

Time for name recognition. How many Joseph's of the Bible can you identify? Clues. There are 4. One in the OT and 3 in the New Testament. The first three we should be able to identify, the last one, not so easy. Start with the Old Testament. Joseph, the man with the coat of many colors. Son of Jacob. One whose brothers sold him into slavery and yet God raised him up to be 2nd in command of Egypt. Move to the NT. Joseph, who was married to Mary. The mother of the Son of God. The Joseph who God entrusted his own son during his childhood years. Third. Joseph of Arimathea. He took the body of Jesus down from the cross and buried him in his own tomb. How about the 4th. Joseph, the Levite. Did you get him? You probably know him by a different name. The name Barnabas. Barnabas is a great figure in the early NT church. He is spoken of much in the book of Acts. A member and leader of church in Jerusalem and Antioch. He accompanied Paul on his 1st missionary trip. Barnabas even took a missionary trip of his own to Cyprus. So just what is his name? That brings us to our text, "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus whom the apostles called Barnabas(which means Son of Encouragement).

His real name was Joseph. He was given the nickname Barnabas. It meant son of encouragement. He was such a positive, encouraging, uplifting person that they called him by a nickname, that stuck with him. Barnabas had a special gift. He had the spiritual gift of encouragement. In Romans 12:6 and 8 it says: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is encouraging, let him encourage." And this is the definition of this spiritual gift: A divine endowment given to certain members of the body of Christ to bring words of comfort and consolation, encouragement and counsel to other members of the body in such a way that they feel helped and healed. Let's take a closer look at what it means to be "Encouraged by an Encourager!"

Does it surprise you that God created this unique gift and bestows this on certain Christian people, this gift of encouragement. It seems to me that it's a bit different than some of the other gifts we looked at a few weeks ago. We've looked at prophesying and teaching. That involves the presentation and instruction of God's Word. Those gifts seem so hands on. But different than encouragement. I believe God gives certain Christians this gift for 2 reasons. One is that we desperately need it. And second, it brings us great blessings.

Let's talk about the spiritual gift of encouragement. Ever felt like Charlie Brown. In a Peanuts comic strip, Charlie has messed up again. And sure enough, here comes Lucy. She says, Charlie Brown you are foul ball in the line drive of life. You are living in the shadow of your own goal post. You are a miscue. You are 3 putts on the 17th green. You are a 7-10 split in the 10th frame. You are a missed free throw, a shanked nine iron. Do you understand? Do I make myself clear. You're a loser.

How often do we mess up in life with our mistakes, failures and our sins. And we beat ourselves up over it. And to make matters worse there is always a Lucy nearby to rub it in, or make us feel worse. Oh, to not be discouraged. Remember the old song, "Home on the Range". It contains the phrase. Where seldom is heard a discouraging word. Imagine seldom facing discouraging words. Discouragement is neither a good feeling nor a good thing. And some of

you may be discouraged right now. And if not, it won't be long and you will be discouraged. Why? Because it is one of the objectives of Satan in this life. If he cannot wrestle our faith away from us in Christ, then he seeks to discourage us. Discouragement eats away our joy in the Lord, eats away at our desire to serve him, to worship the Lord, to read His Word and to pray. Satan wants you to feel miserable and dwell on it. He wants you to think that God doesn't really care for you.

Oh Lord, how we need encouragement in this life. And what a blessing it brings. Let me bring this out of comics to real life. A professional Christian businessman lost his job and was forced to take a menial construction job. Day after day he faced the crude humor and language of his boss and fellow workers. One day he made a rookie mistake that made him the butt of jokes for days on end. Finally, he couldn't take it any longer. He would work one more day and quit. Now one more day happened to be pay day. When the offensive foreman came around that day with his paycheck, he spoke the first decent words to that man in 3 weeks. 'There is a woman in the front office that says she knows you. She says she takes care of your children sometimes.' Whose that the man asked? The foreman said, 'She says she works at the children's activity center at the church where you worship.' When the man opened his envelope it contained his paycheck and a personal note. The note said, 'When one part of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body suffers with it.' I wanted you to know that I am praying for you these days.' The man was astonished at God's timing. He didn't even know this woman worked for his company. And here at his lowest hour, she had encouraged him.

When I was a teenager, I didn't think much of my looks. But my mom kept telling me that I was a decent looking kid, that I had a natural wave in my hair, that she was always pushing up. She said God had blessed me with a great voice that would oneday be used in some way for his kingdom work. She told me, that she would support me in whatever I decided to do with my life. My mom had the gift of encouragement.

So let's take a deeper look at the Son of encouragement. There are 4 brief episodes in his life. We do this so that you who have the gift of encouragement can see how it works and develop it. Further, that all of us recognize the encouragers in our lives, gain strength from them, and praise God for putting them in our lives.

In our lesson for today, Joseph the Levite, sold a field he owned, and put the money at the apostle's feet. It was gift for the congregation at Jerusalem. This congregation had grown rapidly. You remember how in one day 3000 were brought to believe in Jesus as Savior. This congregation needed help, support, and guidance. Joseph or Barnabas had the gift of encouragement. Those with this gift are generous people, giving, sharing people. Those with a generous spirit have a way of lifting the spirits of others.

The second example we have of Barnabas demonstrating encouragement was in his dealings with the apostle Paul. At one time Paul was Saul, who persecuted Christians. But oneday on a Damascus highway he was converted to Christ as his Savior. Now Paul had come to Jerusalem. But the people there wanted nothing to do with him. They were afraid of him. However, Barnabas brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul had come to faith. He

basically defended Saul and spoke on his behalf. Encouragers see the best in us that others cannot see. They encourage us by saying, “I believe in you.”

The third example of encouragement in action is in Acts 11:23 where it says, “When Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” Encouragers have an open mind to see new things that God is doing. Nearly all expansion in Christianity up to this point was amongst Jewish people. Now the Gospel leaps to the Gentiles. Would the non-Jews get it right? Barnabas was a Levite, from the priestly class. A Jew of Jews. Jewish boys and girls grew up believing the only reason God created Gentiles was to fuel the first of hell. But Barnabas put aside racial prejudice. He was thrilled that they were worshiping the same Jesus as Savior as he was. He didn’t begrudge them, nor was he jealous. He was glad. Encouragers have an open mind to see and accept new things that God is doing.

Finally, we meet Barnabas in Acts 15. He has just gone on a missionary trip with Paul and on they way Mark leaves them. We’re not sure if was homesickness, or being physically ill, but he left them. As Paul begins his 2nd missionary trip, Barnabas wants to take Mark along. Paul refuses. So they part company. Paul leaves with Silas on his 2nd missionary trip, while Barnabas takes a mission trip to Cyprus with Mark. Here we see another quality of encouragers. They give others second chances, they have a wonderful forgiving spirit.

The Christian army has a habit of shooting its wounded. When a Christian man, woman, or child messes up, hurts us, we tend to write them off. Barnabas saw beyond Mark’s failure, to restoration. He saw beyond restoration to future fruitfulness. Oneday, Mark would write the Gospel of Mark and eventually be a helper to Paul. Encouragers give us 2nd chances and believe in us.

Sounds like our God, does it not. Every day we mess up, with our own sins. Like Paul, with Mark, God has every right to cast us aside. Our God could rip us with a tirade worse than Lucy unleashed on Charlie Brown. But what does He do. He sends the greatest encourager into the world Jesus. Jesus comes to us and says, Son, Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. I lived and died for you and rose again. Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.” Jesus lifts up our spirits. He believes in us.

As we walk this journey in life, God places generous Christians into our lives who make us feel good about being children of God, who lift us up when we have fallen, who believe in us when we might not believe in ourselves. Thanks God for giving the gift of encouragement to certain Christians around us. For those of us who do not have this gift, don’t be disheartened. We can still can bring the encouraging Word of God to those who are hurting and down in the dumps. We can give them a hug and pray for them. So no reason to be down today. You are surrounded. Encouragers are here. God is watching over you even in the darkest of times. God will make sure you and I are encouraged by an encourager. Go Encouragers!