

**Series: WORDS**  
**4. A tongue that gives life**  
**Barnabas the example – Acts 4.36-37**

There is an old story about a preacher leaving a church. At his farewell dinner, he tried to encourage one of the church members, "Don't be so sad. The next preacher might be better than me." He replied, "That's what they said last time, but it keeps getting worse." That wasn't something encouraging to hear the day you leave a church!

The Bible says in Proverbs 18:21 that: **Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.** Our words have power to bring healing and strengthen another person or to hurt in a very deep way. What we sow with our words is what we will harvest.

In the past weeks we have focused on the negative aspects of the tongue, looking at the destructive power that a negative or a critical tongue can have on the lives of those who surround us and on our own life. But today we are going to focus on the power that the tongue has to give life, and one of the ways is found in the opportunity we all have to bring and give encouragement to those around us.

Ephesians 4:29 commands: Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. This isn't a suggestion, but is something God expects us to follow. In James 4:17 we are reminded that **it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.**

To understand then power of encouragement let's look at the life of a man named **Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement")**, Acts 4:36, which other versions translate as "**the son of consolation**" or "**the one who helps.**" Why do you think Joseph had this nickname? I imagine for being someone who regularly comforted and encouraged others.

How would you like to be known as a comforter, as a person who brings encouragement? Encouraging others is a choice we can make every day and all of us can become known as "**Sons of Encouragement**" or **Sons of Consolation**, instead of other negative things for which others can know us for.

When children begin to want to take their first steps and they fall, what do we do? We encourage them to stand up and try again, to not give up but to persevere. The same thing happens with young people and adults. There are a lot of people around us who are wrestling with problems, perhaps with their faith, who need someone to come along side and encourage them not to give up. We have the privilege to be able to make a difference in their lives, a difference that they will never forget

Someone once said the following: **Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you**". People who receive encouragement usually don't forget those who gave encouragement.

Maya Angelou, an African American poet that died this past May wrote: **People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel.** Words of encouragement not only lift up people but can also change radically their lives and this was what Barnabas did.

What does encouragement mean? It means to give support, confidence, or hope to someone who needs it because of being immersed in a situation that makes them feel vulnerable or weak. Just how can we encourage those who need it?

### **1. We can be by their side.**

Before knowing Christ, the apostle Paul was called Saul of Tarsus and he was a terrible person. He not only persecuted the followers of Jesus, but had them imprisoned. The first Christians were afraid of this man and obviously when they heard about his conversion they doubted that it was genuine, and that's why they didn't want to accept him. Paul was at a crossroads in his life and I imagine he felt confused and alone. He had become a Christian and the Christians did not want him. But Acts 9:27 says that **Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles.**

Even though nobody believed and nobody wanted Paul, Barnabas decided not only to be by his side, but also to walk with him and take him where he needed to go. I believe that the presence of Barnabas was decisive and essential for him to not give up, and continue forward in spite of his circumstances and the response of the Christians.

To encourage means to walk alongside someone and we can also have this same impact in the lives of people, who for different reasons, feel alone and confused if we are willing to be at their side and walk with them.

### **2. We can stand up for those who need encouragement.**

Acts 9:27 **Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.** Barnabas was not only at the side of Paul, but he spoke in his favor, he stood up for him. He saw in Saul what others couldn't see and believed in him when nobody believed. This support was exactly what Paul needed at that moment and was crucial for the future of this servant of God.

This wasn't the only time Barnabas did such a thing. On a missionary journey, a young companion named John Mark abandoned the group and when they were planning another journey to visit the churches that had been planted, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement whether John Mark could accompany them again. The two had different opinions and as a result they separated.

In this case, Barnabas stood up for the young man because he wanted to give him a second chance, even if it meant being against Paul. And though their team was divided, two other teams were formed and the Gospel was spread more rapidly in result, all because Barnabas believed in Mark.

How many people around us need someone to speak up for them, to say what they don't know how to say, to believe in them even though no one else believes, to defend them, to believe in their potential? You can be that person who stands up for others and gives them encouragement so they don't give up. To do so sometimes we'll have to pay a price or we'll have to stand up against someone or against injustice. There are people that will go far if they find someone that believes and supports them.

### **3. We can inspire faith in those who need encouragement.**

Acts 11:21-23 **The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord. When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord.** The leaders of the church heard that a revival had exploded in Antioch and people were giving their lives to the Lord. How should they respond? What should they do? They knew exactly who the ideal person was to go and encourage the new believers, Barnabas. When he arrives he was extremely happy and **he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord.**

When we try to encourage another person it is very important to bring the people to God, remind them of His Presence and love, but also to encourage them to remain faithful.

When someone shares with you about the challenges they are facing, why not pray with that person at that moment? Why not invite God to their situation? Even when people aren't doing what God expects of them we have the responsibility, in love and respect, to be a spiritual influence over them so they don't go away from God.

There are many people around us who need to be reminded of God's love for them. They need to know they can call on Him, they need to know that they can have an encounter with Him. But it's important for people to know not only that we follow God, but they must see God in us.

V. 24 says that **Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.** He was a godly man and people saw God in Him. How do people see us? I pray that we may not only be known as good people but also that we might be filled with the spirit and firm in our own faith. I pray that the example we set may draw people to God.

### **What was the impact of the encouragement that Barnabas brought to others?**

Acts 11.25-26 **Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)**

#### **a. Barnabas impacted the Christians at Antioch**

A church was established in this city where believers were first called "Christians". Barnabas could say that he solidified what God was doing there and his presence, his encouragement, impacted the whole city. In the same way our encouragement can be used to solidify what God is doing in people's lives.

#### **b. Barnabas impacted the life of Paul**

Barnabas needed help to lead the new church at Antioch and that is why he chooses Paul and trains him to be a leader. One year later they plan a missionary journey and the Scriptures refer to Barnabas and Paul. But at a certain time there is a change and from that time onward they are referred to as Paul and Barnabas. Paul had been so well equipped by Barnabas that surpasses him in leadership.

The encouragement that Barnabas brought to the life of Paul was so great and important that he surpassed him. If it wasn't for the support of Barnabas, Paul would not have become who he was. What an example for us! How great to think that our encouragement and support can be so determining in the success of other people.

#### **c. Barnabas impacted the life of Mark**

Barnabas saw the potential in the life of John Mark in spite of his past failure. Instead of labeling him as a deserter, he gives him another chance. Later on Paul acknowledges that Barnabas was right about Mark when in his second letter to Timothy 4:11 he wrote: **Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry.** If it hadn't been for Barnabas believing in this young man and giving him another opportunity, perhaps today we would not have the gospel of Mark.

The encouragement that Barnabas brought to the life of this young man was so great and important that Mark also surpassed him. This second example shows that when we take the time to encourage and support other people we can bring extraordinary success to others.

Ronald Reagan once said that **"there is no limit to what we can achieve if we don't care who gets the credit"**. You might ask, what about me? In Proverbs 11:25 the word of God says that **the generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.** Don't be concerned about yourself because if you take care of others God will take care of you. It is the boomerang effect.

## Conclusion:

What a tremendous legacy Barnabas has left us. He is not only an example for all of us but he demonstrates the power that encouragement has. I challenge you to release this power through your life by seeking intentionally opportunities to give encouragement to others. Seek to praise what people do well instead of just criticizing what they do wrong. Let us go out with this purpose.

There are people we admire for what they are and what they do, but we never take time to verbalize our admiration for them or take the time to affirm them. Do it and this will bless them, whether this person is your husband or wife, boss, companion at work, friend, brother, father or mother.

Don't be like the hard hearted husband that after 30 years of marriage his wife was ready to quit on him. *'I have had it, living with you. You never tell me you love me anymore.'* The husband replied, *'I told you I loved you when we got married; if I change my mind I'll let you know.'*

I end by reminding us of the commandment of Ephesians 4:29 **Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.** Let's obey God's Word by doing what He expects of us.