



Barnabas

The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other. In a powerful way the apostles told everyone that the Lord Jesus was now alive. God greatly blessed his followers, and no one went in need of anything. Everyone who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles. Then they would give the money to anyone who needed it. Joseph was one of the followers who had sold a piece of property and brought the money to the apostles. He was a Levite from Cyprus, and the apostles called him Barnabas, which means "one who encourages others." Acts 4: 32-37

Background

Joseph was someone who made things happen. He was a Levite (priestly family) from the island of Cyprus. He was probably among the pilgrims who heard of the resurrection and traveled to Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration (fifty days after Easter). Peter gave an inspirational sermon and "those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2: 41-42).

This fellowship of new believers cared for each other. No one needed anything. Jesus had converted hearts, minds, and pocketbooks. Joseph was an influential landowner. He saw a need and generously donated a piece of property for the work of the church (Acts 4).

The apostles gave Joseph a new name, "Barnabas," which means "one who shares encouragement." This was an event of great

significance. The new name was a sign of his transformation. The new name reflected Barnabas' transformation but also indicated he was a change agent in the lives of others. The story of Barnabas' gracious generosity in Acts 4: 32-37 stands in stark contrast to the tragic story of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who tried to cheat the church (Acts 5:1-11).

Barnabas was a respected church leader by the time Saul of Tarsus was persecuting Christians. Saul experienced a radical transformation (Acts 9) and turned his life over to Christ. Saul later changed his name to Paul. Many Christians were still suspicious and considered him a spy. They avoided Paul, but Barnabas gave him a second chance. He introduced Paul to the other disciples. Paul was welcomed because of Barnabas' intervention.

Years later there was great growth in the church of Antioch (third largest city in the Roman empire). The news reached Jerusalem and the church leaders sent Barnabas to support the new mission. Barnabas was delighted with the progress but realized he needed help. He sent for Paul. "For an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people" (Acts 11:26). This was the first place believers were called "Christians" which means people who act like "a little Christ" towards one another.

The young church of Antioch generously sent financial help to Jerusalem during a time of great need. They then decided to send missionaries to reach other people. They commissioned Barnabas, his nephew John Mark, and Paul to start this new ministry. They left for the island of Cyprus and then headed towards the Galatian cities (interior of modern-day Turkey). Along the way, John Mark abandoned them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13).

Paul and Barnabas continued on to Lystra. They preached in the marketplace and Paul healed a cripple. The crowd declared them to be "gods" and compared Barnabas to Zeus (a powerful, good-looking Greek god) and Paul to Mercury (the weaker messenger of the gods). Paul and Barnabas used the opportunity to preach

about the one true "God." Following this successful mission, they returned to Jerusalem (Acts 14).

Some leaders in Jerusalem were concerned about the sudden growth of these new churches. They did not like all the new changes. The "Council of Jerusalem" (Acts 15) was held to determine guidelines for outreach. Many were concerned about the customs and practices of these new members. Paul saw it as natural acceptance for all of God's children.

Peter boldly spoke on behalf of sharing Christ's message with all peoples. Jesus' last words had been the Great Commission to "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19-20). Some compromises and agreements were made. Worldwide missions were approved. Paul and Barnabas prepared to begin a new journey.

True to form, Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance. Paul did not. The two disagreed and went their separate ways. Paul set off for Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. Barnabas and John Mark returned to the Island of Cyprus. Paul later mentioned a restored relationship with Barnabas and John Mark in his letters. Barnabas, the encourager, eventually taught Paul the lesson of acceptance and giving people a second chance.

Reflections

Barnabas' ministry was always about building up the body of Christ. He's the model of a church leader who can graciously forgive and forget. Barnabas shared the love of Jesus Christ. He talked the talk and walked the walk.

Sometimes a simple word or deed can make all the difference in another person's life. Barnabas helped make possible the ministries of at least two great leaders of the church: Paul (the great evangelist) and John Mark (the evangelical Gospel writer). Barnabas' gift of encouragement helped the early church in

Jerusalem, the church of Antioch, Paul, John Mark, churches in Cyprus, churches in Galatia, and Christians of all times.

It was a great honor when Barnabas received his new name, but his original name also had great value. Once again, the name "Joseph" means, "may God add children." Whether known as Joseph or Barnabas, he helped add many children to God's special kingdom. In the end, it's not really the name that matters; it's what we do for the glory of God.

Strength Finders talent: Self-Assurance

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252332/self-assurance-theme.aspx>

Self-assurance is a unique talent. Gallup Clifton studies around the world list it as one of the rarest. Such a person is self-confident in themselves. They have an inner compass that helps them navigate tough decisions in life. They are willing to take calculated risks because of experience and personal wisdom. They are known for making the right decision.

Barnabas demonstrated this when he chooses Paul to accompany him with the mission to Antioch. Later he showed the same valued judgement by helping John Mark when he was struggling. Paul ended up being a gifted evangelist and writing many of the books of the New Testament. Mark wrote the first Gospel and went on to be known as a courageous church leader.

Self-assurance is from the influencing domain. Acts 4 tells us how Barnabas gave a significant gift for the early church to help others in need. His act empowered others to respond with generous hearts. The words "generous" and "Genesis" come from the same root word. Our gifts of benevolence and acts of kindness are but faint echoes of the gift of God's love for creation itself.

Enneagram connections: Two

Barnabas was a very empathetic person. He listened to people who were going through pain and struggle. Paul had persecuted the Christians and now wanted a second chance. John Mark had abandoned the 1st missionary journey and now wanted a second chance. Barnabas was only one who demonstrated forgiveness and helped provided healing.

Barnabas acts like a very high level two who has integrated their ability to stand out and yet remain humble. Barnabas never bragged about his accomplishments. He appeared to appreciate the opportunity to help others achieve success. Paul never hesitated to brag about his accomplishments in his work for the kingdom of God. Barnabas probably felt pride for his accomplishments but kept it to himself. Barnabas was a very gifted mentor for many in the early church.

St Francis of Assisi said always proclaim the Good News; and use words only when you really must. Barnabas shared God's love more by his actions than his words. What an encouraging witness.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-two>

integrated

*St. Barnabas, with John his sister's son,
Set sail for Cyprus; leaving in their wake
That chosen Vessel, who for Jesus' sake
Proclaimed the Gentiles and the Jews at one.
Divided while united, each must run
His mighty course not hell should overtake;
And pressing toward the mark must own the ache
Of love, and sigh for heaven not yet begun.
For saints in life-long exile yearn to touch
Warm human hands, and commune face to face;
But these we know not ever met again:
Yet once St. Paul at distance overmuch
Just sighted Cyprus; and once more in vain
Neared it and passed; - not there his landing-place.*

Christina Rossetti 'Verses' (1893)

Questions

1. Canterbury Cathedral Dean Henry Alford was known as a caring friend (author of "Come You Thankful People Come"). These verses reflect his appreciation of Barnabas' ministry. What are the gifts of mighty words and wisdom true?

From the Twelve, with love unblamed, "Son of consolation," named.

Blessed Spirit, Who didst call, Barnabas and holy Paul,
And didst them with gifts endue. Mighty words and wisdom true,

Grant us, Lord of life, to be. By their pattern full of Thee;
(1844)

2. Which people have encouraged you in your faith journey? What difference has it made?

3. Many ministries could benefit from a "Barnabas Gift." Do you have a possession that could make a significant difference for others? Why should we give from our hearts?

