

Joseph

*the story of an
encourager*

Who is the **third** best known “Joseph” in all of Scripture?

He provided food for the hungry in a time of severe famine. *No, it wasn't Joseph, the favored son of Jacob.* He believed the best about an individual—when others assumed the worst. *No, it wasn't Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus.* He was central to the phenomenal growth of the first-century church. Yet this man's fruitfulness did not depend so much on his knowledge and skills: his success in bringing others to Jesus was a natural outgrowth of his attitude and relationship to other people.

So...who is the third best known “Joseph” in all of Scripture?

The apostles were so impressed by his service to others that they changed his name to better reflect this wonderful quality. “And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called **Barnabas** by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement)...” (Acts 4:36)

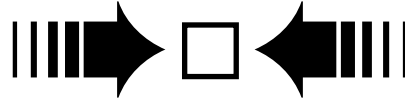
The Greek word translated “encouragement” is **paraklesis**, a form of the same word that Jesus used to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14:16–17. The word literally means “to call to one's side.” What the Holy Spirit was to the apostles—comforting, strengthening and encouraging them in Jesus' absence—Barnabas was in a measure to the first-century church.

The importance of Barnabas to the church cannot be overestimated. And today, his example remains. By learning from Barnabas' spirit of encouragement toward others, we too can learn how to best promote the spiritual growth of our brethren and those who are without Christ! *Are you ready?*

[By the way...there's a test at the top of the next page.]

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Test *[told you so...]*: Everything we know about Barnabas is found in the following passages of the New Testament: Acts 4:32–36; 9:26–30; 11:19–30; 12:25–15:41; 1 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 2:1–21; Colossians 4:10. Examine them carefully. In the box provided below—using a very sharp pencil—copy every memorable word, every significant platitude Barnabas is said to have spoken throughout his renowned ministry of encouragement...



What's the point of this cranial exercise? Isn't it ironic that not one pep talk spoken by the very Son of Encouragement is recorded in Scripture? What does this imply of the nature of encouragement? _____

Precisely **how then did Barnabas encourage**, or stand beside, others?
I'm very thankful you asked...



Barnabas stood beside others through sacrifice of self on their behalf

So close was the fellowship of those first Christians in Jerusalem that they shared of all they had with one another. Those disciples who owned property sold it and gave the sum to the apostles that they might distribute it “to each, as any had need” (Acts 4:35). In particular, the Holy Spirit cited Barnabas, “who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37).

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It has been said, “How we use our money demonstrates the reality of our love for God. In some ways it proves our love more consciously than depth of knowledge, length of prayers, or prominence of service. Those things can be feigned, but the use of our possessions show us up for what we actually are.”


The apostle John wrote, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:16–18).

We have all experienced the inexpressible comfort when one of our brethren came to our aid. It might have been financial help, assistance with the housework or cooking meals during an illness. Perhaps it was counseling or merely a word of encouragement. We still remember the spiritual strength we received from those efforts, though the gift itself is gone.


When we similarly give of ourselves to others, we are reflecting the love of God in our lives. The same type of love that prompted God to give of Himself freely when He sacrificed His Son for our sins. Such love—when present in our lives as it was in the life of Barnabas—can only draw others closer to the cross!



 Can you recall a time when you witnessed an individual stand beside another through sacrifice of self on his behalf?

[Relate.]  Discuss the validity of the statement: “We still remember the spiritual strength we received from those efforts,

though the gift itself is gone. [Comment.]  In Hebrews 10:24

Paul wrote, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” Effective encouragement is thoughtful and relevant to the need. Can you imagine any circumstance where it might not be appropriate for an individual to encourage—to stand beside—another through the sacrifice of money after the example of Barnabas? [Explain.]  Barnabas stood beside others through sacrifice of self on their behalf. What other principles can you learn from his example?



Barnabas stood beside others through strengthening their spirit

Had it not been for the sovereign providence of God, the church might have died in her infancy through the efforts of a young Jewish rabbi named Saul. His persecution, according to Acts 8:3, ravaged the church in Jerusalem. So successful were his efforts in that city, he determined to travel to Damascus and pursue the Christians who had fled north. It was on the road to Damascus that Jesus appeared to Saul, convincing him to serve the Lord whom he had previously persecuted. (See Acts 9:1–22.)

You can imagine the hesitation with which the church in Jerusalem received news of Saul's conversion. "And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26).

Was there no one in the Jerusalem congregation who would reach out to Saul? No one who placed Saul's well-being above his own? "...Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Dasmascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27).

Think for a moment of Barnabas' intercession on behalf of Saul. Unable to know for certain of the validity of Saul's conversion, Barnabas risked his very life to stand beside Saul. Not many of us are ever called upon to risk so much on behalf of another person's soul; are you—at the very least—willing, for example, to become vulnerable to share Jesus with your family, a neighbor or coworker? Would you risk your reputation—if not your very life—to testify of Jesus to a lost soul?

If Barnabas had never served as the bridge between Saul and the church, imagine the loss of this determined young rabbi—who later became known as Paul the apostle! Every soul ever persuaded by Paul to obey the gospel, whether by his words or letters, owes a debt to Barnabas. All due, not to great skill, but simply to an attitude of selfless service to others.

Another example of Barnabas' interest in the spiritual growth of others is recalled in the eleventh chapter of Acts. Although the household of Cornelius had recently obeyed the gospel, many Jews were yet reluctant to share Jesus



with the Gentiles (Acts 11:19). However, in Antioch there were some who “began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20–21)


Upon news of the Gentiles’ conversion at Antioch, the Jerusalem congregation desired to send a man to investigate these happy tidings. By now the church had recognized Barnabas as indeed a fruitful servant to others, and, therefore, selected him to make the journey. “Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:23–24).

Barnabas, like his heavenly Father, was no respecter of persons. The pretences of social status did not prejudice the joy he felt when others obeyed the gospel and persevered. Nothing brought Barnabas greater joy than the spiritual growth of others; consequently, he did all he could to selflessly encourage it. And what about you?

Listen again to the result of Barnabas’ work in Antioch: “And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.” Was it because Barnabas was an intellectual genius or a silver-tongued orator? No, but simply because “he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24).



 Compare the hesitation of the disciples at Jerusalem with Barnabas’ willingness to intercede on Saul’s behalf. How do our preconceptions hinder us from reaching out to others—those within Christ as well as those without? [*Consider.*] 

The church at Jerusalem was quick to send Barnabas to Antioch to investigate the conversion of the Gentiles. Imagine what a wonderful time of fellowship that must have been! How privileged Barnabas was to be in the middle of such a revival. Do you suppose it’s merely coincidence that encouragers often find themselves in encouraging situations? [*Discuss.*] 
Barnabas stood beside others through strengthening their spirit. What other principles can you learn from his example?



Barnabas stood beside others through patience and compassion

As the first-century church prepared to take the gospel beyond Jerusalem, past Antioch and into Asia, Paul and Barnabas were selected to lead the mission. Barnabas' nephew, John Mark, accompanied them to support them in the work. (See Acts 12:25; 13:1–5.)

The reason can only be conjectured—perhaps fear or simple homesickness—but early in the journey, John Mark abandoned the two missionaries and returned home (Acts 13:13). Paul and Barnabas continued on their way, preaching and immersing, and established several congregations.

Sometime later, Paul and Barnabas determined to retrace their steps and visit the young congregations planted on the previous journey (Acts 15:36). Barnabas desired to once again take John Mark, “but Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:38). The contention between these two great men was so sharp that Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul recruited Silas and headed east into Asia.

Since we are not told all of the particulars, it is difficult to determine who was right and who was wrong. One thing is certain, however; Barnabas characteristically demonstrated the greater patience and compassion to young John Mark.

It is very easy for those of us who have lived in Christ for some time to become impatient with those who are young and yet weak in the faith. Eventually, Paul came to love and respect John Mark for his work, recommending him to the brethren (Colossians 4:10) and counting him as a fellowlaborer in the gospel (Philemon 24). What would have been young John Mark's fate had it not been for the patience and compassion of Barnabas?

Because of Barnabas' unwillingness to give up on his young nephew, John Mark grew to become an effective laborer for Jesus and penned the gospel that bears his name, Mark. How many men and women, boys and girls, are there who are similar to John Mark, whose spiritual future depends upon your attitude toward them? Perhaps there is within your sphere of influence another John Mark who—with just a little extra patience and compassion on your part— will bear considerable fruit for Jesus. A sobering thought indeed!



Remember how Barnabas interceded for Saul when the former persecutor needed a friend and a second chance? Should the apostle have acted differently toward John Mark, a young man in need of a second chance? [Discuss.] Did anyone ever see potential in you when no one else would even give you a look? Is there someone in your acquaintance today who might need your encouragement to fulfill his or her potential? [Resolve.] Barnabas stood beside others through patience and compassion. What other principles can you learn from his example? How expensive is encouragement? [Reflect.] One final thought...Take another look at the result of Barnabas' ministry of encouragement in each of the examples cited throughout this study. What common "fruit" accompanied his good work? What can we learn from his legacy?