

Son of Encouragement

Michelle Cox, a published writer tells the following story how Tim LaHaye was an encourager to her at the beginning of her writing career. She explained how she was at a writer's conference in Denver, CO. Her first book had just been published, and she had traveled to the retail show to do a book signing.

As she walked down a hallway with a friend, a man stopped her and said, "Do you have a book out?" She said that she did and he invited her as a guest interview on his radio show. She got there a little early, and realized that her interview would be after two other well known authors which was very intimidating. To make matters worse, right before time to start her interview, Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, whose books had sold millions of copies, arrived to wait for the slot after hers.

Cox said, "When I finished my interview with the host, Tim LaHaye walked up to me, clasped my hand and looked me in the eye, and then with great conviction he told me, "Don't you quit writing." Those few words of encouragement propelled this young writer to great heights. Word of encouragement can never be underestimated.

Well the scriptures tell us of an interesting man that was an encourager. His name was Joseph and he was from the island of Cyprus, though he was a Jew -- a Levite in particular, no one remembers him by his true name; everyone calls him by his nickname -- Barnabas. "Bar" = Son of, and "Nubas" = Encouragement.

Barnabas was a man much deserving of his nickname. We first read of him selling his personal property to aid poor Christians in Jerusalem. *Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, (37) Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

From this passage we get several other opportunities to see the encouraging influence of this Levite from Cyprus. After Saul had been converted to Christianity, it was Barnabas who defended him in Jerusalem and introduced him to the Christians in Jerusalem when no one would believe Paul. *Acts 9:26-27 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. (27) But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*

When word came that there were believers of Christ in Antioch, it was Barnabas who was sent from Jerusalem to encourage their growth. Notice a few points from Acts 11:19-26. The setting is seen in v19. *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.*

It seems that after Stephen had been killed by the Jewish leaders, the attitude was to kill some more; so the Christians were forced to scatter. *Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.* Some went to Antioch and those that did preached the Lord Jesus. *(20) And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. (21) And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

It wasn't long before the church that remained in Jerusalem heard about the success of the church in Antioch and decided to send some encouragement, and who do you think they sent.

(22) Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. (23) Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. We learn from verse 24 that much people were added unto the Lord. The church continued to grow in spite of the persecution it faced. No doubt a bit of that success was the efforts of Barnabas. He is called a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith (v24).

Some time after arriving at Antioch, Barnabas went looking for Paul. ***(25) Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:*** He started in Paul's home town. It seems that he wanted Paul to come and preach/teach. ***(26) And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.***

Later when God requested two men to be sent out to preach the gospel, it was Paul and Barnabas who were picked to go (Acts 13:2). After completing their first missionary trip together, we read in Acts 15:36-40 that Paul wants to go back and revisit some of the churches that they had established. Barnabas was willing and wanted to include John Mark who had traveled with them on their first journey but for some reason left and returned back home. Paul was in strong opposition while Barnabas insisted on taking him along. The disagreement reached the point that the two decided to separate and go their separate ways. Barnabas took with him John Mark. You see, Barnabas was willing to give John Mark a second chance because Barnabas was an encourager.

Would people say that of us? Are the people you come in contact with day-to-day so uplifted that you could be called the son or daughter of encouragement? In Romans 12:3-8 we have a list of some talents that people have and embedded in that list is exhortation (v8) which means encouragement. Some people are better at encouraging than others, but all of us can do a little.

Encouragement is one of the duties of preachers. Notice Titus 2 begins with instruction to younger preacher Titus to preach sound doctrine. ***Titus 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:*** Skipping down to verse 11 we read that this sound doctrine would include awareness that God's grace that brings salvation has appeared to all men and this salvation that is available to all men teaches us to turn from ungodly living and live soberly and righteously in this world. ***Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, (12) Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*** With such living we look forward to the glorious return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. ***(13) Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*** This sound doctrine should include what Jesus did for us. He gave himself for us that we might be redeemed and pure, zealous of good works. ***(14) Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.***

Now notice verse 15. ***These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*** Again we see the emphasis on speaking sound doctrine but there is also instruction to exhort and rebuke. That word "exhort" carries the idea of building up; comforting. This is a method of encouraging. Titus as a preacher was instructed to encourage by exhortation. To Timothy Paul would use similar language. ***2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.***

Encouragement entails exhorting but it also embraces comforting. We should encourage (comfort) and edify each other. ***1 Thessalonians 5:11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even***

as also ye do. Further, Paul encourages us to encourage the timid and help the weak. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*

There are many things in this world that can cause people to be discouraged. Sometimes things turn out to be harder than we first imagined. So, for some living the Christian life is more difficult than they first thought and they become discouraged with their effort. We see this in the Israelites of old as they were discouraged by their journey. **Numbers 21:4** *And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.* I can imagine they thought they would just waltz into the promise land, but that was not the case. Not only was it hard work, but just getting there was very difficult. So it is with the Christian that struggles with living soberly, pure and righteous in this present world.

It doesn't help when you see other people, who don't care anything about godliness and they seem to have an easy time in life. They prosper materially, their kids are popular, they have good health and they seem happy. David speaks of such feelings in Psalms 73. **Psalms 73:3** *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

We sometimes sing the song "Farther Along" on this thought is brought out in one of its stanza's.

*Tempted and tried we're oft' made to wonder
Why it should be thus all the day long
While there are others living about us
Never molested, though in the wrong*

It is also discouraging when the things we hope for don't come as soon as we would like. **Proverbs 13:12** *Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.* It may be broken relationships, declining health, debt, etc.

Regardless, discouragement is an effective tool of Satan and as Christians we need to counter this discouragement. It is not a one-time act, but a daily task. **Hebrews 3:12-13** *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (13) But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Not only are we to exhort one another daily, it's a by-product of our gathering together collectively. **Hebrews 10:24-25** *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: (25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul writes about the second coming of Jesus and how the righteous will meet Him in the air, and he concludes that chapter with these words. **1 Thessalonians 4:18** *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* Let the awareness of Jesus' return help counter discouragement. If Barnabas were here today perhaps he would say words similar to what Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia. "Don't get discouraged with well-doing for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Perhaps you are here today and are discouraged; discouraged by sin in your life of the burdens or life. We stand ready to help you with this matter.

Invitation.