

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Barnabas - Encouragement*

SERIES: *Stand Alone*

SCRIPTURES: *Acts*

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**Credit to Heather Zempel; John Ortberg; FF Bruce Commentary*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. It is good to worship with you today. Everybody here in the room and also to those of you tuning in on the live stream.

You know, there are two kinds of people in this world that can be represented by these two images. **Gas tank FULL and Gas tank EMPTY!** There are intelligent, responsible people...those who fill up their gas tank when it starts getting down around half a tank and basically live with their gas tank on full. They're never in fear of running out of fuel. If someone else borrows their car, they don't worry about whether they'll need to fill up or not.

And then there are careless, and irresponsible individuals, they're dangerous and you have to be cautious getting in their car, they drive around with their vehicles constantly flirting with empty. I speak sarcastically, because these two people live in my home. I'm always giving Jenny a hard time about this. You know how many vehicles will show you how many miles you can drive before you're out of fuel. Jenny loves to send me pictures...**with that gauge on zero**, with crying laughing faces. She likes to see how close she can get to 0. She tells me, our van can drive with 0 miles left...she knows this. Are you a gas tank full person or a gas tank near empty person? It's important to think about because...

Did you know people, also have tanks? We might call them “**emotional tanks.**”

Some people live life with their gauge above half full...all the time...consistently. And other people live life with their gauge constantly flirting with empty.

Wouldn't you love to be that person whose tank hovers above half full...consistently? Wouldn't you love to know the traits of somebody who lives that way? And the other part of this is, wouldn't you love to help other people live that way? Wouldn't you love to be the kind of person, who helps other people fill up their tank?

Have you noticed this before...when you are around someone who lives with their gauge above half...it makes your gauge go up, doesn't it? The Bible has a word for this. It's a very important word, the word is: **encouragement**. Emotionally filled up people, live lives of encouragement. It's a joyous, energizing, satisfying way to live. And it's contagious. These kind of people are a pleasure to be around and they fill up the emotional tanks of others.

And if you're around people who are constantly on empty, the same is true, isn't it? It can make you feel empty, your gauge tends to be influenced in that direction as well.

And I've been thinking a lot about that word encouragement over the last number of weeks. And just how important that word is, in our lives. How important it is to be part of a community of encouragers. In fact, it's one of the primary tasks of the church. Jesus knew, we live in a hard world, a broken world, a world of negativity and loneliness. There are a lot of people wondering around our world with gas tanks near empty. And he knew, there needs to be a group, even if it's just a small community of people, who live consistent lives of encouragement. Who will speak and impart joy and encouragement to the world. Filling up empty tanks.

So that's what I want to spend a few minutes talking about this morning, encouragement. Sometimes the messages we share in here are intellectual and sometimes they are challenging...today, I want the message to be encouraging. I want you to walk out of here today, knowing how to fill up your tank and the tanks of those around you. I want to talk about someone in the Bible who understood this concept really well and who lived a life with his gauge on full and how it impacted the lives of the people around him.

If you have your Bible turn with me to the book of **Acts**...it's in the New Testament, we're going start in chapter 4 and then make our way into a few other chapters. The guys name we're looking at today is

I. Barnabas

(SERMON GRAPHIC) He's kind of like the epitome of encouragement in the Bible. In fact, we've talked in here before about how names in your Bible are often significant...they tend to be symbolic about that person's character. Do you remember back on the first Sunday of June, we looked at a story in 1 Samuel where David met a couple. Their names were? **Nabal and Abigail**. That's right and remember I told you what Nabal's name means. **Fool**. And it was a description of his actions in the story. Foolish. Barnabas, his name means, **"son of encouragement."** His life exemplifies this character quality. We can understand better, what encouragement looks like by looking at his life. And so, we're going to look at three aspects of encouragement that we see in Barnabas. Ok?

First,

A. Encouragement is connected with generosity.

We're gonna read from Acts 4...

In this passage the writer, Luke, is describing some of the earliest church communities. Groups of people who lived shortly after Jesus and believed in the Jesus way of life. This is a description of one of those groups and pay attention to the generosity in the passage.

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had...³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

So this is kind of an interesting picture of the earliest church communities. It's certainly a different understanding of "ownership and private property" than many of us hold today, isn't it? **No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own...those who owned land or houses sold them...and it was distributed to anyone who had need.**

And it brings up interesting conversations sometimes, when we talk about taking the Bible literally...do you think we should literally live out this lifestyle today? Like when someone calls Five Forks church, in need of food or clothing or housing...should we send out an all-church email asking for people in the congregation to start selling property or items and bring that to be given to those in need?

How should we apply "this" to our lives in a capitalist economic system like we live in today?

However, we go about answering that question, certainly, this is a picture of **"extreme generosity"**, isn't it? So much so, that there are debates among Biblical scholars about how much this kind of lifestyle was actually practiced by the earliest

follower of Jesus. We don't know how many people, even in those early church communities, actually did this. But there was at least one. Verse 36...

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

There was at least one person in that community, who had an extremely generous heart...the son of encouragement...Barnabas.

Now, interesting description here, of Barnabas, that many of us don't realize. Notice he is a **Levite** from **Cyprus**. This means he comes from the family line, of Levi. One of the 12 original tribes of Israel, who were given special serving privileges at the Temple in Jerusalem...the Levites were like assistants to the priests. So that's the family line. But, Barnabas was from Cyprus. Which meant he hadn't been born in Israel. He was a **Hellenist** – and it doesn't mean, like a hellion (evil person)...Hellenist was a name given to **Israelites born outside of Israel**. In other words, he was like a foreigner. And at that time in history, there was great tension between the Jews born in Israel and the foreign Jews, born outside of Israel. Not really sure, if you qualify as pure Jews. And because of that, Barnabas would not have been allowed to serve in the temple like Levites normally would. He was a foreigner.

If you were Barnabas, how would you feel about that? A loss of status and privilege simply based on where he was born and something he had no control over. Probably not too happy, right?

But, Barnabas was a gas tank full kind of person...and he was filled with extreme generosity. And so he sold some of his property and brought it to the community anyway, to be given to those in need.

You can imagine the testimony of somebody many years later who had been a benefactor of Barnabas' generosity...We showed up in Jerusalem with nothing. We were from out of town. We didn't belong. We didn't speak the language. Most folks were too busy to notice us and many folks, noticed, but didn't want to share what they had earned for themselves. Our lives seemed hopeless. But then, out of the blue, there was this man who heard about our misfortune. And he sold what he had in order share with us. And our lives were changed.

Encouragement is often connected with generosity.

And so if you want to fill your encouragement tank this week, find some ways to be generous. Take some of your money, or some of your time or some of your resources...something specifically set aside for you and share it with someone else. It will fill up your tank. And if you want to fill up someone else encouragement tank, find some ways this week to be generous.

People who give, even though they have less money, worry less about their money than people who never give, whom you would think would worry less.

(John Ortberg)

I know it sounds counterintuitive, but if you want to fill up your tank and the tanks of those around you this week...if you want to be an encourager...find a way to be generous.

Second, Barnabas also shows us that

B. Encouragement is connected with grace.

Turn to **Acts 9:1 - Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who**

belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Many of you are familiar with the name Saul. And here we're not talking about the Saul in the book of 1 Samuel who became King of Israel. This Saul is a Pharisee, a Jewish religious leader. And what he's most well-known for, before his name change, is killing Christians.

When the early church formed, after Jesus resurrection, Saul was one of the main guys trying to squelch this new group. He was murderous, torturous...

In fact, here's how one follower of Jesus describes him.

Acts 9:13-14 - "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

He's on his way to Damascus to round up followers of Jesus and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. But, on the way there, Saul meets Jesus. And **Jesus changes his life.**

And I'll just pause here for a moment to point this out, you should know that this is what Jesus does. He changes lives. I don't want you to know about Jesus, or what you think about Jesus. Many of you in here have already chosen to follow him. But if you came today or maybe you've been coming for a long time and you're not completely certain about this whole Christianity thing. Maybe you have questions, you have doubts. Maybe there are Christians you know, and you think I'm not sure I want to be like them. I guess I would encourage you, just start following Jesus because Jesus changes lives, he changes hearts.

That's why as a church we've said that's our main focus. You see it on the sign every time you come and go from our church parking lot. You hear multiple times a year in our sermons: we want to be a group of people striving to know and to love and to follow Jesus. It's easy to get off track. It's easy in this world, in our lives to become too busy. To become distracted. To miss the point. But in the end that's what we want to be about. That's what the church should be about. Because when you meet Jesus he can change and he can transform your life. Where there is greed in your heart, he can give you a heart of generosity. Where there is anger, he can teach you forgiveness. Where there is impatience, Jesus teaches patience. Where you struggle with lust, Jesus can teach you purity. Where there is discontent Jesus can give you contentment. Where you experience weariness and discouragement, Jesus offers a life of rest. Where there is murder in your heart, Jesus can make you a person of peace and compassion. It happened for Saul. And it can happen for you.

And Barnabas, he understood that about Jesus. Check out what happens.

Follow the story here, Saul is famous or rather infamous for killing Christians. He's headed to the town of Damascus to round up some Christians and get rid of them. On the way, his life is changed, not because he is given a book on correct theology or takes some kind of Bible class...but because he has an experience with and meets the real Jesus who changes hearts. He continues on to Damascus and then Jerusalem and tries join the group of Jesus-followers!

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

Can you imagine that scene? Everyone knows who Saul is...they're worshipping praying, there's a knock on the door, and there stands Saul? Hey, can I join you all? What would you do? Slam the door, lock it, bolt it. Drag Saul into the house and give him a good ole' whoopin' a little payback.

Text tells us that the “Christians” were skeptical of Saul. You would be, too wouldn’t you? Don’t know if we can trust him? Don’t know if this is some secrete scheme to out all of the Christians by Saul so that he can kill them? Better to avoid Saul. Better to ostrascize Saul. That’s the plan.

Except...except there’s this pesky, courageous, guy in that group who is full of grace.

Look at verse 27 **27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.** Barnabas says, “I don’t know, I think we should give him a chance. Even murderous Saul deserves a chance to experience the grace of Jesus too.” “Yeah but what if he, infiltrates our ranks and what if this is all a ploy and what if he turns against us.” I wonder if Barnabas reminded that little group that that’s exactly what happened to Jesus by his closest friends. And Jesus willingly laid down his life for their benefit. I wonder if Barnabas said, we chose to follow the guy who would give up his life for his enemies. If this all goes south, he turns on us, and even if he hangs us on a cross, well...we’ll have the most amazing opportunity to follow Jesus even into the darkest of places of life.

And so verse 28... **28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.**

It was the grace of Barnabas that brought Saul into the fellowship of believers.

And the rest, as they say, is history. Kind of makes you wonder what would have happened to Paul, if Barnabas had not spoken up in that moment, doesn’t it? Saul, who was renamed Paul...would take the grace showed to him by Barnabas and become the leading missionary to the outcast peoples in his day...the Gentiles. He knew that he experienced incredible grace and fellowship, and if there was grace for him, there must be grace for everyone. In many ways we are here today, gentile

church in the US 2,000 years later because Barnabas knew that encouragement is connected with grace. And grace is what opens the door for you and me to enter into the community of faith. And Barnabas knew that, because he followed Jesus! And he shared that grace with Paul and Paul's life was forever changed.

Doesn't that make you want to be a person of grace to someone else this week? You can follow Jesus, you can be a part of his transformative work in someone else's life, simply by showing them extravagant grace. The same kind of grace that Jesus shows you and me each every day.

Encouragement is connected to grace. Who, can you show grace to this week?

And then third,

C. Encouragement is connected to humility.

Humility is our theme for the year and so it's not surprising that we point out the connection between encouragement and humility and it's also not surprising that we see this in the life of Barnabas.

So Barnabas becomes an advocate and close friend to Saul. And they begin doing ministry work together. Now I'm gonna read a couple of passages from their ministry work and I just want you to listen and pay attention very closely because something important happens in the story that you'll miss if you don't pay very close attention. Ok? See if you figure out what I'm talking about?

Acts 11 - So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people...The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

So Barnabas and Saul working together to lead the church in Antioch.

Now we're gonna turn to Acts 13, two chapters later, Barnabas and Saul are still working together, but the church is looking to send them on to some new locations to start new churches.

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off... ⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There...The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

So they are traveling around, doing ministry, telling the story of Jesus, starting churches. Turn to Acts 14.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue...

Oh wait, stop...did you catch it? Did you notice what just happened? Something significant just happened.

Were you paying attention to **the order of the names** in story. We've talked about this idea before...in Scripture the order of the names of the people mentioned is very important. The person who is mentioned first is often believed to be the more significant or influential figure. A couple of years ago we did a message on two other leaders in the early church, a couple...named **Priscilla and Aquilla**. And we said that's so significant because it likely means that Priscilla, a female in a patriarchal society, was the leader of that church. She played the more significant role. Very rare in the Bible.

For quite a number of chapters it's Barnabas and P(S)aul. Because Barnabas is the leader, the more significant figure. But then did you notice what happens in Acts 14.

The order changes. It's now Paul and Barnabas. Paul is taking over the leadership role.

John Ortberg writes,

From a human standpoint, this is terrible. It seems Barnabas has done a bad job of career management. He has not positioned himself properly. The mission's been a big success; he should have been making sure he was getting credit for it.

Barnabas could have been jealous. He could have longed for Paul's status. Instead, he rejoiced in it. His joy was in recognizing and developing greatness in somebody else. Paul's ministry went on to be far more visible than his own, and nobody rejoiced more than Barnabas did.

And it's because encouragement is connected to humility. And humility is connected to the Kingdom of Jesus. This Paul who was welcomed and trained and encouraged by Barnabas and then given the reins of their ministry, he knew that the heart of humility that leads to encouragement, it really comes from Jesus. He wrote these amazing words in a letter, words that are central to our understanding of humility this year.

Philippians 2 - ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Certainly when Paul wrote those words he was thinking of Jesus. But I also wonder if in the back of his mind he saw his good friend Barnabas as well. Barnabas who had loved and accepted him when no else would, Barnabas who invited him into leadership and trained him for leadership and then who willingly allowed Paul to outshine him in the ministry. He knew that his life has been impacted, changed...because Barnabas practiced the humility of Jesus.

If you want your tank filled up this week or if you want to be a part of filling up someone else's tank this week...find a way to practice humility.

So there you have it. We live in a broken and hurting world. A lot people with their gauge near zero. And what they need is new kind of community, a community filled with encouragers. You can be part of that. Five Forks we can be part of that this week if we practice generosity, grace and humility. And we'll be filling up tanks all over our little community!

Of course, the pinnacle "encouraging" moment of human history comes to us through Jesus. The center of our faith is the moment where generosity and grace and humility all came together in self-sacrificial love...demonstrated by Jesus when Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. And so as we think about words like generosity and grace and humility we want to come to the foot of that cross. We want to remember that that cross invites us into a life of encouragement. And so as we close our service today we are going to share in a time of communion with one another.

Communion 8am service (Old Ritual):

And so, if you would please stand and servers if you would please come and take your places down front. Just a word of instruction as move into our time of communion.

When you receive the bread, you may hold it and when everyone has been served will sit and all eat the bread together. When you receive the cup. You may drink it, place the empty container back in the tray and then serve the person next to you. If you prefer gluten free bread, please raise your hand and Dad or Bill will bring it to you.

We do this, because on the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread broke it, he also took a cup and blessed it and gave it to his disciples and we will do the same. Join me as we pray over the elements.

Friends this bread which we break...(SERVE)

If you would stand and join me again and servers if you would come forward.

Friends this cup which we bless, is it not...(SERVE)

9:45am Service:

So at this time I'm going to invite the worship team to come forward and servers you can come and take your places down front as well. In just a moment we're going to read our corporate prayer together. When we are done reading, you can begin entering the two side center aisle's, walk down front...take bread and eat, juice and drink. And then slightly differently this morning, we have little bins for you to drop your empty cup into, rather than trying to place it back in the tray. Just drop it in the bin and then make your way back to your seat.

If you prefer gluten free bread, just ask when you get down front.

Let's read this prayer together...

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as

ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen"