pursuits . . . be like Barnabas. He was outward focused, unselfish, and willing to give himself for others. **Where did he learn that?**

Jesus. Jesus looked outward to the needs of others, gave Himself to meet our needs, even giving His own life for our eternal benefit.

Do you know Him? He knows you, loves you and wants you to trust Him.