

# Barnabas: Ordinary Everyday Faith

Acts 4:36-37; 9:27-28; 11:23-24, 30; 15:37-39

Dr. Jeremiah Ebeling ---- October 8, 2023

Well, good morning, Grace. You can take a seat. It's awesome to be with you this morning. My name is Jeremiah and I am the Family Life Pastor here at Grace, and I'll be preaching the sermon today. Matt Cassidy was a late scratch this past week. He got sick a couple of days ago. Either that, or he's mad at me and this is how he's taking it out on me. I'm hoping it's the former.

But that means that we're going to do a short little detour together today. Our David series will continue next week—that's the plan—with that awesome night of worship next Sunday evening.

But for this morning, what we're going to do together is we're going to jump ahead about a thousand years in church history—just a thousand—and we'll be in the Book of Acts today. So, if you've got your Bibles or your Bible app, you can open them up to the Book of Acts. And we're going to be on a journey through Acts together. I think we'll enjoy our time together this morning.

When you think of the men and women in Scripture who God has worked through to change the trajectory of human history and to alter the destiny of His people and His church, who do you think of? Who comes to mind for you?

I mean, naturally, our minds go to the heroic men and women of faith and courage that the Bible talks about at length and tells the stories of. We think of Joseph, we think of Esther, we think of Abraham and Moses. We think of Ruth and David. We think of Peter, Paul, and Mary—not the band—the New Testament ones.

But we think about these men and women who were used mightily by God. But just as often in the Bible and throughout history, and even much more often, as a matter of fact, what God does is choose to work through the ordinary, everyday faith of people who are committed to Him; people who are submitted to His will and seeking to obey Him.

And this morning we're going to study the life of one of those individuals. We're going to take a look at a man whose name you might recognize from Scripture, but you may be a little

unclear on how it was that God used this individual. We're going to study his life and see how he was used by the Lord. He's one of those lesser known believers in the New Testament whose ordinary, everyday faith and character in ministry were used by the Lord in order to work in the lives of those in the early Church. He was a significant part of what happened in those first couple of decades in the history of the early Church.

So, we're going to look at him and we're going to see this ministry: that God actually used this ordinary, everyday man and his faith and his ministry to spread the Gospel out of the Middle East and as far as Rome and even to us today. His name? His name is Barnabas. We're going to look at the story of Barnabas today because he was a man who God used to shape several events in those first couple of decades of the early Church.

And we might recognize Barnabas' name because it shows up twenty-eight times in the New Testament. It's all over the Book of Acts. The first time we meet Barnabas is in Acts 4. Before we get there, just to put it in a little bit of context, in Acts 1 Jesus ascends to heaven. And as He does, He commissions believers to spread the news that He had defeated sin and death, and that by believing in Him we can have eternal life. We can have salvation in His name. And as that first group of 120 Christians began sharing the Gospel in Jerusalem, and as thousands are coming to Christ, these early believers did an amazing job of taking care of one another and providing for those Christians who are poor, those who were in need. And there were many of those. And so, it's in that context that we meet Barnabas.

### **Acts 4:36-37**

**Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.**

And let's read the introduction to this man Barnabas in Acts 4. We'll be in verses 36 and 37. This is what Luke writes in Acts. He says, "**Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.**"

And so, in this initial passage we find out about Barnabas' hometown. We find out about his ethnicity, and then also his spiritual heritage. We discover that Barnabas was a native of the

island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean, but that he was also Jewish--specifically, a Levite. And the Levites had been charged of taking care of the temple in Jerusalem. So, we don't quite know how this part of the story happened, but it's very likely that Barnabas would have moved to Jerusalem as a young man, and that while he was there he would've performed the duties of a Levite and would've helped and assisted in taking care of the temple. And it's also likely that while he was in Jerusalem he would have been exposed to Jesus—he would have met Jesus; that he would have heard His teachings; that later he would hear the teachings of the apostles. And at some point he comes to put his trust in Christ. He puts his faith in the Lord and begins to follow Him.

## 1. Barnabas Was an Encourager

And we also learn from the passage something important about Barnabas' character. In Acts 4 we learn this about him: that Barnabas was an encourager. Barnabas was not the name his momma gave him. His name was Joseph. But as the apostles got to know Barnabas, they gave him this nickname. They said, *This man is an encourager. He is the son of encouragement.* That's what the name Barnabas means, actually: son of encouragement. To be the son of something meant that you were intimately associated with it, that it was woven into your DNA, that it was central to who you are. And so, at his core, Barnabas was an encourager. And this word "encouragement" comes from two Greek words that mean "to call out" and "alongside." It means to call out affirmation to those who are around you. And so, as Barnabas moved through life, he was the kind of person who called out affirmation to those who were running alongside him in the race of life.

In long distance races like a marathon there are pacesetters who carry signs, and these signs show the pace that they're running. And so, if you want to finish that marathon with a certain time, what you do is you attach yourself early in the race to this particular pacesetter. And you know that's the time you're going to finish with if you just follow this pacesetter for the entire race. And most of these pacesetters are quiet and focused. I mean, they're running 26.2 miles holding a sign. They've got a pack of people that they're trying to get to this finish line on time. So, they're dialed in. They're focused on the task at hand. But one time I had this pacesetter who I was following, and she was not that. She was anything but quiet. Because throughout this race she would yell and encourage us with, "You can do it! You're almost

there!” She started saying that at mile six, so she was an absolute liar. We were not almost there—we had twenty miles left. But twenty miles in she was still saying that. She would yell out to us, “You’re not alone. Come on, we’re doing this together!” She was just so encouraging, so motivating, not quiet at all. And it was just so fun to follow somebody who was so abundantly encouraging and affirming to those who were around her.



That’s a Barnabas, isn’t it? For that is a daughter of encouragement calling out affirmation, encouragement, hope, to those who are suffering along with her, to those she’s running alongside in this race.

So, let’s just pause for a moment. Before we move on, let’s apply this to us and where we are. And Barnabas was much more than a verbal encourager. But let’s take a moment to think about how we use our words. Let’s think about how we steward the words that we share, that we impart, to the people who are running alongside us in life. Think about that for a moment. Do we call out words of affirmation and hope to those who we’re running alongside, those who are with us at home or at work, those who we are in friendship with, those who we are at odds with, those who are on social media? Are we sons, are we daughters, of encouragement to those around us?

Because you don't have to have the gift of encouragement to be an encourager to those running alongside you.

And so, if you're a parent, let's do this with our children. Let's express our love to them daily and actively be on the lookout for how we can confirm godly character traits that we see in them. And it's going to be hard, because it seems like—especially when the kids are younger—no, anytime you have kids—that they're difficult, there's somebody disobeying. So, it can be hard to make this a part of what we say to our kids, and even prevalent in how we speak to our children. But our children need this from us. And when they grow up, they're not going to remember most of the words that we said to them. They'll remember some, for sure. But they're not going to remember most of the words we said to them. But do you know what they will remember? They're going to remember the relational temperature of our homes. They're going to remember the ways that we experienced our words to them. They're going to remember how our tone made them feel. They will carry that memory with them.

And in a performance-driven world, they need us to affirm them for who they are, not just for what they've done. They need to hear from us, to be reminded that they have value and dignity and worth as image-bearers of Jesus. They need to know—especially when they're in that elementary phase or younger—while all those little minds and hearts are baking, while they're still being formed—they need to hear this kind and honest affirmation from us as their moms and dads and guardians and caretakers. We need to look for the special things about them, the things that God has made them to be, and encourage them to glorify God with those attributes. Even in our correction, even we have discipline for them, we can do that with a graciousness. We can do that in a way that gives them hope that God can help them to change, instead of shaming them. We can do this for our kids. We can encourage them. And then when they become teens and it gets a little harder to like them, it's so important that we've established this pattern of being affirmers, of being encouragers, of our children, and doing that honestly so. And especially we've got to build up this relational bank account. We've got to deposit lots of love early, because we're going to need to pull out some withdrawals in those adolescent years. We're going to need that.

And if you're married, you know one simple way to be a son or a daughter of encouragement in your home and with your spouse is just to say “thank you” a lot. Say it every day. Look for the ways that your husband or your wife is serving and helping and meeting the

needs in the household. Say “thank you” for that. One of the things I appreciate so much about my wife Dayna is that she consistently looks for even the mundane, everyday tasks that I do. And she says “thank you.” She points them out and she expresses appreciation for those things. And do you know what? In seventeen years of marriage I have never once gotten tired of hearing it. And even more, it makes me want to do the same with her and see the ways that she serves our family day in and day out, and to say “thank you,” “thank you for doing that.”

Encouragement and discouragement are both highly contagious. And so, it is up to us as spouses, as parents, as leaders in our home. We get to determine if there’s an aroma of encouragement or the stench of a critical spirit that fills our home. What’s our home going to be filled with? We get to decide that. We get to determine that.

You know, at home, at work, here at church, in your neighborhood, the ten people who know you best, who are closest to you, what would they say when it comes to how you use your words, how you steward your words? What would they say you’re the son or the daughter of? What would their nickname be for you if they had to come up with one? Consider what that might be.

And let’s choose to bring the aroma of encouragement into the rooms that we walk into and in the lives around us. Because life is hard. It is grueling. It is a marathon. And we all need a kind word. **Proverbs 12:25** says, “**Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.**” Let’s cheer up those around us with kindness. Let’s be a Barnabas to the people in our lives.

And it’s remarkable that the apostles of Jesus, when they thought of Barnabas and they got to know this man, said, “This is a son of encouragement”; that when he walks into a room he breathes life into the room, he breathes oxygen into the room, he lifts people up. He builds them up.

But we see that’s true about Barnabas. It can be true about us.

## **2. Barnabas Looked for Needs and Did His Best to Meet Them**

So, Barnabas was an encourager. But that’s not all. There’s something else we discover about Barnabas. Barnabas looked for needs and he did his best to meet them.

In a world of takers Barnabas was a giver. He had this view of his time and his abilities, his gifts, his resources, those things that were given to him by God, that they were not given to

him for his indulgence. Those things were given to him that he might share them with others, and not out of obligation. It was out of a willing heart that he did this. He knew that he had been blessed to be a blessing.

**Acts 4:36-37**

**Barnabas ...<sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

And so, in that passage we looked at earlier in Acts 4 we see the first example of that. Because there were these impoverished Christians that were living in Jerusalem. And when Barnabas heard about their need he didn't hope that someone else would go and help with that need. No, he looked around and said, *What can I do to help meet this need? What little small part can I play to meet this need in front of me?*. And so, in verse 37 of Acts 4, Luke writes that Barnabas "sold a field he owned. And he brought that money and he put it at the apostles' feet." He said, *Here, please, take this. Use it.* And we learn that Barnabas sells some land that he owned and he gives some money to the apostles to provide for the believers in the Jerusalem church who couldn't provide for themselves. And selling this land was no small sacrifice. Because in the first century land wasn't just an investment; land was livelihood. Because a field meant crops and crops meant food on the table. But it wasn't just livelihood. Land was also inherited. It was a family's past, it was their present, it was their future. And so, Barnabas saw that there were Christians in need and he willingly gave what he had to meet that need. And what he gave hurt. But he was still willing to do it.

And then later in Acts 11 after persecution against the church breaks out in Jerusalem, the Christians there are forced out of the city, and they're scattered. That starts in Acts 8. But in Acts 11 what we see is that Christians have now made their way up north to Antioch. And as they get to Antioch, the Greeks that are in Antioch begin hearing the Gospel, and the city is lit up by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so many Greeks are becoming Christians that the church in Jerusalem says, *We've got to send somebody to help pastor this small, fledgling church that's just getting started.* And so, they look around and say, *Who can we send?* And who do they find? They find Barnabas. They say Barnabas is the one who can take on this monumental task of

pastoring this very small and young church. And so, that's what they do—they send Barnabas on to Antioch.

### **Acts 11:23-24**

**When Barnabas arrived and saw what the grace of God had done in Antioch, he was glad and encouraged them all. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.**

In Acts 11:23-24 Luke says, **“When Barnabas arrived and saw what the grace of God had done in Antioch, he was glad and encouraged them all.”** Of course, he did ... son of encouragement. **“He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”**

There you see Barnabas again, and what's he doing? He's encouraging others to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He's looking around and he's calling out to those running alongside him. And he's giving them hope and affirmation. He's sharing Jesus with them.

And notice about Barnabas that he's got no title. He's not one of the twelve disciples, he's not called an apostle until later. He's got no title, but do you know what he does have? He's got a willingness, a willing heart, to meet the needs around him. And that's all he needed. He does this, but then he also gets others involved. He goes to Tarsus and he finds the Apostle Paul, and he says, *Let's go, Paul. There's a need at Antioch. Let's go. We're going to co-pastor this church together.* They go to Antioch and they do that for a year. They shepherd this young church and they begin to lead and to serve and to preach and they do this for a year together.

Later on, in Acts 11:30 when a famine breaks out in Jerusalem and the Christians find themselves in need once again, Barnabas takes the money that's been given by that church in Antioch and takes it back down to Jerusalem to help that church there. He kind of lives by this motto that if someone has a need and he's able to meet it, he will. Barnabas is there.





You've probably heard of the small West Texas town of Marfa. Marfa is a dusty, beat-up, old ranching town, that weirdly is a hub for artists and has a Prada store.



It's a weird little town. But when people move to Marfa, usually they show up with some vision of how they're going to make their name great in Marfa. They show up looking to open up the next big art gallery or something along those lines. But I heard several years ago a story about a man who came to Marfa, and instead of some grand vision for what he wanted to do in Marfa, he showed up just asking, *What do the people of Marfa need? What could I do to help what's already here, to help the people who are here and serve them in some way?* And he was told, *You know, we don't really need another art gallery. We have plenty of those. Do you know what we do need? We need a laundromat. People need a place where they can do their laundry.* And so, what did he do? He opened a laundromat. He said, *I can do that. I can help the people of Marfa in that way.* One of the members of the Chamber of Commerce in Marfa was interviewed, and he said, "You know, it's great having another art gallery, but sometimes you just need a laundromat." And then they said, *We'd love to have a coffee shop here, a place where people can connect, where they can get to know one another, especially with all the new people who are coming here. It'd be great to have a coffee shop.* So, what does this man do? He opens up a

coffee shop right next to his laundromat. It's a place where people can come and get to know one another. *You know, laundromat, coffee shop—what do you need, Marfa? I want to serve your needs.* That's what he came here to do. He didn't come to make his name great. He came to serve those people and to meet the needs that he could. And that's exactly what he did.

So, in a world of consumers, have we decided to be givers? Who are we, as we go out into the world? The team with which you most closely work in your job—would they say that you look for needs and that you do your best to meet those needs? And not just what's in your job description, but do you show up at work and in your relationships with co-workers do you come listening for what the Spirit might show you—a need that a colleague or a supervisor has, that you might be able to help serve, pray, minister in some way? Somebody who does that, who shows up to the office with that attitude, with that mindset, that Barnabas kind of mindset—do you know what they're called? They're called leaders. They don't have to have the title. Everybody knows it. And there is maybe no better way for supervisors and colleagues and employees to get to know our Savior than to have you show up as a believer who is more concerned about the needs around us and about building our little kingdom at work.

We can be like Barnabas. He was an encourager. He was the kind of person who showed up looking for needs and did whatever he could to meet them.

### **3. Barnabas Gave Second Chances to the Undeserving**

And third, Barnabas gave second chances to the undeserving. Barnabas didn't write someone off because they had a rough track record. He was even willing to stand alone if he had to in order to offer a second chance to an undeserving person.

This is what Barnabas did, and we see it in two different places in Acts. In Acts 9 is the first place we see this. It's after the conversion of Saul, who would later have his name changed to Paul—the Apostle Paul. But Saul had been mercilessly persecuting Christians when he is met in a life-transforming way on his way to Damascus. And he has his world totally revolutionized and ends up putting his faith in Christ. And then Saul, now Paul, comes to the Christians who are in Jerusalem. But they don't want to have anything to do with him. They're scared of him. They think he's a mole, that this is a ruse; that he's just there with some evil scheme, and that he's there to be hostile, to persecute them once again.

## **Acts 9:27-28**

**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey has seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.**

But then look at what changes everything. In Acts 9:27: **“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul”**—Paul’s original name—**“on his journey had seen the Lord and the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.”**

And so, what does Barnabas do? He vouches for Paul. He brings Paul in to get to know the apostles. And he is the only one we know about who is willing to give this man a second chance. And this decision by Barnabas is what launches Paul into what God has next for him. The very next verse, verse 28, says, **“So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”**

And so, we see Barnabas, this son of encouragement, opening the door for Paul to join the church in Jerusalem and begin a ministry there that wouldn’t end there. It would reach the ends of the earth in that first century. And he would go on to write thirteen books in our New Testament—almost half of the books in our New Testament.

But that’s not the only story of Barnabas offering second chances to someone who is undeserving. We see it a second time in Acts 13. There’s this one last story where Paul and Barnabas are teamed up again, and they return to Antioch from Jerusalem. And when they get back to Antioch, the church there sends them on their first international mission trip, and they are specifically sent to bring the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles. Well, they decide on this trip to bring Barnabas’s cousin. His name is Mark. They bring Mark along with them on this first missionary journey. And for reasons we don’t entirely understand, Mark leaves in the middle of the trip. He takes off. He deserts Paul and Barnabas in the middle of this first journey. And so, Paul and Barnabas get home to Antioch and they’re sent out a second time on a second missionary journey. And let’s look at what happens when it comes to Mark.

### Acts 15:37-39

**Barnabas also wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,<sup>38</sup> but Paul did not think it was wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.<sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.**

Let's look at what happens in Acts 15:37-39. It says, **“Barnabas also wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.”**

And so, Barnabas and Paul can't agree on what to do about Mark, because Mark had left them on their first missionary trip. And so, what happens? Barnabas and Paul end up splitting up. They go their separate ways. And Barnabas takes Mark with him and Paul heads in an entirely different direction. We don't know why Barnabas made his decision to give Mark a chance. But whatever his reasons were, what we do know is that he refused to give up on Mark, and he gives him a second chance—a second chance that Mark didn't deserve.

And then, look, many years later, when Paul is in prison in Rome, look at what Paul says about Mark. In **2 Timothy 4:11** this is what the apostle writes. Paul says, **“Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”** He says, *Whatever you do, I want Mark here. I want this man with me.* And he wants him in Rome as part of his ministry there, even from prison, because of what a huge help Mark is to him. And so, you see, Barnabas' second chance restores Mark to meaningful ministry. It's because of Barnabas' decision. And not only that, but this is the same Mark who will go on to write the Gospel of Mark.

You see, how did Mark go from an untrustworthy young man to someone who is one of Paul's most trusted, closest companions? To one who would be ready to write a gospel about Jesus Christ and His life in ministry? What's the difference? God used a lot of things, no doubt. But at least in part, one of the things that God used was this man Barnabas who was willing to give a man who didn't deserve it a second chance. He didn't give up on him. And Barnabas had done that years earlier with Paul. He does it again with Mark.

So, I want you to think: is there someone in your orbit who needs a second chance? Is there a person who you have closed and locked the door to relationally and the Spirit of God might be urging you to help restore that person to meaningful ministry once again? Is there somebody in your life that you can think of who that might be true about? Is there someone that we have written off and we need to be open to restoration and reconciliation with that person? Is there someone with whom we need to allow the opportunity to regain trust that was lost in the past?

And I think it's so important that each of us remembers that we all as believers are the recipients of second chances from God; that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And God has given us second chance after second chance after second chance. This is what He does with us, and what Barnabas has done. And we can choose to do this too. We can extend those second chances to the undeserving as well.

And look, absolutely, there are people who are dangerous for us, who because of past abuse or something similar this may not apply to. But look, that's the one percent. And let's not allow that one percent to keep us from the ninety-nine percent that God might want to use us to restore to relationship or to meaningful ministry; someone that we, like Barnabas, could refuse to give up on despite of a past failure or sin or mistake.

### **Application: How Do We Become Like Barnabas?**

How do you become a Barnabas? You do it not by seeking to make a name for yourself. You seek to do it in the places where God has you, in the rooms that you walk into, in the relationships that you're in. You show up asking questions like, "What words of refreshment do they need to hear from me right now? What are the soul-level needs that this person might have that I could help with, that I could meet? How could I restore this person that nobody else believes in? How could I be a part of that, God? Do You want to use me that way?"

Because just imagine how refreshing our home would be if we walked into them each day asking, "What edifying words do our mate, our children, our friends, our roommates need to hear from us after a long, exhausting day?"

Think about how different our workplaces might be if we entered them looking and listening for the soul, the spirit-level needs that the people around us that we work with have that God might want to us to meet a need that we can be all in for; to serve and pray about and meet.

Think about our friendships. Think about how those might be different if we were willing to put away condemnation and judgment and be willing to offer second chances to someone who doesn't deserve it, to someone who needs a second chance in spite of a past mistake or a past failure or mess-up.

This is how we become a Barnabas. This is how we become a son or a daughter of encouragement. Let's go to the Lord and ask Him, that He might help us to imitate the character and the faith of this man Barnabas. Let's do that.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that this man Barnabas was submitted to You; that his desire was to do Your will, was to obey You, to follow You, even when it meant standing alone. And I thank You that You have recorded his story, that we might consider the outcome of his way of life, and that we might imitate his faith, just as Your Word tells us to do in Hebrews 13.*

*And Father, I pray that for each one of us, for each of my brothers and sisters, and I pray for me, that we might imitate Barnabas in the way that we use our words; that we might be encouragers, we might be affirmers; that we might be honest and generous with our hope and our affirmations. I pray that we would look for needs that are around us that we might be able to meet those and not wait for someone else to do it. I pray that we would be ready to offer second chances, Lord, just as we have received that from You; that we would be willing to give that to others. Lord, would You build this into us? We cannot become a Barnabas on our own. We need Your help, so we invite You in. It's in Jesus' name. Amen.*